JETS 24/2 (June 1981) 139-151

CLARK PINNOCK AND INERRANCY: A CHANGE IN TRUTH THEORY?

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I am taking on this evaluation of Clark Pinnock's truth theory as a concerned recipient of his past ministry. As a young believer in 1970 I became convinced of the necessity of inerrancy epistemologically through a reading of Pinnock's 1966 lectureship on Biblical infallibility[1] and was thus rescued by him from equivocating to a limited inerrancy position. In the fall of 1971 it was again Clark Pinnock who enabled me to see the value of graduate theological training during a guest lectureship at the University of California in Berkeley. Because of this early influence on my own theological upbringing I have had a high regard for Pinnock's work—at least until recently.

In his more current publications Pinnock appears to be changing his stance on the very view of inerrancy that he so staunchly defended in his earlier works.[2] Even more alarming is what appears to be an epistemological shift in his writings that Pinnock himself had warned against as so critical to sound theology.[3] In view of this apparent shift, and particularly due to Pinnock's failure to address the issue in print, it is the purpose of this article to display the evidence of a shift in Pinnock's position on inerrancy, suggest a reason for this shift on epistemological grounds, and suggest a latent factor in his original position that may have led to the shift.

I. EVIDENCE OF PINNOCK'S CHANGE

Although Pinnock does not acknowledge any fundamental shift in his posi-

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[1]C. H. Pinnock, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971). Later his *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) influenced my thinking as a textbook in bibliology at seminary.

[2]The first work that I encountered was his "Inspiration and Authority: A Truce Proposal," *The Other Side* 12/3 (May-June, 1976) 61-65. His shift is evident, however, in an earlier article, "The Inerrancy Debate Among Evangelicals," written for Fuller Seminary's *Theology, News and Notes* (1976), which was distributed to members of the Theological Students Fellowship dated December 5, 1975. These apparently were his first articles on the subject after moving from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School to Regent College in the fall of 1974. His "Baptists and Biblical Authority," *JETS* 17 (Fall 1974) 193-205, written at Trinity, still reflects a strong view of inerrancy. Since that last Trinity article his articles have reflected a marked change of stance.

[3]He wrote in 1966: "The writer is convinced that the historic Christian belief in biblical infallibility and inerrancy is the only valid starting point and framework for a theology of revelation" (*Defense*, 1). Later, in 1971, he wrote the following: "The crucial question in theology today concerns the truth claim implicit in the doctrine of inspiration" (*Revelation*, 110).

tion,[4] a reading of his writings after 1974 does in fact show a marked change.[5] These changes will now be set forth briefly, comparing his current objections to inerrancy with the earlier responses he gave to those very objections. The shift will be shown by examining seven of the objections that Pinnock has recently used against inerrancy.

1. *Inerrancy is Divisive.* Pinnock has repeatedly pleaded in his recent writings for a unified front in the evangelical coalition. This unity, he feels, is threatened by the inerrancy issue:

> It [evangelical dispute over inerrancy] is a sad spectacle when one considers the strength of the liberal challenge to any version at all of an evangelical concept of Scripture. We ought instead to be answering those scholars who reject biblical infallibility outright and constitute a truly worthy object of our critical expertise.[6]

This concern for unity is understandable, but it certainly evades Pinnock's own earlier insistence on the nonnegotiability of inerrancy epistemologically. In his widely circulated *Biblical Revelation* he wrote as follows: "Differences between Christians over matters of biblical interpretation are minor compared with the current dispute over the nature of revelation and inspiration."[7] In another article he wrote of the stakes associated with inerrancy: "Nothing less than the authority of Jesus is on the line."[8] In his final article before his move to Regent College he again insisted on the nonnegotiability of inerrancy: "What is at stake, quite frankly, is the possibility of normative theology, and with it the possibility of clear, bold preaching."[9]

Pinnock was well aware of the claim of errantists that inerrancy threatened unity, but he would not budge: "The great ecumenical creeds of the early Church sought *truth* even at the price of unity. Modern statements of faith strive for *unity* before truth."[10] Does Pinnock now expect inerrantists, who hold inerrancy to be fundamental to their epistemology (as he once did), to abandon this doctrine for the sake of unity?

