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Daniel Strange

Clark H. Pinnock: The Evolution of an Evangelical Maverick

The theological debate awakened by the work of Dr Clark Pinnock has figured more than once in the EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY in recent years. The submission of two articles on the topic, the one dealing with the general development of Pinnock's theology and the other with the specific question of exclusivism and inclusivism, suggested that it might be worthwhile to publish them together and also give the subject the opportunity to comment on them.

The author of our first article is doing doctoral research on the problem of the unevangelised in recent evangelical theology in the University of Bristol.

Key words: Theology; religion; inclusivism; Pinnock.

Some theologians are ideologues, so cocksure about the truth that they are willing to force reality to fit into their own system; others are not so sure and permit reality to change them and their systems instead. I am a theologian of the latter type.¹

In this paper I wish to give a biographical study of the Canadian Baptist theologian, Clark H. Pinnock, giving a flavour of his pilgrimage in theology which has spanned five decades. In understanding the current work of a particular scholar, it is always helpful to understand the context within which he or she works, the theological background from which they have come, and the influences that have shaped their thought. From this it may even be possible to predict where they will go next in their theological journey.

Within the Evangelical community, especially in North America, Clark Pinnock is one of the most stimulating, controversial and influential theologians, and a study of his work raises important questions about the nature and identity of contemporary Evangelicalism. His work also provides an interesting 'case study' as to the nature of systematic theology: how change and development in one area of doctrine impacts and influences every area; how the criteria of internal consistency and coherence shape our theological frameworks; how emotion,

1 Clark H. Pinnock, 'Foreword' in Ray C. Roennfeldt, *Clark H. Pinnock On Biblical Theology: An Evolving Position* (Michigan, 1993), xv.

intuition and rationalism influence our theologizing; and how and why theologians feel forced at times to make paradigmatic shifts in their thinking.

The paper will be divided into three parts. Firstly, I will chart, chronologically, Pinnock's life and work in three distinct phases; describing the main elements of his thinking and the influences that have shaped this thinking. Secondly, I will draw attention to some characteristic features of Pinnock's theology. Finally, I will briefly assess Pinnock's continuing impact and significance on Evangelical Christianity.

I. An Outline of Pinnock's Life and Work

Phase I: Up to 1970: In the Calvinist Paradigm

Pinnock was born in Toronto in 1937 and grew up in a liberal Baptist church. It was through the influence of his grandmother that he became a Christian in 1949, and he received nurturing from 'Youth for Christ', '... I was introduced to God in the context of the fundamentalist portraiture of the Gospel. It alerted me to the fact that there are a lot of modernists out there who had vacated the house of authority and sold our birthright for a mess of relevant pottage.'² Pinnock says that the writers he was introduced to as 'sound' in the 1950's, were all theologically Reformed: John Murray, Cornelius Van Til, Carl Henry and J. I. Packer. Looking back he says that he did not realise a Calvinistic hegemony in post-war Evangelicalism, '... it is no surprise that I began my theological life as a Calvinist who regarded alternate Evangelical interpretations as suspect and at least mildly heretical. I accepted the view I was given that Calvinism was just scriptural Evangelicalism in its purest expression, and I did not question it for a long time.'³

After completing his first degree in Ancient Near East Studies at the University of Toronto, he went to Manchester University and did his doctoral research on Pauline pneumatology under F. F. Bruce. Around this time he developed a close association with Francis Schaeffer and even worked at L'Abri for a time. Although Schaeffer was the main influence on Pinnock's early work on 'cultural apologetics', Pinnock believed that more traditional 'evidentialist' apologetics were needed if faith was not to become another irrational 'upper-story leap'⁴ (to use

2 Clark H. Pinnock, 'I Was a Teenage Fundamentalist', in *The Wittenburg Door* 70, Dec 1982/Jan 1983, 18.

3 Clark H. Pinnock, 'From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology' in Clark H. Pinnock (ed.), *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Grand Rapids, 1989), 17.

4 See Clark H. Pinnock's 1971 'Appendix: On Method in Christian Apologetics', in his *Set Forth Your Case: Studies in Christian Apologetics* (Chicago, 1971 ed.), 131f.

a famous Schaefferism). In his evidentialist field, Pinnock was influenced by the work of John Warwick Montgomery.⁵

For Pinnock, successful evangelism depended on the declaration of a specific message and foundational to this message was the Calvinist view of salvation since any other resulted in Christian synergism and a repudiation of salvation by grace alone.⁶

In the mid-sixties he began teaching New Testament studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological seminary but soon moved into the department of systematic theology. A charismatic experience in 1967 would be very influential in Pinnock's life and work. While at a Bible study he received an 'infilling of the Spirit' and caught a glimpse of the dimension of the Spirit which the New Testament describes. Ever since that moment Pinnock has been a fervent advocate of charismatic renewal and Pentecostalism (although he has remained within the Baptist denomination), and this conviction has received more detailed theological treatment in recent work.

