In Memoriam

Professor Emeritus David F. Wright, M.A., D.D., F.R.Hist.S.

Professor David F. Wright, Professor Emeritus of Patristic and Reformed Christianity at the University of Edinburgh and a former President of the Scottish Church History Society, died on 19 February 2008 in Edinburgh, in his seventieth year. He was a historian of astonishing breadth, who made major scholarly contributions in early Church history, the history of the Continental Reformation, and the history of Christianity in Scotland. He was also a well-loved teacher and administrator within the University, and a respected leader in the Church of Scotland.

David Wright was born on 2 October 1937 in London. He studied at Cambridge University, and was awarded the M.A. degree with First Class Honours in Classics and Theology in 1961. He then pursued postgraduate research at the University of Oxford, working under the supervision of the distinguished early Church historian, Professor Henry Chadwick. Before completing his doctorate, he was recruited in 1964 to a lectureship at the University of Edinburgh, where the Rev. Professor A. C. Cheyne was building a team of Church historians of great ability – the renowned ‘Cheyne gang’ – who would collectively have a profound influence in shaping Scottish teaching and research in the history of Christianity. The young Mr Wright assumed responsibility for teaching and supervision in early Church history. He would remain at the University of Edinburgh for his entire career, retiring as Professor of Patristic and Reformed Christianity in 2003, and continuing to serve the University as Professor Emeritus and Honorary Fellow in Divinity until his death.

Professor Wright was the author or editor of several books, and well over 100 scholarly articles or contributed book chapters. In the field of Patristics, his work focused on Augustine’s exegetical and...
theological writings. He translated and elucidated key works of Augustine, including the homilies on John’s Gospel, and the re-discovered Divjak letters. He explored the development of baptismal doctrine and practice in the early Latin Church and made significant contributions to our understanding of Marian devotion in the early Church.

In Reformation studies, he explored the major shapers of the Reformed theological tradition, especially Bucer and Calvin. His work on Bucer focused on the theme of infant baptism and on Bucer’s influence on the Reformations in England and Scotland. His edited volume on *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community* is a seminal work. His studies of Calvin elucidated the theme of “accommodation” (that is, the adaptation of a Scriptural text or doctrine to altered historical circumstances) in Calvin’s writings. He also clarified the place of the Old Testament as a structured element in Calvin’s theological thought. His contributions to Calvin scholarship were recognised when he was named to the *Präsidium* of the distinguished International Congress of Calvin Research. Yet another field of his research was the influence of the Church Fathers on the Protestant Reformers. In a series of seminal articles, he examined how the Reformers were profoundly influenced by the Church Fathers in such areas as the use of Scripture and infant baptism.

His work in Scottish Church history focused on the place of the Bible in Scottish life and culture, the theme of baptism, and the evangelical tradition in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism. Scottish historians are perhaps most deeply in his debt for his immense contributions as an editor of the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* and as the author of a large number of its entries.

He was a committed teacher and academic leader. His well-crafted lectures were full of human interest, rich in ideas, and enlivened by a subdued, often dry sense of humour. In his seminars, he promoted disciplined enquiry and inspired students with a love for historical research. He took a particular interest in the education of candidates for
the ministry, whether of the Church of Scotland, or of other denominations. As a postgraduate supervisor, he trained dozens of Church historians; his students now teach at universities and colleges around the world. He exercised leadership within his University, serving as Convener of the Senatus Postgraduate Studies Committee, Convener of the University Library Committee, Dean of the Faculty of Divinity, and Curator of the New College Library – among many other positions. As an elder within the Church of Scotland, he was active on General Assembly committees and served as a Moderator of the Presbytery of Edinburgh.

Professor Wright was Vice-President of the Scottish Church History Society from 2001 to 2004 and President of the Society from 2004 to 2007. Society meetings over the years were enlivened by his informed and stimulating contributions to discussions and the Society’s Records have been enriched by his valuable articles. He will be greatly missed, and we extend our sympathy to his widow and his family.

S.J.B.