

The Adventure

Exciting Developments

THE ADVENTURE



8. Exciting Developments

by Frank Gray

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One of the great advantages of our being based in Manila was that it was central to the main areas of FEBC ministry in Asia. It had excellent air routes to most of the countries served by the broadcasts.

Travel had a few downsides. My growing involvement with training and planning visits around the region meant that I was increasingly away from home. As a member of Jim Bowman's Field Operations team I needed to visit California often. It was also expected that I attend Field Director's conferences which could be held anywhere in the FEBC circuit.

Sometimes I needed to do presentations about the way forward in a world of change – political, economic and technological. It was becoming increasingly clear that we faced a digital future and struggled to understand how it would impact our ministry, and the changes that would need to be made accordingly.



Running repairs to our car

Hennie was left at home with our children while I was gone. Our car always seemed to breakdown more often – though Malcolm and Eduard were becoming increasingly resourceful having watched what I used to do to get it running again.

In Manila there always seemed to be fix-it men lurking in the bushes on EDSA (the main semi-circular highway), emerging from nowhere whenever a car got into trouble. It was said that if ignition was the issue they would replace the ignition coil – then re-use it in the next car they fixed.

There was also continual unrest during the nine years we were there. There was much political turmoil during the Marcos years and the scandal of the Aquino assassination in 1986. Then after the accession of Cory Aquino to the presidency there were on-going coup attempts to de-stabilise her government. Sadly political freedom after the tight controls imposed by President Marcos, such as martial law in 1972, often led to anarchy. Various pretenders would use their influence and military knowhow to mount coup attempts but none succeeded and were put down within a day or two.

A number of these coup attempts happened while I was away so that just added to the anxiety for both Hennie and me.



Reading the Overseas English news

We had done one radio program together – *Someone to Turn To* – a counselling-type program, but generally we did better with our own programs. One of my responsibilities

was to read the news at

9.30 and 10.30pm in the Overseas English service. It was rather amateurish in some respects, depending largely on a rip-and-read approach, drawing on the copy being clacked out on teleprinters connected to AP, AFP and Reuters news services. Perhaps most challenging – and fascinating to me – was to speedily make decisions about what was newsworthy for our Asian audience – and then in what order to put the headlines. In other words, what really mattered?

FEBC enjoyed a reputation in the region of being an independent, non-government organisation without political bias.

An additional responsibility I – and others - took on when



Faith Academy School bus

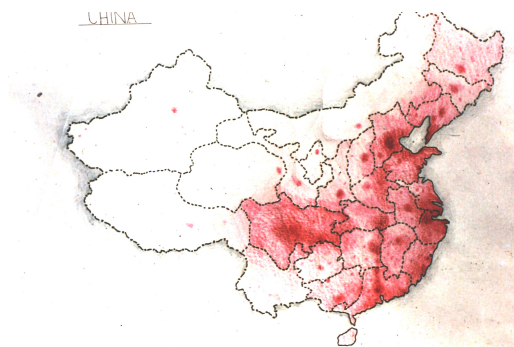
there was a serious typhoon around, was to contact Faith Academy to determine whether school would be cancelled. This had to be done around sign-on at 6am before the children caught their F.A. school buses. I then made the announcement over mediumwave station DZAS for the missions community.

There was a real buzz about working with FEBC in Manila. It was the crossroads of the FEBC world and the centre of much

mission activity. It also played a major part in the life of the local churches.

Manila was a good source of cheap computing equipment and software. It was this factor that played a significant role in the direction my work was to take me in developing RICE – Radio In Church-planting Evangelism.

Much of it could be traced back to the Wheaton Summer School – Church Growth with Peter Wagner in 1976. That had convinced me that we needed to find ways of fusing Church Growth principles with those of Communication in the form of contemporary technology. What energy could be developed by taking these two separate disciplines and fusing them to produce a new dimension in missions? Why not use radio to stimulate and nurture the growth of churches by remote sparking and stimulating the growth of the churches in China and USSR? The thought was energising. Many of a more traditional nature were sceptical – but I was convinced we were onto something new.



Density of China mail responses

The sudden interest in the massive increase in mail FEBC was receiving from China became a big thing in 1981. I saw that listeners' letters provided a valuable

documented evidence of ministry which most other ministries don't have. While in FEBC we knew this was happening it gave an enormous boost to now find missiologists getting behind us. It was also having an impact on our program planning and strategic development.

RICE therefore made one of its main theses the notion that carefully created radio programs could be used to stimulate the growth of the church in closed countries.

