



THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

VOL. 88, NO. 71
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BOSTON — FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 1996

75¢ (\$1.00 CANADIAN)

TEMPLETON PRIZE WINNER

Sharing the Gospel On Campuses

By Ron Scherer

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NEW YORK

BILL Bright admits that he is an ambitious man. But it is not the kind of ambition that creates global empires or drives someone to run for political office.

"I used to be very ambitious for Bill Bright," he says, but "now I am very ambitious for the Lord."

That ambition led Mr. Bright to found the Campus Crusade for Christ, which is now at more than 1,000 major colleges and universities around the world. In 1987, he launched a plan to take the gospel to all 6.3 billion people on earth by the end of 2000. And now he's trying to raise \$100 million for a university that will teach with a Biblical perspective.

On Wednesday, Bright was rewarded for this spiritual ambition with the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. The prize, given annually by Sir John Templeton, the mutual-fund wizard, is worth about \$1.07 million. Past winners have included Mother Teresa and the Rev. Billy Graham.

"Bill Bright has had an enormous impact," says Robert John Russell, a Templeton judge and director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley, Calif. "He has evangelized many people and made an impact on their lives and what they share."

Bright confesses there was a time when he had a different type of ambition: working day and night to make money.

He had moved from a ranch in Coweta, Okla., to Hollywood, Calif., where he had started a business, Bright's Brandied Delights and California Confectioneries. Every week he participated in an amateur radio show mainly as a way to meet people. After the show, he would go horseback riding in the Hollywood hills. "It was fun," he recalls of his worldly ambitions.

One afternoon, however, he stopped at a Presbyterian church to hear Dr. Louis Evans, the pastor. "It was almost as if an invisible hand reached out and drew me in," he says.

Even though he was happy with what he calls his "pagan lifestyle," he started to read the Bible and attend Christian social functions where he was amazed to see young people having fun without drinking or carousing. Then one day, at his Hollywood home, he got down on his knees to pray and ask Jesus Christ to come into

his life, he says. The resulting religious experience convinced him that he should spread the gospel.

For five years he went to seminary school while still running his business. He never became a member of the Presbyterian clergy, though. Instead, one Sunday in 1951, he and his wife, Vonette, "signed a contract with Jesus." That led him to launch the first Campus Crusade for Christ

RELIGION

MARTY LEDERHANDLER/AP



THE WINNER: Bill Bright is embraced by his wife, Vonette, after receiving the Templeton Prize March 6.

at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Bright remains personally active in proselytizing. He recounts a conversation he had with a politician who had been a state governor and served on two presidential cabinets.

"I had a plan to mobilize 1,000 leaders of the world to help take a stand for Christ," Bright says. He found the politician at Harvard University and asked him to join the 1,000. The man replied, "I'm a Christian, not a fanatic. I don't wear my religion on my sleeve."

Bright retorted, "Did it ever occur to you that it cost Jesus Christ his life on the cross to die for your sins or that the disciples died as martyrs getting this message to you?" The politician replied, "No sir, I'm wrong, what do I have to do?"

The Campus Crusade for Christ has grown. Bright claims that 1.5 billion people have read one of his pamphlets and that he has brought the Gospel to 2 billion people, about one-third of the earth's population, in 45 years.