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Wheaton Philosophy Conference

by David Werther

Arthur Holmes, chairman of Wheaton's philosophy department, opened Wheaton College's thirty-second annual philosophy conference, "Applied Ethics: Doing Justice" (October 24-26), with his paper, "Biblical Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy." It was an appropriate beginning to the conference for two reasons. First, the paper included a biblical characterization of justice against which rival philosophic conceptions of justice could be critiqued. Second, Holmes' endorsement of a classical, and more particularly an Aristotelian conception of justice, was echoed throughout the conference. In recent years the Enlightenment conceptions of justice—where the emphasis is on moral character in the classical tradition—have been given pride of place in the works of John Rawls (Kant) and Robert Nozick (Locke); and many of the philosophic discussions of justice have focused on those works. At the Wheaton conference, however, the focus was clearly on Aristotle. Halfway through the conference, Holmes noted that "Aristotle has been resurrected again and again and again," and then assured the participants that "this was not planned or rigged."

Kenneth M. Sayre of the University of Notre Dame and Jon N. Moline of the University of Wisconsin-Madison addressed the topic of environmental ethics from the perspective of ancient philosophy. This was the first of four spheres of justice considered in the conference. Sayre turned to Plato for guidance, whereas Moline approached the issue from an Aristotelian perspective. Sayre argued that responsible stewards of the environment will uphold the mixture of measure, truth, and beauty Plato referred to in the *Philebus*. Moline held that responsible stewardship of the environment can be learned by seeking the guidance of those who have displayed "practical wisdom" in dealing with these issues. Thus complex environmental issues are not to be approached by an appeal to principles, but by an appeal to persons who evidence that which Aristotle refers to as "practical wisdom." This appeal to persons of practical wisdom may be suggestive with respect to Christian views on discipleship. Sayre and Moline, like Holmes, eschewed Enlightenment conceptions of justice in favor of the classical traditions.

This tradition in its Aristotelian form was resurrected again in the discussion of political justice. John Mare of Lehigh University and Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary both examined political justice from the perspective of virtue. Hare

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contended that there is a virtue, the pursuit of consensus, which is characteristic of politicians. Mouw maintained that Christian politicians ought to act as moral pedagogues and that their instruction ought to be shaped by the Christian community. Just as in Moline's paper on environmental ethics, the application of justice to a particular topic focused on persons, not principles.

The two final topics addressed in the conference were justice in medicine and justice in business. Kenneth Vaux of the University of Illinois Medical Center viewed ethics in science, technology, and medicine from the perspective of a dialectic between justice and mercy. David Fletcher of Wheaton College answered affirmatively the question, "Is there a right to health care?" Thomas Donaldson of Loyola University considered the justice of the distribution of technological risks in and between nations. In the conference's final address, Elmer Johnson, vice president of General Motors, shared his application to business of James Gustafson's conception of moral discernment.

Holmes indicated that next year's conference will consist of a series of addresses by Alvin Plantinga on the topic of Reformed epistemology. The following year the conference will be devoted to a consideration of the ethics of virtue. Given the attention shown to virtue by this year's speakers, it will be interesting to see how the thinking of the Christian philosophic community develops with respect to this subject in the next two years. Will Aristotle be buried, or will he again be resurrected?

TSF CAMPUS MINISTRY

Some of our readers may not realize that *TSF Bulletin* is merely one phase of the TSF program. Currently we have 20-25 student chapters operating on seminary and graduate school campuses around the country. Occasionally we print reports of their activities. If something is scheduled to take place in your vicinity, or if something has already occurred, please let us know. If you or a group of students or any faculty personnel are interested in starting a TSF chapter on your campus or in your area, again we request that you write to us. We are more than willing to serve in whatever way we are able. Information can be obtained from

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Pinnock's Major Work on the Doctrine of Scripture

by Donald K. McKim

The Scripture Principle
by Clark H. Pinnock (Harper & Row, 1984,
251 pp., \$14.95).

Through all the wranglings by evangelicals over the Bible, we have missed a strong, sustained, systematic statement about the

many dimensions of the nature of Scripture and how to interpret it.

Clark Pinnock has provided such a statement with his recent, very significant work. In it he explores the doctrine of Scripture and comes down squarely on the side of Scripture's supreme authority for the church and

the Christian. He does this in the face of many challenges from the varied perspectives of both "liberals" and "conservatives." To present this pose and sustain such a stance is not easy. So we can expect his work to be criticized from both ends of the theological spectrum.