2. *Inerrancy is Recent.* Pinnock no longer maintains that inerrancy is the his-

[4]Pinnock still classifies himself as a believer in inerrancy. Cf. "Three Views of the Bible in Contemporary Theology," *Biblical Authority* (ed. J. Rogers; Waco, TX: Word, 1977) 63, 64, 68. See also his footnote in "The Ongoing Struggle Over Biblical Inerrancy," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 31/2 (June 1979) 73 n. 5: "A careful reading of [my own writings] would reveal that I have always advocated a nuanced version of the inerrancy assumption."

[5]This change is so marked it is unsettling. He argues against inerrancy in the face of his own arguments for inerrancy without even identifying his own arguments—or addressing them.

[6]"Truce," 61. See this same irenical concern in "Debate," 11, and in two articles produced since joining the faculty of McMaster Divinity School: "Evangelicals and Inerrancy: The Current Debate," *TToday* 35 (April 1978) 69; "Ongoing," 69.

[7]*Revelation*, 11.

[8]"Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal and Constructive Alternative," *God's Inerrant Word* (ed. J. W. Montgomery; Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974) 152.

[9]"Baptists," 202.

[10]*Revelation*, 112.

toric position of the Church. Instead it is a recent doctrine that sifted into evangelicalism via the old Princeton tradition: "The confluence of the Princeton theology of Hodge and Warfield with dispensational thinking in the Fundamentalist position meant that for fundamentalism *and its successors*, biblical inerrancy had to be an important question."[11] Although he still admits of a strain of inerrantist thinking in Church history,[12] he now claims that this view was never normative in Christian circles and hence should not be pressed today.

This assertion is an astounding turnabout from Pinnock's earlier treatment of the historical data. In the early Pinnock the teaching of Christ was the determinative historical factor for his doctrine of inerrancy. In his article on Christ and Scripture, Pinnock concluded as follows: "We are driven to acknowledge that, according to Jesus' own conviction, the Scriptures are of divine origin, and therefore completely trustworthy, inerrant and infallible."[13] Certainly, then, "if we abandon the high view of Scripture [as Jesus held], we are in effect abandoning *Him* in His authority over us."[14] Pinnock has not of late addressed this change squarely, although he now claims that inerrancy was "not a concept explicitly taught by Christ and the apostles."[15] This is certainly a puzzling claim coming from one who wrote an extensive article demonstrating that it was.

Although anchoring his earlier position on Christ's teaching, Pinnock also pointed to the consistency with which the doctrine was held throughout Church history: "The ease with which contemporary theologians have dispensed with the infallibility of the Bible is surprising in the light of the incontrovertible fact that the vast majority of Christian thinkers throughout the ages have embraced and taught it enthusiastically."[16] In addition he claimed that "biblical inerrancy has been the common persuasion from the beginning of the Church"[17] and that "inerrancy is not a new theory created by Protestant orthodoxy. It has always been an implicit if not explicit belief in the Church."[18]

This radical shift is puzzling to one who gained an interest in logic and theology from Pinnock. Either he has forgotten his formidable compilations of evidence to support this belief or he now denies it. If the latter, why does he not produce an article detailing his earlier "errors"?

3. *Inerrancy Neglects the Phenomena.* In the early Pinnock the existence of phenomenological difficulties in the text of the Bible was irrelevant to the doc-

[11]"Current," 65. In "Ongoing," 65, he calls inerrancy the "Princeton doctrine of perfect errorlessness" that gave the theological basis to modern fundamentalism.

[12]"Three," 60.

[13]"The Inspiration of Scripture and the Authority of Jesus Christ," *God's Inerrant Word* (ed. J. W. Montgomery; Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974) 201-218.

[14]Ibid.

[15]"The Bible: Truth and/or Error?", *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 32/1 (March 1980) 59.

[16]*Defense*, 1-2. He cites Irenaeus, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley in this connection.

[17]"Limited," 143.

