

In *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey to Renewal*, xiii–xvi
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Foreword

Clark Pinnock has been one of the most prominent and provocative theological voices in North Atlantic evangelical Christianity through the last quarter of the twentieth century. This status is grounded in his responsible scholarship and his ability to communicate theological issues clearly and cogently. But it has been heightened precisely because he has been ever ready to engage contested theological issues within evangelicalism and has proven open to revising his views on those issues when he found compelling evidence to do so. In the process he has helped to clarify what is at stake in the debates, and to scout a way forward for others who share his evangelical background and his questions about certain reigning assumptions within that movement.

Of course, one person's "scout" is another person's "drifter." The evidence of change in one's central convictions is not always viewed positively, particularly within the theological academy. Since the truth we deal with is grounded in and concerns the steadfast God, there is a subtle temptation to view any change in our conceptions of this truth negatively. Ironically, this

temptation is as prevalent among Protestants—who emerged with a call to continually reform inadequate theology—as anywhere else. But whatever its object, the discipline of theology is fundamentally a human enterprise, and our human fallibility makes change not only possible but often desirable. The legitimate concern is not whether there be change, but that this change not be mindless drifting or the mere pursuit of novelty, that it be instead an honest and faithful quest for better understandings of Christian truth.

If there is one thing that this book makes clear it is that Clark Pinnock’s entire adult life has been devoted to such a quest. This is reflected in its very form as an “intellectual biography” rather than a systematic survey of Pinnock’s theology. It is reflected as well in the coherence that Barry Callen demonstrates within the changes he chronicles; one could argue that there is more coherence here than in some (supposedly) systematic theologies! But the most striking thing that emerges from this study is the holistic nature of Clark’s quest. He has not limited his search to merely better understanding of the issues because he recognizes that Christian faith involves more than just right belief—it involves that overall orientation of the person that we call the “heart,” and the actions toward God and others that flow from and nurture this orientation. As Callen has aptly titled it, Pinnock’s life as a theologian has been a “journey to renewal.” Those who read this book will not only learn a little about his specific theological proposals, they will be challenged to consider what such a journey might look like for themselves.

To be sure, not all will be (or have been) happy with the direction that Clark’s journey has taken. Some in the evangelical community can view it only as a lamentable deviation from his original “orthodoxy” within the fold. This has been particularly true for those who take classic Princetonian Reformed theology as the exclusive standard for “evangelical” theology. But many others within the broader evangelical tent—Anabaptists, Wesleyans, Pentecostals, and the like—have long protested this standard, and argued the biblical warrant for their alternative stances on such issues as predestination, general

revelation, and the nature of biblical authority. As Callen shows, some of the most significant moves Pinnock has made (based particularly on his reconsideration of scripture!) are toward positions long affirmed by these other evangelicals. As one of these “others,” Callen provides a chronicle of Pinnock’s journey that is sympathetic while remaining very reliable.

In effect, Pinnock’s turn toward scripture to reconsider some of the assumptions that framed his earliest theological work soon embarked him on a journey into the broader Christian community of the interpretation of scripture. It led him to appreciate other dimensions of persons who were already important to him, like C. S. Lewis and Sir Norman Anderson. It led him to consider the broader Arminian wing of evangelicalism. It led him to engage the renewed emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal and Charismatic renewal movements. It led him to appreciative dialogue with liberal theology. And it led him into the recent renewed appreciation of some of the distinctive theological emphases of Eastern Christianity. Overall, it led him to become an “ecumenical evangelical” who wed a strong commitment to the importance of the gospel with a recognition of the importance of listening to and learning from how others read this shared gospel.

We in the Wesleyan tradition have often characterized John Wesley as an “ecumenical evangelical” too. And many of us in the evangelical wing of this tradition have watched Clark’s journey with great interest. Having a prominent evangelical voice publically shift toward positions for which we had taken much chiding in the past from the evangelical establishment has been refreshing, to say the least. But it can also pose a temptation toward unholy smugness. The best way that we Wesleyans can welcome a fellow-journeyer who has come to share some of our deepest convictions is to be willing to listen to, learn from, and dialogue with him when he poses thoughtful challenges to our traditional framing and application of these convictions. I am thinking here particularly of his insightful and provocative work on the possibility of truth and salvation in other religions, the nature of God’s relationship to temporality, and the need for restoring pneumatology to a fully equal role within our theology.

Clark laments at one point in this volume that his journey might have been easier if he had started out as a Wesleyan. That may be true, though there are sufficient examples of Wesleyans caught up in the militant rationalist apologetics that Pinnock struggled to transcend to show that it is not inevitable. In any case, I for one have been instructed and enriched as a Wesleyan theologian by Clark's work precisely because of the specific journey he has taken—and the integrity and grace with which he has taken it. His gain would have been our loss!

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