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JOHN R. RICE AND EVANGELISM: AN ESSENTIAL MARK
OF INDEPENDENT BAPTIST FUNDAMENTALISM

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JOHN R. RICE AND EVANGELISM: AN ESSENTIAL MARK
OF INDEPENDENT BAPTIST FUNDAMENTALISM

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To Mom and Dad

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PREFACE

I am deeply grateful for those who have enabled me to complete this dissertation. Though academic in nature, this work has been undergirded by an ever-growing understanding of God's work for me in Christ, who has given me both the means and the motivation for rigorous study.

The amazing encouragement of my family has been essential, especially that of my wife, Kathleen, who has borne as much of the emotional and spiritual burden as I have. Without family support this work would have been impossible.

I am indebted to my professors at Southern Seminary, whose Christian piety, personal attention, and love of learning has been profoundly life-changing. In particular, Dr. Thomas J. Nettles, my doctoral supervisor, has modeled a joyful love for God combined with rigorous scholarship and patient guidance.

The support of the church community was vital during my studies. My membership at Shawnee Baptist Church, under Pastor Dave Delaney, provided the needed spiritual community during my coursework. The support and patience of the elders and members of Chesapeake Baptist Church, where I pastor now, has been indispensable to the completion of this dissertation.

Matthew Lyon

Severn, Maryland

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout John R. Rice's sixty years of ministry he championed the cause of evangelistic fundamentalism, which he understood to be "a vigorous defense of the faith, active soul winning, . . . having fervent love for all God's people and earnestly avoiding compromise in doctrine or yoking up with unbelievers."¹ His skill, conviction, and fearlessness earned him such titles as "The Captain of Our Team" from fellow fundamentalists,² and "the kindest, gentlest man that ever scuttled a ship or slit a throat" from those he criticized.³ His newspaper, the *Sword of the Lord*, and the large evangelistic conferences it hosted, offered a voice and a point of contact in a movement that was fiercely independent and notoriously lacking in solidarity. His extensive writing ministry was received into the homes of millions of fundamentalists, evangelicals, and liberals.⁴ This allowed Rice to have an influence on fundamentalism that may be unrivaled by any other single man and he sought to persuade his listeners to follow the

¹ John R. Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publications, 1975), 10. "Soul winning" was Rice's favorite term for the work of evangelism, and will be used as a synonym for evangelism throughout this work.

² Viola Walden, *John R. Rice: The Captain of Our Team* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publications, 1990), 8.

³ Attributed to J. Frank Norris by Jack Hyles. Jack Hyles, "Strength and Beauty," accessed February 10, 2011, <http://www.jackhyles.com/strength.htm>.

⁴ Rice's books and pamphlets alone exceeded 60 million copies at his death in 1980. Robert L. Sumner, *Man Sent from God* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1987), 168.

path of God, specifically through evangelism. Rice turned every subject to the cause of evangelism and in doing so created a model of fundamentalism that attempted to navigate between what he saw as the spiritual dryness of liberalism, the compromise of neo-evangelicals, and the harshness of fundamentalism.

Biographical Overview

When Bobby Roberson, a personal colleague of Rice and host of seventeen *Sword of the Lord* Conferences, was asked about Rice’s ministry, he summarized it briefly: “clean living and soul winning.”⁵ Rice was whole-heartedly committed to evangelism, and this passion shaped his life and ministry.

Rice’s evangelistic passion was a natural part of the world in which he was raised. Born in 1895 to a West Texas cowboy/preacher/politician, William Rice, John R. Rice was saturated in rural revivalism. Revivalism, which began as far back as the eighteenth-century celebrity preacher George Whitefield, emphasized the dramatic conversion of the lost sinner, especially under the preaching of the impassioned evangelist, whose delivery was powerful, pointed, and aimed at the immediate change in the hearer. The intensity of these revival meetings was systematized by Charles Finney, who took the dramatic public conversion to a new level with his introduction of altar calls. This style of Christianity, with its urgency and life or death demands, was appealing to many people, especially in a day when mortality was closer to home. At six years old, Rice watched his mother die, just a few months after her newborn. The memory was engraved forever—the family gathered around the bed, singing “How Firm

⁵ Bobby Roberson, interview by author, Hillsville, VA, August 6, 2010.

a Foundation,” his mother, with her last breath, exclaiming, “I can see Jesus and my baby now!”⁶ Rice later reflected on the grim impact that event had on his life:

I remember the November day when we laid her body away. My father knelt beside the open grave. There was no white muslin to hide the raw dirt of the grave—like a wound in the earth. My father put one arm around his two little orphan girls, and one around his two little boys, and watched as they lowered the precious body in its dark casket into the bosom of mother earth. The rain beat down on us, and a friendly neighbor lady held an umbrella over our heads. O death! Death! DEATH! All the years my lonely heart has known the reality of death.⁷

Revivalism’s plea to turn to Christ before it was too late resonated with Rice, and the excesses of the movement can often be explained by the excesses of the harsh culture where it developed.⁸

When Rice, who was academically gifted, began to explore his future he settled on teaching, a respectable career that also allowed him to remain active in the Southern Baptist church. He attended Wayland Baptist College, where he met his wife Lloys, and after a brief stint in the Army during World War I, graduated from Baylor University in 1920. In what would be a remarkable chapter in his life, the next year he ventured out of the South to the University of Chicago, which was a bastion of the growing theological liberal movement. Significantly, this was in the midst of the denominational battle between conservatives and liberals, and the year before Rice enrolled at Chicago, Curtis Lee Laws, editor of the *Watchman-Examiner* coined the phrase “fundamentalism,” describing “all those who are willing to do battle royal for the

⁶ Sumner, *Man Sent from God*, 24.

⁷ Sumner, *Man Sent from God*, 24

⁸ For more on revivalism see Josh McMullin, *Under the Big Top: Big Tent Revivalism and American Culture, 1885-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) and Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750 – 1858* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994).

Fundamentals.”⁹ Rice, whose life had been spent in the deeply religious, conservative South, was shoved into the middle of the controversy when he heard the “statesman-Fundamentalist” William Jennings Bryan¹⁰ speak against evolution on the campus of the University of Chicago, followed by a long personal conversation between the two of them about defending the faith and soul winning.¹¹ Bryan’s bold and confrontational fundamentalism in the face of modernism combined with Rice’s work at the Pacific Garden Mission, which fed and housed the Chicago’s homeless and transient male population, while also urging them to turn to Christ; these experiences transformed Rice. Grippled by the need for public defense of the faith and, more importantly, the opportunity to save a soul, Rice left Chicago, returned to Texas and enrolled in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. But even there the urgency of evangelism drove him to leave one year short of his Master of Theology degree, and sent him on to increasingly more successful evangelistic ventures.¹²

His geographical and theological proximity to J. Frank Norris, the infamous¹³ pastor of First Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, led to a partnership. Norris’s volatile and controlling nature eventually became too overbearing for Rice, and the relationship ended

⁹ George Marsden, “The Rise of Fundamentalism,” in *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Heath W. Carter and Laura Rominger Porter (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 145.

¹⁰ C. Allyn Russel, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 162.

¹¹ John R. Rice, *The Golden Path to Successful Soul Winning* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1961), 57-58.

¹² Walden, *John R. Rice*, 23.

¹³ Norris was well known for his shocking behavior, including killing an unarmed man in his office in 1926. For more see David R. Stokes, *The Shooting Salvationist: J. Frank Norris and the Murder Trial that Captivated America* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2011).

after Norris attempted to ruin Rice's theological reputation.¹⁴ During this time, Rice began the *Sword of the Lord*, an evangelistic, fundamentalist newspaper, which grew to be one of the largest religious periodicals in the nation, peaking in 1974 with 288,000 subscriptions, and giving Rice a powerful platform.¹⁵ The *Sword of the Lord*, was, according to George Marsden, "probably the most influential fundamentalist periodical for the next four decades."¹⁶ Despite this literary fame, Rice described himself as a simple soul winner at heart.¹⁷ Remarking on his first conversion at the Pacific Garden Mission that "I wanted nothing better than to win souls and have welling up in my heart continually the glad joy I felt at that moment."¹⁸ This passion for evangelism, along with other fundamentalist pursuits, continue unabated until Rice's death in 1980.

Thesis

In an attempt to understand the broader, complex field of fundamentalism, specifically the Baptist variety, this dissertation focuses on the public theological ministry of John R. Rice, and argues that evangelism was the central defining principle in Rice's theology and ministry. Specifically, it focuses on Rice's understanding of evangelism as

¹⁴ Matthew Lyon, "Separatism and Gender: The Unique Contributions of John R. Rice to Fundamentalism" (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2011).

¹⁵ Sumner, *Man Sent from God*, 131. The *Sword* began in 1934 and was initially handed out door to door by Rice's children.

¹⁶ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 238.

¹⁷ Rice was noted for his humble nature. His close friend and colleague, Jack Hyles, related an example: "One day when we were preaching together in Milton, Ohio, Dr. Rice disappeared after the morning service. The pastor and I looked and looked . . . We were frustrated after nearly an hour of looking for him. We went outside, happened to glance down a side street, and about a half a block away, spied Dr. Rice playing hopscotch with a couple of children." Jack Hyles, *Fundamentalism in My Lifetime*, ed. Ray Young (Hammond, IN: Hyles Publications, 2002), 144-45.

¹⁸ Sumner, *Man Sent from God*, 63.

shaped by the revivalistic tradition of men like D. L. Moody¹⁹ and further refined by the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of the early twentieth century. Rice, though strongly identified with the fundamentalist movement, as well as independent Baptist ecclesiology, saw these practical and theological positions as implications of an infrastructure for evangelism. Evangelism was Rice's self-identified lens for all other theological and ministerial positions. By doing this, Rice attempted, with some success, to bridge the gap between nineteenth-century (and older) conservative, revivalistic, Protestantism and twentieth-century fundamentalism. While Rice actively sought to remain true to biblical and historical patterns and avoid modern trends, he was often shaped more by his revivalistic and fundamentalist assumptions than the broader scope of church history.

The result of this evangelistic model, mixed with a love for evangelists of multiple centuries, as well as living in the cultural and theological wars of the twentieth century, was a unique form of fundamentalism that often broke traditional boundaries. Rice's version of Christianity was controversial because he lived between multiple traditions, and should be understood on its own theological terms, and not conflated with other fundamentalist models, or with the wider cultural biases and expressions of twentieth-century America. Rice was complicated and unique because he was truly an independent Baptist, both theologically and dispositionally (with all the resulting eccentricities,) but his focus on evangelism allowed him a stable and historically orthodox matrix with which to process the turbulent environment of twentieth-century

¹⁹ Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899) was the most influential evangelist of the nineteenth century, leading a nondenominational evangelistic movement that profoundly altered the shape of American Protestantism.

American Christianity. Though he often misunderstood or misinterpreted cultural and theological issues, throughout it all he remained faithful to his one passion: evangelism. Because of his wide influence, Rice's evangelistic perspective was welcomed into thousands of Christians homes, churches, and school for half a century.

Personal Background

I was raised in a pastor's home. My father left the Southern Baptist Convention in the late 1970s over theological concerns he encountered while attending Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. After leaving the Convention, he sought out John R. Rice, who recommended he finish his education at the fundamentalist school Tennessee Temple University. My father identified closely with the ministry of Tennessee Temple University and its founder Lee Roberson, as well as with John R. Rice. As I grew up, the *Sword of the Lord* was a common feature in our house, and Rice's books were frequently referenced, leaving me with a deep personal appreciation for the ministry and influence of Rice.

Not only have I grown up in fundamentalism, I currently pastor an independent Baptist church in Maryland. This church was planted in 1981 by my father and was heavily steeped in fundamentalism, especially Rice's works and ministry. This setting required me to understand how Rice's ministry affected the practical theology and culture of my congregation. This subject is not simply an academic pursuit, but a pastoral one as well. And though I have deep personal connections to Rice's ministry, I have developed a certain skepticism regarding the fundamentalist movement and Rice's leadership. I find that certain aspects of the revivalistic culture are overbearing and doctrinally lopsided and that seeds of theological and practical errors were planted by early leaders, including

Rice. I have a divided opinion over the value of the movement as a whole, though its loose organization, independence, and complicated variations leave room for growth and reform. Recovering Rice's practical theology is part of a wider effort to understand the lasting influence of fundamentalism, as well as how to interact with the movement in the future.

Background of Research

Though Rice was a prominent leader in fundamentalism, there are very few works dedicated to him, and his name is scarce in studies of fundamentalism in general. Only three books have been published on Rice's life—the first written by his close friend and editor at the *Sword of the Lord*, Robert Sumner. Though it was not an authorized work, Rice reviewed it for accuracy while Sumner worked as his assistant editor.²⁰ This work, helpful for details of Rice's life as well as an insider perspective, is openly sympathetic toward Rice. The second biography was by Viola Walden, Rice's personal secretary for forty-six years.²¹ It gives unique information, but she was even less critical than Sumner. A third book, written by Rice's grandson, Andrew Himes, is an interesting combination of Rice's life, the history of fundamentalism, and Himes's personal relationship with his grandfather and the movement in general.²² Himes rejected fundamentalism and so brought a mix of sympathy for Rice with a negative perspective of the movement. The work is colored by this subjective approach and is not a critical

²⁰ Sumner, *Man Sent from God*.

²¹ Walden, *John R. Rice*.

²² Andrew Himes, *The Sword of the Lord: The Roots of Fundamentalism in an American Family* (Seattle: Chiara Press, 2010).

work, but is helpful for a first-person account of Rice.

The only other serious treatment of Rice in a published work is a chapter in *One Hope and Doctrine*, a recent book by Kevin Bauder and Robert Delnay.²³ This book is an overview of the fundamentalist movement, with an emphasis on its northern development. It devoted a chapter to what it called “The Sword Movement” and provided one of the more academic summaries of Rice’s ministry and influence.

There are also several unpublished dissertations that interact with Rice and his version of fundamentalism.²⁴ These studies trace the rise of fundamentalism and its conflict with its surrounding world, using Rice as a focal point. They contrast his positions and place with other fundamental leaders, cultural and political directions, and religious movements. These are helpful to place Rice in the wider setting of twentieth-century America’s religious and secular environment, as well as see how he helped shape fundamentalism in relation to these environments.

Though these discussions are valuable, they do not focus on any particular aspect of Rice’s theology. In general, almost all research on Rice has been done from a broad perspective, with little in-depth focus on any particular theological or ministerial position of Rice. This dissertation will focus on Rice’s theology of evangelism in order to explain his ministry, philosophy, and his relationship to twentieth-century American

²³ Kevin Bauder and Robert Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2014).

²⁴David Keith, Bates Jr., “Moving Fundamentalism Toward the Mainstream: John R. Rice and the Reengagement of America's Religious and Political Cultures” (PhD diss., Kansas State University, 2006); Nathan A. Finn, “The Development of Baptist Fundamentalism in the South, 1940-1980” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007); Howard Edgar Moore, “The Emergence of Moderate Fundamentalism: John R. Rice and ‘The Sword of the Lord’” (PhD diss., The George Washington University, 1990).

religious life.

Methodology

Rice was a prolific writer and the main focus of research will be his own voice, specifically his published works, which number over 200. Rice's published books, which include numerous sermons and articles reprinted from the *Sword*, often distilled over several years, offer a broad and consistent source for his theological and practical perspective, which this dissertation will analyze in order to show the common theme of evangelism running through Rice's work. The culture of fundamentalism accentuated open, straightforward communication, and though this often came across as overbearing or crude, it also removed filters, and allowed the listener not only to hear the material, but to understand the mindset of the speaker. Rice's books offer a unique source of knowledge, both in their breadth and in their quantity. These factors, combined with Rice's unusual level of consistency (with one exception,²⁵ he had no significant theological or philosophical changes in over forty years of writing,) make Rice's published books and pamphlets uniquely suited for a clear and through understanding of what Rice offered to the world as a model for Christianity.

Overview

Chapter 2 explores Rice's context in twentieth-century fundamentalism. Rice's focus on evangelism over doctrine or even separatism placed him in a unique category. His attempts to recover the irenic evangelicalism of the nineteenth century while also accommodating the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy created an atypical

²⁵ Early in Rice's ministry he would attempt to discern the "signs of the times" by interpreting political events by biblical prophecy. This is addressed below in chapter 5, "Dispensationalism."

version of fundamentalism. Though he was associated with stricter separatists, his approach was much broader than the typical description of fundamentalism. His legacy was complicated by the divergent paths of his followers, most clearly seen in the contrasting ministries of Jerry Falwell and Jack Hyles.

Chapter 3 evaluates the relationship between evangelism and the practical life of the Christian and the church. Rice maintained a very narrow interpretation of the Great Commission that centered around evangelization, both as the primary action of the individual as well as the focus of the teaching and training of the church. The pastor was to focus every aspect of the church on evangelism, which would in turn produce both converts and healthy Christians. Ultimately, this focus on soul winning led to the elevation of the role of the evangelist, which Rice believed was the highest office in the church, above even the pastor.

Chapter 4 discusses Rice's view of Scripture, which was both literal and inerrantist as with all fundamentalists, yet also pre-critical and similar to certain Reformed theologians, like Abraham Kuyper. Rice believed there was a basic divide between the believer and the unbeliever, and only the former could access the truth of Scripture—the Scriptures were a spiritual document, and thus only accessible by the Spirit. He differed from most fundamentalists who appealed to Common Sense philosophy and evidentialist assumptions. Rice's bibliology was unique, in that he reflected both Old Princeton and Dutch Calvinism.

Chapter 5 addresses Rice's relationship to dispensationalism. While Rice was a dispensationalist, as almost all fundamentalists were, he did not ground his theology in the system. Instead, he used evangelism as a filter for dispensationalism, never

emphasizing the system, and ignoring or changing it when it did not serve evangelistic ends. While he was converted from postmillennialism by nineteenth-century evangelicals like C. I. Scofield, R. A. Torrey, and W. E. Blackstone, he most closely resembled D. L. Moody, for whom evangelism always trumped dispensationalism.

Chapter 6 examines Rice's understanding of Reformed Theology, specifically the soteriology of Calvinism and Arminianism. Rice had a superficial grasp of both systems, and though he consulted reputable sources and followed the ministry of great evangelists on both sides, such as C. H. Spurgeon and John Wesley, he was unable to distinguish between Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism, as well as Arminianism and legalism. As a result, he rejected both systems as unbiblical and most importantly, opposed to evangelism.

Chapter 7 explores Rice's understanding of the Holy Spirit. He believed that effective evangelism was dependent on a special filling of the Spirit, and that every Christian should seek it. His theology was drawn directly from nineteenth-century evangelicals like D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey; their success gave him confidence that their pneumatology was correct. This led him to conclude that twentieth-century Pentecostalism was a dangerous innovation, and must be opposed in order for the true, soul-winning power of the Spirit to be understood.

Chapter 8 evaluates Rice's prioritization of evangelism in his interaction with social issues. Rice, like most fundamentalists, was known for highly targeted, culturally conservative preaching, but unlike many, Rice's primary motivation was evangelism. He believed that repentance only came after the preacher showed the listeners their sin, in as specific a way as possible. While Rice was motivated to preach on sin by his evangelistic

focus, he used fundamentalism's fixation on authority as the key for identifying transgressions, resulting in a high view of white America and a low view of social activism like the Civil Rights Movement.

Chapter 9 addresses the methodology of Rice's evangelism. As a practical writer, Rice sought to move theology out of the pulpit and classroom into the lives of Christians, and this meant understanding how to facilitate the maximum amount of conversions. Rice was primarily an advocate of personal interactions, seeing them as the biblical and most effective means of evangelism. However, he also pressed the need for mass evangelism, as it motivated and shaped Christians to engage in evangelism, as well as producing direct conversions.

Chapter 10, the conclusion, summarizes Rice's position on evangelism and offers final reflections on the sustainability of his model as well as opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER 2

EVANGELISTIC FUNDAMENTALISM

There is no reason why we can't have Bible Christianity, but we have to put first things first—keeping people out of Hell.

—John R. Rice

Everything Dr. Rice did revolved around one thing—soul winning. Dr. John R. Rice's ministry was built and determined by the defense and promotion of soul winning.

—Jack Hyles

Though multiple historians have made it clear that fundamentalism was not a monolithic tradition, stereotypes still remain fixed in people's minds. A large part of this problem lies in the confusion between the culture of fundamentalism and the theology of fundamentalism. When neo-evangelicalism began to emerge from fundamentalism in the 1940s, negative attitudes and dispositions were one of the largest factors. Carl F. H. Henry, a leader in the movement, explained, "Fundamentalism as a theology should be distinguished from fundamentalism as a temperament. The problem is with the latter. 'The real bankruptcy of fundamentalism,' said Henry, 'has resulted . . . from a harsh temperament, a spirit of lovelessness and strife.'"¹ As Justin Taylor described,

By the late 1930s and early 1940s, some quarters of fundamentalism began to experience discomfort with the trajectory of the movement. There was a concern that the militancy of fundamentalism was having unfortunate results. Speaking in broad terms, some critics perceived the default posture of fundamentalism to have

- a focus on infighting over soul-winning
- a diminished social conscious in order to protect the doctrine of the gospel,

¹ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 165

- and
- a downplaying of intellectual engagement with the academy in the desire to avoid influence by modernism.²

While these may describe a general pattern within fundamentalism, Rice's ministry should not be characterized this way (though on the second point his social focus was limited rather than diminished). Rice was always more concerned with evangelism than doctrine, he never broke fellowship with anyone except modernists, and he valued scholarship, as long as it contributed toward evangelism (though it could be argued that he downplayed non-conservative sources). Rice's legacy has been obscured by his association with other fundamentalists, as well as his successor's departure from his emphasis on broad fellowship around key doctrines and evangelism. When taken on its own, Rice's theological version of fundamentalism would place him in the category of early ecumenical fundamentalists of the 1920s. The fundamentalism that took hold in the 1970s ultimately rejected Rice's inclusive evangelistic model.³

Intellectual Fundamentalism

J. Gresham Machen occupied a seminal place in fundamentalist history and his book *Christianity and Liberalism* was one of the most definitive analyses (from a conservative perspective) of the theological differences in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.⁴ Machen's legacy was the defense of the conservative theological

² Justin Taylor, "10 Key Events: Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism in 20th Century America," The Gospel Coalition, accessed January 3, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/10-key-events-fundamentalism-and-evangelicalism-in-20th-century-america/>.

³ In today's ecclesiastical categories, he would be a conservative evangelical, perhaps even a Southern Baptist. Nathan Finn argued that the Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention was facilitated by Rice's ministry, Nathan Finn, "John R. Rice, Billy Graham, and the Dilemma of Ecclesiastical Separation," *American Baptist Quarterly* 33.2 (Summer 2014): 229–52

⁴ Machen (1881-1937) was a Presbyterian minister and theologian who opposed the growing liberalism in Protestantism in the early twentieth century, eventually leaving his teaching post at Princeton

foundation of Christianity, as he argued, “If any one fact is clear, on the basis of this evidence, it is that the Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not upon mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words, it was based upon doctrine.”⁵ Machen’s argument that the New Testament defined true Christianity was foundational for fundamentalism, making the militant preservation of conservative doctrine essential to its identity. Machen himself was defined by his intellectual approach to Christianity, which he saw suffering from a lack of knowledge, declaring, “The Church is perishing to-day through lack of thinking, not an excess of it.”⁶ With his academic credentials and scholarly work, Machen created a fundamentalism that was marked by intellectual and doctrinal defense, a notable fact due to later tendencies toward anti-intellectualism within the movement.

Rice followed in this doctrinal and intellectual path, often citing the works of conservative scholars, encouraging his followers to appreciate the scholarship that Machen exemplified. This was most clearly seen in Rice’s work on Scripture, where he promoted and relied upon on the work of eighteenth-century Swiss Protestant Louis Gaussen, Princeton scholars B. B. Warfield and Machen himself, and twentieth-century scholars such as E. J. Young and Carl F. H. Henry.⁷ Rice rejected anti-intellectualism,

Seminary and his membership in the Northern Presbyterian Church to lead in founding Westminster Theological Seminary (1929) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1936). For more, see Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thoughts* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004).

⁵ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923, repr., Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 21.

⁶ Quoted in George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 137.

⁷ John R. Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book—The Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord,

welcomed conservative scholarship, and his fundamentalism was clearly in the stream of Machen, whom he included among the “great defenders of the faith” and regularly listed as a standard source for faithful scholarship.⁸

However, his alignment with fundamentalist scholarship was not the same as his emphasis on it. For Rice, doctrine served evangelism, and while he was clearly a theological fundamentalist, he was not primarily an apologist. Evangelism was the primary goal, not the articulation of pure doctrine, as the necessary means with which to win souls. Fundamentalism did not encompass all doctrine—it emphasized what was necessary to salvation. Rice explained, “Now, clearly, not every secondary truth and fact in the Scriptures is regarded as a part of ‘the faith’; but certain essential truths are . . . the essentials that are in the Gospel itself are especially precious; they are indispensable, they must be kept and defended. They are essential to salvation.”⁹ Salvation was what separated fundamental doctrines from secondary doctrines. Rice was an ardent defender of doctrine, but he was more concerned about soul winning than sound doctrine, not because doctrine was dispensable or unimportant, but because it played only a supporting role for evangelism, his primary focus. This distinction was not always apparent. When engaging a controversial doctrine itself, Rice sounded like a typical fundamentalist, doggedly fighting for the truth above all else; but when Rice spoke of doctrine and evangelism together, he was careful to prioritize the latter over the former. Rice held up the Jerusalem church in the book of Acts as the model, stating, “Oh, it is important that

1969).

⁸ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 265-66, 272, 275, 401.

⁹ John R. Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975), 19.

we hold to the basic doctrine of the Scriptures But surely, we have missed the point if we do not see that the thing for which they lived and the aim which governed all their activities, their prayers, their ministry, their daily lives, was soul winning.”¹⁰ Rice even placed the high doctrines of the Trinity and Christology beneath the practice of evangelism, pointing to Scripture itself and asserting,

We know that John’s Gospel especially pictures Jesus as the Son of God, God the Son. But the signs that are written in the Gospel of John are written to prove the deity of Christ only secondarily. That proof is a means to an end. For John says, ‘But these things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; AND THAT BELIEVING YE MIGHT HAVE LIFE THROUGH HIS NAME’ (John 20:31). To prove the deity of Christ was only a means to an end, and the end was getting people saved!¹¹

Defending fundamental truths was not the goal of the Christian life, and though Rice was as firm in the defense of orthodoxy as Machen, he was never satisfied to establish merely the theological parameters of authentic New Testament Christianity. If opposition to liberalism did not lead to soul winning, Rice would have rejected it as unscriptural. To modify George Marsden’s classic definition of fundamentalism to include Rice, he was militantly anti-modernist *in order to win souls*.¹² Rice was a practical person, and soul winning was the real-world result of intellectual arguments; without it, Christianity was not the faith that impacted real people. This meant, as Jack Hyles explained, “Dr. Rice did not fight all error with the same fervor. He fought the most and the hardest against anything that would detract from soul winning.”¹³

¹⁰ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 36.

¹¹ John R. Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1964), 97-98.

¹² Marsden’s definition was as follows: “militantly anti-modern Protestant evangelicalism.” Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4.

¹³ Jack Hyles, *Fundamentalism in My Lifetime*, ed. Ray Young (Hammond, IN: Hyles

Separatist Fundamentalism

Often the core of fundamentalism, especially after the 1950s, has been defined as separatism. Marsden distinguished between fundamentalists of the 1920s, whom he described as “militantly opposed to modernism in the church and certain modern cultural norms,” and fundamentalism of the 1950s, which he said was used “as a self-designation almost only by ecclesiastical separatists who break fellowship with [Billy] Graham.”¹⁴ However, Rice should not be defined by his relationship with Billy Graham and the new evangelical movement that was departing from fundamentalism. Rather, he continued the classic fundamentalist model: separate from modernists, but not from anyone who maintained orthodoxy. As a result, Rice offered a third way between hyper-separatist fundamentalists like Bob Jones, Jr., and neo-evangelicals like Billy Graham. Rice was often misunderstood because of his close relationships with other fundamentalists who practiced secondary separation, which was unfortunate since Rice loudly opposed such practices, and continued to fellowship with many who remained within denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention.¹⁵

Rice had a very simple formula for ecclesiastical separation, one he maintained consistently throughout his career: separate from modernism/liberalism (the two terms were used synonymously). In 1934, the very first year of publishing the *Sword of the*

Publications, 2002), 164.

¹⁴ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4.

¹⁵ Nathan A. Finn provided a deeper look at how conservative evangelism created close links between independent fundamentalists like Rice and denominational fundamentalists in “The Development of Baptist Fundamentalism in the South, 1940-1980” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007); Finn also had an interesting and helpful article on the personal relationship between Rice and Billy Graham, and the transitions of fundamentalism over the issue of separation. His suggestion that Rice was flexible on separation was not convincing, perhaps as it was more related to Rice’s personal relationships than his theological positions. Nathan Finn, “John R. Rice, Billy Graham, and the Dilemma of Ecclesiastical Separation,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 229–52.

Lord, Rice identified whom he opposed:

A modernist does not believe that the Bible is what it claimed to be, the very Word of God. A modernist does not believe in the virgin birth of Christ, does not believe in His bodily resurrection. A modernist does not believe in the substitutionary death of Christ; that Christ actually died in sinner's stead and paid for our sins on the cross. The modernist does not believe in a personal regeneration, salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ. The modernist does not believe in a literal Hell for Christ-rejectors.¹⁶

A modernist was an unbeliever, a non-Christian, rejecting those core doctrines that were required for salvation. Forty years later Rice reiterated the same position:

One who does not hold continually to the Bible teaching about Christ, 'hath not God,' is not converted, is not a Christian. One who does not accept the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His miraculous life, His blood atonement, His bodily resurrection, is unconverted and is not saved. He should never be called a Christian nor given Christian recognition, the Scripture says.¹⁷

Since modernists were not Christians, it was unacceptable to unite with them for spiritual purposes, as Rice concluded from Scriptures, citing 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" Therefore, "Christians ought not to be yoked up with non-Christians. God's people ought to separate from the Devil's people."¹⁸ Rice's formula for separation was based on agreement over fundamental doctrines, which centered around the gospel message of Christ as revealed in the Scripture.

Rice was also clear on what did not constitute grounds for separation, clarifying what he meant by "modernist." He asserted,

It is important that we use terms correctly. A man is not a modernist because he differs with you on baptism, though he may be wrong. To be untaught or to be

¹⁶ John R. Rice, *The Ruin of a Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1944), 216; John R. Rice, *Come Out or Stay In?*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1974), 171.

¹⁷ Rice, *Come Out or Stay In?*, 31.

¹⁸ Rice, *The Ruin of a Christian*, 195.

mistaught on the second coming of Christ is not modernism. It is true that modernists are postmillennial in their belief, but not all postmillennials are modernists. It is wrong, unbrotherly, and misleading to call people modernists because you believe them to be wrong on some matters of Scriptural interpretation.”¹⁹

Though an independent Baptist, Rice would not allow separation over denominational membership, even when the denomination contained liberalism. Though he spent much of his ministry speaking out against certain people and practices within the Southern Baptist Convention, and other mainline denominations, often encouraging pastors to leave, he still maintained ecclesiastical ties to churches within those denominations. When asked the question, “Dr. Rice, could you fellowship with a man who stays in, we will say, the Southern Baptist Convention?” Rice answered, “If he can keep the church as it ought to be—an independent church according to Christ and the Bible, and standing true—yes. If he has fellowship in the Convention and if he supports only those things he feels certain will please God he might stay in.”²⁰ Though a proud independent and vocal critic of every denomination that harbored liberals, Rice was not a typical separatist, at least not in the way fundamentalism was often portrayed. Ecclesiastical separation was only required when direct support of liberalism occurred.

One of Rice’s most public conflicts on separation was with Billy Graham in 1957, over Billy Graham’s relationships with liberals in his campaigns.²¹ Though

¹⁹ Rice, *The Ruin of a Christian*, 218.

²⁰ John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice Goes to College* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1977), 93.

²¹ Howard Edgar Moore gives an excellent examination of this conflict, especially the personal relationship between Rice and Graham, and the less-than-open way in which Graham interacted with Rice, though his analysis of the competing claims of fundamentalism and new evangelicals for historical continuity with nineteenth-century evangelicals seems to ignore the paradigm change of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. Howard Edgar Moore, “The Emergence of Moderate Fundamentalism: John R. Rice and the Sword of the Lord” (PhD diss., George Washington University, 1990).

Graham had been solidly in the fundamentalist camp, and Rice had personally promoted his ministry from the beginning, Graham allowed modernists to publicly participate in his 1957 New York Crusade. Bob Jones, Sr. and other fundamentalist leaders had already dismissed Graham, but Rice continued to support him until this open association, which led him to end his relationship with Graham, as well as the last ties between fundamentalism and the new evangelicalism, a division that had been growing since the 1940s under the leadership of Carl F. H. Henry and Harold Ockenga. Rice's disagreement with Graham has led many to cast Rice in an unnecessarily rigid mold. George Marsden called Rice an "archetypically strict fundamentalist" who publicly broke with Graham and joined "The strict 'fundamentalists' . . . who shared a fundamentalist heritage with the new evangelicals but unlike them disapproved of Graham. Separatism, accordingly, now became a chief test of 'fundamentalism.'"²² But Marsden misrepresented Rice here, or at least conflated him with other fundamentalists. First, Rice was less strict in his separatism than many fundamentalists, especially Bob Jones, Jr., and second, Rice never separated from Graham, at least not in an ecclesiastical or theological sense. For Rice, separatism did not equate to fundamentalism, and he admitted, "I love Southern Baptists. They are the largest group of fundamental Bible believers really working at soul winning left in the world."²³ As Nathan Finn noted, "Rice always made it clear that he thought consistent fundamentalists should leave the convention, but he never ended personal relationships with those who chose to work as

²² Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 164-65.

²³ John R. Rice, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1965), 151.

conservative dissenters in the convention.”²⁴ Though Rice was called a separatist, he openly worked with preachers still associated in denominations that were known for containing liberals, such as the American Baptist Convention. Rice himself was a member of Highland Park Baptist Church in the 1950s, under Lee Robertson, while the church was still a member of the Convention (though they refused to give to the Cooperative Program, as it supported liberal professors and literature, and were eventually removed from the Convention).²⁵

When Rice and Graham parted ways, it was for one reason: Graham worked with modernists and Rice opposed that practice, not Graham himself. Rice did not refuse to work with Graham, he refused to participate in Graham’s endeavors with modernists. Rice never hinted that Graham was not a believer, or that he had compromised the fundamentals of the faith. The contrast between the language that Rice used for liberals and how he spoke of Graham was telling. Rice stridently denounced modernists: “We are to expose false prophets. We are to say that are wolves in sheep’s clothing, that they are deceitful in their words, that they deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Jude says they are like ‘beasts’ (vs. 10) We are told that they are ‘sensual, having not the Spirit’ (vs. 19).”²⁶ He was especially harsh toward modernists in Christian circles: “We are against infidelity wherever it raises its head. We are more against it when it pretends to be Christianity because it adds deceit and hypocrisy to its Christ-rejection.”²⁷

²⁴ Finn, “The Development of Baptist Fundamentalism in the South,” 119.

²⁵ John R. Rice, “The Editor Travels,” *Sword of the Lord*, March 21, 1952; Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 163.

²⁶ Rice, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith*, 149.

²⁷ John R. Rice, *Southern Baptists and Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1972), 156.

However, when Rice spoke about Billy Graham his tone was brotherly: “We are not against Billy Graham I love Billy Graham. I would not stop him from preaching anywhere. I rejoice in every soul he wins to Christ.”²⁸ Marsden described 1920s fundamentalism as “militantly opposed to modernism in the churches,” but by the 1950s Marsden placed them in contrast to ‘New Evangelicals’ and said, “‘Fundamentalism’ is used as a self-designation almost only by ecclesiastical separatists who break fellowship with Graham.”²⁹ Yet Rice should not be placed in this second category. He, like Marsden’s first category, was opposed to modernists, but not, like the second category, opposed to Graham, and he never broke ecclesiastical fellowship with him. In fact, Rice explicitly affirmed that he was against only Graham’s support of modernists, not Graham himself. He affirmed that he would fellowship with Graham just as he would with Southern Baptists, as long as he himself was not supporting modernists. Rice declared,

I say I am against Dr. Graham yoking up with unbelievers. I am not against him preaching the Gospel. I am not against him personally. I rejoice in every soul that he wins and rejoice in every person who hears the Gospel by his lips. I would have fellowship with him if I could do so without approving or condoning his fellowship with unbelievers. I would have fellowship with Southern Baptists who believe the Bible and ardently win souls, anywhere I can do so without supporting a program I know is wrong.³⁰

The fundamentalism Marsden was describing was marked by secondary separation, referring not only to personally separating from modernism, but also from orthodox men who did not separate. Rice openly opposed this view: “One that believes in secondary

²⁸ Rice, *Come Out or Stay In?*, 176.

²⁹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 235.

³⁰ Rice, *Come Out or Stay In?*, 235.

separation finds he must believe in tertiary separation. If you separate from those [like Graham] who do not separate from liberals, unbelievers, then you must separate from those who do not separate from others who do not separate? Where would you stop?”³¹ Rice did not break fellowship from Graham, because he had always had only two theological principles for separation: “First, we are FOR working with born again, Bible believing Christians. Second, we are AGAINST working with unconverted infidels.”³² Billy Graham fell into the first category, not the second.

Part of the confusion over Rice’s position was his association with Bob Jones, Jr, who strongly advocated for secondary separation, especially from Graham, later claiming that Graham was the reason “evangelism is in the greatest peril it has ever been in.”³³ However, in the 1950-60s this distinction was not apparent, and practical dissociation from Graham appeased Jones, Jr. Rice, however, never planned on cutting ties with anyone who claimed the fundamentals of the faith and pursued soul winning. The difference between Rice and Jones, Jr. became apparent in 1971 with an ambitious conference for evangelism that Rice was initiating. This conference, dubbed the International Conference (or World Congress) on Biblical Evangelism, was an attempt to unite fundamentalism. Its planning committee had the usual leaders such as Bob Jones, Jr., Jack Hyles, and Lee Roberson, but also included Earl Oldham, a prominent leader in

³¹ Rice, *Come Out or Stay In?*, 227.

³² John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 148, emphasis original. Rice also avoided men who lived in “gross open sin” as well as those who were intent on causing disruptions. However, these issues were accepted by all conservatives and did not factor into the conflicts between fundamentalists and evangelicals. Rice, *Dr. Rice Goes to College*, 94.

³³ Mark Taylor Dalhouse, *An Island in the Lake of Fire: Bob Jones University, Fundamentalism, and the Separatist Movement* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 83.

the World Baptist Fellowship, the organization founded by J. Frank Norris and Bill Dowell, vice-president of Bible Baptist Fellowship, the group that had split with Norris in the 50s.³⁴ All was well, until Rice invited prominent conservative Southern Baptists R. G. Lee and W. A. Criswell to speak at the conference. Rice was only being consistent with his views on fellowship with other conservatives, and though some placed part of the Graham split on his support of the Co-operative Program,³⁵ Rice even allowed for that, admitting, “And I do not mind anybody supporting the whole Southern Baptist Co-operative Program or any other denomination program, provided he has prayed about it and feels clearly led of God to do so.”³⁶

Though Rice had not changed his positions, Jones, Jr. was not on board for this ecumenical fundamentalism. For Jones, Jr. a fundamentalist should attack not only modernists, but also compromising Christians.³⁷ Jones, Jr. saw little difference between W. A. Criswell, whom he called a “traitor to the Cause of Christ,”³⁸ and Billy Graham. Further exacerbating the problem, but also showing the difference between the fundamentalism of Rice and Jones, Jr., was Rice’s requirement that the conference refrain from criticizing Billy Graham. For Rice, evangelism was the priority, not policing other Christians, but for Jones, Jr. this was treason, and under the rules of secondary separation, Rice was now considered part of the problem, and was rejected by Jones, Jr. and his

³⁴ Rice, “Editor’s Notes,” *Sword*, February 5, 1971.

³⁵ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 163-64.

³⁶ Rice, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith*, 151.

³⁷ Bob Jones, Jr., as interviewed by Howard Edgar Moore, January 23, 1987, Greenville, SC. Moore, “The Emergence of Moderate Fundamentalism,” 328.

³⁸ Bob Jones, Jr., *Facts John R. Rice Won’t Face* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University, 1977), 19.

followers.³⁹ Looking back at the Graham incident from this perspective, one sees that Rice and Jones, Jr. were never on the same page; Rice was upholding the classic fundamentalist position of separation from modernism, while Jones, Jr. was attacking Graham personally over his lack of separatist credentials. Rice always sought a broad, non-denominational coalition that focused on evangelism, just as D. L. Moody and others had done in the nineteenth century, and, living in the aftermath of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy, he only rejected those who rejected orthodoxy.

