

chapter 3

lords of the air: the cnp's media empire

he founders of the CNP exulted in Reagan's election. They considered the traditional Republican Party to be controlled by the East Coast elite, and saw Ronald Reagan as a true conservative. They had encouraged him to run, supported his campaign, and played an important role in his victory: white evangelicals had voted in equal numbers for Carter and Ford in 1976, but they voted two to one for Reagan, and the Republicans took control of the Senate for the first time in twenty-six years. "The men who recruited Reagan were all men of the New West," Richard Viguerie wrote. "They had no ties to the old Republican establishment."¹

Reagan's landslide victory energized the movement. In 1981 Viguerie told *People* magazine that he had grown his original mailing list of 12,500 into a computerized roster of 4.5 million potential Republican donors. He stated that he planned to "double his list by 1984 and pour the donations into a massive conservative media blitz . . . in the forefront of a revolution being fought with 20-cent stamps."² He would be called "the funding father of the conservative movement."³ Under Viguerie's influence, Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority invested \$6 million in a massive direct mail campaign aimed at registering and engaging additional fundamentalist voters.

But the founders of the CNP understood that their ultimate victory depended on a fully integrated strategy that controlled their messaging from creation to distribution. Viguerie's experiments in direct mail showed them the impact of targeting an audience. Now they followed Viguerie's lead in bypassing the national news media and started building a media empire composed of sympathetic outlets. They started expanding to new platforms—cable, satellite, internet, mobile—as the regulatory environment and technology evolved.

The history of U.S. media tends to focus on East Coast institutions: the great urban newspapers and magazines, public broadcasting, and the three major networks. The networks made a point of hiring announcers with midwestern and southwestern accents, but they answered to the Boston-Washington corridor.

In the hinterlands, a parallel universe of media bloomed. Thousands of daily newspapers served communities with hometown news, public notices, and local advertising. The same was true of local broadcasting outlets. During World War II, Middle Americans turned to outlets such as *Life* magazine and CBS for reports from the front, but they found their hometown heroes in the local paper.

Radio played a different role in rural America from its role in the coastal cities. It was affordable, accessible, and easy to integrate into everyday life. People who couldn't afford magazine subscriptions gathered around the radio to hear the news. Most stations were locally owned and locally oriented. Announcers read the national news off the wires, but they were sure to include high school football scores.

In my father's hometown of Clay Center, Nebraska, broadcasting arrived with Old Trusty, a company that manufactured copper incubators for hatching chicks. In 1926 Old Trusty's founder, Manander M. Johnson, "The Incubator Man," launched KMMJ, the local radio station bearing his initials, to market his products to farmers across the region. It was one of the first commercial radio stations in the area.

Performers from local schools and churches filled the airtime. My Swedish great-grandfather's gospel quartet sang favorites like "Telephone to Glory" and "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood." "Johnson's Radio

Visitor Monthly” offered listeners photos of local artists “Emmett Kinney, Harmonica” and “Ralph Snoddy, Xylophone.”⁴ In 1939, battered by the Great Depression, the station was sold and moved to Nebraska’s “Third City” of Grand Island, just in time for the war years, when everyone hungered for news from overseas.

But times changed, and the radio market changed with it. Like many other stations, KMMJ joined the fundamentalist choir. In 2008 it was acquired by the Praise Network, adopting the motto “Keeping your Mind on the Message of Jesus,” and reverting to gospel music. Its talk shows featured CNP affiliates David Barton, a Christian nationalist; and David Jeremiah, the fire-and-brimstone preacher who succeeded Tim LaHaye as pastor at his California church. Of Nebraska’s 220 radio stations, at least 50 are religious, and many belong to members of the CNP. By comparison, the state has only eleven NPR stations. Crossing the Great Plains, a driver can go for miles without a public radio signal, but he’ll never be far from fundamentalist broadcasting—or messaging inspired by the CNP.

Media played a critical role in the CNP agenda. It was well and good for Weyrich, Viguerie, and Blackwell to recruit millions of evangelical voters. But they needed a way to reach them that complemented their pastors’ sermons, not encroached on them.