Pinnock is concerned with what he calls the "Scripture principle." This is simply the recognition of the authority of the Bible. It means "belief in the Scriptures as the canon and yardstick of Christian truth, the unique locus of the Word of God." The Introduction to his work is a discussion of the importance of maintaining this Scripture principle in light of the various crises it faces and which the rest of his book details. What is needed, Pinnock argues, is "a systematic treatment of the Scripture principle that faces all the questions squarely and supplies a model for understanding that will help us transcend the current impasse." (this Introduction was published in the January/February 1985 issue of *TSF Bulletin*).

The Scripture Principle has three parts with three chapters in each part. The major divisions are: *The Word of God*, in which Pinnock deals with the "Pattern of Revelation," "The Biblical Witness," and "Inspiration and Authority"; *Human Language*, where the topics are "Incarnation and Accommodation," "The Human Dimension" and "Biblical Criticism"; and *Sword of the Spirit*, where the concerns of "Word and Spirit," "Unfolding Revelation" and "The Act of Interpretation" are taken up. Major components of the doctrine of Scripture are amply addressed and the major thrust of Pinnock's work is seen in the three main parts. The Bible is the Word of God that comes to us in human language and comes alive for us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Each element here is crucial. Truncated views of Scripture will eliminate or underplay any of these three realities which Pinnock in a balanced way maintains in parity. He gives cogent expression to the positive theological value of each ingredient, stating forcefully the implications of subsuming any of the three dimensions.

Pinnock sees Scripture as the Word of God that leads sinners to a saving knowledge of God in Christ. As a deposit of revelational truth and the religious classic of Christianity, Scripture is revelation through both propositional communication and personal communion. Scripture's purpose is to give us a right relationship with God, and through a variety of literary modes God gives in Scripture a norm or rule for faith and practice. Inspiration, Pinnock argues, does not occur only with the final redactor of Scripture but over a long period of time as a "charism" of God's people.

Part II of this work is a strong statement on recognizing that Scripture comes to us in the form of the human, having been written by real human creatures. Three categories expressing this human dimension are accommodation, incarnation and human weakness. Pinnock wants to maintain a "dynamic personal model" of inspiration that gives full room to both the divine initiative and the human response in the composition of Scripture. In inspiration, "God does not decide every word that is used, one by one, but works in the writers in such a way that they make full use of their own skills and vocabulary

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while giving expression to the divinely inspired message being communicated to them and through them." The Bible is not written according to how we in the Western world think history-writing should be done, but rather by the principles of ancient historiography. Biblical criticism can be either a positive or negative force, depending on whether it helps us hear God's Word in Scripture or seeks only to excise the supernatural from Scripture.

Part III deals with the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Word of God in Scripture as well as with God's unfolding revelation in Scripture. It also includes a most helpful chapter on the art of biblical interpretation, which develops some basic principles for hermeneutics. Pinnock stresses that "revelation has to be received and become meaningful to those whom it addresses. The external letter must become an inner Word through the work of the Spirit." While "the Bible is a deposit of propositions that we should receive as from God, is also the living Word when it functions as the sword of the Spirit." "What is needed," urges Pinnock,

is an encounter with God in and through the text and a discernment as to what God is saying to us now. The possibilities of meaning are not limited to the original intent of the text, although that is the anchor of interpretation, but can arise from the interaction of the Spirit and the Word. We read the text and in it seek the will of the Lord for today.

In his final chapter, Pinnock shows how we are saved from hermeneutical chaos by the safeguards and controls that "fend off radical subjectivity." These include the text itself, tradition, and the living community of believers.

One sees in this book a clear call to recognize Scripture as God's authoritative Word. This Scripture functions first and foremost to bring us to a saving knowledge of God in Jesus Christ and to give guidance for the life of faith in the present day. *The Scripture Principle* is a call to commitment to the Bible while honestly facing the challenges to scriptural authority in the church. These include the perspectives on Scripture from liberal theology in its many forms, and from those committed to a biblical criticism which imports modern, "scientific" standards on biblical texts, not permitting the possibility of the reality of the supernatural to which the texts themselves witness.

This book is also a call to those in evangelical circles to approach Scripture on its own terms and not to impose theological presuppositions or categories that do violence to the essential nature of the biblical materials. For an understanding of revelation and inspiration, Pinnock urges a recognition of the human dimensions of the Bible as a book written in an ancient near-Eastern cultural setting by many authors who employed a variety of literary forms and who through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit communicated God's message of salvation to the world.

