

Instructor readies for publication text of beloved professor

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PLAINVIEW—Throughout more than 20 years teaching spiritual formation classes at [Wayland Baptist University](#), Gary Manning has relied heavily on a textbook that never was published.

Manning studied at [Howard Payne University](#) under the tutelage of Nat Tracy. On his deathbed in 1977, Tracy put the finishing touches on his book, *A Search for Authentic Christianity*. Two of Tracy's students attempted to publish the book, but due to his widow's request that no editing take place, the book never was published.

"He wrote like he taught," Manning said. "There was a lot of repetition—a lot of making sure we understood a certain concept before moving on to something else."

Gary Manning

Due to the repetition and Tracy's vast vocabulary that Manning said was beyond that of your average undergraduate, no publisher picked up the book.

About 14 copies were printed and made available. Manning, who has read everything Tracy wrote, acquired one of the available copies and has used it in the classroom since.

In the book, Tracy poses the question of whether people have come dangerously close to missing authentic Christianity.

“His answer would be in the affirmative,” Manning said. “I would personally elaborate on that and say that is true especially in our Western culture. We have seen Christianity as forgiveness from God without discipleship. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘Christianity without discipleship is Christianity without Christ.’ He would say that Americans are content to bask in our blessedness rather than becoming Christlike.”

Manning loved Tracy’s “theological approach to spiritual formation,” and decided to use the book in his spiritual formation classroom.

Each class, he hands out photocopies of the book to be used by students as a text, and always asks for feedback on the text.

Through these responses, and with an undying admiration for Tracy’s work, Manning knew that one day he would prepare the manuscript for publication.

“That was a dream,” Manning said. “About 15 years ago I thought to myself, ‘Someday I would like to rewrite it.’ That was a dream that I did not think would ever happen until I retired.”

Manning, who serves as Wayland’s religious education professor, knew rewriting the manuscript would be a major task that would require extra time. And that was time he did not have, since he was required to teach specialized courses every semester in order to keep students on track for graduation.

However, as Wayland’s external campus offerings continued to grow, so did the school’s list of adjunct professors. Two of those adjunct professors teaching in Lubbock—Stan Blevins, pastor at Highland Baptist Church, and Chuck Gartman, associate pastor at First Baptist Church—together with Micheal Summers, Wayland’s director of church services, became available to cover course load.

This set Manning's dream in motion. First, he contacted Robert Williams, one of the students who first tried to publish the book and who wrote a tribute to Tracy that is included in the manuscript. Williams said since the manuscript was never published and all of Tracy's family members have died, the book was his to be rewritten.

Manning received approval for a sabbatical in the fall of 2008. Prior to his leave from teaching, however, he offered a special seminar course in which seven upperclassmen and graduate students helped organize some of the preliminary work needed to rewrite the manuscript.

"It involved rearranging information on certain topics and pulling all of that into singular chapters," Manning said. Tracy's "way of doing things was to talk a little bit about something, then two or three chapters later talk about it again in a different context. We decided to pull all of those together."

The group then rehashed the information to make sure it made sense, and they reworked vocabulary. Once this process was completed, it was up to Manning to make sure the material flowed properly and was presented in a clear and understandable manner.

He added a detailed table of contents, as well as endnotes and explanatory notes. He also added reflective discussion questions at the end of each chapter, along with a document Tracy put together years before that shows the difference between authentic Christianity and human-centered Christianity in a point-by-point manner.

Manning completed the project and is back in the classroom this spring, once again teaching his spiritual formation class. He still has a little extra work on his plate, however, as he must now sort through publication offers in order to have the book published and marketed to other schools and interested parties. To date, Manning has received six publication offers, and he is still waiting to hear from another publishing company.

“It will be published,” Manning said. “That’s the neat thing. Nobody has said, ‘You’re an idiot for trying to publish this.’”

Manning hopes the book will be published and available in time for his next spiritual formation class, which will be offered in the spring semester of 2010.