

Back Home Again (and Again) in Indiana:

E. Howard Cadle, Christian Populism, and the Resilience of American Fundamentalism

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Four days before Christmas 1942, the *New York Times* published an obituary for Indianapolis-based evangelist E. Howard Cadle. Drawing from his 1932 autobiography, the *Times* offered a summary of Cadle's career. Having spent his youth entangled in various vices, so the story went, Cadle converted to Christianity as a young adult and "promised his mother he would reform and spend his life helping unfortunates." Success in several business ventures led to the construction of the Cadle Tabernacle in downtown Indianapolis in 1921. After losing control of the building within two years, Cadle mounted a successful campaign to buy it back in 1931. Using the Tabernacle as his base of operation, he gained a vast regional audience over the course of the next decade by becoming an "evangelist of the air," as the *Times's* headline tagged him. The moniker possessed a double meaning: it referred both to his practice of conducting revival meetings in distant locations,

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Indianapolis-based evangelist E. Howard Cadle, c. 1932

How I Came Back (1932)

which he reached by his private airplane, and to his daily radio program on Cincinnati station WLW. The obituarist noted that Cadle "broadcasts his Sunday and weekday preachments to an audience that in 1939 answered with 4,000 letters a week."¹

¹"Cadle, Evangelist of the Air, Dies," *New York Times*, December 21, 1942. Locally, Cadle's death made front-page news. "National Fame Won By Cadle," *Indianapolis Times*, December 21, 1942; "Cadle, Evangelist, Dies; Ill 10 Weeks," *Indianapolis Star*, December 21, 1942. Small obituaries also appeared in far-flung newspapers, for example, "E. Howard Cadle," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 21, 1942.

Cadle's obituary was by no means the first notice that he had received from national publications. In March 1939, *Life* had published a five-page photo spread about his evangelistic pursuits, describing him as the most recent "in the long line of free-lance revivalists who have won fame and fortune by exhorting U.S. sinners to repentance." The same year, *Radio Guide* characterized him as "a combination of Horatio Alger's most persistent and heroic character, Henry Ford, and Billy Sunday."²

Despite the attention that Cadle's life and death attracted in major media outlets, his fame proved fleeting. The Cadle Tabernacle stood at the corner of New Jersey and Ohio Streets for twenty-five years after the founder's death, but both the building and the evangelistic operation began declining rapidly in the mid-1950s. Historian Kenneth Jackson, researching a book about the Ku Klux Klan in the 1960s, observed the structure in its last days and described it as "an unwashed and unimpressive building The creaking floors are now covered with dust; the air is musty. The ghostlike atmosphere is quite unlike that which prevailed in the 1920s, when the auditorium reverberated with the prayers and hymns of the faithful."³ The Cadle family sold the building soon afterward, and the new owner razed it to make way for a parking lot. Cadle's radio program continued under the supervision of his two eldest children; when it ceased production after their deaths in the early 1990s, the last lingering trace of the evangelist's erstwhile fame, or even his existence, faded from public consciousness. Today the most visible surviving tribute to Cadle and his Tabernacle can be found not in Indianapolis, but 100 miles south of the city, where an etched rendering of the Tabernacle on the back of Cadle's tombstone in a small graveyard in Fredericksburg stands as a curious testament to a nearly forgotten past.

Cadle has been nearly lost to memory among historians as well. He plays no role in scholarly accounts of early twentieth-century religious history, nor has there been a scholarly article focused on him. This neglect is not entirely without reason. Cadle's ministry was neither the first of its kind nor the largest. By the time he built his structure in downtown Indianapolis in 1921, tabernacle revivalism was fading

²"Cadle of Indianapolis Streamlines Evangelism with Radio, Airplane, Glass-Fronted Baptismal Tank," *Life*, March 27, 1939, p. 73; Francis Chase, Jr., "America on Its Knees," *Radio Guide*, June 30, 1939, p. 39. See also "Cash & Cadle," *Time*, March 13, 1939, pp. 38-39.

³Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York, 1967), 144.

quickly, and the earliest entrepreneurs in religious radio had been broadcasting for nearly a decade by the time Cadle debuted his own radio program in 1932. And though Cadle claimed a huge audience for his program, it was limited to a loyal base in the Midwest and upper South. It never achieved truly national significance.⁴

If Cadle's legacy is slim, his story is nonetheless important, for it offers a case study in the techniques that have allowed evangelicalism and fundamentalism to survive and thrive into the twenty-first century. His life straddled two dramatically different eras. Born in rural Indiana two decades after the Civil War, he died in Indianapolis in the midst of World War II. His lifetime witnessed dramatic industrialization and urbanization. Biblical criticism and widespread acceptance of Darwinian evolution threatened the Bible's authority and literal truth. American universities emerged as research-oriented, value-neutral institutions that produced experts in relatively narrow disciplinary fields.⁵

In the religious realm, the evangelical consensus that dominated the culture at Cadle's birth shattered as he approached middle age, leaving him, and others like him, apparent losers in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Historians traditionally held that Clarence Darrow's triumph at the 1925 Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, signaled the beginning of fundamentalism's demise. Recent scholarship has thoroughly dispatched that myth, suggesting that fundamentalists were momentarily humiliated in 1925 and temporarily retreated from the cultural spotlight, but that they had not disappeared and were not dormant.⁶ Cadle's career serves as a prime example. After a string of failures and embarrassments in the mid-1920s, he rebounded in the 1930s to achieve his greatest success as a full-time evangelist. His life was, in brief, a microcosm of fundamentalism's resilience in American culture.

⁴In 1999, Cadle tied for ninth place in a scholar's panel ranking of the century's "top ten religious stories" in Indiana. Bill Theobald, "Scholars Pick Century's Top 10 Religious Stories," *Indianapolis Star*, November 14, 1999.

⁵James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, 1985); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York, 1981).

⁶Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York, 1997); Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); James Ault, *Spirit and Flesh: Life in a Fundamental Baptist Church* (New York, 2004).

He embodied the *soul* of the movement—the methods and the message that have allowed it to survive setbacks, regroup, and even thrive.⁷

MISSPENT YOUTH (1884-1914)

Most of what we can know about Cadle prior to 1921 comes from his autobiography, *How I Came Back* (1932). By Cadle's own account, his ancestors migrated from eastern Tennessee to southern Indiana in the early 1830s. Both his grandfather and father farmed in the small town of Fredericksburg, situated 100 miles south of Indianapolis, 30 miles northwest of Louisville, Kentucky, and about a dozen miles from the Washington County capital, Salem. Cadle described his parents as "plain Anglo-Saxon folks" and Fredericksburg as "a little village of about 200 population, down where they do not raise much of anything but sassafras and Democrats." He was born in a log cabin in this village on August 25, 1884. From the very beginning, he recounts, he knew himself to be different from other children: "I was always full of energy and wanted to get a 'bang' out of life. I started that way very early in life. I always wanted to ride the wildest horse we had, and when I could not find one wild enough, I would ride a steer."⁸

Cadle's account of his childhood and early adulthood repeatedly emphasized his strong rebellious streak and juxtaposed it with the virtuous women in his life. He wrote that his mother, a Christian since childhood, helped to spark a revival in Fredericksburg by raising money to

⁷Definitions of evangelicalism and fundamentalism vary, but sufficient agreement permits working definitions of these substantially overlapping camps. Evangelicals believe in the importance of a conversion experience to the Christian life, as well as the efficacy of Jesus's death in making human redemption possible. In addition, they stress the importance of the Bible as the ultimate source of wisdom and the preeminent guide to human conduct. To this core belief system, fundamentalists add an unwavering commitment to literalism in biblical interpretation; a premillennialist eschatology, which predicts an imminent, apocalyptic battle between the forces of good and evil; and a strong separatist impulse, which moves them to perpetually identify and stigmatize "impurities" both within the Christian tradition and the wider culture. Mark Noll adds a "zealous defense of an idealized nineteenth-century American Christianity" as a defining feature of the fundamentalist tradition. Cadle fits comfortably within both camps, which I occasionally group together as "conservative Christianity." Noll, "Evangelicalism" and "Fundamentalism," in *A Companion to American Thought*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and James Kloppenberg (Cambridge, Mass., 1995); Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 3-12; George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1991).

⁸E. Howard Cadle, *How I Came Back* (Indianapolis, 1932), 13.

pay for a preacher to come to the town. She and a friend had become concerned about male feuding and believed a revivalist would have a taming influence. When they eventually persuaded one to conduct meetings, the results were spectacular: "an old-fashioned revival broke out which lasted six weeks, and which brought into the Kingdom practically the entire neighborhood. Men who had threatened to take the lives of other men, locked arms and sang together, 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus.'" Cadle's father converted, and a permanent church was established.⁹

Despite his parents' example, Cadle resisted conversion during the revival. Nor, despite his family's hopes, did he convert at any time during the remaining years of his youth. Instead, he began dabbling in the vices that would dominate his adolescence. He cadged his first drink from men in a local saloon at the age of twelve—" [f]rom the very first, I loved the taste and effect of liquor"—and learned to play poker with friends, "using grains of corn for poker chips."¹⁰

Late in his teenage years, Cadle met his future wife, Ola Collier, a telephone operator, and "I had occasion to go through the exchange many times." In December 1904, they married: he was twenty, she was seventeen. They settled briefly on his father's farm, but after a cycle of planting and harvesting Cadle longed for bigger things. He and Ola moved west, settling in 1905 in Oklahoma City, where he found a job unloading potatoes from railroad cars. He soon made friends, "for God had given me a likeable personality," as Cadle wrote. "However, I met some acquaintances which were not conducive to building character." Cadle joined his friends at local saloons after work and began drinking heavily. But his drinking proved less severe a problem than his carousing or gambling. "There is a fascination to gambling," he wrote. "I would rather my boy become a drunkard than a gambler." After staying about a year in Oklahoma City—long enough to lose "the respect and confidence of many people"—he and Ola decided to return to Indiana.¹¹

Arriving in Indianapolis, the couple found the city "crowded with gamblers and crooked politicians." Cadle quickly resumed the gambling lifestyle he had left behind in Oklahoma—though on the business side

⁹Ibid., 23. Cadle and his wife, in addition to several other family members, are buried in the cemetery adjacent to the church.