Apart from apologetics, Pinnock's main interest in this period was Biblical authority and revelation. In 1971 he wrote his first important work, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology*⁷ which at the time was called, 'the most vigorous scholarly statement of verbal, plenary inspiration since Warfield.'⁸ This work advocated a strong yet nuanced version of Biblical inerrancy and infallibility. Again looking back, Pinnock notes three factors which determined the nature of this work. At this time he thought it epistemologically fundamental to prove a perfect Bible in which there were no errors or contradictions. He writes in the conclusion of *Biblical Revelation*, 'to cast doubt on the complete veracity and authority of Scripture is a criminal act creating a crisis of immense proportions for theology and faith.'⁹ Secondly, Pinnock notes that this view of the Bible is only possible within the predestinarian framework of Calvinism: 'Since God is thought to decree and control everything, he can also be thought of as controlling and determining the text of the Bible through the supernatural inspiration of it . . . one might [also] deduce that it would partake of the attribute of divine truth itself and be perfectly inerrant in every respect.'¹⁰ Finally, Pinnock realises that his earlier view was a militant

5 Pinnock refers especially to Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past: An Introduction to Philosophical Historiography* (Ann Arbor, 1962).

6 See Clark H. Pinnock, *Evangelism and Truth* (Tigerville, 1969), 29-29.

7 Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation. The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago, 1976) with Foreword by J. I. Packer.

8 Gordon R. Lewis, review of *Biblical Revelation*, in *Eternity* (Jan. 1972), 50. Quoted from Robert V. Rakestraw, 'Clark H. Pinnock: A Theological Odyssey' in *Christian Scholars Review*, 3: 252-270, 1990, 253.

9 Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 228.

10 Pinnock, *op. cit.*, xviii.

one and one which was intolerant of any other view of Scripture even though it claimed to be 'Evangelical'. Only three years before in *A New Reformation: A Challenge to Southern Baptists*¹¹, he had called for the Southern Baptist Convention to expel any non-inerrantist professors. Speaking recently about this time he says, 'This does not make one an easy going fellow ecumenically as others may testify from knowing me during those years.'¹² This whole period sees Pinnock fighting against the spectre of liberalism and relativism which had infiltrated many churches and taken away the only 'valid knowledge of redemption'¹³—that is the authoritative revelation of the Bible.

Phase II: 1970–1986; The slow realisation of a paradigm shift and the conversion to Arminianism

From 1969–1974, Pinnock taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. It was during his tenure there that he underwent a second 'conversion', the impact of which would eventually filter down to every area of his thought. Pinnock was teaching the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints in the book of Hebrews.¹⁴ He found that he could not square this doctrine with the passages in Hebrews that urge us to persevere or the stern warnings about falling away from Christ (Heb. 3:12,10:26). He was also strongly influenced by I. Howard Marshall's study of the same problem in the entire New Testament, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study in Perseverance and Falling Away*.¹⁵ Pinnock writes:

The exhortations and the warnings could only signify that continuing in the grace of God was something that depended at least on the human partner. And once I saw that, the logic of Calvinism was broken in principle, and it was only a matter of time before the larger implications of its breaking would dawn on me. The thread was pulled, and the garment must begin to unravel, as indeed it did.¹⁶

What had happened here? One perspective from which one could analyse this change is Pinnock's new construal of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom and responsibility. He

11 Clark H. Pinnock, *A New Reformation: A Challenge to Southern Baptists* (Tigerville: Jewel Books, 1968).

12 Pinnock, *op. cit.*, xix.

13 Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 104.

14 This is the belief that those who are saved, the elect, will be kept by the grace of God and will persevere until they are glorified.

15 I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study in Perseverance and Falling Away* (London, 1969; Minneapolis, 1975).

