

Baptist theologian Clark Pinnock dies

by [Bob Allen](#) in the [September 21, 2010](#) issue

Clark Pinnock, 73, an influential theologian whose spiritual pilgrimage led him from a fiery fundamentalism as a young professor to an openness that caused some to brand him a heretic, died August 15 of a heart attack. A longtime professor of systematic theology at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Pinnock had withdrawn from public life since announcing in March that he had Alzheimer's disease, but his death was unexpected.

Pinnock, the grandson of British Methodist missionaries to Nigeria who switched their affiliation to Baptist when their understanding of baptism changed, grew up in a fairly liberal congregation, Park Road Baptist Church in Toronto. But as a youngster he wasn't particularly interested in church. Through influences including Youth for Christ and evangelical theologian Francis Schaeffer, he began his theological career in the context of "post-World War II fundamentalism."

Teaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary from 1965 until 1969, Pinnock became an influential figure in the Southern Baptist Convention's battles over biblical inerrancy. Among his students were Paige Patterson, Adrian Rogers and Jerry Vines, all key leaders in what became known alternately as the "conservative resurgence" or the "fundamentalist takeover" of the U.S.'s second-largest faith group.

In his first book, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, published in 1967, Pinnock said the doctrine "is a necessary, not merely an optional, inference from the biblical teaching about inspiration" and that "*Sola Scriptura* cannot be sustained apart from biblical infallibility." A year later, in *New Reformation: A Challenge to Southern Baptists*, Pinnock accused professors of Southern Baptist seminaries and related Baptist colleges of holding a "scaled-down" view of scripture and called for "a new reformation" in the denomination.

After moving successively to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Regent College in Vancouver, and McMaster, Pinnock's views on the Bible changed. At a 1987 conference on biblical inerrancy, Pinnock said that conservative Southern Baptists'

approach to the Bible was really not inerrancy but rather a "simple biblicism" and that the "inerrancy controversy" was invented as a political weapon.

Pinnock's evolving views on inspiration were controversial to his former disciples, but it was nothing compared to his theological journey regarding the nature of God. Originally a Calvinist who emphasized God's sovereignty and foreknowledge, Pinnock gradually embraced a theology giving greater weight to human free will.

Pinnock was an early proponent of open theism, which focuses on God's self-imposed limitations in dealing with humanity. "The Christian life involves a genuine interaction between God and human beings," Pinnock wrote in his 1994 book, *The Openness of God*. "We respond to God's gracious initiatives and God responds to our responses . . . and on it goes." Consequently, the future is not entirely settled. While God knows all possibilities, God does not know with certainty what human beings will do until they act. "If choices are real and freedom significant," Pinnock argued, "future decisions cannot be exhaustively known."

Those views nearly got Pinnock kicked out of the Evangelical Theological Society. In 2002 members of the group for academic professionals voted 388 to 231 to retain him as a member.

In his later years Pinnock was a member of Little Bethel Community Church in Hamilton. —Bob Allen, ABP