[18]*Revelation*, 80. Chapter 4 of the book details this view.

trine of inerrancy—that is, the doctrine was so clearly taught in Scripture that any purported difficulties must be dealt with from a presumption of inerrancy.[19] He was also careful to distinguish a difficulty in the Bible from an error.[20] The problem with the limited inerrancy position, he argued, was that it removed these phenomena (the only really testable data) from the reach of criticism.[21] Although acknowledging the existence of phenomenological difficulties, Pinnock was careful to point out that their number had been diminishing in recent years:

> Negative critics who do charge errors in Scripture usurp, we believe, the very infallibility for themselves which they deny to Scripture! It is a matter of record that the majority of critical hypotheses charging the Bible with error over the past hundred years have been refuted by facts or withdrawn. How is it then that today's critics can so boldly claim the Bible is error-ridden? Evangelicals are more conservative than that. Our belief in biblical inerrancy rests upon the demonstration that God in Christ teaches it: it does not depend upon our ability to establish it from the extant text.[22]

So what does Pinnock say of late on the subject of the difficulties of Scripture? They now loom as unsurmountable hurdles to the establishment of inerrancy. Instead of being viewed from the vantage point of the doctrine of inerrancy, they must be used in establishing the proper meaning of inerrancy:

> One of the most serious difficulties the theory of errorlessness faces is the Bible itself. To defend it in a way that does not evade the phenomena of the text requires incredible dexterity and ingenuity. It is not hard if, like Warfield, we do not take the difficulties very seriously. But it is not easy at all if we do. The tragedy in conservative evangelicalism today is the fact that the defense of inerrancy is often carried on by those still wrestling with a list of difficulties that has not changed for a hundred years.[23]

Inerrantists, then, are no longer critically honest with the Bible but are employers of "implausible harmonizations, allegorizations, and explanations."[24] How can these phenomenological difficulties mean so little to Pinnock in his early years and so much in recent years? Surely, as he admits, the list of difficulties has not changed. Perhaps something more basic has changed for Pinnock.

[19]"Inductive difficulties encountered in the text cannot change the fact that the Bible claims not to err" (*Defense*, 18-19). In another place he asserts: "In our approach to biblical difficulties we do *not* give equal weight to the phenomena and to the doctrine of inspiration, as Beegle does" ("Limited," 151). Cf. also "On Revelation and Biblical Authority," *Christian Scholars' Review* 2/4 (1973) 333.

[20]"It is essential to distinguish carefully between 'difficulties' and 'errors' in Scripture. It requires an infallible critic to declare at the present state of our knowledge that the Bible contains errors" (*Defense*, 19). Cf. also "Limited," 153; *Revelation*, 183.

[21]"There is a marked tendency to equate the non-revelational material with the testable and possibly errant and to reserve inerrancy for theological truth which cannot be falsified" ("On Revelation," 333). Cf. also *Revelation*, 79.

[22]*Revelation*, 178-179. His entire fifth chapter grapples with the phenomenological problem. See also "Limited," 153-154: "Biblical difficulties are a steadily vanishing number."

[23]"Three," 67.

[24]"Ongoing," 71. Cf. "Three," 68. He lists examples of the parallel gospel and kings accounts, the numbers in Chronicles, Stephen's errors, the days of Genesis 1, the size of the Exodus population, and so on.

4. *Inerrancy Misplaces the Emphasis.* Due to a concern over minutiae that accompanies belief in inerrancy, Pinnock now asserts that evangelicals have failed to contribute to the mainstream of theological thought in terms of redaction criticism, canonical shape, history of transmission within the Bible, and so forth.[25] In support of this fact he points out that the most scholarly contributions in theology from evangelicals have come from those who hold to limited inerrancy—namely, F. F. Bruce, G. C. Berkouwer, G. E. Ladd, R. P. Martin, David A. Hubbard and others.[26] Not only is theology sidetracked by an inerrantist position, but so is life. Whereas the "strict" inerrancy position can suspend the whole authority of the Bible upon each detail, the simpler noninerrantist position allows believers to glory in the gospel of Christ without fuss and worry about "the latest development in genealogical researches."[27] It thereby enjoys "greater practical relevance."[28]

The earlier Pinnock would not have been satisfied with such proposals. The earlier Pinnock was aware that Augustine, the fountainhead of orthodox theology, knew of the epistemological problems of an errantist "leak" and took time to square away apparent errors.[29] The early Pinnock knew that it would be foolish to suggest that Augustine's belief in inerrancy prevented him from making any significant contributions to theology.