16 Clark H. Pinnock, 'From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology' in Clark H. Pinnock (ed.), *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Grand Rapids, 1989), 17.

writes, 'I began to doubt the existence of an all-determining fatalistic blueprint for history and to think of God's having made us significantly free creatures able to accept or reject his purposes for us.'¹⁷ Moral responsibility required him to believe that human actions are not determined either internally or externally. This is described by philosophers as categorical freedom, so while reasons and causes can always affect our decisions, it cannot determine them, and the agent can always categorically do otherwise than what she did.

Pinnock believed that in creating Man in his image, God gave humans this relative autonomy of self-determination, and it is only this definition of freedom that can firstly, account for the mutuality and relationality we see between God and his creatures, and secondly, the only account of freedom which does not make us responsible for our sin. Significant freedom shows itself in the fact that we are sinners who have not fulfilled God's plans, 'our rebellion is proof that our actions are not determined but free—God's plan can be frustrated and ruined.'¹⁸ Pinnock believed this to be existentially true on an intuitional level, 'Universal man almost without exception talks and feels as if he were free . . . this fundamental self perception, I believe, is an important clue to the nature of reality.'¹⁹

So far this debate will be a familiar one with those acquainted with the theological and philosophical positions known as Calvinism and Arminianism. In light of this revelation concerning the nature of freedom, Pinnock realised that he had to reformulate certain areas of his soteriology, 'Just as one cannot change the pitch of a single string on a violin without adjusting the others, so one cannot introduce a major new insight into a coherent system like Calvinian theology without having to consider many other issues.'²⁰ So: Man was never so depraved (either in his natural state or because of a restoring grace) that he could not freely respond to grace; predestination, rather than being an all-determining plan for the world and our lives, was a set of all-inclusive goals that could be accepted or rejected, 'it became possible for me to accept the scriptural teaching of the universal salvific will of God and not feel duty-bound to deny it as before';²¹ election was conditional and based on the human response to faith; the atonement was unlimited in its scope and included everyone in its provision (Pinnock admits that this meant that he had to reduce the precision

17 *Ibid.*, 18.

18 Clark H. Pinnock, 'God Limits His Knowledge' in Randall Basinger and David Basinger (eds.), *Four Views on Predestination and Free Will* (Downers Grove, 1986), 147.

19 Clark H. Pinnock, 'Responsible Freedom and the Flow of Biblical History', in *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis, 1975), 95.

20 Pinnock, 'From Augustine to Arminius', *op. cit.*, 18.

21 *Ibid.*, 19.

in which he understood Christ's substitution to take place); saving grace was resistible and could be spurned, and believers could fall away and lose their salvation. At this stage of Pinnock's thinking he had yet to formulate the theological theories that would explain many of these truths he wanted to affirm.

Pinnock believes that these changes were not made only out of logical necessity and the need to be internally consistent, or because they felt 'right' on an intuitional level. Rather he believed that the Biblical text demanded such a change, the 'dark shadow of Calvinism'²² was lifting for him to see the Bible in a new light:

Obviously what is happening here is a paradigm shift in my biblical hermeneutics. I am in the process of learning to read the Bible from a new point of view, one that I believe is more truly Evangelical and less rationalistic. Looking at it from the vantage point of God's universal salvific will and of significant human freedom, I find that many new verses leap up from the page, while many familiar ones take on new meanings. In the past I would slip into my reading of the Bible dark assumptions about the nature of God's decrees and intentions. What a relief to be done with them!²³

From an initial question concerning the perseverance of the saints, Pinnock had started a chain reaction in his thinking which resulted in a complete paradigmatic shift in his theology. This could conveniently be called a move to Arminianism although as we shall see, the recent implications for the doctrine of God which Pinnock has seen possibly push him beyond this category. This said, Pinnock in the 1970's and 1980's became one of the leading spokesmen and figureheads of the Arminian wing of the Evangelical community, editing two books of collected essays by a variety of contemporary Arminian scholars, *Grace Unlimited* (1975),²⁴ and *The Grace of God and the Will of Man: A Case For Arminianism* (1989).²⁵ The overriding concern of these books is to assert the love of God, his universal salvific will and the unlimited nature of atonement, 'we reject all forms of theology which deny this truth and posit some secret abyss in God's mind where he is not gracious.'²⁶

Outside of soteriological issues, Pinnock was continuing to make changes in other areas of doctrine, purging the Calvinistic framework that had influenced his earlier thought. One area where there was a

22 *Ibid.*, 21.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Clark H. Pinnock (ed.), *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis, 1975).

25 *The Grace of God and the Will of Man: A Case For Arminianism* (Grand Rapids, 1989). It is interesting that I. Howard Marshall, the theologian who started Pinnock's thinking on these issues, contributes two essays to these books.

