

# John R. Rice - a Giant of Evangelism

by Fred Barlow

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*Dr. John R. Rice was a renowned evangelist who played a significant role in bringing back large-scale mass evangelism and leaving a lasting legacy in the church through his ministry and THE SWORD OF THE LORD magazine.*

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 12:12, Daniel 12:3, Luke 1:63, Romans 8:31, Ephesians 4:11

**Topics:** "Evangelism", "Christian Legacy"

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## Description

Dr. Fred M. Barlow preaches about the remarkable life and impactful ministry of Dr. John R. Rice, a giant of evangelism and a prolific author who dedicated his life to soul-winning and spreading the Gospel. Dr. Rice's intense convictions, marked by a sincere spirit of compassion, led him to weep over sinners and rejoice with saints, embodying a deep love for people. His legacy includes over 200 written titles with a circulation of over 61 million copies, and a total of 24,058 reported conversions to Christ through his ministries. Dr. Rice's unwavering commitment to soul-winning, uncompromising stance against modernism, and pioneering efforts in citywide revival campaigns and evangelistic conferences have left an indelible mark on fundamental Christianity.

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## Transcript

### ABOUT THE MAN:

Preacher ... evangelist ... revivalist ... author ... editor ... counsellor to thousands ... friends to millions -- that was Dr. John R. Rice, whose accomplishments were nothing short of miraculous. Known as "America's Dean of Evangelists," Dr Rice made a mighty impact upon the nation's religious life for some sixty years, in great citywide campaigns and in Sword of the Lord Conferences.

Dr. Rice was born in Cooke county, in Texas, December 11, 1895. He lived and died a man of intense convictions. But, Dr. Rice was also marked with a sincere spirit of compassion. Those who knew him best, knew a man who loved them. In preaching, in prayer, and in personal life, Dr. Rice wept over sinners and with saints.

In 1980, one of the most prolific pens in all Christendom was stilled. Dr. John R. Rice left behind a legacy in writing of more than 200 titles, with a combined circulation of over 61 million copies. And through October of 1981, a total of 24,058 precious souls reported trusting Christ through his ministries, not counting those saved in his crusades nor in foreign countries where his literature has been translated.

And who but God knows the influence of THE SWORD OF THE LORD magazine which he started and edited for forty-six years!

DR. JOHN R. RICE

Giant of Evangelism

by Dr. Fred M. Barlow

"Not only one of the most controversial figures in the field of evangelism, being both applauded and criticised, Dr. John R. Rice is one of the most underrated Christian leaders of our time. His accomplishments are nothing short of miraculous. He has put the fires of evangelism and soul winning into the bones of more preachers than any other man. Daring to be different in an age when Hell-fire-and-damnation preaching is not emphasized, Dr. Rice simply did it because, as he noted, 'Jesus did.'"

So cited a column in a Sword of the Lord publication some years ago. The paragraph is without exaggeration -- John R. Rice has doubtlessly had a more profound impact on evangelism in the 1900's than any other person.

Texas born (Cooke County -- near Gainesville), Dr. Rice was often introduced in his earlier ministry as the "Will Rogers of the Pulpit," since there was a real similarity in their looks, cowboy background and style of speech. Dr. Rice was a five-year-old boy when his mother died of tuberculosis. On her deathbed she made a passionate plea for John, as well as her other children, to meet her in Heaven. It was a crisis experience in young John's life, one he never forgot and one to which he referred multiplied times in his messages.

At the age of nine he heard a message on "The Prodigal Son," preached by Pastor A. B. Ingram of the First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Texas. Young Dr. Rice went forward to claim Christ as His Saviour. Lamentably, no one dealt with him about biblical assurance of salvation. And when his father forbade his request to be baptized by admonishing him, "When you are old enough to really repent of your sins and be regenerated, then will be time enough to join the church," his confidence in his conversion was put in doubt.

Three years of uncertainty and fear elapsed before the youth read John 5:24 and received rock-ribbed, Bible-based assurance of his personal and eternal salvation. Thus he preached powerfully and positively afterwards: "From that day to this I have never doubted for a moment that I am God's child. I know one thing beyond any doubt: When I trusted Jesus, depending on Him to forgive me, He did! The Word of God says so and that makes it so!"

His boyhood and youth were a montage of many employments: a student in school, a ranch hand for his father, a teacher in a country school -- physical labors and mental disciplines which became significant contributions to his later labors for Christ.

On the calendar, that ministry officially commenced on January 13, 1916, when Dr. Rice was twenty years of age. Concerned about further education, yet depleted of finances, Dr. Rice laid his life out before the Lord under a chaparral bush. He later related: "I told God that I would do anything He wanted me to do. I would preach the Gospel, or I would be a Gospel singer, or do anything else if He should clearly lead." With \$9.35 in his pocket, Dr. Rice rode off in the rain on his cowpony toward Decatur Baptist College --

120 miles away. He was on the road to becoming a world-renowned evangelist -- although at the moment he was totally unaware of God's will for his life.

