



The Literacy Millennium

February 2003
Special Edition

A Time for Opening God's Word through the Gift of Reading

Remembering Our Founder

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.
Psalm 116:15*

The Rev. Dr. Robert F. Rice went home to be with the Lord on December 26, 2002.

Dr. Rice was born in Iowa in 1921. After graduating from *Princeton Theological Seminary*, he was married to Alice Venable in 1946. In 1950 they went to Korea as Presbyterian missionaries, arriving six weeks before the Korean war began.



Upon learning the language, Bob helped the mission start its first work with orphans, bringing in over 700 homeless boys from the streets of Korea and personally setting up an orphanage for them. Many of these former orphans are leaders in Korea today. He also worked with *World Vision* and *Compassion International*. After 15 years, the family returned from the mission

field and moved to Tulsa where Bob taught missions at *Oral Roberts University Graduate School of Theology*.

In 1967 he founded the ministry which is now known as *Literacy & Evangelism International* (LEI). His vision was to teach the illiterate half of the world to read by developing Bible-content literacy primers and instructing missionaries and local Christians in how to use them to teach reading and writing.



*Robert F. Rice, Founder of
Literacy & Evangelism
International*

The whole Bible, or at least scripture portions, are available in the languages of more than 95% of the world's people, but it is still a closed book to more than half of them, who cannot read.

Another aspect of his vision was a simple "5-step" teaching method, which could be mastered even by the new reader, so after completing the primer, the new reader can begin to teach someone else. This principle of "each one teach one" remains a foundation of the ministry.

One example of his work gives an idea of the impact it has had around the world. One of his first primer construction trips was to India, where he helped to develop primers in 15 languages. Today there are over 10,000 house churches in India started by people who became Christians as they learned to read, using these primers.

Dr. Rice is survived by his wife, Alice, sons Willis and wife Linda, Bob and wife Bev, Roland and wife Linda, Sid and wife Christa, and daughter Alice and her husband David Tubley, as well as ten grandchildren, and a great-grandson.

Literacy & Evangelism International

Pioneering Missions in Literacy and English as a Second Language

Partnering with Churches and Other Mission Agencies

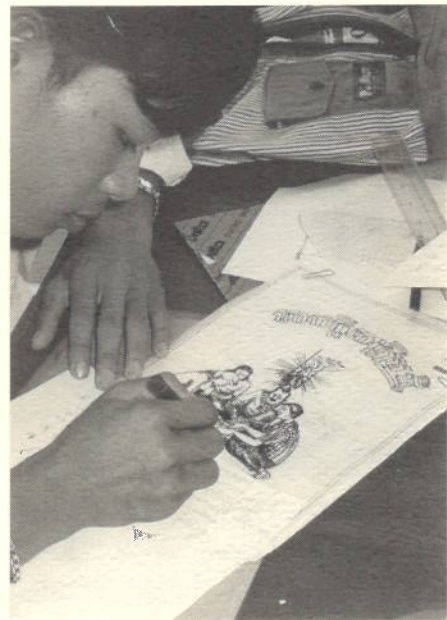
Producing Bible Content Primers in Any Language

Preparing Teachers, Leaders, and Missionaries

The Primer Construction...

“Bob...should be looked upon as one of the dynamic leaders of the church in the 20th century. [He] picked up the mantle of Frank Laubach and ran with it and expanded Laubach’s ideas. Bob’s thought of putting ‘J’ early on in the literacy manuals was a gift from God.* He has, through those manuals, reached more people for Christ than the Apostle Paul. Let us pray that this ministry will continue through his associates.”

Dr. & Mrs. Thomas S. Goslin, Wildwood Crest, New Jersey, who assisted with the writing of the first primer in Spanish in Madrid by enlisting some of Dr. Goslin’s seminary students to help.



The artist on the primer construction team in Cambodia, working on the cover of the Khmer primer.