Rudi Wiens took this to heart while studying at Biola University and looked at ways of transforming FEBC's Russian language broadcasts. In USSR at that time small groups of Christians were gathering together for worship, fellowship and teaching. But if they reached fifteen in number the group became illegal and would need to split. Dr David Barrett in WCE did a statistical estimate of the number of 'isolated radio churches' in the USSR as being 39,750 as an indirect result of the combined impact of international Christian broadcasters, notably Trans World Radio, HCJB and FEBC.

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I was also motivated in part by my experience with the church in Laos that we had had to leave behind in 1975. What could be done for them? How were they to be taught, encouraged and ministered to now that missionaries had all left? How

could evangelism be done in a land where the government was now so strongly anti-Christian?

RICE also had another dimension: the tabulating of radio broadcast hours for each language assigned to Christian broadcasting around the world. This was brought about by the meaningful information I was getting from data I had been compiling on our own modest Apple II+ (compatible) which I had picked up in Hong Kong . It came about like this...

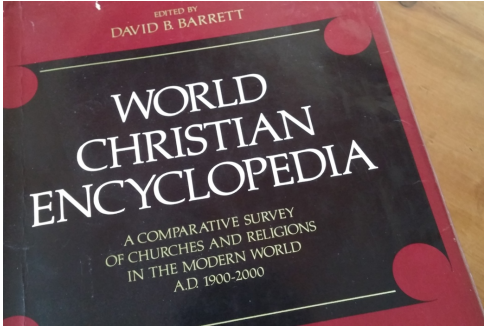
While still working together in La Mirada Jim Bowman and I had been compiling data on all our FEBC broadcasts. But then I left to go to Manila in the summer of '82. "Who," I asked Jim in 1984, "is now answering the phone for those donors who call regarding our various language broadcasts?" It seemed that no one back in La Mirada had the information to hand. To me it became apparent that we needed to start collecting this data with renewed effort, so that it was completely up-to-date and reliable.

I also saw enormous value in being able to compile data on what all the other major international Christian broadcasters were doing:

Trans World Radio, HCJB, Radio ELWA, and FEBC's sister organisation Feba Radio. The realisation that this exercise had never been done before added to my motivation. We had no joint listing that showed what everyone else in the world was

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also broadcasting. It was overdue, and with the help of affordable computers we now had the means to do this.



Dr. David Barrett's monumental work

The second significant event was the publication of Dr David Barrett's monumental work – the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, published in 1982. It was the compilation of world mega-

languages that took my attention. When I came

across this table I knew that we were onto a significant discovery. Hennie and I worked late one night entering data on languages into the primitive database I was assembling on our computer in our air-conditioned bedroom.

Combining these two sets of data yielded some fascinating information. It revealed how much broadcasting the mega languages were getting – or not getting. More especially it revealed huge gaps in the distribution of languages and some gross inequalities.

I tried to develop a suitable algorithm which would highlight

The table's sub-total at the end: 'Languages'

Language	Native speakers				
Chinese	886,376,100	Lao	14,117,800	Slovak	5,6
Mandarin*	551,716,000	Litvak	1,411,700	Finnish	4,9
Wu*	75,638,000	Malay	14,011,500	Norwegian	4,8
Cantonese*	59,208,000	Hungarian	13,948,000	Indic	4,8
Hsinang*	44,403,000	Yoruba	13,721,100	Rundi	4,8
Hakka*	35,400,000	Provasak*	13,250,000	Konari	4,8
Hak	25,600,000	Ibo	2,799,500	Batak	4,8
Minnan*	23,100,000	Galla	2,455,900	Mongol	4,8
Kare	22,500,000	Swahili	19,544,000	Nahant	4,8
Taiwanese*	13,416,000	Fulani	11,790,100	Nahant	4,8
English	265,095,000	Azeri	11,499,000	Shanghaan	4,8
Spanish	227,951,000	Greek	11,024,700	Abkhaz	4,8
Hindi	168,537,000	Tajiklog	10,795,000	Basgian	4,8
Arabic	144,309,400	Sinhala	11,024,700	Moro	4,8
Russian	142,596,100	Malaynes	10,800,000	Georgi	4,8
Bengali	138,044,400	Hindi*	10,695,700	Miao	4,8
Portuguese	135,419,000	Geedi*	10,695,700	Yunnanest	4,8
Japanese	117,609,000	Sewali	10,695,700	Mongolian	3,9
German	90,040,100	Byetoneasian	9,964,000	Kazani	3,9
Polish	80,136,000	Cheweg	9,785,300	Kazani	3,9
French	67,827,200	Kurdish	9,785,300	Kordic	3,9
Italian	65,626,200	Malagasy	9,154,400	Mongol*	3,9
Japanese	63,762,200	Yiddish	9,113,100	Galician	3,9
Tamil	62,487,000	Khmer*	8,940,000	Muresh	3,9
Malay	58,179,400	Khmer*	8,815,200	Yiddish	3,9
Korean	57,045,000	Chinese*	8,550,000	Yiddish	3,9
Telugu	44,829,200	Burman*	7,944,300	Luba	3,9
Ukrainian	43,540,000	Ambare	7,945,200	Sis	3,9
Turkic	42,932,300	Bulgarian*	7,930,000	Madrinan	3,9
Vietnamese	39,224,000	Karachi*	7,667,500	Madrinan	3,9
Polish	38,057,100	Karachi*	7,667,500	Baltian	3,9
Urdu	38,000,000	Bengali*	6,500,000	Kemp	3,9