That road had many a twist and turn before Dr. Rice rode through the open door into full-time preaching. He graduated from Decatur, but was immediately drafted into the army for military service in World War I. Discharged after the Armistice, he enrolled in Baylor University, from which he graduated in 1920, and then married Lloyds McClure Cooke. Dr. Rice's next educational stint was graduate work at Chicago University. All the while he preached in jails, on street corners and "went" soul winning.

But for the record, Dr. Rice became a preacher when, as he told it: "Down at the Pacific Garden Mission, singing and doing personal work, one night I more or less volunteered myself to be a preacher on the basis of Romans 12:1,2, 'present your bodies a living sacrifice,' and the call of Isaiah 6 in which he said, 'Here am I, send me.'" He then knew that all his life God had planned for him to be a preacher.

As his biographer, Dr. Robert L. Sumner, penned in *Man Sent From God*: "Apparently the very last one to realize that God wanted John R. Rice to preach was John R. Rice .... His mother and father gave him to God before he was born and his mother (in a letter to a sister in Texas) called him her 'preacher boy'; and his father had underscored in his Bible the words of Luke 1:63, 'His name is John.'" Also, "Dr. Tidwell (head of Bible department at Baylor) remarked in one of his classes, 'If any girl does not want to marry a preacher, she had better not marry John Rice.'"

And as Dr. Sumner further stated of that mission night experience, "Kneeling with that drunken bum, sensing the evidence of peace in the troubled sinner's breast, seeing the transformed expression on his face, in that single moment all the glamor and glitter wrapped around Dr. Rice's ambition to be a great educator or politician fled away. He lost all his taste and enthusiasm for college classrooms or political platforms."

Dr. Rice related of that transforming time: "I wanted nothing better than to win souls and have welling up in my heart continually the glad joy I felt at that moment. I looked through the vista of future years and saw the time when 'they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever' (Dan. 12:3)."

Dr. Rice took some more schooling -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas -- but the passion and purpose to preach became a pulsing, propelling power. John Rice quit school to become an associate pastor to Dr. Harlan Matthews at Plainview, Texas. Shortly he accepted a call to be a pastor himself at First Baptist Church, Shamrock, Texas. And from there he entered evangelism for a season.

In an open-air campaign in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas a revival ignited. Hundreds were saved and the first independent Baptist church in Dallas was organized. Dr. Rice was called to be pastor and for seven and one-half years led the Fundamentalist Baptist Tabernacle in a great, growing ministry: 7,000 professed salvation in Christ; 1,700 were baptized and united in membership; a building was built, then rebuilt due to a disastrous fire; the area of Oak Cliff was encircled with the Gospel, resulting in a multitude of transformed lives and homes.

As an esteemed evangelist, few people realize that John R. Rice was a pastor of great repute. It is right to say at Dallas he was an evangelist doing the great work of a pastor; calling on, comforting, counseling, encouraging his members. But he was also the pastor doing the great work of an evangelist. Dallas, in that

day, knew there was an old-fashioned, Bible-quoting, sin-hitting, Christ-exalting preacher in the Fundamentalist -- or, as it was later renamed, Galilean Baptist Church -- pulpit.

A sampling of those sermon subjects shows the sensational yet scriptural subjects on which Dr. Rice preached: "Wild Oats in Dallas -- How Dallas People Sow Them and How They Are Reaped"; "The Dance-Child of the Brothel, Sister of Gambling and Drunkenness, Mother of Lust -- Road to Hell!"; "Company for Supper -- and Not a Bite in the House"; "Filling Stations on the Highway to Hell"; "The Man Who Went to Heaven Without Baptism, Without Joining a Church, Without a Mourner's Bench, Without Even Living a Good Life."

Aye -- sensational, spectacular -- but scriptural! Dr. Rice preached sharply, severely against sin -- its appeals, but also its pernicious power and its predestinated payday! He preached on the home, godly Christian living, prayer, revival, prophecy -- some of those sermons are in print today. Although preached over four decades ago, they are amazingly timely to our day and still speak to the soul!

It was in that Dallas pastorate that THE SWORD OF THE LORD magazine was born, and it was also there that the burning desire for full-time evangelism reblazed in Dr. Rice's heart. Thus on January 19, 1940, he announced in THE SWORD his resignation as pastor of Galilean Baptist Church and his plans to return to the field of full-time evangelism. Three months later the Rice family, THE SWORD OF THE LORD, his offices and the bookstore moved to Wheaton, Illinois, from where John R. Rice would become renowned as one of the great evangelists of the 20th century -- yea, any century.

Evangelists, evangelism and evangelistic campaigns were all at a low ebb when Dr. Rice entered the field in 1940. After World War I, humanism, higher criticism, evolutionary teaching began undermining biblical faith as well as the foundation of morality, home education.

Every area of human life was infiltrated; aye, infected with the unbelief, compromise and indifference of these infidelistic teachings. Religion was no exception. Christian educators and pastors prided themselves on their "new freedom" in biblical interpretation. The emotional and moral facets of the Billy Sunday, Bob Jones, St., citywide revivals were held in ridicule and disrepute.

Most revival efforts were concentrated in the southland of America, nicknamed the "Bible Belt." However, those revivals were conducted almost exclusively by Southern Baptist Convention evangelists, and not on a year-round basis.