¹⁰Ibid., 17, 45.

¹¹Ibid., 25, 42, 45, 47.

this time. He bought several slot machines and placed them in restaurants, hotels, and saloons throughout Indiana, and when the venture proved profitable, he expanded his operations to Kentucky and Illinois. But the boom times ended when Cadle lost his machines to a ruling by the Indiana Supreme Court that judged them to be gambling devices. He next opened a "fine saloon and wine room" on North Illinois Street in Indianapolis. "I prospered for a time," Cadle wrote, "but I met many beautiful girls, and it was not long until they had the proceeds of my business, and I finally lost the fine saloon." He later returned to the saloon he had once owned to wash dishes for \$9 a week, until he was fired and was "kicked out the back door" for his lax work ethic.¹²

A doctor's diagnosis that Cadle suffered from Bright's disease (infection of the kidneys) culminated this string of reverses. Given six months to live, Cadle found himself with "[n]o friends, no money; and sentenced to die." He decided to return home to "see if mother would take me back." Though his father had banned him from the farm, Cadle's mother "gathered me into her arms tenderly, covered my swollen face with her kisses, and I thought I was resting in an angel's arms. . . . I never got such tender treatment from any human being as I did that day from mother." They prayed together through the afternoon but "no relief seemed to come to my soul, and so all through the night I prayed. When morning came, the load was not lifted yet." He went downstairs, where his mother "persuaded me to lie down on her bed," and soon fell asleep. When he awoke, the world seemed suddenly, strangely new—and he felt like a new man: "[A]ll the beauty of heaven seemed to burst into the windows. The old, dead apple tree seemed to be in full bloom and I could hear the rustle of the wings of angels of mercy. My sins were washed away! I arose as my conversion dawned on me and started to greet my mother, but I did not need to say a word, I leaped into her arms. 'It's done, it's done, the great transaction is done!' she sang joyfully."¹³

¹²Ibid., 48, 56, 58. The Indianapolis city directory for these years provides little in the way of confirmation or contradiction of his story. Cadle's name does not appear in 1906; for the next two years his occupation is listed as "janitor"; and in 1909 he bears the odd title of "Department of Fish and Game commissioner, statehouse." For the next four years, he disappears from the directory, reappearing in 1914 in connection with a restaurant on North Illinois Street, possibly the saloon from which he was "kicked out the back door." *City Directories of the United States, 1902-1935: Indianapolis, Indiana* (Woodbridge, Conn., 1985).

¹³Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 59-63. The ecstatic quality of Cadle's conversion account mirrors that of numerous other autobiographical accounts—most notably, perhaps, that of revivalist

Such is the essence of Howard Cadle's conversion story as recounted in his autobiography. It happened in March 1914, when he was twenty-nine and almost exactly at the midpoint of his life. It became the narrative touchstone to which he would persistently point, in print and in person, throughout his life.¹⁴ "Without modesty," as one obituary writer put it, "he would depict his past as a drunkard, wastrel and professional gambler, to draw converts with his fiery, dramatic delivery."¹⁵

BIRTH OF A SALESMAN (1914-1921)

In the years following his conversion, Cadle worked primarily as a salesman. He began with a job selling suits and then found work for the National Biscuit Company making \$30 a week. "The following Sunday morning," he recalled, "we went to Sunday school and church. I had \$3 for the work of the Lord . . . My health was much better, too."¹⁶ As his health continued to improve, his network of contacts broadened and he became one of the company's top salesmen. In addition to biscuits, Cadle began selling automobiles, and he did so well that he was appointed the sales manager of a dealership, which he and a business partner soon bought out. In 1916, a sales visit to a dingy shoe-repair store sparked a dream of "a nice shop, a large shop, with plenty of waiting rooms for those who wanted shoe repairs made 'on the spot,'" located in "the very heart of the city." He proposed the idea to his partner, and soon "we opened up the first high-class shoe repair shop in the United States." It proved such a success that he decided to buy out his partner and pursue shoe repair full-time. With the help of a loan from Governor James Goodrich, he expanded the business into a chain; by the end of 1918, he

Charles G. Finney. Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York, 1994).

¹⁴Cadle's story apparently sold well during his lifetime and retained its market appeal long after his demise. Sales figures for *How I Came Back* are unknowable, but nearly a decade after the founder's death, the ministry's monthly publication, *Cadle Call*, advertised the book as "now in the tenth edition." It added that "hardly an issue of the *Cadle Call* is published without one or more letters in it, telling how Mr. Cadle's life story . . . has brought salvation and great spiritual blessing into lives and homes." "Thousands Helped by Reading the Life Story of E. Howard Cadle," *Cadle Call* (August 1951), 1.

¹⁵"Cadle, Evangelist, Dies," *Indianapolis Star*, December 21, 1942.

¹⁶Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 75.

wrote, "I had twenty-two stores in various cities of the Middle West. My company's earnings were \$85,000 clear."¹⁷

Cadle's salesmanship skills were confirmed by those who knew him. "I always said that I never wanted a pair of shoes that he liked, because he could talk you out of them," said Thelma Moore, a pianist who once worked for Cadle. "He knew how to talk to you and persuade you, and yet without you realizing it. It was almost like you didn't recognize what was happening. You would just do it. Everybody knew that he was really a salesman from the word go."¹⁸

In 1920, Cadle's burgeoning success allowed him to venture into Christian philanthropy. In Louisville, the site of so many adventures in his gambling days, he built a 1,200-seat tabernacle, which he then donated to the United Brethren Church. A plaque near the building's entrance announced that it was "erected by E. Howard Cadle in honor of his mother, whose prayers saved him from a gambler's and a drunkard's grave." A local newspaper reported that Cadle intended to multiply the tabernacles "throughout southern Indiana and parts of Kentucky," just as he had done with his shoe-repair shops. They would serve as "an employment bureau in connection with the churches" and "be open every day of the year for those seeking aid."¹⁹

¹⁷Ibid., 88, 92. The size of Goodrich's loan is an inconsistency in Cadle's story (the autobiography puts the amount at \$40,000; in other accounts Cadle cites it as \$25,000 or \$30,000). The city directory tells the same story, listing Cadle as a salesman for the Loose Wiles Biscuit Company (1915), as a salesman for the National Biscuit Company (1916), as president of the Mertz-Cadle Sales Company (1917), as a shoemaker (1918), and as president of American Shoe Repair (1919), with repair shops on East Market and North Illinois Streets and offices in the United Building on North Illinois. *City Directories of the United States, 1902-1935: Indianapolis, Indiana*.

¹⁸Thelma Moore, interview with author, July 1996. In the summer of 1995, I began researching the Cadle Tabernacle for my thesis—Theodore Slutz, "E. Howard Cadle: Conversion, Capitalism, and Christian Populism in Early Twentieth-Century America" (MA thesis, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, 2000). The following spring, the *Indianapolis Star* published an article about my research. "Researcher Revives the Memory of Local Christian Evangelist," *Indianapolis Star*, April 20, 1996. In response to the article, I received several dozen phone calls from people—local and distant—who had listened to the Cadle program or worked for Cadle. Many of these people agreed to share their memories, and the quotes that appear in this article are taken from those interviews. Unfortunately, exact dates were not recorded.

¹⁹"Tabernacle Built Here By Indianapolis Man," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 28, 1920. Cadle's mother had helped found a United Brethren Church in his boyhood; after his conversion, he joined the First United Brethren Church in Indianapolis and formally remained a member until his death.

The Louisville tabernacle served as the site of a month-long series of evangelistic meetings. Cadle spoke on at least one occasion, the week after the building's formal dedication. A journalist reported that, with his mother standing beside him, Cadle "told of his passage 'through the depths' and of his rise to wealth"—subjects inextricably linked for Cadle. "I am now riding in a \$7,000 car and living in a \$30,000 house," he said. "Only through the grace of God and the prayers of my mother could I be doing this today."²⁰

At about the same time, back in Indianapolis, he began telling his conversion story to various groups around the city, including a Bible class "in one of the largest Presbyterian churches in the city, the teacher of which was Governor James P. Goodrich." In mid-January 1921, he appeared at the YMCA's "Big Meeting," where, as the *Indianapolis Star* reported, he "told simply and without any attempt at oratory his experiences with crime and fair dealing."²¹ More than thirty years later, one man recalled the talk vividly in a letter to Cadle's son:

All eyes and ears were attentive to this unusual story that he told. As I remember on that day, he was not a gifted speaker; there were breaks in his delivery much as a school boy's first appearance before the public; awkward like, not finding a place or a way with his hands. But his words were clearly spoken, and as clearly and fully understood by his listeners, making it evident that many in the audience were known to him and he to them. He talked in their language, and made it plain to them that he was no longer one of their group, but pleading that they become a man of God, as he had, and forsake their manner of living We marveled at E. Howard Cadle—this man we knew—who could, and would, bare his past life of sin to the men who knew him better than I; and then in the same hour, so forcibly evangelize those 1,600 men who sat before him with unbroken attention. When he had finished speaking, this vast audience surrounded him with hand-clasps, with cheers, and with volumes of words—thus confessing they had faith in what he had said and done in their presence.²²

²⁰"50 Hit Trail on Cadle's Plea," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 7, 1920.

