

In Memoriam – Bob Wright – 1940-2012 by Alan Myatt – 11/30/12

It seems unreal, to find ourselves here today when only a few months ago Bob was sitting on our deck in Charlotte, enjoying a cookout with us and discussing his progress on the various book projects that were underway. The suddenness of his illness and unexpected departure at the age of 72 has been a shock to us all. We never imagined that we would not see another Christmas with Bob; that he would leave us so soon. There was some much more to do, so much more time to share. Now we are left with our memories and the reminder that every moment is precious indeed.

I first met Bob at Bear Valley Baptist Church, in 1981, as a young seminarian cutting my teeth on my first theology and apologetics courses. I remember hearing about some Australian guy in the church who knew all about apologetics and for some strange reason, held to the rather esoteric and radical views of someone called Cornelius Van Til. Having seen Van Til supposedly debunked in my apologetics class, I was curious to meet such a creature as an actual Van Tillian. So I approached Bob one day after church (5:15 pm service I think), introduced myself and asked him, “Why are you a Van Tillian?” I didn’t know Bob yet, so I was expecting an explanation and a defense. He simply looked at me, smiled and said, as if it were obvious, “Because Van Til is right.” That was it. I later learned that this type of brash confidence was part of the Aussie culture that Bob was proud of (and which was celebrated in the Castle – Wright household by the presence of the Universal Corrective Map of the World, in which the world was inverted so that Australia assumed its rightful place at the top). Bob would lament many times how the Americans and Brits were just too soft or reserved to enjoy a good brawl (theological or otherwise). He was always respectful but never pulled any punches.

That first meeting was the beginning of a friendship that lasted for 30 years and has had an absolutely formative influence on my life as a Christian and as a theologian. It began to take off full force over many conversations over tea or dinner at Bob and Julia’s home. Then there was the 12 week series of apologetics lectures, from 1982 or 1983 I think. Here I began to get a vision of Bob’s system of thinking, and learned about such things as the Great Chain of Being, the problem of the One and the Many and the cultural mandate, as well as a method for dealing with cults that actually gave me my first clear understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. (I still have the tapes of those lectures, by the way, and have converted them all to mp3s, if anyone is interested. Maybe we could transcribe them and publish them). There were many hours of discussion following these and other lectures that opened me up to an entire world of Dutch apologists and Puritan theologians. One of my favorite memories of this time is being newly married and attending a lecture with Kathy where Bob discussed the problem of the One and the Many. With her pragmatic nurse’s training I remember Kathy saying, “well if there is a problem, just solve it.” Bob’s patience in responding to that remark was evident and typical of the way he interacted with people. Indeed, we did find many solutions and much to think on in moving forward towards more clarity of thought and depth of devotion.

Perhaps one of the most influential things Bob ever did in my life was to persuade me to consider going to Iliff –DU for my doctoral work. I was getting started at about the time he finished, but

he was always ready to discuss with me the ideas that were being presented in classes. In many ways he served as a mentor for me, even though my studies eventually branched off into other areas of specialization. It seemed that the vision for a comprehensive Christian world and life view was always relevant for whatever challenges would arise.

Bob's knowledge of theology, history, and philosophy was vast, and he was no slouch when it came to questions of science and culture as well. I was always amazed both at the breadth and depth of his reading. He seemed to be a virtual encyclopedia of many subjects and could carry on an interesting discussion of just about anything. He was more well read by the time I met him in his early 40s than I am today in my mid 50s. His library, as you all know, is legendary in its size. It is no doubt, one of the best private scholarly libraries I have ever seen. And he seemed to actually know what each of these books contained. Of course, everyone who knew him, knew that books were one of Bob's passions. He seemed to epitomize the words of the Solomon in Ecclesiastes, "Of the making of many books there is no end." (12:8)

One of my favorite things to do back in our Denver days, was to make a book run to Boulder with Bob. We would hit two or three second hand shops and I remember Bob constantly pulling books off the shelf saying, "here you need this one," or "here's an important classic text on ..." Arianism, cults, Christology, or any of a number of subjects he deemed important for a young theologian to know about. I am sure that several thousand dollars worth of book purchases I have made are due to Bob. I recall sometimes justifying my book expenditures to Kathy by saying, "Well of course this book is essential. Bob says so." I have often thought of Bob when I find myself in a book store shoving books into the hands of one of my students and saying, "you have to have this one." Bob's passion for knowledge and truth set the bar high for us to emulate.

So when I think of Bob, I first of all think of someone who was passionate for truth, and whose passion for truth was contagious. He had little patience with intellectual laziness or nonsense, but who could be very patient with *people*, whatever their needs, intellectual, spiritual or physical. Bob was a warrior for truth, but he was a compassionate warrior. I remember many meetings in his home where he would listen and talk with non-Christians of various types, faithfully laying out before them the claims of Christ and their need for a savior. You see, Bob's passion for truth was not just an intellectual obsession. It was first and foremost and commitment to faithfully serve his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the Father and Holy Spirit; the glorious Trinity of the Bible who condescended to save lost sinners such as us.

Bob was also an example, both in dedication to Christ and in modeling what an egalitarian home is like. I had never heard of egalitarianism before meeting Bob and hadn't really given the question much thought. But as a young husband, I learned much from his teaching and example about how to navigate some of the potential pitfalls of marriage and strive towards a true partnership reflective of the mandate for equality that the Scriptures teach. Bob and Julia were always transparent and willing to let others see them in their home the way they really are. There were no attempts to create some kind of stereotyped image; just the warmth and grace that comes from the reality of equal partners walking

together with the Lord. I can't say that I have been such a great success at following their example, but it was always there as a model to be approached.