Legacy of Rice's Fundamentalism

Contemporary Fundamentalism is often characterized as narrow focus and separation over secondary doctrines. J. D. Greear, elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2018, reflected this popular understanding of the movement, describing it “in part, as too much weight given to certain aspects of Christian doctrine or practice (the word fundamentalism, historically, doesn't mean that, but in common parlance that is how it might be understood). Some people give such enormous weight to minor issues that the gospel itself is obscured.”⁴⁰ While Greear's non-technical description may accurately described a certain segment of fundamentalism, especially after the 1970s and 80s, it did not include John R. Rice. In fact, it was exactly what Rice passionately stood against, even when powerful friends rejected him for what they considered a compromise of true fundamentalism. Rice was primarily focused on the fundamentals of the faith for the purpose of soul winning, and while he had strong

³⁹ George W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), 253-54.

⁴⁰ J. D. Greear, “Don't Be a Fundamentalist (Calvinist or Otherwise),” J. D. Greear Ministries, accessed January 3, 2019, <https://jdgrear.com/blog/dont-be-a-fundamentalist-calvinist-or-otherwise/>.

convictions on many things, he never broke fellowship over secondary issues.⁴¹ Unlike Greear’s definition, Rice refused to break fellowship over secondary doctrines, even key ones like dispensationalism, which has been used to identify fundamentalism,⁴² or even charismatic practices. He said,

You say, “This person talks in tongues.” Well, personally I prefer the English tongue! But a man who talks in tongues—is he saved? Yes. Does he believe the Bible? Yes. Does he love the Lord? Yes. Is he right on all the essentials about Christ and the Bible? Yes. If so, I can have fellowship with him, provided he does not make doubtful disputations. Here is a postmillennialist. Shall we let him co-operate in a revival campaign? . . . Yes, if he makes no divisive issue about postmillennialism.⁴³

The purpose of the Christian life was evangelism, and secondary issues distracted from that goal. Rice argued, “Good Christian people surely ought to be more concerned about getting out the Gospel and seeing people saved than about their belief in a certain form of baptism or speaking in tongues, or sanctification, or the organization of a church.”⁴⁴

However, the leaders that followed Rice did not see things with the same evangelistic focus, and after his death they took his version of fundamentalism in two different directions. These men, especially Jerry Falwell and Jack Hyles, were trained and promoted by Rice for decades, and when they spoke at his funeral in 1980, their views were indistinguishable from Rice’s.

⁴¹ Rice’s articulation of separation would be typically defined today as “conservative evangelical.”

⁴² Most notably by Earnest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁴³ Rice, *Dr. Rice Goes to College*, 92.

⁴⁴ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 148.

Jerry Falwell

Jerry Falwell, founder of the megachurch Thomas Road Baptist Church, Liberty University, and the Moral Majority had been following Rice since the 1950s, though his prominence was limited until almost 1970. His evangelistic focus and church building skill made him a rising star in the *Sword of Lord* crowd, and during the 1970s he was a popular preacher at the *Sword of the Lord* Conferences. His love of politics was always present, but that was not conspicuous among fundamentalists, as Rice had always spoken boldly about political issues on the side of conservatism and capitalism.⁴⁵ When Jerry Falwell began to pursue a political coalition that would become the Moral Majority in 1979, he already had the backing of Rice, who that same year published a collection of Falwell's sermons entitled *America Can Be Saved: Jerry Falwell Preaches on Revival*.⁴⁶ Falwell had been taught by Rice that ecclesiastical and secular co-operation operated differently—Rice maintained that Christians could work with non-Christians as long as it was not in a spiritual realm, such as a lawyer joining the Bar Association. He explained, “To join a Christian and a lost person in a spiritual matter is unequal; for a lawyer to deal with another lawyer is not unequal.”⁴⁷

Falwell knew that Rice would support his conservative and patriotic attempt to right American politics, even if it meant working with unbelievers, so he and Elmer Towns (co-founder of Liberty University and popular church growth expert) approached

⁴⁵ For example: John R. Rice, *Dangerous Triplets: Russian Communism, New Deal Socialism, Bible-Denying Modernism* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1960); John R. Rice, *War in Vietnam: Should Christians Fight?* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1966); John R. Rice, *The Murder of the Helpless Unborn: Abortion* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1971).

⁴⁶ Jerry Falwell, *America Can Be Saved: Jerry Falwell Preaches on Revival* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1979).

⁴⁷ Rice, *Come Out or Stay In?*, 50-51.

Rice for support in 1979 for the expansion of Liberty University (then Liberty Baptist College) and the formation of the Moral Majority. Falwell needed a national network of sympathetic conservatives, and Rice's *Sword of the Lord* had one of the largest religious subscriptions in the country, with hundreds of thousands of names. Falwell presented his case: double the size of the school and form a conservative coalition that would push for political leaders with Christian values. In the aftermath of Baptist Jimmy Carter's interview with *Playboy*, fundamentalists and evangelicals were eager for a more like-minded conservative in the White House, someone who could help turn America back to God. Falwell's evangelistic and church growth success gave him credibility with Rice; this, combined with Rice's love for America and higher education, made Falwell's request for support very attractive. Rice responded immediately: "Of course we can help," said the eighty-four-year-old Rice. "Do you want the names today?"⁴⁸

What Rice did not anticipate, and did not live to see, was the emphasis that Falwell would put on politics. While he would retain soul winning as an important part of his ministry, his legacy was political, and the success of the Moral Majority in electing Ronald Reagan catapulted Falwell from an evangelistic to a political powerhouse. Liberty University became a frequent stop for Republican presidential candidates. The fundamentalism of John R. Rice would slowly fade into the background, and when Falwell wrote his autobiography in 1987, he never mentioned Rice's name.⁴⁹ As Falwell grew in national prominence, his kind of fundamentalism became synonymous with conservative, Republican politics.

⁴⁸ Dirk Smillie, *Falwell, Inc.: Inside a Religious, Political, Educational, and Business Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 95-97, Google e-book.

⁴⁹ Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 1987.

Jack Hyles

This was not the case for Rice's true fundamentalist heir, Jack Hyles, who made Rice's name a central part of his ministry, drawing credibility from his supposed continuation of Rice's ministry. Rice discovered Hyles in the 1950s as a rising star in Texas, and over the next twenty-two years they traveled and spoke together thousands of times.⁵⁰ When Rice died in 1980 (and Lee Robertson retired in 1981⁵¹) Hyles's megachurch status, dynamic preaching style, and personal charisma placed him at the front of the fundamentalism that did not follow Jerry Falwell or Bob Jones, Jr. Hyles continued to honor the legacy of Rice, calling him one of the greatest men since the apostle Paul, and in the process giving himself the credibility of Rice's long ministry.⁵² However, Hyles did not continue Rice's model of fundamentalism, going the opposite direction from Jerry Falwell. While he, more than Falwell, made evangelism a prominent part of his ministry, he rejected the broad fellowship of Rice around key doctrines, and became the kind of fundamentalist Greear described above, making secondary issues primary.⁵³ In fact, Hyles's version of separation was closer to Bob Jones, Jr.'s than

⁵⁰ Over 2,200 times according to Hyles, indicative of the enormous speaking schedule these men sustained over the years, which contributed both to their influence as well as their close relationship. Jack Hyles, *Jack Hyles Speaks on Biblical Separation* (Hammond, IN: Hyles-Anderson Publishers, 1984), 49.

⁵¹ Rice and Robertson were closely aligned in their fundamentalist principles and philosophies and worked closely for many decades. They held complementary roles, Rice as the evangelist and publisher and Robertson as the pastor and educator (at the megachurch Highland Park Baptist Church and Tennessee Temple University). The death of Rice and retirement of Robertson within a few years of each other were significant in allowing new leadership to rise in independent Baptist fundamentalism.

⁵² Hyles, *Fundamentalism in My Lifetime*, 131.

⁵³ The departure from Rice was illustrated by a political edit to Rice's book, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*. In the first 1958 edition, shortly after parting ways with Billy Graham, Rice included Graham's names among a list of great evangelists. However, in the 1986 reprint (6 years after Rice's death) the new editor of the *Sword of the Lord*, Curtis Hutson, replaced Graham's name with Jack Hyles's name, making no mention of the change, leading an uninformed reader to assume it was Rice's choice. In the days before digital copies, when pasting was done by hand, the imperfect change is visibly noticeable. John R. Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1958), 16.

Rice's. The clearest example of this was the debate over the King James Version and personal moral standards.

King James Version Debate. John R. Rice, while adamant on the inerrancy and inspiration of Scriptures, never placed that divine seal on any particular translation. The particular version of Scripture that a Christian used was secondary, never a dividing line between those who agreed on the core issues of the faith. When voices began to call for exclusive use of the King James Version in the 1970s, Rice, while highly valuing the translation, refused to allow it to become a point of separation. Only the core doctrines of the faith, as expressed historically by orthodox Christians were to define true Christians. This broad fundamentalism was rejected by Jack Hyles shortly after Rice's death, and Hyles made the sole use of the King James Version a new fundamental of the faith, effectively rejecting Rice's model of fundamentalism.

Rice was confident that the original writings (as well as their transmission) were reliable and accessible, explaining,

When we speak of inspiration, we speak of the original autographs, the original manuscripts. We have not of the original manuscripts. All we have are copies and we have thousands of manuscripts; so if one copyist made a mistake accidentally altering or leaving out a letter or adding a word, and if perhaps two or three others copied his mistake, yet we have hundreds of other manuscripts that did not make the same mistake so that we can compare them and almost certainly come to the very original words.⁵⁴

This same philosophy applied to translations. Though many were concerned about the multiplication of translations in the twentieth century, Rice believed that it was not only beneficial but necessary, stating, "The various translations contain, together, the eternal,

⁵⁴ John R. Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book—the Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1969), 354-55.

unchangeable Word of God A perfect translation of the Bible is humanly impossible So, let us say, there are no perfect translations Whatever their faults, all translations have the very Word of God.”⁵⁵ Since the original manuscripts, copied in the original languages, contained the perfect words of God, then any translation was, by its very nature, incapable of being inerrant. Of course, Rice, like most conservatives of his time, valued the King James Version above all others, and he remarked, “There is no evidence that any translation of the Bible now in existence will ever supersede the King James Version in the love and usage by common Christians.”⁵⁶

This seems to have been the view of most fundamentalists, including those at Bob Jones University; however, beginning in the 1960s, and increasing in strength in the 1970s, vocal support was given for the King James Version as the *only* inspired Scriptures. The most extreme, and perhaps influential, was a radical Bob Jones graduate named Peter Ruckman, who claimed that the King James Version actually improved upon the Greek and was inspired itself.⁵⁷ Ruckman positioned himself as the only true fundamentalist, and critiqued everyone who did not hold his position. The strength of the movement increased until it began to produce divisions, and Rice addressed it himself, though only as an extreme position. He declared in a chapter called “Be a Fundamentalist but not a Nut!” that “if I say that the American Standard Version of the Bible is a good version (though we prefer the King James Version), I get letters from ardent extremists

⁵⁵ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 366-77.

⁵⁶ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 381.

⁵⁷ For a critique of Ruckman and the King James Version Debate in general, see James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2009); and James D. Price, *King James Onlyism: A New Sect* (self-published, 2006).

saying that the King James Version, even the translation, is perfectly done without error.”⁵⁸ These followers of Ruckman were to be avoided since they set themselves against Christians and were untrustworthy as teachers. Rice warned,

When a Peter Ruckman sets out to say that only he and a few others in the world are right on the Bible, and says that in the King James Version the translation itself was inspired of God and is without error and that all other translations, even the American Standard Version, are perversions; when he says that Origin and Wescott and Hort and others all united to pervert the Scriptures and go against the Bible and God and that all are modernists or hypocrites or ignorant who do not agree that the King James Version—even the translation—is inspired perfectly, then we know that that arrogant attitude, that calling of good men by bad names, shows the man cannot be trusted in doctrine.⁵⁹

Despite this strong warning, within a few years of Rice’s death, Jack Hyles began repeating Ruckman’s arguments.⁶⁰ Having been freed from Rice’s restraining influence, he quickly rejected Rice’s views, declaring, “It bothers me when people say, ‘We believe that the Bible, in the original manuscripts, is the Word of God.’ If that’s true, we have no Bible. Did you hear what I said? We have no Bible.”⁶¹ Then holding up the King James Version, Hyles drew the line: “Either what I hold in my hand is the Word of God, or we don’t have any Word of God.”⁶² Unlike Rice, Hyles made the “King James Version” equivalent to the “Word of God,” thus making it a part of the core fundamentals of the faith. Once Hyles had done this, he proceeded to condemn those who rejected the “Word of God/King James Version.” Thus, Hyles would call anyone

⁵⁸ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalism*, 70.

⁵⁹ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 74.

⁶⁰ Jack Hyles, “Logic Must Prove the King James Bible” (sermon, First Baptist Church, Hammond, IN, April 8, 1984).

⁶¹ Hyles, “Logic Must Prove the King James Bible.”

⁶² Hyles, “Logic Must Prove the King James Bible.”

who used another version a liberal, making the King James Version a non-negotiable, and eliminating Rice from the new version of fundamentalism, exclaiming,

You say, “I don’t like your preaching.” I don’t give a flip. I don’t like your liberalism either. I don’t like your compromise. I don’t like your dirty NIV Bible. I don’t like your dirty ASV Bible. I don’t like your dirty New ASV Bible, or your Revised Standard Version of the Bible. I’m trying to say, anybody that’s got any sense to understand this Bible, and you can understand it, you’ve got the Holy Spirit that lives on the inside of you, and He said, He will lead you into all truth. So maybe you liberals ought to have a bigger Bible.⁶³

The broad coalition around evangelism was lost when Rice died and Hyles became the de facto leader, and as the years passed, Rice’s evangelistic fundamentalism was watered down as lines were drawn around Bible versions, moral standards, and denomination affiliation. Rice had made it clear that these things were not grounds for separation, clarifying that a liberal pastor was one who rejected the old fundamentals, not simply someone who was wrong on certain secondary doctrine. Liberal pastors were to be rejected, but, Rice said, “I do not mean the pastor who may be wrong on some interpretation of Scripture. That is not modernism. I do not mean a pastor who is worldly. Worldliness is wrong, but that is not modernism.”⁶⁴ Rice was willing to let peripheral matters go for the sake of soul winning, Jack Hyles rejected that model and attempted to keep both evangelism and raise the standards of separation. The closest he came to admitting he had left behind Rice was a back-handed compliment, saying of Rice, “If a preacher was a soul winner, he could do no wrong. Dr. Rice seemed to look at everything in life through a pair of soul-winning tinted glasses. He was the most patient

⁶³ Jack Hyles, “Get Your Stinking Feet Out of My Drinking Water” (sermon).

⁶⁴ Rice, *The Ruin of a Christian*, 217.

man if someone was a soul winner.”⁶⁵ Though Hyles always remained aloof from Bob Jones, Jr, his model of fundamentalism began to take on the same characteristics of harshness and hyper-separatism.

Conclusion

In the end, many evangelicals returned to Rice’s kind of broad fundamentalism, though they continued to reject Bob Jones, Jr.’s hyper-separatism. Iain Murray’s *Evangelicalism Divided*, written twenty years after Rice’s death, argued that the result of neo-evangelicals’ wider fellowship was harmful to the core doctrines of the gospel and ultimately undermined the movement.⁶⁶ Prominent evangelicals such as R. C. Sproul of Ligonier Ministries and Mark Dever of 9Marks ministries agreed with Murray, opposing cooperation with modernists or liberals, but seeking interdenominational fellowship around evangelism and the fundamentals of the faith.⁶⁷ In the end, the intellectual, evangelistic, and broad fundamentalism of Rice was abandoned by his followers, but re-acquired by the followers of the neo-evangelicals he opposed. In this regard, Rice was equivalent to today’s conservative evangelical.

⁶⁵ Jack Hyles, *Fundamentalism in My Lifetime*, 158.

⁶⁶ Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001).

⁶⁷ Andy Naselli gave a summary of thirty different reviews on the book. Andy Naselli, “Review of Iain Murray’s ‘Evangelicalism Divided’,” Andy Naselli: Thoughts on Theology, accessed, January 11, 2019, <http://andynaselli.com/review-of-ian-murrays-evangelicalism-divided>.

CHAPTER 3

THE PRIMACY OF EVANGELISM IN PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

John R. Rice believed evangelism was the key to true Christianity, asserting, “There is no reason why we can’t have Bible Christianity, but we have to put first things first—keeping people out of Hell.”¹ In his ministry, Rice harnessed the powerful activism and conversionism of evangelical revivalism to produce a model for discipleship. Drawing from particular, narrow interpretations of Jesus pronouncements about the mission of the church, Rice unified the Christian life around soul winning. This became the means by which Christians could draw close to Christ, both in heart and actions; if evangelism was placed first in the individual life and the church, it would produce healthy, vibrant, and faithful churches. Pastors were tasked to manage teams and programs to ensure that evangelism was primary, and all were to aspire to the chief role in the church, the evangelist. Rice believed that God had ordained this office, based on its evangelistic focus, to lead the church toward sanctification, declaring, “The Great Commission, then, shows how above all concerns, soul-winning is the work of the Christian on this earth.”²

¹ John R. Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975), 45.

² John R. Rice, *God’s Work and How to Do It* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1971), 42.

The Heart of Christ

John R. Rice drew his emphasis on soul winning from what he perceived to be the focused zeal of Jesus Christ. Rice saw Jesus as both Savior and Lord, and as a conservative evangelical, he saw the Christian life as a pursuit of conformity to Christ. He believed that Jesus was consumed by a desire to see people saved from damnation, and that his earthly ministry was focused on that goal.

Rice demonstrated his perception of Jesus's soul-winning passion first by showing how he was deeply concerned for the lost. Rice believed that soul winning necessarily followed an emotional burden for the lost, declaring, "Indeed, I make bold to say that it is the broken heart that drives one out, that makes him go."³ This was the secret to successful soul winning, because it engaged the heart, the emotions, and moved one to rescue the lost as an act of love. Rice illustrated this truth with past evangelists: "All the great soul winners of men have had compassionate hearts. Moody, Spurgeon, Torrey, Finney succeeded beyond other preachers in soul winning mainly, if not solely, because of this compassion."⁴ But his primary argument was from Jesus himself. Using the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, which he believed was written as an object lesson to show something particular about Jesus, and by extension Christianity, Rice demonstrated the soul-winning, world-encompassing burden of Jesus's heart.⁵ When Jesus wept over the grave of the recently deceased Lazarus, it was not "primarily over the loss of Lazarus . . . most of Jesus's tears were not for the grief of Mary and of Martha,

³ John R. Rice, *The Soul-Winner's Fire* (Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941), 41.

⁴ Rice, *The Soul-Winner's Fire*, 42-43.

⁵ John R. Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1964), 97.

surely I think that in part the Lord Jesus standing by that grave saw all the graves in the world For all the sorrow of death in a sinning race, Jesus wept.”⁶ Jesus was driven by his love and burden for the lost, and Rice expected faithful Christians to share in this concern. To be an obedient disciple was not simply to follow the commands of Christ, but to share in his desires, his heartaches, his compassion for the lost. Rice was confident that Jesus had a singular fervency: “You see, we know ahead of time what the one consuming passion was in the heart of the Lord Jesus all the time. Jesus said, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10) Lost sinners were on the mind and heart of Jesus all the time.”⁷

Since Jesus was singularly passionate about the doomed condition of the lost, it followed that he was also singularly focused on saving them from that condition. While Jesus may have fed the hungry, healed the sick, and preached virtuous living, these were secondary issues in his ministry. While Rice praised the humanitarian effects of Jesus’s presence throughout history, he concluded with a qualification, “Oh, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in human form to this world has been the most civilizing and exalting impact that society ever had. But all of these things are incidental and are by-products. They are not what Jesus came for. He came to save sinners!”⁸ Meeting physical or intellectual needs were not what motivated Jesus in his ministry and suffering, what drove him to serve people, it was the “joy of seeing multitudes redeemed forever through his precious blood.” Rice was confident that this was what was dearest to the

⁶ Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners*, 101.

⁷ Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners*, 103.

⁸ John R. Rice, *The Golden Path to Successful Soul Winning* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1989), 46-47.

heart of Christ.⁹ “What makes the Lord Jesus happy? In what does he rejoice?” Rice asked, “He himself told us. He told how the shepherd who finds the lost sheep brings it him on his shoulder and calls to his friends and neighbors saying ‘Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.’”¹⁰ Evangelism was the purpose of Jesus’s advent, his focus in ministry, and his hope in death, and thus, Rice concluded, the most divine activity a person could do.

Following Jesus

Once Rice had determined that evangelism was Jesus’s primary focus, it was a small step to apply that to the Christian life. For Rice, discipleship was centered on evangelism. Soul winning was the means and goal of following Christ, and all other aspects of the Christian life, from the church to holiness, were to serve the cause of evangelism. In Rice’s theology, spiritual growth was growth in soul winning.

Evangelism as the Key to Discipleship

Evangelism has always been prominent in Christianity, but never more so than in the rise of evangelicalism and revivalism. The emphasis on crisis conversions and emotional pleas focused the services and the lives of revivalist Christians on the conversion of souls. Fundamentalism continued this course, and evangelism always featured prominently in the lives of its leaders. But Rice took the focus on evangelism to a new level. As George Marsden explained, when Moody’s followers began to develop the fundamentalism that Rice would assume, they fused piety and correct belief, setting

⁹ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 47.

¹⁰ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 49.

the pattern for the cultural and theological militancy of later fundamentalists.¹¹ Rice saw himself in this tradition and adopted those principles. However, he subtly shifted the focus off of defending the faith and living a holy life and on to evangelism; the Christian life was a pursuit of lost souls, and that was the standard for discipleship—doctrine and holiness were servants of evangelism.

Evangelism as the Key to Successful Christianity

Rice was a practical person, and he sought to give straightforward, simple guidance on how to live the Christian life. He understood that if there was a primary goal that offered a clear focus and standard by which believers could measure their lives and spiritual growth, they would be helped—he offered evangelism as the key. In no uncertain terms, he declared, “Soul winning is the main job of the Christian.”¹² It was clear to him that the passion of Jesus was the guide for his followers, and to fail to follow in Jesus’s single-minded pursuit of souls was to render all other matters irrelevant. Evangelism was the *sine qua non* of discipleship, so much so, that Rice asserted, “One is simply not a good Christian if he is not a soul winner.”¹³ Evangelism was one of the fundamentals of the faith, and the primary fundamental of discipleship; losing it would shipwreck the faith. Rice urged, “We need to come back to the fundamental verities of the Christian religion. The one fundamental OUGHT of moral necessity of divine imperative for a Christian is to get the Gospel to every creature. No Christian can be a

¹¹ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 46.

¹² Rice, *The Soul-Winner’s Fire*, 21.

¹³ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 45.

good Christian who does not feel that ‘it is this when I live; it is this until death. The main thing in all the world is to keep people out of Hell!’”¹⁴ Rice argued that the call of Jesus to follow him was simple: suffer all to win souls, this is what the Christian life was aimed toward. Referring to Jesus calling his disciples out of their fishing boats, he explained, “‘Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,’ He said. Everyone who follows Jesus, He makes into fishers of men.”¹⁵ This call to win souls trumped all other aspects of the Christian life, and Rice saw no competition between the life of soul winning and other Christian duties or vocations; evangelism was not one of several pursuits in life, it was the basis for all others pursuits. Rice was certain that the key to a joyful Christian life was evangelism, averring, “A really successful Christian will have to be a soul winner . . . Saved people in the Bible who were happy Christians were soul-winning Christians.”¹⁶

This was so important for spiritual fulfillment it surpassed the regular means of grace such as prayer and church attendance. Here Rice departed from older views of Christian progress, where the worship of God was seen as the means of growth and the goal of the Christian life, exemplified in Augustine of Hippo’s declaration, “You have made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you,” and John Calvin’s statement, “We should consider it the great end of our existence to be found numbered among the worshippers of God.”¹⁷ Rice even departed from the teaching of his

¹⁴ John R. Rice, *Ten Messages that Changed Ten Thousand Lives* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 77-78, emphasis original.

¹⁵ Rice, *Dr. Rice Goes to College*, 156.

¹⁶ John R. Rice, *Preaching that Built a Great Church* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1974), 44.

¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Classics, 1961), 21; John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book

favorite teacher-evangelist, R. A. Torrey, who stated, “There is no higher, no deeper, no purer joy than that which springs from the adoring contemplation of God . . . Beholding God and worshipping God we become like God. Our complete transformation into his likeness will come through the complete and undimmed vision of Himself.”¹⁸ Torrey believed that the growth of a Christian was found in God’s presence, through prayer and meditation on God’s revelation. The results of this were soul-winning power, but they were secondary and subsequent; the goal was to be in God’s presence, there was the secret to happiness. Rice, on the other hand, made soul winning the key to spiritual success or failure, warning, “No matter how much you pray, or how many times you go to church, or how many prayers you get answered, if you are not a soul winner you are a failure. You are not doing the main thing that God wants a Christian to do.”¹⁹ Rice did not reject the theology of Torrey, he reordered it. His perspective was seen in his prayer of sanctification that culminated in evangelism: “O God, let the people have a holy burning desire to be like Jesus, to want the power of God like Jesus, to want to win souls like Jesus.”²⁰

Doctrinal Education a Consequence of Evangelism

Since evangelism was the motivator for the Christian, it followed that it was

House, 1981), 2:318.

¹⁸ R. A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933), 477-78. Reuben Archer Torrey (1856-1928) was a Congregational pastor, international evangelist, first superintendent of what would become Moody Bible Institute, pastor of Moody Bible Church, first dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA).

¹⁹ Rice, *Preaching that Built a Great Church*, 45.

²⁰ John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice Goes to College* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers), 1977), 180.

also the principle behind teaching new believers. Following a very narrow interpretation of the Great Commission, Rice saw soul winning as the engine that drove education. Like most evangelicals, Rice understood Christ's last command as an overarching imperative for Christianity, and his interpretation of the first two commands, "teach/disciple" and "baptize," were straightforward: evangelize and publicly profess faith by water baptism. But the last command to teach new disciples "to observe whatsoever I have commanded you" was not as broad. Rice explained, "It is important to note here new converts are not taught doctrine, but to do certain things. They are taught 'to observe.' . . . But what are we to teach the new converts? 'To observe whatsoever I have commanded you.' They are to keep the same commands the Lord Jesus gave to the apostles. And that would involve, first of all, the Great Commission."²¹ Rice saw the Great Commission as primarily the command to evangelize, and that the 'commands' that were to be taught were essentially what Jesus had immediately said, not the complete doctrine of the Bible.

Rice criticized E. Y. Mullins, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1899-1928, for saying, "'The gospel train runs on two rails, evangelism and Christian education.' But he was wrong," Rice asserted. "That is a statement of the modern denominational viewpoint, not the statement of the Bible viewpoint. In the Bible, evangelism is itself the gospel train, not one of the rails."²² Rice did not exclude Christian education; he saw it as a consequence of evangelism, declaring, "Should we never, then teach young converts doctrines? Yes, we should! But that is more or less

²¹ John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 496-97.

²² Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, 496.

inevitably follows good evangelistic Bible preaching and teaching.”²³ Doctrinal education was naturally produced as a result of evangelism, it was not part of the Great Commission, which

has nothing about Christian education in the ordinary sense except as it is implied and is a corollary to the soul-winning emphasis. The Great Commission does not command us to teach doctrine, it does command us to teach people to observe what Jesus commanded, and that would first of all center in soul winning—the command He gave clear and strong, the matter dearest to His heart, the thing for which He died.²⁴

Rice was confident that evangelism would naturally produce doctrinal knowledge, citing history and his own experience. He looked to his model evangelists for proof that education followed soul winning: Finney, who founded Oberlin College, Moody, who founded Moody Bible Institute, and Torrey, who he considered one of the greatest Bible teachers, which led him to conclude, “The greatest soul winners are in some sense the best educators . . . and the great evangelistic preachers are among the best Bible students.”²⁵ Additionally, Rice saw churches that followed his evangelism-centered model as proof, remarking, “You will find that the churches that major on soul winning develop the best Christians, those who love and know the Bible better than Christians in the ‘Bible teaching-churches’ where they do not win souls.”²⁶ Teaching doctrine was not to be the goal of any Christian, it was to be a consequence of soul-winning emphasis; education was produced by evangelism.

²³ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, 497.

²⁴ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, 497.

²⁵ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, 499.

²⁶ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, 493.

Evangelism as the Key to Organizing Churches

Rice perceived the church's purpose as evangelistic mobilization. While he placed the actual soul winning on individuals, he taught that "the standards, the climate and the program that make Christians into soul winners and make it possible for them to win souls, or at least make it easier, must grow in the churches."²⁷ Rice did not spend much time on ecclesiology, and in the one book where he addresses the proper function of the church, *God's Work: How to Do It*, soul winning was still the focus of each chapter.²⁸ The pastor, the deacons, the services, and programs of the local church all had one organizing principle: evangelism.

The Authority of the Pastor

Rice saw the pastor as the most central position in the church; the pastor was to teach, rule, and lead, but most importantly he was to win souls—evangelism was his core task. Rice maintained, "Neither the work in the study nor the visiting among the Christian church members is the main work of the preacher. The main work of the preacher is to win souls, and the examples and teachings of the New Testament are that he should regularly, persistently, make personal soul winning one of the principle parts of his life."²⁹ Since evangelism was the primary focus of the pastor he was to devote himself to it, so much so that Rice made it a qualification for the office. He asserted, "I think any pastor who does not win somebody every week is not fit to be a pastor. He is

²⁷ John R. Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1966), 5.

²⁸ Rice, *God's Work and How to Do It*.

²⁹ Rice, *God's Work and How to Do It*, 47.

not a good Christian. He does not honestly earn his pay.”³⁰ The basic requirement of a Christian was to evangelize, and a pastor was first a Christian and therefore a soul winner. In addition, the church was to be led correctly by the pastor, which meant he must first model soul winning so that he could lead by example. Rice saw the pastor as the most important key to an evangelistic church.

Because of his emphasis on the leadership of the pastor, Rice saw the structure of the office as important, which he believed was a single pastor at the head. He allowed for a type of plurality of elders, but he distinguished between pastor/bishop and elder. An elder was simply a mature Christian, he explained, “the term elder in the Bible would refer generally to a Christian leader and probably a preacher, but not necessarily to an officer in the church . . . A bishop however, is literally an ‘overseer’”³¹ He did not see a plurality of bishops in Scripture, interpreting Paul’s instruction to Timothy and Titus as establishing a “chief pastor” with multiple pastors under his supervision. He used the example of megachurch pastors Lee Robertson and Jack Hyles, his close associates, as an example of this structure. Rice saw these churches as models of fast-growing, evangelistic ministries, and balanced the need for a strong pastor alongside the pastoral care of thousands. This emphasis on growth and strong leadership allowed Rice to lean into episcopal polity when he explained the structure of Lee Robertson’s church: “In the great Highland Park Baptist Church at Chattanooga, with some eighteen thousand members, there are two full time pastors, and other full-time assistants in the main church. But there are forty chapels or branch churches aligned with the main church, and

³⁰ Rice, *God’s Work and How to Do It*, 49.

³¹ John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1962), 136.

each one has a pastor who work in co-operation with the main church and under the supervision of the pastors.”³² This description sounds very similar to an episcopal diocese, in which the bishop (here senior pastor Lee Robertson) oversees multiple local pastors within his jurisdiction. Rice never indicated he intended to give approval to non-Baptist polity, but practically he did. This was all a result of the practical need he saw arise from proper evangelism, stating, “where a church is really evangelistic and wins thousands of souls, there is a need for many teachers and preachers and supervisors. So in such a case there is a need for a plurality of pastors.”³³ Rice was careful to exclude equality among these pastors, and warned that churches that advocate for a plurality of equal pastors are “failures in soul winning, failures in impact on the community, and their elders do not really have the authority and power they were supposed to have in New Testament times.”³⁴ Rice saw episcopal-congregational hybrids like Highland Park and First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, with their fantastic growth in numbers and compared them with the churches who had plurality of elders but were smaller and he had all the proof he needed for which one was biblical.

This model of pastoral authority was used by Kevin Bauder and Robert Delnay to distinguish between Southern Fundamentalists and Northern Fundamentalists.³⁵

Northern Fundamentalists came out of the Northern Baptist Convention, and were led by

³² Rice, *God's Work and How to Do It*, 135. First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, with pastor Jack Hyles operated under a similar model.

³³ Rice, *God's Work and How to Do It*, 136.

³⁴ Rice, *God's Work and How to Do It*, 136-37.

³⁵ Kevin Bauder and Robert Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine: Origins of Baptist Fundamentalism 1870-1950* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2014), 295-301. These titles were more about origins than geography.

T. T. Shields, W. B. Riley, and Robert T. Ketchum. Southern Fundamentalists came out of the Southern Baptist Convention and were led by J. Frank Norris, Lee Robertson, John R. Rice, and later, Jack Hyles (from about 1980 until his death in 2003). Bauder and Delnay used Hyles's promotion of the "Great Man" philosophy of leadership (i.e., authoritarian and individualistic) to mark off Southern Fundamentalists from Northern. This style of leadership was introduced to independent Baptists by J. Frank Norris at the inception of the movement in the 1920s. They stated,

While he never attended Norris' school, Hyles was strongly influenced by Norris' philosophy of ministry. He carried his philosophy into the pastorates of Miller Road Baptist Church in Garland, Texas and First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana. Identified loosely with the *Sword* crowd, Hyles really developed a sub-movement of his own. For decades he was probably the most prominent representative of Independent Baptist Fundamentalism."³⁶

While this was largely accurate, Norris' model was not handed directly to Hyles, rather, it was transmitted through Rice. The relationship between Hyles and Rice was very close until Rice's death; Rice had brought Hyles under his wing when Hyles was a young Southern Baptist pastor in Texas, and they worked closely together. As Hyles described it, "We shared platforms together all over the nation for 22 years. I spent more time with Dr. Rice than his wife did."³⁷ Hyles described Rice as "of the stature of a Charles Haddon Spurgeon or a Dwight Lyman Moody. In fact, I believe he was of the stature of the Apostle Paul."³⁸ Hyles's dependence on Rice, rather than Norris, was evident when Hyles's wrote "What Great Men Taught Me," which included a dozen fundamentalist

³⁶ Bauder and Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine*, 295.

³⁷ Jack Hyles, *Fundamentalism in My Lifetime* (Hammond, IN: Hyles Publication, 2002), 138.

³⁸ Hyles, *Fundamentalism in My Lifetime*, 131.

leaders, from Bob Jones, Sr. to R. G. Lee.³⁹ Rice's name appeared in almost every chapter, including several dedicated to him specifically. Norris, on the other hand, only made two incidental, historical notes. Given the nature of this relationship, Hyles's (and by extension his followers') adoption of the "Great Man" philosophy of ministry was primarily a result of Rice's influence, and only secondarily of Norris's influence.

The connection between Norris, the first independent Baptist fundamentalist of the 1920s and Jack Hyles, the most prominent fundamentalist into the next century, was John R. Rice. Hyles taught tens of thousands of independent Baptists the same pastoral and ecclesiastical structure that John R. Rice had taught him. Bauder and Delnay argued that the two strands of fundamentalism were contrasted by Southern individualism and authoritarianism and Northern associationalism and congregationalism. They stated, "Hyles noted the existence of at least two versions of Baptist fundamentalism. Ketcham and Norris exemplified these two versions—in fact each helped to define a version."⁴⁰ Though Rice was not a pastor, his close connection to Hyles made him a better source than Norris for the shape of ecclesiology in Southern fundamentalism.

Program of Evangelism

The authority of the pastor was not for its own ends, it was to ensure that the church was molded around evangelism. Rice urged pastors and churches to make evangelism the organizational touchstone of church planning. Rice saw churches weighed down by a multitude of activities and plans that were falsely oriented and he taught his readers to judge the usefulness of a program by its conformity to the Great

³⁹ Jack Hyles, *What Great Men Taught Me* (Orange Park, FL: Berean Publications, 2000).

⁴⁰ Bauder and Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine*, 301.

Commission. This was not innovative but simple Christianity, he claimed, “Nearly everyone will agree that the Great Commission plan by the Saviour demands that soul winning have the priority, that soul winning be the main business of the Christians, pastors and churches. This is the Great Commission. This sets out the principle plan the Lord Jesus had for his disciples after he went away.”⁴¹ With that overarching focus, Rice called for the church to be overhauled accordingly. If the members wanted to be faithful to Christ, they must put actions to their words. “Since it is really true that Christ Jesus died to save sinners and that is his principle command to Christians and churches, surely that great fact should be the dominating factor in planning all the public services of the church.”⁴² Tradition, liturgies, formalities were all to be tossed aside in favor of evangelism. Rice did not call for the church to place the evangelism agenda at the top of the activities list, he declared that it *was* the list. He averred, “Let us consider the program of the New Testament churches, which was soul winning. Not part of the program, not one of the major things on the program, but *the program in the New Testament church was soul winning.*”⁴³ It was simple for Rice; when soul winning became the mission of the church, organizational decisions were easy, all the people had to do was determine which choice would bring in the most conversions.

The Evangelist

Rice invested the pastor with a great deal of importance, and called for the church to submit to his rule and leadership, but he reserved an even more prominent place

⁴¹ Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 22.

⁴² Rice, *God's Work and How to Do It*, 49-50.

⁴³ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 43, emphasis original.

for his own vocation, the full-time evangelist. While Rice emphasized that the pastor should do the work of an evangelist and must be a soul winner, his time would necessarily be given to other duties, such as administration and pastoral care of members. The full-time evangelist, however, had soul winning as his singular occupation, and since evangelism was the primary task of the church and every Christian, the evangelist was higher than any other position in the church, and was occupied by a higher class of men.

The Role of the Evangelist

Rice leaned heavily on Ephesians 4:11-12 when developing his theology of the evangelist, which read, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and 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.” Rice interpreted this text as a description of the offices in the church, including the evangelist, in which a man was called of God to devote himself to the ministry of gospel proclamation.⁴⁴ Historically, Baptists have maintained that there are only two offices in the church, elder/pastor overseer and deacon. Rice seems to depart from that distinctive by adding the third office of evangelist. Rice explained, “The place of the evangelist is given to him of God. The calling of the evangelist is a holy calling.”⁴⁵ This calling was twofold: discipleship and soul winning, as he described, “Evangelists are intended of the Lord ‘for the perfecting of the saints’ as well as for direct appeal to the unsaved.”⁴⁶ Rice had a more expansive view

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⁴⁵ John R. Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), 11.

⁴⁶ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 28.

than other fundamentalists, such as evangelist Lewis Sperry Chafer.⁴⁷ Chafer's description of the evangelist's work with the unbeliever was similar to Rice's definition, as Chafer stated, "The evangelist of Scripture is, without question, the messenger to the unevangelized, preparing the way for the pastor and teacher in his more constant ministry in the church."⁴⁸ However, Chafer went on to criticize the concept of an evangelist who sought to minister to the church itself in a revival, since the concept of a revival was not to be sought regularly. He warned, "The modern 'revival'—the work of the 'revivalist' who comes under the title of an evangelist, but works as a religious promoter in the organized church—is unexpected in the Scripture." The work of revival was rare, and when it did happen it was "accomplished only through the work of teaching and pastoral care."⁴⁹ In other words, reviving the church was the work of the pastor, not the evangelist, but since revival was the result of pastoral care, and was necessary for outreach, Chafer argued that pragmatism forced evangelists to assume that role, so "the sincere and intelligent evangelists, almost without exception, must first do the work of a pastor and teacher by seeking to revive the church itself. The unfruitful condition of the church has created a great temptation for the evangelist to be superficial in his aims and undertakings."⁵⁰

When Rice came across Chafer's book, he was outraged at this depiction, claiming that Chafer was an ultra-dispensationalist, who was unfaithful in his

⁴⁷ Chafer (1871-1952) was an evangelist, pastor, theologian and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. He was close friends with C. I. Scofield and was pivotal in the promotion of dispensationalism.

⁴⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *True Evangelism* (Findlay, OH: The Dunham Publishing Co., 1919), 6.

⁴⁹ Chafer, *True Evangelism*, 7.