²¹Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 82; "Hits Gambling at Big Meeting," *Indianapolis Star*, January 17, 1921.

²²Jesse M. Trinkle, "Southern Indiana Resident Gives Details of the First Public Testimony of E. Howard Cadle," *Cadle Call* (February 1957), 1.

Thus, by January 1921, Cadle had emerged as a familiar figure in the life of Indianapolis, and his conversion story proved as integral to his celebrity as his business success.

Over the course of the next few months, Cadle became an even more prominent figure in Indianapolis. His increasing fame would be driven by two religious events: a citywide revival in the spring and the dedication of the Cadle Tabernacle that fall. The spring revival stemmed mainly from the efforts of the Indianapolis Church Federation, founded in 1912. In a January 1921 advertisement, cast in the form of an opinion essay, the Federation argued that the city needed something to restore it to a “more sober, decent, and orderly state . . . [A]bove all and underlying all we need a revival of religion, such a revival as will create a new conscience—a conscience that will deal in thorough-going fashion with all these matters with which we have been trifling and compromising.”²³ The essay marked the beginning of a publicity campaign promoting just such a revival.

The featured evangelist would be Rodney “Gypsy” Smith, who had first created a sensation in the United States in 1906 with a highly successful revival in Boston. Smith’s pulpit style differed markedly from that of the era’s pre-eminent evangelist, Billy Sunday. Rather than stage antics, Smith was known, according to a later historian of revivalism, for his “heart-warming tenderness and eloquence . . . He was pre-eminently ‘winsome’ and in turn could be sentimental, eloquent, or ‘manly.’”²⁴

Smith’s gentility harmonized with the spirit of cooperation that marked the spring revival. According to the Church Federation’s advertising, 140 churches (nearly half the total number in the city), representing 20 Protestant denominations, supported the event. An interdenominational choir of 1,000 people was assembled, and another 1,000 people took part in a training program “regarding the best methods of leading men and women into fellowship with Jesus Christ.” In the booklet published to commemorate the revival, one local pastor wrote that Smith came to the city “with the best atmosphere ever created by Christian people in this city for an Evangelistic Campaign.”²⁵

²³Advertisement, “Revival Over-Due,” *Indianapolis News*, January 22, 1921.

²⁴William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York, 1959), 392.

²⁵Advertisement, “The Gypsy Smith Campaign,” *Indianapolis News*, March 12, 1921; Frederick Taylor, “Appreciation of Gipsy [sic] Smith,” in *The Silent Evangel. Published in the interest of Indianapolis Evangelistic Campaign* (April 1921), 11.

The evangelist's arrival by train on March 12, 1921, was attended by a small contingent of ministers and city leaders, including Cadle, who had chaired the event's building committee. A picture of this group ran on the front page of the *Indianapolis Star*, with Cadle appearing half-a-head taller and at least a decade younger than everyone else.²⁶

The revival opened the following day, Sunday, at 2:30 p.m. in a temporary tabernacle built at the intersection of Ohio and Alabama Streets, directly across from what was then City Hall. At both the afternoon and evening services that day, the building was filled to its 7,500-person capacity. The revival continued every night for four weeks, and its effect on the city was electric. Nearing the end of the third week, 8,000 "decision cards" had been signed by attendees. About 1,000 claimed a conversion experience; the remainder were "re-consecrations." The chairman of the YMCA committee declared in a local newspaper that the revival "has been a great awakening. Our city can never again be the same. Men have had new visions, have responded to higher aspirations, have rededicated themselves to a life of usefulness and service." Nearly half a century later, a journalist who remembered the revival described it as a "shot in the arm for the inspirational life of the community" and quoted a businessman who claimed that it was "one of Indianapolis' great events" from "an inspirational and moral standpoint."²⁷

As the revival drew to its conclusion, the *Indianapolis News* reported that "a meeting for the further organization of the Gypsy Smith choir will be held at the tabernacle the afternoon of April 24 at 2:30 o'clock, it was announced by E. Howard Cadle, president of the choir." The purpose of the meeting was to plan for the choir's future, with the goal of having it meet once a month and offer concerts "at intervals."²⁸

Within a month, Cadle's vision had expanded far beyond that modest goal. On May 20, the *News* announced his plans to build a permanent tabernacle at an estimated cost of \$75,000. "According to the present plans, the tabernacle will seat 10,000 people and a choir loft to accommodate 1,000 will be built. Assembly rooms, which will seat 500, will be

²⁶"Arrival of Gypsy Smith in Indianapolis," *Indianapolis Star*, March 13, 1921.

²⁷Wayne Guthrie, "City Could Use 'Gypsy' Revival," *Indianapolis News*, August 17, 1967; "Big Meeting to Continue One More Week," *Indianapolis Christian Visitor*, April 1, 1921; F. C. Fields, "The Gipsy [sic] Smith Meeting Appreciation," *The Silent Evangel*, 23.

²⁸"Permanent Organization," *Indianapolis News*, April 11, 1921.

built under the platform pulpit.” Echoing the Church Federation’s earlier call for a citywide revival, Cadle explained that “this tabernacle will be for the free use of all movements of cooperative Christianity in the community upbuilding of the social, moral, and spiritual life of the city of Indianapolis.” Once built, Cadle promised, the tabernacle would be placed under the leadership of a “man of national reputation.”²⁹

The anchor of the Smith revival, the 1,000-person Gypsy Smith choir embodied the revival’s interdenominational character, drawing members from a wide variety of churches across the city. But Cadle’s plan to organize it on a permanent basis in a permanent revival center raised suspicions. Four days after the *News* announcement, a front-page newspaper article in the *Star* announced a Methodist Preachers’ Association resolution approved by sixty ministers opposing the idea, “the fear being expressed that it would interfere with the work of other churches in Indianapolis.” The resolution announced a “consensus of opinion” that “[i]nasmuch as the Gypsy Smith choir was organized out of all the cooperating churches, and having accomplished its purpose, in all fairness to the churches and the choir, it should be immediately disbanded. We furthermore hold that there is no need for an afternoon interdenominational Sunday school or Sunday afternoon service or evening interdenominational service, for such needs are abundantly met by the Y.M.C.A. men’s meetings, the Y.W.C.A., the Wheeler Rescue Mission and the various churches.”³⁰

Methodist opposition was symbolically significant, because Methodists represented the heart of the city’s Protestant establishment in the early twentieth century. In 1906, nearly one-fifth of all church members in Marion County had belonged to a Methodist church—the highest percentage claimed by any Protestant denomination. But the opposition to Cadle extended far beyond that denomination. An Episcopal minister told a newspaper that “it isn’t fair and I think that it shows a lack of genuine Christianity.” A Unitarian minister observed that “if a continuance of the Gypsy Smith choir promoted church unity, I should favor it, but apparently it has the opposite effect. It would seem to dissipate the religious forces of the city.”³¹

²⁹“E. Howard Cadle to Build Tabernacle,” *Indianapolis News*, May 20, 1921.

³⁰“Oppose Cadle Plan to Build Tabernacle,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 24, 1921.

³¹*Ibid.* For statistics on the religious life of Indianapolis in the century’s early decades see David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 1553–54.



The Cadle Tabernacle, Indianapolis, 1921

The building stood at the corner of New Jersey and Ohio streets from 1921 to 1968.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Bass Photo Company Collection

Cadle responded to his detractors with defiant incredulity. "I have never had any intention of building a church around myself," he said. "I made a public statement to the choir that I would never ask them to sing at the tabernacle when it would conflict with their church services . . . [M]y only hope in the enterprise is to make Indianapolis an easier place to do right and a harder place to do wrong, and I say in the words of the Master: 'Forgive them, Father: they know not what they do.'"³²

Two days after this exchange appeared, the *News* announced that site preparations for the building of the tabernacle would begin the following Monday on a lot east of the site where Gypsy Smith's temporary structure had been built. The article included excerpts from several letters of support Cadle had received. "Would you not consider the idea of going ahead with your project and of dedicating this fine building," one asked, "with such an infinite number of possibilities, not alone to evangelism and religion, but also to patriotism, good citizenship, social uplift, civic welfare, better business and industrial life?"³³

³²"Oppose Cadle Plan to Build Tabernacle," *Indianapolis Star*, May 24, 1921.

³³"Work on Tabernacle Will Be Begun Monday," *Indianapolis News*, May 26, 1921.