The movement’s media saga began in 1972, in the CNP’s prehistory, when two future members acquired a radio station in Bakersfield, California, two hours north of Los Angeles. It was a fitting birthplace for their empire, reflecting the life of the migrants from Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma who began arriving in the 1880s to work in the oil fields. Bakersfield was the site of multiple lynchings in the late nineteenth century, and the Ku Klux Klan took over the city government in the 1920s.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* the Joad family, fleeing the Dust Bowl from Sallisaw, Oklahoma, buried Granma and tangled with vigilantes in Bakersfield. Nearby Oildale was called “Little Oklahoma”—the birthplace of Merle Haggard, the son of Okies from Checotah. Haggard’s hit “Okie from Muskogee” was based on a secondhand memory.

Stuart Epperson wasn't an Okie, but he knew the tunes. He grew up on a tobacco farm in Ararat, Virginia, where his grandmother worked as a midwife and his father moonlighted as an undertaker.⁵ He got his start in broadcasting as a ten-year-old, reading Bible verses on a radio station set up by his brother who worked for the Naval Research Station during World War II on walkie-talkie and radar technology.⁶ As a teenager Stuart Epperson drove a jalopy for his brother's moonshine business, but once his brother was sent to prison, Epperson got religion.⁷ He studied broadcasting at Bob Jones University, and following graduation he married the sister of his fellow Bob Jones graduate Edward Atsinger III. Not long after, Epperson and his new wife joined Atsinger in California.⁸

The brothers-in-law brought a creative solution to a nagging problem. The radio business was in a state of flux, as popular music genres wildly multiplied and stations swapped out formats in search of a winning formula. Among the losers were ministers who paid local stations to broadcast their services, usually landing at the outer reaches of the AM dial. Epperson believed in the future of FM, a relatively new platform that was still scarce in the South and the West.

In 1973 Epperson and Atsinger launched a small FM radio station in Oxnard, northwest of Los Angeles, basing it on a new business model. They sold the local clergy on their station as a fundamentalist alternative to the secular noise on the rest of the dial. They oriented their programming to fundamentalist audiences, with sermons, call-in shows, and religious music, charging their religious customers substantial fees to carry their message to larger FM markets.⁹

In 1977 Epperson and Atsinger went for broke, mortgaging their houses and unloading their nonreligious stations to acquire stations in big-city markets from San Francisco to Staten Island. They named their company Salem, in reference to a biblical name for Jerusalem.

They had a social agenda as well as a profit motive. Epperson explained that Salem Radio was designed to counter "secular humanism" by building "a platform for the best communicators to communicate biblical truth."¹⁰ "Biblical values" became the rallying cry for an entire movement, which divided the world into a Manichean cosmology. "Good" applied to those who adhered to a literal interpretation of the Bible and rejected homosexuality,

abortion, and feminism. “Evil” was anyone who disagreed on principle. Everyone else was a candidate for proselytization. Broadcasting was the most powerful tool to date. It’s not clear exactly when Epperson and Atsinger joined the Council for National Policy, but by 2014 Epperson was president and Atsinger was a member of the board of governors.¹¹ Salem became a linchpin of the CNP’s media outreach.

Epperson and Atsinger benefited from the religious dynamics of the 1970s.¹² As rural Americans migrated to cities, they flocked to the congregations of traditional churches like First Baptist Dallas and Southern California’s Saddleback Church. Many of these mushroomed into megachurches (defined as Protestant churches with a weekly attendance of over two thousand). Their preachers, whose predecessors once thundered their sermons in tent revivals, now turned to massmedia.

Megachurches existed across the country, but they were largely a southern and southwestern phenomenon; of the twenty-five largest churches in America, the vast majority are in the Sun Belt and the Old South.¹³ They also provided important platforms for Southern Baptists and other fundamentalist denominations. The megachurches did not speak with one voice. The largest cohort were nondenominational: some of these were unaffiliated Pentecostal congregations, and many were proponents of the “Prosperity Gospel.” This creed held that godliness, in the form of giving money to the church, led to financial gain on earth. The second largest cluster of megachurches corresponded to the Southern Baptists. Other fundamentalist sects accounted for the rest.

The megachurch phenomenon aroused some criticism. Author James B. Twitchell wrote, “Clearly, they have done to churching what Wal-Mart did to merchandising. They are the low-cost deliverer of salvation.”¹⁴ But megachurches also served an important purpose, offering mobile Americans an instant form of community. At the same time they created a seedbed for conservative activists.

