

Texas-Based Library to Highlight Historic Revival Leaders

Founded by 'the world's oldest teenager,' the Winkie Pratney Memorial Library will house works by trailblazing ministers

The man affectionately known as the world's oldest teenager is looking to historic revival leaders for lessons in radical Christian living.

Winkie Pratney, a New Zealand-born evangelist who journeys hundreds of thousands of miles speaking to more than a half-million people each year, is preparing to open his unique collection of rare, handpicked books this summer as an extension of his ministry to young people and their leaders.

Located on Youth With a Mission's Twin Oaks Ranch outside Lindale, Texas, and comprising more than 10,000 volumes, the Winkie Pratney Memorial Library will offer a unique look at the lives and teachings of historic revival leaders such as John Wesley, Charles Finney and William and Catherine Booth. Eventually, Pratney hopes to make many of the writings available online for free.

"The ultimate goal is to be a library that tracks evangelism, missions and spiritual awakening," Pratney said, "one that chronicles the work of the Holy Spirit in history."

Pratney, who celebrated his 60th birthday last year, said the library will be based on a Hebraic, rather than Greek, style of learning. Instead of packing the library with as many books and resources as he can acquire to help patrons accumulate

knowledge, Pratney said he wants to highlight the works of leaders who can teach by example, who were known both for their evangelistic zeal and their Christian character.

"[When selecting a book] I ask: 'Is the person who wrote this a soul winner? Are they doing what Jesus did, or are they merely theoretical?'" he said. "... The next thing I ask is, 'What was the long-term fruit of their lives? What were the kinds of results they got when they pushed the truth God gave them? When you put these two meshes on a good chunk of the Christian life, a large number of things get left behind. What remains is a core of people who left a lasting legacy."

Pratney said many of the authors in his collection have been omitted entirely from the racks of most Christian bookstores. And many of those who are included in anthologies have been edited to remove their emphasis on the supernatural.

"This is a unique sort of library because it follows the stream of the red-headed stepchildren of the Reformation," Pratney said. "Many of these writers were neither Catholic nor Reformed, but were persecuted by both sides. They were of the stream that believed that a pure heart and unreserved love and obedience was what God required and that Jesus still worked miracles in their day."

The library houses such original works as Butler's Lives of the Saints, which John Wesley used extensively; the complete collected hymns of John and Charles Wesley; Charles Spurgeon's 80 volumes of sermons from the Metropolitan Tabernacle and the Park Street pulpits; as well as books by such revivalists as Charles Finney and Catherine and William Booth.

The library will also house a natural healing library that includes books, videos and current research into alternative healing methods. Pratney plans to have a fully stocked kitchen where visitors will be able to prepare healthy alternatives to the burgers, fries, refined sugar and white flour that are staples of the American diet.

"Martyrdom is one thing ... but death by stupidity is something else," Pratney said. "I'm interested in Christians living long, productive lives so they can die old and happy serving Jesus."

Plans are under way to make it possible for patrons to watch archival footage of revivals or teaching videos by such ministers as Campbell McAlpine, Leonard Ravenhill, Keith Green, Gordon Olson or even Winkie Pratney.

"Winkie is part of our spiritual heritage," said Bob Weiner of Weiner Ministries International and former president of Maranatha Campus Ministries. "The world's been changed because of the message he's preached, and millions of young people have gotten saved."

Weiner said Pratney has been teaching the truths he gleaned from the lives of the people represented in the library for more than 40 years. "Because of it, thousands of people are out there preaching the truth of the kingdom of God," Weiner said.

"We need to study the works of [past great saints of God] to learn why they were so anointed and why God used them," he added. "There's something in the character of the people God chooses, and we need to line ourselves up with that."

Vinson Synan, dean of the Regent University School of Divinity in Virginia Beach, Va., said a library of this sort can help provide a backdrop against which to judge present-day spiritual awakenings.

“No movement lasts very long unless it is buttressed by good thought and strong theology,” Synan said. “Experience is important, but it’s what you write down that affects future generations.”

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