Work proceeded on the building through the summer of 1921. In the days before the scheduled dedication, the *News* reported that more than fifty workers were “rushing” to have the building finished on time. “The interior . . . is painted old ivory and the steel supports for the roof are painted green. The pulpit is demountable, thus affording a stage for pageants, plays or civic affairs.” The *News* put the project’s cost, including land, at \$305,000.³⁴

Completed on schedule, the building was filled to capacity during the afternoon and evening dedicatory services held on October 9, and an estimated 10,000 people were turned away. Gypsy Smith returned for the dedication, and memories from the spring revival played some part in the attendance, but the event possessed an importance all its own. Mayor Charles Jewett, a Republican close to Cadle in age and also from southern Indiana, offered to “accept, as mayor, this beautiful Tabernacle from our sincere Christian citizen, E. Howard Cadle.” (This was a somewhat misleading sentiment, since Cadle had promised use of the building for public purposes but had not actually given it to the city.) “There are always people who are skeptical, and no one knows this better than a public servant,” Jewett continued. “No man has ever done a greater thing than has Mr. Cadle in erecting this Tabernacle. He has done a noble deed to dedicate it in honor of his dear old mother, whose prayers saved him.”³⁵

For his part, Cadle addressed the audience briefly—describing the day as the most significant in his life—and then assisted his mother onto the platform. Though too weak to give a speech, “she knows how to pray,” Cadle told the audience, which broke out in applause. Addressing the choir, he said, “You’ve been my pal, and you’ve stood by me when others said bad words about me.” The choir sang “Tell Mother I’ll Be There,” and an assistant unveiled two life-size portraits to be hung on either side of the choir loft—one of his mother, the other of himself.³⁶

FALL AND RISE OF A SALESMAN (1921-1931)

The harmony and goodwill of the dedication service had lasted scarcely a month when the local press reported a dispute over control of

³⁴“Cadle Tabernacle Ready for Dedication,” *Indianapolis News*, October 8, 1921; “Work Is Being Rushed on Cadle Tabernacle,” *Indianapolis News*, October 7, 1921.

³⁵“20,000 Hear Gypsy Smith Dedicate Cadle Tabernacle,” *Indianapolis Star*, October 10, 1921.

³⁶*Ibid.*

the Tabernacle's evangelistic program. The board of directors presented Cadle with a contract designed to invest the board with this authority. Cadle rejected it, saying the contract "would eliminate me from having any part in the program that would be conducted at the tabernacle."³⁷

As a result of the controversy, evangelist Bob Jones, founder of the South Carolina university that now bears his name, severed his association with the Tabernacle. At Cadle's invitation, Jones had planned to hold regular meetings for several weeks after the dedication. He had planned, as well, to devote several weeks each year to preaching at the Tabernacle, but he refused to honor the agreement when Cadle asserted his authority and appeared to position himself in competition with local ministers. "I have for a number of years been working in harmony with the organized churches," Jones said in a statement released to the press, "and my conscience will not permit me to be associated with any movement which is liable to be turned into a campaign antagonistic to ministers and the organized churches."³⁸ Several board members submitted resignations, which Cadle accepted. He then named an official in the Volunteers of America charity organization, Earl Hites, as the Tabernacle's "permanent evangelist," announcing that he and Hites would work out a schedule of special speakers and submit it to the board of directors for approval.³⁹

The seeds of another controversy were sown just one month later. Facing low attendance and insufficient donations, Cadle announced that his new Tabernacle, with its removable seating, could also be "sold to the world as a convention place, where the largest assemblages may be housed—conventions, educational exhibits, industrial shows, agricultural displays, religious meetings, concerts and pageants, where either a large floor space or a large seating capacity is desired."⁴⁰

³⁷"Cadle and Tabernacle Association Disagree," *Indianapolis News*, November 21, 1921.

³⁸*Ibid.* Relations between the Jones family and the Cadle organization improved at some point after Cadle's death. Bob Jones, Jr., preached several anniversary services for the Tabernacle in the 1950s, and advertisements for Bob Jones University appeared in the *Cadle Call* in the 1950s and 1960s.

³⁹*Ibid.* See also "Split over Use of Tabernacle," *Indianapolis Star*, November 22, 1921; "Resignations Follow Tabernacle Tangle," *Indianapolis News*, November 22, 1921; "Cadle Backers will 'Carry On,'" *Indianapolis Star*, November 24, 1921.

⁴⁰"Cadle Tabernacle Provides Place for Conventions," *Indianapolis Star*, December 31, 1921. In the first eleven months about 350,000 people attended the 781 public religious services held, for an average of less than 500 people in a building that could seat about 20 times that number.

The availability of such a large meeting hall fit well with the plans of city politicians. As the 1920 city directory had proudly observed, “more cities of 30,000 population and over can be reached in a night’s ride from Indianapolis than from any other city in the United States.” The directory’s editors also noted that the city had five public auditoriums, but the largest, Tomlinson Hall, seated only 3,500.

Recognizing this need, the city and the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce jointly pressed ahead with plans for a coliseum. On July 7, 1922, recently elected mayor Lew Shank, a politician who was both unimpressed with Cadle and fully his equal as showman, announced that, if the proper ordinances were passed, “the city will match a reasonable sum raised by sale of stock for erection of a five-story exposition building.” He also proposed buying the Cadle Tabernacle to meet its convention needs, an idea which the Chamber rejected as inadequate. Cadle’s reaction revealed the animosity that marked his relationship with the new City Hall: he publicly promised choir members that they need not worry about “ever having to move from this sacred spot in the Cadle tabernacle, to make way for the cheap hobbies of the mayor of our city, because Mayor Lew Shank nor any one else has enough money to buy my tabernacle.”⁴¹

Shank responded the following week by instructing the city’s lawyers “to find some way to put Cadle Tabernacle on the tax duplicate.” The religious building had been exempt up to that point, but because it was now also used for secular conventions, Shank believed Cadle should pay taxes on the rent he received. “I know Cadle charged us \$500 to hold a [Senator Albert] Beveridge meeting in the place last spring,” Shank said. “I guess that wasn’t a religious meeting, was it?”⁴²

The mixture of religion and politics soon brought the Tabernacle into another controversy. On an April evening in 1923, eighteen Ku Klux Klan members dressed in full regalia marched down the

During the same period, the Tabernacle took in about \$30,000 through offerings. “Cadle Tabernacle Will Be Rededicated Next Sunday; First Services Recalled,” *Indianapolis Star*, September 27, 1931.

⁴¹“‘50-50,’ Shank Idea of Plan for Coliseum,” *Indianapolis Times*, July 7, 1922; “Cadle Tells Choir He Will Keep Tabernacle,” *Indianapolis News*, July 8, 1922; Connie J. Zeigler, “Samuel Lewis (Lew) Shank” in Bodenhamer and Barrows, eds., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1254-55.

⁴²“Wishes Tabernacle Put on Tax Duplicate,” *Indianapolis News*, July 12, 1922.

Tabernacle's center aisle and presented visiting evangelist E. J. Bulgin with a letter of appreciation and a check for \$600 to be split between him and the Cadle Tabernacle Evangelistic Association. As the Klansmen filed out, the audience stood and applauded. That night 200 people reportedly converted to Christianity.⁴³

Tolerance, the Chicago-based anti-Klan newspaper, reported the incident beneath a bold headline proclaiming "E. Howard Cadle on Klan Roll!" The newspaper also identified a prominent Klan ally as a Cadle associate: Ed Jackson, Indiana's secretary of state (soon-to-be governor) and chairman of the Cadle Tabernacle association's board of directors. The article went on to describe Cadle as a man whose "business is the 'rebuilding' of shoes, and whose diversion is the cobbling of souls in his great 'Tabernacles' in Indianapolis and Louisville."⁴⁴

The Klan's secretive nature mystifies the extent of Cadle's involvement.⁴⁵ As the Bulgin incident clearly shows, some level of sympathy and cooperation existed between the two organizations. But Cadle would be gone from the scene by the time the Klan exerted its greatest influence in Indiana. Within weeks of the Klan's dramatic show of support for him, Cadle had become involved in a dispute with the Tabernacle's board that prompted his decision to leave the organization.

The details of this estrangement remain as fuzzy as his Klan ties. Cadle's published autobiographical version of the story cited treachery on the part of the board of directors: they accused him of embezzling money from the Tabernacle offerings, then voted to oust him as the organization's president. When this news reached the public, a storm of protest forced them to reconsider and rescind the vote. But soon after this reconciliation, Cadle judged the Tabernacle too heavy a financial burden and agreed to relinquish his controlling interest. Contemporary press accounts, however, centered on the Klan and a complicated power struggle between Cadle and choir director Joe Overmeyer. It "came to a showdown for the board to retain me or Mr. Overmeyer," Cadle offered, "and when they refused to back me up . . . then I decided to step down and

⁴³"Thousands Cheer as Klan Donates \$600 at Revival," *Indianapolis Times*, April 2, 1923.

⁴⁴"E. Howard Cadle on Klan Roll!," *Tolerance*, April 8, 1923.

⁴⁵Kenneth Jackson describes the Tabernacle as "the favorite haunt of local Knights" but sheds no further light on the connection. Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 144, 149. No mention of Cadle may be found in Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991).

out.”⁴⁶ Both of these accounts are frustratingly sketchy, but whatever the truth about his break with the Tabernacle, in June 1923 Cadle sold off his interest to a corporation that promised to carry on its religious program.

In October, Cadle announced a plan to compete with his former ministry by building a new auditorium and office building in the city's downtown district. He had the support, according to a newspaper account, of the “Cadle faction of the Gypsy Smith Choir.” Cadle's plan for a competing tabernacle came to nothing. The new leadership of his former ministry carried on with Sunday afternoon and evening services, and Cadle dropped out of sight. One year later, he briefly reappeared in the newspapers with an announcement that he would seek the Republican nomination for mayor of Indianapolis. Again nothing came of it. The fate of Cadle's shoe-repair shops remains unknown.⁴⁷ Sometime soon thereafter he moved his family to Florida.

