

Influential Pentecostal Historian Vinson Synan Dies at 85

Pentecostal historian, author and professor Vinson Synan died March 15, 2020, after being under hospital care for seven weeks. He was 85.

Synan is known as a leading authority on the history of holiness, Pentecostal and charismatic movements. He was one of the founders of the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 1970.

Early in his career, he served as pastor of four churches in Virginia and Georgia. After teaching at Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia, for 13 years, the family moved to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where he served at the general headquarters of the Pentecostal Holiness Church as the general secretary, assistant general superintendent and director of evangelism.

After serving as interim president of Southwestern College (now Southwestern Christian University) in Bethany, Oklahoma, and a professor of Pentecostal/charismatic history and director of the Holy Spirit Research Center at Oral Roberts University (ORU), he returned to his native state of Virginia where he was dean of the School of Divinity at Regent University in Virginia Beach for 12 years, followed by several years as a professor and dean emeritus.

In 2017, Vinson and his wife, Carol, returned to Oklahoma. He served as interim dean of ORU's School of Theology and developed the school's Ph.D. program in theology. Until his death, Vinson was a scholar in residence at ORU, assisting President Billy Wilson with various projects. He also served on the U.S. Cabinet of Empowered21 (E21).

“Dr. Synan was a wealth of information with a tremendous amount of experience in the significant faith movements of our time,” Wilson said. “He will be missed not only for his knowledge, but also his love and passion for the Word of God and its transforming power through the work of the Holy Spirit. I was very honored to know him and share his friendship. ORU, E21 and the entire Christian world will miss this legend of a man. Our prayers and love go out to his faithful wife, Carol, and to his entire family. Vinson’s legacy will continue to bless millions of people for years to come.”

He wrote 25 published books, including *The Century of the Holy Spirit* (Thomas Nelson), *Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the 21st Century* (Charisma House) and his 2019 autobiography, *Where He Leads Me: The Vinson Synan Story* (LifeSprings Resources). Many were used as college and university textbooks for years.

He held a bachelor of arts from the University of Richmond and a master of arts and doctor of philosophy from the University of Georgia. All of his degrees were in the field of history.

Much of his life was focused on a vision of unifying the church at large in the power of the Holy Spirit. He helped bring together as many as 50,000 Christians from every major denomination for Congresses on the Holy Spirit in five cities. He met and had dialogue with Pope John Paul. He has preached at the Vatican, and recently spoke to 30,000 Catholics at the Circus Maximus in Rome, sharing the stage with Pope Francis.

He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Carol, of Edmond, Oklahoma; two daughters and two sons and their spouses; his eldest sister, Maurine Synan Gminder; eight grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Barring any state mandates on large gatherings, a memorial service will be held Saturday, March 21, in Christ’s Chapel on

the campus of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Bishop Doug Beacham, general superintendent of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, and Dr. Billy Wilson, president of Oral Roberts University, will officiate.

A second service will be held Saturday, March 28, at Regent University Chapel in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Dr. Pat Robertson, founder and chancellor of Regent University; Bishop Doug Beacham and Rev. Craig Walker will officiate. After the service in Virginia Beach, he will be buried in Chester, Virginia. Rev. Bert Synan, Dr. Synan's nephew, will officiate at the burial service.