A CRITICAL REVIEW OF CLARK PINNOCK'S†
FLAME OF LOVE: A THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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1. Introduction

Balancing the relationship between cognitive appropriation of the Word of God with heartfelt experience of the Spirit of God has been a difficult challenge for many of us in the Pentecostal movement. Education has been suspect in the movement since it seemed to elevate one's mind over one's experience; yet, ecstatic excesses have also been suspect since they seemed to rivet attention to one's subjective experience of God without necessarily offering any rational content of who this God of our experience was. As Pentecostals and charismatics gradually move into the realm of academia, the tension between these aspects has increased. Into this arena comes a book written by a Baptist who has been 'touched' by the charismatic renewal. Clark Pinnock, a professor of theology at McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario, suggests the material he is studying requires both mind and heart.1 'To know the

† The editors have invited Clark Pinnock to serve as the special dialogue partner for this issue of JPT. He has produced several ground-breaking (and ground-shaking!) studies in evangelical theology, to include now this pneumatological study under review. Terry Cross begins the dialogue with an overview and general critique, with Frank Macchia providing a review of more specific focus. Professor Pinnock then follows with a response to both reviews.

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Spirit we must become persons of prayer who are willing to yield in complete openness to God’ (p. 13). When was the last time we read such a challenge to prayer in the theological task?

Because of its method and message, Flame of Love is a vital theological treatise for Pentecostals and charismatics. It is the most needful and yet most provocative book I have read in a decade. It is needful for the church at large since the doctrine of the Spirit is visibly absent and the urge to consider the work of the Spirit in our lives is also missing; it is needful for the renewal movement since we are lacking good systematic theological reflection on the whole. We are just beginning to dialogue and reflect at levels of vital theological importance for our churches; therefore, any direction or assistance we can receive is a welcomed gift from the Spirit. This book is also provocative in the sense that it stimulates immediate reaction. I cannot recall a book I have mentally dialogued with or marked up more than this book. It is provocative in the best sense—it makes us open to considering our own narrowness of theological reflection and to reshaping the treasured (but uncritical) assumptions of our views of the Spirit. For these reasons alone, the book should be read by anyone interested in the move of the Spirit in this last century and the direction of the movement in the next century.

However, there are various aspects of Pinnock’s theology of the Spirit that require further reflection and questioning. He himself suggests that he walked on the edge of interpretation in order to ‘stimulate discussion’ (p. 248). It is in this spirit of convivial theological discussion that I will review his work. I will consider two major aspects: first, the style and method of the book, and secondly, the specific content of his theology of the Spirit.

2. Comments on Method and Style

The first five chapters of Flame of Love provide some of the most refreshing theological prose that has been printed recently. The liveliness of the Spirit seems to have invigorated Pinnock’s writing style.

2. Pinnock suggests such a ‘gift’ to the renewal movement as one of the purposes of his book. Since theology is not the strength of the renewal movement, he states that ‘I dare to hope that this book might be of some help in the construction of a theology for it’ (p. 240). As we shall see, I believe it is an excellent contribution.

3. I mention only the first five chapters because it seems the creative prose