Cadle spent about two years in the Tampa area, joining in a frenzy of real estate speculation that journalist Frederick Lewis Allen described as “the most delirious fever of real-estate speculation which had attacked the United States in ninety years.” When the bubble burst in 1926, Cadle lost (by his own account) \$150,000. At this point, “being discouraged, [and] having no money, we came back to Indianapolis early in 1927.”⁴⁸ In July 1927, Cadle announced that he would run for governor in 1928 as an independent candidate. Like the mayoral bid four years earlier, this plan foundered. In *How I Came Back*, Cadle described the change of plans as submission to God's will. Again, his “conversion” took place on his parents' farm. His mother, responding to the announcement of his candidacy for governor, declared “I would rather have you be the poorest preacher in the state, than the best Governor we ever had.” The rebuke set off a night of soul-searching similar to his conversion experience fifteen years earlier: “After battling until 3 o'clock in the morning, I finally said, ‘Yes, Lord, I'll go where you

⁴⁶Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 126-30; “Board Withholds Its Decision as Cadle Steps Down and Out,” *Indianapolis Times*, April 24, 1923; “Cadle Resigns His Membership upon Tabernacle Board,” *Indianapolis Star*, April 24, 1923.

⁴⁷“Cadle Proposes New Tabernacle,” *Indianapolis Star*, October 2, 1923; “E. Howard Cadle Seeks to Head G.O.P. City Ticket,” *Indianapolis Times*, October 18, 1924. A magazine writer in 1939 noted only that he was “forced out of the shoe business by falling prices.” Chase, “America on Its Knees,” *Radio Guide*, 3.

⁴⁸Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (1931; reprint, New York, 1964), 230; Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 134.

want me to go, I'll do what you want me to do.'"⁴⁹ Cadle would soon transform himself from a full-time businessman who dabbled in evangelism to a full-time evangelist who dabbled in business.

"EVANGELIST OF THE AIR": RADIO AND AIRPLANE EVANGELISM (1931-1942)

Cadle apparently spent much time during the next several years on the road, preaching at various revival meetings in the Midwest and South. In the last week of June 1931, he reemerged as an important religious figure in Indianapolis. By this time the Cadle Tabernacle sat unused, and its ownership had reverted to the bank that originally financed it.⁵⁰ Cadle persuaded the bank to allow him use of it for several weeks, then called a series of special meetings to raise money. A newspaper announced that Cadle would speak in the Tabernacle the following Sunday, with a subhead more prophetic than its writer could have known: "Cadle to Tell of Comeback, Tabernacle Builder Will Relate Story by Radio." Cadle announced his plan to buy back the building and restore it to its original function; local radio station WFBM broadcasted the address. The *Indianapolis Times* described the campaign as "a drama that will appeal to every citizen" and predicted that "the vast majority will undoubtedly cherish a hope that he succeed." Distancing itself from Cadle's theology, the *Times* nonetheless noted the need for "a real revival of spiritual outlook in these days of turmoil and change. The people feel a growing need of spiritual fortifications."⁵¹

Cadle's cause drew crowds. Perhaps the people who showed up at these meetings were former members of the Gypsy Smith Choir and still felt some sense of loyalty to Cadle. Whoever they were, they gave generously. "One precious soul," Cadle wrote, "said she had saved up \$25 to get a new set of false teeth, but that she would give that to the work of

⁴⁹Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 142-44. Oddly, Cadle agreed to be the Prohibition Party's candidate for governor of Indiana not long after he wrote these words. "Prohibitionists Nominate Cadle," *Indianapolis Star*, June 3, 1932.

⁵⁰The building's former owners had rented it out for boxing matches on various occasions in the 1920s. In 1928, Cadle filed suit to have an event stopped on the grounds that boxing violated a clause in the contract transferring ownership. "Boxing at Cadle Tabernacle Sanctioned by Court Ruling," *Indianapolis Star*, October 20, 1928.

⁵¹"Cadle to Tell of Comeback," *Indianapolis Times*, June 25, 1931; "Back to Cadle," *Indianapolis Times*, June 26, 1931.

the Lord and go on without her teeth.”⁵² In October 1931, nearly ten years to the day after the first dedication service, Cadle rededicated his Tabernacle.

At about the same time, Cadle began the venture that would broaden his base of support far beyond Indianapolis—radio broadcasting. The first broadcasts aired locally, but sometime in 1932 he managed to secure a spot on Cincinnati’s WLW, which in 1928 had become one of the first stations to transmit its signal at 50,000 watts. By the time Cadle joined WLW’s roster, the federal government had authorized experimental use of a 500,000-watt transmitter. The station tested the signal throughout 1933; by 1934, it was approved for full-time use. President Franklin Roosevelt presided over the dedication ceremony, pushing a gold key to symbolically begin the super-power transmission.⁵³

Depending on weather conditions and the time of day, WLW’s signal could be heard in Canada, Central and South America, and sometimes even across the oceans. In the first six months after the power upgrade, WLW’s mail volume quintupled over the same period a year before. In 1935, the Federal Communications Commission estimated that the station’s signal could be received clearly and consistently by more than ninety million people, or two-thirds of the nation’s population. “The nation’s station,” as WLW billed itself, reached out to an audience eagerly embracing radio. In 1935, two-thirds of all households in the U.S. had a radio; by 1941, that figure had climbed to an estimated 85 percent.⁵⁴

WLW broadcasted Cadle’s program, “The Nation’s Family Prayer Period,” every morning for a decade. It featured a brief devotional, deliv-

⁵²Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 156. For an account previewing the dedication service, see “Cadle Tabernacle Will Be Rededicated Next Sunday; First Services Recalled,” *Indianapolis Star*, September 27, 1931.

⁵³Lawrence Wilson Lichty, “The Nation’s Station. A History of Radio Station WLW,” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1964), 239-45. The origins of the relationship between Cadle and WLW are uncertain. In an interview, his daughter insisted that her father sought out WLW’s owner, Powel Crosley, Jr., and persuaded him to donate airtime to the fledgling ministry. Crosley liked him so much that he agreed, and Cadle’s time on the station remained free until his death. The story is not implausible, given Cadle’s salesmanship skills and their shared Republican inclinations. Dick Perry, *Not Just a Sound: the Story of WLW* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), esp. chap. 1.

⁵⁴Lichty, “The Nation’s Station,” 348, 345, 237-38. Regarding radio’s role in the resurgence of conservative Christianity, see Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 124-40; Tona Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002).

ered by Cadle or a guest, as well as singing by Ola Cadle and various soloists and choirs. Monday through Saturday the program aired in a fifteen-minute time slot beginning at 6 a.m. On Sundays it aired from 11 to 11:30 a.m. Ola typically opened the program with the hymn "Did You Think to Pray?" and closed with "Sweet Hour of Prayer," while Cadle's son, Buford, introduced the program and signed it off. Sometimes he announced a revival that his father would be conducting in a certain town, or described a recent meeting at the Tabernacle or elsewhere. But he always introduced Cadle with the same words: "Now I introduce to you your friend and my father, E. Howard Cadle."

In his devotional addresses, Cadle persistently reminded his audience of the "bigness" of his enterprise. The choir was "the largest permanently organized chorus choir." The Tabernacle was variously "the largest religious auditorium in the world" and "the world's largest religious interdenominational institution." Cadle had collected these and similar grand claims, along with details about the Tabernacle's history and its staff, in a brochure, which he offered to anyone who requested it. "We still have a lot of booklets left yet," he noted one morning at the close of the program. "If you'd like to know the story about this great religious institution, the largest religious auditorium in the world with a seating capacity of 10,000, built at the cost of half a million dollars through a redeemed drunkard whose mother's prayers saved him, we'll send you one free of charge."⁵⁵

It is impossible to know exactly how many people listened to the show or responded to Cadle's booklet offers and pleas for money. Whatever records were kept are now gone, and the extant reports are of uncertain reliability. *Life* noted in 1939 that the WLW audience "floods his office with 4,000 letters weekly." In a memoir published in 1957, a Cadle friend and associate estimated that in 1934 the Tabernacle had received 24,000 letters a month, a volume that required the attention of twenty staff members. A writer for *Radio Guide* in 1939 described the Tabernacle as "the spiritual center" of thirty million Christians.⁵⁶

⁵⁵In April 1996, I came into possession of several hundred wax cylinders used by the Cadle ministry to broadcast his radio program in the late 1930s and early 1940s. I donated them to the Indiana Historical Society in 2001.

⁵⁶"Cadle of Indianapolis Streamlines Evangelism," *Life*, 73; William T. Arnold, *Your Friend and Mine . . . E. Howard Cadle: The Story of Cadle Tabernacle* (Indianapolis, 1957), 14; Chase, "America on Its Knees," 2.



The Cadle Family, c. 1932

The entire Cadle family—Howard and Ola, and children Buford, Helen, and Virginia Ann—participated in the Cadle ministry.