Conservatives, evangelicals, and media: it was a perfect convergence of interests. The architects of the Council for National Policy, Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie, wanted to activate millions of unengaged evangelical voters to advance their takeover of the Republican Party. Pastors sought ways to increase their followers, their influence, and their revenues. The

broadcasters pursued profits by selling airtime to their fundamentalist clientele and leveraging political interests.

Richard Viguerie developed a formula for candidates that he called “the Four Horsemen of Marketing: 1. Position (find a hole in the marketplace). 2. Differentiation 3. Benefit. 4. Brand (it’s what makes you singular or unique).”¹⁵ Conveniently, Salem’s broadcasting business also met Viguerie’s marketing requirements at the same time it provided an important platform for his agenda.

Salem found a new way to monetize religion. Other radio outlets depended on advertising for 95 percent of their revenue, subject to the state of the economy. Less than half of Salem’s revenue came from traditional advertising; most of it came from selling blocks of time to scores of religious organizations that solicited contributions from the listenership.¹⁶ Over time, the definition of “religious” customers evolved to encompass partisan organizations tied to the Council for National Policy.

One of Salem’s earliest and most durable partnerships was with another early member of the CNP, the fundamentalist psychologist James Dobson, who hosted a radio program called *Focus on the Family*. A Louisiana native, Dobson was the scion of ministers from the Church of the Nazarene, a small Pentecostal sect that spun off in the early twentieth century. He was a true son of the Bible Belt, born in Louisiana and educated in Oklahoma, Texas, and Southern California.

Evangelicals tended to distrust psychology, but Dobson embraced the field as his calling, earning his doctorate from the University of Southern California. Visitors to pediatricians’ offices in the Southwest can find racks of Dobson’s publications in the waiting room, covering topics ranging from the dangers of working mothers to the benefits of “discipline.” The only question regarding corporal punishment, Dobson wrote, was whether a parent uses a hand or an object when he strikes his child. “The reason I suggest a switch or a paddle,” he argued, “is because the hand should be seen as an object of love—to hold, pat, hug or caress.” He added that “the spanking should be of sufficient magnitude to cause the child to cry genuinely.”

Dobson took similarly harsh stands against homosexuality, abortion, and pornography, clinging to positions that were increasingly discredited by the medical establishment. He claimed that “no credible scientific research has

substantiated the claim that homosexuality is genetic or innate.” Instead, he held that it was usually the result of “a home where the mother is dominating, overprotective, and possessive while the father rejects or ridicules the child.”¹⁷

Dobson was no fan of feminism. “A good part of my professional life,” he noted, “has been devoted to trying to straighten out some of the feminist distortions about marriage and parenting and to address the relationships between men and our women in our society.” His radio program invited Dorothy Patterson—wife of the Conservative Resurgence leader Paige Patterson—to support his case. “A wife was created from the beginning to be a helper to her husband,” she told his listeners. “That functional role . . . is one of subjection, it is one of submission.”¹⁸

Dobson founded his flagship organization and launched his broadcasts, both named Focus on the Family, in 1977. By 1982 his programs had expanded to a half hour daily and were carried by almost two hundred stations.¹⁹

Dobson sported metal aviator glasses and thinning ginger hair draped in a long comb-over, the image of a social engineering nerd. His nostrums, delivered in a folksy drawl, urged parents to exercise the same authoritarian principles at home that they heard from the pulpit. Dobson’s show was especially popular with homemakers struggling with marriage and parenting, who called in and wrote in epic numbers. Dobson hired a staff of Christian therapists to make sure every question received a sympathetic response. There was no charge for these services, but donations were gratefully accepted. Focus on the Family became a multimedia empire. Dobson published a series of bestselling marriage and parenting manuals, and his broadcasts reached audiences across the country on fundamentalist radio stations.

But Dobson aspired to more than counseling; he was also interested in politics. He had grown close to Paul Weyrich in the late 1970s, and the two men looked for ways to leverage his influence.

The 1980 elections amounted to a declaration of war between fundamentalists and liberals in the United States. Ronald Reagan was the standard-bearer not just of the fundamentalists but also of hawks on defense and fiscal conservatives. Over the early years of his presidency, advocacy organizations proliferated on both sides. In 1981 television producer Norman

Lear, Texas civil rights leader Barbara Jordan, and a group of their associates cofounded People for the American Way specifically to oppose the fundamentalist movement.