26 Pinnock, *Grace Unlimited*, 11.

major change, was Pinnock's doctrine of Scripture itself.²⁷ Admitting that it took him ten years to realise the significance of his paradigm shift for issues of revelation, Pinnock's 1984 book, *The Scripture Principle*,²⁸ sees him moving away from Warfield's view which he claims is too rationalistic and docetic in its treatment of the biblical text. Rather he was now free to understand the human character of the text, and the result is more of a concomitant view of inspiration where God supervises the writers in varying degrees, and is a partner in the creation of the text rather than a coercive determining influence. Pinnock comments on this view, 'Respecting the Bible means accepting it humbly in the form in which it comes. The effect of this realisation was to make the category of biblical inerrancy less intelligible unless quite broadly defined and then it sounded a little meaningless.'²⁹ Perhaps a fair description would be to say that the Bible is inerrant in its 'macro-purpose',³⁰ that is its 'salvific/paraenetic intention',³¹ as set down in 2 Tim. 3:16. Pinnock believes that this shift on inspiration and inerrancy is another necessary move if he is to be logically consistent. On those non-Calvinist Evangelicals who hold to plenary verbal inspiration, Pinnock says that they, 'do not think systematically and limit their Calvinism to this one subject.'³²

Finally Pinnock's 'political theology' at this time reflects his paradigm shift. Before 1970, Pinnock describes his position as part of the mainstream which supported democratic capitalism although he admits he had not reflected much on this area of theology. However, while at Trinity, Pinnock became involved with the 'Sojourners' group which adopted an Anabaptist understanding of discipleship, ethics and the state. Price comments that this was a rejection of 'the historic Calvinist belief in the state as the Christian common-wealth with its "Christ the Transformer of Culture" model.'³³ He even voted for a communist candidate in the 1974 Vancouver civic election.³⁴ As regards his teaching career, Pinnock, in 1977, had become Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario.³⁵

27 For a very detailed study on Pinnock's doctrine of Scripture comparing *Biblical Revelation and The Scripture Principle* see Ray C. W. Roennfeld's doctoral thesis, *Clark H. Pinnock On Biblical Authority: An Evolving Position*.

28 Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco, 1984).

29 Clark H. Pinnock, *op. cit.*, xx.

30 Robert M. Price, 'Clark H. Pinnock: Conservative and Contemporary' in *Evangelical Quarterly* 88:2 (1988), 157-183, 178.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 101, 102.

33 Price, *op. cit.*, 168.

34 This was during Pinnock's brief tenure at Regent College, Vancouver, 1974-1977.

35 He is presently still teaching there, now as Professor.

*Phase III: 1986 until present.*³⁶ *The transition to free-will theism and the category of openness*

As I have already said, Pinnock's 'conversion' to a more Arminian view of soteriology impacted on every area of his theology. However to describe this change from the perspective of freedom is to only understand part of a much more fundamental and comprehensive change in Pinnock's thinking. Pinnock's crisis over the perseverance of the saints had made him rethink what he calls his 'root metaphors' for God. He defines these metaphors as, 'basic portrayals of God which affect how we view and relate to him.'³⁷ Rather than having a root metaphor which stressed absolute sovereignty and power, Pinnock's metaphors of God now revolved around the ideas of a loving parent and a personal, relational God who was involved in reciprocal 'give and take' relationships with his creatures. A presupposition integral to this view was a certain way of construing freedom.

In the last ten years, Pinnock has realised that there are further implications of adopting a root metaphor of a personal God and a categorical view of freedom if one is to be biblically faithful, internally consistent and emotionally satisfied. This has led him, in more detail, into the territory of the doctrine of God, a journey in which he has been accompanied by like-minded Evangelicals, namely Richard Rice, David Basinger, William Hasker and John Sanders.³⁸ The outcome has been the proposal of a new theistic paradigm variously called 'free-will-theism', 'creative love theism' or 'the Openness of God'. This proposal places itself between the model of classical theism (which is accused of being heavily influenced by Neo-Platonism and which exaggerates God's transcendence), and Process theology (which stresses a radical immanence). Pinnock summarises his model as such:

Our understanding of Scripture leads us to depict God, the sovereign Creator, as voluntarily bringing into existence a world with significantly free personal agents in it . . . In line with his decision to make this kind of world, God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed and a relationship with the world that is dynamic not static . . . Our lives make a difference to God—they are truly significant.³⁹

36 I have chosen the year 1986 to mark Pinnock's third phase because it was in this year that he began to publish material explicitly on the doctrine of God, the first being the essay, 'God Limits His Knowledge'.