How I Came Back (1932)

Whatever the exact numbers, it is certain that Cadle's appeals reached a wide audience. The program's routine met critical needs in Depression-era America. For millions of people, concentrated mostly in the Midwest and upper South, "The Nation's Family Prayer Period" formed as much a part of their daily routine as breakfast. One woman described the program's place in her childhood in Alleghany County, Virginia. Her family owned the only radio in town, but since batteries for it were expensive, her father restricted their listening. The only sure bet, she said, was Cadle's program. At night, when the family gathered together for its daily devotional time, her father would often quote



Cadle and the Cadle Tabernacle Choir, c. 1932

The 1,000-member choir loyally contributed to the success of the Cadle radio ministry.

How I Came Back (1932)

something Cadle had said back to them. More than a source of spiritual uplift for her family, the Tabernacle also served as a connection to a world beyond Alleghany County—a glimpse of a better tomorrow. “It’s hard to identify with what I’m saying [if you didn’t live through the Depression],” she recalled, more than half a century later. The daily Tabernacle broadcast “was a breath of fresh air. It was a touch of the outside. It was inspirational. It brought spirit and a goal to life. We got up by it every morning. It’s still a special memory in the recesses of my mind.”⁵⁷

Listeners also came to think of Cadle as a close personal friend. An intimate, adoring tone permeates the notes sent to the Tabernacle. They arrived by the thousands, day after day, from all over the map. Cadle printed a handful of them in the Tabernacle’s monthly publication, the *Cadle Call*, which first appeared in 1941. “When I heard you say this morning that Buford was sick,” one listener wrote, “I just felt it was one of our own family who was sick. For that is how near we feel to all of the

⁵⁷Frances Craddock, telephone interview with author, April 1996.



Cadle's "One Night Revival" Staff, 1930s

Cadle's son Buford sits in the cockpit while assistant William T. Arnold (wearing suspenders), and Arnold's wife, Georgia (at William's right), stand with unidentified staff members.

Courtesy of the author

Cadle Tabernacle Staff. So we are praying that God touches his body and makes him well real soon." Cadle responded by assuring readers that "your prayers—and the prayers of many others—had their effect. Buford Cadle was up and around shortly afterward and his voice greets you daily from the radio now." In the same issue, a "Mrs. L. P." wrote that "I am enclosing a little gift to help you carry on your great work of preaching the Gospel. I am a widow, 81 years old, am blind and cannot read or write a line. I have a little girl friend to write for me. I can hardly wait until Sunday to hear you preach the Gospel and hear the songs. It is a great pleasure to me." Cadle responded with a plug for the daily program: "Mrs L. P. doesn't have to wait until Sunday to pray with us. The Nation's Family Prayer Period is heard from WLW (and other stations) every morning."⁵⁸

As these exchanges suggest, Cadle cultivated a sense of personal connection with his audience while aggressively trying to broaden it. In

⁵⁸ "Letters from Our Readers and Listeners," *Cadle Call*, July 1941, 5.



William Arnold (second from left) with members of a mountain church in Athol, Kentucky. Finding the chapel in irreparable condition, a Cadle representative oversaw the construction of this new building using the donated labor of church members.

Courtesy of the author

the later 1930s, his methods for doing so generated much of the press attention he received. He sought out both his faithful listeners and potential listeners wherever they lived—whether in cities or towns or the remote valleys of West Virginia. Cadle's "one-night revivals" drew much attention. He owned a small airplane, and Buford served as his pilot. After the morning show, they and several members of the staff would fly to various locations in the Midwest and the South, hold a service that evening, then fly back to Indianapolis in time for Cadle to appear on his radio program the next morning. Upcoming dates and sites for the meetings were advertised on the program and, judging by press accounts, Cadle often spoke to full houses. A report of one of the early meetings, held in 1934, noted that an audience of 3,000 people packed Dayton, Ohio's, Memorial Hall to hear "Rev. Cadle, who has become nationally known by his radio sermons."⁵⁹ Cadle's volunteer assistant, William T. Arnold, once wrote that he had booked more than 500 of these meetings, and in 1941 Cadle estimated that he and his staff

⁵⁹"Crowd Fills Memorial Tabernacle Hall to Hear Tabernacle Head," *Dayton Journal*, June 22, 1934.

had driven 250,000 miles and flown half a million more in arranging and conducting them.⁶⁰

Cadle called another effort to broaden his audience “mountain church work.” Beginning in 1937, Cadle put Arnold to work installing radio receivers in isolated and sometimes abandoned churches throughout the upper South, generally in Appalachian communities too small or too poor to support a full-time preacher. With a Crosley radio (also donated) installed in the building, people could meet together on Sunday mornings and feel part of a regular worship service.⁶¹

Arnold’s son often traveled with his father. He later recalled that they would leave Dayton early on Saturday mornings and be away until late Sunday evening. “Half of the churches, something would keep you from getting all the way to them,” he said. “The road would run out. Sometimes, the church people would be there with mules. These were dirt roads, so if it rained there was no getting through with a car.” Arnold kept a log of his journeys, and the fragmented entries register the poverty and challenges he encountered. “Abandoned mining camp leased by the county, Logan, for folks on relief,” read an entry from West Virginia, dated February 1938. “Have a Sunday School regular, lead by Miss Virginia Nourse. Children repeated . . . Bible verses. Very needy place. All persons on direct relief of WPA. Use a dwelling for a church. Plank seats. 75-100 present.”⁶² In 1941, Cadle estimated that more than 600 such mountain congregations listened to his broadcast each Sunday.

Cadle’s success rode upon the strong loyalty of his audience. A pianist who played at the Tabernacle in the early 1930s said of the Gypsy Smith choir: “They adored him, really. There was something that just pulled. There was just a tightness of fellowship, friendship.” Though widely scattered, his radio audience felt the same pull of love and loyalty. Lonely widows like “Mrs. L. P.” tuned in every morning knowing that others did the same. And on Sundays, people across the Appalachian South gathered in small churches, seated before a radio attached to a pulpit, and heard the Cadle Tabernacle choir singing familiar gospel hymns. “He is

⁶⁰Arnold, *Your Friend and Mine*, 18; E. Howard Cadle, *The Flying Preacher: One Night Revivals* (Indianapolis, 1941), 8.

⁶¹Arnold owned a dry-cleaning shop in Dayton and met Cadle at the one-night revival held in 1934.

⁶²William Arnold, interview with author, August 1996. The log had been handed down to Arnold’s son, who donated it to me during our 1996 interview.

one of the great evangelists of our age,” the author of the *Radio Guide* piece on Cadle concluded. “He could live to be as old as Methuselah and never touch the surface of the millions he reaches now through a microphone on his pulpit, which makes the world his parish.”⁶³

Cadle’s radio success finally made plausible his claim of not competing with local churches—but not because the Tabernacle sat empty. Indeed, several thousand people attended the Sunday morning broadcast each week, and the Tabernacle also held a Sunday evening service. Attendance at both of these meetings was greater than that at the vast majority of churches in the city and, Cadle’s protests notwithstanding, the Tabernacle gave every appearance of being a church: it took an offering, baptized people, held communion services regularly, and sponsored clubs and organizations that catered to one’s age or interests.⁶⁴ But in truth, the importance of this local audience diminished dramatically when Cadle began his radio broadcasts. His competition now consisted primarily of other radio personalities, secular and sacred.

At the same time, though, the importance of the Tabernacle itself increased. As home to “The Nation’s Family Prayer Period,” it soon became a sort of shrine, a place of pilgrimage. Curt Davis, who served as the Tabernacle’s organist from 1931 until Cadle’s death, recalled that the 6 a.m. weekday broadcasts typically included 200 or 300 people in the audience. Always, he said, the parking lot was filled with out-of-state cars. People came to see a radio star, to see the “largest building of its kind in the world,” and on Sundays to see the famous choir. “See, this is before television,” Davis said, “You can tell the listening audience that they’re hearing 1,200 people sing, or that they’re hearing 1,000 people sing. They would say, ‘I don’t believe it. I’m going to go see.’ So, when he had visitors stand . . . sometimes that took ten or fifteen minutes [after the broadcast]. He would call off the states: ‘Who’s here from Tennessee?’ I would play ‘The Tennessee Waltz’ while they were standing. For Wisconsin, I would play ‘On Wisconsin.’”⁶⁵

Along with Cadle’s increasing celebrity came a striking increase in his wealth. As a young man, Cadle had put his philosophy of living this

⁶³Thelma Moore, interview with author, July 1996; Chase, “America on Its Knees,” 39.

⁶⁴The primary basis for Cadle’s claim that the Tabernacle’s work supplemented local churches was the fact that it kept no formal membership list.

⁶⁵Curt Davis, interview with author, May 1996.

way: "Personally, I live well. I want the best things to eat. I drive what I think is the best looking automobile and my wife one as good. We wear the best clothes, eat the best food, see the best things and shall continue to do that . . . But about the good living . . . wealth is only good to make others happy—others who have been less fortunate than the man who has the wealth." *Life's* profile of Cadle in 1939 juxtaposed his broken-down home after his "ruin" in the Florida real estate collapse with his current "spruce" residence, noting the Cadillac parked in front of it. "He liked nice things," Cadle's youngest daughter once observed. "He drove nice cars, big cars, and he did have servants."⁶⁶

Cadle's activity in Belleville, a community about fifteen miles west of Indianapolis, provides perhaps the best evidence of his economic success. In the mid-1930s, he bought a large home, several small homes, and more than one thousand acres of land there. He used the land to graze animals and grow crops and lodged his farmhands and their families in the smaller homes as part of their pay. In a note written to William Arnold in October 1937, after a recent illness had briefly sidelined him, Cadle said that "I have made a mighty important decision since being back. I am through with all outside business, and am going to take care of the farm . . . No more business; no more saw mills; no more veneer mills; no more plants; no more timber; no more nothing! . . . You know the old devil was trying to get me off on the wrong track with so much business that it would take my mind off winning souls for Christ, but I caught the old cuss just in time."⁶⁷

The promise proved impossible to keep. Four months later, a local newspaper reported that "a new saw mill which, when completed, will provide employment for 25 to 30 men, is being built by E. Howard Cadle at Belleville, five miles west of Plainfield on the National Road." To supply the mill with wood, Cadle also bought two eighty-acre tracts of virgin timber in another town. "The mill is equipped with all modern machinery necessary to produce finished products," the paper reported.