In 1983 James Dobson cofounded a new organization called the Family Research Council. This group, despite its anodyne title, served as the policy arm for Dobson's agenda, in partnership with the Council for National Policy. "Family" was a loaded term from the start; it became the movement's code for its militant opposition to same-sex marriage. Dobson's programs kept homosexuals in the line of fire, cherry-picking, inflating, and inventing bogus "research" to suggest their pernicious influence in society, and ignoring legitimate studies that demonstrated their success in partnerships and parenting.

Communities in Middle America, like the ones where I grew up, were ripe for manipulation. In my hometown in Oklahoma in the 1970s and '80s, no one came out of the closet. I'd never knowingly seen or heard of a gay person until I left for college. Years later I heard that one of my Sunday school classmates—a kind, quiet boy with freckles—had moved to San Francisco after college, come out, and died by suicide. It's painful to think of the burden of secrecy and opprobrium he must have endured in our town. Radio offered an obvious advantage for the fundamentalist strategists.

Over the postwar period, the American landscape was covered by an interstate highway system. Americans commuted in their cars, ate in their cars, courted in their cars—often with the radio on. Epperson and Atsinger systematically expanded the Salem network across the country, station by station.

But radio wasn't the fundamentalists' only platform; television also played an essential role. Richard Viguerie's patron Billy James Hargis was one forerunner; Jerry Falwell was another. Both men purchased time on local stations, and fund-raising went hand in hand with audience engagement. In one mailing, dated August 13, 1981, Falwell urged his followers to send him money because his broadcast was "one of the few major ministries in America crying out against militant homosexuals . . . They do want to transform America into a modern Sodom and Gomorrah."²⁰

Falwell staged *The Old Time Gospel Hour* from his Baptist megachurch in Lynchburg, Virginia. At its height in the 1980s, his program was carried

on nearly four hundred U.S. television stations and nearly five hundred radio stations, and he claimed an audience of fifty million monthly viewers. (By comparison, the combined audiences for ABC, CBS, and NBC network news in 1980 was around forty-two million.²¹)

But the true pioneer was Pat Robertson, the son of a U.S. senator from Virginia. Robertson graduated with high marks from Yale Law School, but inexplicably failed the bar exam. He dealt with the trauma by becoming a Southern Baptist pastor. In 1960 the Federal Communications Commission opened up a new world of opportunity for fundamentalist preachers, giving commercial broadcasters the right to sell airtime they had previously given to traditional churches as a public service. The new ruling allowed fundamentalists the chance to compete in the marketplace and develop telemarketing as a profit center.

That year the thirty-year-old Robertson founded the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), with the vision of owning his own network rather than simply purchasing time on existing stations. His flagship program was called the 700 Club, named after the seven hundred donors who initially kept it afloat. CBN would become a major force among fundamentalist media, as well as a platform for Robertson's political ambitions. Robertson was an early member of the Council for National Policy's board of governors.

Robertson's initiative was emulated by the enterprising California pastor Paul Crouch and his wife Jan, who founded the Trinity Broadcasting Network (originally Trinity Broadcasting Systems) in 1973. CBN and TBN attracted vast audiences in Middle America with highly politicized programming, yet they were almost invisible to the national press corps. Following Reagan's election, Richard Viguerie was invited to a press breakfast in Washington. "We had a political earthquake last Tuesday," a puzzled journalist said. "Nobody saw it coming. What happened?" Viguerie, amused, responded by asking how many of the two dozen or so journalists had ever heard of Pat Robertson. Only two or three raised their hands.²²

But the *Christian Science Monitor* noted that while Pat Robertson's broadcasts didn't endorse specific candidates, they could (and did) "insinuate" endorsements on the air. Fundamentalist media was becoming a political force. The *Monitor* reported that Christian broadcasters ran around 1,300 radio stations in the United States (one out of every seven); a

third of commercial publishing was evangelical, and that the outcome of the election “may ultimately depend on the impact of the so-called ‘electronic church,’ the far-reaching Christian broadcast networks.” Viguerie predicted that born-again evangelicals could become “the strongest force in American politics in the next few years.”²³

The CNP leadership was disappointed by the early days of the Reagan administration. His cabinet appointments favored moderates, such as chief of staff James Baker, and the traditional Republican congressional leadership showed an unwelcome spirit of compromise with the Democrats across the aisle. The fundamentalists had expected Reagan to show his gratitude by moving full steam ahead on their social issues, ending abortion and quashing IRS challenges to their tax-exempt status. Instead, the White House emphasized economic policy and put the fundamentalists’ issues on the back burner.