During the depression years of the 1930's, charlatans using evangelism as a cloak of respectability and for a paycheck brought true evangelism and evangelists into degrading disrepute. Every evangelist became suspect until proven honest, honorable and holy. Reformed theologians and pastors chilled the spirit of evangelism nationwide. Men like Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, president of Dallas Theological Seminary, cataloged evangelists as "false forces in evangelism" and charged that invitations to accept Christ and confess Him in public services "implied salvation by works." Evangelists were labeled "grafters," "racketeers" and "Elmer Gantrys." It was into this kind of a religious climate that Dr. Rice entered full-time evangelism.

He was an ordained Southern Baptist, trained in Convention schools. At first, invitations to conduct campaigns came regularly. However his fundamental conscience was assailed by the obvious unscriptural practices and teachings evidenced everywhere in his denomination. Dr. Rice's characteristic outspoken opposition soon began to close church door after church door. Shortly a committee of denominational

dignitaries called on him. An ultimatum was issued! Further infractions would necessitate his being blacklisted in the official denominational magazine, The Baptist Standard, which, spelled in simple English, meant being barred from Convention church pulpits!

Rather than buckle under, Dr. Rice bolted! He could not serve Christ and denominational bosses -- and he would not! In his characteristic, confident, in-Christ kind of spirit, Dr. Rice asserted that if God could not open doors and could not give him places to preach, could not provide for his family apart from the approval of denominational leaders, then he would find another God to serve who could!

Dr. Sumner stated of that separation with the Southern Baptists: "Following this break with the denomination in which he was raised, saved, baptized, educated, ordained and had served all his life, a surprising thing happened to his ministry. Where he had formerly preached often to rather small congregations, now he began to get great crowds of common people to hear him .... Where he had previously ministered primarily to those already connected with the churches, now he began to reach great masses of those on the outside."

For fifty years John R. Rice was a living testimonial of the great Bible truth -- "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Dr. Rice's revival meetings were not only exciting -- great gospel music, great gospel preaching, and great results -- they often were explosive! The Triple Cities campaign (Binghamton, Johnson City and Endicott, New York) is a case in point. Almost called off at the last moment by the host pastor because of unfounded charges that Dr. Rice was a "Holy Roller," the campaign began under a cloud of confusion and suspicion. Subzero temperatures put another kind of chill on the campaign. Denominational leaders and preachers, plus local political officials, challenged Dr. Rice's integrity and resisted him openly. But people attended, God blessed, and 374 public conversions and reclamations to Christ were recorded.

One of Dr. Rice's messages, "Sodom, Gomorrah and Binghamton -- Three of a Kind," resulted in an investigation of sexual orgies being sponsored and practiced by local officials. Incredibly, such a carousal was in progress the very night Dr. Rice was preaching the message!

Although he had always had a burden for a renewal of the great citywide revivals of the Bob Jones, Sr., and Billy Sunday stripe, it was not until two o'clock one morning in a southside Chicago YMCA room that Dr. Rice, after much waiting on God in prayer, got his directives from Deity. He promised God that with His help and at any cost he would bring back citywide revival campaigns to America. The rest of the story is hallelujah history!

Teaming up at first with musician Stratton Shufelt of Moody Memorial Church -- and later with Dr. Harry Clarke, former associate of Billy Sunday -- Dr. Rice experienced what was to be recognized as remarkable results. Readers must remember that citywide campaigns in that day were a rarity. He had to storm the beachhead of anti mass-evangelism spirit and stigma, suspicion of evangelists, small budgets and small sponsorship of a handful of churches. Thus his attendance and decision reports seem small in comparison with the huge, highly organized and publicized campaigns so prevalent today.

Believe it! Dr. Rice's breakthrough opened wide the doors for the mass evangelism that became the accepted and welcome norm of the 1950's until the present. As it is spelled out in Man Sent From God: "Just as John the Baptist was the forerunner who prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, so John R. Rice was the forerunner who helped bring back large-scale mass evangelism -- and almost all

widely-used evangelists frankly say so, giving him the credit."

For nearly five years Dr. Rice crisscrossed the continent: Everett, Washington; San Pedro, California; Waterloo, Iowa; Springfield, Missouri; Goshen, Indiana; Akron, Ohio; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada; Chicago; Buffalo; Cleveland, Ohio.

The Cleveland campaign was a thirty-day campaign—something unthinkable in today's Christian circles, and not altogether common in the 40's. The closing night attendance was 3,767, a thrilling total for that day! At least 800 first-time decisions for Christ were counted. A year earlier Dr. Rice had filled Kleinhan's Music Hall in Buffalo, New York, with attendances reaching 3,094. Some 997 public professions were recorded.

The Chicago campaign, called "Life Begins," was unique in format and unusually blessed of God in its finality. For five weeks, three different preachers spoke in the Chicago Arena. About 200 churches and service organizations united. Dr. Rice was the speaker for the last fifteen nights, Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., and Dr. Paul Rood preceding him. It was the first union evangelistic effort since the 1918 Billy Sunday meetings. Over 2,000 salvation decisions were tabulated -- which outnumbered the Sunday totals. Some 400 youth dedicated their lives to Christian service. All involved were agreed that the "Windy City" had experienced a breath of blessed revival air from Heaven!

