

Honoring the Life's Work of a Soul Man

■ **Beliefs:** Bill Bright's concern for people's spiritual welfare has earned him a \$1-million award for his work in furthering religion.

By MARY ROURKE
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In a UCLA cafeteria during a lunch break, two young women study a Bible. One, Daphne Telfer, leads this Campus Crusade tutoring session. The other, Phoebe Park, asks hard questions in an easy manner. "If I do something wrong, how does God feel?"

Forty-five years ago, the person holding the Bible could have been Bill Bright, who founded



"I just want to spread the Gospel message," says Bill Bright, who founded Campus Crusade for Christ.

Campus Crusade for Christ on the UCLA campus. Now 74, he heads what has become an international organization with staffers such as Telfer on 650 university campuses in the United States and about 470 more overseas.

For this and other vast scale achievements, Bright on Wednesday was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. He will be presented the \$1.07 million in prize money at Buckingham Palace on May 8. Past winners include Mother Teresa, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the Rev. Billy Graham.

A Presbyterian who publicly committed his life to Christ as a born-again Christian at age 24, Bright launched his college program at 30. By then the Oklahoma native had built a successful candy and confections business in California and had entered the oil industry. He

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gave them both up for his new job: to spread the Gospel to every soul on Earth. He figures there are 6 billion souls and he has reached one-third of them so far.

As he collects his prize, Bright's mission keeps expanding. Over the years, about 40 ministries have been added—for athletes, prisoners, business executives, the military, families and others. There are 13,000 staffers accounted for in the Crusade's annual budget of \$270 million. Bright's wife, Vonette, and one of his two sons work with him full time.

The inexhaustible leader set a course for expansion 34 years ago, when he moved his headquarters to the 18-acre Arrowhead Springs Hotel in the San Bernardino Mountains. "It had been vacant five years," Bright recalls. "We paid \$2 million and the owner let us buy with a \$15,000 down payment. I borrowed the \$15,000."

Now the site houses conference rooms and an International School of Theology with 80 graduate-level students enrolled. Students are responsible for enlisting churches to finance the overseas fieldwork required for graduation. "The faculty raises its own support, too," explains Donald Weaver, the school president.

Five years ago, Bright moved his headquarters to Orlando, Fla., where he now lives. But he traveled 300 days last year, promoting his spiritual books and directing the evangelical rallies he launches in cities from Washington, D.C., to Seoul.

A separate staff of nearly 300 attends to Bright's only film venture, "Jesus," a documentary-style movie that he produced 17 years ago in Israel. Dubbed into 355 languages, screened for Africa's Masai warriors, Bulgaria's presidential Cabinet and central India's cave dwellers, the film is now being translated into 200 more tongues. Natives of each country do the dubbing.

"People are amazed Jesus doesn't speak their language with even a trace of an accent," says Paul Eshleman, director of the project.

Like most whirlwind human beings, Bright has ruffled some feathers along the way.

"Many in America, here from different parts of the world, have diverse views," Bright concedes. "I don't believe in high pressure and arguments. I just want to spread the Gospel message."

Baptized Christians who were

not born again, as he was, wonder why he might not define them as Christian. "A lot of our problems are self-made," he answers. "Semantics can be a barrier. I know President Reagan, he's a Presbyterian and he doesn't talk about being born again. But I have no question, he knows Jesus." (He and Reagan served on a year of the Bible committee in 1983.)

Known as a grass-roots tactician who pursues one-on-one conversion, Bright says he has not joined forces with the Christian Coalition—the evangelical Christian group based in Washington, D.C., that uses mass media to promote prayer in school, their opposition to abortion and political candidates who share their views. Yet, he agrees with them that religion and politics should mix.

"Christians should be very involved in government, from the precinct to the White House," he says. "Remove biblical values from government and you soon have no standards. Myself, I've never been involved with politics, though some moral issues may look like politics."

If not involved, he has come close to the halls of political power. In 1975, Bright opened the Christian Embassy in Washington, D.C., staffed by Campus Crusaders. It offers counseling and socializing, as well as prayer services for legislators and government officials.

At the time, the Rev. Billy Graham, the best known evangelical preacher in America, opposed the idea, saying he was against the organizing of Christians into a political bloc. He also criticized Bright's South Korea rally of 1974, where the controversial Park Chung Hee regime was praised for allowing Christianity to be taught in schools. "The press makes too much of things," Bright says. "Billy Graham is a friend."

As a younger man, Bright thought of becoming a clergyman. He graduated from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1946 while he was still running his fancy foods business and has been awarded six honorary doctorate degrees since then.

"I had doors open to me as a businessman that would be closed to me as a minister," he explains of his choice to remain a layman.

While the Templeton Prize has gone to clergy in the past, more often it has not. Judges chose Bright this year "because of the vast expanse of his ministry and the way in which he has achieved it," says Wilbert Forker, executive vice president of the Templeton Prize. The group of nine judges

includes high- and low-profile people, with former President George Bush and a Nassau, Bahamas, homemaker, among them.

The prize is named for John Marks Templeton, a Bahamas-based pioneer global investor who began the prize in 1972. One of his goals, he says, is to "influence educated people to wake up to religion."

Bright will spend his prize money promoting his newest project. "God has sent me a sense of the urgent need for Christians to mature," he says. "The best way to do

that is to fast and pray." He has led several rallies on the theme and plans others. "It will awaken the church, and accelerate the spread of the Gospel more than anything else can."

Chances are good that most of the money will reach Bright's chosen destination. Last year, Money magazine named Campus Crusade the most efficient religious group in America for the percentage of contributions that go directly to ministry programs. Bill and Vonette Bright's combined salary, excluding housing, is \$43,402.