** Although the most frequently used letters in a language are generally introduced first, Bob’s idea was to include “J” by the twelfth lesson so the name of Jesus could be introduced.*

“The last time I traveled with Dad was in the winter of 2000. In India I saw a side of Dad I had never seen before. We were in a very remote part of Northeast India and he was holding a tutor training workshop. Basically, he was training teachers how to teach others, using curriculum that he had developed. When he was engaged in the training time he was totally animated. It was as if he were at a party. He had a grin on his face the entire time he was teaching. He was totally engrossed, passionately doing the work God had called him to do.”

Sid Rice

Evangelism and Service...

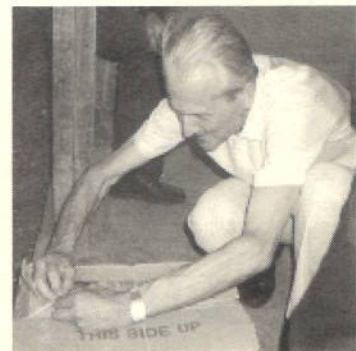
“In all of our association with this man of God, we have been deeply touched by [Bob’s] strong faith and humble spirit, as well as by the hard work and self-sacrifice he has offered in order to share the gospel with others.”

The Staff of Herald of His Coming

“Anyone who knew Dad knew how focused and disciplined he was. He heard salt was bad for you so he quit salting his food. It almost killed him! But that’s what kind of person he was: he decided to do something and did it! He was fit, always watched what he ate, and salted things aggressively the last six or seven years. He walked daily and swam three times a week when he could. But his one overriding goal was telling people about Jesus. He found a unique way to do that...through literacy. Teach someone how to read, lift up the poorest, the least, the lost, and as they were learning how to read, make sure they could read about a gracious God who wanted to have a relationship with them personally.”

Roland Rice

When the work is finished in one place, it’s time to pack up and move on to the next.

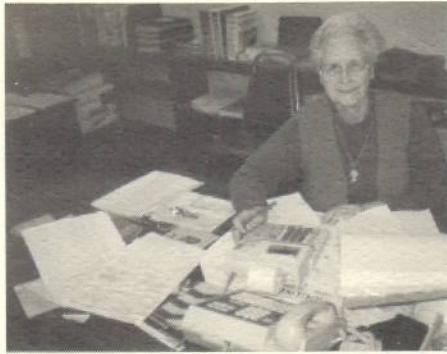


“Many of us have found a career ministry in literacy as a result of the divinely ordained appointment or contact with Rev. Rice who so ably [helped] us to see the need.”

James Kigamwa, Director, Literacy Evangelism Fellowship of Kenya

While back home...

Alice at work on the ministry books.



This is just one of the things Alice did for the ministry from time to time, although when the children were young, she always gave them priority.

"I just have to think about him off on another trip. It's just a little bit longer this time." Alice Rice

In all things, prayer

Praying with an associate overseas before beginning the day's work...



"Dad taught us the value of prayer not just by talking about it, but by doing it. If you were up early enough at Mom & Dad's house you found him on his knees behind a big chair in the corner of the front room meditating on the scriptures and praying." Sid Rice

...and Thanksgiving



Some of the LEI primers.

"Only because Dad was by temperament and gifting, a crusader and not a leader, an evangelist and not a pastor, was he able to do such a large work in Christian missions. You see, we have been given (each one of us) this treasure in earthen vessels and our vessels are a different mix of strengths and weaknesses. By such, some are called to be prophets and apostles and administrators and teachers and preachers, and a thousand other things. And God takes these vessels and puts us all together, in families, in communities of faith, and pours us into the world that God so loves, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God.

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels — and it is a treasure! Today we turn the pages of a loved one's story. Between its covers of ash and ash, between dust and dust, we dig for treasure in what has become the gift of memory, and turn our hearts with thanksgiving to God"

Rev. Bob Rice, Jr.



Bob teaching overseas

The Literacy Millennium

"If we should name each millennium since Christ in terms of the major task the Church needed to undertake for helping people connect with God's Word, I would submit the following:

The First Millennium A.D. was

The Canon Millennium.