Two years later, in 1948, John R. Rice made another momentous decision. At the height of his revival successes, Dr. Rice retired from the ministry of citywide campaigns to give himself unstintingly to editing THE SWORD OF THE LORD, conducting conferences on evangelism. Dr. Rice reasoned that through the latter ministries he could shake the lethargy of Christian America and shape the course of greatly needed revival in our land -- multiplied more times by reaching and teaching pastors and people how to have revival, how to win souls, how to experience God's power and purpose in life than he could from the revival meeting pulpit! That decision was "the hardest decision I've ever made," Dr. Rice related afterward; "it broke my heart to give up the revivals."

Editing THE SWORD rightly recognized as "America's greatest soul-winning publication," had always been one of Dr. Rice's first loves (he never accepted a salary for his ministry as editor) and one of his most far-reaching ministries. Mention the name John R. Rice and most Christian leaders (and hosts of laymen) think of THE SWORD OF THE LORD. The man and his magazine are inseparably linked. Incidentally, the original title of this magazine was THE SWORD OF THE LORD, AND OF JOHN R. RICE, the inspiration for that title being Judges 7:20: "...and they cried, the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon."

THE SWORD was born September 28, 1934, in Dallas, Texas, when Dr. Rice was pastoring the Fundamental Baptist Church. The first page of that first issue carried this statement of purpose: "An Independent religious weekly to preach the Gospel, expose sin, spread premillennial, fundamental Bible teaching, and foster the work of the Fundamental Baptist Church." This was later revised to read, "An Independent Christian Weekly, Standing for the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible, the Deity of Christ, His Blood Atonement, Salvation by Faith, New Testament Soul Winning and the Premillennial Return of Christ. Opposes Modernism, Worldliness and Formalism." In over 46 years THE SWORD never dipped its colors nor deviated from its original purpose.

Mrs. Rice and Dr. Bill Rice (Dr. John's brother) claim to have been the first circulation department. Bill handed out armloads person-to-person on Jefferson, the main street of Oak Cliff, where the church was located. Mrs. Rice and four of the Rice girls (later six daughters made the family circle complete), and

some other Sunday school children, delivered THE SWORD from house to house.

That was the genesis of the magazine that now has a circulation of over 150,000 copies, distributed in every state of America and in over 100 foreign nations; read by over 40,000 preachers, evangelists and missionaries.

The magazine has varied in length from its original four pages to eight, to twelve, to sixteen, and sometimes more. Now a bi-weekly, it has 24 pages and regularly features four to five full-length sermons by greatly-used present-day preachers and always one of the past. A sampling of those authors sounds like a "Who's Who" of God's greats: Hyman Appelman, B. H. Carroll, Joe Henry Hankins, Jack Hyles, H. A. Ironside, Curtis Hutson, Bob Jones, Sr., R. G. Lee, Tom Malone, D. L. Moody, Rice himself, T. DeWitt Talmage, Lee Scarborough, C. H. Spurgeon, Billy Sunday, R. A. Torrey, George Truett -- the list is endless!

And THE SWORD OF THE LORD is abrim with timely articles -- an arsenal of information, instruction, inspiration on such areas as: "Answers to Bible Questions," "News and Views," "With the Evangelists," "The Editor's Notes," columns to children, to teenagers, to women, to soul winners, "Scrapbook Clippings," etc.

Small wonder one nationally known evangelist enthusiastically wrote: "The paper breathes devotion to Jesus Christ, compassion to the souls of men. Each issue is a blazing torch of fire, enough to set aflame the heart of the coldest, the most backslidden, and the farthest away-from-God sinner."

And small wonder that THE SWORD OF THE LORD became required reading in many Bible colleges-institutions where the leadership wanted to turn out soul-burdened, revival-concerned young preachers. Most soul-winning pastors, evangelists and missionaries regularly read this magazine that transforms ministries, inspires zeal, ignites compassion and refreshes the soul. It has been "must" reading for me since 1948 -- and it is, in my honest opinion, one of the mightiest means at our disposal to light revival fires and infuse God's people with purpose of life, compassion for the lost, and power in personal evangelism!

Yet, THE SWORD OF THE LORD is actually only one of Dr. Rice's printed ministries. Dr. Robert L. Sumner significantly titled him: "The Twentieth Century's Mightiest Pen." He wrote: "When you begin to total up the cloth and paperbound volumes which have flowed from the pen of John R. Rice, you begin to wonder if Solomon was referring personally to him when he wrote, 'of making books there is no end.' (Eccles. 12:12)." At his death Dr. Rice had over 200 different titles in print with a combined circulation exceeding 60 million copies.

Many of his books are considered Christian classics. Prayer -- Asking and Receiving is doubtless the most used book on prayer in this generation. The Home: Courtship, Marriage and Children and his gospel tract, "What Must I Do to Be Saved?" must be included, also. That tract is Dr. Rice's most famous publication -- and most fruitful -- printed in 39 languages. There are 10,532 recorded decisions just from the English printing.