Bob also knew how to have fun. We enjoyed a common appreciation of science fiction films, especially of Star Trek. And of course, leave it to Bob to explain how Captain Kirk represents the autonomous man, who has rejected God, caught in the dialectical tension between pure rationalism (the logic of Spock) and pure irrationalism (the emotionalism of Dr. McCoy) in a futile attempt to balance them off against each other and solve the One and Many problem. This eventually gave way to the New Age mysticism (the Great Chain of Being) evidence in the notion of cosmic evolution so prominent in Star Trek the Next Generation. That was vintage Bob, analyzing and discussing this. But it wasn't all about philosophy. It was also about just having a good time watching the Federation shooting it out with different varieties of aliens.

Bob's appreciation on sci-fi, of course, was just one aspect of a much larger appreciation of the fruits of culture that humankind in the image of God creates. Bob was knowledgeable about art and music and knew how to appreciate the pleasures of the creation that God has provided for us, always with a view to how these things fit into the program of redemption. Always optimistic, he looked forward to the coming of the Lord and the future millennium in which there will be a magnificent realization of cultural development under the Lordship of Christ that is beyond all that we can imagine.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy things about all of this is that Bob never was satisfied to live in the rarified air of abstract philosophy and theology as if it were just some kind of hobby or game. He held to truth because it matters. He knew, just as Jesus taught us, that the truth sets us free. (John 8:32) Bob lived with the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God, and that in its pages we find the truth that we need. He loved the Bible and dedicated himself to studying it and teaching it, because it is here that we find eternal life. The truths of Scripture matter because they answer the questions of life that we all face. Where did we come from? Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Why is there suffering and evil in the world and what has God done about it? How can I come to know God and be assured of eternal life? How do I live life in such a way as to have eternal significance? How do we bring healing and redemption for the poor and the suffering? For Bob the answer to all of these questions is summed up in the gospel of God's grace. That while we were yet sinners, living a life of guilt, shame and alienation, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) All those who believe in him will be saved and as Jesus said, "never, ever die." Oh, this physical body will die. But we will leave it to be in the presence of the Lord and at the day of the resurrection, we will be restored to return and reign with Jesus forever.

Bob lived these truths to make a difference. And make a difference he did. He embodied the grace of the Lord through the rich ministry of hospitality that he and Julia shared over the years. All were welcome in their home, for a cup of tea and discussion of whatever was needed. But beyond this, there were many wayfaring souls over the years with whom Bob and Julia shared their home as a place to live. Some came for a short time, others lived with them for a period of years. There were international students, friends and family, who found in their home a place of true Christian community; a place of rest and retreat, a place to gain strength, a place to laugh or cry, to share joys and sorrows.

I'm sure that many of us have our favorite "Bob" stories from those days together, and no doubt we will have a chance to share many of them in the days to come. Many of us here simply would not be who we are today without having benefited from the healing touch of Bob and Julia's ministry of hospitality. We are all richer for the marks that Bob left in our lives, and our lives will be just a bit poorer now that he is gone.

The Scripture says, "For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1 Cor 15: 53-57)

Bob's labor was not in vain. We are his legacy. So to my dear friend Bob Wright, I say thank you, on behalf of us all, for the years of friendship, love, the ministry, the sharing, and fun. For all that you brought to us and gave to us. For challenging us and leading the way forward so that we all could come closer to home in God's Kingdom. We say goodbye for now. But we will see you soon. And we will pick up where we left off, knowing that we will have all of eternity to share together in the presence of our Lord, never to be parted or separated again.

Alan Myatt, Nov. 30, 2012



*Dr. Robert Keith  
McGregor Wright*

### ***Dr. Robert Keith McGregor Wright***

Born in Adelaide, South Australia on Mar. 24, 1940  
Departed on Nov. 27, 2012 and resided in Johnson  
City, TN.

Visitation: [Friday, Nov. 30, 2012](#)

Service: [Friday, Nov. 30, 2012](#)

Cemetery: [Hermon United Methodist Church  
Cemetery](#)

Please click on the links above for locations, times,  
maps, and directions.

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1. Dr. Robert Keith McGregor Wright, a 15-year resident of Johnson City died Tuesday at Johnson City Medical Center. Born in Adelaide, South Australia in 1940, Bob, as he was known to friends and family, was a high school English teacher before leaving Australia to study at the University of London in the United Kingdom. Bob earned a Bachelor of Divinity from London

University, a Masters of Theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield Illinois, and a Ph.D. from the Iliff School of Theology and University of Denver in Denver Colorado. Dr. Wright was a Bible teacher, theologian, writer, and scholar. His is the author of No Place for Sovereignty (InterVarsity Press), and The Perfections of Scripture (forthcoming in 2013). Bob's ministry stretched from Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Romania but his influence went far beyond that via those whom he influenced through his ministry.

Bob was founder and co-director of Friendship International, an outreach ministry to international students and visiting scholars. He was also founder and co-director of the Aquila and Priscilla Study Center whose ministry continues to reach out to others through the internet.

Dr Wright's ministry of friendship, hospitality, teaching and scholarship touched everyone he met. A friend and former student recently said of Bob, "he lived his faith so vividly that people were inspired to live deeper, richer lives of Christian faith." He lived well what he taught so well, and so helped shape the lives and faith of many people whose paths intersected with his. Bob is survived by his wife, Julia Castle, brother, Barrie James McGregor Wright, 25 nieces and nephews, including Lisa Duffy and Scott Castle, as well as countless brothers and sisters in Christ whose lives he touched so richly.

The family will receive friends on Friday, November 30th from 4-7:00 pm at Hamlett-Dobson Funeral Home, Kingsport. Funeral services will follow at 7:00 pm with Rev. Charlie Scalf and Dr. Alan Myatt officiating.

Graveside services will be conducted on Saturday, December 1st, at 11:00 am at Herman Cemetery in Gate City, VA.

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