The early Pinnock also would have dismissed the idea that inerrancy placed the practicability of the Bible in doubt by hanging its trustworthiness on dubious difficult areas. The problem would have been for him a lessening of the trustworthiness of Scripture if error be admitted:

> The result of denying inerrancy, as skeptics well know, is the loss of a trustworthy Bible. Limited inerrancy is a slope, not a platform. Although we are repeatedly assured that minor errors in unimportant matters would not greatly affect the substance of the Christian faith nor the authority of Scripture, this admission has the effect of leaving us with a Bible which is a compound of truth and error, with no one to tell us which is which.[30]

Again one is confronted with the question of what the later Pinnock has done with the earlier Pinnock since he is now setting forth the very objections he claims to have refuted earlier—and that without registering much apparent awareness that he has done so. At least he has not addressed the issue.

5. *Inerrancy is Only One Inference.* Following E. F. Harrison, who himself followed Francis Patton of a century earlier, Pinnock now holds that inerrancy is an

[25]"Three," 67.

[26]"Ongoing," 71.

[27]Ibid., 72. Cf. "Current," 67-68: "What most Evangelicals want to know is how they can trust and use the Scriptures available to them. . . . Such a question has little to do with the perfect errorlessness of nonexistent autographs and a great deal to do with the continuing authority of a (slightly) imperfect document."

[28]"Ongoing," 71.

[29]*Revelation*, 73-74, 82, 151.

[30]Ibid., 80.

inference that is not required from the doctrinal verses on the subject.[31] Although Pinnock claims that he still clings to the inference,[32] he regards its subtlety as grounds for allowing that it may not be a certain one.

This certainly is clear evidence of a shift in his thinking. To the early Pinnock the inerrancy inference was a necessary inference from Scripture: "Infallibility is a *necessary*, not merely an *optional* inference from the biblical teaching about inspiration. It is an intrinsic property and essential characteristic of the inspired text."[33] He claimed that it was a necessary deduction because, as seen earlier, it is the one drawn by Christ and the apostles.[34] In fact, "hardly a notable theologian failed to draw this conclusion until the time of the Great Defection, the rise of deistic rationalism in the eighteenth century."[35] Now, however, the necessary inference has become merely a possible inference to Pinnock. There must be an explanation for this alteration.

6. *Inerrancy Must Be Qualified.* Pinnock now is wary of the doctrine of inerrancy because it must be so carefully defined to be meaningful in view of the phenomena of Scripture. He claims that a term is meaningful only when it conveys the sense intended without too many qualifications.[36] In view of this, the term inerrancy "requires major qualifications almost as soon as it is uttered, and we should shy away from terms with this liability."[37] Among the qualifications that a difficulty must meet in order to pass the test of an "error" are that (1) it must belong to the nonexistent autographs (something that cannot really be proved),[38] (2) it must be proved beyond a doubt (a practical impossibility),[39] and (3) it must belong to the intended assertions of Scripture.[40] In view of these qualifications, inerrancy is "a somewhat untestable and unfalsifiable assertion."[41]

What would the early Clark Pinnock have said to these affronts to the doctrine? The number of qualifications is not restricted to the inerrantists, he claimed, for "any single term employed requires considerable definition on both the negative and positive sides."[42] He certainly was not unaware of this objection in view of this statement:

[31]"Truce," 63-64.

[32]"Three," 63-64.

[33]*Defense*, 10. Cf. also *Revelation*, 73: "Inerrancy is to be regarded as an essential concomitant of the doctrine of inspiration, a necessary inference drawn from the fact that Scripture is *God's* Word."

[34]Ibid. Cf. also "Truce," 63-64.

[35]*Revelation*, 73.

[36]"Three," 64.

[37]"Truce," 64.

[38]"Three," 64; "Truce," 63-65; "Ongoing," 71-72.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid.

[41]"Three," 65.