⁵⁰ Chafer, *True Evangelism*, 8.

interpretation: “But does the Bible teach that the evangelists is only, or principally, a missionary to the heathen and unevangelized? Not at all! . . . How strange that Dr. Chafer would make such a statement without giving a verse of Scripture to corroborate his position!”⁵¹ Rice was certain that the Scriptures gave the role of edification to the evangelists, and that Chafer’s interpretation “was wrong . . . The work of the evangelists, as described in Ephesians 4:11, 12 is to prepare and perfect Christians for soul winning and to edify the body of Christ so that the body increases itself in the salvation of souls.”⁵² Rice blurred the distinction between the pastor and the evangelists, claiming,

It is worthy to note that the best evangelists have usually had fine successful work as pastors Spurgeon was really primarily an evangelist. Wesley was primarily an evangelist. So was Dr. George W. Truett So one cannot draw the line and say that some men have only the gifts of pastors and others have only the gifts of evangelists. As far as possible, all preachers ought to do the work of an evangelists.⁵³

So what were the differences between the office of the pastor and the evangelists? Rice used the primacy of soul winning as the guide—evangelists were effective soul winners and effective developers of soul winners. A man could hold both offices, as evidenced by Spurgeon and others, but they were not the same. The evangelist was called and specially gifted to win souls among the lost, as well as promote soul winning in the church. In fact, Rice saw the work of evangelistic-oriented discipleship as the first work of the evangelist, declaring, “In fact, the arousing and training of personal soul winners is one of the first aims of every evangelist who seeks to be used of God in bringing a great

⁵¹ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 24.

⁵² Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 25.

⁵³ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 22-23.

revival to a church or community.”⁵⁴ The work of the evangelist was to produce conversions, both personally and by means of discipleship.

The Importance of the Evangelist

Rice maintained that the evangelist was the preeminent position a Christian could hold: “The gift and calling of evangelism is the most important lifetime ministry to which a preacher can be called. It is more fruitful in saving souls, it takes more grace, it demands greater rewards.”⁵⁵ He taught that the office of the evangelist was not just necessary for the church, but was the most important position in the church. Based on his reading of Scripture and the logic of evangelistic-centered Christianity, he elevated the role above even the pastor, making the evangelist more vital to both soul winning and discipleship, as well as a higher character of spirituality.

Rice identified the list of gifts in Ephesians 4:11 as divinely ordered, and interpreted it to give a hierarchy of offices in the church: apostles first, then prophets, then evangelists, and lastly, pastors and teachers. He maintained that the evangelists were elevated over the pastor, and he warned those who tried to ignore such an essential role, asserting, “The evangelist, named before the pastor, has a more important role in carrying out the Great Commission. It is rebellion against the New Testament plan, it is substituting human wisdom for the divine order when we try to get along without full-time, anointed, dedicated, Spirit-filled evangelists.”⁵⁶ This interpretation was common-sense to Rice, since evangelism was always the priority in his theology, making the logic

⁵⁴ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 106.

⁵⁵ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 11.

⁵⁶ Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now*, 189.

straightforward: “The work of evangelism is preeminently the central task of Christianity. Evangelism is the heart of the Great Commission.”⁵⁷ Since soul winning was the pinnacle activity of the church, the most effective soul winner was the pinnacle of Christian living. This meant that the pastor, if not an evangelist as well, should not be seen as the primary means of advancing the church. Rice argued that “the evangelist speaks with as much authority to Christians as does the pastor. In fact, his work is the higher work and more essential to the prosperity of the body of Christ, just as it is more essential in saving souls.”⁵⁸ Rice seemed to have created a conflict for the Baptist conviction of two offices (elder and deacon) by including the third office of an evangelist. He reconciled this by making the pastor the final authority in the teaching and administration of the local church, while the evangelist was the higher spiritual authority in matters of evangelism and revival. Because the full-time evangelist was constantly traveling, spending only a few weeks at each church, and then only with the goal of soul winning gains, conflicts seemed to have been avoided (in practice, if not in ecclesiology).

In the process of elevating the evangelist, Rice also created a kind of spiritual hierarchy, similar to the early church’s elevation of martyrs, virgins, or ascetics. The work of the evangelist, closer to the heart of Jesus, meant that evangelist himself must be of higher spiritual character, and Rice averred that “the work of an evangelist requires more praying, more sacrificing, more faith than most other works of the Lord.”⁵⁹ The focus on evangelism purged the heart of the evangelist and focused his ministry, by

⁵⁷ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Word*, 19.

⁵⁸ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 26.

⁵⁹ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 135.

necessity removing the distractions that pastors faced. Rice explained,

A pastor may feel that his ministry is somewhat of a success, though he never wins a soul. We believe he is sadly mistaken; yet many pastors feel that comforting the sad, visiting the sick, carrying on the routine of a church and doing some Bible teaching of a general sort is in itself a good ministry. But no evangelist feels that way. The evangelist realizes he must win souls or his ministry is a failure. Hence, in the nature of the case, evangelists are a little more down-to-earth on the simple fundamentals of the Gospel and what it takes to win souls, than are many other ministers.⁶⁰

This meant that the evangelist was the true model for biblical preaching, targeting sin and creating holiness in the people when pastors were unable to maintain the nerve. Rice declared that it was the evangelist who was the real force of sanctification in America:

It is the evangelist who first teaches the separated life and do it with pungency and power that churches set standards . . . And evangelists have had more to do with the sentiment that swept legal booze out in America It was only when pastors and churches turned against mass evangelism that the public sentiment allowed the prohibition amendment to fail.

Usually evangelists have been so strong in their standard of Christian living that only the boldest and strongest of pastors would go along with them Beyond any controversy, mass evangelism . . . has had more to do with setting good public standards of morality than any other kind of Christian work. Not the editors, not the pastors, not the Sunday schools, but evangelists themselves have set the great standards of morality in the minds of common Christians.⁶¹

Rice's superlative models of Christian ministry were men like Charles Finney, D. L. Moody, and R. A. Torrey, all full-time evangelists, and pastors (unless classified as "pastor-evangelists") were too weak, preoccupied, or distracted to truly fulfill the calling of Christ. To spend one's entire ministry focused on personal soul winning and developing soul winners was Rice's ideal for the Christian life; evangelists were given an extra measure of grace, and "The evangelist, that is, the man who wins souls and teaches

⁶⁰ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 29.

⁶¹ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 30-31.

and inspires others to win souls, is the closest to the center of the will of God.”⁶²

Conclusion

Rice loved simplicity, and his evangelical background offered him a convenient, powerful lightning rod for his practical theology, reinforced with powerful examples like Moody and Torrey. Soul winning, never a controversial subject among conservatives, was elevated and centered as the chief desire of Jesus himself, offering all of his followers a simple, measurable goal to strive toward and promising both increase in numbers as well as increase in sanctification. Churches and pastors were to purge all activities that did not see evangelistic results, and ultimately, the evangelist, the gifted expert in the business of soul winning, laser-focused and hardened against compromise, was the catalyst for the fulfillment of the mission of God.

⁶² Rice, *The Evangelist and His Word*, 19.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLIOLOGY

It is the Bible and Christ or no Bible, no Christ, no salvation, no Christianity.
—John R. Rice

The Bible was the foundation for all that John R. Rice’s evangelism sought to proclaim, and they were mutually supportive. For even while the Bible provided the message, evangelistic zeal determined one’s valuation of Scripture, whether it was divine or not. Rice argued, “Those who are not much concerned about saving sinners, whose great concern is not to obey Christ in winning souls to him, are not obedient Christians and thus not likely to have the high doctrine of Scripture of soul-winning scholars.”¹ To understand Rice’s evangelism, it is necessary to understand his view of Scripture, since he considered it the source of his theology, which, given Rice’s fundamentalism, this high view of Scripture is not surprising. However, his bibliology is not as predictable as one would expect.

Rice was not a consistent fundamentalist on the doctrine of Scripture; that was not to say that he was drifting away from inerrancy, rather that he did not fit the typical fundamentalist model. Instead he often resembled older traditions such as premodern Protestantism.² In the conventional understanding of fundamentalism, Scripture was

¹ John R. Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book - The Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1969), 14.

² The modern/premodern distinction is roughly drawn in the seventeenth century with the rise of the Enlightenment. This divide was marked by the elevation of the individual and human reason, the scientific method; in general, the critical examination of things by individuals, rather than the acceptance of

evaluated based upon modern, empirical perspectives, and a heavy reliance on Common Sense philosophy, which assumed the ability of all people to correctly assess the facts by virtue of a common nature. Rice, however, viewed Scripture differently; he saw the Bible in a pre-critical way, finding it a foundational, divine resource, and therefore unique. He did not think that everyone's cognitive ability was equal; rather, like older Dutch Calvinists, especially Abraham Kuyper, Rice saw a spiritual antithesis between believer and unbeliever. This divide prevented unbelievers from apprehending the truth. Only after a person came to the Bible with faith and submission to its authority was it then accessible to every "honest" inquirer. Rice believed it was God's intent to provide man with a divine standard for life, and thus the Bible must be able to be interpreted by all true believers. This unusual combination of beliefs produced a theology of Scripture that was unique among fundamentalists.

Not a "Modernist Fundamentalist"

Rice was a leading figure in the fundamentalist movement but his hermeneutical presuppositions did not fit the typical description of its members and leaders. Though Rice championed the inerrancy theology of B.B. Warfield and others of "Old Princeton,"³ he rejected the tradition of evidentialist, critical approach to Scripture that followed.⁴ This put Rice at odds with mainstream fundamentalism.

authority and tradition as the primary means of receiving truth.

³ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1886-1902) and other professors at Princeton (a conservative bastion since 1812) were credited with the modern formulation of the inerrancy of Scripture. In the 1920s liberal influences altered Princeton's theological stance, causing an exodus of conservatives such as J. Gresham Machen, who helped found Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia as a conservative counter to the liberalism of "New" Princeton.

⁴ There is debate whether Old Princeton was as captive to Common Sense Philosophy and Enlightenment critical methods as has been previously supposed by George Marsden and others. Paul Kjoss Helseth, in *Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010) argued that Hodge, Warfield, Alexander and others were not subverted by the

Peter J. Thuesen, building on the work of Hans W. Frei and Erich Auerbach, divided the history of interpretation into two eras: pre-critical and critical, with the divide corresponding roughly with the Enlightenment.⁵ The pre-critical method presupposed the truth of the Scripture, not looking to verify historical events but assuming the continuity between the text and history. The pre-critical interpreter saw the unity of the Bible dependent “not on direct ‘horizontal’ linkages, whether temporal or causal, but on ‘vertical connections to Divine Providence.’”⁶ In other words, the continuity of all history, Biblical or otherwise, had its origin and direction in God, and the Bible was unique in its divine perspective. The events in the Old Testament were divinely connected to the New Testament, giving prominence to a typological interpretation that emphasized the God’s providence over disparate time in history. This method was carried on by Calvin and the Reformers, and, in Thuesen’s analysis, ended as an intellectual pursuit with Jonathan Edwards, after which modern thinkers such as the Deists initiated criticism concerning the veracity of the text.⁷

In contrast to this premodern method, Thuesen and Frei placed virtually all post-Enlightenment theologians, including Protestants and fundamentalists, in the modern or critical camp. The critical method resulted from applying Enlightenment and modern

modern age’s elevation of human reason, but were more in line with the broader Reformed tradition than had been supposed. Helseth made a strong argument, but even if he was correct, the fundamentalist followers of these men did not maintain the same position as Old Princeton. Marsden’s assessment of Old Princeton may be too harsh, but his evaluation of its fundamentalist descendants was not. As the focus of this paper is twentieth-century fundamentalism, it will continue to use Marsden’s categories.

⁵ Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5-6; Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁶ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 7.

⁷ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 8.

processes to the Bible; it incorporated the empirical search for truth into biblical interpretation. This Baconian search for evidence and proof, imported philosophically in Scottish Common Sense realism, became infused into modern Protestantism, both liberal and fundamentalist versions. Within this revolution “emerged the modern concept of history, with its realization that societies and their texts are conditioned by time and circumstance.”⁸ The German school of higher criticism took this concept and applied it to the Bible, thus attempting to reconcile ancient texts with modern thought, and finding the text lacking in historical veracity. But Thuesen found that fundamentalists also took part in this revolution and assumed the same critical process for themselves. Since the critical method viewed the Bible in light of its correspondence with actual history, inerrantist fundamentalists viewed the Bible as completely identical with actual history. Thuesen contended that the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy became about the amount of truth-value in the text. How closely did the text match what actually happened in reality?

According to Thuesen, the focus for fundamentalists and liberals was not the bare literal sense of the Bible, but the accuracy of its historical reference. Was the account of Christ’s resurrection, or his virgin birth, the same as what actually happened? Thuesen and Frei concluded that both liberals and fundamentalists believed that the actual events were autonomous, controlled by God, but accessible however they may be accurately apprehended. In other words, if someone could find another contemporary account of the resurrection, it would be viewed similarly to the Scriptural account. The Bible, before viewed as the primary, and often only, means to access the events, now

⁸ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 10.

simply verified them. Thuesen believed that both the fundamentalists and the modernists confused the understanding of the text with the understanding of history. Fundamentalists said that the Bible accurately described the events of history, thus understanding that the text was equivalent to knowing the history, while liberals saw a discontinuity. Thuesen averred that despite faith in the inerrancy of the text, this view made the Bible and history two different events. Fundamentalists professed faith in every jot and tittle, but still tended to subject it to the rationalistic, critical, and modern test of proof and evidence. Consequently, inerrancy limited the Bible and separated it from real history. According to Thuesen and Frei, even when the fundamentalists held to the complete accuracy of Scripture, it was still disjoined from history. Fundamentalists were nothing more than theologically conservative modernists, using modern methods, but coming to traditional conclusions.

While this description of mainstream fundamentalist epistemology and hermeneutics seems accurate, though perhaps surprising, Rice was an exception. He was a product of his age and spoke the language of his peers, but he was more consistently a pre-critical theologian. Though he never developed his epistemology in the same self-conscious way that Thuesen and Frei evaluated it, and at times he contradicted himself as a result, the emphasis of the principles he most consistently applied diverged from the critical, modern approach. For Rice, the starting point was not the search for evidence or historical correspondence, but the inspired Scripture. Scripture was not something to be examined; it was to be received.

Thuesen identified the fundamentalists' critical mindset with their development of inerrancy. If this is true, it is significant that Rice rarely used that term.

Rather, he most often described the Bible as verbally inspired or dictated. While the modern, empirical mind looked for proof of the veracity of the text, attempting to prove that the Bible was true and reliable, Rice took a different approach. He unashamedly proclaimed his belief that the Scripture came straight from God himself. This explained his fixation with what he called dictation (even to the point of damaging his relationship with long-time colleague Bob Jones, Jr.). Rice believed that the very words of Scripture had their creation in the mind of God, before history even began, announcing, “We believe the Bible clearly teaches this: the eternal Word of God was settled in Heaven before it was written by men.”⁹ Rice’s emphasis on verbal dictation placed the text in the mind of God prior to the mind of men; thus, “the Word of God, the Scriptures originated in Heaven, not on earth.”¹⁰ When Thuesen proposed that the intellectual revolution that produced higher criticism and modern hermeneutics was grounded in the “realization that societies and their texts are conditioned by time and circumstance,”¹¹ he excluded Rice. Whereas Rice may have applied this “modern concept of history” to every other document, he specifically placed the Bible above cultural or circumstantial conditioning. Not only were the words of Scripture “pre-history” or eternal, Rice found that the writers themselves were conditioned by God:

The circumstances of the Bible writers? God prepared them. The heart attitude and emotions of the writers? God arranged that, too. And the vocabularies, the style, the idiosyncrasies of various writers? Yes, God planned all that so that each one was chosen before he was born and fitted to be the instrument God wanted to use.¹²

⁹ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 180.

¹⁰ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 181.

¹¹ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 10.

¹² Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 206.

Rice did not ascribe to the modern historical theory that found the text was primarily shaped by the local environment of the authors; rather, the authors and their world were shaped by God to produce his precise words. Consequently, Rice did not need to “get behind” the text, or to decipher the intentions of the authors, or to critically judge the level of correspondence between the biblical account of history and the actual events of history. The pre-critical or pre-modern understanding that Scripture and history had “vertical connections to Divine Providence”¹³ was also Rice’s understanding.

Not a “Naive Fundamentalist”

Because of this older perspective, Rice departed from the typical fundamentalist hermeneutics in another way. George Marsden contended that fundamentalism’s embrace of Baconian empiricism and Scottish Common Sense philosophy often degenerated into anti-intellectualism, an all too common occurrence among revivalist conservatives.¹⁴ Marsden argued that the problem arose when the plain-folk American Christian spread the respectable structure of Common Sense realism and empiricism too thinly. When this average fundamentalist, improperly understanding the disjunction between his worldview and the liberal’s worldview, saw that the majority of them were well-educated, he reacted against the whole academic structure. The

¹³ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 7.

¹⁴ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 212. There is debate whether Old Princeton was as captive to Common Sense Philosophy and Enlightenment critical methods as has been previously supposed by George Marsden and others. Paul Kjoss Helseth, in *Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010) argued that Hodge, Warfield, Alexander and others were not captive to the modern age’s elevation of human reason, but more in line with the broader Reformed tradition than had been supposed. Helseth made a strong argument, but even if he was correct, the fundamentalist followers of these men did not maintain the same position as Old Princeton. Marsden’s assessment of Old Princeton may be too harsh, but his evaluation of their fundamentalist descendants was not. As the focus of this paper is twentieth-century fundamentalism, it will continue to use Marsden’s categories.

fundamentalist perceived that the core of this cultural and religious upheaval between the conservative and the liberal, was “a crisis in common sense.”¹⁵ While many leaders such as J. Gresham Machen, were able to present an intellectual argument, others who “accepted the common sense assumptions more naively, began to turn to increasingly extreme versions of their view of reality to explain the widespread failure of rationality in the culture.”¹⁶ Even further exacerbating the problem was the reality that the fundamentalist “worldview, which until recently had been generally considered both sacred and academically impeccable, was now becoming the laughingstock. This was a key part of the fundamentalist’s experience of social displacement.”¹⁷ Marsden illustrated the depth of the crisis of common sense with the president of Wheaton College, Charles Blanchard. Marsden used Blanchard as an example of the “unquestioned assumption of Common Sense philosophy.”¹⁸ This naive view of Common Sense philosophy assumed that every individual, by virtue of their common creation and makeup, could view all facts in the same way. Marsden pointed out, “Being a Christian was for Blanchard simply equivalent to using good sense.”¹⁹ When the culture began to reject Christianity for modernism, fundamentalists like Blanchard were unable to understand how the world could misconstrue the obvious facts of the Bible. In fact, Blanchard found the turn from Christianity as a break from reality: “The reason why materialists and spiritualists . . . are not shut up in an asylum is because while their

¹⁵ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 218.

¹⁶ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 219.

¹⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 218.

¹⁸ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 219.

¹⁹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 219.

fundamental beliefs are irrational, their practical patterns are sane.”²⁰ Since these modern philosophies were primarily found in higher education, anti-intellectualism was a small step for Blanchard. He declared, “Ministers and teachers of theology . . . seem to be the one who lead the Church into error, and the more these are paid, the longer vacations they have, the higher positions they obtain, the more unfaithful to God and his Church they seem to become.”²¹ Marsden found Blanchard’s sentiments common among fundamentalists, and he declared that the “common sense tradition in America assumed a national consensus of rationality and morality wed to Protestant religion and the revival.”²² For Marsden, the average fundamentalist, even intellectual leaders like the president of Wheaton, were naive, applying this Common Sense philosophy to the widest extent in America, and ultimately identifying traditional national religion with human epistemology.

However widespread this description may have been, it did not suit John R. Rice. Though he was conversant in the language of the common man, and identified with the leaders that Marsden discussed, he had his own version of Common Sense philosophy. In Rice’s thought there was a modified perspective, one that he had tempered with spiritual boundaries, and was more in line with intellectual conservatives like J. Gresham Machen.²³ Both Rice and Machen prioritized a spiritual understanding of

²⁰ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 220.

²¹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 220.

²² Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 220-21.

²³ Marsden declared that Machen “was not a typical fundamentalist or evangelical.” George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 182. When Machen left Princeton to found Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929, Dutch apologist Cornelius Van Til went with him. Van Til is considered the father of presuppositional apologetics. Rice’s view of the antithesis between believer and unbeliever is remarkably similar to Van Til’s approach, though there is no indication Rice interacted with presuppositional apologetics.

reason and philosophy. Unlike the uniform view of Blanchard, Rice saw a binary classification of humanity: believer and un-believer. This disjunction between Rice and other fundamentalists was not apparent on the surface. Rice, first and foremost a popular evangelist and newspaper editor, regularly appealed to the honest interpretation, the plain sense of Scripture. But unlike the other fundamentalists that Marsden described, Rice disagreed in his basic presupposition of human ability. The reason was not the difference between conservative and liberal, but the spiritual condition: “The heart tends to dictate the mental choice.”²⁴

Though Marsden did not deal with Rice by name he did provide a useful dichotomy between two other conservatives: the proto-fundamentalist Benjamin B. Warfield and the Dutch Reformed Abraham Kuyper.²⁵ These men, equally invested in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, but seemingly opposite in epistemology, offer a convenient standard with which to evaluate Rice in Marsden’s critique of fundamentalism.

Marsden described the difference between the two men in reference to the ability of humans to understand science. Warfield believed that there was one science, one way of looking at the world, that was equally valid for all men (similar to Blanchard’s view). In contrast, Kuyper “argued that because there are ‘two kinds of people,’ regenerate and unregenerate, there are ‘two kinds of sciences.’”²⁶ Marsden

²⁴ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 32.

²⁵ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 122. As mentioned before Warfield (1886-1902) was a professor at Princeton, and one of the leaders in the development of a cogent doctrine of inerrancy which helped shape fundamentalism. Kuyper (1837-1920) was a conservative Reformed theologian, philosopher, and politician from the Netherlands.

²⁶ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 123.

highlighted Kuyper's belief that the believer and the unbeliever could both do equally scientific work, "but they would be working from differing starting points and frameworks of assumptions."²⁷ Thus, when approaching the world, Warfield would have the typical fundamentalist view of common sense, expecting all honest men to appreciate the facts in the same way. Kuyper, on the other hand identified the differing spiritual starting points and believed that they would produce different interpretations of the same evidence.

Though Rice was a strong supporter of Warfield's doctrine of inspiration, using his works more than any other author in his extensive book on the Bible,²⁸ he cannot be identified with what Marsden described as Warfield's generic Common Sense philosophy. Rather, Rice should be categorized with Kuyper. To show the contrast, Arthur T. Pierson, a dispensational fundamentalist leader and Rice's colleague, using Common Sense reasoning, proclaimed "if one approaches Scripture 'in a truly impartial and scientific spirit,' all honest doubt would be cured."²⁹ Rice objected to this possibility, asking, "Does some modernist tell us that he is some scientific student and that his learning compels him to doubt the Word of God? Do not believe him! He is an insincere hypocrite. He has not made an unbiased investigation."³⁰ Rice did not believe in some great equalizing common sense that found common ground for all men, fundamentalists and liberals alike. He was not confused by the critical attack on the Bible and conservative Christianity in twentieth-century America. Because of his overriding

²⁷ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 123.

²⁸ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, index.

²⁹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 57.

³⁰ John R. Rice, *Is Jesus God?* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1948), 184.

concern of evangelism, he filtered both philosophy, anthropology, and hermeneutics through it. Evangelism was the touchstone of the Christian life. This meant that the fundamental breakdown of humanity was between those who were believers and those who were not. Like Kuyper he saw two antithetical forces, declaring,

I do not quote the opinions of unconverted men, enemies of the Bible, except as it becomes necessary to refute those opinions. I do not believe that a man who does not personally accept Christ and love him, and does not revere the Bible as God's Word, has the sincerity of heart and the humility of heart, the unbiased objective approach with a good heart which is necessary to understand spiritual truth.³¹

When Rice addressed a doubter on the matter of interpretation, he urged, "First of all surrender your will to God . . . One can read the Gospel of John again and again and not come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, if he reads it with an unsundered will."³² He further clarified how to understand the Bible, charging, "Each time you read it, look up to God and ask Him to show you how much truth there is in the verse you are about to read, and promise him you will take your stand upon what He shows you to be true."³³ Rice saw no way that an unbeliever, a modernist or liberal, could approach the Bible without rebellion and bias. The optimistic, universal, common sense of Marsden's naïve fundamentalist was foreign to Rice; being "born again" was the first step to proper hermeneutics. Clearly, he insisted, "One who has not been converted, born of the Spirit, cannot understand the Word of God"³⁴ and, "The natural man has a natural hostility to the Bible," and "The unconverted man . . . cannot be expected to approach the Bible with an

³¹ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 43.

³² Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1962), 56.

³³ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*, 57.

³⁴ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 338.

unbiased and objective approach.”³⁵ While Blanchard and other fundamentalists reacted with confusion to the attack on the “plain facts” of Christianity, Rice responded with a clear belief in the absolute divide between the regenerate and unregenerate understanding, and the impossibility of any conciliation between the two. The Christian’s opposition was not intellectuals, but spiritual darkness.

Still a Common-Sense Fundamentalist

Though Rice did not hold to the typical fundamentalist understanding of Common Sense philosophy when applied to unbelievers, he was firmly in their camp when it came to believers. Once the Holy Spirit regenerated the heart of a believer, they were able to receive the truth of Scripture properly, by means of honest inquiry into the text. The Bible was not cryptic, it was accessible to all who applied themselves with good intentions and faith. Rice never saw himself as an innovator or prophet, but as someone who pointed out the obvious, plain facts of Scripture. Though educated, Rice was not an elitist. The Bible was for all people, and thus all people could understand it.

What was the basis for this optimistic view of hermeneutics? Rice found it in his understanding of the purpose of the Bible: God had given the Scriptures, not as depository of facts, but as divine instructions for mankind. The instructions were twofold: salvation and behavior. Rice declared, “The purpose of the Bible . . . is to reveal Christ as the Son of God and to make clear God’s plan of salvation by believing in Christ.”³⁶ The Scriptures were not merely true statements, but truth given for a purpose, specifically the purpose of evangelization. Rice maintained that God had given Scripture

³⁵ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 339.

³⁶ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 166.

to convey a message to man—salvation through faith in Jesus. Thus, since salvation was for all people, then the basic message of the Bible must be understood by all people. The purpose of God, combined with his omnipotence, provided the bridge for the common man to understand that message.

The second purpose of the Bible was to provide a comprehensive guide to the questions of life. When dealing with controversies Rice consistently appealed to the Scriptures. He explained, “The Bible is the Word of God, verbally inspired and therefore we find an exquisite accuracy in the way God deals with such questions.”³⁷ This statement highlights two of Rice’s principles: that God gave the words of Scripture and that they were given to answer questions. The will of God was revealed by his intentional, direct inspiration of certain words. For Rice, the direct revelation of God showed the intent of God to direct and lead his people. There are no incidental words or passages in the Bible, but all given from the mouth of God, and thus all equally authoritative, binding, and direct. Rice saw here that “God deals with . . . questions.” Since God had spoken specifically on a subject then God was not simply revealing random, though true, information, but rather information that was divinely applicable, and necessary for his people.

Rice, like most fundamentalists, took this principle to the limit. For example, he published two books of questions and answers which were intended to “help everyone possible to understand the Bible and how it applies to daily living—in the family, in the church, in the community, and the happy Christian heart.”³⁸ Rice believed that God had

³⁷ John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives & Women Preachers* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941, 18-19.

³⁸ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*; John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More of My*

given the Bible to answer questions, so a good student of the Bible would be able to respond to almost anything with confidence. The entries he included in the books show how far he took that belief. Many were standard: “When a Christian sins, does he lose his salvation?”³⁹ and “Did Christ’s miracles prove his deity?”⁴⁰ But Rice also felt comfortable responding to “Should a Christian go to a skating rink?”⁴¹ “Do other planets have humans on them?”⁴² and “Is ventriloquism sinful?”⁴³ While most of his answers were fairly typical of a middle-class, white fundamentalist from the South, the sheer number of trivial issues revealed how Rice understood the comprehensive nature of Scripture. At the same time, Rice never claimed special authority or revelations, instead he consistently attempted to help people understand the answers for themselves. And though he pronounced verdicts on extra-biblical things, he assumed his readers will be able to do the same with proper training. Rice felt secure in relying so heavily on the Bible because of his belief in its unique authority. He declared, “The Bible is the place to find what God wants people to do.”⁴⁴

Rice also saw a hermeneutical corollary to this authority: the meticulous perspicuity of Scripture.⁴⁵ God had given commands which he intended to be followed,

Questions... (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 7.

³⁹ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More of My Questions*, 448.

⁴⁰ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*, 65.

⁴¹ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*, 36.

⁴² Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*, 342.

⁴³ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More of My Questions*, 346.

⁴⁴ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More of My Questions*, 38.

⁴⁵ Rice expanded on the traditional Protestant understanding of perspicuity, which was limited to salvation, as explained in the Second London Confession of Faith (1688): “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient

therefore he intended them to be understood. If man wanted to know the mind of God, he could not discover it for himself, he must receive revelation, so God must voluntarily condescend to man's level. For Rice, the entire purpose of God giving the Scripture was for it to be understood and obeyed. Rice stated, "The Bible speaks on these matters; it speaks so clearly that any heart can learn what is God's will."⁴⁶ If the Scriptures were only open to the educated, or the enlightened, then they could not truly be the ultimate divine guide Rice believed they were. The perspicuity of all Scripture was necessary for its authority. God would not require obedience to a revelation that could not be understood; in fact, Rice would not call it revelation at all. The purpose of Scripture was to inform the believer of God's will, and since God wanted everyone to know his will, then Scripture was accessible by the common sense of every believer.

In conjunction with the origin and intent of inspiration, Rice was also a firm believer in the simplicity of interpretation. In the introduction of his commentary on the complex book of Revelation, Rice pronounced his hermeneutical approach as "honest" (using the word five times in three pages). He also included numerous phrases such as "right to believe," "should simply be content," "honest reader can take at face-value," and "understood by the common Christian."⁴⁷ Rice opened the commentary with "This book is God's revelation. It is not His concealment. God intended the book to be read and understood by the common Christian, so he said, 'Blessed is he that readeth' (Rev.

understanding of them." William J. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 251.

⁴⁶ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More of My Questions*, 7.

⁴⁷ John R. Rice, "Behold He Cometh!" *A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1977), introduction.

1:3).”⁴⁸ Rice reacted against the elitist notion that higher education or complex critical methods were necessary to understand the text. Rice firmly believed that the Bible was meant to be understood by all Christians.

Inerrancy, Perfection, and Origin

Rice saw the Scriptures as revelation with a purpose—to bring believers into line with God’s perfect will. Thus, the instructions were required to be absolutely perfect in order to accomplish this absolute goal, a quality Rice described as “verbally inspired.”⁴⁹ He preferred this term to inerrancy because he was not merely concerned with truthfulness, but with perfection; it was not enough that the Bible did not contain factual errors, it must also have a fully divine origin. Because of his understanding of the Bible’s authority Rice relied heavily on this strict definition of inspiration, which meant that God directly gave the individual words of the Bible to the authors. This precluded the use of previous man-made texts, ideas, or sources. He criticized conservative theologian O. T. Allis for saying that Moses gathered traditions and documents for the Pentateuch, even if it was done under the inspiration of God.⁵⁰ Rice rejected any form of human origins for the words of the text as it seemed to him to undermine verbal inspiration.

Rice did not hold to this word-for-word, direct inspiration of the Bible simply for accuracy, in a mechanical empirical way, but primarily for heavenly revelation of full

⁴⁸ Rice, “*Behold He Cometh!*,” introduction.

⁴⁹ Rice. *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*, 52.

⁵⁰ John R. Rice, “*In the Beginning...*”: *A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975), 17.

truth. When dealing with a question or issue Rice appealed to the exact words of Scripture, which demanded that they be inspired for applicability. He explained that the Bible was “verbally inspired, therefore we find . . . the way God deals with such questions.”⁵¹ If the Christian were to follow the commands of God found in the Bible, he must be assured that they are first from God, or inspired, secondly, that every word was from God, and thirdly that they are purposeful revelation, not merely accurate facts. Rice was not willing to concede anything on the verbal inspiration of the Bible, not simply, or even primarily, because he wished to defend Scripture against the modernists, but because he believed it was God’s expectations for man’s behavior.

Rice’s Definition of Inspiration

It would be helpful here to define what Rice meant by inspiration. Though he wrote extensively on the subject, the task is surprisingly difficult. Nathan Finn pointed out that Rice’s vocabulary was a contributing factor to his unpleasant break with fellow fundamentalist Bob Jones, Jr.⁵² Rice insisted on using the term “dictation” to describe the method that God used to convey his words. Since Rice was so dependent on the Bible for his theological positions, and because he read the Bible authoritatively, he was obligated to find a direct connection between the words of the text and the words in God’s mind. The only safe way to ensure this connection was to maintain a form of inspiration that delivered the individual words pre-formed to the human authors. Rice

⁵¹ Rice, *Bobbed Hair*, 18.

⁵² Nathan Finn, “John R. Rice, Bob Jones Jr., and the ‘Mechanical Dictation’ Controversy” (unpublished paper, 2013). Finn argued that the break was primarily over ecclesiastical separation, but that disputes over the method of inspiration were a contributing factor. Finn concluded that idiosyncratic personalities and misunderstandings over Rice’s imprecise language played a large part in the conflict.

contended that “God gave the very word of the Scriptures so that not only the thought, but also the very words are God’s words.”⁵³ Realizing that this implied dictation, he embraced it, asserting “there is no disgrace that God dictated to men.”⁵⁴ Rice did reject the ‘mechanical’ dictation theory by maintaining that God used men, not as machines, but as willing servants. In the introduction to a collection of sermons by leading conservatives, he remarked, “These giants of the past and present believe in verbal inspiration. They do not believe in mechanical dictation, of course: Who does?”⁵⁵

Yet, despite the conflict over the use of dictation method, Rice refused to concede the term, preferring potential misunderstandings over different language. Finn believed that this was due to Rice’s lack of scholarship,⁵⁶ which may be true, but perhaps it was part of Rice’s perspective on Scripture’s role in Christianity. Rice’s primary concern was not with refuting unbelievers, who he believed were unreachable in their unbelief; he sought to speak to believers. He opened his book on the subject of inspiration with the declaration, “We already know the Bible is the Word of God . . . We come with reverence, already accepting the Bible as the very Word of God, which it claims to be. We come bowing to its authority as the authority of God and of Christ.”⁵⁷ Rice even went as far as to say that the opinions of unbelievers were worthless. He asserted, “To give weight and respect for opinions of Bible enemies is wrong . . . I do

⁵³ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*, 52.

⁵⁴ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*, 53.

⁵⁵ John R. Rice, *A Coffer of Jewels about Our Infallible, Eternal Word of God, the Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1963), iv.

⁵⁶ Finn, “John R. Rice,” 7.

⁵⁷ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 16-17.

not quote the opinions of unconverted men, enemies of the Bible, except as it becomes necessary to refute those opinions.”⁵⁸ When faced with challenges to his terminology of dictation, Rice felt that other conservatives had given too much space to liberals. He claimed, “that it is probably true that most scholarly men who read predominantly the work of unbelieving scholars are influenced in their language and even their thinking, away from the simplicity of what the Bible says on such matter.”⁵⁹ Rice saw no need to accommodate his language to avoid the criticism of liberals, or those he felt were deferring to them. Rice would not give any ground for human origin or creation in the text; he pronounced, “the supernatural element is dominant.”⁶⁰ This was the emphasis for his belief in inspiration, and he held to the full origin of the Bible in God, and that it was revealed in a way that preserved the perfect words of God in the transmission.

Though fundamentalists are described as primarily focused on the doctrine of inerrancy,⁶¹ Rice did not emphasize this aspect of conservative bibliology. The entire tenor of Rice’s works was on the origin of the revelation of God’s will, the authority of the Word of God, and the necessity of man’s submission to it. Rice did affirm inerrancy as strongly as any fundamentalists, but he did so as a consequence of his devotion to the direct inspiration of the Bible. Its divine origin, and the absolute authority that came with it, led to inerrancy, not the other way around. Since God dictated the words to men, while preserving their divine character even in human minds and hands, these words must be of the same character as their author—without flaw. Inerrancy was not a polemical

⁵⁸ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 43.

⁵⁹ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 277.

⁶⁰ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 20.

⁶¹ Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 3.

tool to defeat the modernist or to build a doctrinal defense for conservative theology, but rather as a necessary byproduct of a ‘God-breathed’ book. If God literally spoke the words of the Bible, then to find error in these words would be to find error in God. Thus, the perfection followed from what Rice truly wished to proclaim, that the Christian must obey God, and that this was only possible by heeding his revelation, the divine Scriptures.

Conclusion

Though Rice was absolutely a fundamentalist, he was also a scholar; he valued the writings of learned men, drinking deeply from the writings of men like B. B. Warfield and Louis Gaussen and John Calvin.⁶² He did not see academics, but rather unbelief as the enemy. When the intellectuals denied the Bible, Rice decried them as an unbeliever, the same as when the common man did so. Rice only appealed to the common sense of the humble believer, not the unbeliever, saying, “It is wonderfully true that one in whom the Spirit of God dwells in the regenerated heart, and one illumined by the Spirit, judges all things.”⁶³ Even with a difficult text like the Book of Revelation, Rice could affirm, “Christians with humble, believing hearts who simply mean business and give attention to it, as an honest heart seeking truth, can understand.”⁶⁴

⁶² Rice praised the Swiss Reformed Protestant Gaussen’s as “the most thorough, the scholarly and perhaps the most tender and devoted in his marvelous discussion of the inspiration of the Scripture.” Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 268. Rice elevated Calvin above critics, asking, “Where among all of them was a mighty, exact scholar like Calvin. We should be as logical and mentally honest as Calvin.” Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 289.

⁶³ John R. Rice, *The Church of God at Corinth: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on I and II Corinthians* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 37.

⁶⁴ Rice, “Behold He Cometh!,” 13.

Understanding fundamentalism has always been a complicated task. The diversity of factions, the lack of self-assessment, and polemic nature of the movement tend to make classification complex. Men like John R. Rice compound the problem. Though he was deeply entrenched within the dispensational, literalistic, fundamentalist movement, he departed in significant ways from their structures. At times, especially with Scripture and epistemology, he appeared more Reformed than revivalistic. Rice's unique positions are a result of his combination of education, conservative theology, and evangelistic focus. The resulting mix of Common Sense philosophy, Kuyparian epistemology, and Old Princetonian theology created a distinctive system that proved more durable than the usual fundamentalist structure.

CHAPTER 5

DISPENSATIONALISM

Rice was only a first-generation dispensationalist. His theological upbringing and training were entirely in the postmillennial tradition and he recalled that he was “reared and trained altogether under the teachings of postmillennialists in Sunday School, preaching services, college, university, seminary.”¹ Given Rice’s Southern and rural context this absence of premillennial teaching corresponded with Sandeen’s conclusion that premillennialism was, “Never rural or in any sense a grass-roots sentiment . . . having taken hold first among urban pastors, particularly in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago and their surrounding areas.”² Though Rice trained briefly in the North, it was by personal, independent study that he came to different conclusions than his teachers. He admitted that the “writings of Dr. R. A. Torrey, Dr. C. I. Scofield, Dr. W. E. Blackstone and many others” were the key to his acceptance of premillennial dispensationalism.³

¹ John R. Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ* (Murfreesboro, TN: The Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1945), 4.

² Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 163.

³ Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ*, 5. All three men were closely associated with D. L. Moody. Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921) was the editor of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which sold millions of copies and was probably the most effective tool in the spread of dispensationalism. William E. Blackstone (1841-1935), was a Methodist minister who wrote the popular *Jesus Is Coming*, in 1878, which eventually sold over a million copies by his death (aided by one of the Stewart brothers). It was this book that provided an accessible gateway in to the new world of dispensationalism (especially since Darby’s own writings were difficult to decrypt). William Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908).

Part of Rice's motivation to study this new system was the volatile political and cultural climate of early twentieth-century America. The optimistic outlook of the late nineteenth century was crumbling under the weight of war and social ills.⁴ The postmillennial view of the world seemed to hold little weight as atrocities piled up around the world and premillennialism's pessimism combined with its hope of Christ's return was a powerful alternative. Rice admitted that in his early years he was a postmillennialist "despite the evidence of my senses and the testimony of history and current events."⁵ The study of the Bible through the lenses of premillennial teachings resolved this conflict; dispensationalism was viewed as the "key" to understanding the Bible.⁶

However, Rice never became a thoroughgoing dispensationalist. The primacy of revivalist evangelism caused him to reject certain dispensational teachings, namely, the focus on discerning the signs of Christ's return and Pentecost as the origin of the church. For Rice, dispensationalism served the cause of evangelism, and when it differed from Rice's evangelistic model, he felt free to discard or modify it. Like Moody, evangelism drove his ministry.

⁴ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, & Modernity 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). Dorrien examined the radical changes that theological liberalism was forced to make in these years, resulting in neo-orthodoxy, among other variations.

⁵ Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ*, 28.