The Second Millennium A.D. was

The Translation Millennium.

And this, the Third Millennium A.D. is

The Literacy Millennium."

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Rev. John C. Taylor, Executive Director

A TRIBUTE TO ROBERT F. RICE

by John Taylor, Executive Director
Literacy & Evangelism International

If I were to count on one hand the most extraordinary and influential people in my life, Bob Rice would have to be one of them. I know many others who would say the same.

I first met Bob at the Tulsa office of Literacy & Evangelism International in the summer of 1984. Kathy and I were at a crossroads in our sojourn. We had sensed God's calling to cross-cultural missions and had approached a number of mission agencies. We were in a quandary about where and with whom we should serve and what type of ministry we should do. I was looking for an effective ministry to unreached people that would help them both practically and spiritually.

As Bob and I talked that Monday morning on June 25, 1984, something happened. He opened my eyes to the bondage of illiteracy in which many people subsist – especially in Asia where Kathy and I wanted to go. I was amazed that illiteracy was still such a huge problem. He went on to explain how we might open God's Word to the illiterate by teaching them how to read in their own language. That resonated with me. Bob's voice was soft and low, but his eyes shone with passion. He gazed at me with soul-piercing earnestness as if to say, "The fields are ripe. The Lord of the harvest bids you come labor with us." When I left Bob's office and went out to my car, I sensed that God had just spoken to me. Kathy and I did become missionaries with Literacy & Evangelism International. Even now, nearly nineteen years later, we can look back and say that indeed God did speak to us through Bob that June morning.

When I began working in this ministry, I found a corporate Christian culture unlike any I had ever experienced before. Although Literacy & Evangelism International pulsed with evangelistic vision and energy, the hub in Tulsa had an air of almost monastic quiet and austerity.

There was a strong emphasis on prayer and personal devotion. I soon realized that this culture in fact was an extension of Bob Rice himself. He believed that *world mission* begins with *personal submission* – both to God's Word and to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. A missionary must have a deep level of personal commitment and self discipline.

To encourage this, Bob had instituted a *Covenant Commitment* whereby all missionaries, staff and board members pledge to spend at least one hour daily in Bible reading and prayer. Along with this *One Rule*, as he also called it, Bob emphasized two virtues. He eschewed loudness, extravagance, complexity, wordiness and frivolity. So he urged us to cultivate *humility* and *simplicity* in our life-style, conversation, teaching and ministry. He also set for our Tulsa office staff a half hour each day in corporate prayer, and one full day each month devoted to prayer and fasting. As might be expected, some thought Bob was being legalistic. Nevertheless I always sensed that Bob's heart was ever to encourage us to trust in God and aspire to His best will and witness, recognizing all the while that we stand in constant need of God's grace. Bob's regimen stretched us. But I believe most of us would testify to the inestimable benefit these disciplines have had in our life and ministry.

Bob sought to lead by example . . . and that he did. I remember when I was with him in India, I saw him working hard day after day, going to bed early, rising before dawn and kneeling by his bed to pray for

concerns around the world that weighed on his heart. Bob truly walked his talk.

Dr. Jimmy Yen, a Christian from China and a renowned pioneer in the field of literacy in the early 1900s, once said: "C o m m i t m e n t cannot be taught; it can only be caught."



Praying over one of the missionaries before he leaves for literacy work overseas. Standing, from right, rear: Bob Rice, John Taylor

continued

"I refer to the crusading spirit. Without the crusading spirit, you may have the starting power but not the staying power."

Of all the people I have known in my lifetime, Bob Rice stands out as a man with the *crusading spirit*. He saw it as his mission to take on two formidable challenges of our time – one in the world and the other in the church. The first was what he called *the silent disability* – referring to the plight that billions of illiterates silently suffer, with little understanding and little hope. The second was what he called *the blind spot in missions* – referring to the church's unheeding failure to recognize, let alone do much about, what is probably the biggest physical impediment to God's Word in the world today – not the shortage of Bible translations in the native languages, but the lack of reading ability.