On the contentious question of using the term *inerrancy* to describe the nature of Scripture, Pinnock sees two sides and makes a choice. On the one hand, he recognizes that the slogan "What the Bible says, God says" is "too simplistic" and that the case for biblical errorlessness is "not as good as it looks." He cautions that we should not ask whether God can lie, for "what we might expect God to do is never as important as what he actually does." Pinnock concludes that the case for total inerrancy just "isn't there"; the inerrancy theory is "a logical deduction" without firm exegetical support, and "those who press it hard are elevating reason over Scripture."

On the other hand, Pinnock sees "inerrancy" as a term to describe the Bible's fundamental trustworthiness. He believes the New Testament encourages a trusting attitude along with a lenient definition of "inerrancy," evidencing the deep confidence we ought to have in Scripture. A moderate use of the term possesses a nice combination of "strength with flexibility." Pinnock predicts this moderate definition will lead many people to "flock to its use" when the term is "fairly interpreted," thus allowing a "great deal of latitude in application." So he chooses to retain the term.

In the face of the vociferousness of those who so staunchly claim inerrancy and whose presuppositions are at crucial points so radically different from Pinnock's, it is questionable whether the choice to retain the term is helpful or even possible. To hope to be able to salvage this seventeenth-century theory which, as it is used by its loudest defenders today, moves in directions Pinnock wishes to avoid, is a hard struggle indeed. Unfortunately, Pinnock has not yet been persuaded that the "Reformation principle"—that "Scripture can be trusted in what it teaches and relied upon as the infallible norm of the church"—is better conveyed by the term *infallible*, used by the Reformation Confessions themselves, than by the nineteenth-century Hodge-Warfield "inerrancy" theory which is still the major operative model for contemporary inerrantists. To demonstrate this, one need note only that, while Pinnock mentions a piece by Roger Nicole as providing a "careful and responsible" definition of inerrancy, Nicole himself has strongly criticized Pinnock's book, especially at this point, quoting approvingly Carl F.H. Henry's assessment that Pinnock "retains inerrancy as a concept, but seems to thin it out almost to the breaking point" (*Christianity Today*, February 1, 1985, p. 68). In light of this, if Pinnock thinks his plea for flexibility will be able to reverse the stringent definitions of Hodge-Warfield now consciously propagated in new garb by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, one wonders how well-founded his judgment here can be.

Unfortunately, too, Pinnock has also accepted the strict inerrantists' reading of the church's tradition on Scripture in spite of the work by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (Harper & Row, 1979). While Pinnock's current position accords well with many of the positive emphases of this

work, in rejecting its historical arguments, he must defend his use of the term *inerrancy* despite the inerrantists who maintain that only the strict view has the proper historical justification. Pinnock may legitimately do this as a systematic theologian. But he should hardly expect to persuade those who have invested their lives in defending what they believe is the church's historic tradition. Whether a "moderate definition" of inerrancy will "carry the day" as Pinnock bravely expects is doubtful, yet remains to be seen.

But this is a major work on the nature of Scripture. It deserves to be widely read and used as the best systematic evangelical treatment of the doctrine. It is a splendid statement since it combines biblical fidelity with a clear-eyed vision of how technical difficulties about Scripture can be approached using the best positive tools of theological scholarship from the perspective of faith. One should not lament (as some have and will) that Pinnock's views have changed since his 1971 work, *Biblical Revelation*. The direction

of his development has been toward an honest, open appraisal of Scripture in light of its own witness and contemporary questions. Yet Pinnock has not wavered in his commitment to Scripture as God's authoritative Word which has as its "central purpose" to "bring people to know and love God." For this commitment we can all be grateful, and from this book we can all learn as we seek to be faithful to the Word of God.

A Critique of Carl Henry's *Summa*

by Alan Padgett

God, Revelation, and Authority

by Carl F. H. Henry (Word Books, 1976-1983, 6 vols., \$24.95 each).

Carl Henry is well known to readers of *TSF Bulletin*, as the foremost representative of evangelical thought in America today. We have reason to rejoice that he has finished his *magnum opus*, a work of six large volumes. He has brought into the twentieth century that great movement in American Reformed thought which extends back to the Puritans, on through Princeton Orthodoxy, and down to Henry himself. His theology exhibits both the positive and negative aspects of this tradition.