But they had a strong ally in California Republican Ed Meese, counselor to the president. It’s not clear when Meese joined the CNP, but he served on the executive committee as of 1994 and as president in 1996.

In Reagan’s second term, his administration handed the fundamentalists a gift that would galvanize their media and leverage it into an even more powerful political tool: its ruling on the Fairness Doctrine. The doctrine had been in effect since 1949, and required any radio or television broadcaster seeking a license to devote a certain amount of airtime to controversial matters of public interest and to offer opposing views on critical issues.

The doctrine also dealt with two other contingencies. If a station aired personal attacks on an individual involved in public issues, it was obliged to notify the party in question and offer a chance to respond. If a station endorsed a candidate, it had to provide other qualified candidates the opportunity to respond over its airwaves.

In 1985 the Federal Communications Commission’s chairman (who had served as a Reagan campaign advisor) released a report arguing that the Fairness Doctrine violated First Amendment rights. The ensuing debate broke down along sharp party lines: the Democrat-controlled Congress passed legislation that codified the Fairness Doctrine into law, and Reagan vetoed the measure. In August 1987 the four FCC commissioners—all Reagan or Nixon appointees—abolished the doctrine unanimously.

Critics argued that the Fairness Doctrine had stopped making sense when cable television burst upon the scene with the birth of CNN in 1980. Television and radio transmissions were no longer captive to “scarce frequencies.” Cable channels (which were not covered by the Fairness Doctrine) proliferated, representing diverse points of view.

The advent of cable television—combined with the demise of the Fairness Doctrine—represented a bonanza for the radical right. Many critics have focused on Fox News, launched in 1996, but the fundamentalist broadcasters benefited far earlier. Cable allowed them to both target and grow their audiences on a national level. The traditional networks employed huge teams of professional reporters, gatekeeping editors who checked facts, and vice presidents to enforce standards and practices, but the newly liberated cable broadcasters were unencumbered. Not only did they find ways to “insinuate” their endorsements of candidates, skirting the Johnson Amendment, they also launched an attack on professional news outlets.

North Carolina State professor Jason Bivens wrote in *Pacific Standard* magazine that fundamentalist broadcasting was politicized over the Reagan era: “Pat Robertson’s longstanding talk show ‘The 700 Club’ . . . and others began to address what was happening in the news from a biblical perspective. They claimed they were providing viewers with ‘real’ explanations that media and liberal politicians covered up. These shows also reinforced conservative talking points as objective facts.”

Fundamentalist broadcasting, Bivens added, “authorizes a particular, often conspiratorial way of viewing the world. It denounces neutrality or accountability to multiple constituencies as burdensome or even hostile to the Christian faith.”²⁴ These rallying cries to tribalism and paranoia, echoing across the South and the West, would cleave a rift in Americans’ political perceptions that persists to this day.

The disruption of the American media landscape didn’t end with the birth of cable; it had just begun. Technology would shake up American journalism many times over the next few decades. The previous era had represented the apogee of legacy media. The national news media—especially New York based—had played an important role in supporting the civil rights movement, providing a platform for Martin Luther King Jr. and

shaming southern states for their brutal police tactics. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* rode high on the Pentagon Papers and Watergate, where the power of the press triumphed over government lies and misdeeds. When Walter Cronkite, the most trusted man in television, declared that the Vietnam War was unwinnable, President Johnson responded, “If I’ve lost Cronkite, I’ve lost Middle America.”²⁵

I traveled across the national fault line. When I graduated from my high school in Oklahoma in 1972, my hometown newspaper’s front page was dominated by national and international stories from the Associated Press and United Press International. Our family subscribed to *Newsweek* and *Life*, and dinner was accompanied by the six o’clock network news. When I left for Yale, I’d never seen the *New York Times* or the *Village Voice*, but my classmates and I shared the same reference points for current events. American journalism was a national institution, and it was thriving.