37 Clark H. Pinnock and Delwin Brown, *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue* (Michigan, 1990), 66.

38 All these writers have edited a book which could be called the manifesto for 'free-will theism'. See *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, 1994).

39 Pinnock, 'Systematic Theology' in Pinnock (ed.), *The Openness of God*.

There are three particular doctrines which form the basis of this model of God: the 'social analogy' of the Trinity; God's transcendence and immanence in creation and a reformulation of the divine attributes. The third of these has proved the most controversial and deserves a brief summary.

Pinnock and the other 'free-will theists' have had to rethink the nature of divine sovereignty. God is sovereign in that he created the world *ex nihilo* and does not rely on anything for his existence (contra process theism). Indeed God could have created a world in which he determined everything, but he has not done this. In fact he has created creatures with genuine autonomy and so has accepted limitation on his divine power. Therefore God's sovereignty is not in the form of dominion but in God's ability to anticipate obstructions to his will and deal with them. Omnipotence is not the power to determine everything but the power to deal with every circumstance that can arise: it is an omniscience. Similarly there have been questions raised and revisions made to the doctrines of impassability, immutability and God's timeless eternity.

The most contentious aspect of this proposal is a redefinition of divine omniscience. Pinnock not only rejects the Calvinist belief in foreordination but also the traditional Arminian doctrine of foreknowledge, because it is seen to contradict significant freedom, 'I could not shake off the intuition that such a total omniscience would necessarily mean that everything we will ever choose in the future will have already been spelled out in the divine knowledge register, and consequently the belief that we have significant choices would be mistaken.'⁴⁰ So God knows everything that is logically knowable but does not and cannot know future human actions although he can accurately predict many human decisions based on his exhaustive knowledge of past and present.

Pinnock sees many benefits in adopting this model of theism. God is said to be pictured in more dynamic terms. he takes risks and opens himself to genuine rejection and failure. This is the stuff of personal relationships where one partner not only acts but reacts to the other. Such a view also can deal with the many biblical passages which speak of God rejoicing, repenting, grieving, changing his mind, being frustrated, etc. These are not anthropomorphisms but literal statements about God. Finally such a view provides a powerful theodicy, for although God knows that evil will occur, he does not know what specific instances will arise from free human decisions.

In adopting this view of God, Pinnock has finally come to understand the full implications of his 1970 'conversion'. From the perspective of

40 Pinnock, 'From Augustine to Arminius', 25.

'free-will theism', not only Calvinism is to be rejected but traditional Arminianism which is to be seen as merely an epicycle of the Reformed paradigm. Pinnock calls all Evangelicals to make a paradigm shift to this new proposal which he believes is a truly biblical position.

Although the 'Openness of God' has been Pinnock's main concern in recent years, other important areas of theology have received detailed treatment and can be seen to be inextricably linked to the 'Openness' worldview and vision. All these areas come to fruition in Pinnock's latest work, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*⁴¹ (1996) which is the most comprehensive overview and summation of his theological vision to date. I will briefly mention a few of these areas.

Firstly, Pinnock is very open to truth found in other Christian traditions, indeed he believes the Holy Spirit to be at work throughout the Christian world uniting Christian traditions. So in *Flame of Love* we see a catholic Pinnock drawing from a variety of traditions (traditions which in the past have been seen to be the antithesis of Evangelical theology and methodology), to explain those areas of theology which he feels Evangelicalism has been ill-equipped to tackle. So, for example, he goes to the Cappadocian Fathers and Greek Orthodoxy for the 'social analogy' of the Trinity; Irenaeus, Orthodoxy, and Barth, for a revised doctrine of kenotic 'Spirit Christology' and a 'recapitulation' theory of the atonement; Greek Orthodoxy again for the holistic view of salvation called theosis. However in spite of all these influences, Pinnock still calls this work Evangelical.

Linked to this has been Pinnock's work in the 'theology of religions' which is further evidence of an openness in his thinking.⁴² Taking the foundational axioms of the universal salvific will of God, and the particularity of Christ, Pinnock has formulated a position which he calls 'modal inclusivism'.⁴³ Again the inspiration for this is not primarily Evangelicalism (although he refers to the influences in his formative years of C. S. Lewis and Norman Anderson) but the statements of Vatican II. He writes, 'I make no apology as an Evangelical in admitting an enormous debt of gratitude to the Council for its guidance on this topic.'⁴⁴ In Pinnock's model, the possibility of salvation must be universally accessible if God loves the whole world and Christ died for the whole world. God may use elements of other religions to offer the Holy

41 Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, 1996).