[42]*Defense*, 20.

> Often it is claimed that infallibility is an equivocal term since in many definitions of it a dozen qualifications are proposed for what the word does *not* mean. Therefore, some appeal for more positive terms to express Biblical authority; e.g., trustworthy, adequate, reliable. . . . Infallibility is preferred because it has expressed in the long history of the subject, and continues to express correctly, what the Bible does teach about itself; namely, that God has efficaciously willed Scripture in this verbal form, so that the impact of its language is always truthful and veracious. Terms which say less than this are themselves inadequate.[43]

The appeal to the autographs, he insisted, offered no problem. In the face of an objection by Piepkorn (which is identical to that which Pinnock now offers) the early Pinnock countered with these words:

> Since no one living has ever seen these documents and thus is able to verify or falsify the claim, is it not perhaps a meaningless point to make? Certainly not! It is of the greatest theological and practical importance to insist on the infallibility of the apographic Scriptures. Just as no one has seen the infallible originals, no one has seen the fallible originals either. The whole question comes down to what Scripture is. Inspiration refers to the spoken-written words of men moved by the Spirit, not to the production of scribal copies from them.[44]

This again leaves us wondering why Pinnock has abandoned his earlier views. It is not so much a change of position that comes to the forefront of our consideration but the reason for that change in view of the fact that the very objections that Pinnock now uses he was clearly aware of in his earlier days and argued convincingly against. This leads us to the last objection on Pinnock to be examined.

7. *Inerrancy Neglects the Human Side.* Pinnock's view regarding the nature of the Bible as a confluent document has also changed. Now if errors are not admitted in the Bible the human side of Scripture is lost:

> In a pendulum reaction against modernism, conservative evangelicals find it difficult to accept the evidence that God in his written Word has stooped to our infirmity and given us a Bible with human limitations. A false piety has grown up which would seek to protect the Bible from its own humanity, fearful lest a close examination of its inconsistencies, duplicate passages, seemingly pointless details, would detract from its divine authority.[45]

Again, challenging the assumption that inerrancy is a logical corollary of inspiration, he asserts: "Although this position may seem reasonable at first sight, it is difficult to see how human beings could be capable of drawing such inferences from the fact of inspiration. God uses fallible spokesmen all the time to deliver his word and it does not follow that the Bible *must* be otherwise."[46]

The early Pinnock would have nothing of this sort. This kind of thinking is equivalent to saying that the proposition "to err is human" is necessarily a true one. But Pinnock demonstrated the illegitimacy of that kind of logic in his early writings:

> Naturally we reject the puerile maxim: "To err is human—Scripture is human—

[43]Ibid., 19-20.

[44]Ibid., 15.

[45]"Three," 61-62.

[46]Ibid., 64

> therefore, Scripture errs." For error is no more required of the Bible's humanity than sin is of Christ's. Inerrancy no more deifies Scripture or makes criticism impossible, than sinlessness renders Christ docetic and makes historical study of His life impossible. A better maxim is this: "To err is human—*ergo*, God gave Scripture by inspiration—so that, it does not err." The fact that all men, including the biblical writers, are sinners, does not obviate the existence of infallible Scripture; it underlines the *need* for it.[47]

Pinnock insisted that the humanity of Scripture is not dismissed in such a view: "God has given us neither a docetic Christ, nor a docetic Scripture, whose humanity is unreal and intangible. We wish to affirm the true and real humanity of Christ and the Bible."[48] Again, he insisted that "Scripture is simultaneously the product of divine and human authorship, the two factors interpreting the text at every point, so that Scripture is never less than human and divine anywhere."[49]

Thus there are numerous points of variation in Clark Pinnock's current position on inerrancy. The arguments that he is marshalling against what he now calls the "strict" or "militant" view of inerrancy are nothing more than arguments that he has salvaged from the opposing camp's arsenal—an arsenal that he once opposed with equal force. We have suggested that since none of Pinnock's arguments are arguments that he did not challenge in his earlier writings, and that the facts have not changed, there must be an underlying presuppositional change that enables him to reinterpret the facts. That is the subject of the next section.