The range of Dr. Rice's writings is almost unbelievable. He wrote books on these subjects, among others: inspiration of the Bible, commentaries on a number of books of the Bible, books on Christian living, deity of Christ, doctrines in the Scriptures, evangelists and evangelism, eschatology, the home, lodges, a novel on Abraham, prayer, sermon books by the score, worldliness, to cite just a few.

Such voluminous writing on so many varied subjects did not produce skimpy-in-substance, wordy-in-content volumes. Dr. Rice's writings are not shallow, frothy sentimentalities; rather, his sermons and studies show strong scholarship, are supported by many Scriptures and speak to the subject and to the reader's intellect and heart.

The "Twentieth Century's Mightiest Pen" is a plaudit earned not only by output but also by outcome. Some 25,780 persons (through April of 1982, that would equal the population of Bristol, Tennessee) have written Sword of the Lord Foundation offices that they made a decision for salvation through Dr. Rice's writings. Further fruit of his prolific pen is the host of young men who have surrendered to preach or to enter into enlarged ministry. To record the number of men who have gotten a revitalized ministry through his writings would be humanly incalculable. It is a rare, rare gathering of independent, separatist preachers where one does not hear a glowing testimonial to the transforming influence of John Rice's writings on someone's life and labors for the Lord.

Alluded to earlier were Dr. Rice's conferences on evangelism. In 1945 he instituted the first of these conferences, which have to be one of his greater contributions to the cause of soul winning. D. L. Moody had similar conferences in his day. But Dr. Rice was one of the first men to sponsor such conferences on such a wide geographical scale: Winona Lake, Indiana (the first); Toccoa Falls, Georgia; Cedar Lake, Indiana; Moody Church, Chicago, Illinois; Highland Park Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee; Bill Rice Ranch, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; convention centers in Indianapolis, Atlanta, Detroit, Dallas, Birmingham, Cincinnati, and Wichita, Kansas.

Indianapolis, Indiana, 1974, was the first national-in-scope Sword Conference on Evangelism. Seven thousand persons thronged the auditorium. The week-long program was freighted with blessings from Heaven. Anointed preaching spoke to the heart. Pointed workshops on almost every area of soul winning, revival, evangelism, church growth, Christian living and service instructed huge audiences with "how to" do the job and inspired them with the "want to." Exhibitors of Christian literature, audio/visual equipment, Christian colleges, and hosts of other revival, evangelism-related organizations filled a huge hall adjacent to the auditorium. By Friday evening there were hundreds of decisions made by Christians smitten over their indifference, fruitlessness, faithlessness, carelessness and sinfulness.

Indianapolis was the pattern. In following years there were conferences in Dallas (6,000 in attendance), Atlanta, Detroit, Murfreesboro, Birmingham, etc. -- all worthy successes. The Detroit conference at Cobo Hall was highlighted by the Wednesday night message of Dr. Rice on the subject of the "New Birth." Dr. Ron English, former conference coordinator and assistant to Dr. Rice, told of an emotional moment not known to many of the 5,000 audience who heard that stirring sermon. He stated: "I remember how pleased he (Dr. Rice) was after preaching the message .... There were thousands of people present and lots of people streaming down the aisles at the invitation. Dr. Rice left the platform and came down to the main floor and stood by me weeping and said, 'This is the way it used to be in citywide campaigns.' And for a moment I felt like I was with the young evangelist who blazed trails all over America. We recorded that message for television and showed it later on 160 stations and had over 20,000 people respond by phone calls and letters, with hundreds being saved."

Early in his ministry, Dr. Rice learned the value of utilizing greatly used men of God on his platforms. Elite evangelists have ministered with their holy, white-hot zeal on Sword conference programs: Hyman Appelman, B. R. Lakin, Joe Henry Hankins, Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., Dr. Bill Rice. And pastors -- powerful preachers, builders of dynamic churches -- have inspired and instructed thousands of young men (and

older ones, too) to build going, growing, soul-winning churches by the grace of God for the glory of God: Dr. Jack Hyles, Dr. Tom Malone, Dr. Bob Gray, Dr. Lee Roberson, Dr. John Rawlings, Dr. A. V. Henderson, Dr. Ray Batema, Dr. Curtis Hutson, now Dr. Rice's successor, and others.

The results of these conferences are nothing short of phenomenal. In Dr. Rice's own appraisal, the facts must speak for themselves. He stated: "In an amazing way, God has seen fit to bless our efforts and those of my associates. All over America independent Baptist churches have sprung up. Old churches have come to a blessed reviving and blooming and growth. A few years ago [written in 1973] we could find only 20 churches that won and baptized as many as 200 converts in a year; now there are doubtless ten times that many. We recently published accounts of seventeen churches that baptized from 500 to 2,300 converts in a year. Some hundreds of young men have started new churches, set goals, and their works are growing rapidly."

Only Heaven's records will reveal the eternal worth of the Sword conferences, but a sampling is already seen.

Dr. Curtis Hutson, a part-time pastor carrying mail in greater Atlanta, one who had never personally won a soul to Christ, had his life totally transformed at a Sword conference -- returned to build the largest independent Baptist church in Georgia.

Dr. Bob Gray did the same thing in Florida after a Toccoa, Georgia, conference.