⁶⁶"Howard Cadle, Ex-Gambler, Saloon Bum and Wreck, Tells How He Came Back," *Salem* [Ind.] *Democrat*, October 26, 1921; Virginia Good, interview with author, May 1996. For most of the 1930s, the Cadles resided on Fall Creek Boulevard. In 1941, the family moved to 4411 N. Meridian St. The ministry's operating expenses ran to approximately \$100,000 in 1939, but the income derived almost exclusively from pleas for donations on his radio program; there were no sponsors. "Cash and Cadle," *Time*, 39.

⁶⁷Reprinted in Arnold, *Your Friend and Mine*, 69.

"Cabinets for radios, and baskets and boxes for handling fruits and vegetables will be produced by this industry."⁶⁸

In addition to these ventures, Cadle constructed in Belleville a log tabernacle with a seating capacity of 5,000. The tabernacle stood as the centerpiece of a summer campground that included open land for parking trailers and pitching tents, a restaurant, cabins, and small man-made lakes for fishing and swimming. Each summer, he invited evangelists from around the nation to be guest speakers in the log tabernacle, and he invited his radio and print audience to spend their vacation at the Cadle campgrounds. In July 1936, a local newspaper reported that the tabernacle's dedication service "was completely filled, and the remaining heard the sermon through an amplifying system on the meeting grounds."⁶⁹

By 1942 Cadle's varied pursuits—local and far-flung, business and religious—functioned in perfect symbiosis. On Sundays, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, heard the morning service broadcast live from the Cadle Tabernacle. On weekdays and Saturdays, many listeners started their day with his 15-minute devotional. Some drove to Indianapolis to participate in a broadcast from the Tabernacle, or planned a vacation at the Cadle summer campground. For many of those unable to see him in person, Cadle brought his ministry to their town through one-night revivals. This vast audience showed their thanks by sending Cadle money, which he used to build and expand both his business and religious endeavors.

Given more time, this symbiotic setup might have propelled Cadle to truly national significance. World War II, perhaps even more so than the Depression, created a powerful demand for the sort of soothing tonic that Cadle offered. But little more than a year after the U.S. entered the war, his ministry abruptly ended. One morning in October 1942, after delivering what would be his final program from the Tabernacle, Cadle checked into Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis. He conducted the pro-

⁶⁸"Cadle Brings New Industry to Belleville," *Plainfield [Ind.] Messenger*, February 17, 1938.

⁶⁹"Many Attend Cadle Dedication Meeting," *Hendricks County [Ind.] Republican*, July 23, 1936. Cadle's activities in Belleville stirred a tax-evasion controversy in 1937. "Tax-Exempt Property," *Indianapolis Star*, March 2, 1937. In 1947, the Internal Revenue Bureau sought nearly \$300,000 in back taxes and fines for the Tabernacle's failure to file income tax returns from 1931 to 1943. The parties reached a compromise, with the Tabernacle agreeing to pay about \$100,000 in taxes and penalties. "Tax Evasion Cases Total \$863,588 Here," *Indianapolis Times*, May 19, 1947; "Cadle Tabernacle Ordered to Pay \$104,095 Back Taxes," *Indianapolis Star*, June 11, 1947.

gram from bed for several weeks, but his condition steadily worsened, and he died on December 20, 1942, at the age of 58, probably from complications related to the kidney disease that had plagued him since his youth.⁷⁰

E. HOWARD CADLE'S APPEAL: POPULISM, PRAGMATISM, AND SUPERNATURALISM

In the decades since Cadle's death, Americans have seen many others of his ilk ascend to fame: the charismatic radio or television preacher with a gift for salesmanship, a large and loyal base of supporters, a vague or nonexistent denominational affiliation, and an ambiguous identity that is equal parts businessperson and believer. The same character type has a long history in the annals of American religion—one can trace it back at least to George Whitefield and his massive outdoor revival meetings, over the protests of "regular" clergy, in the mid-eighteenth-century American colonies.⁷¹ Cadle's significance to historians stems from the fact that he appeared on the scene—and achieved widespread popular success—precisely at a moment when modern science and culture threatened the moorings of traditional religion and morality.

Cadle presented two personas to his audience—a Savvy Businessman and a Country Preacher—and created a productive tension out of the contradictions between them by relying on an intensely literal supernaturalism. His ability to harmonize divergent images—to embrace traditional and modern, urban and rural—offers a model of the strategies that conservative Christians used to resist and adapt to broad religious and cultural changes in the decades after the 1920s.

Cadle's theology and his interpretive approach emphasized a literal, "common sense" understanding of scripture: all believers who approached the Bible in good faith, taking its words literally, would

⁷⁰Ola Cadle served as president of the Tabernacle's board of trustees until her death in July 1955. The Tabernacle began a television ministry in the early 1950s, but it never achieved the sort of success that the radio program enjoyed under Howard Cadle. The last issue of the *Cadle Call* appeared in October 1967. After the Tabernacle was sold off and torn down the following year, only the radio ministry survived. It eventually became a weekly program conducted by an out-of-state preacher. The show finally ceased broadcasting in the early 1990s after the deaths of the Cadle children, Buford and Helen, who managed it.

⁷¹Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1991).

come to essentially the same conclusions about its meaning.⁷² In Cadle's world, Jonah spent three days in the belly of a whale, and Noah and his family were the only survivors of a universal flood. As for humanity's origins, Cadle stated, "I do not believe man was made through the process of evolution. I believe God made man from a pile of dirt, because the Bible says so, and I have sense enough to believe the Bible." God was also intimately involved in people's individual and collective fate: "God will not stand for the rampant, sinfulness of our nation today, but He will bring down fire from heaven to wipe out creation, unless men and women are willing to forsake the devil and turn to Him."⁷³

In the context of Cadle's rise to evangelistic success in the 1930s, this theological supernaturalism bore a crucial social message. "God has brought on this economic depression to make a lot of people realize there is more to life than prosperity," Cadle preached. In another sermon he denied that "we will ever solve any problems until we do it in the name of Jesus Christ. Now, I mean *all* problems—our economic, our social, our educational, and our religious. They *all* have to be solved at the foot of the cross The Bible tells me so, and I see where people cannot solve problems other places, other ways, or through different mediums." Human effort alone might be useless, but the believer who surrendered to God's will discovered a newfound power that dramatically enhanced personal prospects in every endeavor. In a sermon titled "The Reason I Am a Christian," Cadle explained that "when one is a Christian and is born into the Kingdom of God, He will hear our prayers for health, money, job, sweetheart, home, and every phase of our life." Another sermon offered that "[d]ivorces, home troubles, family differences and quarrels, and economic distress can be avoided if men and women would accept the peace and power of Jesus Christ in their daily lives. Jesus Christ is the truest friend of man in all of his troubles and is the best business partner today."⁷⁴

This intertwining of pragmatism and supernaturalism characterized the part of Cadle's public image that can be called the Savvy

⁷²On the centrality of the commonsense philosophical tradition in American Christianity, and particularly its influence on biblical interpretation in the nineteenth century, see Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2002); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, rev. ed. (New York, 2005), 54-62.

⁷³Cadle, *The Flying Preacher*, 17; Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 181.

⁷⁴Cadle, *How I Came Back*, 177, 182; Cadle, *Flying Preacher*, 32, 47.

Businessman. Expressed rhetorically in his conversion story and tangibly in his lifestyle, the message delivered by Cadle's luxury cars and expensive homes, his private airplane and the building bearing his name in downtown Indianapolis was that Christianity *works*. Jesus Christ was indeed the best business partner around, just as advertising executive Bruce Barton claimed in his 1925 bestselling book, *The Man Nobody Knows*.⁷⁵

In Depression-era America, the Savvy Businessman persona presented serious pitfalls, especially given Cadle's expensive tastes and his unembarrassed displays of wealth. Cadle mitigated the contradiction with another image characterized by his nickname for himself: "the Country Preacher." The Country Preacher set rural, "traditional" values over the vices of the cities. "Country" also signified "community." In his conversion story, Cadle descended into sin—and his social networks fell apart—when he first ventured into big cities. Back in his parents' home, on a farm in southern Indiana, he found cosmic redemption and restoration to an earthly community. His mother, who would accept him no matter how far he fell, symbolized all the traditional values that had defined Cadle's nineteenth-century boyhood, and her embrace served as a gesture of unconditional acceptance and love—precisely those things that the city and its vices had stripped away. Thus the "Country" in Cadle's self-description resonated on both literal and metaphorical levels: where he came from, and the place of eternal communion.