⁶ R. A. Torrey, *The Return of the Lord Jesus: The Key to the Scripture, and the Solution of All Our Political and Social Problems; Or, The Golden Age that is Soon Coming to the Earth* (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1913).

The Origin of Dispensationalism: John Nelson Darby

Dispensationalism began with the Irish Protestant John Nelson Darby in the mid-1800s.⁷ It had its foundation in more established doctrines, namely, the inerrancy of Scripture, literalistic hermeneutics, and premillennialism. Darby was unique, however, in his concern for a pure church unified by the cross and the return of Christ. His overriding conviction of these things caused him to leave the Church of Ireland to form a non-denominational group he called “brethren.”⁸ This group sought to return to a simple church free from ecclesiastical entanglements with the world and focus on holiness in preparation for the return of Christ.

As Darby continued to pursue this anti-establishment church, he delved deeper into prophecy. Guided by a literal, inerrantist hermeneutic, he held a premillennial position on Christ’s return, which was not unusual at that time (though perhaps unpopular). However, he made several innovations that were distinctive of his system; the first was the secret rapture. While the imminent return of Christ was commonly held, Darby divided the Second Coming into two events. The first would be a “catching up”⁹ into heaven of all the saints, which would not be apparent to non-Christians (hence “secret”). The second event would be the actual return of Christ to the earth to establish his kingdom in full view of the world. Darby’s particular view of the spirituality of the church led to this secret rapture and he argued that “the church is properly heavenly, in its calling and relationship with Christ, forming no part of the course of events of the earth,

⁷ Darby (1800-1882) was a controversial figure. A sympathetic view was presented by Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 77-79, while Sandeen was more critical in *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 59-80.

⁸ Because of their location in Plymouth, England, they were known as Plymouth Brethren.

⁹ I Thess. 4:17, ἄρπάζω, *harpazō*, which the Latin Vulgate translated as *raptura*.

which makes the rapture so simple and clear . . . our calling is on high. Events are on earth.”¹⁰ The rapture was not connected to earthly timetables because it was “called out” from the world. This introduction of an “any moment” rapture allowed Darby to avoid the rash of predictions concerning the date of Christ’s return or aligning current events with world events. This was Darby’s focus. It was, as he related, “our present hope. There is no event between me and heaven.”¹¹

The second innovation in Darby’s system was the separation of the nation of Israel and the church. Because of his literalistic hermeneutic, Darby saw the physical/ethnic nation of Israel as distinct from the spiritual New Testament church, and the New Testament writings had to be divided, as some portions were directed at the nation of Israel, while others at the church. This allowed otherwise contradictory statement about the Second Coming and the Rapture to be reconciled. It also meant that the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels were divided between the Jews and the church; “rightly dividing” Scripture included discerning this distinction.

This interpretive system was labeled “Dispensationalism” because of the heavy use of divisions in understanding the way God worked in the world. However, this partitioning of Scripture was not unique to Darby or even premillennialism. Many other interpreters saw divisions or dispensations in the Scripture, including those who strongly opposed dispensational, such as covenant theologians Charles Hodge and Louis Berkhof.¹² What made Dispensationalism unique were the additions of the rapture and the Israel-Church distinction.

¹⁰John Nelson Darby, *Collected Writings* (n.p.: Irving Risch, 2007), 6:217.

¹¹ *Letters of J.N.D.*, 1:329-30, as cited in Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 64.

¹²Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 2:373-

While this system had small beginnings, it soon exerted a dominant influence in America. This began in 1862 when Darby commenced making multiple trips to the United States to promote his theology of the church and prophecy. His focus was on the large cities of the north including New York, Chicago, and Boston. His innovative theology, arising out of the context of English church-state entanglement, was not as popular as he had hoped and he made small progress at first, though he did attract enough followers to warrant an article in the *Princeton Review*, in which the Plymouth Brethren were criticized for being a “zealous and aggressive sect . . . they prowl unceasingly round all our churches, seeking to reap where they have not sown.”¹³ Negative beginnings aside, within a few decades Darby’s system of prophecy took hold among influential evangelical leaders.

Second Wave Dispensationalism and Rice

Though Darby was the original creator and promoter of premillennial dispensationalism, Rice only mentioned him critically. Rice’s primary sources were the men that followed Darby in America and helped popularize his system. Perhaps Darby’s greatest achievement was to sway the mind of D. L. Moody, the preeminent evangelical leader of that time.¹⁴ Moody himself did little to promote the new system, but his acceptance of it allowed his lieutenants to become adherents and it was through these men that Rice was introduced to dispensationalism. Through Moody’s ministry,

79; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), 290-301.

¹³ Thomas Croskery, "The Plymouth Brethren," *The Princeton Review* 1, no. 1 (January 1872): 48-77.

¹⁴ J. F. Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 250-51.

especially in Bible conferences, schools like Moody Bible Institute and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, and in C. I. Scofield's *Reference Bible*, the new generation of dispensationalists were able to usher in a movement that became wide-spread and immensely popular.¹⁵ Rice were merely one of millions who were introduced to the system through these men and ministries.

As mentioned above, Rice attributed his conversion to dispensationalism to Blackstone, Torrey, and Scofield. Though there are many other notable names that contributed to the spread of dispensationalism, these three men were unique, especially from Rice's perspective as a disciple of Moody. They worked closely with Moody, serving next to him in evangelistic campaigns and administering and teaching in the various educational institutes he created. A comparison between the major themes in their writing and Rice's will show the continuity between the generations, as well as reveal the discontinuities.

Literal Hermeneutics as Guard against Liberalism

One of the key aspects of dispensationalism was its reliance on the literal interpretation of Scripture. This fit well with the conservative nature of evangelicals, especially as higher criticism began to gain influence. Dispensationalism was not just the proper reading of the Bible, it was a bulwark against heresy. This provided a key link for Rice.

Blackstone's second chapter of *Jesus Is Coming* was titled "Literal Interpretation," where he asked,

¹⁵ Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 181-82, 191.

Are we authorized . . . to do away with the literal sense of Luke 1:32-33, or of the multitude of passages which predict the restoration of Israel, the coming of Christ, or which describe His glorious Kingdom? There can be no warrant for it. It subverts the authority and power of the Word of God, and Post-millennialists, by so doing, open wide the door for skeptics and latitudinarians of all descriptions the same process of spiritualizing away the literal sense of these plain texts of Scripture will sap the foundation of every Christian doctrine and leave us to drift into absolute infidelity, or the vagaries of Swedenborgianism.¹⁶

At this time in 1878 the clash over inerrancy between Fundamentalists and Modernists had not happened. Higher criticism was known, but it was only an outside threat that needed to be guarded against. For Blackstone, the debate was between the interpretive hermeneutics of spiritualization and literalism, but with the implication that the first led to the undermining of the orthodox faith. R. A. Torrey echoed this, with more urgency, in 1913: “In the truth concerning our Lord's Return is the safeguard against all current heresies, errors and falsehoods. One error after another is arising to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect.”¹⁷

Rice reflected the same concern, though he wrote after the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the 1920s and was more militant as a result. He contended that the Bible answered the questions of prophecy “so clearly that they would never have been asked but for the ignorance of those who do not know the Bible and the folly of those who explain away the plain, literal teaching of God’s Word.”¹⁸ For Rice, Blackstone and Torrey’s warning about the neglect of a literal hermeneutics leaving an open door for skeptics had been prophetic. He lamented, “The Devil has raised up these scoffers among

¹⁶ Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*, 22. “Swedenborgianism” (also called “New Church”) after Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), who claimed to have received special revelation from God and taught that the literal sense of Scripture concealed the spiritual sense, which must be unveiled by special “correspondence.”

¹⁷ Torrey, *The Return of the Lord Jesus*, 8.

¹⁸ Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ*, 12.

Bible preachers, Sunday School lesson writers, and seminaries, to keep the masses ignorant concerning God's plain statements of the things which must come to pass."¹⁹ Dispensationalism was not just an eschatological tool; it was necessary to combat the higher criticism and liberalism infiltrating the church. In fact, to deny dispensationalism was tantamount to denying the Scripture. Rice clearly drew a line in the sand when he declared,

Those of us who take the Bible literally and believe it all and are therefore premillennialists, expecting the literal, bodily, physical return of Christ and his reign upon earth as foretold in the Scriptures, have much to preach. We have the great themes of the resurrection, the rapture or meeting Christ in the air; the judgement seat of Christ; the great tribulation; the man of sin, or Antichrist; the glorious return of Christ with saints and angels, the battle of Armageddon; the restoration of the Jews to Palestine; the judgement of the living nations; the millennial reign of Christ on David's throne, etc. All these matters ought to be preached for they are clearly taught in the Bible.²⁰

Dispensationalism was about faithfulness to a literal, "plain," look at Scripture. Rice was confident that all honest believers would come to the same conclusion if they would just take the Bible at face value. To reject the system was to admit ignorance or worse. He claimed that

post millennial and amillennial preachers who teach that the book of Revelation is of little importance, hard to understand, that a study of it is largely speculation, and that most of it has already been fulfilled, speak out of their ignorance and indifference toward the Second Coming of Christ. They do a very great harm and sin against God and His people.²¹

¹⁹ Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ*, 13.

²⁰ John R. Rice, *Twelve Tremendous Themes* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1943), 231-32.

²¹ John R. Rice, *"Behold, He Cometh!": A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1977), 25.

Rice was following in line with Blackstone and Torrey, claiming both that dispensationalism was plain in Scripture as well as necessary for a sound faith.

The Imminent Return of Christ

When Darby introduced the rapture, he was careful to keep it separate from any current affairs in the world. It was necessarily imminent and disconnected from the political, social, and environmental events on earth. His followers were consistent in maintaining this technical point but were unable to resist the allure of discerning the “signs of the times” in order to predict the coming of Christ. This led to somewhat contradictory perspectives on the rapture.

Blackstone and Torrey equivocate. In *Jesus Is Coming*, written in 1878, Blackstone tried to have the best of both worlds. On the one hand he echoed Darby,

The principal thought in regard to the [rapture] is that it may happen now. Nothing is given us in Scripture so definite as to form a sign of or date for the Rapture. We are to be always watching and waiting for it, and expecting it at any moment So we have no date for the Rapture, only that it will precede the Revelation [of Christ.]²²

But Blackstone could not resist the lure of comparing current events to biblical predictions. He managed to avoid the blatant contradiction by explaining that these signs are cyclical, and that “they have been of such a character that the Church could see them repeated in each generation.”²³ Having preserved his dispensational credentials he launched into five pages of current signs, prefaced with the confident declaration, “We believe, if we can rightly read the signs of the times, that the godless, lawless trio of

²² Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*, 207-8.

²³ Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*, 209.

communism, nihilism and anarchy so alarmingly permeating the nations today, are unclean spirits preparing the way for Anti-Christ.”²⁴ These signs included the widespread return of the Jews to Palestine beginning in 1867, the unrest in the world, and widespread apostasy. He continued this doomsday clock in a twelve-page section that included the numbers of travelers in the world on railroads, the efficiency of the world postal service, the political, social, and financial unrest in Europe, and the lack of spiritual revival, among others dire warnings; Blackstone was confident that the coming of Christ was near.

R. A. Torrey also reflected these sentiments in his 1913 *The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ*, though in considerably more reserved words. Like Blackstone, he formally affirmed the imminent return: “Over and over again we are told in the Word of God that the exact time of our Lord's return is not known, and cannot be known, by man.”²⁵ However, he was still sidetracked into a few paragraphs of comparing the current events to prophecy. He asserted, “If one should take up in detail each item in Paul's characterization of the last days, he would find it marvelously fulfilled in our own day. This naturally leads many to suppose that the Lord's coming is very near at hand.” He attempted to reign in his own speculation with a warning: “We should always bear in mind that earnest men of God and students of the Bible have often thought in by-gone days that the coming of the Lord was very near.” However, he immediately slipped back into a lengthy description of the “signs of the times”:

But at the present time, the multiplied iniquities of our day, the apostasy into damning error and unbelief of many professed and hitherto apparently sincere Christians, and of many professedly evangelical preachers, and of numerous

²⁴ Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*, 210.

²⁵ Torrey, *The Return of the Lord Jesus*, 102.

professors of theology in seminaries built at great sacrifice by orthodox men and women for the promulgation of truth and not for the breeding of error, the increase of lawlessness on the part of great corporations on the one hand and on the part of the oppressed poor on the other hand, the mutterings preceding the storm of wild anarchy that seems likely soon to break, all these things are signs of His coming which may be very near at hand.²⁶

The sensationalism of Torrey and Blackstone's revivalism created tension with the literalism of dispensationalism.

Rice More Consistent. Rice followed in the formal doctrine of these men, both in the understanding of the rapture as well as the discerning of the times. He also divided the return of Christ into two phases: "First, he will come in the air to receive His saints . . . Then will come the second phase of Christ's Second Coming, when Christ will return with saints and angels."²⁷ For Rice, the sudden appearance of Christ was central to Christianity. In fact, he was driven to rewrite a chapter in his book on the end times because he felt it was not clear on its importance. The chapter, he admitted, "did not heretofore emphasize, as much as it ought, the one great central teaching of Christ and the apostles, that Jesus Christ may come at any moment, that his coming is imminent."²⁸

The realization of the doctrine's importance led Rice to diverge from his predecessors on the viability of discerning the signs of the times. In the first part of Rice's ministry he reflected the attempts of Blackstone and Torrey; caught up in sensational attempts to warn of Christ's coming. However, in a rare course correction, Rice repudiated his earlier approach, confessing,

²⁶ Torrey, *The Return of the Lord Jesus*, 108-9.

²⁷ Rice, *The Coming Kingdom*, 176.

²⁸ Rice, *The Coming Kingdom*, 165.

I have been compelled to alter my previous position. During thirty years of ministry, I found that preaching on signs of Christ's coming did not turn out satisfactorily. I once thought the rise of Mussolini must be a sign of the Roman Empire. I know now I was wrong. I have found that events which seemed very significant at the moment later faded into insignificance when Christ did not come when expected.²⁹

As a result of his chastened perspective, Rice became vocal in his opposition to searching for signs, pointedly calling out others who did so. He warned, "We should not look for Christ's coming because of meteor showers or because of numerals found in the Bible . . . let us stop looking in the newspaper for signs of Christ coming and simply believe Christ may come at any moment because he said so."³⁰ He was even more specific in a later book, discounting many of the most popular event in the past, stating,

Not a single Scripture gives any evidence that Christ's coming for his own waits in any prophesied event Christ could have come . . . before the first World War, before the second World War, before the rise of communism, before the atomic bomb. It is unscholarly and spiritually less than honest to teach that anyone can know when the end of this age approaches.³¹

Why this departure from his teachers and his earlier preaching? One reason he gave was his dedication to literal hermeneutics, but this tenet was a core belief for all dispensationalists and does not explain the discontinuity. As far as the consistency between Rice and Darby, no mention is ever made of it. Rice gave no indication he was even aware of Darby's reasoning from the spirituality of the church. It seemed that Rice's emphasis on expecting Christ without signs was in large part due to his concern for evangelism. Rice believed that looking for signs of Christ coming dampened efforts

²⁹ Rice, *The Coming Kingdom*, 176. This perspective was reflected in one of Rice's first published books: *World-Wide War and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1940).

³⁰ Rice, *Twelve Tremendous Themes*, 230.

³¹ Rice, "Behold, He Cometh," 22.

for outreach and reversed the motivational aspect of the imminent return. He even went as far as to say that “our whole attitude toward the possibility of great revivals and soul-winning work will depend on how we understand this question [concerning the “last days.”]”³²

Rice laid the blame for erroneous attempts to predict the Second Coming at the feet of “ultra” or hyper” dispensationalists.³³ Rice was critical of their position, averring,

this ultradispensational teaching that Jesus is certain to come soon, that certain signs prove the age is rushing to an early end, that the apostasy, world conditions and increased activity of Satan make gospel efforts less fruitful and revivals more difficult and unlikely, is a distressing perversion of a great truth.³⁴

Though Rice never specifically referred to Blackstone’s or Torrey’s attempts to do this (perhaps because of the many decades separating their ministries), he effectively implicated them when he said, “All these people, usually faithful Bible believers and earnest Christians, have been influenced and misled by a heresy that has become widespread in recent years.”³⁵

Not only were these people wrong in looking for signs, they had made an even graver error in labeling the current generation as the “last day,” and that, “This mistaken teaching holds that we are now . . . in the last few weeks or months or years before Jesus must come.”³⁶ Though this may have comforted or excited many people, Rice warned that it had a deadening effect on evangelism. According to Rice, these false teachers

³² John R. Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1992), 71.

³³ Rice uses term “ultradispensationalist” in a non-technical sense here. Later he will use it to refer to a certain kind of dispensationalist, as discussed below.

³⁴ Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now*, 49.

³⁵ Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now*, 47.

³⁶ Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now*, 47.

believed that the last days were marked by a “great apostasy” and as a result it was harder to reach people with the gospel. For Rice, who centered his ministry around that very task, this threatened the very soul of the church. Because he saw evangelism so clearly in the Scriptures, he attributed this error to apathy and lack of faith. He called Christians to recognize their weakness, declaring,

this ultradispensational outlook is largely a retreat from alarming conditions which Christians are not willing to face and for which they think the Gospel is not sufficient...let us face this defeatism for what it is Let us recognize the lack of faith, the powerlessness for the retreat of Christians from the battle which seems hard.³⁷

To look for signs of the times was not only to misunderstand the “plain” reading of Scripture, it was to call the power of the gospel into question, as well as to neglect the call of the Great Commission. Rice instead saw the possibility of wide-spread evangelism despite the dark events of the world. “In fact,” he asserted, “the whole trend of the New Testament teaches that we are in the age of great revivals.” This was the age of the gospel, from Pentecost till the imminent, unknowable time of Christ’s return. Rice was certain from his interpretation of Scriptures that the “great promises of fruit-bearing, of answer to prayer, of enduement of power with the Holy Spirit, are all given to be in effect throughout this whole gospel age.”³⁸ Pentecost was the beginning of the age of revivals, and “Just as Joel prophesied that Pentecost was included in ‘the last days,’ so the enduement of power on that day is promised throughout the age for all Christians who will meet God’s requirement.”³⁹

³⁷ Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now*, 50.

³⁸ Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now*, 34.

³⁹ John R. Rice, *Filled with the Spirit: A Verse-by-verse Commentary on Acts of the Apostle* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1963), 50.

In this optimistic outlook, the influence of Moody can be seen. Moody was convinced of the dispensationalist view of the imminent return of Christ and yet did not take the pessimistic outlook that many dispensationalists held. One author's description of Moody could be applied to Rice:

In certain ways it is hard to understand how an evangelist, with his essential optimistic temperament and his deep love of men and things of this world, could be attracted to such a pessimistic, world-denying doctrine. However, a careful reading of his sermons on the second coming suggests that at least initially premillennialism served Moody as another weapon of evangelism . . . It was a way of urging sinners to turn from their too exclusive concerns of the world to contemplate more important matters of the spirit . . . Moreover, sure knowledge of Christ's return to this world had its effect on the evangelist as well as the evangelized. It imparted more urgency to an already tense race.⁴⁰

Rice may have drawn theologically from Blackstone and Torrey, but he drew from the spirit of Moody. In contrast to the "ultradispensationalist" Rice also maintained that the imminent return was a motivation for evangelism. Since it potentially could happen any day, Christians should seek all the more to reach unbelievers. He urged believers to be found faithful at Christ's return lest they be ashamed: "But a child of God who is not on duty, not winning souls, not living right will be ashamed before Christ when he comes."⁴¹ Though the Christian will certainly not be lost, without evangelistic efforts his reward would be: "Even a child of God, saved by the blood, who is caught up to meet Christ in the air but finds all his works burned up and with no treasures in heaven will be ashamed before Christ at his coming."⁴² But even more important was the fate of those they know who do not believe. Rice admonished unbelievers and their Christian loved ones to

⁴⁰ Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody*, 253.

⁴¹ Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ*, 297.

⁴² Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ*, 197.

consider the sudden return of Christ and seek to prepare for it. Urgently he pleaded, “Quickly! *Quickly!* QUICKLY! He may come at any moment . . . Brother, are you ready?”⁴³

The Day of Pentecost and the Beginning of the Church

Rice’s understanding of the present age led him to depart from another key dispensational teaching: the origin of the church at Pentecost. Disagreement over the transition into the new dispensation of the church was not new; earlier in the century a splinter group of dispensationalists originated in England under the teaching of Ethelbert Bullinger, followed in America (with modifications) by J. C. O’Hair, Cornelius O. Stam, and Charles F. Baker. While they agreed upon the literal hermeneutic, the rapture, and the Israel-church distinction, there were some key differences from mainstream dispensationalists. Charles Ryrie explained, “The primary one is difference over when the church, the body of Christ, began historically. Dispensationalists say that the church began at Pentecost, while ultra-dispensationalists believe that it began with Paul sometime later.”⁴⁴ This put the Gospels and the Book of Acts under the Jewish Law, not applicable to the Christian church—understandably, this was cause for major division among dispensationalists. Rice adamantly opposed this teaching and he countered it

⁴³ Rice, *Twelve Tremendous Themes*, 248, emphasis original.

⁴⁴ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 229. Ryrie (1925-2016) was a leading dispensational teacher, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, and editor of the *Ryrie Study Bible*, which sold over 2.5 million copies.

under numerous topics, such as baptism,⁴⁵ the gospel and the kingdom,⁴⁶ the Holy Spirit,⁴⁷ and works against serious false doctrines.⁴⁸

But Rice did not entirely side with Ryrie's dispensationalism either. While Rice used arguments to refute the church's later origin that were typical of dispensationalism, he did not believe that it began at Pentecost. This was unique. Ryrie even went as far as to identify only two camps: "Virtually all ultradispensationalists, of whatever school, agree that [the church] did not begin at Pentecost. All dispensationalists agree that it did."⁴⁹ It was interesting that Ryrie, who was a contemporary of Rice, did not caveat his distinction here, especially since Rice was vocal on his position; Rice held to an even earlier beginning for the church than Pentecost. He asserted, "Not a word was said about the church being born at Pentecost . . . The Bible never, in a single verse, says nor even implies that the church began at Pentecost."⁵⁰ Rice was departing from standard dispensationalists, and he knew it. The influential *Scofield Reference Bible* commented on Leviticus 23:17: "The wave-loaves were offered fifty days after the wave-sheaf. This is precisely the period between the resurrection of Christ and the formation of the church at Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit."⁵¹ Rice, though an avid promoter of

⁴⁵ John R. Rice, *Bible Doctrines to Live By* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968).

⁴⁶ Rice, *Twelve Tremendous Themes*, 93.

⁴⁷ John R. Rice, *The Power of Pentecost or the Fulness of the Spirit* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1949).

⁴⁸ Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*.

⁴⁹ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 233.

⁵⁰ Rice, *Filled with the Spirit*, 97.

⁵¹ C. I. Scofield, Leviticus 23:16, *Scofield Reference Notes*, 1917, accessed April 26, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/scofield-reference-notes/>.

Scofield, disagreed: “We believe the *Scofield Reference Bible*, the most valuable and helpful of all reference Bibles, is in this matter mistaken.”⁵² He pinned this error on Darby himself: “As I understand the teachings of Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, those dear people have widely stressed the teaching that the church began at Pentecost.”⁵³ Despite this almost universal agreement of dispensationalists on the Pentecostal origin of the church, Rice consciously made an exceptional departure.

While Rice may have been at odds with dispensationalism, he was working within a consistent framework that prioritized evangelism. For Rice, the origin of the church was relatively insignificant, practically unknowable. He stated, “If you insist on believing that the church began at Pentecost, I will not be distressed, provided you take the Bible’s attitude about the matter, and say nothing about it.”⁵⁴ The issue was not the origin of the church, but the meaning of Pentecost, and for Rice that focused entirely on the new work of the Spirit. Pentecost was not about the church, rather, “Pentecost began the great era of revivals.”⁵⁵ Rice was concerned that applying dispensationalism to Pentecost distracted from its purpose. He lamented,

People who think Pentecost is simply the technical beginning of a new dispensation miss the lesson God gives us there. A dispensational event, long past, has not special message for us, they think. Hence, they do not learn to wait on God for soul-winning and revival power as did the apostles and others at Pentecost. Being absorbed in a false meaning for Pentecost, they miss the true meaning.⁵⁶

⁵² Rice, *Filled with the Spirit*, 61.

⁵³ Rice, *Filled with the Spirit*, 97-98.

⁵⁴ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 96.

⁵⁵ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 92.

⁵⁶ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 90.

While Rice subscribed to dispensationalism for the most part, here it interfered with his evangelistic perspective, and was discarded. Pentecost was not a new dispensation—that happened after the Resurrection when the Spirit was given to the disciples. Rice maintained that “the clear teaching of the Word of God is that the new dispensation (when the Holy Spirit should dwell in the body of every believer) began the day Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus himself promised this in John 7:37-39.”⁵⁷ The meaning of Pentecost was simple: “Pentecost was a model revival.”⁵⁸

Rice believed that dispensationalism had supplanted evangelism. He caustically noted,

The teachings of Darby were substituted for the great doctrinal position of D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey. The Bible teachers who never had revivals, never knew the power of Pentecost for themselves and rarely won souls, became the spokesmen in doctrine where once the soul-winners—Spurgeon, Wesley, Whitefield, Finney, Moody, Torrey—had been heard.⁵⁹

Rice urged his readers to seek a Pentecost experience. He implored, “We, too, can have that same power as those Christians had at the ‘specimen day,’ as D. L. Moody called it, of revival at Pentecost.”⁶⁰ The revival in Acts was meant to be repeated; it was a model for the church. Like those Christians, believers today were to wait in prayer until they were baptized in the Spirit in order to effectively preach the gospel. Dispensationalism removed that model, and Rice believed that evangelistic power went with it. Rice may

⁵⁷ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 93.

⁵⁸ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 95.

⁵⁹ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 89.

⁶⁰ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 88.

have subscribed to dispensationalism for the most part, but he was after the order of D. L. Moody, an evangelist first, and a dispensationalist second.

Conclusion

In the end, Rice was not always clear on his relationship to dispensationalism. Often, he treated it as obvious and natural, while other times he saw it as peripheral, or even dangerous. Rice, unlike most of (if not all) of his contemporary fundamentalists, did not operate from a dispensational worldview. Rather, he drew from the older, more revivalistic, and simple approach of D. L. Moody. There were certain things that were fundamental to the Christian faith. Evangelism was one of them; dispensationalism was not:

It is time for us to go back to the fundamentals and essentials. There are clear dispensational teachings in the Bible . . . [but] when they spend more time chopping the Scriptures up into artificial dispensations, dividing between John the Baptist and Christ, between Peter and Paul, than they do in studying and teaching the great themes of the Bible as clearly traced in the Scriptures themselves, then all kind of divisions and carnal strife will appear among the people of God.⁶¹

⁶¹ Rice, *Twelve Tremendous Themes*, 109.

CHAPTER 6

REFORMED THEOLOGY

John R. Rice was a vocal opponent of both Calvinism and Arminianism; however, he only had superficial understanding of these traditions. While he referenced legitimate sources, his grasp of their theological principles was limited. Though Rice was able to accurately critique some aspects of Reformed theology, for the most part he misunderstood (or missed entirely) their fundamental doctrines. As a result, he was unable to distinguish between Arminianism and legalism, and Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism. When he evaluated Reformed theology by his concern for evangelism, his interpretation of both Arminianism and Calvinism failed to stand up to that test.

Rice's Taxonomy

Rice classified Reformed theology into three categories: Arminianism, nominal/moderate Calvinism, and strict/hyper-Calvinism; yet compared to the traditional definitions of these terms, Rice conflated or misunderstood the meaning of all of them, at least to some degree. This will become apparent by first looking at Rice's own definitions of the categories, then comparing them with historical descriptions.

Arminianism

Rice did not spend much time discussing Arminianism and when he did, it was only from one perspective: the possibility of apostasy. As a conservative, Rice operated from a classical Protestant position regarding *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, and he felt

Arminianism undermined both of these positions with a form of legalism, wherein works were required for security.

Rice not only understood works to be excluded from justification, but he also believed that the future destiny of the believer was based on grace as well. Though a large part of his ministry was focused on advocating for practical holiness, he never tied it to the security of the believer. His emphasis was so strong on the eternal security of the believer that it drew criticism. When accused of antinomianism by several Arminian evangelists, he protested,

I believe I set as high a standard for holy living as the most radical Arminian. I believe my revival campaigns raise the moral tone among Christian people as much as do the campaigns of any evangelist living I teach now and have always taught that sin does not pay, that nobody gets by with sin. But I do teach that salvation is of God's grace not of works, 'lest any man should boast.' People do not earn salvation before they get it, and they do not earn it after they get it. People are saved by grace and kept by grace. So the Bible clearly teaches.¹

This was his objection to Arminianism: it taught that believers maintained their salvation by works, not grace. When asked if he was an Arminian, he denied it with this explanation,

I do believe that people are saved by grace, not of works, and that they are kept the same way, wholly on the merits of Christ's atoning blood. I do not believe they can earn it or keep it. I believe God gives salvation free and that it is all of grace. So I believe God saves people and changes their hearts and makes them children of God and then keeps his own children. So I am not an Arminian.²

To be an Arminian in Rice's mind was to diminish the grace of salvation in favor of a works-based security, not in justification, but in sanctification and glorification. So, for

¹ John. R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 438-39.

² John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1962), 253-54.

Rice, Arminianism required works to maintain salvation; it was identified with “those who believe that men must ‘hold out faithful to the end’ to keep saved and think that they will never surely, eternally safe until they reach Heaven.”³ Rice saw the Arminian tradition as a practical denial of *sola gratia*, since it required good works to keep salvation, rather than grace alone.

However, Rice’s understanding of Arminianism was incorrect. This may have been because of his limited concern for the system. He did not spend much time on the subject, only addressing it when dealing with Calvinism or responding to attacks on his evangelistic campaigns. Perhaps because of this lack of interest, Rice did not have a clear understanding of the Arminian theology of perseverance. Rice assumed that Arminianism required perseverance in good works (or lack of sin) in order to achieve final salvation, but this was not the traditional understanding of the doctrine. In the early days of the doctrine the followers of James Arminius,⁴ the Remonstrants, were hesitant to affirm even the possibility of falling away. In their official statement, after they declared that no other power can remove a believer from the security of salvation, they hesitantly articulated that the individual Christian’s ability to “despise grace must be more accurately sought from sacred Scripture before we are able to teach others with [full persuasion] of our minds.”⁵ Later Arminians such as John Wesley did allow for the elect

³ John R. Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1970), 273.

⁴ James (also Jacob or Jacobus) Arminius (1560-1609) was the first theologian to comprehensively lay out the theology that bore his name. Rice viewed him and John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of the Methodist tradition, as representatives of Arminian theology, as he stated, “Why not just be a Bible Christian instead of an Arminian or a Calvinist? Why should any man follow either Calvin or Arminius? Why should anybody let his doctrine be settled, on the one hand, by the Westminster Catechism, or, on the other, by the teachings of John Wesley?” John R. Rice, *Predestined to Hell? NO!* (Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord Foundation, 1958), 27.

⁵ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English*

to finally fall away from grace, but not as a consequence of sin. For Wesley, both justification and sanctification were by grace through faith. In a statement that Rice himself would have appreciated, Wesley asserted,

I have continually testified in private and public, that we are sanctified as well as justified by faith. And indeed the one of those great truths does exceedingly illustrate the other. Exactly as we are justified by faith, so we are sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the only condition, of sanctification as of justification. It is the condition: None is sanctified but that he believes; without faith no man is sanctified. And it is the only condition: This alone is sufficient for sanctification. Every one that believes is sanctified, whatever else he has or has not. In other words, no man is sanctified till he believes. Every man when he believes is sanctified.⁶

Contrary to Rice's opinion, Wesley believed salvation both present and future was conditioned upon the grace of God, as appropriated by faith. If the faith was lost, so also the grace. In an appendix to their doctrinal statement, the National Association of Free Will Baptists explained the doctrine further, clearly rejecting a works-based security:

We believe that salvation is a present possession by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, and that a person's eternal destiny depends on whether he has this possession. This we hold in distinction from those who teach that salvation depends on human works or merit.⁷

Though Rice would still have disagreed with the possibility of falling away, he would have done so on other, less significant, grounds. As an evangelist, his primary message was of salvation by grace through faith, not of works. But this was consistent with Arminian theology, and therefore his primary disagreement with them was based on a misconception.

Translation: 1600-1693 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 4:41-44.

⁶ John Wesley, *The Works of Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 6:49.

⁷ "Free Will Baptist Treatise," appendix to chapter XIII, adopted July 1969.

Nominal Calvinism

Rice saw Arminianism as part of a binary relationship with Calvinism, both of which he believed were false. But he also knew that many of his favorite Christian heroes, as well as contemporary ministry partners operated under the Calvinist banner; so, he reconciled this discrepancy by calling them “nominal” Calvinists. Rice did not deny that many people claimed the name “Calvinist,” but he believed they were not actually ascribing to the theological system of Calvin. Rather, they were opposing Arminianism, and thus chose the only other name available.

Rice was convinced that the average American Christian did not know the intricacies of Reformed theology, and instead used the positions as shorthand for the key issue of eternal security. He argued,

to thousands who may call themselves Calvinists, the word means only that they believe in salvation by grace, without human merit, as Calvin did, and so believe in everlasting life for the believer, since he is kept by the power of God. One who says he is a Calvinist generally means that he is not an Arminian, that he is kept by the grace of God, and is not saved or kept by his own works or life.⁸

Since Rice believed that Arminianism taught a works-based eternal security, while Calvinism strongly held to a grace-based security, he perceived that many only identified with the latter on this one issue. He asserted,

any person who is not Arminian in faith but rather believes in eternal security of the believer is likely to describe himself as Calvinist . . . Most of those who might be called Calvinists do not believe in limited atonement, for example But they do believe in eternal salvation by grace, the principle truth that Calvin emphasized.⁹

It was not a choice between the theological systems—there was only one issue connected to these names—the belief in eternal security, and so many “Calvinists” would

⁸ Rice, *Predestined to Hell, NO!*, 8-9.

⁹ Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 274.

better be described as “non-Arminians.” He even went as far to say that “the simple truth is that probably not one in ten, even of Presbyterians, in the United States believe Calvin’s position on predestination. Almost no Baptists believe that. And yet these groups are not Arminian.”¹⁰ Rice’s low estimate of Calvinistic numbers was driven mostly by a limited grasp of what the term actually represented.

Misidentifying Hyper-Calvinism

Perhaps the greatest historical-theological mistake Rice made was his failure to distinguish between Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism. As a result, his arguments switched regularly between the two, and he used the terms synonymously.

Rice’s Rejection of the Historical Understanding of Hyper-Calvinism

Hyper-Calvinism was not an extreme form of Calvinism; it was a deviation from Calvinism. It developed in the centuries after the Reformation in piecemeal fashion, making it difficult to pin down. Tom Nettles offered a helpful summary:

A man may not be exhorted to do anything he is spiritually incapable of doing . . . According to the true hyper-Calvinist, this lack of ability ‘to any spiritual good whatever’ does not arise from the fall. It is, rather, an ability with which man was never endowed, and it contemplates activities that in his unfallen state were both not required and not necessary.¹¹

In other words, even perfect Adam could not believe the Gospel if it was offered to him, so neither could his unregenerate descendants, and therefore to call them to respond to it was pointless. “Since, therefore,” Nettles explained, “it was no part of [Adam’s] powers

¹⁰ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 16.

¹¹ Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1986), 389-90.

in the unfallen state, it could not now be required of him in the fallen state. On this basis, duty-faith and duty-repentance are denied. This is the essence of hyper-Calvinism.”¹²

The most consistent feature of hyper-Calvinism is the relationship between the call of the gospel and the responsibility of the hearer, the duty to believe the gospel. To deny this duty is to undercut the open and free call of the gospel, and effectively eliminate evangelism.

One of the most prominent opponents of hyper-Calvinism, Andrew Fuller, titled his polemic *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*,¹³ referring to the universal call of the gospel to all people. According to Fuller, a Calvinist believed that the gospel should be preached to all, elect and non-elect, and that all should be urged to accept it. Further, all the non-elect have the natural ability to believe the gospel, and therefore the duty to do so. This articulation of true Calvinism revealed that it was conducive to evangelism.¹⁴

It is easy to see why an evangelist like Rice would be appalled by this perspective. He wrote, “The hyper-Calvinists says sinners are totally depraved and so incapable of repentance except as God calls some selected individuals, and leaves others He has predestined for Hell, *unable to repent*.”¹⁵ Rice could not conceive of the complete inability of the non-elect to respond to the gospel; it was contrary to his entire understanding of the purpose of evangelism in Scripture. In fact, he declared, “hyper-

¹² Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 391.

¹³ Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, vol. 3 of *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988). Fuller (1754-1815) was a British Particular (he called himself a strict Calvinist) Baptist pastor, and one of the leading theologians and apologists of his day. He was also instrumental in launching the missions movement that sent his friend William Carey to India.

¹⁴ Tom Nettles effectively argued for this in *By His Grace and for His Glory*, chapter 16.

¹⁵ Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 275, emphasis added.

Calvinism must inevitably oppose soul-winning activities of those who try to get every sinner to repent.”¹⁶ He quoted Herman Hoeksema (an actual hyper-Calvinist¹⁷) who described non-Calvinists like Rice as depending on “the begging and pleading and contortions of the modern hawker of Jesus.”¹⁸ The hyper-Calvinist doctrine rejected the free call of the gospel and the necessity and appropriateness of urging all people to accept the gospel, and men like Hoeksema showed Rice the practical, anti-evangelistic outcome of that doctrine.

Rice’s Conflation of Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism

Though Rice rejected traditional hyper-Calvinism, he did so mostly by failing to see the distinction between it and traditional “five-point Calvinism.” As a result, most of his attacks were on Calvinism itself, though he would refer to it as hyper-Calvinism.

The five points of Calvinism were first articulated at the Synod of Dort in 1618-19, where followers of John Calvin formally condemned the followers of James Arminius, the Remonstrants. The official response, called the Canons of Dort, had five categories (corresponding to the five objections brought by the Remonstrants):

1. The election of sinners by God was based upon his good pleasure, not on any foreseen condition in the sinner;
2. The death of Christ was of infinite worth and value, but only efficacious for the elect;
3. The total depravity of man renders him unable to effect any part of his own salvation;

¹⁶ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 95.

¹⁷ Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 78.

¹⁸ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 96. Rice quoted from Herman Hoeksema, *Whoever Will* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1945).

4. The call of the God by the Spirit to the elect works in them a regeneration of the heart, so as to produce faith and repentance, thus the call is effectual in all the elect and not dependent on the free will of man;

5. The elect, though regenerated, still are susceptible to sin, but are kept by the power of God, so that they will continually repent and believe, and thus persevere until the end as a sign of true faith.¹⁹

These have been popularly reorganized into the acronym TULIP (Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints).²⁰

Rice did not confuse the above definitions with hyper-Calvinism because of a lack of resources; his noted materials were prominent Calvinistic sources such as Loraine Boettner, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, and John Calvin himself. Rice's contention was not that hyper-Calvinism was an alteration of historic Calvinism, but that hyper-Calvinism *was* historic Calvinism. In fact, he consistently used "Calvinism" and "hyper-Calvinism" interchangeably, seeing the latter as merely a faithful representation of the first. He maintained, "Those who do believe in a doctrine of God's limited love, limited grace, limited atonement, and unchangeable plan to damn millions who could not be saved, are called hyper-Calvinists."²¹ As a result, his critique of the errors of hyper-Calvinism included opposition to traditional Calvinism as well.²²

¹⁹ Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, 6:120-47.

²⁰ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1981), 59-60.

²¹ Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 274.

²² Rice found fault in all of the points of Calvinism except "perseverance of the saints," which he preferred to call "preservation of the saints." As mentioned above, this point of eternal security was why many took the name Calvinist, despite rejecting most of its specific teachings. Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 283.

Rice's Critique of Calvinism

Rice's main point of contention with the entire system of Calvinism was that it hindered evangelism because it claimed that predestination made it impossible for the un-elect to be saved. And since they could not be saved, then there was no need to preach the gospel to them. Unfortunately, he often confused his understanding of the implications of Calvinism with the actual doctrines, thus framing each point in the worst light, or even misinterpreting them. His objection centered around the doctrine of unconditional election, but it extended to the other points as well.

Unconditional Election

Rice, rightly seeing the importance of "unconditional election,"²³ found this doctrine the most grievous error in Calvinism, viewing it as a fatalistic, chilling doctrine. Unfortunately, this was mostly because he misinterpreted it; he went further than his sources, and missed important qualification that would have tempered his animosity. It is unclear how much of Rice's perspective of Calvinism was informed by his bias, or vice versa.