Dr. Ray Batema attributed, under God, his great, growing church in California to a John R. Rice message at a Sword conference when his ministry was transformed.

Wally Beebe, a young pastor in Illinois, attended a Sword conference. Today we know him as "Mr. Bus." Dr. Jack Hyles wrote of him, "Without doubt, there are more people in Sunday school on Sunday morning in the United States because of the ministry of Dr. Wally Beebe than any other living man."

The number of preachers who have had their visions lifted and enlarged, their hearts fired, their spirits revived, their ministries totally transformed in Sword conferences are beyond comprehension. Those conferences always will be one of John R. Rice's greatest accomplishments. His inauguration of, his involvement in, his inspirational genius through the Sword conferences will make his memory and ministry a shining light through the centuries and throughout eternity.

The sum total of the ministries of the man tell an almost awesome story. It seems incredible, impossible that one man could accomplish so much for Christ in one lifetime. The average preacher would be thoroughly thrilled to accomplish but one of Dr. Rice's achievements. Perhaps that mediocrity accounts for their "fiverage" status.

Often one hears the question, "What would the Apostle Paul do with all the opportunities and resources available to preaching the Gospel today?" This is no attempt to compare the spirituality nor the service of either that first century apostle or this twentieth century evangelist. Paul doubtlessly would employ today's opportunities and resources for evangelism much more zealously and effectively than John R. Rice ever did or could, but it is interesting to note that to equal Dr. Rice's record of service for the Saviour, the apostle would have to utilize the following ministries today.

He would have to preach thousands of sermons in local church revivals and great citywide campaigns. He would have to preach in tents, churches, tobacco barns, opera halls, arenas and civic centers. He would

have to utilize the printed page by editing a worldwide circulated evangelistic magazine, publish millions of books, booklets and tracts translated in many languages, write notes and references for a reference Bible, and publish full-page ads in great national magazines (Reader's Digest, etc.) to get the Gospel into millions of homes. And Paul would have to pen countless thousands of letters counseling, answering questions of pastors, missionaries, evangelists, sinners and saints around the world. And he would have to pen and publish poetry and music.

This is not all -- Paul would have to major with such media as radio, television and tape ministries to get the Gospel into all the world. Dr. Rice regularly used radio in his revival ministries, but in 1959 he inaugurated the weekly "Voice of Revival" broadcast which was being heard on sixty-nine stations at his death.

No wonder internationally known evangelist Dr. Hyman Appelmann appraised John Rice: "He was a man who comes, perhaps, once in a generation. The Holy Spirit had endued him with many talents...gifted author...giant of the pulpit...pastor, evangelist, protagonist and a leader of noble causes... Titan in the realm of soul winning."

As intimated in the very first paragraph, Dr. Rice was also a controversialist for the cause of Christ as he saw it. With his potent pen and his preaching power in the pulpit, Dr. Rice waged relentless war against everything he considered heresy or hypocrisy. He bore strong similarity to Dr. Henry Coray's commentary on Aurelius Augustine (St. Augustine). Coray analyzed Augustine: "A list of his treatises make Augustine sound like an arch reactionary: Against the Pagans, against the astrologers...against the Manichees, against the Priscillians, against the Donatists, against the Pelagians, against the Arians .... "

Dr. Rice was against modernism, against humanism, against evolution, against the lodges, against worldliness, against denominational overlordship, against formalism, against hypocrisy.

In contending for the Faith, Dr. Rice, along with others, learned they had to contend with individuals who deny that Faith -- there being no divorcing doctrine from the doer of that doctrine.

Dr. Rice was a fervent and fearless foe of liberalism or modernism. That constraining conviction was precipitated by a crisis that occurred when he was doing graduate work at Chicago University. After a message by William Jennings Bryan on the subject, "The Bible and Its Enemies," controversy raged on the campus and Dr. Rice saw a Turkish missionary's son swayed by the controversy and then succumb to the infidelity. Dr. Rice related of that defection: "It was a time of crisis in my life. Standing there on the steps of Mandel Hall that spring afternoon with dusk coming on, I felt burning in me a holy fire. I lifted my hand solemnly to God and said: 'If God gives me grace and I have opportunity to smite this awful unbelief that wrecks the faith of all it can, then smite it I will, so help me God!' That vow I tried to keep, and keep it I will by His grace and help."

Dr. Rice kept that holy vow! The pages of THE SWORD OF THE LORD and his printed pamphlets and books became the battleground where he contended for biblical faith against the insidious infidelity of the National Council of Churches; the World Council of Churches; the Revised Standard Version of the Bible; The Interpreter's Bible; countless liberal schools, especially Southern Baptist institutions and their leaders; as well as the Fosdicks, Ferres, Oxnam, and other liberal leaders.

Those were not rantings and ravings of some wildeyed, fire-eating, publicity-seeking evangelist. Dr. Rice's rebuttals were thoroughly researched, carefully and accurately stated (sometimes sensationally), but

honestly and honorably handled!