Volume one (438 pp.) is subtitled, "God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations." Henry begins with a critique of culture and modern epistemology and philosophy, setting his own view over against that of others. These chapters function as a prolegomenon, and discuss the method which controls the rest of the work. In volumes two, three and four (373, 536, and 674 pp. respectively), Henry expounds at great length his "Fifteen Theses on Revelation." These are:

- (1) Revelation is freely initiated by God.
- (2) Revelation is given for human benefit.
- (3) God nevertheless transcends his own revelation.
- (4) The fact that God gave revelation assures that revelation has a unity.
- (5) The nature, content, and variety of revelation are God's determination.
- (6) God's revelation is personal.
- (7) God reveals himself in nature and history, as well as Scripture.
- (8) The climax of revelation is Jesus of Nazareth.
- (9) The mediating agent in all revelation is the Logos of God (the Second Person of the Trinity).
- (10) God's revelation is conceptual-verbal.
- (11) The Bible is the reservoir and conduit of divine truth.
- (12) The Holy Spirit is active in revelation by (a) inspiring the authors of Scripture, and (b)

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illuminating our reading and understanding of Scripture.

(13) The Holy Spirit also enables individuals to savingly appropriate revelation.

(14) The church approximates the kingdom in miniature, and models the appropriated realities of divine revelation.

(15) The self-manifesting God will unveil his glory in a crowning revelation of power and judgment.

In the final two volumes (443 and 566 pp. respectively), subtitled, "God Who Stands and Stays," Henry deals with the doctrine of God against the backdrop of the first four books. He argues for the traditional view of God found in Protestant orthodoxy of the seventeenth century, brought up to date merely by reacting to and criticizing modern "heresies" such as process theology, feminist theology, and neo-orthodoxy. Henry argues for a literal heaven and hell, a six-day creation, Angels, Devils, and a God who is immutable, impassible, and timeless.

I cannot deal adequately with Henry's multi-volume work in this review. The only adequate response would be another multi-volumed dogmatics! I wish to focus here on the "Fifteen Theses," since these form the heart of Henry's work.

There are many strengths in this, the largest systematics ever published in America. Henry has certainly done his homework, as is obvious from the many outlines of other books, and the large bibliographies at the end of each volume. To read Henry carefully is to acquire a theological education! There are many sections in which he has effectively argued for an evangelical position over against other options in modern theology. In the first volume alone, I commend and recommend the chapters on "Revelation and Myth," "The Ways of Knowing," "The Rise and Fall of Logical Positivism," "Secular Man and Ultimate Concerns," "The Meaning or Myths Man [sic] Lives By," etc. The problem with this, on the other hand, is that Henry tends to devote page after page to outlines and quotations from other perspectives. This often makes his books repetitive. More than once, I had to force myself to finish a chapter. From time to time, I had to perform redaction-criticism to discover what Henry himself thought amidst all the quotations and summaries! The

bottom line is, these books have not been edited well enough. We might expect more from the founder and former editor of *Christianity Today*.

Much of Henry's theology is excellent, and there is a great deal to be learned from his *summa*. The discussions of Theses 1, 2, 7, 8, and 15, *inter alia*, are really very good. The rest of this essay will be negative, however. Such is the nature of a review! But what follows should be taken in the context of my positive regard for Henry's work.

A good part of the time, Henry complains about the illogic, confusion, and contradiction present in other theologians. We need, therefore, to examine his own philosophy.

When Henry uses the word *logic*, he always means Aristotelian logic. He does not appear to realize that there are other logics, such as Chinese or Hegelian. While symbolic logic works well for abstract thought, I believe that Hegelian logic, for example, has much to say for itself with respect to physical and human nature. In the real world, things are sometimes not so black and white as "A does not equal not-A": reality often involves elements of both. A modern automobile is neither M (metal) nor Non-M, but elements of both. While Henry might complain that Hegel is a "pagan" philosopher, surely he was much more Christian than Aristotle!

Perhaps the greatest weakness in Henry's philosophy is his undefended and naive dependence on Gordon H. Clark. Because of this, Henry's theology becomes rather "hyper-rationalist": truth is found *only* in propositions. True propositions are clearly known and easily accessible in an inerrant Bible, and Aristotelian logic reveals the machinations of the Divine Mind.

I believe, on the contrary, that the biblical notion of truth is not limited to propositions. For someone who believes in inerrancy, Henry has a strange tendency to read his views into the Bible, rather than perform legitimate exegesis. One instance of this eisegesis can be found in his discussion of the Logos in John (3:482-487; cf. any standard commentary on John). The Bible does speak about truth, and about the Logos, but this is first and foremost a Person for John (Jn. 1:14, cf. 14:6, "I Am the Truth"). Paul, also, does believe that the "love of the truth" will lead