42 Pinnock's main work on this is his book, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, 1992). Since this book, though, Pinnock has developed and nuanced his argument considerably. See his essay, 'Inclusivism' in Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (eds.), *More Than One Way? Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, 1995), 93-124; and chapter 6 of *Flame of Love*, 'Spirit and Universality', 185-215.

43 See Pinnock, 'Inclusivism', 100.

44 *Ibid.*, 97 fn. 4.

Spirit's prevenient grace to someone who has not come into contact with the Gospel proclamation. An unevangelised person can be saved through explicit faith in God as revealed in general revelation or by implicit faith through acts of love which are equally a response to grace. Therefore Pinnock believes that an atheist can be saved by 'accepting the mystery of their being, which is the goal of his or her life.'⁴⁵ This proposal has some similarities and affinities to John Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace and Karl Rahner's 'supernatural existential'. Behind all this theological formulation is a firm belief of a wideness in the mercy of God and an optimism in the number of people who will eventually be saved (*Heilsoptimismus*), 'Christian theology must speak of universality and inclusion.'⁴⁶ In explicitly adopting inclusivism, Pinnock is definitely on virgin territory for an Evangelical theologian.

Finally, Pinnock has continued to be open to the work of the Spirit in the life of the church, and *Flame of Love* is a firm endorsement of charismatic renewal. He says of Pentecostalism that it is, 'a mighty twentieth-century outpouring of the Spirit. I think of this as the most important event in modern Christianity.'⁴⁷ Indeed on a personal note he mentions his indebtedness to the Toronto Blessing for the influence it had over the writing of *Flame of Love*, 'the flow of grace and love in this remarkable waking can only be marveled at.'⁴⁸

II. Some Paradoxical Features of Pinnock's Theology

Clark Pinnock's *modus operandi* is that of seeing theology as an adventure and a matter of curiosity. He admits that sometimes he doesn't know where he is going in his thinking or how he will get back, and he admits that in this respect he is serendipitous, not having a 'big plan' or 'system' that he is working with. Price perceptively comments on this fact, 'Pinnock wants to avoid deductively imposing some neat and simple *a priori* scheme on the stubborn "phenomena" of reality. He must be honest and take each case as it comes, responding to each as seems appropriate. This hermeneutic of reality keeps him open to change as reality itself is changing . . .'⁴⁹ This means that while some areas of his theology have moved in one direction, others areas have moved in the opposite direction. The main area where this is evident is in his latest thoughts on political theology. Although Pinnock has repudiated Calvinistic soteriology and the Calvinist portrayal of God, he has moved

45 *Ibid.*, 119

46 Clark H. Pinnock, 'Inclusivism', 93.

47 Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 18.

48 *Ibid.*, 250 n. 10.

49 Price, *op. cit.*, 183.

away from his 'radical' Anabaptist phase of the 1970's towards a 'neo-Puritan' vision and Reformed hermeneutic with respect to the Old and New Testaments. As Rakestraw notes, 'He is excited about the resurgence of this theonomy teaching in the later writing of Francis Schaeffer, in the efforts of the New Right . . . and even urges Christians in his land to work hard to move the country, "in the direction of a Christian commonwealth"'.⁵⁰

As a conservative risk-taker, Pinnock is not afraid to experiment with new ideas and there is somewhat of a playfulness to his theology. He says that he has the ability to make changes without losing his Evangelical moorings and that he has been able to manage this intellectually because he can retrieve the best conservative thought from the past as well as realising that there are contemporary questions (e.g. religious pluralism) that have to be dealt with. In this Pinnock places himself with a number of theological allies, Barth, Bloesch, Fackre, Ward, Oden and Grenz, who are both conservative and contemporary. Pinnock says, 'By mixing all this together, I found it possible to construct a reformed (not Reformed) Evangelical theology and I suspect that whatever appeal it has is due to the fact that there is a large group in the churches who want a theology like this.'⁵¹ Perhaps the *raison d'être* behind *Flame of Love* demonstrates the above point most clearly. Pinnock believes that this is a work which does not deny or repudiate the Evangelical heritage from which he has come. Rather his resolve in this work was to pick up anything that Evangelicalism had neglected, and put it back. His aim was to enrich the feast and to re-emphasise certain areas. So Spirit Christology is emphasised but this is not to negate Logos Christology. Recapitulation and salvation by resurrection is stressed, but this is not to deny substitution or the element of judgment in the cross. Theosis is emphasised as a large model of salvation, but this is not to deny justification by faith, rather justification is only a small part of soteriology, the wider perspective being union with God. Of course the question which Pinnock's theology raises is: when does re-emphasis become over re-emphasis and therefore mark a definitive change? For example in *Flame of Love*, he rejects the purpose of the atonement as being 'primarily penal'.⁵² On this he says, 'This is a delicate point for me to discuss. First, it was the view of John Calvin and has been the distinguishing mark of Evangelicalism . . . It is risky to seem to be calling it into question.'⁵³