Evangelism and evangelists were ever near and dear to his heart. He often stated he prayed daily by name for scores of evangelists. He also ceaselessly battled for their acceptance. The Scriptures state in Ephesians 4:11,12: "And [God] gave some...evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." To Evangelist Rice, the order of Scripture as well as the content of Scripture was Holy Spirit of God inspired. Thus, to him, the office of the evangelist was the paramount New Testament ministry. Naturally he battled for the evangelists' rightful recognition in their office, as well as the churches' obligation to them.

But his crusade for their cause was not a one-way street. Just as vigorously Dr. Rice charged evangelists that they must be circumspect in every relationship with pastors and congregations -- that meant in the areas of morals, manners, message, money! What he preached to others he practiced himself.

Dr. Rice was unsparing of himself -- and he was unsparing of others in the Lord's work. Right was always right; wrong was always wrong. To him there were no shades of gray, grayer or grayest -- it was either black or white. It was this uncompromising conviction that led to one of the great heartbreaks of his ministry -- his controversy and ultimate cleavage with Evangelist Billy Graham in 1957. The issue was Dr. Graham's crusade policy of sponsorship of modernists and modernistic councils and his using liberals in committee positions and on the platform in his revival crusades.

That separation sent shock waves through the Christian world. Dr. Graham, in the 1950's, had become a nationally and internationally known, loved and honored evangelist. He was regularly preaching to larger attendances in his crusades and on his weekly radio broadcast -- "Hour of Decision" -- than any living man, and the number of decisions for Christ he saw under his ministry was probably the largest ever tabulated in evangelistic meetings.

Dr. Rice and Dr. Graham were fast friends. Each served on the other's board: Dr. Graham serving on the Sword of the Lord Cooperating Board and Dr. Rice on the Board of Trustees of Northwestern Schools, of which Dr. Graham was then president. Dr. Graham's messages and meeting statistics regularly appeared in THE SWORD OF THE LORD.

Dr. Rice was one of Dr. Graham's staunchest defenders in Dr. Graham's early and surprising defections from the separatist-fundamentalist position. For example, when Dr. Graham endorsed the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Dr. Rice asked people to excuse it on the basis of Dr. Graham's youth and immaturity. And when it was discovered that liberals were on the Executive Committee during Dr. Graham's Atlanta Crusade, Dr. Rice passed on to his readers the explanation Dr. Graham had given him: The liberals had been placed on the Committee without his knowledge and he had not learned of it until he arrived at the Crusade. And Dr. Rice assured those readers that Billy had promised God on his knees it would never happen again.

However, when Dr. Graham refused to accept a New York City crusade under sponsorship of only evangelical, fundamental churches and organizations, insisting that the liberal Protestant Council support must be included also -- and when Dr. Graham refused to be classified as a fundamentalist -- opting for the terminology "Conservative-Liberal" or "Constructionist," John Rice took his stand against a brother he loved in the Lord so that he himself might walk in the way of "thus saith the Lord."

Dr. Rice lived and died a man of convictions -- intense convictions. To some, many issues he raised and positions he defended were comparatively unimportant, but to Dr. Rice an issue was never unimportant and he spoke out uncompromisingly, dogmatically, boldly, even harshly, regardless of the person(s) or price to himself involved. If he felt he was right, he stood. His life was a luminous illustration of that principle.

But Dr. Rice, like many other strong fighters for the Faith, was also marked with a sincere spirit of compassion. Those who knew him best -- his co-workers at Sword of the Lord Foundation, his co-laborers in the services, and his close companions in life knew a man who loved them. In preaching, in prayer and in personal life, Dr. Rice wept over sinners and wept with the saints.

Every successful Christian leader or worker is possessed of a propelling, compelling, impelling motivation. I am bold to believe that Dr. Rice's motivating power was his love for souls. Soul winning was supreme to the man. As stated earlier, Dr. Rice sold out to soul winning that night in the Pacific Garden Mission after leading a poor, dirty, unshaven bum to Christ.

Out of his inner being poured this passionate plea: "I wanted nothing better than to win souls and to have welling up in my heart continually the glad joy I felt at that moment." It is safe to say that this heart cry was the heartthrob of the rest of his life. He considered soul winning "the most important business in the world." And he maintained that "the winning of individuals by individuals in personal conversation is the main way to win souls," adding that, in his evangelism of over fifty years and having seen tens of thousands of people come to Christ, he could say that personal contact, personal invitation had a part in winning nine out of ten of all those he had seen come to Christ.

Dr. Rice practiced what he preached. He resolved as a young evangelist that "he would never have a fruitless revival effort...never preach long in any place attempting to win souls without winning some." So he would leave off writing and editing a manuscript on soul winning to go out and win some soul to Christ. He would leave the pulpit, rush out of a building to meet a man and lead him to Christ when his sermon had failed to do so. He would pay a drunken bum's lodging in a cheap rooming house to show him God's love so he could witness to him more effectively. The stories of John R. Rice's soul winning became legendary in his lifetime -- because he lived out soul winning for a lifetime.

Yet he was human. Once, on a car trip from Dallas to Chicago, he prayed with his family, "Lord, help me to find someone I can win on the way before I reach Chicago." Then he related how he missed a turn at Ardmore, Oklahoma, and drove fifty miles out of the way. At the filling station where he sought directions, he dealt with the attendant -- and led him to Christ. Retracing his route, and upset with himself because of the unnecessary delay and detour, he was suddenly challenged by the giggle of girls who confronted him: "Daddy, don't you see? You asked God to lead you to a soul you could win today, so He brought you fifty miles to reach the man who was ready."