The listing of world mega-languages

the inequity and quantify it. The simplest was the hours per month per million people computation. From that we might be able to deduce what would be an appropriate level of hours to broadcast each week – if it needed to be linked to the number of speakers.

Within months RICE research would find wider attention and result in splitting off into two separate partnership ventures with the other major Christian broadcasters. The first of these was the *World by 2000* initiative.

Looking back over the past 30 years it is interesting to note how God was aligning Ron Cline on the one hand with vision and the ability to communicate it, while myself and others were working behind the scenes to provide the research that would provide the factual basis.



There was widespread surprise when the news of the *World by 2000* commitment was revealed at our first RICE Consultation in Cambridge, UK in December 1985. Ron Cline (HCJB), Paul Freed (TWR) and Bob Bowman (FEBC) had signed the declaration in September - but without prior consultation with operational staff. It was a move initiated by Cline, then CEO at HCJB World Radio.

The commitment read like this:

We are committed to provide every man, woman and child on earth the opportunity to turn on their radio and

hear the Gospel in a language they can understand, so that they can become followers of Christ and responsible members of His Church. We plan to complete this task by the year 2000.

It was only after we left Cambridge that we discovered the background to this bold declaration and to explore what the implications might be for our respective organisations. We soon discovered that there was little more to it than a simple statement of commitment. It was yet waiting for operational staff to provide definition and turn it into reality.

Thankfully much of the homework had already been done. Never had an overall picture of Christian broadcasting worldwide been obtained before and none of us really knew what each of the others was doing.

Though working with FEBC I was developing the *Radio In Church-planting Evangelism* (RICE) initiative which was sponsored by the Lausanne Committee following the Wheaton '83 conference. For our data we used a database management system developed by Jonathan Marsden of FEBC. Jonathan had been recruited after we had been speaking at a friend's church in my home town of Reading. He proved to be able to provide just the professional skills we needed in this and other projects. The database contained information of all the broadcasts of international Christian broadcasters as well as others. It also contained statistical information on language groups and countries.

Studying the data I was quite appalled by the inordinate amount of broadcasting in a few major languages while so many had none or very little.

RICE addressed the need for the strategic use of radio in mission. If radio were to be used strategically we first needed to have a good understanding of what we were already doing between us.

One of RICE's first priorities was to conduct an assessment of the current status of Christian radio broadcasting worldwide. We decided to exclude N. America from our study on the basis that it was in a league of its own and would seriously detract from our main purpose, while skewing the results.

The *World Christian Encyclopedia* listed all the known mega-languages of the world and I

had already been involved in documenting all shortwave Christian broadcasts, an outgrowth of documenting all of FEBC's begun in 1980.

Studying the data I was quite appalled by the inordinate amount of broadcasting in a few major languages while so many had none or very little. As a rough guide I had used population statistics from the SIL *Ethnologue* and adopted the SIL 3-letter code as standard for each language. The results were very revealing.

Thus it was that Barrett's list defined our 'universe' - or set a standard by which we as broadcasters needed to be guided in terms of language. So by subtracting the known broadcasts from this list we would obtain a listing of all significant mega-languages that were unknown to Christian broadcasters. On

top of that would be the vast number of languages spoken by less than one million. Moreover, it was also a moving target, we discovered. Much of the population data was old. Many of the smaller groups were increasing rapidly and passing the one million figure. There was also the issue of dialects. Many ethnic minorities seemed to have a wide range of dialects - but how different were they? It proved to be a very educational exercise.