II. Underlying Changes

It is always dangerous to assume that one knows the precise reason why another person does something. Motives are complex factors and frequently not known by the individuals themselves. Nevertheless, certain factors can be observed by outsiders that are frequently overlooked by an individual. It is with this idea in mind that we investigate the underlying shift in Clark Pinnock's thinking on inerrancy.

As a preparation for this investigation, it is helpful to lay out in chronological order Pinnock's works on inspiration in order to see clearly when and where the change came.

School	*Dates*	*Articles and Books*	
New Orleans Baptist Seminary	1965-1968	*A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*	1966
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School	1969-1974	*Biblical Revelation*	1971
		"On Revelation and Biblical Authority"	1973
		"Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal"	1974

[47]*Revelation*, 176.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid.

		"Inspiration of Scripture and Authority of Christ."	1974
		"Baptists and Biblical Authority"	1974[50]
Regent College	1974-1977	"Inerrancy Debate Among Evangelicals"	1975[51]
		"Inspiration and Authority: A Truce Proposal"	1976
		"Three Views of the Bible"	1977
McMaster Divinity School	1977-present	"Evangelicals and Inerrancy"	1978
		"The Ongoing Struggle Over Biblical Inerrancy"	1979
		"The Bible: Truth and/or Error?"	1980

The first item to notice is that Pinnock's shifting views do not appear in print until his first article written at Regent College, but they are consistently divergent from his views thereafter. One wonders whether the shift from Trinity to Regent's more "free" doctrinal atmosphere, coupled with the publication in English of Berkouwer's work on inspiration in 1975, were influential in this transition.[52] Either way, a subtle shift in epistemology begins to appear after 1974.

1. *Changes in Epistemology.* In his earlier works, the nonnegotiability of inerrancy is anchored firmly in the epistemological issue. In his opening sentence of *Defense* we find these words: "The central problem for twentieth century theology is its own epistemological basis."[53] From this he insists that the historic belief in infallibility and inerrancy is the only valid starting point and framework for a theology of revelation.[54] Upon this epistemological certainty hangs the entire Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura.*[55]

The issue, then, is the truth-claim implicit in the doctrine of inspiration.[56] To

[50]This article must have been written while Pinnock was at Trinity, since it came out in the fall of 1974. In the fall of 1974, however, Pinnock began teaching at Regent College.

[51]Although this article came out in the 1976 edition of Fuller Seminary's alumni magazine, it was written and distributed to members of the Theological Students Fellowship on December 5, 1975.

[52]Notice Pinnock's changing evaluation of Berkouwer. In 1971 Pinnock cites the shift of Berkouwer with disfavor: "G.C. Berkouwer, formerly a staunch defender of plenary inspiration, seems now to have shifted to a view of infallibility of reduced scope. His denial of the truthfulness of matters not directly concerned with the central doctrines of Scripture is to be resisted" (*Revelation*, 103). After the translation of his work into English in 1975, Pinnock's estimation of Berkouwer changes. He is now the "dean of evangelical theologians" ("Three," 62) and one of the "finest scholars which [has] yet emerged out of the evangelical movement," who is helping to produce a noninerrantist theology of inspiration ("Ongoing," 71).

[53]*Defense,* 1. Also, "the central problem in contemporary theology is neither theism nor ecclesiology, but epistemology" (p. 4).

[54]*Defense,* 1.

[55]Ibid., 4.

[56]Ibid.

him it was not the pressures of Biblical criticism or scientific discovery that threatened the doctrine of Biblical inspiration. On the contrary it was existential *a prioris* that would do the most harm.[57] Limited inerrancy, he claimed, "is a slope, not a platform."[58] It was a "misdevelopment in theology which could have serious and tragic consequences. Limited inerrancy is a half-way house on the way to unlimited errancy."[59] The reason for such strong statements is the lack of any objective criteria for distinguishing between the inerrant and the errant. Moreover, "if the biblical writers were liable to err in one particular, what guarantee have we that they were not equally fallible in another?"[60]