Yes -- John R. Rice was a soul winner. God led him to souls -- and God led souls to him. Once, a family of five drove from Dayton, Ohio, to Wheaton (350 miles), Illinois, "to have Brother Rice show us how to be saved." That soul winner's heart beat with hungering purpose until the man was discharged from his privileged responsibility by death. Just days before that summons, he was seeking the lost. Dr. Curtis Hutson tells it in these heartwarming words: "Just a few Sundays ago Dr. Rice was in the Franklin Road Baptist Church for the last time. Although he was weak and handicapped by impaired hearing and eyesight, at the end of the service he stopped a little girl and asked gently, 'Honey, are you a Christian?'"

That experience is typical of the man."

Dr. Rice bared his soul winner's heart in this moving message -- a Christmas letter dictated to his friends a few days before his death -- when he wrote: "I still, from my armchair, preach in great revival campaigns. I still vision hundreds walking the aisles to accept Christ. I still feel hot tears for the lost. I still see God working miracles. Oh, how I long to see great revivals, to hear about revival crowds once again! I want no Christmas without a burden for lost souls, a message for sinners, a heart to bring in the lost sheep so dear to the Shepherd, the sinning souls for whom Christ died. May food be tasteless, and music a discord, and Christmas a farce if I forget the dying millions to whom I am debtor; if this fire in my bones does not still flame! Not till I die or not till Jesus comes, will I ever be eased of this burden, these tears, this toil to save souls." Yes -- that is the beat of a soul winner's heart!

That was not just Christmas season sentimentality. It was the overflow of a bleeding, broken heart for the lost which had been constrained and conquered by this terrible truth: "If there is a place of eternal torment where damned souls cry in vain for water amid the flames they cannot escape forever, it is the most alarming and terrifying fact in the universe! The very possibility that such a doom may await a sinner is so shocking that no other question can compare with its importance. How can today's feasting or hunger, clothing or nakedness, honor or infamy, pleasure or pain compare in importance with a million years of pain, torment of body, mind and conscience?"

Yes -- John R. Rice -- "Titan of soul winning"!

These pages are penned mere months after Dr. Rice's Homegoing. December 29, 1980. Words written by Bud Lyles in 1965 well express the thoughts of multitudes at that Homegoing of the one he called "God's good man."

"What is the measure of a man's ministry?...Can a man's ministry be measured? Certainly Christians are aware that the influence of a life extends far beyond the short span of years in which that life is lived in this world. Only at the judgment seat of Christ will all be known of the good or bad in any one man's life and work .... It will likely remain for generations beyond our own, if Jesus tarries, to really appreciate what the ministry of John R. Rice has meant to fundamental Christianity."

Hosts of other fundamental leaders have emphasized the same awareness of an appreciation for the impact and influence exerted on his and forthcoming generations. Dr. Tom Malone measured him: "John R. Rice loved people. Some men appear to love great crowds or institutions, but he loved individual human beings .... He loved God's servants and had a special love for preachers .... Preachers and missionaries all over the world have felt the impact of a man wholly dedicated to Jesus Christ."

Dr. John Rawlings wrote: "This has been a period of church history when the need for leadership was at its greatest. It is during times like this that a man like Dr. John R. Rice stands head and shoulders above his fellows .... He had insight as an editor to look into the future and chart a course for evangelism, Bible study, and separation that few men have had the perception to see."

Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., founder of Bob Jones University, and Dr. John R. Rice were associated in the cause of evangelism and fundamentalism from 1937 until Dr. Bob's death in 1968. Dr. Bob, who knew John Rice more intimately than any other man, and knew men more minutely than most, probably spoke the sentiments of multitudes of twentieth century Christians when he witnessed of John Rice: "I regard Dr. Rice as one of the greatest spiritual assets this nation has."

What more could be added than an articulate Amen!.

(Less than seventy-one hours before the dawning of 1981, this Giant of Evangelism, and one of the most prolific pens in all of Christendom, was stilled. Dr. John R. Rice, founder of all Sword of the Lord ministries, went to be with the Lord in the early morning hours of December 29, 1980.

A church auditorium completely encircled with memorial wreaths and packed with nearly 1,200 mourners marked funeral services for this great man at the Franklin Road Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, of which Dr. Rice was a member. The three-hour program of eulogizers included prominent clergy from across the nation.

Dr. Rice, who celebrated his 85th birthday just weeks before his death, was hailed as one of the most prominent figureheads of fundamentalism in America, and the most published author in the country's history.

While his mighty pen and voice have been stilled, thank God the fruit remains! Like the noble British writer of the 19th Century, Charles H. Spurgeon, through the printed page it is possible for him, though dead, to continue to speak. As Dr. Jerry Falwell said at his memorial service, "No one more appropriately fits the fulfillment of the promise, '...and their works do follow them,' than John Rice. He left behind a family. He left behind an arsenal of written material that says who he is, what he believes, and with whom he had a personal relationship."

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