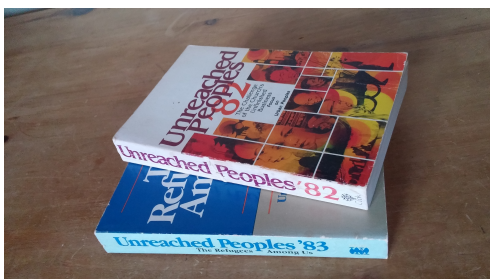
Phil Sandahl with me at Cambridge
RICE consultation

Working with Phil Sandahl of HCJB we refined and added to our data. We wanted to make sure we had credible data - particularly in understanding languages and dialects so that we

had reliable numbers to present. This coincided with a large

volume of language data becoming available largely through the Unreached People series of books and later by the work of The Joshua Project.

At this point the number of languages we were committing to was still an unknown quantity. Given that there were over seven thousand clearly identifiable languages in current use around the world we needed to know how many of these were



intended by the three presidents.

It was not until July 1986 in Flevohof in the Netherlands that we had opportunity

Unreached People Group books

to meet the presidents and discuss these matters in any detail. The occasion was the International Christian Media Conference, an event that brought together the major media organisations, especially those engaged in radio.

The afternoon I met with the three presidents I remember quite clearly. I had all the main data at my fingertips - enough to answer their questions. The biggest issue concerned the minimum size of a language group: would it be 10 million - or even 100,000? It was finally decided to use one million.

We then got down to working out what we needed to do. It was decided to establish a research office. The US Center for World Mission (USCWM) in Pasadena was identified as a suitable venue and each of the three agencies designated its own representative to be part of this. Dave Fisher was designated by TWR though he would remain in TWR HQ in New Jersey. Phil Sandahl (HCJB) would be the resident researcher based in Pasadena, while I (FEBC) would travel from the Philippines as needed.

I was feeling somewhat miffed that my RICE project had been hi-jacked by the *World by 2000 (Wb2)* initiative. The first reports that I generated for a year or more reflected my reluctance to give up my RICE identity and ownership of the data. This was with some justification as my work thus far had been encouraged by Dayton acting in his capacity as Senior Advisor to LCWE. Lausanne had also sponsored our first RICE consultation in Cambridge.

But at the same time I was forced to acknowledge that what *Wb2* was committed to was something extremely simple, both to understand and to communicate. It was one part of RICE that could be acted upon as a joint effort. RICE, by contrast, was somewhat erudite and academic. Working with Phil we presented a report to the *Wb2* Committee in December 1987. It listed 170 language services that would probably be needed.

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As time progressed we decided to reduce the cut-off to 900,000 language speakers on the basis that many groups may have grown in size since the last official figures were

processed. We also learned that a number of languages were dying - Ryukuan (Japan) was one of them - Manchurian another.

Chinese languages in particular were a challenge - because of the great disparity between a written language and a spoken language. It highlighted the issue of who was publishing the statistics and where they were coming from in terms of their use of statistics. SIL/Wycliffe were primarily interested in print - for which there was one standard text. But for spoken languages there were many dialects.

In spite of the rise of *World by 2000* RICE still had a role to play in the run-up to the 1989 Lausanne II in Manila. Funds were



Issues of RICEFields Journal

provided for a magazine to be launched. Its purpose was to help stimulate the use of radio for the ultimate purpose of planting churches – as we were seeing in China and USSR. I edited *RICEFields Journal* in conjunction with Ross James and other networkers. We thus had a broad background of experience, and most of this provided content on cutting-edge topics, together with a few other media folk whom we invited. It had a circulation of around one thousand copies.

RICE eventually died out, having played its part. Its concerns were now being carried by Wb2 on the one hand and ICRE (*International Communications Research for Evangelism*) on the other. ICRE was later to change its name to *Intersearch* in 1992 at the ICMC conference in Sheffield. It has gone on to expand its service to Christian media agencies. As for me, I was content in the knowledge that my initial foundational work had not been in vain. It was now part of something much bigger.

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The stark reality our research revealed was that approximately ninety percent of Christian radio broadcasting outside of North America was catering to just ten major language groups.

Without having had a background in linguistics Phil and I found we were on a steep learning curve. People were also looking to us for advice and answers. Some of the questions that arose were “When is a language not a language?” “How much dialectical difference needs there to be before we classify it as a different language?” “What if the language is a dying language?” “What if a language is the same when written, but not when spoken?” This latter one was particularly the case with Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese dialects.

Barrett, on the other hand, had adopted another system of language classification as proposed by Professor Dalby. And

therein we found some disagreement as we sought to harmonise our statistics. For example, we found for a while that there was an approximate factor of ten difference between our statistics for the number of languages broadcast (about 350) compared with Barrett who was publishing a number ten times that (3300).