Rice recognized that election itself was a biblical teaching, and in a fairly typical non-Calvinist method, he interpreted it in light of God's omniscience and the believer's eternal security. Taking Romans 8:29-30 as proof,²⁴ he explained,

God knows ahead of time who will trust in Him. God knows the future. And when God knows a certain person will put his trust in Christ for salvation, then God predestinates, or determines that he will take that one straight on through to Glory

²³ Boettner remarked, "this part of the doctrine is naturally thrown up into a place of special prominence." Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 83.

²⁴ Rom. 8:29-30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

until he turns out in the image of Jesus Christ! God's foreknowledge comes first . . . If you remember that predestination and election are based on God's foreknowledge, then that is as close as you need to come to the doctrine of the Bible.²⁵

Predestination was a reference to the end of the believer salvation, not the beginning; an assurance that salvation could not be lost. It had no bearing on who would believe, only on the destiny of the believer.

Rice's interpretation of Calvinism was much grimmer. Though he was familiar with the writings of Calvin, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, and other reputable sources, Rice did not comprehend the entire picture of Calvinism, instead only selectively using some teachings, and then treating his inferences of those teachings as necessary consequences. Rice boiled Calvinism down to a form of double fatalism, which taught "that some are predestined to be lost and cannot be saved, that others are predestined to be saved and certain to be saved . . . a more deadly heresy than speaking in tongues or in sprinkling for baptism."²⁶ Rice's sharp conclusion may seem hyperbolic, since he himself admitted that predestination occurred in Scripture. However, Rice meant more than simply God setting the destination of believers and unbelievers; Rice perceived that Calvinistic predestination meant the meticulous, fatalistic, and mechanical control of God. It was, Rice averred,

the doctrine that every detailed event that happens in all the world was foreordained of God and had to happen, every sin was ordained by God, every act of a Christian or of a sinner, and that everyone was foreordained to be saved before he was born, without having any free choice in the matter, or was damned without any possibility

²⁵ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, 402.

²⁶ John R. Rice, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1965), 321.

of his being saved—that doctrine is hurtful and has done great harm to the cause of Christ.²⁷

Rice was persuaded that Calvinism taught predestination in such a way that man’s actions and decisions were co-opted by God. In opposition, he said, “Judas would not repent for salvation, but he could have done so. He was not compelled to be lost.”²⁸ Rice rejected what he saw as the “doctrine that unduly stresses foreordination and predestination, and so emphasizes God’s part in the salvation of sinners to the discredit of all human agencies.”²⁹ By perceiving that Calvinism removed the ability to participate in moral decision making, Rice assumed Calvin would say that Judas was a slave to his destiny and that predestination contradicted moral responsibility. Free-will was an illusion and man’s path was fixed, like a train on its tracks, solely in the hands of God. This, he said, was clearly wrong:

There is one clear thread of thought that runs throughout the Bible, one persistent teaching that never varies. It is that man chooses right or wrong, may choose to obey or to disobey, may choose to believe or disbelieve, may choose to be saved or lost On moral questions, mankind is left with solemn warnings and with tender entreaties, but with the freedom to choose. To ignore that teaching will lead to heresy as well as sin.³⁰

Calvinism took that choice away, Rice inferred, having already determined sinners’ destiny beforehand. This made God into a puppet-master, having offered things that could not be had: “If the Bible is an honest book, and if God is an honest God, men must

²⁷ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 95.

²⁸ Rice. *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 61.

²⁹ John R. Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), 195.

³⁰ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 63.

themselves, of their own choice, decide for or against God.”³¹ If they had been predestined their choices were irrelevant, the fix was in. Rice was convinced that double predestination made the evangelistic call in the Bible an empty promise; more practically it made the evangelist’s ministry a mechanical effort. “The point is,” Rice lamented of Calvinism, “that the only decisions made are made by God, that God was and is absolutely unlimited and, therefore, that God takes all the moral responsibility in the world.”³² In other words, Calvinism both made God the author of evil and made evangelism a sham. With God making all the choices, what was the point of anything? For Rice, “There is no essential difference between the unbelieving fatalism of Calvinism and the fatalism of Moslems . . . Essential Calvinism would teach that there is no right or wrong, no moral responsibility.”³³

Rice’s formulation fell short, however. He insisted on taking the doctrine to places that it was not meant to go, and where Calvinists had clearly and explicitly forbidden. He latched on to certain statements in Calvinism while ignoring subsequent qualifications. For example, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* described predestination as “God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”³⁴ From here Rice built his case for fatalism, but he ignored the rest of the sentence, “yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is

³¹ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 65.

³² Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 78.

³³ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 81.

³⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646), in Dennison, *Reformed Confession*, 4:238.

the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”³⁵ Unable to reconcile these two statements, Rice dismissed the qualification—in doing so, he created a false form of Calvinism, since it explicitly required both. Rice’s superficial understanding was revealed further in his use of a quote from Boettner, where Rice inadvertently allowed him to make the point of human responsibility. Boettner said, “We believe that from all eternity God has intended to *leave some of Adam’s posterity in their sins*.”³⁶ Boettner saw reprobation as a result of man’s own sins, and not as a result of fatalistic decree. Rice was so biased against Calvinism that he could not see the full scope, even when selecting specific quotes.

Rice also revealed his limited interaction with Calvinism (and his use of second-hand sources³⁷) by quoting selectively from Calvin himself. Rice maintained that Calvin’s doctrine,

so obviously disagrees with the oft-repeated invitations in the Bible to all sinners to come to Christ and be saved that some will think we have misrepresented Calvinism. But a casual study of the documents available will show that we are very carefully giving the meaning of extreme Calvinism.³⁸

He followed this with a line from Calvin’s *Institutes* that “not all men are created for a similar destiny, but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others

³⁵ Dennison, *Reformed Confession*, 238.

³⁶ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 10, emphasis added.

³⁷ Rice seemed to have accessed Calvin only through Boettner’s book, as evidenced by his method of attribution. Boettner strung two separate Calvin quotes together, noting that the first had already been used (but not giving the source) in a previous chapter (where it was correctly attributed to Calvin’s *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 21, Section 5). Boettner then followed with the quote “there can be no election . . .,” which he attributed to Calvin’s *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 23. Rice, however, used both quotes in the same order as Boettner, but introduced them together: “John Calvin in his *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 23, says . . .,” showing that he did not use Calvin’s *Institutes* directly but only through Boettner’s quotes. Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 15, 105; Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 10.

³⁸ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 10.

. . . There can be no election without its opposition, reprobation.”³⁹ Rice concluded that, since Calvinism removed human effort from the equation, it necessarily “kills soul-winning, it hurts the cause of Christ, it turns people into Pharisees.”⁴⁰ But Rice’s casual study allowed him to present a truncated version of Calvinism, and if he had read to the end of the chapter he quoted, he would have found Calvin strongly refuting his conclusion. Drawing from Augustine, Calvin said that if anyone were to preach the version of predestination that Rice called Calvinism, that such “senseless teachers or minister and ill-omened prophets, [should] retire from the church.”⁴¹ Instead, “because we know not who belongs to the number of the predestined, or does not belong, our desire ought to be that all may be saved, and hence every person we meet, we will desire to be with us a partaker of peace.”⁴² Rice failed to take into account the entire doctrine of predestination as taught by Calvinism. Though he may not have agreed with all the connections made, Rice would have seen that Calvin, following Augustine, clearly taught that predestination did not exclude evangelism.

Total Inability

Rice, summarizing “total inability,” stated, “Calvin meant and Dr. Boettner means that a lost sinner cannot repent, cannot believe unless he is foreordained to repent and unless God overpowers him, and that God has not chosen to overpower many.”⁴³

³⁹ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 10.

⁴⁰ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, 398.

⁴¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tran. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 634.

⁴² Calvin, *Institutes*, 635.

⁴³ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 9.

Yet again, Rice read into Boettner what was not there. The key that Rice overlooked was the connection between the will and the ability. The lost sinner could not repent because he did not want to, or as Boettner explained,

He possesses a fixed bias of the will against God, and instinctively and willingly turns to evil. He is an alien by birth, and a sinner by choice. The inability under which he labors is not an inability to exercise volitions, but an inability *to be willing* to exercise *holy* volitions How can he repent of sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates him?⁴⁴

Rice framed the doctrine in such a way as to make it seem as if the sinner would like to be saved but was unable to do so, a clear departure from Boettner's meaning.

Though Rice condemned this inability, he later affirmed the principle; criticizing Arminianism's over-emphasis on free-will, he said, "Man has 'freedom of the will' in the sense that he can, by God's help, do what God has told him to do a lost sinner may have free-will, and can be saved, but if he goes on in sin, his heart may become so hardened and his mind so set in sin that eventually the man cannot be saved."⁴⁵ Rice clearly saw the need for God's intervention into man's heart in order to obey him, as well as the concept of love of sin making it impossible to turn to God. Rice's rejection of Calvinism conflicted with his rejection of Arminianism (represented more as Pelagianism). Rice could not accept the concept that 'total inability' was not a decree barring man from salvation, but that it was a result of man's own, unaided nature. Rice contrasted Calvinism with Pelagianism, and rejected both, ending up in Arminianism's prevenient grace, all without realizing it. He affirmed that man was unable to seek God without divine grace, taking the classic Arminian position that God's

⁴⁴ Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 62.

⁴⁵ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 26.

grace came to all, and misunderstanding Calvinism to say that total inability was a natural condition of man, rather than a result of his own desire.

Rice's desire to preach the gospel required that everyone have the ability to respond, else he felt his work was in vain, and his false conception of Calvinism did not allow that. But Calvinism only taught that man did not want to come to Christ unless his heart was changed, that it was a matter of unwillingness. Rice unconsciously made the same case. He emphatically declared, "In all eternity not one soul can lift tortured eyes from Hell and say, 'I *could* not.' It will always be, 'I *could* but I *would not* be saved by the grace of God."⁴⁶ Here Rice was arguing for a distinction between natural ability and moral ability, which was exactly how Calvinists represented 'total inability.' Rice even made the same point about Jesus, who, he taught, "was tempted to sin and could have sinned if He ever consented to do so; but . . . He was so pure and good that whatever the temptation, it was morally impossible for Him to give his consent to sin."⁴⁷ Rice had understood the concept of moral inability, but could not perceive it in Calvinism. As a result, he rejected its teaching without fully understanding their content or implications to his own doctrine.

Limited Atonement

Rice opposed limited atonement based on both God's loving nature as well as his general call for individual to share and respond to that message. God's love, he exclaimed, "is for the whole world! That love is for every lost sinner who ever walked

⁴⁶ John R. Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1964), 87-88, emphasis original.

⁴⁷ Rice, *Here is My Question*, 67.

the earth or ever will! . . . Do not talk to me, then, about a limited atonement as some brilliant minds and cold hearts talk Would you honor God by speaking of his limited knowledge? Or of his limited power? Then how silly to talk of His limited love, His limited grace!”⁴⁸ Of course, Rice understood that Calvinism’s motivation for limited atonement was the sovereignty of God. He acknowledged that some,

following Augustine or Calvin, say that if God died for some sinner who is never saved, then God’s love and grace were thwarted. And so to insist on a man-made doctrine of ‘absolute sovereignty of God,’ by which they mean that God never offered anybody anything that he did not compel them to take, they make God the author and planner of every sin that occurred. They even say that God himself planned for Adam to sin, because they do not want to allow that God’s love could be rejected and God’s grace refused.⁴⁹

But Rice had little time for the concern about limiting God’s sovereignty. That was a theoretical concept for him, he was focused on practical things like man’s responsibility and the availability of the atonement for all.

Rice saw two perspectives on the atonement: general and particular. These were not referring to the historical understanding of the terms, but to the efficacy and application of the atonement. In the first sense, opposing limited atonement, he said, “The infinite, unlimited grace of God provided salvation for all men, so he is, potentially, ‘the Saviour of the world.’”⁵⁰ This was the basis for the universal call of evangelism as demonstrated by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:10, who “wanted everybody to hear the Gospel, because Christ is ‘the Saviour of all men, specially to those who believe.’ He is, in

⁴⁸ Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners*, 86.

⁴⁹ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 44.

⁵⁰ John R. Rice, *The Son of Man: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1971), 342.

general, a Saviour of all men.”⁵¹ For the gospel call to be a well-meant offer, Rice believed that the atonement must be generally, or potentially available to all: “Every person born had his sins paid for. He could have had them forgiven if he would. He could have been a child of God if he would. The atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross paid for the sins of every poor sinner ever born.”⁵² The payment of sins was a potential for all because the need was for all. Rice saw in Scripture the universality of sin as coordinate with the universality of the atonement and so he asserted, “The Scripture plainly teaches that all men potentially became sinners by Adam’s sin, so all that are ever born are potentially made alive in Christ.”⁵³ Rice’s doctrine of evangelism required an atonement for all in order to be authentic. The universal malady of sin led to the universal cure of the gospel, and he cried, “No difference, all have sinned! . . . And now, thank God, we read that there is no difference, all may be saved! If sin is universal, then salvation is offered just as freely and universally.”⁵⁴

Because Rice also believed that all men would not be saved, he saw a second category for the atonement: “particular” or “actual” atonement. What was available to all was only applied to some. Christ is, he insisted, “potentially, ‘the Saviour of the world’ but especially and actually of them that believe.”⁵⁵ Rice was careful to preserve the exclusivity of salvation by grace through faith, so that universal atonement did not equal

⁵¹ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 40.

⁵² Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 41.

⁵³ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 47.

⁵⁴ John R. Rice, *Twelve Tremendous Themes* (Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1943), 72.

⁵⁵ Rice, *The Son of Man*, 342.

universal salvation. He maintained that, “all who reject the Saviour are damned and ought to be damned.”⁵⁶ The atonement was for everyone, but salvation was only for those who believed.

Despite this qualification, Rice did see some kind of universal salvation, not from conscious sins or for eternal life, but from the original corruption of Adam. In discussing the original sin of Adam in Genesis 3, he explained, “And now Adam and Eve are become the parents of a race of sinners. The taint is in the blood. The curse is on every cell of their bodies. The curse will be on every child they shall bring forth and every descendent down through the millenniums.”⁵⁷ Though Rice did not hold a federal headship view of original sin, he did see infants born under a curse, and, in order to avoid what he considered the Calvinist heresy of infants being predestined to hell, he maintained that the atonement covered all infants’ original curse. All children who died before making a conscious decision to sin would go to heaven. He clarified,

I believe that the dear Lord Jesus has paid for all of Adam’s sins and that no one goes to Hell because of the inherited taint of sin. I think little children are kept safe until they come to know right from wrong and come to choose sin for themselves and then they must personally turn to Christ and be born again or go to hell.⁵⁸

Rice was navigating between his revivalistic anti-Calvinistic background (which emphasized the free will and crucial importance of making a crisis decision for Christ) and his strong doctrine of sin; this view of the atonement provided a solution for him. In

⁵⁶ Rice, *Predestined to Hell? NO!*, 41.

⁵⁷ John R. Rice, “*In the Beginning...*”: *A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on Genesis* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975), 143.

⁵⁸ Rice, “*In the Beginning,*” 143.

the end, the limited atonement of Calvinism struck Rice as making the call of the gospel limited as well, and so he created a modified universal atonement.

Irresistible Call

Rice did not seem to have interacted with any Calvinists in person and his representation of its doctrines was unfairly harsh at times. Nowhere was this more apparent than his treatment of the effectual calling of God. Rice was convinced that Calvinism taught a strong-arm approach to the call of the gospel, where God basically forced people to do things that they did not want to do, arguing that “when we speak of grace we do not speak of the mailed fist or the dictator’s fiat, but the Father’s love, of the Saviour’s suffering, of the tender wooing of the Spirit.”⁵⁹ This representation was not simply an uncharitable perspective, but an erroneous one, and it sprang from Rice’s emphasis on the importance of the ministry of the evangelist.

Rice believed in a fairly standard Arminian view of prevenient grace.⁶⁰ He asserted,

Not only did Christ atone for every man’s sin. His love reaches all, His Spirit enlightens every heart, His enabling grace goes with His command for all to repent, and in the Bible he clearly invites all to be saved. No one need go to Hell. Provision is made so every sinner can be saved.⁶¹

Rice, embracing the depravity of man, agreed that grace was needed for the sinner to respond, that he could not initiate the move toward God. He even agreed with the

⁵⁹ Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners*, 87.

⁶⁰ James Arminius explained, “Free will is unable to begin or to perfect any true and spiritual good, without grace . . . This grace goes before [*prævenit*], accompanies, and follows; it excites, assists, operates that we will, and co-operates lest we will in vain.” James Nichols, ed., *The Works of James Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 2:700.

⁶¹ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 48.

Calvinists' premise that the Spirit must first move upon the sinner: "God must . . . change the heart. Mark this. A sinner never lived who could change his own heart."⁶² This distinguished Rice from Charles Finney, who stated that "Sinners are bound to change their own hearts."⁶³ But while Rice avoided drifting into Pelagianism, he also added the classic Arminian caveat of the Spirit's universal work: "every sinner does have the enabling grace of God. Every sinner has some light from God. Every sinner has some conviction from God."⁶⁴ Rice, like others before him, saw proof in passages such as John 1:9: "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."⁶⁵ This witness, along with creation, and the preaching of the Gospel, rendered everyone capable of receiving Christ, and, according to Rice, provided hope to the evangelist.

In contrast to this view, Rice portrayed Calvinism as both limited and domineering. He claimed that "according to the philosophy of Calvin, irresistible grace means that God simply forces some to be saved."⁶⁶ This had obvious implications for evangelism: "Calvin meant," Rice warned that "it is foolish to urge people to decide, because those who are ordained to be saved will be irresistibly moved and overpowered by God's grace, and so will be saved."⁶⁷ Rice was convinced that Calvinism was a death

⁶² John R. Rice, *Preaching that Built a Great Church* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1974), 278.

⁶³ Charles G. Finney, *Principles of Revival* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1987), 13.

⁶⁴ Rice, *Predestinated for Hell? NO!*, 50.

⁶⁵ John Wesley said something similar: "'Natural free-will,' in the present state of mankind, I do not understand. I only assert that there is a measure of free-will *supernaturally* restored to every man, together with that *supernatural* light which "enlightens every man that cometh into the world." John Wesley, *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 447.

⁶⁶ Rice, *Here Are More Questions*, 398.

⁶⁷ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 10.

knell for evangelism. He warned, “I remind you that God wants every poor sinner. Some say that God appointed a few people to die and go to Hell. No, He didn’t God wants people even who will not come. You need not say that God’s election and predestination intended that men would turn down him down and be lost. No, God wants everyone.”⁶⁸ If Rice’s depiction of irresistible grace were accurate, his concern would have been understandable; however, he ignored the actual teachings of Calvinism in favor of his own deductions.

Rice interpreted Calvinistic writings through the lens of his own bias, reading into them what was not there. He first declared that Calvinism, “represents grace as the irresistible act of God compelling a man to be saved who does not want to be saved, so that a man has no choice in the matter except as God forcibly puts a choice in his mind.”⁶⁹ Then, to prove his point, he quoted Hermann Hoeksema:

That work is absolutely divine. Man has no part in it, and cannot possibly cooperate with God in his own salvation. In no sense of the word, and at no stage of the work, does salvation depend on the will or work of man, or wait for the determination of his will.⁷⁰

Would Rice say that some part of salvation depended on man or that he must cooperate with God in his own salvation? No. Rice was reading into Hoeksema, inferring that he was saying man was practically absent from the process. While Hoeksema may not be the best representative for Calvinism, his goal in this quote was to place the entire weight of salvation on God, and not on man, and nowhere does he say that man was forced to do

⁶⁸ John R Rice, *Favorite Chapters of the Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), 222.

⁶⁹ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 25.

⁷⁰ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 25.

something he didn't want to do. Rice, proof-texting, failed to understand the point of Hoeksema, or Calvinism in general. Two more examples (quoted in Boettner, Rice's favorite resource,) will show this.

The Westminster Confession, Chapter X, Section 1, articulated irresistible grace:

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: *yet so, as they come most freely*, being made willing by His grace.⁷¹

This statement clearly guarded against any coercion, or violence against the will of man. It used the language of “drawing” to emphasis the subtle nature of God's grace, and explicitly denied what Rice claimed, that God forced man to be saved. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 31, explained,

Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our will, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered in to us in the Gospel.”⁷²

This explanation is markedly different than Rice's summary: “God simply forces some people to be saved.”⁷³ Rice's attempt to discount Calvinism drove his interpretation, and led him to overstate his case, resulting in a false interpretation.

⁷¹ Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 161, emphasis added.

⁷² Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 162.

⁷³ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 25.

Reconciling Calvinistic Evangelists

Because of Rice's focus on evangelism, his formulation of Calvinism made the two incompatible. But Rice also loved the ministry of prominent evangelists in history, some of whom claimed to be Calvinists, and it was important to him that he trace his evangelistic emphasis to these other successful evangelists. In order to reconcile their Calvinism and soul winning, he created a new category of "Calvinists on paper." But this was only possible because Rice misunderstood their own words, as well as Calvinism in general. Rice evaluated and discarded a person's Calvinism, not on their stated positions, but on their commitment to evangelism.

Spurgeon as a "Paper" Calvinist

Rice was forced to acknowledge that some Christian's claim to be Calvinistic was based upon a fuller understanding of the theology behind it. His favorite past evangelist was Charles Spurgeon,⁷⁴ who, as a Baptist, conservative, proto-fundamentalist, and the most prominent English evangelist of his time, held a special place in Rice's (and most other conservative Baptists') heart. And though Spurgeon may have been a Calvinist "on paper," in practice he, and by extension others like him, were not, or so Rice claimed,

Calvinism especially appeals to those who think that hyper-Calvinism is the only answer to Arminians . . . Hyper-Calvinists would like to make people believe that . . . if one does not teach universal salvation he must either be a Calvinist or an Arminian. The Arminian position does such violence to the grace of God, many would rather be Calvinists. I am convinced that Whitefield and Spurgeon were both influenced, by the pressure of Arminian theology in their day, to call themselves

⁷⁴ Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) was a London Baptist megachurch pastor, who preached to crowds as large as 20,000, and is commonly called the 'Prince of Preachers.' For more information on Spurgeon's ministry and doctrine, see Thomas J. Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), and Iain M. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017).

Calvinists, although neither was a hyper-Calvinistic in actual practice and emphasis.⁷⁵

Because Rice believed that true Calvinism was fatal to evangelism, he could not accept that the great evangelists of the past and present were authentic Calvinists. Though it was clear that they formally espoused the doctrines of Calvinism, since they also regularly and fervently gave a general salvation appeal to non-Christians, Rice concluded that their formal Calvinism was not consistent with their true beliefs. He believed that Calvinism “must inevitably oppose soul-winning activities of those who try to get a sinner to repent, of those who offer salvation freely . . . hyper-Calvinists disagree violently with the thought that lost sinners can repent and that it is man’s own fault if he will not turn to Christ and be saved.”⁷⁶ If Calvinism was antithetical to evangelism, then any committed evangelist was not a Calvinist. For Rice, actions spoke louder than words, and in his opinion no true Calvinist could preach evangelistically. He argued that “original Calvinists believed that if anybody was going to be saved, he would be saved without any Christian bothering about it.”⁷⁷ As an evangelist shaped by revivalism, that crisis moment, driven by the pleading of the preacher, was made pointless by Calvinism, so Rice warned, “Hyper-Calvinism is an unscriptural, false doctrine. It tends to flourish in intellectual pride and in neglect of soul winning, and is a symptom of moral guilt [for lack of evangelism]. It is Satan’s effort to kill concern and compassion for souls.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 6-7.

⁷⁶ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 95.

⁷⁷ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 195.

⁷⁸ Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 289.

With this formula in hand, Rice interpreted the ministry of Spurgeon and mistakenly cleared him of the key Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, thus allowing him to remain a model for Rice’s brand of evangelism. That Rice misunderstood Calvinism and Spurgeon was evidenced by the very quotes he used to vindicate Spurgeon—when examined they actually prove the opposite of Rice’s claim. Rice wrote, “Spurgeon, the great English preacher, called himself a Calvinist, but he did not go into the barrenness and fruitlessness of the hyper-Calvinist who hold that some men are predestined, compelled, to reject Christ.”⁷⁹ Rice immediately set the context for Spurgeon: he was a Calvinist, but not a *true* Calvinist, since he preached the Gospel. Rice had loaded the deck by testing Spurgeon’s doctrine by his evangelism. Rice then quoted him to prove that Spurgeon gave a “non-Calvinistic” general call for conversion:

The predestination of God does not destroy the free agency of man, or lighten the responsibility of the sinner. It is true, in the matter of predestination, when God comes to save, *His free grace prevails over our free agency, and leads the will in glorious captivity to the obedience of faith.* But in sin man is free—free in the widest sense of the term, never being compelled to do any evil deed, but being left to follow the turbulent passions of his own corrupt heart, and carry out the prevailing tendencies of his own depraved nature.⁸⁰

It is remarkable that Rice missed the obvious contradiction in this quote. Contrary to Rice’s assertion that man was free to choose Christ or not, Spurgeon said that God “prevails over our free agency, and leads the will in glorious captivity.” If this was not Calvinistic “effectual calling” what could it possibly mean? Spurgeon affirmed that man’s will was “irresistibly called” by God so that it became obedient. Rice was either blinded by the evangelistic success of Spurgeon or he had such a superficial grasp of

⁷⁹ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 64.

⁸⁰ Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 64, cited from *Spurgeon’s Sermons*, 13:30-31.

Calvinism that he could not see Spurgeon affirming both total inability and irresistible call.

Perhaps a more charitable interpretation would be to include Rice's misunderstanding of the distinction between hyper-Calvinism and Calvinism. This was important since Spurgeon was deeply involved in the controversy between the two.⁸¹ Rice had already misidentified hyper-Calvinism as five-point Calvinism, and when this was combined with hyper-Calvinism's claim to true Calvinism, the confusion was apparent. Rice correctly recognized Spurgeon's vocal opposition to a limited gospel invitation, declaring, "Charles Spurgeon, great and blessed London preacher, was a Calvinist though he spoke out against 'hyper-Calvinism' and called it that; and his hyper-Calvinist friends criticized him for preaching that 'whosoever will' may come."⁸² However, Rice misinterpreted Spurgeon. He quoted a rebuke Spurgeon gave to hyper-Calvinists (whom he graciously referred to as "Calvinists"), saying, "'Repent and be baptized every one of you.' I do feel so grieved that many of our Calvinistic brethren; they know nothing of Calvinism."⁸³ Rice thus concluded, "So Spurgeon was a Calvinist and said so, but he did not accept all the doctrines of hyper-Calvinism and he said so."⁸⁴ Yet Spurgeon was denouncing the hyper-Calvinists' rejection of the general call of the gospel, pointing out that he "had all the Puritans" with him in his universal invitation to the gospel as a true five-point Calvinist.⁸⁵ However, Rice was using these words to

⁸¹ For a more detailed look at the controversy, see Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010).

⁸² Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 284.

⁸³ Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 286.

⁸⁴ Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 286.

⁸⁵ Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Carlisle,

denounce traditional Calvinism, an absurd twist. Rice's conflation of hyper-Calvinism and Calvinism proved to undermine his historical theology once again.

Though Rice was wrong on Spurgeon's lack of adherence to all of the five points of Calvinism, he did recognize some degree of acceptance. In his mind, unconditional election was the key error in Calvinism, so much so that he could even admit that Spurgeon held some other parts of Calvinism:

It would be foolish to follow Spurgeon in whatever part of the false doctrine of hyper-Calvinism he believed as to follow him in smoking cigars. He saw the error of smoking a little while before he went to Heaven, and I am sure he saw the errors of hyper-Calvinism, besides those he himself criticized, as soon as he got there.⁸⁶

For Rice, Calvinism was wrong, but the "unpardonable sin" was the anti-evangelism of predestination, and since Spurgeon opposed that portion, he was not categorized as a true Calvinist. As in so many other areas of Rice's life, evangelism was the primary key to ministry; passing the test of evangelism was paramount to being accepted as a faithful minister of Christ.

Conclusion

In the end, Rice's approach to Calvinism was driven by misinterpretation and evangelistic zeal. Because he misread, misinterpreted, or missed the true teaching of Calvinism, he concluded that God was working in conflict with the will of man, and did not incorporate human means into his eternal decrees. Rice saw the cause of the gospel, his core passion, threatened and he believed that a decline in soul winning and missions

PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 42.

⁸⁶ Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines*, 286; Rice was adamantly opposed to tobacco use and published a tract against its sinful use: John R. Rice, *Tobacco: Its Use a Sin?*, (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, n.d.). He even lamented one friend's decline in evangelism and acceptance of Calvinism, asking, "Perhaps the fact that in secret he held on to the tobacco habit had something to do with it." Rice, *Predestined for Hell? NO!*, 102.

were inevitable. Rice was even so bold to say that no great missions movement arose from the teachings of John Calvin, and that Calvinism “cuts the nerve of soul winning on the foreign field as it does at home.” This statement was only possible because he reinterpreted the self-identified Calvinism of past missionaries and evangelists such as William Carey, George Whitefield and Charles Spurgeon. For Rice, Calvinism was inconsistent with evangelism, and anyone who claimed to be a Calvinist while also actively proclaiming the gospel was not a true Calvinist. Rice was zealous for the work of soul winning, but that zeal distorted his historical perspective.

CHAPTER 7

"THE FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT"

On the back cover of John R. Rice's book, *The Power of Pentecost*, two endorsements from prominent Southern Baptists showed the reach of his influence in evangelicalism. Though Rice was an independent Baptist fundamentalist he received glowing praise from Robert G. Lee and W. A. Criswell.¹ Rice may have been outside of mainstream denominations, but when it came to his theology of the Spirit, he was well within the popular evangelical tradition that flowed back to D. L. Moody. Rice's theology was never more clearly indebted to nineteenth-century evangelicalism than in pneumatology.

While Rice was solidly orthodox, his primary perspective on the Holy Spirit corresponded with his ministry goal: evangelism, and he argued most strenuously and expansively on the role of the Spirit as empowering for gospel witness. For Rice, the most important issue was how to receive Spirit-given power in order to effect spiritual change through evangelization, pronouncing, "There cannot possibly be any great revival except by a mighty moving of the Holy Spirit . . . And I believe that revival is the only

¹ John R. Rice, *The Power of Pentecost or the Fullness of the Spirit* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1949). R. G. Lee (1886-1976) was the pastor of megachurch Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, TN, for thirty-two years, and the President of the Southern Baptist Convention for three years in a row, 1949-51. W. A. Criswell (1909-2002) replaced G. W. Truett at First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX, in 1944, which grew to 26,000 under his leadership. He was also the President of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1970. Billy Graham was a close friend and a member of this church for fifty-five years.

hope of survival for Bible Christianity.”² This conviction outweighed all others and Rice felt he had the answer, as evidenced by his longest monograph’s topic: the empowerment of the Spirit.³ Rice believed that the Holy Spirit must do a special work in the believer, separate from and subsequent to salvation, in order for the work of evangelism to proceed—Rice referred to this as “the baptism of the Spirit” or “the fullness of the Spirit,”—and he saw the account of Pentecost in Acts 1-2 as the model for the church. It was, however, not to be confused with the charismatic understanding of that same event, a confusion that Rice spent his entire life untangling. Instead, Rice sought to use Acts as a prescriptive how-to manual for the filling of the Spirit for effective evangelization.

Orthodox Pneumatology

While Rice spent most of his time promoting the empowering of the Spirit for evangelization, he possessed a conservative understanding of the Holy Spirit. Because Rice operated in an innovative, and changing environment it is worthwhile to briefly lay out his complete view of the Spirit in order to put his pneumatology in perspective and show his connection to historical orthodoxy.

When Rice spoke on the doctrine of the Spirit, he addressed a theologically conservative audience, and he spent most of his time speaking to fundamentalists on the practical implications of the doctrine. As a result, the more formal aspects of the Spirit were minimized. In his most significant work on pneumatology, the nature of the Holy

² Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 11.

³ Rice’s, *The Power of Pentecost*, was 431 pages long, while John R. Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book –The Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1969) was only 402 pages, a noteworthy fact considering how strong of an inerrantist Rice was.

Spirit covered a mere five pages (of 430).⁴ This work made it clear that Rice drew heavily from his evangelical predecessors, especially R. A. Torrey.⁵

Rice, in arguing for the personhood of the Spirit, freely used Torrey's threefold argument, "that the distinctive marks or characteristics of personality of the Holy Spirit are knowledge, feeling, and will."⁶ Though the Spirit did not have a body, "He is nevertheless a person, as definitely and really a personality as Christ is a personality [In Scripture] The Holy Spirit knows and wills and feels and acts as a person, and so He is a person."⁷ Further, the person of the Spirit was a part of the Trinity, in the orthodox tradition. Drawing from the doctrine of the inseparable operations of God, in which each person of the Trinity acts with the others, thus signifying their equality in divinity, Rice pointed to Scriptural examples such as Acts 10:38, 40 and 1 Peter 3:18, which attribute the Resurrection of Jesus to both God and the Spirit. Along with other examples, Rice concluded that the co-identification of the work equaled the unity of the divine nature.⁸ Here we find that Rice followed not only Torrey,⁹ but the Church Fathers as well (though almost certainly not intentional). This was seen clearly by comparing Rice to Basil of

⁴ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 35-40.

⁵ R. A. Torrey, *The Holy Spirit: Who He Is and What He Does* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1927).

⁶ Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 38.

⁷ Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 38.

⁸ Acts 10:38, 40; Acts 2:32; 1 Pet. 3:18, Rom. 8:11; Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 39-40.

⁹ R. A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches: A Thorough and Comprehensive Study of what the Bible has to Say Concerning the Great Doctrines of which it Treats* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933), 231-32.

Caesarea,¹⁰ in his fourth-century work *On the Holy Spirit*, where Basil used the same arguments for the Spirit's divinity from inseparable operations. Basil explained,

When we speak of the plan of salvation for men, accomplished in God's goodness by our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who would deny that it was all made possible through the grace of the Spirit? In the first place, the Lord was anointed with the Holy Spirit, who would henceforth be inseparably united to His very flesh, as it is written, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who . . . is my beloved Son," and "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit." . . . After His baptism, the Holy Spirit was present in every action He performed . . . Nor did the Spirit leave Him after His resurrection from the dead. When the Lord renewed mankind by breathing into His Apostles' faces, (thus restoring the grace which Adam had lost, which God breathed into him in the beginning) what did He say? "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."¹¹

Rice always sought to keep his theology within the stream of historic Christianity, and in this case he did.

A Distinct Work of the Spirit

Because Rice operated after the popularity of several innovative perspectives, such as Pentecostalism and dispensationalism, much of his energy was expended describing what 'the fullness of the Spirit' *was not*. This meant that he had to distinguish it from three things: the normal indwelling of the Spirit at salvation, other terminology referring to the same event, and the baptism of the believer into the spiritual church.

¹⁰ Basil, also called the Great, (329-379) was one of the Cappadocian fathers, and led the way in opposing Arianism and establishing an orthodox understanding of the Trinity, as well as writing on monasticism and other pastoral and theological issues. For more comprehensive introduction, see Stephen M. Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

¹¹ St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen Hildebrand (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 2011), 73-74.

‘The Fullness of the Spirit’ as a Second Work after Indwelling

Along with other conservatives, Rice believed that the Holy Spirit, upon conversion, took up residence in the individual Christian. In his explanation of John 20:22,¹² Rice noted the change from Old Testament believers to New Testament believers, commenting, “No doubt this has in mind the dispensational change that now the Holy Spirit is to live within their bodies . . . and from this time on, as far as we know, every Christian in the world, from the time of conversion, has the Holy Spirit abiding in his body. This is the plain statement of I Corinthians 6:19, 20 and Romans 8:9.”¹³ But, unlike some dispensationalists, this indwelling was distinct from “the fullness of the Spirit.” Rice went on to say,

But it is implied and intended that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is to be fruitful in the fullness of Holy Spirit power pouring out from the Christian Keep these two things separate: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit began in the day of the resurrection of Christ; the fullness of the Spirit for these disciples, a special endowment of power on High, came at Pentecost.¹⁴

Rice broke no new ground here; instead he followed in the steps of his spiritual and theological mentor, Torrey, who taught the same individual indwelling. Torrey asserted,

The Spirit of God dwells in the one thus born of the Spirit Some say that it is not the individual believer, but the church who is indwelt by the Spirit of God. But 1 Cor. 6:19 (‘What! Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?’) shows that Paul conceived of the individual believer as the temple of the indwelling Spirit.¹⁵

¹²“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you, And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”

¹³ John R. Rice, *The Son of God: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1976), 396.

¹⁴ Rice, *The Son of God*, 396-97.

¹⁵ Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches*, 249.

Torrey also made the same distinction between indwelling and fullness. Responding to critics of this separate work of the Spirit, he said,

it is argued still further that each believer has the Holy Spirit. This is also true in a sense. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' (Rom. 8:9.) But as we have already seen, it is quite possible to have something, yes much, of the Spirit's presence and work in the heart, and yet come short of that special fullness and work known in the Bible as the Baptism or Filling with the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

This was also the belief of Torrey's predecessor, D. L. Moody, though he did not leave as systematic an account. He related the same perspective in a question and answer format with Andrew Bonar¹⁷ at a Northfield conference:

Q. Is it right to pray to be "baptized by the Holy Ghost?"

A. In Acts 1:5, Christ says: "John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." That referred to Pentecost. But you will notice that after Pentecost that word is never used in that connection; it is always "filled"—"filled with the Spirit"—"full of the Holy Ghost." I don't know why it is, but it is a fact that after Pentecost the word was changed.

Q. Then, instead of praying that we may be baptized by the Holy Ghost, it is more Scriptural to pray that we may be filled.

A. Yes; more so.

Q. And we need, all of us, to pray to be filled.

A: Yes; the Spirit is dwelling in every believer, but from time to time even the Apostles needed to seek to be refilled.¹⁸

Though this formulation of a second work of the Spirit was not held by all evangelicals, it maintained a popular and widespread appeal due to the work of such prominent evangelists as Moody and Torrey. It also showed Rice's self-identified continuity with these men.

¹⁶ R. A. Torrey, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1897), 50.

¹⁷ Andrew Bonar (1810-1892) was a minister in the Free Church of Scotland, close friend and biographer of Robert Murray M'Cheyne, and youngest brother of hymnist Horatius Bonar.

¹⁸ D. L. Moody, *Bible Studies from Northfield* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1883), 185.

Biblical Terminology

As seen in Moody's account above, the terminology of this special work of the Holy Spirit was problematic. Rice recognized this problem, as well as the various ways the event at Pentecost was interpreted:

What shall we say happened at to the disciples at Pentecost? Shall we say that the waiting disciples got "a second blessing"? Shall we say that they got "a second work of grace"? Shall we say that at Pentecost the apostles and others who waited were "sanctified"? Certainly we ought to find some acceptable terminology that is true to Scriptures when we discuss the power that came at Pentecost upon the waiting disciples. We ought to use terms that mean what God meant when He talked about the blessing He gave at Pentecost, and we ought to use terms that are descriptive and accurate.¹⁹

Rice knew that if he was to emphasize this work of the Spirit, he would have to distance himself from charismatics who also used Pentecost as a model. So, he examined the popular definitions mentioned above, and he found them "misleading and inadequate," and open "to mean whatever people who use it want it to mean."²⁰ Rice did not find them objectional in themselves, only that they were extra-biblical and used by those who he felt had incorrect theology, especially of sanctification. He explained,

The terms "second blessing" and "the second work of grace" are terms used by Nazarenes and Holiness people, Free Methodists, Salvation Army members, and others who believe in what they call "entire sanctification." They believe that after salvation a second miraculous work may take place in the heart whereby one is freed from the carnal nature, freed from sin, and given Christian perfection. I do not believe this is taught in Scripture However, one can have many, many blessings after salvation.²¹

¹⁹ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 141.

²⁰ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 142.

²¹ John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1962), 166.

To combat these potential misunderstandings, Rice, true to his inerrantist background, urged his readers to rely only on the Scripture as the standard for definitions and vocabulary. Rice was confident that “we are always safer when we are on Biblical ground. We are always wise to use Bible terminology about matters which the Bible clearly discusses.”²²

Having rejected these definitions, Rice offered a list of five biblical terms: “1) ‘endued with power from on high,’ 2) ‘filled with the Holy Ghost,’ 3) ‘baptized with the Holy Ghost,’ 4) ‘I will pour out my spirit,’ 5) ‘the gift of the Holy Ghost.’ These terms are clearly used about the one identical blessing.”²³ Rice went to great lengths to establish that each of these terms was a synonym for the others, concluding that while the most common phrase in the Bible was “filled with the Holy Ghost,” the key explanatory description was “endowment of power.” For Rice, the purpose of the work of the Spirit was to give supernatural abilities to the Christian; it was a pragmatic gift, intended to produce results. Thus, other terms that detracted from this Spirit-power were to be avoided; Rice summarized, “If one wants to be clearly understood and to be true to the Bible, he probably should not use the terms ‘the second blessing’ or ‘a second work of grace,’ referring to the power of Pentecost. But he should teach that Christians need to be ‘endued with power from on high’; that Christians need to be ‘filled with the Spirit.’”²⁴ Rice was insistent that the language of Scripture emphasized two things about this Pentecost event: its purpose (power), and its source (the Spirit).

²² Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 141.

²³ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 144.

²⁴ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 172.

Different Baptisms

Though Rice’s convictions restricted his vocabulary to the Bible, it did not clear him of all linguistic confusion—the biblical phrase “baptism of the Spirit” was used in different ways in the Scripture. Rice admitted, “the term ‘baptism of the Holy Ghost’ has been badly misused, and so has come into disrepute among many good Christians With this in mind, we can understand why sound preachers and Bible teachers rarely speak of people being ‘baptized in the Holy Ghost.’”²⁵ Since Rice wanted Christians to emphasize this work of the Spirit, he felt it necessary to defend and clarify his understanding of the phrase.

Rice knew that the Bible used “baptism” in different ways, causing misunderstandings among Christians, but he understood the basic meaning of the word to mean an immersion or covering over, and he distinguished between the literal and figurative uses. Literally, the Bible spoke of the rite of water baptism: “There is one literal, physical baptism. It is the immersion of a believer in water.”²⁶ Then there was the figurative use, which Rice saw in three ways: 1) the immersion of someone into an experience, (e.g. “Jesus overwhelmed in suffering said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with”); 2) the baptism with the Spirit, in which a believer was “overwhelmed, covered, buried in the Holy Spirit in an enduement of power for witnessing;” 3) the inclusion of the believer into the spiritual church, where “the believer is made part of the body of Christ, buried in it, made part of it, by the Holy Spirit at conversion;” and 4) the

²⁵ John R. Rice, *Bible Doctrines to Live By* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), 223.

²⁶ Rice, *The Son of God*, 68.

identification of Israel with Moses in the Red Sea.²⁷ What Rice found most problematic was the identification of baptism *with* the Spirit for power and the baptism *by* the Spirit into the body. If these two were equated then the baptism the apostles experienced at Pentecost was not a special endowment of power for witnessing, but rather the origin of the church, the common dispensationalist perspective.

As discussed before, Rice did not believe the church began at Pentecost, but earlier, sometime after Christ was resurrected. He also did not believe that the Spirit was first given at Pentecost; that happened when Jesus met his disciples in the upper room. Instead, Rice maintained that the work of the Spirit at Pentecost was special power given for witnessing, the new work of church revival—which was repeatable for all churches and Christians. In other words, the baptism *with* the Spirit was at Pentecost, while baptism *by* the Spirit into the spiritual church was prior; so also for all Christians, first inclusion (baptism) into the body of Christ at conversion, then, subsequently, baptism with the Spirit for evangelism. The Spirit was the agent of both events, but in different ways. Rice explained, “When the Holy Spirit takes one and buries him into the body of Christ and makes him a part of that body at resurrection, it is not the same as ‘baptized with the Holy Ghost’ promised to the disciples by the Lord in Acts 1:5 and fulfilled at Pentecost.”²⁸ To conflate these two was a ultra-dispensational error, one Rice placed at the feet of Darby and his followers.²⁹ Instead, Rice instructed, “compare Acts 1:5 with 1 Corinthians 12:13 and you will see that being baptized in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and

²⁷ Rice, *The Son of God*, 68-69.

²⁸ John R. Rice, *Filled with the Spirit: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1963), 70.

²⁹ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 97-98.

baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ are two different baptism.”³⁰ Rice’s desire was that the second work of the Spirit would be sought after by Christians in order to evangelize. He was convinced that the “fullness of the Spirit” was missing in most Christians’ lives, partly because they did not know that it was a separate event.

Fullness of the Spirit

Rice believed that an essential part of evangelism was the power of the Holy Spirit given to the Christian. He called this gift from the Spirit by several names: “baptism,” “fullness,” “endowment,” “anointing,” all referring to the same event, namely, when the divine power of the Holy Spirit was shared with a Christian in a special, effectual, and practical manner. Rice distinguished this event from other works of the Spirit by its essential purpose and results: evangelization and conversions. He confidently asserted, “beyond any possibility of doubt that to be Spirit-filled means not anything else but to be empowered for witnessing and soul winning. The Holy Spirit may give various gifts when He comes in power, but he always when He fills a Christian, it is for soul-winning witnessing and service.”³¹

Purpose of the Fullness of the Spirit

Rice saw the meaning of the baptism with the Spirit as derived from the purpose of Pentecost in Acts 1-2. As mentioned before, Rice did not see this day as the beginning of the church, or a new dispensation, but as the perpetual model for the evangelical and revival work of the church. Rice repeated Moody’s interpretation:

³⁰ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 98.

³¹ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 123.

“Pentecost was simply a specimen day.”³² Thus, what happened at Pentecost was not merely descriptive, but prescriptive; it was the manual for how to have the same magnificent results for every Christian. This was the standard view of Moody’s followers, as seen in R. A. Torrey’s remarks on the day of Pentecost: “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit was not merely for the apostles, nor merely for those of the apostolic age It is for every believer in every age of the Church’s history.”³³ Rice, lamenting the loss of this prescriptive interpretation, said,

People who think of Pentecost as simply a technical beginning of a new dispensation miss the lesson that God gives us here. A dispensational event, long past, has no special message for us, they think. Hence they do not learn to wait on God for soul-winning and revival power as did the apostles and others before Pentecost. Being absorbed in a false meaning for Pentecost, they miss the true meaning.³⁴

Pentecost was the first powerful work of evangelism, and it was preceded by the filling of the Holy Spirit in the evangelists, and for Rice that gave the clearest definition of what the Spirit promised for all churches. Commenting on Acts 2, Rice noted,

There is a direct connection between verse 4 [“they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak . . . as the Spirit gave them utterance”] and verse 41 [“then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day were added unto them about three thousand souls.”] Remember the fullness of the Spirit . . . was to the purpose that ‘ye shall receive power . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto me.’ Soul-winning power on witnessing and on our preaching and teaching is the blessed result God has promised when we are filled with the Spirit.³⁵

Simply put, Rice endeavored to “show beyond any possibility of doubt that to be Spirit-

³² John R. Rice, *The Scarlet Sin and Other Revival Sermons* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1946), 223.

³³ Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches*, 278.

³⁴ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 90.

³⁵ Rice, *Filled with the Spirit*, 100.

filled means not anything else but to be empowered for witnessing and soul winning.”³⁶

The Necessity of the Fullness of the Spirit

Rice’s interpretation at Pentecost, merged with his driving desire for evangelism, made the filling of the Spirit a necessary part of the process. Since the “distinguishing mark at Pentecost was the power of God that helped them to win three thousand souls” then “that is exactly what we should seek today.”³⁷ Evangelism was impossible without the filling of the Spirit. Rice pronounced, “there are good churches . . . where the pastor believes the Bible and the people are generally converted, godly people, who want to see souls saved, and they even try to win souls but do not succeed because the pastor and the people are not filled with the Spirit.” This was Rice’s application of the prescriptive interpretation of Acts 1, where the disciples were commanded to wait until they were filled with power. Though they had been given a command to go into all the world and preach the gospel, they were first given a prerequisite, Rice asserted, “Wait!’ said Jesus. They were not to go powerless. They were not to go empty. They dared not depend on human learning or talent or personality to make their message effective. They must tarry in Jerusalem until they should be ‘endued with power from on high’!”³⁸ Rice even went so far as to say that the remedy for all the churches’ ills was this work of the Spirit. He believed that evangelism was the key to even the modernist problems of doctrine and behavior. This fresh baptism with the

³⁶ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 123.

³⁷ John R. Rice, *Some Serious, Popular False Doctrines Answered from the Scripture* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1970), 206.

³⁸ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 22.

Spirit

is the only antidote for the worldliness which has come in like a flood. It is the only antidote for modernism, that wicked rebellion against Christ and his Word, that infidelity in the pulpit and pew so prevalent these days. What we need is not simply the arguments of men . . . What we need is a demonstration of the power of God upon his minsters and His witnesses . . . there cannot be any great revival except by a mighty moving of the Holy Spirit.³⁹

If Christians wanted to see God move in this world, Pentecost had to be taken at face-value, understood as a model for all churches.

Because Rice's primary lens was evangelistic proclamation with the power of the Spirit, as he saw in Pentecost, he was willing to allow for the continued occurrence of the various miracles, as long as evangelism was the result. Since he saw the miracles as merely aids to evangelism, and Pentecost as an ongoing model, he believed God could continue to grant them for the same purpose. Using the gift of tongues as an example,⁴⁰ he admitted, "if there be an occasion and the need for it, then God could and would give this gift to some as He did at Pentecost. It was a very rare and unusual thing in Bible times, and very rarely needed. It would be rare now. It was never for anybody except as an occasion like this demanded it and people had faith for it, to get out the Gospel."⁴¹ This allowance for ongoing miracles showed Rice's commitment to his interpretation and the necessity of it for his view of evangelization.

But Rice did not see himself as an innovator. It was his conviction that his position located him in the heritage of faithful evangelists throughout church history. He

³⁹ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 10.

⁴⁰ As will be described later, Rice saw tongues as merely human foreign languages.

⁴¹ John R. Rice, *The Charismatic Movement* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1976), 50.

stated, “The greatest preachers down through the years, including Spurgeon, Moody, Torrey, and Finney, believed in a definite anointing with the Holy Spirit power as being necessary for the best preaching and soul winning.”⁴² His goal all along was to continue the model of ministry seen in the massively popular ministries of these men, which he believed was a result and proof of their biblical theology.

The Problem of Pentecostalism

In the twentieth century, one of the most controversial aspects of the Spirit’s work at Pentecost was speaking in tongues. This was one of the most frequent issues that Rice confronted; in fact, he devoted half of a book to it (the other half dealt with miraculous healing) in which he opposed the charismatic position.⁴³ Because Rice was zealous for evangelism, and believed that baptism with the Spirit was necessary for its effectiveness, he was concerned because the Pentecostal movement, which also emphasized the Spirit’s work, required tongues as a sign. Rice was certain that soul winning, not tongues, was the evidence of the fullness of the Spirit.

Moody, Torrey and New Challenges

The influences of Moody and Torrey are apparent in Rice’s theology of the Spirit, which was chronologically significant. In 1871, already well into his evangelistic career, Moody experienced his first “baptism with the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁴ As he related, he was,

⁴² John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 256.

⁴³ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*. The book is divided into two parts: “All about Tongues: Scriptural or Fraud?” and “Divine Healing & Healers: Some Healed, Many Not.”

⁴⁴ This was shortly after the Great Chicago Fire, which burned Moody’s church building.

crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well one day, in the city of New York—oh, what a day!—I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name I can only say that God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths, and yet hundreds were converted.⁴⁵

While Moody may have been reticent to speak of his first baptism, he would make it an emphasis in his ministry. This emphasis was picked up by his lieutenant Torrey, who took it to new heights, publishing *The Baptism with the Spirit* in 1895. Significantly, both men did not ascribe any particular event or experience to this baptism, except power for evangelism, as Torrey explained,

This power will not manifest itself in precisely the same way in each individual In my early study of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, I noticed that in many instances those who were so baptized "spoke with tongues," and the question came often into my mind: if one is baptized with the Holy Spirit will he not speak with tongues? But I saw no one so speaking, and I often wondered, is there any one today who actually is baptized with the Holy Spirit. This twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians cleared me up on that, especially when I found Paul asking of those who had been baptized with the Holy Spirit: "Do all speak with tongues?"⁴⁶

Two things can be seen here: one, Torrey did not see tongues as a sign of the Spirit baptism, and two, his reference to tongues was both offhand and self-discovered. Here was where Rice's approach was put into perspective: Rice drew his theology of Spirit baptism from Moody and Torrey, but Rice operated *after* the Pentecostal movement in the early 1900s.⁴⁷ When Torrey spoke of baptism and its evidences he was working in a

⁴⁵ William R. Moody, *The Life of D. L. Moody by His Son* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1980), 149.

⁴⁶ Torrey, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, 17-18.

⁴⁷ This modern Christian movement that required tongues as a sign of the fullness of the Spirit, can be traced to Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929) a sensational, unorthodox, American preacher, who, beginning in 1901, first linked tongues and baptism of Holy Spirit together. His fellow minister, William Seymour, began the 1906 Azusa Street Revival, the popular beginning of the Pentecostal movement (whose popularity caused a bitter separation between the two). For further detail, see Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 1993.

vacuum; Rice, however, using the same language as Torrey, was ministering alongside Pentecostals, who claimed the Spirit baptism, but required tongues as evidence.

Rice's Defense Against Pentecostalism.

Rice was intensely aware that the teaching he had inherited was threatened by this new perspective, and he was compelled to respond. In order to deal with this threat, Rice primarily used two defenses: the Scriptural account of tongues and an appeal to historic Christianity.

As a fundamentalist, Rice sought to make the Biblical text the foundation of his beliefs; thus, when the tongues issue was met, he relied most heavily on what he saw in Scripture. Rice had already committed himself “definitely and eternally that such matters should be settled by the Word of God, taken literally and at face value, and not by vision, or dreams, or emotional experiences.”⁴⁸ This partly explained why Rice was so adamantly against the Pentecostal position—he saw it as a product of human experience, not the Scriptures, a red flag for any fundamentalist. Rice took to the Bible to prove his case: “It seems wise to go through the New Testament and carefully examine every Scripture that discusses the matter of tongues.”⁴⁹

What he saw was that “tongues” in the Bible meant languages. And since it was plural it meant other languages than one’s own, as he explained, “‘tongues’ means natural foreign languages.”⁵⁰ Rice immediately limited the Pentecostal argument with this definition. While he agreed that the Bible spoke of a miraculous gift first mentioned

⁴⁸ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions*, 509.

⁴⁹ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*, 31.

⁵⁰ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*, 34.

at Pentecost in Acts 2, this miracle was not of an otherworldly type, and to insist otherwise was to misread the plain instruction of the text and others in Acts and 1 Corinthians, which he saw as practically given to refute Pentecostalism. Rice instructed, “the Bible is very, very careful, in this second chapter of Acts, to make clear that the languages were regular languages There is nothing spoken about an ‘unknown’ tongue, except as some languages were unknown to other people who speak other languages. Here is no ‘spiritual language,’ no ‘heavenly language.’”⁵¹ Rice even went so far as to criticize the translators of the venerable King James Version for aiding in this error: “Throughout the fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians translators inserted the word ‘unknown’ before the word ‘tongue,’ in many cases. That was a serious mistake, because the word is not in the Greek in this passage.”⁵²

In addition to tongues being ordinary languages, Rice also found that they were incidental to the main point: evangelism. In fact, Rice argued that while there are many times people in the Bible were filled with the Holy Spirit, tongues was mentioned only three times, causing Rice to exclaim, “It is a shock to careful and unbiased Bible students that anybody should claim that speaking in tongues is required evidence for the initial baptism or fullness of the Spirit, but that is widely held Pentecostal doctrine.”⁵³ In response to one Pentecostal author, Rice declared, “He ignores all the other times in the Bible when people were filled with the Holy Spirit: Jesus, Elisabeth, Mary, Zacharias, John the Baptist, the seven deacons in Acts 6, Stephen particularly in Acts 7, the Apostle

⁵¹ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 211.

⁵² Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 212.

⁵³ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*, 87.

Paul in Acts 9:17, Barnabas in acts 11:24, and elsewhere He ignores the fact that there is no command anywhere to talk in tongues or to seek to talk in tongues.”⁵⁴

Rice was so concerned about this teaching that he declared that it cut at the core of Christianity: “The Bible does not say anywhere that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To infer and say that is heresy and shows an improper irreverence toward the Word of God and its authority.”⁵⁵ For Rice, the only true evidence of the baptism of the Spirit was evangelistic results:

The point is that they are to receive power, to have witnessing power and to get people converted. That is the meaning of Pentecost. It isn’t that some were talking in other languages. It happens that some of them did talk in known languages that people understood, and these people heard the gospel in their own tongues in which they were born. That is alright, but that is an incident. It was not promised that it would be specially in these certain languages. That is not the point. The point is that they got power to witness for Jesus and get people saved.⁵⁶

Here again Rice followed in the theological footsteps of nineteenth-century evangelicals like Torrey, who saw tongues as secondary:

The gifts vary with the different lines of service to which God has called different people. The church is a body, and different parts of the body have different functions, and the Spirit imparts to the one baptized with the Spirit those gifts which fit him for the work to which the Spirit has called him. For example, many in the early church who were baptized with the Holy Spirit spake with tongues, *but not all*.⁵⁷

Rice was not merely making an argument over some bit of theology or church history—he felt he was defending the very task of evangelization. In his mind, if the Pentecostal

⁵⁴ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*, 89.

⁵⁵ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*, 92.

⁵⁶ Rice, *The Scarlet Sin*, 223.

⁵⁷ Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches*, 274, emphasis added.

view were to prevail, the possibility of wide-spread results of men like Moody and Torrey would be lost.

Rice insisted that his position on Spirit baptism, evidenced by soul-winning power not tongues, was not innovative; rather, “the historic Christian position for centuries had been that ‘baptized with the Spirit’ referred to enduement of power for soul winning.”⁵⁸ Based on this pragmatic definition Rice was able to look into history at preachers who recorded large numbers of conversions and mark them as filled with the Spirit. He even claimed that “these men, almost without exception, or entirely without exception, claimed to have upon them the power of the Holy Spirit, to be endued with power from on high. They were filled with the Holy Ghost. They themselves said so; their works have proved it.”⁵⁹ According to Rice, Pentecostal theology was the newcomer, lacking any support prior to the 1900s, and for a conservative fundamentalist, that sort of novelty was unacceptable.

In proving the historicity of his view Rice very briefly mentioned pre-modern men such as Savonarola, Martin Luther, and John Knox as evidence of soul winners who did not speak in tongues,⁶⁰ but the names that he repeated over and over, and spent lengthy paragraphs describing, were nineteenth and twentieth-century evangelicals like Charles Finney, Charles Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and Billy Sunday.⁶¹ Rice was necessarily confined to these examples because of his commitment to the evangelical

⁵⁸ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*, 75.

⁵⁹ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 234.

⁶⁰ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*, 97.

⁶¹ For example, see Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 391-412, where he devoted an entire chapter, “How Great Soul Winners Were Filled with the Holy Spirit,” to six nineteenth-century evangelists.

concept of the “baptism with Holy Spirit,” an idea that was prominent in the nineteenth century, but not before. Rice’s opposition to tongues stemmed partly from the lack of tongues in these formative evangelists, and he could not conceive of a sign of the filling of the Spirit that his model evangelists did not display. He dismissed his Pentecostal adversaries with these examples, declaring, “the most useful soul winners throughout the centuries have not talked with tongues.”⁶² In the place of charismatic practices he sharply challenged his readers with this alternative, “May I ask every honest Christian, Would you not rather have what D. L. Moody got than some jabber in a foreign language that doesn’t do anybody any good but simply show how pious you are?”⁶³

Because Rice wanted to see evangelism recovered in the image of nineteenth-century, city-wide revivals, and that would only happen by modeling after the leaders of that generation, Pentecostalism had to be rejected, and the special work of the filling of the Holy Spirit re-emphasized.

How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Rice’s ministry was designed to reach the average Christian, to bridge the gap between scholarship and daily living, and so his work was always aimed at application. Since Rice believed that evangelism was the overarching duty of every Christian, he sought to provide a straightforward, step-by-step path to receiving the fullness of the Spirit for that purpose.

In the spirit of the pragmatic Charles Finney, Holy Spirit power was not a mysterious work for Rice, he believed that there were clear steps that a person took in

⁶² Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 234.

⁶³ Rice, *The Charismatic Movement*, 67.

order to receive this power. Once again, he quotes directly from R. A. Torrey, who gave seven requirements for the fullness of the Holy Spirit:

1. Accept Jesus as Saviour.
2. Repent, that is, renounce all sin.
3. An open confession before the world of our renunciation of sin and our acceptance of Jesus Christ, as implied in baptism.
4. Obedience, doing everything God commands: that is, the unconditional surrender of the will to God.
5. Thirst, or holy desire for the Spirit's power.
6. Asking, definite prayer for this definite blessing.
7. Believe the promise and confidently expect God to do what He definitely promised to do.⁶⁴

Rice believed that Torrey's list was correct, and that anyone who "meets those seven requirements will be filled with the Spirit."⁶⁵ In his own formulation, Rice felt that the list could be simplified under two heads: obedience and prayer, though in practice, he included desire as well.

Evangelistic Obedience

Rice begins with the most practical step: obedience. "In Acts 5:32 Peter clearly says '...the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.' Wholehearted obedience is certainly one requirement of the fullness of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁶ Given Rice's fundamentalist emphasis on personal holiness, one would assume this meant some sort of daily faithfulness to the Scriptures or separation from "worldly amusements." However, Rice had a very specific application of obedience in mind:

Somebody says, 'Oh, I want to please God: I am going to quit the movies!' I hope you do! I think they are dirty and that a Christian ought not go to them. But that is

⁶⁴ Rice, *The Power of Pentecost*, 294, condensed from R. A. Torrey, *The Holy Spirit: Who He Is and What He Does* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1927), chap. 7.

⁶⁵ Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 294.

⁶⁶ Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 294.

only a snap of the finger A lot of people have given up going to picture shows but have never won a soul. Do you want to please God? Then get a passion that will make you say, “Lord Jesus, here I am You can have me, lock stock and barrel, to help keep people out of Hell.”⁶⁷

The primary command to be obeyed was soul winning; everything else was secondary to reaching people. Since the Spirit-power was only given for evangelism, one must be entirely committed to obeying that primary command to evangelize in order to receive it.

Rice’s call to obedience was a single-minded focus on soul winning, so he asked,

Are you ready to lay self on the altar, count self dead, crucified? And when self is crucified, will you come and follow Jesus, do what He says about soul winning? That is the kind of obedience the Bible is talking about. If you are not setting out to win souls with a holy passion, you do not mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸

Rice was calling for evangelism to become the primary command, enveloping all others commands, and thus obeying it was a determining factor in receiving the evangelistic power of the Holy Spirit.

Persistent Prayer

In his commentary on Acts, Rice, drawing from his prescriptive hermeneutic, noted the need for tenacious prayer in order to be filled with the Spirit, as found in Acts 1:14: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” He warned, “We dare not dismiss these ten days of persistent prayer and supplication in the upper room as an incidental matter, or as peculiar to that time and place. No, there is a Bible principle that always those who need the fullness of the Holy Spirit, power to do God’s work, need

⁶⁷ John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice Goes to College* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1977), 131.

⁶⁸ Rice, *The Scarlet Sin*, 232.

to wait on Him and plead till they be endued with power from on high.”⁶⁹ Rice was convinced that Christians would not receive the power of the Spirit until they specifically prayed for it and the length of time spent in prayer was indeterminate. This persistent, often long-term, prayer was necessary for several reasons—the confession of sin, the conforming of the soul to God’s will, and the need for suffering before reward. Rice found this pattern of prayer in Scripture and he pointed the reader to numerous accounts of people praying for various lengths of time before receiving the Spirit, both in the Old Testament and the New. He saw the accounts of Elisha, Paul, and the disciples (at Pentecost and after), as definitive in mandating the need for prayer to precede the reception of the Spirit.

As seen in so many other areas, Moody and other nineteenth-century evangelists had an outsized influence on Rice’s vision of Christianity, and persistent prayer for the Spirit was no different. He often recounted Moody’s experience, including the long period of perseverance that was required: “It took D. L. Moody some two years of heartbroken waiting on God to be filled with the Holy Spirit in mighty power . . . he kept on pleading with God until he was wonderfully anointed from Heaven.”⁷⁰ Even more extreme was Rice’s example of Welsh evangelist Evan Roberts, who “prayed for thirteen years before the mighty revival for which he prayed for came,[sic] and that the fulness of the Spirit made him the great soul winner that he became.”⁷¹ It was apparent that these men set a pattern for Rice, though he was careful to preface their stories with a

⁶⁹ Rice, *Filled with the Spirit*, 54.

⁷⁰ Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 389.

⁷¹ Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 409. Roberts (1878-1951) was the leading figure in the 1904-1905 Welsh revival.

doctrinal caveat, cautioning, “It is not wise to base a doctrine upon human experiences.”⁷²

Yet, perhaps more telling, he concluded the various accounts in that chapter with a weighty caution:

I leave this chapter feeling that every reader will be held accountable to God for what he does about the overwhelming testimonies of the great soul-winning giants of the centuries who say that they themselves were mightily filled with the Holy Spirit for soul winning, and in answer to prayer May God speak to every humble heart who read and make him willing to receive the testimony of those upon whom God has breathed in His might power.⁷³

This seriousness about the matter revealed how much Rice desperately wanted to see evangelism grow, and he believed this desire was also necessary for everyone who wanted to receive that special blessing of the Spirit. Though he did not list this desire as a requirement for the filling of the Spirit, it essentially became one. He consistently called obedience and prayer the two conditions, but that deep desire was a sort of key. He promised, “if the Holy Ghost becomes so overmasteringly in your life that you will say, ‘O God, I can’t live without this power. I will not go on without it! I’ll die if I do not have it,’ you will get it.”⁷⁴ The other two requirements would never be reached if first the heart of the Christian was not gripped with a craving for the Spirit. Rice explained,

A sincere, deep-seated desire is itself a condition of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. There are two other conditions to the fullness of the Holy Spirit. One is wholehearted obedience to Christ’s soul winning command (Acts 5:32) and another is prevailing, importune prayer (Luke 11:8,13). But before you set out to meet any other conditions you had better earnestly examine your own heart to see if you really want to be filled with the Holy Spirit!⁷⁵

With typical revivalistic fervor, Rice called for a passionate, crisis moment, one that set

⁷² Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 391.

⁷³ Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 412.

⁷⁴ Rice, *Dr. Rice Goes to College*, 132.

⁷⁵ Rice, *Power of Pentecost*, 365.

the heart on fire for God, which he believed was sure to produce the desired results.

Rice offered his audience a promise of a powerful experience, and a simple, though strenuous, path to becoming filled with the Holy Spirit. Reinforced by the stories of past heroes, Rice devoted his whole life to bringing the power of Pentecost, interpreted by the spirit of Moody, to the average twentieth-century Christian.

Conclusion

Rice grew up in an age that had just missed the spectacular careers of Moody, Torrey, and Sunday, and he longed to return to those days. It was both his conviction and his passion that the interpretation and ministry model of these men was consistent with true Christianity and the necessary paradigm for effective evangelism. Rice dedicated himself to the task of recovering the legacy of those men, as well as battling with usurpers like the Pentecostals. He doggedly proclaimed the need for a return to Acts and the great work at Pentecost as the marching orders for every church and Christian. Rice, true to his fundamentalist spirit, saw the matter of evangelism as black and white: there was no real Christian life without soul winning, and there was no soul winning without the baptism of the Spirit.

CHAPTER 8

SOCIAL ISSUES

Rice was both a social conservative and an evangelist. He was keen to protect and preserve the social mores and institutions that were threatened in the cultural upheaval of the twentieth century—this led to sermons against modern hairstyles, the dangers of alcohol, and the evils of the motion picture.¹ Rice never shied away from any subject he perceived a threat to righteous living. Yet his passion for evangelism motivated his outspoken social activism. His goal was to reveal sin and bring sinners to repentance; the more direct the preaching the more likely the repentance. Rice saw his role as an evangelist necessitate detailed preaching against sin. But while his evangelistic motivation was as old as Christianity, his criterion for sin went to the heart of fundamentalism: authority—lawbreaking was the root of sin. This was clearly seen in his high, but inconsistent, view of America, which he considered a God-ordained, Christian nation—defiance of her laws was defiance of God’s laws.

Faithful Preaching was Hard Preaching

Rice sought to oppose the sins of the modern age because he believed they led to hell (as did all sin), and the only way to prevent that end was to condemn them openly

¹ John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941); John R. Rice, *The Double Curse of Booze* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1960); John R. Rice, *What’s Wrong with the Movies?* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1938).

and specifically. Rice was convinced that it was the modernistic way that was preventing revivals, hindering soul winning, and allowing Satan to drag people down, both in society and in the church. Rice, who saw preaching as the primary means of influencing change, believed that the biblical and historically Christian method was confrontational, not just calling for repentance from sin in a general sense, but specifically targeting it. He warned, “The late General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, feared the coming of a day when men would preach ‘salvation without regeneration, faith without repentance, Heaven without Hell.’ That time is upon us.”² Rice interpreted this balance of salvation and judgement in a very specific way; the preacher was to name and rail against the individual sins he saw in the world. Rice did not just preach self-control, he preached, “The Double Curse of Booze;”³ he did not just call for sexual purity, he preached, “What’s Wrong with the Dance: Child of the Brothel, Sister of Drunkenness, Lewdness, Divorce and Murder, the Mother of Lust—A Road to Hell!”⁴ Understandably, this type of pointed, culturally-conditioned approach was controversial, but Rice saw lack of agreement on the subject as sinful compromise, an unwillingness to preach the hard truth. Modern evangelists were characterized as silent on the dangers of sin, preaching only a ‘positive evangelism’ that sought to avoid the harshness of Rice’s approach. He disapprovingly related one such example:

The other day a minister, leaving the pulpit of a prominent church, announced that he was entering the field as a full-time evangelist; that he felt there was a particular need for a positive evangelism, by which he meant, doubtless, and evangelism with no don’ts in it, no preaching against sin. He has heretofore plainly gone on the

² William Booth (1829-1912), an English Methodist evangelist, founded the Salvation Army in 1865 as a means to meet the needs of the poor, both spiritually and physically. John R. Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1946), 3.

³ Rice, *The Double Curse of Booze*.

⁴ Rice, *What’s Wrong with the Dance*.

record against any preaching which denounces sin.⁵

Challenges to Preaching: Fear of Man

Rice perceived the fear of man to be one of the roots of this problem. As evangelists sought to schedule meetings, they felt pressure to not rock the boat, lest they lose meetings and the support of churches. This was especially relevant for Rice and many of his followers, who, having left the Southern Baptist Convention, now operated independently and personal connections were vital for survival.⁶ This independence often brought a desire for accommodation, as Rice explained anecdotally, “Some time ago a famous preacher, a Bible teacher, wrote me about a suggested code for evangelists, and he wanted me to add the statement that evangelists should never discuss worldly amusements and modern sins since he had found that often displeased the people and made them dislike evangelists!”⁷ Rice sympathized with this concern, especially among less-established preachers, some of whom were still unsure if they should follow Rice as an independent or stay in the safety of the status quo, so he pleaded,

Young preacher, do not be taken in by the sophistry of the time-serving preachers who do not preach against sin. Do not be influenced by denominational leaders who fear you will cause a disturbance in your church. Do not be too much moved by the pleadings of your wife who is afraid that you will have your salary lowered or that you will be out of a job with no place to go. Be faithful to Christ and Christ will be faithful to you.⁸

In Rice’s evaluation, this pressure, both internal and external, led many preachers to leave the biblical path, even those who knew better. This desire to be held in esteem by their

⁵ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, 4.

⁶ One of the purposes of Rice’s paper, *The Sword of the Lord*, was to build a network to support independent Baptist evangelists, since they worked outside of traditional denominational support, Bill Rice, “Announcing Sword Extension Department,” *Sword of the Lord*, January 7, 1949.

⁷ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, 4.

⁸ Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners*, 137.

listeners led to compromise, and Rice criticized some preachers who

frankly admit that there needs to be preaching against sin—sharp plain Bible preaching to bring conviction, to lead sinners to repentance and God’s people to renunciation of the things of this world and a holy life—yet they sometimes are unwilling to suffer the odium and criticism that comes on a preacher who rebuked sin.⁹

Rice saw spiritual weakness at the root of this attitude, and a refusal to follow the plain teaching and examples in Scripture. He noted that John the Baptist was bold in naming sins in his preaching, but that “the preachers today who plead that they must preach only ‘a positive message,’ that preaching against sin is ‘a negative message,’ certainly do not follow the pattern of this great man of God, one of the greatest ever born of woman, Jesus said.”¹⁰ However, this sinful behavior was not limited to the weak of heart, it was also indicative of the modern age’s rejection of historic Christianity.

Challenges to Preaching: Modernism

As a fundamentalist, Rice saw a basic divide between those who held to the conservative, historic faith and those who adopted the modern way. The real source of opposition for his method of preaching were the theological liberals, who, having denied the Scripture, inevitably stopped preaching it faithfully. It was a simple test: “No man can preach or teach all the Bible who does not teach and preach against sin, who does not name and denounce particular sins and call for repentance.”¹¹ It was not the weak Christian that was the problem, but the apostate modernist, who, having made an alliance

⁹ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, 4.

¹⁰ Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners*, 135.

¹¹ Rice, *Why Preach Against Sin?*, 9.

with the world, sought to undermine true preaching. Rice explained, “The ungodly world has a saying, ‘Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative.’ Modern and liberal preachers have scorned what they called ‘negative preaching,’ that is, preaching against sin.”¹² In Rice’s mind, to preach against sin was to be faithful to God, to refuse was to capitulate to Satan. And in his concern for what he thought God wanted most, the conversion of souls, he saw this sort of hard preaching as essential for the work of evangelism: “Men never called a doctor until they are sick. If you get a sinner lost enough, you can get him saved, by which I mean only men convinced and convicted of their sin and their danger repent and turn to Christ.”¹³

The Necessity of Hard Preaching for Evangelism

Joel Carpenter characterized fundamentalist preaching as a method of control, indicative of what he saw as self-righteous bullying, a way to distinguish and fortify the faithful from the world. He singled out Rice as “one of the most famous and widely read of the fundamentalist behavioral guardians.”¹⁴ Though this dictatorial spirit may have been true of fundamentalism in general, Rice’s motivations were more complicated. Rice valued and mirrored his white, Southern, Protestant background, but he did not see the preservation of that conservative culture as the ultimate goal of his preaching. The pointed nature of his sermon was meant to pin down his hearers’ consciences, not to give them a separate identity from the modern world, but to force them to face the reality of

¹² Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners*, 186-87.

¹³ Rice, *Great Truths for Soul Winners*, 187.

¹⁴ Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66-67, 270.

their rebellion against God. Vague, general preaching was insufficient to do this, it was only when the preacher unambiguously called for repentance of specific sins that the sinner would feel the conviction. Rice was focused on conversion, and he preached against those things he saw standing in the way of that.

Outward-focused and Optimistic

As an inerrantist and a Biblicist Rice had multiple motivations to preach against sin. He gave five reasons a faithful preacher would do so:

First, because Christians are against sin, God is against sin, the Bible is against sin, the churches are against sin, and the moral consciences of even unsaved people are against sin. Second . . . to preach or teach all of the Bible necessarily involves preaching and teaching that part which denounces sin, particular sins. Third, because the Bible plainly commands preachers to preach against sin. Fourth, because Bible preachers, including the Lord Jesus Christ, preached against sin. Fifth, because preaching against sin brings revival of Christians and salvation of sinners.¹⁵

This list could be boiled down to two heads: being faithful to Scripture and evangelism. As a separatist, dispensationalist, and fundamentalist, Rice's frequent cultural and social denunciations could look like an attempt to protect the purity of the church against the evil intrusion of the world. But Rice's evangelistic focus prevented this insular worldview. Rather, he was outward focused, seeking to win the world, to confront them in order to change them. Though Rice often assumed a great deal about the Christianity of American culture and values, as well as the reliability of his own interpretation of Scripture and culture, his goal was not to retreat, but to advance. Rice, unlike many of his dispensational peers, was optimistic, drawing from the ethos of Moody, Torrey, and Sunday, who saw massive cultural and personal changes as a result of their preaching.

¹⁵ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, 5.

This pre-fundamentalist optimism was tied to Rice's evangelistic fervor, and his preaching was harsh, but hopeful. He was confident that conversions were all but guaranteed as a result of faithful preaching. In order to see this success with unbelievers two things were required: an effective witness and the conviction of sin.

An Effective Witness

In Rice's Southern historical context, Christianity was ubiquitous, especially in the first half of his life, which meant that even unbelievers had certain expectations of how Christians would behave (for better or worse).¹⁶ Rice felt that the modern 'positive' preaching undermined the witness of the preacher because even the world perceived it as avoiding the truth. His first reason for preaching against sin, given above, was partly because the lost person's conscience recognized its own fallen nature and would naturally identify with a message confronting that problem. Rice believed that the lost world expected Christians to speak openly against sin, and if they failed, the unbeliever would consider it hypocrisy. In order to gain a hearing for the gospel, it was necessary to take a strong stand; this was what the world expected, he explained, "This world had not confidence in any kind of Christianity that is not against wrong, against unrighteousness, against the bad and wicked things that men and women do."¹⁷

This applied to public behavior as well, such as drinking alcohol, which Rice assumed was socially recognized as a vice. He asserted, "The wickedest old sinner in the community would lose his respect for any Christian if he knew that Christian drank a

¹⁶ Rice was born in Texas in 1895 and began ministry in the 1920s.

¹⁷ Rice, *Why Preach Against Sin?*, 6.

glass of beer with meals.”¹⁸ The preacher who did not openly oppose sin would never receive a hearing with the lost and Rice used his own evangelistic successes as proof:

It was during prohibition days, and I preached boldly against grocers who sold malt for making home brew, against druggist who carried whiskey, and the doctors who prescribed it to people who were not sick. I even collected evidence and read from the pulpit the names of bootlegging doctors. Yet, though preachers thought I was too sensational, drunkards flocked to hear me and many were saved. One man who had spent five years in the state penitentiary on the conviction of bootlegging He told me that he wanted a preacher who was honest and who was against sin to come and tell him how to get right with God.¹⁹

To seek to evangelize without hard preaching was fruitless, Rice maintained, a hypocrisy that the whole world could see. Rice appealed to the common sense of the average person, contrasted with the soft, foolish religious person. It was hard preaching that reached hard people, he explained, “even the unconverted, even outrageous sinners themselves know that a preacher ought to be against sin and ought to say so.”²⁰ Rice, instead of avoiding a bold style, relished the reputation, seeing it an aid to evangelism, not the hinderance his more “cultivated” peers warned. Once sinners knew a preacher was honest and forthright, then they would listen to the message, where the actual work of conversion would happen.

Conviction of Sin

On the surface, Rice’s detailed, culturally-conditioned preaching looked like an attempt to hold together a semblance of the past, to restrain the wheels of history as it left his beloved Christian South behind. But at a deeper level, Rice’s message was much

¹⁸ John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1962), 95.

¹⁹ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, 6.

²⁰ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, 6.

more ancient: repent and believe. Of course, Rice was concerned with the breakdown of society, a sentiment shared by most people, especially during the post-war years, and he believed that the loss of Christian morals was a detriment to America. But more profoundly, he saw the need to confront social ills in order to bring the hearer to a sense of his personal failure, and thus to his need for a savior.

Rice believed that to become a Christian was to have a profound heart change, to repent, and this was precipitated by a confrontation. “In the very nature of the case,” Rice explained, “people do not repent of their sins until they are conscious and convicted of their sins.”²¹ This meant that the sides had to be clear; Christ must be preached according to Scripture as the object of faith, but, just as importantly, sin had to be preached clearly so that the sinner could be confronted with their own need. More than that, they needed confrontation so blunt as to shock them into seeing the grievous nature of their sin. Rice did not employ harsh preaching simply to draw crowds, but as a means to an end. “Away with these nice, easy sermons,” he cried, “that do not stir anyone’s fears, do not bring any tears, do not lead men to repent! Away with this preaching that leaves sinners asleep in their sins, undisturbed, and self-satisfied. Oh, God give us the kind of preaching that makes men tremble as they think about Hell and judgement to come!”²² The only way to produce true evangelism was to strike at the sinner’s heart. Rice saw faith and repentance as inseparable, and repentance came when the sins were brought before the sinners’ eyes forcefully. Thus, to avoid hard topics, or preach only of grace, was to hide Christ—why would a sinner want Christ if he were not conscious of

²¹ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin*, 17.