All these points demonstrate a major paradox in Pinnock's theological project. Pinnock has been criticised for his theological instability

50 Rakestraw, *op. cit.*, 263.

51 Pinnock, 'Foreword', xviii.

52 Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 106.

53 *Ibid.*

and his changes of mind over a variety of issues. However this 'change' is rarely a going back over old positions (the noticeable exception being his political views). Rather than being a sign of instability, it could be argued that this changing is a sign of thoroughness and a striving to work through the full implications of earlier presuppositions. It is more like an evolution of thought moving in one direction than a regression which is unstable and whimsical. From 1970 and Pinnock's 'conversion' to the relational model of God and categorical freedom, there has been a systematic (albeit subconscious) attempt by Pinnock to be internally consistent and coherent in his theology. This can be seen in many areas of his work. On the atonement, where he realised early on that strict penal substitution led inexorably to limited atonement, the 70's and 80's saw him looking for an appropriate model before finally adopting the model of recapitulation. He rejected total depravity because it implied monergism in the work of salvation rather than synergism. Again he has thought about many theories before adopting the Orthodox distinction between image and likeness and a version of prevenient grace which still enables him to say we are saved by grace through faith. Finally there is the denial of exhaustive divine omniscience which is seen to contradict real freedom. Ironically Pinnock is perhaps more critical of traditional Arminianism than Calvinism because it is confused and inconsistent lying midway between the Calvinist position and 'free-will theism'. Pinnock admits that the Calvinist paradigm is a consistent one but is fatally flawed both biblically and experientially.

A final point worth remembering about Pinnock is that he does not concentrate his work in one area of systematics but roams the theological world writing on a variety of issues. He realises himself that a disadvantage to working in this manner is that no one area is given comprehensive treatment, but is left without detailed explanation, with the result sometimes that there can be a ambiguity over what he means. While this may give rise to the accusation of superficiality and crudeness in expounding certain ideas, a benefit of this approach is that it is easier to see how one area of systematics fits into Pinnock's wider theological concerns as he has written on so many areas.

III. Pinnock's impact upon evangelicalism

Robert Rakestraw comments in somewhat diplomatic manner that Pinnock's influence on the content of Evangelical theology will be, 'more in forging new patterns of thought than in honing or defending established Evangelical doctrines.'⁵⁴ It is fair to say that within the

54 Rakestraw, *op. cit.*, 269.

context of the Evangelical community, Pinnock is influential and yet highly controversial. Perhaps it would be unfair to call him the *enfant terrible* of Evangelicalism; he still is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society (although he notes that some have been expelled from this organisation for less radical views than his), and he believes that he is tolerated because he has been part of the Evangelical community for over forty years. Away from the Establishment his work has been grasped enthusiastically by Wesleyans and Pentecostals, the latter group seeming to 'adopt' him as their theologian.⁵⁵

Perhaps Pinnock's lasting legacy to the Evangelical community will be that his work raises perennial questions concerning the nature and identity of Evangelicalism itself. Alister McGrath comments that Pinnock, 'has been the catalyst for much rethinking within the Evangelical movement.'⁵⁶ Pinnock still believes there to be a Reformed hegemony in the Evangelical establishment and that it is this wing that has ostracized him and his theology, 'The Reformed group has occupied this position among us and to a degree still does and so is in a strong position to equate Evangelical theology with their own viewpoint and declare who is in and who is out of the movement.'⁵⁷ So Pinnock is highly critical of, for example, the 'Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals' because it excludes not only his views but the views of more orthodox Wesleyans and Pentecostals, 'Evangelicalism in its recent form [e.g. A.C.E] began with a birth defect in method that has to be overcome if there is to be excellent work. Fortunately the corrections are being made.'⁵⁸ Enter 'free-will theism' with which Pinnock believes Evangelicalism can grow out of propositionalism and omnicausalism and face the future with integrity and promise. He has recently stated, 'I love the Evangelical heritage but have been burdened by difficulties such as these [propositionalism and omnicausalism] my whole life. They have impeded me from producing the quality of work that I would have wished. Fortunately a new generation is coming along which recognises the problems and (I hope) will be able to transcend them more effectively in future.'⁵⁹ So we see a situation emerging with definite battlelines drawn out. Both Pinnock and his critics accuse each other of the same things, that is a move away from