I visited David Barrett at the Foreign Mission Board headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. It was there that I found out the reason for the apparent discrepancy. It all came down to what he called a language and what we called it. He and Patrick Johnstone, editor of *Operation World*, had agreed on using 'speech community' as their basis for language. This meant that where a language is spoken in a variety of countries it develops, in time, its own dialect, absorbing foreign words and phrases that are specific to that country. This accounted for there being a factor of ten difference.

The *Wb2* initiative gathered momentum as a steering committee was appointed and agreed to meet together on a quarterly basis. One of their tasks was assigning 'stewardship' to each of those major languages without broadcast and assisting one another by sharing information and resources. It proved to be a very useful forum for updating one another and brought us closer together.

Wb2 was not just about statistics – something I feared might happen. More important it was about people, giving people of many ethnic groups the opportunity to hear the Gospel for the first time. On the front end this meant the challenge of finding believers to prepare and make radio programs in that specific

language. A lot of prayer went up for God to put us in touch with these people – and He did!

One such language on our list was that of the Mon people of the southern part of Myanmar. Little did we know in FEBC-USA that we had any Mon people living nearby, yet there was a student at Biola University just along the road from FEBC's La Mirada office, who was a Mon. He would drive past our offices and see the FEBC sign – and the words 'Christ to the World by Radio'. One day Mehm called in with his wife Ruth to find out more. Were we interested in recruiting a broadcaster from Myanmar? Yes we were. The original thinking was that we should send them to Manila.

Then we learned that he was a Mon who had grown up in Myanmar and had a strong calling to reach his own people. When I heard this I recommended that it might be much better if they should go and live in Thailand where a large number of Mon people were living. This would provide them the cultural environment and resources they would need.



Ruth, Jenny and Mehm in 1993

And so in 1993 Mehm and Ruth moved to Thailand with their small daughter and took up residence there, first for language study and orientation then to set up a small recording studio in their own home. They have been having an

impressive ministry among the Mon ever since. It was a move they have never regretted.

It was not long before other Christian broadcast agencies wanted to get in on the action and so arrangements were made for them to share in the *Wb2* commitment. Some were able to allocate representatives to sit on the Steering Committee and they took turns to host the quarterly meetings. There was still more to be done by the turn of the millennium and after much discussion and deliberation it was agreed that *World by 2000* become *World by Radio (WbR)*. But some changes were anticipated...

In one meeting in 2001 the suggestion was made that we take the show on the road – closer to the action. For too long we had met in North America and Europe but we needed to move on. Africa was ripe for this as there were many independent Christian radio initiatives across the entire continent but while Radio Africa Network and others had done a great job in southern Africa there was still room for a continent-wide

network. We therefore arranged to hold a Steering Committee meeting in Arusha, Tanzania in 2002.



World by Radio meeting in Arusha

We flew into Nairobi, Kenya then travelled by road, past Mt Kilimanjoro, to Arusha. Invitations had gone out to Christian radio

groups in northeast, east, south and west – and they came. We then presented to them what *WbR* was about and how they could partner with us.

It proved to be a big hit. A local chapter was established in Africa – *Africa by Radio*. One of the greatest needs among broadcasters was that of training, which they could share in.

Similarly, *Asia by Radio* – now *Asia by Media* – was established. It was in Arusha that we began to see that we had to move on from thinking primarily in terms of languages –and turn our attention to Key Cities. In the modern world city dwellers are less likely to be impacted by shortwave broadcasts. They needed to be reached through local radio initiatives.

WbR was to continue till 2009 when it was finally disbanded. In the mean time around 160 new Christian language services had been added worldwide.

Since the inception of *Wb2* the world of radio broadcasting had changed dramatically. At the outset the mainstay of our work was via shortwave radio but by 2000 this was already in decline, due in part to the end of the Cold War. Local and regional FM stations were now blooming as de-regulation of the media was adopted in many countries. The Internet had established itself, too, and would soon become the dominant force in global communication. The database designed to track all our radio broadcasts could not keep pace with all the latest developments – local broadcasting on the one hand, and streaming broadcasts via the Internet on the other. It was a new world.

Perhaps the greatest loss in disbanding *WbR* is that broadcasting agencies no longer have a forum for discussion and shared networking, something which all of us who were actively involved greatly valued.

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NOTE:

This is the 8th chapter in the Adventure series. You will find all previous chapters available on line at www.francisgray.com/adventure/

Picture on front cover: Our *World by Radio* participants in Arusha in 2002