²² Rice, *Great Truth for Soul Winners*, 140.

his sin, did not feel the need of a Saviour?”²³

This was not a fundamentalist idea, Rice argued, but the pattern of all faithful evangelists. He saw this justification for confronting sin throughout church history:

Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, Charles H. Spurgeon all agreed that preaching to bring repentance and an honest running to God must include preaching on sin. And all the great evangelists had the same conviction and the same practice—D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, Charles G. Finney, J. Wilbur Chapman, Billy Sunday and many more—all, all preached against sin and based a hope of revival on the fact that the Spirit of God would use the Word of God to convict men of sin.²⁴

Rice was convinced he was following the pattern laid down for him by the successful evangelists he sought to duplicate. His denunciation of drinking, dancing, and movies may have seemed stereotypical of a twentieth-century fundamentalist, but Rice pointed to nineteenth-century evangelicals as his model, who also preached against cursing, drinking, Masonry, dancing, and theater attendance.²⁵ Rice regarded himself as a normal Christian evangelist, who, like his predecessors, sought to confront sin in order to win souls. He declared, “Every evangelist knows that if he is to have genuine repentance on the part of lost people, he must preach against sin. There is no indication that any Bible preacher ever was able to turn people to God and lead people to repentance if he did not preach against sin.”²⁶ Anything less than hard, specific preaching against the common sins of society was a dead end in evangelism.

²³ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, 19.

²⁴ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 29-30.

²⁵ Rice, *Why Preach against Sin?*, 24-25

²⁶ John R. Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), 29.

“What Is Sin?”

“Sin leads to Hell.”²⁷ This simple belief drove Rice’s preaching, but it also raised the question ‘What *is* sin?’ Rice’s first source was the Bible, but he also knew that it must be applied to the listener’s life; this was the individual Christians job, but especially the preacher’s. “O God,” he pleaded, “raise up preachers who would apply the truth of God to their immediate sins and problems and needs, and who use current events as a warning of the judgement of God which awaits unrepentant sinners!”²⁸ Rice was always ready to offer his perspective, and since specificity was the goal, nothing was off topic. He answered questions from concerned readers of every sort, from “Is ventriloquism wrong?” and “Is the space program wrong?” to more serious, even taboo topics, such as “If a girl is in love with a girl instead of loving a boy—what can she do?”²⁹ But he mostly dealt with those things that concerned white, Protestant conservatives, such as alcohol, race, politics, and ‘worldly’ amusements, and his answers were fairly consistent with his demographic. How did he come to those conclusions though? To determine what was sin, Rice interpreted and applied one thing: authority. This first applied to the ultimate authority, the Bible, but it also meant the application of that authority.

²⁷ John R. Rice, *The Gospel that Has Saved 16,000 Souls* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1974), 184.

²⁸ John R. Rice, *Soul-Saving Sermons for Sinners* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1963), 14.

²⁹ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 531-43. Rice answered ‘no’ to the first two questions. For the last, Rice, while still holding a conservative view of homosexuality, gave a remarkably kind and patient answer for a fundamentalist in the 1970s. He basically said to abstain from physical relationships, though friendships could remain, and that over time God would help past the loneliness and desire. The most important thing was to remain faithful to prayer and Bible reading on a daily basis. There was no call for any severe, or even public, measures.

The Preeminence of Authority

Twentieth-century America was a volatile place, especially for a conservative Christian. The world was changing and fundamentalists were waging war on multiple fronts: feminism, liberalism, traditional morality, and more. Rice saw in all of this a basic problem: the lack of respect for authority. Authority was the foundation for life, as Rice saw evidenced by the inerrant Scripture's central role as the revealer of God's rule over people. This essential concept of authority was key to identifying and confronting sin—sin was the rejection of proper authority: “What is wrong with America is lawlessness. Lawlessness is another word for sin. Satan himself is the lawless one, and all rebellion against authorities that God put over us is wicked, and it comes from wicked hearts.”³⁰ The refusal to submit or acknowledge proper authority removed any fear of consequences, and thus no need for a savior from those consequences. The “positive gospel” avoided God's judgement, Rice argued, and left men undisturbed in their sins. Rice was certain this would lead people to destruction: “These days it is not popular for preachers to preach on Hell America will go to Hell soon unless we have that kind of preaching to build respect for law and right and to build a fear of sin and to make men tremble at the thought of meeting God.”³¹ Sin was defying God's authority, wherever it was revealed. Rice taught that God had handed down an orderly system in the world, one that began with his rule as revealed in the Bible, but was manifested in daily life in other forms, primarily in the headship of the father over the family, the pastor over the church,

³⁰ John R. Rice, *God's Authority in Home, Government, and the Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968).

³¹ John R. Rice, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1965), 73.

and the government over the citizen. These structures were sacred and absolute. Rice's formulation of authority in the social life of Christians was his key for understanding sin, but was also conditioned by his white, American culture. A look at one aspect of this, government authority, will reveal how Rice utilized a culturally-conditioned template for identifying sin.

The American Government

John R. Rice loved the United States of America. He believed that God had done a special work in the country, and that, despite its recent failures, was a place that deserved high honor and respect; in fact, America was “most blessed of all nations.”³² Like all blessings, Rice interpreted this as a sign of obedience to God, as he explained, “these blessings on America grew largely from our Christian heritage.” Rice saw the founding of America as a deliberate, sacrificial attempt to create a nation under God's authority, and as a result it had reaped the reward of faithfulness. Rice was certainly not taking a unique position here, as patriotism was an integral part of conservative life, especially after the world wars. Rice attempted to preserve the separation of church and state by distinguishing between formal denominational Christianity, and general approval of Christianity, though he managed to water that definition down enough to include Catholicism. He claimed,

The heritage of America is not distinctly Protestant heritage, not distinctly a Catholic heritage. It is not distinctly Baptist, but it is distinctly Christian. When we put it in our Constitution that no denomination should be promoted above others and there should be no state church, it was never the intention of our Founders to do away with the influence of Christianity and the Bible. Infidels today, in colleges and politics and new deal programs, would like to do away with all Christian influences and Bible and prayer in the school, but that was not the plan, the

³² John R. Rice, *Blessed America!* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1977), 1.

intention, nor the practice of our Founding Fathers. America was built on Christian influence.³³

Rice saw no need to distinguish between the Christian and the American. Based on the witness of the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, inscriptions of “In God We Trust” on coins, and the example of leaders like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Robert E. Lee, Rice concluded that “America has officially through the years taken the position that the Lord God is our God, that America at least claims to be, and the best in America hope to be, a Christian America.”³⁴ This Christian heritage was what Rice urged his listener to defend, as the trajectory of the twentieth century threatened to abandon it.

It was the duty of every Christian to preserve and promote this heritage, Rice taught, going so far as to declare, “One who is not a patriotic citizen is not a good Christian.”³⁵ But this command was not simply because of America’s supposed piety, it was because of the what Rice saw in Scripture: obedience to God-given authority. Rice cited Romans 13:1-4 to show the duty of the Christian to the state:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

³³ Rice, *Blessed America!* 5.

³⁴ John R. Rice, *Bible Doctrines to Live By* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), 295-305.

³⁵ John R. Rice, *Let Us Save Our God-Given American Heritage* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975), 24.

Rice found clear grounds for requiring Christians to uphold the power of the state, not because it was inherently good, but because it was an extension of God's authority. Rice commented,

Notice 'the powers that are ordained of God.' Patriotism is a Christian virtue. Patriotism and Christianity go together. One is not a good Christian who is not a patriot, who doesn't love his country, who doesn't obey the laws. He may be saved, yet he is a rebel in society and a very poor Christian . . . Patriotism and the Bible Christianity go together. Godliness and patriotism are akin. So the great patriots of America have been godly men.³⁶

When Rice combined America's Christian heritage and the biblical commands it was simple to equate civic and religious duties. Thus, the evangelistic preacher, seeking to raise awareness of sin and need for a savior, could evoke love of country, and especially the duty of obedience to the government.

The call to patriotism was a moral issue in Rice's mind. The lack of morality in America was a direct result of rebellion against God's laws, which were practically synonymous with America's laws. Rice lived in a tumultuous time, his diagnosis was rejection of authority, and his answer was a reemphasis on law and order. He warned, "If you don't have law enforcement, and if you don't have honest people obeying the law and citizens backing up the law, what are you going to have? Anarchy."³⁷ Rice did not view this as a practical matter, but a direct cause-and-effect path to Hell. He argued,

Notice further that all morality and righteousness is wrapped up in this matter. Do you know why hippies so often are dope addicts? Because they are rebelling against society, they rebel against morals also. Do you know why in the rebellions in the colleges men got on loud-speakers and shouted obscene and dirty, filthy language of the gutter? Because those who are against law are for immorality and dirt and adultery and filth.³⁸

³⁶ Rice, *God's Authority*, 11.

³⁷ Rice, *God's Authority*, 17.

³⁸ Rice, *God's Authority*, 18.

Rice was not merely advocating for patriotism, or decency, he was seeking to save souls from judgement. The rejection of government authority led people down a path to deeper sins, and hardened them to the gospel. If Rice was to evangelize, he had to confront what he saw as the sin that separated men from God. Peoples relationship to authority was the testament to their standing before God, and those who were “against plain Bible preaching and against the authority of the Bible, also talk against the authority of the government. They do not want God to send an unrepentant sinner to Hell, and they do not want the government which acts as the minister of God to put a murderer to death. But the Bible is clear on this matter.”³⁹ If Christians wanted to see people repent, they must call for a respect for authority, especially the American government.

The Paradox of Civil Rights

Rice’s emphasis on law and order as Christian duty ran him head on into the Civil Rights Movement, which happened almost simultaneously with his ministry career. For most of his ministry Rice tried to stay clear of the racial issue. He was often ahead of his time on issues of equality, but ultimately, he was more often a part of the problem than a part of the solution. He felt that civil rights fell outside of the message of the gospel, and was a social issue similar to poverty. He opposed the Civil Rights Movement for several reasons, but his greatest objection was the civil unrest it produced.

For an early twentieth-century, white, Southern fundamentalist, Rice was a moderate on the race issue. On one side was his fellow Texan fundamentalist, J. Frank

³⁹ Rice, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith*, 73

Norris, who publicly supported the Ku Klux Klan, even hosting them in his church,⁴⁰ and his own father, who was a member of the Klan.⁴¹ On the other side was Billy Graham, who worked closely with Rice in his early years, but became more progressive, eventually denouncing racial segregation. Rice's position was much more muted, falling between these two paths.⁴²

On the side of equality, he denounced open racism, arguing for the equality of all races by virtue of common creation. He said, "People of all races are members of the same family. We are blood brothers."⁴³ Because of his inerrantist view of Scriptures, especially the creation story, he believed that all humans were descendants from the same family. He declared, "All the black people, all the white people, all the yellow race, all the brown race—all the way from the bushmen of Australia . . . or the people in the American Congress—all are descendants of Eve."⁴⁴ This coincided and supported Rice's evangelistic focus; the human race was equal, both in sin and in potential for salvation. He asserted, "God is just as anxious for a Negro man to be saved as for a white man to be

⁴⁰ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 6, 1924. Two years previous, two members of the Klan presented him a bouquet of flowers immediately before he took the pulpit to preach on a Sunday night. After he received them, he made a few remarks about opposing "bootleggers and dope peddlers." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 22, 1922.

⁴¹ John R. Rice, *Lodges Examined by the Bible* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1943), 25.

⁴² Rice thought very highly of his father, admitting, "I remember with joy the reverence I had for my own father and my unbounded trust in him If my father said a thing was right, I felt it was right I revere the memory of my father now. Before he went to heaven in 1930, I always held him in profound respect." John R. Rice, *The Home: Courtship, Marriage, Children* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1946), 88. This helps explain how Rice could indulge racism. He struggled with his respect for his father while rejecting his more extreme views on race. By moving past the position of his father, his model for virtue, Rice probably felt that he had left behind racism altogether. The status his father held in his life seems to have inoculated Rice against further critique of his own culture and upbringing.

⁴³ John R. Rice, *Negro and White* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1956), 5.

⁴⁴ John R. Rice, *"In the Beginning": A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on Genesis* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975), 117.

saved. And exactly the same offer is made, the same plan of salvation is announced I believe there will be no distinctions in heaven on the basis of color and race.”⁴⁵ This egalitarian but individualistic evangelism was typical of revivalism since the eighteenth century, as one historian explained: “The individualistic emphasis of revivalism, with its intense concentration on inward conversion, fostered an inclusiveness which could border on egalitarianism. Evangelicals did not hesitate to preach the necessity of conversion to racially mixed congregations. Revivalistic preachers had little doubt—indeed were enthusiastic—about the capacity of slaves to share in the experience of conversion.”⁴⁶ It focused on the issues of the individual’s need for salvation while never confronted the systemic issues of slavery and racism.⁴⁷

Rice went a step further and extended to legal standing as well, declaring, “Every person is equal before the law. One is not kept from citizenship because of his race or his previous condition of servitude. The Negro has a right to vote just as well as the white man. The Negro has a right to run for office and try to be elected just the same as the white man.”⁴⁸ Rice’s view of Jim Crow laws was more progressive than many other fundamentalists, like his close friend Bob Jones, Sr., who publicly advocated for legal segregation.⁴⁹ Rice opposed Jim Crow (though his opposition was subdued,)

⁴⁵ Rice, *Negro and White*, 6.

⁴⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 136.

⁴⁷ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 26.

⁴⁸ Rice, *Negro and White*, 6.

⁴⁹ Bob Jones Sr., *Is Segregation Scriptural?* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University, 1960). This text was originally given over the radio on April 17, 1960 on Bob Jones University’s own station, WMUU.

admitting, “I personally feel that the Jim Crow laws are not wise and that slowly, as fast as sentiment can be properly created so that the thing will be done righteously and calmly with the best results for both white and colored people, the Jim Crow laws ought to be abolished.”⁵⁰ For all of Rice’s weaknesses, he was able to sympathize to some degree with the oppression that Jim Crow brought. This was probably due in part to his friendship with popular African-American gospel singer, Elmer Tindley, with whom Rice worked with in many evangelistic campaigns.⁵¹ One notable event in 1948 saw Rice face-to-face with this segregationist racism. After a revival service in which Tindley sang, Rice invited him to join his family at a local ice cream parlor. However, upon arrival, the owner “refused to serve Tindley, announcing that blacks were not welcome in his store. Rice was fiercely indignant and led his family back out of the store, while announcing that he would tell other Christians not to patronize the store until the owner changed his policy.”⁵²

While this story showed the progressive side of Rice, it also highlighted a contradiction in his life—he refused to let his daughter socialize with African-Americans, lest they lead to intermarriage, one of the great fears he shared with white Southerners. He followed his opposition to Jim Crow with a caveat: “But I say frankly that many things are worse than these, and most intelligent people would prefer to have Jim Crow

⁵⁰ Rice, *Negro and White*, 7.

⁵¹ Rice, *Negro and White*, 5, Rice also mentioned Tindley’s father, Charles Albert Tindley, who pastored one of the largest African-American congregations on the East Coast. He was considered one of the founding fathers of American gospel music and wrote several popular hymns, including “Nothing Between My Soul and the Saviour” and “Stand by Me.”

⁵² Andrew Himes, *The Sword of the Lord: The Roots of Fundamentalism in an American Family* (Seattle: Chiara Press, 2010), 218. Himes was Rice’s grandson and heard this story from Rice’s daughter, Joy.

laws than to have unrestrained intermarriage between the races.” For all of Rice’s differences from other fundamentalists, he continued to propagate racist stereotypes against African-Americans, claiming that “in moral standards, also, the Negro people need to grow,” since drug addiction and venereal diseases were “ten times as frequent among Negroes as among white people.”⁵³ Rice used these stereotypes to advocate for non-judicial segregation in social settings, such as public swimming pools, schools, and churches—not by law, but by custom: “Some segregation is natural and proper,” he argued, “it makes for happiness and occurs naturally when there is not too much agitation and when it is not made a special issue and quarrel.”⁵⁴ In fact, though Rice claimed that the Gospel was for all, he also advocated for segregated churches, under the paternalistic assumptions of ‘separate but equal’: “Colored people will generally be happier to join colored churches, and white people will generally be happier to join white churches. There will be no lack of love, no lack of fellowship, in going where one can be happiest and with people among whom one feels most at home.”⁵⁵ Underneath this supposed desire for happiness was Rice’s fear of intermarriage, and the desire to prevent it at all cost. He explained,

It is always wrong for whites to marry Negroes . . . Socially, it is better for both Negro and whites to run with their own kind and intermarry with their own kind. The mixing of races widely differing is almost never wise . . . Thus if a girl would do wrong to marry a Negro boy, who would be wrong to keep company with him, mixing regularly with him in social life.⁵⁶

⁵³ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here is My Question*, 241; *Negro and White*, 20-21.

⁵⁴ Rice, *Negro and White*, 14.

⁵⁵ Rice, *Negro and White*, 15.

⁵⁶ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here is My Question*, 240-41.

Though Rice opposed legal segregation, he wholeheartedly supported practical segregation, even among like-minded Christians.

Despite Rice's social racism, his opposition to legal segregation should have led him to support the Civil Rights Movement—but he was prevented by a greater priority than equality: law and order. Rice, comfortable in what he perceived as one nation under God, wanted a solution to the racial problem that was calm and orderly. Even in his opposition to the Ku Klux Klan his argument was based upon their extra-judicial and violent tendencies, not their inherent racism.⁵⁷ He loathed the “agitation” that produced riots and disorderly conduct. The racial protests were evidence of a nation that had turned its back on God's authority in favor of liberalism, rejecting the Bible in favor of modern notions of communism and disrespect. He lamented in 1956, “The agitation is often carried on by those who are not particularly good citizens nor good Christians, and very often for selfish purposes.”⁵⁸ Rice believed that true Christians were patriotic and law-abiding, and those who did not respect God and country were setting themselves against God, however much they advocated for good causes. The protests were a tool of the devil to cause division, “The agitation has aroused hate and suspicion on the part of both races.”

Rice saw the Civil Rights Movements as an impediment to progress; in fact, he thought white people in the South had been making great strides; he argued, “All intelligent people ought to give southern white people credit for wiping out lynching in

⁵⁷ Rice, *Lodges Examined*, 25.

⁵⁸ Rice, *Negro and White*, 1.

the South, and rapidly improving the opportunities of colored people.”⁵⁹ It was the white South that was bearing the burden of the outside forces, Rice complained, “the racial agitation which has been going on wrongs southern white people. Southern people carry a great load . . . white people pay the taxes and build the school for both colored people and white people.” Rice maintained that the white Southerners were “honestly trying to get Negroes into the whole life of the people.”⁶⁰ The real problem, he asserted, was the modernists protestors like Martin Luther King Jr. and the NAACP, who were disrupting society, and even causing harm. Rice even went so far as to say that Emmitt Till’s death was to be laid at the feet of the Civil Rights advocates, and in a remarkable paragraph that began by blaming the victim and ended with an oblique excuse for lynching (all in the name of law and order), he explained,

I have no doubt that this agitation caused the death of Emmitt Till. That colored boy, who attempted to embrace and to make a date with and to seduce a white woman, was spurred on by widespread feeling, a cocky attitude agitators have cultivated among colored people. Remember, it was down in Mississippi, where a white woman dare not walk alone at night because of the animosity and the standards of the large Negro population. On the part of colored people, all this agitation makes for bad incidents. It makes cases for murder and rape. It makes for some rare cases of vengeance and cases in which offended white men, even good men, take the law into their own hands.⁶¹

This conflation of God’s law and America’s law did not stop at violent protests, but included Martin Luther King, Jr.’s nonviolent movement. Rice condemned any disruption of American law, declaring,

That means, then, that all these demonstrations are wicked that break the law. I don’t care if we say ‘nonviolent disobedience’—lawlessness is lawlessness; crime is crime; sin is sin; rebellion against government is rebellion; and rebellion against

⁵⁹ Rice, *Negro and White*, 11.

⁶⁰ Rice, *Negro and White*, 10-11.

⁶¹ Rice, *Negro and White*, 11.

government is rebellion against God; the Scriptures says. So the government is given the right by the Lord to mete out punishment.⁶²

Rice, when faced with police brutality towards black protestors, wrote, “The policeman on the corner does not arrest the criminal because of hate. He does it because of duty and love of country and because of the integrity which makes him keep his solemn oath of office.”⁶³ He published this in 1965, the same year brutal images of police beating protestors in Selma, Alabama were broadcast around the country. Rice’s concern for racial issues went only as far as the first social disruption of authority—he could not see a difference between breaking an American law and breaking God’s law. Both were sin, and salvation only happened when the sinner bowed before the authority of God, in all its manifestations.

This elevation of authority over civil rights led to an unconscious paradox in Rice’s thinking, one that revealed the control American culture had on his theology. While Rice condemned the disruption of the Civil Rights Movement, he praised the American Revolution. Rice never set these two events side by side; the American Revolution was always taken for granted as necessary and good. One of his readers may have noticed this discrepancy when they asked him if a revolution against the government was allowed. He replied without mentioning the American Revolution, preferring instead to use biblical examples of the overthrow of evil kings. He then applied this principle to the American citizen:

As a citizen, a Christian is to obey the laws of the land and be subject to the rulers of the land. But as a person responsible to God to help in the government of which he is a part, a citizen may sometimes need to change the government. In America we do that by voting for this president or that . . . but sometimes a change may

⁶² Rice, *God’s Authority*, 14.

⁶³ Rice, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith*, 78.

necessarily need be done by a revolution. Certainly only in a very clear case of wicked oppression should a Christian take part in a revolution.⁶⁴

What would it take to justify breaking the law of the government, how bad would the evil have to be? Rice used the Roman Empire as standard, and found it not evil enough:

To resist authority is to resist the ordinance of God. That is why good Christians obey the law You say, ‘Oh, but it may be a bad government.’ Well, it was when this Scripture was written. Nero himself, the man who is going to have Paul beheaded, is the emperor at Rome You have no worse government nor have you any more right than the Apostle Paul to decide that your way is better than the government’s.⁶⁵

It seemed that Rice set the standard so high that not even the tyranny of Nero himself would justify rebellion, which of course ruled out rebellion in the face of civil rights. Rice did not see bad laws themselves as justification for breaking them, as the law was not the final authority, the ruler was. He criticized a reader who thought they could hold leaders to a higher standard of law, replying,

You have misunderstood Romans 13 That Scriptures plainly says that the ruler himself is the ‘higher power’ ordained by God Not the law but the ruler God doesn’t give children the right to pass judgement on their parents, whether they will obey them or not The Bible does not give citizens the right to decide in secular matters what kind of government they will respect and obey.⁶⁶

Here Rice departed from the ancient Christian principle, first articulated by Augustine in the fourth century, and again in the twentieth century by Martin Luther King, Jr.: “An unjust law is no law at all.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here is My Question*, 79.

⁶⁵ Rice, *God’s Authority*, 13.

⁶⁶ Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More of My Questions*, 237-38.

⁶⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 8; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail>.

Rice's support of the American Revolution, which began largely over tax disputes, was even more contradictory in light of his demand for Christians to pay taxes. This was, he declared, "the united teaching of the Old and New Testaments, and all citizens should pay tribute, that is, taxes for this very cause, that the government may have strength to protect us from criminals and to enforce the laws. Those who resist the powers that be, resist the ordinance of God and the ministers of God."⁶⁸ For those who would say that the government was not fair in their taxes (as the colonists argued), Rice made no exceptions, "the Bible says we pay taxes. Taxes are too high . . . but the principle that people ought to pay taxes is thus plainly vindicated . . . because the powers that be are ordained of God, and Christians ought to be good Christians."⁶⁹ Rice's view of authority was conditioned by American values and patriotism and he rejected almost every form of rebellion against the government except for the first American one. Rice wanted to call people back to God, to save their souls from the punishment due to rebellious people, but he could not see past his esteemed white, Christian America, and he lionized the rebel George Washington for fighting for equality while demonizing the rebel Martin Luther King, Jr. for the same thing. Rice's obliviousness to this disjunction revealed how American culture unconsciously conditioned his evangelistic message.

In the end, the unity of black and white Christians was not a gospel issue; in fact, it detracted from the gospel. He argued that "it would not help the cause of Christ, it would not lead souls to be saved, it would not advance Christians in spiritual nurture . . . God does not want me to spend my time crusading for racial equality. He just wants me

⁶⁸ Rice, *War in Vietnam: Should Christians Fight?* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1966), 11.

⁶⁹ Rice, *Let Us Save Our God-Given American Heritage*, 25.

to preach the Gospel and help people do right.”⁷⁰ Racism was not a Christian problem—Rice saw pastors like Martin Luther King, Jr. leading people away from the gospel. He warned, “Negro ministers, unfortunately, have also very often had a bad influence. The Negro minister in Birmingham who led in the organization of the buses, led that fight, not as a Christian leader He led that boycott as a modernist and a socialist who was more concerned about racism than he was about Christianity.”⁷¹ Rice never examined his own dearly held views of American history, and as a result, he was unable to properly evaluate modern political events, relying instead on a simplistic understanding of authority. Rice attempted to call out sin, but often he was unable to discern between truth and the status quo; his formulations of sin always sided with the social and systemic structures that benefited those already in power.

Conclusion

The last page of every social issue sermon or pamphlet that Rice printed was a direct call for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. For all of Rice’s unique, idiosyncratic, and often outrageous social claims, he always used them to get to the main point: the gospel. His desire was to be as pointed as possible in order to convict and draw toward Christ. He saw the modern world’s view of sin as deficient in two ways: either the willful ignorance of the average person, or the theological heresy of the modernist. Both of these were the result of rebellion against God’s authority, and Rice sought to point out the specific ways God’s authority was being undermined, whether in the rejection of the home through adultery or the rejection of the government through protests. Whatever the particular rebellion, the end result was hell in Rice’s mind, and his calling was to point out the judgment and present the Savior.

⁷⁰ Rice, *Negro and White*, 15.

⁷¹ Rice, *Negro and White*, 8.

CHAPTER 9

METHODOLOGY

John R. Rice was considered by many fundamentalists as “the Captain of our Team,”¹ and he helped shape their evangelistic practices through his writings and conferences. But his methodology of soul winning was not original, he borrowed from earlier evangelicals, especially Finney, Moody, and Torrey; Rice was a methodological connection between nineteenth-century evangelicalism and mid-twentieth-century fundamentalism. This methodology was driven by a single-minded focus on evangelism, which produced an open-minded pursuit of any effective means of sharing the gospel. Rice, following Moody and Torrey, used multiple methods to evangelize, but he prioritized personal soul-winning interactions; mass evangelism was valued primarily as a means of motivation, preparation, and the culmination of personal work, and only secondarily for direct evangelism.

“Any Way Possible”

Revivalism had always been marked by its bold, often controversial, methods, such as the open-air preaching of Whitefield and Wesley, the “anxious bench” of Finney, the non-denominational crusades of Moody, and the national radio broadcasts of Charles Fuller’s “Old Fashioned Revival Hour.”² Driven by evangelistic fervor, methods were judged by their effectiveness in connecting the Christian witness with the non-believer,

¹ Viola Walden, *John R. Rice: The Captain of Our Team* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1990), 9.

² David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 117-120; George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 68.

rather than on tradition, formality, or decorum. Fundamentalism continued this practice, and Rice was active in pursuing innovative avenues of communication. He explained his broad efforts:

Since I am called to get the Gospel to people, to get people saved and keep them from eternal destruction, I edit a paper, I hold revivals, I have conferences on evangelism, I teach people to win souls, I write songs, I carry on a 40-station radio broadcast. By God's mercy I have spread my books and pamphlets with over twenty-one million copies around the world in thirty languages. All this simply means that any way in the world we can get the Gospel to sinners and keep people out of Hell, we are obeying the Great Commission.³

This pursuit of new means of evangelism was driven by two things: the command to reach the world and the imminent danger of hell. Rice was driven to try and snatch every single person from hell and bring them into the kingdom of God at every opportunity, declaring, "The New Testament method was simply to get the Gospel to every creature, get it to him any way possible, and to get it to as many people as possible."⁴

Accordingly, Rice sought new measures at every chance, as well as drawing from tradition.

This flexibility was one of the reasons for revivalism's success, and Rice clearly drew from the methodological philosophy of Charles Finney and D. L. Moody. But it was from Moody's successor, R. A. Torrey, that Rice found the most practical help. He declared,

Dr. R. A. Torrey did more to teach proper technique in soul winning than any man who lived in modern times. He set up the curriculum of Moody Bible Institute and Bible Institute of Los Angeles, especially supervising the practical work. He wrote the first great American book on methods in soul winning, *How to Do Personal Work*, which has been a valuable source for all who have written since on the same

³ John R. Rice, *The Golden Path to Successful Personal Soul Winning* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1989), 28.

⁴ John R. Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), 94.

subject.⁵

In his book, Torrey was clear that innovation was consistent with biblical evangelism; he urged, “The Christian worker should always watch for new methods and new means of presenting the gospel. The message is changeless, but we must not be blind to changes in our civilization which offer the possibility of fresh approach with our message.”⁶ It was necessary to pursue all possible means because of the difficulty of the work; Torrey, like all evangelicals, believed that sin and Satan were active in opposition to the gospel, and that the Christian must exercise perseverance in order to see fruit. Torrey cautioned, “No work requires so much patience and perseverance as soul winning. Men are not usually won to Christ in a day. You must hold on to men day after day, week after week, month after month, and if need be, year after year Anyone who wishes to win souls at the rate of one every fifteen minutes better go into some other business.”⁷ Like his nineteenth-century evangelical models, Rice (and fundamentalism in general) was doggedly conservative in theology and morality, but progressive in methodology; the “old-fashioned religion” was paired with modern opportunities for outreach. Rice echoed Torrey: “Not every advance will be received kindly. Not every witness will bear immediate fruit. Some seed will fall on stony ground and the birds of Satan will take some seed away. But some will fall on good ground. The church should set out to use every means available to meet, to love, and to witness to every person in the community

⁵ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 102.

⁶ R. A. Torrey, *How to Work for Christ: A Compendium of Effective Methods* (1901; repr., St. John, IN: Christian Book Gallery, n.d.), 241. Interestingly, Torrey was introducing a chapter on the use of automobiles for evangelism.

⁷ R. A. Torrey, *Personal Work* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1901), 24.

and beyond.”⁸ The urgent, enterprising, and innovative methodology of Finney, Moody, and Torrey was reproduced in the ministry of Rice, who affirmed that it was the biblical model, asserting that “getting the Gospel to every creature as quickly as possible, was God’s plan then [in the Bible] as now.”⁹

Personal Evangelism

Though evangelicals like Moody and Torrey were known as mass evangelists, they did not see public meetings as the most effective means of reaching people; counterintuitively, the individual was key. One article in *The Fundamentals*, while affirming the power of mass evangelism, identified personal evangelism as the “great universal method our Lord Himself instituted, of reaching the individual by his fellow man.”¹⁰ Rice, following this evangelical tradition, was confident that the primary method of evangelism was personal interaction between two people. His fellow revivalist of 22 years, Jack Hyles, recalled, “Everything Dr. Rice did was built around the preservation of personal soul winning.”¹¹ For all the sensationalism of Rice’s revivalist culture, he saw the individual, face-to-face work of evangelism as the biblical and practical priority. This model was effective because it allowed the average Christian to participate in evangelism to the same degree as the famous preacher; there was no elitism, everyone was qualified, and thus the evangelistic impact of the church was multiplied.

⁸ John R. Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1966), 165.

⁹ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 102.

¹⁰ John Timothy Stone, “Pastoral and Personal Evangelism, or Winning Men to Christ One by One,” in *The Fundamentals* (1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 179.

¹¹ Jack Hyles, *Fundamentalism in My Lifetime* (Hammond, IN: Hyles Publications, 2002), 162.

Effectiveness

Rice believed that the Bible identified evangelistic focus groups when in Luke 24:47-48, Jesus said, “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Rice interpreted this to prioritize those closest to the Christian before those farther away. He commented, “I want you to notice that the Great Commission must start where you live a foreign mission program is important, but that is not first. The first thing is your own community. Every church, every pastor, must set out first of all, to win those near you.”¹² This was practical as well, for Rice maintained that neglect of evangelistic opportunities close to a Christian would necessarily cause neglect in all evangelistic efforts. He asserted,

Put this down, God’s plan is for you to begin in your Jerusalem, begin with your loved ones, begin with those you know. You are more apt to win somebody you meet and look into their faces and shake their hands and have daily conversation with, than you are some heathen on the other side of the world who never heard your name, doesn’t know you when he sees you. God’s plan is, use your human personality and the contacts you have, with people you know. Win these first, the Scripture says. That is the Bible plan.¹³

Rice observed in the Bible a plan of evangelism that harmonized with human nature. It was natural for a father to be concerned for his child, or a man for his coworker, and these natural opportunities were the starting point for effective soul winning. If a woman could not care enough to speak to her neighbor, how could she possibly speak to a stranger? Rice observed, “Oh, the light that doesn’t shine bright at home, won’t shine very far. And the church that doesn’t win souls at home, won’t do much for the foreign

¹² John R. Rice, *Winning Your Loved Ones* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975), 6.

¹³ Rice, *Winning Your Loved Ones*, 7.

field.”¹⁴ Effective evangelism prioritized the closest prospects.

It was not just the geographical or relational closeness that produced evangelistic success, but the close, personal interactions. Rice maintained that “The winning of individuals by individuals in personal conversation is the main way to win souls.”¹⁵ While the crusades and city-wide meetings may have garnered the attention, it was the quiet dialogue that was the key to reaching the world for Christ. Rice saw this model in the Scripture, where he found “Most of the people whose conversion is related in the New Testament were won in personal conversation.”¹⁶ While most Christians saw the preacher as the model of an evangelist, and the sermon as the height of soul winning, Rice offered a different perspective: “I believe in preaching. It is a great privilege to preach the Gospel, but this world can be reached and evangelized far more quickly and thoroughly by personal work than by public preaching. Indeed, it can only be reached and evangelized by personal work.”¹⁷

Individualism

Though Rice was a committed Baptist, church planter, and supporter of pastors and churches, he had a very minimized ecclesiology. To start, effective evangelism was not tied to the church service; in fact, Rice saw very little of the formal church structure in the Bible. He noted, “The simple truth is that in New Testament times there were no church houses (not a single one mentioned in the New Testament). The public meetings

¹⁴ Rice, *Winning Your Loved Ones*, 6.

¹⁵ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 25.

¹⁶ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 33.

¹⁷ Torrey, *Personal Work*, 15.

were informal and more or less incidental to the main work of carrying the Gospel all over town, yes, all over the world, speaking to individuals.”¹⁸ Real evangelism happened in private, and the gathering of the church was supplementary to that. The church service was a time to gather the harvest that had been reaped during the week, or to draw the net on those who had been encouraged to attend by friends or family. He asserted, “The simple truth is that down through history, in great periods of soul winning, the multitudes have been saved outside of the church buildings more often than in them.”¹⁹ Rice’s view of the church was much like his view of evangelism, individualistic, and very few of his books dealt with ecclesiology. This was not an anomaly, but a continuation of a pattern seen in the ministries of earlier revivalists like Moody and Torrey, who thrived outside the formal structure of denominations and churches. The absence of ecclesiology was even more marked in their writings. Torrey compiled a systematic theology entitled: *What the Bible Teaches: A Thorough and Comprehensive Study of What the Bible Has to Say Concerning the Great Doctrine of Which it Treats*—but of its fifty-four chapters on subjects from the “Personality of God” to “Our Duty towards Satan and His Destiny,” not a single one addressed ecclesiology.²⁰ Rice’s theology followed this trajectory, not rejecting ecclesiology but simply ignoring it for the most part, except where it intersected with evangelism. The church had one purpose, soul winning, and all of its structures and theology revolved around that effort. Rice’s evangelistic focus, especially personal evangelism, led him to expend little energy on a corporate understanding of Christianity.

¹⁸ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 25-26.

¹⁹ Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 104.

²⁰ R. A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches: A Thorough and Comprehensive Study of What the Bible Has to Say Concerning the Great Doctrine of Which it Treats* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933).

Historical Appeal

Rice followed men like Torrey because he saw their results; he believed that the effectiveness of their evangelism was proof that they understood the proper methods. Thus, when he saw their emphasis on personal soul winning it reinforced his own experiences, as well as his resolve to perpetuate their legacy, leading him to note, “All the greatly used evangelists have been personal soul winners.”²¹ This sealed the case for Rice—how could he reject this method when it was the basis for tens of thousands of conversions under past evangelists’ ministries? For while Moody may have been renowned for his preaching, Rice pointed out that Moody declared “that if he had to win one thousand souls in order to make sure of Heaven himself, he would certainly choose to risk it by personal soul winning without preaching rather than to attempt it by public preaching without personal soul winning.”²² Moody himself asserted,

To whom is the Gospel to be preached? ‘To every creature.’ This means personal, hand-to-hand contact with the unsaved—man to man and woman to woman. Look through the Scriptures and you will be surprised to see how much springs out of interviews with single persons. The call is to you personally, and it summons you to personal dealing in the name of Christ with every creature in the range of your influence.²³

Rice loved the globe-circling preaching tour of R. A. Torrey, but he also noted that it was his emphasis on personal evangelism that produced the results at these meetings. Torrey explained, “Even when men are aroused and convicted, and perhaps converted, by a sermon, personal work is necessary to bring into clear light and into a satisfactory

²¹ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 103.

²² Rice, *The Golden Path*, 26-27.

²³ D. L. Moody, *Bible Studies at Northfield* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1883), 215.

experience one whom the sermon has thus aroused, convicted and converted.”²⁴ It was the direct approach that worked best in Torrey’s estimation, as he illustrated by an encounter with a man who professed Christianity, but needed to be converted:

When I saw him coming in, I said to myself, I am glad you have come. I will hit you this morning. I have a sermon just adapted to you. While I was preaching, I looked right at him so he would know I meant him. He sat there beaming up at me. When the sermon was over, he came down to me rubbing his hands. He said, "Oh, Brother Torrey, I came eight miles to hear you this morning. I have so enjoyed it." That was just what I did not want to hear: I wanted to make him miserable. But I had him now face-to-face, and he didn’t enjoy it. That is the advantage of personal work. You can aim right square at the mark and hit it.²⁵

In Rice’s opinion, the great preaching ministries of Moody and Torrey were tied closely to their skills as personal evangelists. He asked, “Who ever did better personal soul-winning work than D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey? And who ever developed personal soul winners like these great evangelists?”²⁶ The priority for every great evangelistic effort was the individual soul winner’s work.

Multiplied Effort

One of the things that Rice respected in the evangelistic model of Moody and Torrey was the singular focus on conversions, not on the fame that great evangelistic campaigns could bring. He desired to see a maximum amount of people saved, by any means necessary. Personal evangelism contributed to this effort because it multiplied the amount of evangelistic witnesses; since the soul winner would best be served by personal connections, the whole church could be involved. Personal work, as Torrey had taught,

²⁴ Torrey, *Personal Work*, 19. Rice, *The Golden Path*, 30-31.

²⁵ R. A. Torrey, *Real Salvation and Whole-Hearted Service* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), 241-42.

²⁶ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 26.

“is the simplest form of Christian work, and one that everyone can do. It is also the most effective method of winning lost souls.”²⁷ Rice believed that evangelism was commanded of every Christian, and therefore every Christian was able to do it successfully. Since the most effective evangelism happened face-to-face, then the key was to multiply the amount of face to face interaction between Christians and unbelievers. This of course started with the pastor, as Rice concluded, “Surely God intended the preacher’s first concern to be soul winning, and that his principle activity about soul winning should be person to person.” Rice continued to make an even sharper point: “The call to preach is a call to win souls, and perhaps the preacher is called even more to win souls personally and privately, than publicly and professionally.”²⁸ But the efforts of one person were not sufficient for such a great need; Rice called for the multiplied efforts of the entire congregation. After reading Torrey on the universal call for evangelism, he argued, “Since we are to get the Gospel to every creature, personal soul winning has the great advantage that anybody can do it, that it can be done at anytime and can be done anywhere.” Rice was drawing from Torrey’s logic, who reasoned,

In an average congregation there are not more than four or five who can preach to edification. It would be a great pity, too, should all attempt to become preachers; it would be a great blessing if all would become personal workers. Any child of God can do personal work, and all can learn to do effective personal work . . . How enormous and wonderful and glorious would be the results if all Christians should begin to be active personal workers to the extent of their ability! Nothing else would do so much to promote revival in any community, and in the world at large.²⁹

²⁷ Torrey, *Personal Work*, 15.

²⁸ Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 58.

²⁹ Torrey, *Personal Work*, 17-18.

Rice believed that the call to evangelize was for all, that the efforts of all were needed; he urged individual Christians to take up the calling, for “The harvest is always great, the fields always white, the laborers are few.”³⁰

The Most Effective Personal Method

While Rice emphasized personal evangelism, he did not limit the methods he used, advising that “there should be preaching in every place that an open door can be found,” including parks, hospitals, vacation Bible schools, special banquets, funerals and weddings, evangelistic services, and more.³¹ But Rice believed that there was one method that soul-winning churches used that was more effective than any other: door to door visitation. He based this on the two premises that evangelism happened face to face, and that efforts must be made to reach everyone in the church’s area. While reaching family members and friends was most effective, it was limited in scope, only reaching those in immediate proximity and with a previous relationship. Door to door visitation, on the other hand, was comprehensive and aggressive; not waiting for the lost person to come to the believer, but seeking them out in their homes, systematically and confrontationally. When Rice was criticized for this confrontational evangelism by those who called for a more “lifestyle evangelism” he retorted, “If living a good, moral, religious life would get loved ones saved, then all the Pharisees in the time of Christ ought to have been wonderful soul winners!”³² The Christian wasn’t called simply to live a holy life and wait for opportunities, but to go out “into the highways and hedges.”