55 Pinnock's influence is not restricted to North America. In November 1997, Pinnock was the keynote speaker at a major conference organised by Ichthus, Pioneer, Holy Trinity Brompton and YWAM. All these groups warmly endorse *The Openness of God*.

56 Alister E. McGrath, 'Response to Clark Pinnock', in Okholm and Phillips (eds.), *Four Views*, 129.

57 Clark H. Pinnock, 'Evangelical Theologians Facing the Future: an Ancient and a Future Paradigm', *Keynote Address for the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society*, Nov 7-8, 1997.

58 *Ibid.*, 6.

59 *Ibid.*, 16.

the biblical testimony and a dependence upon logical rationalism and intuitive experience. This debate has a long way to go and Evangelicals are just beginning to tackle it.⁶⁰

Clearly Pinnock is an emotive theologian who is not afraid to ask difficult questions of the Evangelical movement. A trait of his personality is that he is always ready to give an opinion and is not afraid to publish quickly, some say too quickly, before he has thought through all the implications of a particular position. A glance at his prolific bibliography is testimony to this. This means that he has often become the figurehead (perhaps not intentionally) of many of the controversial issues which have confronted Evangelicalism in the last two decades: the authority of Scripture (as a 'limited inerrantist'); the role of other religions (as an inclusivist); the nature of hell (as an advocate of annihilationalism); the charismatic renewal and the place of spiritual gifts (a strong advocate); and the doctrine of God (as a free-will theist).

But can Pinnock still be called an Evangelical theologian? As we have seen, this depends on your definition of Evangelicalism. Perhaps, though, Pinnock should take solace from the adage that those you criticise the most are usually the ones closest to you. Certainly if we are to take Pinnock's own sociological definition of Evangelicalism as a loose coalition based on a number of family resemblances, then it will be easy to categorise his theology as Evangelical.⁶¹

However, categorising Pinnock on the theological spectrum may be a more difficult task than this, and Pinnock himself realises that as a theological maverick who is open to change, this is a difficult, painful yet hopeful question to answer:

Not only am I not often listened to, I am also made to feel stranded theologically: being too much of a free thinker to be accepted by the Evangelical establishment and too much a conservative to be accepted by the liberal mainline. Sometimes I do not know where I belong. But I am not discouraged by this because, being a creature of hope, I can imagine a future where Evangelicals and liberals mature and come around to more sensible middle positions. I will not object to some views of mine being accepted belatedly if not now.⁶²

60 See for example, Millard Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1997); John H. Armstrong, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* (Chicago, 1996); Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New Open View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis, 1997).

61 Pinnock lists these resemblances as: 'commitment to the biblical message as the supreme norm; belief in a transcendent personal God who interacts with creation and acts of history; a focus on the transforming grace of God in human life, and the importance of mission to bring the [sic] goodness to the whole world.' See Pinnock, 'Evangelicals Facing the Future', 3.

62 Pinnock, 'Foreword', xvi.

Whether this prophecy will come true is like much of Pinnock's theology, stimulating, provocative and open to debate.

Abstract

This paper is a biographical study of the Canadian Baptist theologian Clark H. Pinnock. Pinnock is one of the most influential and controversial Evangelical theologians writing today, and a study of his work provides an interesting vehicle to discuss the definition of Evangelicalism and the organic nature of systematic theology. The paper is in three parts. Part 1 gives an outline of Pinnock's life and work charting his theological development in several areas of systematics. Part 2 notes some paradoxical features in Pinnock's theological methodology, and Part 3 assesses his impact on the Evangelical community and whether in fact he can be labeled as an Evangelical theologian.

Edited by Clark Pinnock

The Openness of God

Presents a careful and full-ordered argument that the God known through Christ desires "responsive relationship" with his creatures. While it rejects process theology, the book asserts that such classical doctrines as God's immutability, impassibility and foreknowledge demand reconsideration.

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