In defining truth on this epistemological base, Pinnock followed what he himself identified as a normal "correspondence idea of truth."[61] That is, "when the Scripture records a historical fact, we presume a real event occurred which corresponded to it. If it speaks of the purposes of God, we assume these are his very intentions. If poetic language is used to describe the rapture of a soul in contemplation of God, we can share the deep feeling with real empathy."[62]

More recently Pinnock has repudiated this epistemological need for inerrancy, labeling it as a "fortress mentality."[63] It is very saddening to see how he now treats the epistemological issue just as he treats the seven points against inerrancy cited earlier—namely, by marshalling the very arguments and sources in his behalf that he formerly challenged critically. He now says that since inerrantists claim that a flaw in the Bible would destroy religious certainty, "when we consider the fact that no Bible in existence is flawless, logically we should stop trusting the Bible at once."[64] He calls this emphasis on inerrancy's epistemological importance "rationalistic arguments" and "scholastic orthodoxy."[65] Furthermore, in the face of his own argumentation to the contrary he claims that "it is certainly difficult to understand why God, if he deemed errorlessness epistemologically so crucial, did not take greater care to preserve the text errorless, and how it is that errant Bibles Christians have always had to use have been so effective for millennia."[66]

[57]Ibid., 5.

[58]*Revelation,* 80.

[59]"Limited," 150.

[60]Quoting H. D. McDonald in *Defense,* 12.

[61]Following R. Preus in *Defense,* 13. Cf. *Revelation,* 71. For an excellent recent treatment of the vital link between the correspondence theory of truth and inerrancy see N. L. Geisler, "The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate," *BSac* 137 (October-December, 1980) 327-339.

[62]*Defense,* 13.

[63]"Three," 65-66.

[64]Ibid., 65.

[65]Ibid., 66.

[66]Ibid. Pinnock had said earlier that "there is nothing absurd about an infallible text imperfectly transmitted. If there is good evidence for the trustworthiness of the Bible as it came from the hand of God, and there is (the entire testimony of Christ and the apostles referred to above); and there is no evidence for the inspiration of copyists or translators, and there is none; then if follows quite logically that such a distinction must be made" (*Revelation,* 81-82).

This last statement hints at a key reason why Pinnock is now challenging the epistemological argument: He now apparently holds to a pragmatic view of truth in the place of the correspondence theory of truth. It is the effectiveness of the Bible that is important rather than its self-claims. If it is the effectiveness of the Bible that is central in defining its truth, then what is subsidiary to its effectiveness (genealogical data, and so on) becomes excess baggage that is not subject to falsifiability because it is not part of the Bible's truth-claim. How did this subtle shift in truth theory slip into Pinnock's theology? I would suggest that it slipped in through a crack in his system that has been evident as early as 1966—namely, his view of inerrancy as qualified by author intentionality.

2. *The Constant of Intentionality.* Clark Pinnock claims that he has always held to a "nuanced" definition of inerrancy.[67] In his earlier writings we find this "nuance" stated in these words: "Infallibility is obviously restricted to the intended assertions of Scripture understood in an ordinary grammatical exegesis of the text."[68] In his *Biblical Revelation* he stated this again: "The infallibility of Scripture is not, in one sense, absolute. Its field is restricted to the *intended* assertions of Scripture understood by an ordinary grammatical-historical exegesis of the text."[69] In his article against limited inerrancy he wrote thus: "In order to be candid and fair, we must admit to limiting inerrancy ourselves, not to a macro-purpose elevated above the text . . . but to the intended teaching of each passage of Scripture."[70] After his shift of position we can see this same qualification. It is now drawn, however, to a more subtle conclusion:

> I doubt whether the upholders of inerrancy have reflected sufficiently on the implications of this qualification, according to which one could fairly say that the Bible *contains* errors but *teaches* none, or that inerrancy refers to the *subjects* rather than all the *terms* of Scripture or to the *teaching* rather than to all the components utilized in its formulation. It is important to notice that, when we qualify inerrancy hermeneutically and place it into relation to the authorial intention, we shift the emphasis from the *errors as such* and place it instead on the *nature* and *purpose* of each biblical passage. Of course, the upholder of "inerrancy" would claim that an "error" in the unintended teachings of Scripture is not really an error in *Scripture.* That is correct. But let it be plainly stated that, according to this understanding of inerrancy, the Bible is *not* free of all "errors" in its whole extent, but free of errors where its intended teachings are concerned.[71]

Pinnock is careful to point out that he is not introducing a new category to restrict inerrancy from outside the text, such as "revelational matters," but rather is using author intentionality as an internal guide for each passage.[72] Yet this principle of intentionality became the hinge that opened the door to Pinnock's appreciation for limited inerrancy. Daniel Fuller was quick to snatch up this

[67]"Ongoing," 73-74 n. 5.