The Country Preacher also practiced an aggressive populism.⁷⁶ A eulogy appearing in a local paper after Cadle's death noted that he was "a highly unusual man" who "had the gift of knowing his people."⁷⁷ The reference to Cadle's "people" hints at something difficult to quantify but nonetheless real: the class tensions underlying his success. It is

⁷⁵T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, ed. Lears and Richard Wightman Fox (New York, 1983), 1-38; Leo Ribuffo, *Right Center Left: Essays in American History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1992).

⁷⁶My interpretation of Cadle's populism and his cultivation of an "outsider" persona, here and throughout, is deeply indebted to two works: Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn., 1989) and R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York, 1986), esp. ch. 5. Though dated, Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1962), contains a still-insightful account of the populist impulse in American evangelicalism.

⁷⁷"E. Howard Cadle," *Indianapolis Times*, December 22, 1942.

simplistic to say that Cadle appealed to only the poor and downtrodden, but it is beyond doubt that his followers felt deeply vulnerable. The legal name he gave to his evangelistic work—the People’s Church, Inc.—underscored the populist thrust of his ministry.⁷⁸ Like the People’s Party of the 1890s, Cadle identified a group of elites as the source of the nation’s problems, but instead of challenging the moneyed elite of the Gilded Age, the Country Preacher charged elitists of the mind—intellectuals and technocrats—with threatening to bring the nation to ruin.⁷⁹ “You can cram your little, old head full of all the knowledge of the books of the world,” Cadle declared, “You can get all the sheepskins from every university in the country You will never do it there. You will never do it in the name of science Science, psychology, physiology—all the ologies in the world will not solve the problems. I solved all my problems on my knees, coming to Christ.”⁸⁰ Perhaps no statement captures so succinctly the symbiosis of populism, supernaturalism, and pragmatism in Cadle’s message.⁸¹

The Savvy Businessman’s pragmatism, the Country Preacher’s populism, and the intense supernaturalism underpinning both personas allowed Cadle simultaneously to embrace and defy the modern world—reaping the benefits of its technological and economic institutions while

⁷⁸Pentecostalism has inspired some fine analyses of conservative Christians’ socioeconomic standing. The older interpretation is represented by Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York, 1979). Grant Wacker’s more recent book suggests that early Pentecostals were much more middle-class than has been recognized. *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, 2001). In 1983, sociologist James Davison Hunter found that “Evangelicalism remains based within the middle and lower socioeconomic echelons of American life—lower overall than the other major bodies yet clearly not within the lowest reaches of social and economic life.” Hunter, *American Evangelicals: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1983), 53–55. On conservative Christians and class status, see also Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago, 1998).

⁷⁹On the People’s Party, see Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment* (New York, 1978) and Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 2006). On the varieties of populism in American history, see Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY, 1998).

⁸⁰Cadle, *The Flying Preacher*, 33–34.

⁸¹Cadle’s style influenced at least one young listener who would go on to achieve even greater fame and fortune than his own. Dave Thomas, the famous folksy founder and spokesperson of the Wendy’s fast-food chain, remembered listening to Christian radio programs with his grandmother Minnie: “On Sundays before church we would listen to shows like the *Cato Tabernacle* [sic] out of Indianapolis.” Dave Thomas, “What Makes for Success,” *Imprimis* 25 (July 1996), 3.

decrying the social upheaval inflicted by them. If the Savvy Businessman lived in the city and dressed like a dandy, the Country Preacher reassured listeners that he remained a farm boy at heart. The Savvy Businessman understood the push and shove of the modern world; he played by its rules and was rewarded with a Cadillac and an airplane. The farm boy could conquer the city so long as he cultivated self-discipline, resisted the lure of city vices, relied on God's help, and stayed true to the simple truths of the Bible. Cadle's life offered proof that the transition from a rural to an urban society need not mean the end of morality and traditional values.⁸²

Radio's rapid rise allowed Cadle to promote his "country" values from an urban headquarters. That irony takes us to the heart of the religious right's persistence—and influence—in modern American culture. Cadle's radio program provided his listeners with a sense of connection to a wider, albeit largely invisible, world of like-minded people.⁸³ "I do not know how I could carry on some days if it was not for the morning prayer period to give me strength to keep on trying and trust[ing] in God," read one letter from a listener, reprinted in Cadle's monthly magazine. Another wrote that "our entire family (wife and five kiddies and self) are using your family prayer period as a foundation for our family altar. You'll never know this side of the pearly gates just what your life has meant to me and millions of others."⁸⁴ As the leader of a vast community knitted together by radio during a time of economic desperation and social turbulence, Cadle reassured his audience that God controlled their fate and the fate of the nation. The politicians and their advisers, the intellectuals and the technocrats—all were impotent in the face of the nation's problems. The only cure was God's grace, and the only path to that was through prayer and repentance. In true populist fashion, Cadle's message of hope gave power to the people.

⁸²On fundamentalists' complex relationship to modernity, see Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 234-36. George Marsden develops a similar theme in "Preachers of Paradox: The Religious New Right in Historical Perspective," in *Religion and America: Spiritual Life in a Secular Age*, ed. Mary Douglas and Steven Tipton (Boston, 1983), 150-68. See also Douglas Carl Abrams, *Selling the Old-Time Religion: American Fundamentalism and Mass Culture, 1920-1940* (Athens, Ga., 2001).

⁸³For an important essay describing radio's cultural unifying and homogenizing influence in this era, see Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1985), 150-83.

⁸⁴Cadle Call, August 1941, 6.

Across the nation, scores of Cadle's contemporary American revivalists engaged in similar sorts of regionalized community building. Aimee Semple McPherson's evangelistic career in California spanned roughly the same years as Cadle's. Her supernatural faith healings could hardly have launched a more direct affront to the rising naturalism of modernity. A skilled self-promoter and entertainer, McPherson used her flamboyant personality and energetic sermons to keep radio audiences spellbound. In 1924, she began broadcasting from radio station KFSG, located in her institutional headquarters, the Angelus Temple. The station's reach was vast: live broadcasts from the Temple made McPherson's voice "one of the most familiar in the United States." When an earthquake struck Santa Barbara in 1925 her listeners demonstrated vividly the community-building aspect of her work by responding to her pleas for assistance and delivering two convoys of aid before the Red Cross could deploy its own relief efforts. The thriving denomination she built, the Foursquare Church, survives to this day.⁸⁵

Like McPherson, E. Howard Cadle is important, in the end, because his blend of pragmatism, populism, and supernaturalism presaged the emerging character of conservative Christianity in America. In the 1930s, when fundamentalists were tempted by their theology and the verdict of Scopes to isolate themselves and reject American culture as corrupt beyond hope, Cadle took the opposite tack. He often quarreled with more "mainstream" religious and community leaders, but he never withdrew into silence. Indeed, he relished being at the center of conflict and controversy, and he always sustained an active engagement with the culture in which he operated. In building his institution, he drew on the sense of betrayal and powerlessness felt by millions of Americans who had watched their communities fragment and their "old-fashioned" faith come under withering attack by scientific and humanistic scholarship. But he played on more than their despair. Like scores of other charismatic Christian leaders, he offered a positive alternative: a "community" of like-minded believers—a support network—

⁸⁵Edith Blumhofer, *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1993), 267. See also Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York, 1982); Tom Sitton and William Deverell, eds., *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (Berkeley, Calif., 2001).



Tribute to B. R. Lakin on display in Jerry Falwell's
Liberty University, 1990s
In 1984, Falwell honored Lakin as "Fundamentalist of the
Year." Portraits of the Cadle Tabernacle are visible in the lower
left and lower right corners of the display.
Photograph by Jan Shipps

set militantly against the presumed godlessness of mainstream American culture.⁸⁶

By the close of the twentieth century, new transitions in American culture—the expansion of government bureaucracies, the growth of

⁸⁶Other religious figures built similar regional "empires." William Vance Trollinger, *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison, Wis., 1990); Barry

higher education after World War II, and the corporate mobilization against communism during the Cold War—would change the threats to conservative Christianity, but not the strategies of resistance. Countless preachers and politicians of a conservative bent followed the familiar paradigm, decrying the nation's fall from grace while exhorting the nation's "pro-moral" majority to fight back against the godless elites who had corrupted American society. *Time* declared 1976 the "year of the evangelicals," and in 1980 Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority helped Ronald Reagan win the presidency, laying the groundwork for an energized religious right that remains politically influential to this day.⁸⁷

As it happens, Howard Cadle played an important, if vicarious, role in that resurgence. After his death, his young assistant and "disciple" B. R. Lakin stayed on as "pastor" of the Tabernacle and hosted the radio show until 1952. Lakin, a West Virginian who possessed a folksy appeal similar to that of his mentor, went on to his own career as a renowned revivalist in fundamentalist circles. In the 1960s, he mentored a young Jerry Falwell. Howard Cadle might have relished the prescience of his autobiography's title, *How I Came Back*. His own existence has nearly been forgotten. But in spirit, if not in flesh, the Country Preacher has come back yet again.



Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington, Ky., 1996); Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial*; Philip Goff, "Fighting Like the Devil in the City of Angels: The Rise of Fundamentalist Charles E. Fuller," *Metropolis in the Making*, ed. Sitton and Deverell. On the emergence of right-wing populism in the twentieth century, see Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York, 1991), 509-517.

⁸⁷Frances FitzGerald, *Cities on a Hill: A Journey Through Contemporary American Cultures* (New York, 1986), 121-201; Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Politics and Piety in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993); Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *American Historical Review*, 99 (April 1994), 409-29; Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000); Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J., 2001).