³⁰ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 234.

³¹ Rice, *Why Our Churches Don’t Win Souls*, 154.

³² Rice, *The Golden Path*, 95.

Rice saw this method in Scripture as well, specifically in the early church in Acts 5:42: “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” Rice interpreted this as evangelistic efforts, commenting, “that was personal soul winning, person by person, house by house, and it is indicated as the regular pattern of Christian work in the book of Acts.”³³ He also saw this in Paul’s words in Acts 20:20-21, “And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” The account of Paul’s activity was “a revealing word which tells us of the regular pattern of Paul’s soul-winning ministry.”³⁴ Rice was confident that this method was simply biblical faithfulness, explaining, “Any church that sets out to literally obey the command of Christ to get the Gospel to every creature, to visit in every house, even to go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, would try to reach as many as possible and build great congregations.”³⁵

Though Rice believed that house-to-house evangelistic visitation was a biblical pattern, this interpretation was historically uncommon. The passages in Acts had not traditionally been understood to mean evangelism, rather they were referring to the edification of the saints. In the fourth century, Chrysostom read “house to house” to indicate Paul’s perseverance and discretion in the teaching of the church. Reformation pastor John Calvin saw this as a model for personal pastoral care in the home, ministering

³³ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 36.

³⁴ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 37.

³⁵ John R. Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975), 244.

to the individual needs of Christians. Eighteenth-century theologian John Bengel also saw this a guide for pastors, urging them to remain diligent and faithful in ministering to their flocks personally.³⁶ The practice of house-to-house visitation was established with the rise of evangelical activism in the eighteenth century, most notably with the establishment of the Stranger's Friend Society in London in the 1780s. The changing social context combined with new evangelical movement's concern with practical engagement bolstered this direct approach. Its popularity was cemented when Scottish minister Thomas Chalmers published a book, *Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, describing his implementation of lay visitation in Glasgow.³⁷ The method's rise in popularity was seen in the 1870 adoption of a report by the London Council to combat poverty. The report outlined an organized, volunteer system that sought to connect with people in their homes in order to build relationships and references Chalmers's book as a resource.³⁸ By the time R. A. Torrey published his methodology in 1901, house to house visitation was his first chapter, where he called upon apostolic precedent as well as unparalleled effectiveness.³⁹

Rice's adoption and promotion of the method was unsurprising given its evangelical credentials, but he also saw its results first-hand in independent fundamental Baptist megachurches. He revealed, "The real secret to these great soul-winning

³⁶ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, Homily 44; John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 2:244; John A. Bengel, *Bengel's New Testament Commentary*, trans. Charlton T. Lewis and Marvin R. Vincent (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981) 1:886.

³⁷ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 118.

³⁸ *House-to-House Visitation: Report of a Sub-Committee of the Society for Organizing Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity* (London, 1871).

³⁹ Torrey, *How to Work for Christ*, 183-91.

churches is house-to-house visitation. It is going out after people lovingly, and from door after door, house after house, person after person, meeting them, loving them, inviting them, urging persuading them to come to the service.”⁴⁰ Rice wrote in 1975 that “It may well be that there has never been any forty years since the book of Acts when so many churches grew so rapidly, reaching so many people, baptized so many converts. One element in the growth of such churches has been a greater emphasis on house-to-house visitation.”⁴¹ This was one of the great focuses of Rice’s ministry, where he and his colleagues promoted evangelistic church growth primarily through this method. He argued that the success seen was due in large part to the

Sword of the Lord Conferences on Revival and Soul Winning where Dr. Jack Hyles and this editor, and sometimes with help from Dr. Lee Robertson, Dr. Tom Malone, Dr. Curtis Hutson, Dr. Bob Gray, Dr. Bill Rice and others, have tried to stir people up in building soul-winning churches, to be filled with the Spirit, to get their prayer answered, to do the daily visitation, and put the emphasis on day-by-day, house-by-house, personal soul winning.⁴²

This method created another innovative tool, the bus ministry, which was a practical connection between the home visit and the church service.⁴³ Rice also advocated for the existing Sunday School program to create the organizational structure for visitation. These methods and practices became so foundational to independent Baptist churches that door-to-door visitation was synonymous with “soul winning.” A current look at the weekly schedules of two of the largest independent fundamental Baptist churches, who

⁴⁰ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 120.

⁴¹ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 240.

⁴² Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 241.

⁴³ Though he commended the bus ministry for its stunning growth, he qualified it by explaining, “Those busses cannot be filled, of course, without extended, house-to-house visitation.” Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 239.

were strongly influenced by Rice, showed an event simply called “Soul Winning” which in practice was door-to-door visitation.⁴⁴ Rice, and those he guided, were convinced that the primary practical means of evangelism was personal visits to every home in the church’s area.

Mass Evangelism

Given his intense prioritization of personal evangelism it may be surprising to see his vocational commitment to mass evangelism. Rice had given his public ministry over to the revival of mass evangelism because he believed that it was an integral part of effective evangelism, not as an alternative to personal evangelism but as its complement and facilitator. The mass evangelism in churches or revival meetings was designed to motivate, train, and prepare people, lost and saved, for the personal work of individual Christians, whether in the service itself or later on the streets. The evangelistic services were designed to heighten the potential for public commitments to Christ.

Synergism of Mass Evangelism and Personal Evangelism

Rice’s dedication to mass evangelism was not present from the beginning, it came as a revelation after more than a decade of fulltime ministry. His career began in the 1920s, when mass evangelism was unpopular and he remarked, “Following the rise of modernism in the churches at the time of World War I and following, evangelists pretty well passed off the scene. They began to build tabernacles and stay in location or they

⁴⁴ “Announcements,” First Baptist Church, Hammond, accessed, December, 12, 2018, <https://www.fbchammond.com/grow/announcements/>; “Ministries,” North Valley Baptist Church, accessed December 12, 2018, <http://nvbc.org/ministries.php>. In this author’s personal, lifelong experience in fundamentalism, there was never a need to explain weekly soul winning—it was always understood to be door-to-door visitation.

became ‘Bible teachers and world travelers,’ or they accepted pastorates.”⁴⁵ The heyday of Moody, Torrey, and Billy Sunday were gone and Rice’s ministry was occupied with Bible teaching, one-day meetings, and pastoring a church in Ft. Worth. But as his reputation grew, so did his vision. By the late 1930s he was convinced that mass evangelism was possible again. He recalled, “some years back I had a great conviction that God wanted me to go into the revival field nationwide and help bring back great citywide revival campaigns.”⁴⁶ His official biographer related Rice’s commitment to this end:

on his face before God at 2 o’clock in the morning in a YMCA room on the south side of Chicago, John Rice definitively committed himself to bring back mass evangelism in America—citywide campaigns such as had been conducted by Moody, Torrey, Billy Sunday and others. He surrendered his tongue, his pen, his paper, his entire being into the hands of God to be used at His disposal toward this end All he wanted was to see great revivals return to America with the ultimate result of the winning to Christ of hundreds of thousands of precious souls for whom He died.⁴⁷

This was Rice’s passion and became the focus of all his public efforts for the rest of his life. Even when he transitioned away from evangelistic meetings to focus on writing and hosting conferences, his energies were still focused on the renewal of mass evangelism, and though he was not in the pulpit as before, he was fulfilling the office. He stated, “As an editor, I do the work of an evangelist. As a writer, I write as an evangelist. I reluctantly gave up the great citywide revival campaign but by pressure of God, to enter into the wider work to make a climate for revival in America, to set the standards for

⁴⁵ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 141-42.

⁴⁶ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 141-42.

⁴⁷ Robert L. Sumner, *John R Rice: Man Sent from God* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1987), 114.

evangelists and to help make churches into soul-winning churches.”⁴⁸ The point of all of his books, papers, and conferences was not simply to educate or edify, but to multiply evangelists and restore the culture of revival to America.

How did this focus on mass evangelism coincide with the prioritization of personal evangelism? Rice recognized that on the surface it seemed contradictory, but he did not believe that they were incompatible, rather they were mutually reinforcing. In a chapter entitled “Mass Evangelism and Personal Soul Winning,” Rice clarified,

Please note the heading again. It is not “Mass Evangelism Versus Personal Soul Winning.” It is not “Mass Evangelism or Personal Soul Winning.” My theme is not that mass evangelism is preferable to personal soul winning nor that personal soul winning is preferable to mass evangelism. My theme is that mass evangelism AND personal soul winning go together. In the Bible and in all Christian experience, mass evangelism and personal soul winning go together.⁴⁹

The perception of a contradiction was only a result of lack of experience. Rice contended that those who knew what real evangelism looked like on a large scale understood the relationship between the two forms of preaching the Gospel. He contended that effective personal soul winners loved mass evangelism:

Seminary professors and others without much practical experience sometimes discuss the relative merits of personal soul winning and mass evangelism. The truth is that they are essentially part of the same thing. The right kind of gospel preaching send Christians out to win souls, and bombards the hearts of sinners, dynamites the hard ground, and arouses the conscience, and makes a climate for personal soul winning. And the personal soul winning is best done, always, where there is plain Bible preaching, evangelistic preaching. No man who is against mass evangelism is ever a very good personal soul winner, and the greatest soul winners have been the best advocates of mass evangelism.⁵⁰

Rice saw the public work of the preacher as a preparatory work, either in the hearts of the

⁴⁸ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 133.

⁴⁹ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 93, emphasis original.

⁵⁰ Rice, *The Golden Path*, 26.

lost, to convict, or in the heart of the Christian to provoke to personal work. This meant that “revival” and “mass evangelism” were effectively the same event. Rice believed this was how it had been used historically:

What do we mean by revival? Some would make a distinction between revival of the saints and evangelism—winning the unsaved. But all the great soul winners have used the word ‘revival’ to include not only the stirring of Christians and winning them to new consecration, a new cleansing of heart and life and a new obedience, but the winning of the unconverted . . . All the successful evangelists have known this. And when Spurgeon, Finney, Moody, Torrey, Chapman, Gipsy Smith or Billy Sunday spoke on revival, they meant not only a blessed refreshing for Christians but a great campaign of evangelism for the unsaved.⁵¹

Because the goal of every Christian was evangelism, then public events where sin was denounced and the gospel preached would have the same result: personal soul winning, either as witness or listener. The mass meetings were like a river that carried all toward one end: conversions. Though personal soul winning was the goal, it was necessary to have the public exhortation to drive the Christian to engage the lost; without this motivation, individual efforts would lack energy. Rice declared, “The house-to-house visitation and the personal soul winning which is not prepared and inspired and empowered by the ministry of mass evangelism generally makes a few church members out of unconverted people and does not lead people to Christ. Actually, mass evangelism has always produced the greatest group of personal soul winners.”⁵² It was synergy; the public meetings were combined with the individual to produce effective evangelistic workers. Rice was adamant that without mass evangelism or revival, churches could not have personal evangelism. He attested that “Everywhere experience proves that the

⁵¹ John R. Rice, *We Can Have Revival Now* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1992), 12.

⁵² John R. Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1968), 38.

churches that believe in mass evangelism and believe in the ministry of God-called evangelists, also are more effective in soul winning through the Sunday school and through other usual church agencies.”⁵³

Rice wanted to see the return of these public, large scale meetings, and thus his devotion to that end, both through the *Sword of the Lord* paper and its conferences. Individual efforts would not spring out of anything short of a large-scale gospel impression, where the gospel is preached by the Spirit-filled evangelist, and the people were shaken from their sin. He said that mass evangelism was essential to churches because “while we know that the individual must be won by individual efforts, and often by more than one person, yet the standards, the climate and program that make Christians into soul winners and make it possible for them to win souls, or at least easier, must grow in the churches.”⁵⁴ This growth was initiated by mass evangelism.

Methods of Mass Evangelism

“Since it is really true that Christ Jesus died to save sinners and that that is His principle command to Christians and churches, surely that great fact should be the dominating factor in planning all the public services of the church.”⁵⁵ Rice believed that the public services, whether ordinary Sunday meetings or planned revival meetings, should be geared for evangelism. The goal was to prepare and reap the harvest of individual soul winners, which required an informal, but emotionally-charged atmosphere that was conducive to a crisis moment in which the listener would make a public

⁵³ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 36.

⁵⁴ Rice, *Why Our Churches Don't Win Souls*, 5.

⁵⁵ John R. Rice, *God's Work and How to Do It* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1971), 49-50.

commitment to Christ. These public commitments were the proof that the methods were sound.

Formalism. Rice was open about the strong positions for which he stood. He listed the paper's platform on the front page of every *Sword of the Lord*: "An Independent Christian Publication, 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."⁵⁶ Most of this description was typical of a fundamentalist paper, but the last word, "formalism," was less so. What was formalism, and why was Rice so opposed to it that he placed it next to the great fundamentalist evils of modernism and worldliness? The answer reveals something of Rice's cultural conditioning as well as his focus on soul winning in public services. Formalism, to Rice, was the format for public services that combined superficial, non-biblical practices and a stiff, somber atmosphere. The result, he lamented, was "a very serious sin . . . because it takes the place of New Testament Christianity."⁵⁷

One of the divides between fundamentalists and liberals was their culture; generally, the former was more informal, with a kind of Southern friendliness, along with a flair for the dramatic and dynamic. Liberals, on the other hand, were more Northern, reserved, intellectual. Part of this was the liberal trajectory of the mainline denominations, such as Episcopalian, Lutheran, and Methodist—traditions with high-

⁵⁶ This front-page description continues to this day, *Sword of the Lord*, December 14, 2018.

⁵⁷ John R. Rice, *The Sin of Formalism* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1989), 4.

church influence and more established, formal liturgies. Fundamentalists tended to come from the low church traditions, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal. Like many southern Baptists, Rice saw these liturgical traditions as derivative of Roman Catholic tradition, not corrupt, but tending toward apostasy. When these same mainline denominations began to reject traditional orthodoxy, Rice and others felt that this perception was confirmed. He felt that the Roman Catholic influence was part and parcel of the formal liturgy, and when he saw churches following this style, he was sure “God was disgusted at the aping of formalism and popery of modernistic and cold, unspiritual, and unevangelistic churches.”⁵⁸ In the early church this formalism was the result of loss of the evangelistic fervor, as Rice explained, “In Rome, when the New Testament simplicity and power and evangelism changed into that unscriptural monster, the Roman Church, the forms became more elaborate, rich, and awesome as the orthodoxy and the New Testament doctrine and power disappeared!”⁵⁹ He was convinced that this was the pattern throughout church history: “As every major group of Christians or professing Christians have gone away from New Testament simplicity, orthodoxy, and soul winning, they have gone into more elaborate ritual and formalism. Formalism is itself the opposite of Bible Christianity and has always marked the departure from soul winning.”⁶⁰ The more formal the service, the less the church was concerned about evangelism.

Rice was confident that the Biblical model was simplicity and informality, which not surprisingly, corresponded with his own background and culture. Since the

⁵⁸ Rice, *The Sin of Formalism*, 5.

⁵⁹ Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 85.

⁶⁰ Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 86.

First Great Awakening, American evangelicalism was intertwined with the outdoor revival meetings, the ecstatic outbursts, the emotional pleas of Whitefield, Finney, and Moody, and the individualistic, common-man approach to religion. Even the terms that arose out of these revivals spoke of their relaxed attitude: the “sawdust trail,” tent meetings, and the “anxious bench.” Rice followed this tradition partly because he was raised in it, and partly because he believed it produced massive evangelistic results. When the intended goal of the service was to see people “walk the sawdust trail” to the front of the meeting to profess Christ, Rice believed that the service must be conducive to this end. He gave a model evangelistic service, in which the visitor received a friendly welcome, heard simple gospel songs that may have reminded him of his mother, or perhaps in the happy style of the Kiwanis Club he attended as a child. The sermon would be “earnest, warm, informal, and plain,” with a clear call for action to repent of specific sins, and publicly profess Christ. This type of service would allow a friend to urge the visitor to go forward to pray and receive Christ, without hindrance or embarrassment.⁶¹ In contrast to this, Rice warned of the formal service, which offered a stiff, dark, quiet atmosphere, with no children or greetings allowed. The singing was high and difficult, and the sermon was deep and philosophical, with no appeal to the heart. Of course, no one would feel comfortable seeking Christ, and so the unsaved left this service unchanged.⁶²

Rice set two cultures side by side, obviously preferring the simple style that reminded him of friends and family, while the more formal service was meant to dampen

⁶¹ Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 110.

⁶² Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 111.

even the faithful soul. Rice made no mention of the fact that other cultures, including Great Britain, had always favored the more reserved service, including evangelists like Spurgeon. Rice, drawing from his own cultural imagination and experience, could not imagine that the Apostle Paul had not worshipped in the same way as Moody or Sunday. It was the Pharisees who “were strong on formalism and very strict,” not the soul-winning Jesus.⁶³

This strong demand for a simple, sentimental church service was necessary for the emotional and yet rational style of evangelism that Rice used, one he clearly drew from his preeminent evangelist, Moody. While other great preachers (like Whitefield,) moved people to respond through their sermons, Moody, with song leader Ira Sankey, used the entire service to that end. In order to secure immediate results, everything was geared to move people out of their seats to profess Christ, a skill in which Moody was unrivaled. His son described Moody’s methods:

D. L. Moody never began to preach until he had gathered his audience into almost perfect *rapport* with himself To accomplish this result he devised a method perfectly adapted to himself It was the conduct of a remarkably intense and spiritual preliminary service of song and prayer, interspersed with brief, pungent, characteristic sayings of his own. From the time he came before his great audiences to the moment when he arose to preach, he kept the entire body absorbed with something interesting. Singing by the massed choir, by quartettes, duetists, soloists, and by the whole assembly, never ceased, except for prayer.⁶⁴

This model of a dramatic, simple, and emotional service would lead to the main event, the sermon, where the preacher would take the Bible and plainly speak to the people of sin and salvation., climaxing in the public invitation to respond immediately by walking

⁶³ Rice, *The Sin of Formalism*, 4.

⁶⁴ William R. Moody, *The Life of D. L. Moody by His Son* (1900; repr. Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, n.d.), 499-500.

to the front. Rice saw this as the most faithful means of bringing people to a confrontation with God and producing conversions. As might be expected, this method would see far more immediate and public results than the more formal service—for Rice, this was proof that it was correct. He concluded,

If some reader would brush aside all the arguments brought, it still remains true that the formal church is not the soul-winning church. And one of the principal reasons our churches do not win souls is that they seek to please men with rites and ceremonies, beauty and culture, instead of returning to the passion, power, and simplicity which New Testament Christianity had.⁶⁵

The public invitation. The goal of the public service was to bring the listener to a crisis moment, in which the preacher would end his sermon with a passionate plea for consecration or conversion, and a public invitation to walk to the front of the room. This public invitation was pioneered in Charles Finney’s “New Measures,” when he called people to come to the “anxious bench” where they could be dealt with personally. This new measure to produce converts was received with mixed feelings, a sentiment which continued to Rice’s day and beyond.⁶⁶ One of Finney’s contemporaries wrote, “Spurious revivals are common, and as the fruit of them, false conversions lamentably abound. An anxious bench may be crowded, where no divine influence whatever is felt . . . Hundreds may be carried through the process of anxious bench conversion, and yet their last state may be worse than the first.”⁶⁷ Despite these criticisms, the public invitation (or altar call) became a staple of evangelicals’ revival meetings and church

⁶⁵ Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 114.

⁶⁶ For recent criticism, see Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750 – 1858* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994).

⁶⁷ John D. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg, PA: German Reformation Church, 1844), 36.

services. Rice defended the practice because of the soul-winning results he perceived.

The public invitation, in which the listener was invited to move forward physically, must be distinguished from the ordinary and traditional invitation, in which the preacher verbally called for the listener to repent and believe; to make a definitive decision for Christ. This verbal invitation had ancient roots in the Christian church, as seen in Gregory of Nazianzus's fourth-century sermon, in which he pleaded with his listeners: "May He who proclaims unity and looses those who are bound . . . change these men and make them faithful instead of rhetoricians, Christians instead of that which they are now called. This indeed we entreat and beg for Christ's sake: 'Be ye reconciled to God.' And quench not the Spirit."⁶⁸ This clear call for repentance and faith would have been wholeheartedly endorsed by Rice—but he would have gone a step farther and called for the listener to express their faith by confessing in front of the congregation, or, if the listener was unsure, Rice would call them down to the front to be counseled individually.

This public invitation was a staple of Rice's preaching, one that he adamantly insisted remain. His conviction was made evident in the clash he had with Lewis Sperry Chafer, former evangelist, and author of a book Rice found highly offensive, *True Evangelism*.⁶⁹ Chafer, who was an evangelist at the turn of the century, when he had a similar methodology as Rice, but after studying under C. I. Scofield, he wrote *True Evangelism* to correct what he believed were the unbiblical excesses of revivalist evangelism. He specifically singled out the public invitations for censure, calling it part

⁶⁸ Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), 176.

⁶⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *True Evangelism* (Findlay, OH: The Dunham Publishing Co., 1919). This book was originally published in 1911. Rice encountered it in the 1940s. The historical account of Rice and Chafer's dispute was detailed in Kevin Bauder and Robert Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine: Origins of Baptist Fundamentalism 1870-1950* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2104), 304-33.

of an “undue emphasis on methods in modern evangelism,” which was “disclosed by the imperative demand for some public action in connection with conversion, such as standing or going forward in a meeting. Great confusion has been wrought by the intrusion of such public acts into the condition of salvation; thereby making salvation seem to be by faith in Christ, plus a supposedly meritorious public act.”⁷⁰ He argued that public confession was a *result* of conversion, not a part of it, and calling for a public act, even by well-meaning, orthodox preachers, would create a pressure in which “it is difficult to demand confession in connection with conversion without making it seem meritorious.”⁷¹ Chafer understood, and had participated, in services where the public invitation was given with true results, admitting, “In coming to a positive decision, the human mind is undoubtedly aided by some physical action which serves to strengthen the impression. However, the danger of misleading the listener on so important a subject as salvation by faith alone was too great and real to risk such methods.” He warned, “It may be conceded that genuine results are sometimes obtained even where misleading methods are employed; but there may be great harm done as well . . . some of these evils should be mentioned,” which he goes on to list as timidity, false assurance, undermining the promises of God, and minimizing the work of the Spirit.⁷²

When Rice came across these points, he was infuriated, rightly understanding Chafer to be directly criticizing the methods of evangelists like Finney and Rice himself. He spent several years on a campaign to have Moody Press cease printing the book,

⁷⁰ Chafer, *True Evangelism*, 10.

⁷¹ Chafer, *True Evangelism*, 12.

⁷² Chafer, *True Evangelism*, 12-20.

alienating friends and restricting the scope of his ministry in the process, but he believed the book was a direct attack on evangelism in America.⁷³ Rice was in agreement with Chafer's theological premise; he knew that the act of coming forward was not salvific; rather, he affirmed, "I believe that the moment one honestly repents in his heart and turns to Christ for mercy, trusting Him, that moment he is saved."⁷⁴ The public invitation was a method used to facilitate the internal work of the Spirit, one that Rice saw as necessary for effective evangelism. He saw Chafer's opposition to these public methods as a result of a rejection of human agency in evangelism, and accused him of opposing all use of methods, relying instead on the fatalistic sovereignty of God. He declared, "This hyper-Calvinism is the backbone of Dr. Chafer's book, *True Evangelism*, wherein he sought to show just about all Christians can do about soul winning is to pray, that the Holy Spirit does most of the rest, and that any human methods are undesirable and unnecessary."⁷⁵ Chafer was only a moderate, four-point Calvinist, but Rice did not understand that distinction, since he viewed all Calvinists as hyper-Calvinists. He saw Chafer's argument as a model for apathy, where no human effort was used to urge people to trust Christ; but this was an exaggeration, as Chafer only opposed potentially manipulative or misleading methods such as public invitations.

Rice acknowledged that these methods could conceivably be misused, but he dismissed Chafer's concerns, declaring, "Very rarely in dealing with thousands of sinners have I ever found one who thought that going forward had anything to do with salvation

⁷³ Bauder and Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine*, 321.

⁷⁴ John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Are More Questions...* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1973), 394.

⁷⁵ Rice, *The Evangelist and His Work*, 195.

except to claim it after he had already decided for Christ in his heart.”⁷⁶ Rice was confident that his abilities as a preacher would prevent potential misunderstandings, and he felt that the risk was small, though one must wonder if Rice would have been able to reject the preferred methods of his quintessential evangelists, whose spectacular results were largely counted from immediate, public professions, and from those results Rice concluded that they were models to follow.⁷⁷ In addition, Rice read Chafer in the most uncharitable way possible, accusing him of attacking preacher’s motives, claiming that Chafer,

insisted that true evangelism is not obeying the Great Commission to go out after people but simply to pray. He said that is true evangelism He said that for a pastor or an evangelist to give a public invitation to accept Christ and to indicate it by coming forward or raising their hands or standing, is itself wrong, that it is only from a worldly motive to make a big show and to get more offerings. This is slanderous and wicked, but so the man has taught in that book *True Evangelism*.⁷⁸

Rice’s commitment to revivalism caused him to misrepresent Chafer, exaggerating his words. While Rice claimed that Chafer impugned the intentions of evangelists, claiming that public invitations were “only from a worldly motive,” Chafer only warned of the “great temptation for the evangelist to be superficial in his aim and undertaking. His reputation, and often his remuneration, are dependent upon apparent results.” In other words, when immediate, public results are a notable evaluation of an evangelist’s success, then some preachers may seek to boost those numbers, lest they be thought

⁷⁶ John R. Rice, “A Hurtful and Unscriptural Attack on Evangelism and Evangelists,” *Sword of the Lord*, June 21, 1946, 6.

⁷⁷ Arguing that Billy Sunday was endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit, Rice stated, “We would not need further evidence on this matter than the million souls, and more, who turned to God under Mr. Sunday’s preaching.” John R. Rice, *The Power of Pentecost* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1949), 402.

⁷⁸ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 123.

unprofitable. Rice may not have been guilty of this, but his continual emphasis on using the number of public professions as the standard for a good evangelist certainly created the environment in which some, less resilient preachers might cut corners in order to meet Rice's standards.⁷⁹ Additionally, Chafer himself allowed for the use of public invitations if precautions were in place. He advised,

The real value of public methods may be secured and many evils avoided if, after explaining the way of life and during a season of silent prayer, the unsaved are asked to accept Christ by a conscious act of the will, directed in definite silent prayer to God. Such a decision may then be greatly strengthened by an immediate public confession of Christ. The vital difference in question is, however, that such are then confessing that they have believed on Christ, rather than making a confession in order that they may be saved.⁸⁰

Despite this allowance for a public invitation, Rice saw Chafer as an enemy of soul winning, and rightly recognized that adoption of Chafer's more subdued methods would reduce the numbers of public professions, and thus, in Rice's theology, reduce the number of conversions.

Conclusion

What will produce the maximum number of conversions? That was the driving question for Rice's methodology. It governed his evaluation of past evangelists as well as current practices. From personal experience and the witness of revivalistic evangelists, as well as biblical examples, Rice believed that personal interaction was the primary and overwhelmingly best way to reach a soul for Christ, while mass evangelism was needed to motivate, prepare, and train individual soul winners. The methods of mass evangelism

⁷⁹ Rice replied to one reader who wanted to have Rice help him get started in evangelism. Rice required recommendations from pastors who "have you in revivals and who can tell actually how many souls were saved . . . Have the pastor write to the *Sword of the Lord* telling about the revival, how many were saved, how many joined the church, etc." John R. Rice, *Dr. Rice, Here Is My Question*, (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1962), 221-22. Rice often referred to his own numbers of conversions as proof of his calling as an evangelist.

⁸⁰ Chafer, *True Evangelism*, 20.

were geared toward capitalizing on the work of individuals, as well as manifesting the soul-winning power of the Spirit-filled preacher. The most effective way to see the results of evangelism was to create an informal environment in the meeting that encouraged public displays of commitment to Christ, culminating in a public call to follow Christ. For Rice, these were tried and true methods of the greatest evangelists, and those who disagreed with them were marked as unfaithful soul winners: “Criticism of the successful comes naturally from those who are less successful and less useful.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Rice, *I Am a Fundamentalist*, 222.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

John R. Rice was entirely convinced that God had one agenda in mind: rescue sinners from Hell—that conviction was so strong that it engulfed all other concerns. Rice easily pushed aside powerful emphases like dispensationalism and Calvinism, as well as other powerful leaders, and even some versions of fundamentalism when they encroached on evangelism. His personal determination and fortitude propelled him forward in an age of controversy and unrest, and he offered his followers, beset by modernism and social changes on every hand, a consistent and credible vision of Christianity. He managed to avoid many some of the pitfalls into which other religious leaders fell; however, his moderation and spiritual focus inadvertently left him overlooked among more intense or extreme versions of fundamentalism and evangelicalism. His evangelistic focus led him to be either innovative or conservative, depending on what he believed would affect soul winning, but never for the sake of building his influence or platform. Because of this passion for reaching the world for Christ he stood far above his peers and culture in some areas, though it was not enough to keep him from falling far short in others.

In order to demonstrate Rice’s evangelism-first paradigm, this dissertation examined the various aspects of Rice’s understanding of Christianity, both historically and theologically, revealing how each was related and ultimately controlled by his passion for soul winning. Chapter 2 placed Rice in the context of twentieth-century evangelicalism and fundamentalism. With so many versions and transformations of

religion in modern America, Rice's model of fundamentalism was unique and influential, both in its evangelistic primacy, as well as its ecumenicism, though, ultimately, it was rejected by most of his peers and successors. Chapter 3 argued that Rice's single-minded pursuit of evangelism led him to create a version of practical Christianity that placed evangelism at the center, both personally and ecclesiastically. The mission of soul winning was to shape the philosophy, practices, and discipleship of every believer, pastor and member, all exemplified by the evangelist himself. Chapter 4 examined Rice's bibliology, revealing that he broke the bounds of evidentialist, Common Sense philosophy implicit in fundamentalism; and led by his understanding of sin and the need for conversion, he adapted a Reformed, presuppositional approach to Scripture, which required spiritual enlightenment for understanding, which was accessible only to the believer, though to all believers. Chapter 5 distinguished Rice's understanding of dispensationalism from the typical fundamentalist. Rather than using dispensationalism to define his theology, Rice used evangelism to adapt dispensationalism. While he was clearly a pre-millennial dispensationalist, he, like D. L. Moody, was unconvinced of its importance. He rejected certain aspects of traditional dispensationalism or ignored it altogether when it hindered evangelism. Chapter 6 looked at two other theological systems, Arminianism and Calvinism, and how Rice used evangelism to evaluate both. However, Rice only had a shallow understanding of both systems, especially Calvinism, which he could not distinguish from hyper-Calvinism. This resulted in Rice's rejection of both systems, though he continued to promote past evangelists who held to them, often at the expense of his own historical credibility. Chapter 7 explained how Rice's strong emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit was directly derived from his adoption of older,

nineteenth-century evangelical interpretations. Specifically, Rice maintained that evangelism was only possible with a special, post-salvation, filling of power from the Spirit. He sought to defend this pneumatology against charismatic opponents, as well as offer practical encouragement and steps for believers to receive this evangelistic power. Chapter 8 examined another historical aspect of Rice—his evangelistic focus on social issues. While Rice was typical of many fundamentalists in his conservative, socially-conditioned preaching, his motivation was not social preservation or reaction, but evangelism. He believed that conversion only happened after sharp preaching which led to conviction of specific sins. Though Rice had an evangelistic purpose, he was blinded by his love for his own white, American context, and he defined sin accordingly. His authoritarian foundation resulted in dismissal of any social unrest, most clearly seen in his denouncement of the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, chapter 9 observed Rice’s methodology and how it was driven by his primary goal: maximum conversions. In Rice’s model, this was primarily accomplished by personal interactions, though mass evangelism was key for preparing and motivating individuals for soul winning, as well as reaping the harvest. Rice was heavily influenced by cultural and pragmatic results, and he saw the success of nineteenth-century evangelists and mid-twentieth-century fundamentalist megachurches as validation of his approach.

Final Reflections

How should Rice be evaluated, and did he offer a viable path forward with his “evangelism-as-priority” model? One option is to look to those who successfully adopted his ideas. In the long-term assessment of Rice’s most successful colleagues there are indications that his model was lacking. In the preface to his 1966 book, *Why Our*

Churches Do Not Win Souls, Rice called on the glowing reviews of five pastors to confirm his evangelistic model. These men were the “pastors of some of the greatest soul-winning churches in the world.”¹ They had accomplished what Rice had been passionately urging Christians to do for decades, make soul winning the primary end of the ministry, and their megachurches were proof of their success. Rice advised his readers that they would “do well to hear these notably used and Spirit-empowered men of God on the matter of building and leading soul-winning churches.”² Rice gave five names: Lee Robertson, Jack Hyles, Tom Malone, Harold B. Sightler, and Bob Gray. Though they stood out during Rice’s life as bright lights of evangelistic fundamentalism, after Rice’s death four of them would suffer extreme setback in one of two categories: declining numbers leading to closure or pastoral scandal.³ A brief overview follows.

1. Lee Robertson retired as leader of Highland Park Baptist Church and Tennessee Temple University in 1983. The church had tens of thousands of members and the school had thousands of students. The church declined dramatically, and in 2012, with only 370 members left, it effectively closed, replanting under a different name in a different area.⁴ Three years later, the University closed its doors.⁵
2. Tom Malone founded Emmanuel Baptist Church in 1942, and had seen its numbers swell to seven thousand before his retirement in 1985. The church declined rapidly and seven years later they called Malone out of retirement to a

¹ John R. Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1966), 9.

² Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls*, 9.

³ The only exception seems to be Harold Sightler, founder of Tabernacle Baptist Church in 1952, which he pastored until his death in 1995. His successor, Melvin Aiken, seemed to have avoided scandal or rapid decline until his retirement in 2016, and the church continues to operate with a moderately-sized congregation. “Dr. Harold B. Sightler,” The Historical Marker Database, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=24126>; “Tabernacle Baptist College,” accessed January 25, 2019, <http://www.findglocal.com/US/Greenville/112730602075893/Tabernacle-Baptist-College>.

⁴ “Chattanooga’s Iconic Highland Park Baptist Church Will Move,” *Times Free-Press*, September 10, 2012.

⁵ “The End of Tennessee Temple in Chattanooga,” *Times Free Press*, March 3, 2015.

congregation of less than a hundred.⁶ Malone was able to energize the church and boost the attendance to over a thousand, retiring again in 2000.⁷ However, in 2016 the church had declined again and they were forced to close their doors, merging with another small church in the area.⁸

3. Jack Hyles, who pastored First Baptist Church, Hammond, IN, which numbered in the tens of thousands, was plagued with sexual scandals in the 1980s and 1990s,⁹ and while the church continued to grow past his death in 2001, his successor, Jack Schaap, was given a 12-year federal sentence in 2013 for sexual relationships with a minor he was counseling.¹⁰
4. Bob Gray, pastor of megachurch Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL from 1954 to 1992, died in 2007 while on trial for capital sexual battery against minors, with victims going back to the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹

Each one of these men and ministries is complicated with their own individual contexts (making them ripe for further research), but it is suggestive that they were not merely colleagues of Rice but his handpicked representatives. These accounts indicate that the evangelistic fundamentalism that Rice advocated was not sustainable for much longer than the original pastor, and could contribute to internal corruption.¹² Further study into

⁶ Joyce Vick, *Tom Malone: The Preacher from Pontiac* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 2003), 3.

⁷ Vick, *Tom Malone*, 233-34.

⁸ “New Beginning Baptist Church,” accessed January 25, 2019, <https://fundamental.org/kjv-church-directory/2462/new-beginning-baptist-church/>; “Emmanuel Baptist Church (Late Pastor Tom Malone) to close its doors,” April 27, 2016, accessed January 25, 2019, <http://www.fundamentalforums.org/index.php?PHPSESSID=0e36e4bb5b1ef17e3b7b22c69a0375d8&topic=7858.msg161999#msg161999>.

⁹ Rice’s assistant editor and biographer wrote the most damning account: Robert L. Sumner, “The Jack Hyles Story,” *The Biblical Evangelist*, accessed January 25, 2019, <http://www.biblicalevangelist.org/jack.hyles.chapter3.php>. Jack Hyles’s daughter, Linda Murphrey confirmed these accusations in 2012. “Open Letter/FBC,” March 18, 2012, accessed January 25, 2019, <http://www.lindamurphrey.com/open-letterfbc.html>.

¹⁰ “Schaap sentenced to 12 years for sexual relationship with teen parishioner,” *Northwest Indiana Times*, accessed January 25, 2019, https://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/hammond/schaap-sentenced-to-years-for-sexual-relationship-with-teen-parishioner/article_c7aa6a30-5a5a-567a-ae02-1e8664b4a4ae.html.

¹¹ “Former pastor talked openly with police about sex charges,” *News 4 Jax*, November 21, 2007, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://www.news4jax.com/news/former-pastor-talked-openly-with-police-about-sex-charges>.

¹² In 2018 the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* released an investigative report detailing over 400 allegations of sexual assault among independent fundamentalist Baptists nationwide, and the ensuing cover-ups by leaders. “Hundreds of sex abuse allegations found in fundamental Baptist churches across U.S.,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, December 9, 2018, accessed January 25, 2018, <https://www.star-telegram.com/living/religion/article222576310.html>.

the relationship between Rice’s values and the practices each church is needed to better understand how closely these failures were connected.

Despite these unfortunate associations, Rice himself was noted for his personal morality; one study related that “no whiff of scandal ever touched his ministry. No one ever questioned his personal integrity, his devotion to the Lord, or his passion for evangelism. Even those who disagreed with his ideas could respect him as a man of God.”¹³ Perhaps this was Rice’s greatest legacy—a man who valued consistency and commitment to truth, willing to face criticism and loss for his convictions, endeavoring for unity around great principles rather than divisiveness over secondary issues, focused in others, marked by integrity, and respected even by his opponents. In the end, John R. Rice’s ministry, like twentieth-century America, was a complicated merging of the old and new, traditional and radical, right and wrong.

¹³ Kevin Bauder and Robert Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine: Origins of Baptist Fundamentalism, 1870-1950* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2014), 332.

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ABSTRACT

JOHN R. RICE AND EVANGELISM: AN ESSENTIAL MARK OF INDEPENDENT BAPTIST FUNDAMENTALISM

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This dissertation examines the theology of John R. Rice through the lens of his commitment to evangelism. Rice was a prominent twentieth-century independent Baptist fundamentalist whose ministry covered many areas, including pastor, newspaper editor, and evangelist. This dissertation argues that evangelism was Rice's focus and defined his other theological, ministerial, and historical perspectives. Rice's devotion to evangelism, especially as informed by nineteenth-century revivalism, created a unique form of fundamentalism, one that trumped other doctrines, such as separatism. Chapter 2 places Rice in the context of twentieth-century fundamentalism. Rice developed a unique model, focused on cooperation with all believers for evangelism. It was largely abandoned by his successors. Chapter 3 argues that Rice taught that the Christian life and church should be organized entirely around evangelism, following the heart of Jesus. This approach would naturally produce discipleship and church health. Chapter 4 examines Rice's bibliology. His conversionism led him away from evidentialist and Common Sense views and toward a Reformed, presuppositional perspective. Chapter 5 demonstrates that Rice was only a nominal dispensationalist. Rice held to the system as far as it facilitated evangelism, but no farther. This stance left Rice on the edges of the

typical fundamentalist identification with dispensationalism. Chapter 6 analyzes Rice's opposition to Arminianism and Calvinism. Rice's held a superficial understanding of both systems, leading him to make errors in evaluating them, as well past Reformed evangelists. Chapter 7 focuses on Rice's pneumatology. Rice maintained that evangelism was dependent on a post-conversion endowment of power from the Holy Spirit. Rice's also strongly opposed the tongues theology of Pentecostalism. Chapter 8 examines Rice's preaching style in relation to current social issues. Rice advocated pointed preaching against modern social ills, primarily as a means to bring conviction. However, Rice drew most of his analysis from a white, conservative culture, centered around authority, demonstrated by his opposition to the Civil Rights Movement. Chapter 9 focuses on Rice's methodology of evangelism, which was determined by pragmatism. Rice taught that personal evangelism was the most effective means of evangelism, while mass evangelism was necessary mostly as a means to prepare for evangelism.

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