But the ground rules for broadcasting had been transformed, and the demise of the Fairness Doctrine paved the way for the expansion of companies like Salem. There was no more right of reply. “The last thing a religious broadcaster wanted to do was eat up airtime with liberals ‘promoting’ abortion and homosexuality,” wrote Adam Piore in *Mother Jones*. “But when the FCC repealed the fairness doctrine, the shackles that had forced Salem to tiptoe cautiously around the society’s great cultural fault lines fell away.”²⁶ The repeal gave Salem and other fundamentalist media new opportunities to widen the fault line across a regional as well as a cultural divide.

Other CNP members ran additional broadcasting operations, and the events of the late 1980s gave them a chance to grow. One important player was Donald Wildmon, a Methodist minister from Tupelo, Mississippi. Wildmon’s crusade began one evening in 1976 as he watched television sitcoms with his family and was shocked by what he beheld: curse words and an extramarital love scene. Wildmon assigned his congregation to monitor network television and emerged with a list of programs to boycott—including *Three’s Company*, *Love Boat*, and *Charlie’s Angels* (in which an attentive monitor counted twenty-three “jiggle scenes”).²⁷ Wildmon resigned from his pastorate and founded a group to organize pickets and boycotts against the networks.

In 1982 Wildmon was appointed to the board of governors of the Council for National Policy, and in 1988 he changed the name of his group to the American Family Association. Three years later he launched American Family Radio. It would expand into scores of stations across the South and the Midwest, providing a platform for Wildmon and other CNP stalwarts, including James Dobson.²⁸

Dobson was also reviewing his strategy. His Family Research Council had begun to run short of funds and lose steam. In 1989 Dobson merged Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council, and ramped up the Family Research Council's radio programming, with an emphasis on influencing policy. That same year he brought on a new president, Gary Bauer, a diminutive Southern Baptist from Covington, Kentucky. Bauer's credentials were ideal: he had worked in opposition research for the Republican National Committee, in government relations for the Direct Mail Marketing Association, and as an advisor on domestic policy for the Reagan administration. Bauer and Dobson began planting Family Policy Councils, state-based organizations with a mandate to lobby legislatures for "profamily" (i.e., anti-LGBT) laws.

But the movement experienced some setbacks. Over 1987 and 1988, a series of sex scandals broke involving prominent televangelists with connections to the movement. One was Pentecostal preacher Jim Bakker, who began his broadcasting career at Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network. A 1987 investigation revealed that Bakker had defrauded his contributors, in part to fund a \$279,000 payoff to a young assistant who accused him of rape. Bakker was sentenced to forty-five years in prison. (His term was later reduced to eight years, and he was freed in 1994.) Next came Louisiana Pentecostal preacher Jimmy Swaggart (a cousin to rockabilly star Jerry Lee Lewis), who was exposed for patronizing prostitutes.

CNP member Jerry Falwell denounced Bakker as "the greatest scab and cancer on the face of Christianity in 2,000 years of church history." Falwell—whose own broadcast lost fifty stations in the fallout—took the program over himself, but the damage was done.²⁹

Televangelism had grown exponentially in the South and the West, but it was regarded as a regional curiosity by the mainstream news media. When

televangelism made the headlines, it was often in the worst possible way, identified with conspiracy, fraud, and rape.

The movement was further fractured when Robertson decided to run for president in 1988, only to have Falwell endorse George Bush instead. Robertson brought fervent supporters and a sizable war chest to his campaign, second only to Vice President Bush's, but it sputtered out before the end of the primaries.

Once again, CNP regulars were disappointed; Bush's establishment Republican, Episcopalian credentials were not to their liking. In the face of political division and financial setbacks, Falwell disbanded the Moral Majority. But he put a brave face on it, proclaiming, "Our goal has been achieved . . . The religious right is solidly in place and . . . religious conservatives are now in for the duration."

But here Falwell had gotten ahead of himself. He and his colleagues at the CNP chose to depict Bush's election as a favorable development. Their members had launched important media initiatives that would exert influence in the future, especially in swing states in the South and the Midwest. But media and churches were only two legs of this stool. There was considerable work to be done, connecting media and churches to the active electorate, and turning sermons into votes.