With double-barreled force, Bob took aim against these two challenges, hurling himself with all his might. He pursued them doggedly to the far corners of the earth. Even beyond the frontiers of literacy ministry set by those who had gone before

him – great pioneers like Jimmy Yen and Frank Laubach – Bob Rice succeeded in addressing the needs of the whole man (body, mind and spirit) through literacy. His method was revolutionary in the 20th Century. By incorporating Bible content right into the reading lessons he sought to deal with, rather than conveniently avoid, the pressing spiritual issues of his literacy students. As a result, their motivation soared, and with it their learning. For most, the greatest

motivation for learning how to read is to read the Bible. Through 35 years and 40 round-the-world trips, Bob kept after these two goals right up till the end. He had *starting power* and he had *staying power*.



Praying over the 2002 Tulsa Literacy Institute students as they are commissioned and send forth



Bob with the staff of Gospel Literacy Ministries, which he helped establish as an independent organization in Korea, similar to Literacy Evangelism Fellowship, which he helped form in Kenya.

My words here about Bob are but a poor expression. The greatest tribute will ever be the chorus of personal testimonies of hundreds of thousands around the world who are now reading and writing. Given the chance, they would testify of their own, their family's, and their neighbors' lives, transformed because they learned to read from one of Bob's primers and met Jesus and His love through it. They would say to Bob, "We thank God for sending



Two ladies in Bangladesh who were converted through the literacy classes.

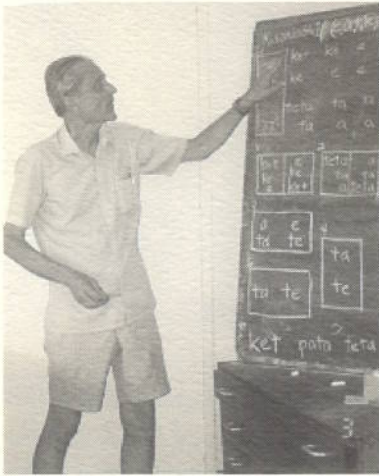
you and giving us the gift of reading and God's Word."

For those of us who had the privilege of knowing and working with Bob, our sentiment is one of sorrow, love, joy and gratitude all mingled. He was our pioneer, our leader and mentor. The world and the church little realized just how great a man this was in their midst. I have sometimes thought that Bob

was like one of those heroes of the faith spoken of in Hebrews 11:38, "of whom the world was not worthy." Now Bob has gone to where earth meets heaven, and he has slipped over the horizon. We can be sure he was greeted with those glad words from his Master, "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:23).

It is up to us now who remain behind in this dark world to carry on. Much work lies ahead. It is encouraging to see Christian groups, churches and individuals – some we didn't even know about – now shining forth. There must be a thousand lights out there all set aflame by the torch that Bob carried wherever he went. We thank God for the legacy Bob left us and for the firm foundation on which he established the ministry of Literacy & Evangelism International.

John



Reflections

“Bob Rice had none of the characteristics of what modern society often holds up as standards of greatness. He never made any significant income in his life. He was never on the cover of any major publication. He was not a member of the international social jet set. He never led a major corporation. He was not a general or a national politician. He was not a sports hero, actor, or TV talk show host.



“However, Bob was one of the finest Christian gentlemen I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. He worked with the poorest and most under-served people in the world, developing literacy primers in their native language so they could read the Bible and develop a personal relationship with their God. For the last 25 years he traveled twice a year around the world working among some of the most remote and deprived people on earth. During this time he and his associates developed Bible-content primers in over 155 languages. Literally tens of thousands of people have come to know Jesus due to his work.

“I have known many great Christians in my life, but I would be hard-pressed to name any who so fully exhibited the power of meekness, humility and love in the quest for saving the world for Christ. Men like him help define true greatness.”

George Bragg of San Juan Capistrano, California, a longtime personal friend of Bob Rice, is a member of the Board of Trustees of Literacy & Evangelism International and of Literacy Ministries International.

1921-2002

Robert F. Rice

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