[68]*Defense,* 13.

[69]*Revelation,* 71.

[70]"Limited," 148.

[71]"Debate," 12.

[72]Ibid., 13.

similarity between Pinnock's position and his own when he reviewed *Biblical Revelation* in 1974:

> I certainly have never said, like Beegle, that parts of the Bible are not inspired. I would argue that you have misconstrued me as being unwilling to regard all that the Bible teaches as inerrant and arbitrarily acceding only to its teachings of what makes a man wise to salvation. But surely II Timothy 3:15 (" . . . Scriptures make you wise to salvation") is the simplest way to denote in one statement the whole intention of the biblical writers. I do not believe you would want to say they had two or more intentions, only one of which was to make a man wise unto salvation. As for myself, *I am in complete agreement with you that our confidence in Scripture would vanish if any Scriptural statement or necessary implication therefrom which involves what makes a man wise to salvation were regarded as untrue. If there is one error anywhere in what Scripture intends to teach, then everything it intends to say is suspect and we have not even one sure word from God.*[73]

Fuller was right. Although Pinnock denies this concept of a "macro-purpose," he is led via the principle of intentionality ultimately to that position. Notice how the "salvific" purpose of the Bible becomes paramount in his later writings: "Instead of [inerrancy] placing emphasis upon the saving truth of the Bible to bear witness to Christ, attention is focused rather on the precise accuracy of minor details. This unfortunate development does not do justice to the kind of book the Bible is."[74] In his most recent article on the subject, Pinnock sounds very close to Fuller in defining the Bible's intention (and thereby its inerrancy) in salvific terms. In predicting what he sees as the future of the evangelical theology of inspiration he writes the following:

> There will be greater emphasis upon the Bible's own stated purpose, to give knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ, and resistance to substituting for that purpose such an extraneous ideal as factual precision. Stress will be placed on the competence of the Spirit to use Scripture in nourishing the church and his dependability in keeping believers in the truth. Certitude, rather than certainty, will be encouraged, certitude in the unbreakable validity of the gospel. Focus will be placed on the sufficiency of the Scriptures to meet our needs in the practical realm of Christian living. Validation of biblical authority will be sought, not in scholastic controversy, but in the effective preaching of the Word and in its proven relevance for decision making.[75]

Thus whereas the correspondence theory of truth loomed large in Pinnock's early works, the pragmatic theory has been blooming in his later works.[76] It seems evident, therefore, that Clark Pinnock's use of intentionality as a limitation for inerrancy has been the sloping platform on which he slipped away from his earlier theory of truth. As it is, that early weakness formed the subtle factor that led to a shift in his truth theory and hence to a shift in his entire epistemological approach to the Bible.

[73]"On Revelation," 331.

[74]"Three," 67.

[75]"Ongoing," 73.

[76]Other examples of this pragmatic emphasis were pointed out earlier under the heading *Inerrancy Misplaces the Emphasis.*

III. CONCLUSION

It has been shown that Clark Pinnock has indeed shifted his position on inerrancy, so that he is now utilizing arguments against the doctrine that he once refuted. It has also been pointed out that he has changed his entire epistemological approach to the Bible in the face of his own dire warnings. It has further been suggested that this epistemological shift was precipitated by a faulty view of an author-intentionality qualification on inerrancy, which led to a shift in his truth theory itself.

As was stated earlier, it is hoped that Pinnock will approach his own earlier works in some sort of written retraction so that the evangelical public will be informed as to where he thinks he erred in his earlier thinking. I, for one, am deeply saddened by the changes in this one who influenced me to adopt the very position he is now attempting to refute.