

Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996. 280 pp.

By Gani Wiyono

Summary

Flame of Love is written by Clark Pinnock of McMaster Divinity College, one of the most evangelical stimulating theologians today. It is basically a one-volume systematic theology with the Spirit as its central motif. Chapter one discusses the Spirit and the Trinity. Here, Pinnock develops a relational (or social) model of God which views Godhead as a community of love and mutuality. Within that community, the Spirit is “a distinct Person who, besides bonding others in love, shares and participates in it.” (p. 40). Chapter two elaborates the role of the Spirit in creation. Here Pinnock argues for (1) Spirit works both inside and outside the Church; (2) the Spirit of creation is the also the Spirit of redemption (the continuity of creation and redemption); the Spirit can be the link for a dialogue between science and theology. Chapter three discusses the Spirit and Christology. Here, Pinnock attempts to recover a “Spirit Christology” which emphasizes the complete dependence of the human Jesus on the Spirit for his miracles and sinless life without dissolving his divine nature. He also understands the salvific work of Christ (atonement) through the lens of Ireneaus’ *recapitulation* theory (participatory model) without totally denying the value of Anselm’ penal substitution theory (forensic model). Chapter four examines the relationship between the Spirit and the Church. Here, Pinnocks argues for the pneumatological model of ecclesiology which views the Church as the community created, fostered, and empowered by the Spirit. Chapter five discusses the Spirit and union which essentially views salvation more as union with God rather than as right legal standing before God.

Chapter six discusses the Spirit and universality. Here, Pinnocks rejects both universalism which believes all will be saved and restrictivism which believes that non-Christians will all be damned whether they hear Gospel or not. Instead, he believes that “God is serious lover who does not allow persons to perish without any opportunity to responds his love.” (p. 212) The only implication here is that “we ought to be saying not that ‘outside the church’ but that ‘outside grace’ is no salvation. Inside the church there is salvation in fullness-but outside the church there is still grace and hope.” (p. 241) The final chapter deals with the Spirit and Truth. Here, Pinnock sees (1) the truth in revelation as not merely propositional, but personal-transformational, since it is grounded in the dynamic self-disclosure of God; (2) The truth however is not private, but communal, since the Spirit bears witness to truth in the bosom of community. Therefore, the Scripture normally should be read and understood in the context of the church and its tradition.

Evaluation on Pinnock's Approach

Flame of Love undoubtedly reflects Pinnock's spiritual journey that has been blessed by “the fresh air of spiritual renewal” amidst the “dryness” of his theological odyssey.

The book reflected my own faith journey. The Spiritual vitality so evident in Scripture is rare and thin in the religious circles I inhabit. The atmosphere is restrained and the style cognitive; expectation are rather low regarding the presence of the kingdom in power. So, I thirst to experience the reality of Spirit in my heart and church. I am tired of spiritless Christianity with only rumors and occasional glimpses of wonder and signs. But I am glad to report that in the course of writing my heart has been blessed, I have caught the fire again (p. 247-48).

Pinnock's experience with the vivifying power and presence of the Spirit undoubtedly has caused him to value “heart knowledge,” without forgetting the value of “head knowledge”. As a result, an analytical-critical, yet creative, challenging, and inspiring book on pneumatology was produced.

Pinnock's mind and heart approach is commendable. First, as many begin to recognize now, that knowledge is not merely "head" (intellectual), but "heart" (emotional-spiritual) matters since human being is both intellectual and experiential-relational existence. Even in the secular/general education, the so-called IQ (Intelligence Quotient) is gradually losing its prominence, replaced by the so-called EQ (Emotional Quotient) and SQ (Spiritual Quotient). Secondly, it must be understood that we who get involved in theological odyssey deal with the transcendent God who cannot be totally figured out or diagrammed even in the context of our most vigorous reasoning. In other words, we must be ready to encounter mystery. The word "mystery" here should be not understood as the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning than we can intellectually comprehend. Thus, we must be willing to leave much room for prayer, worship, and devotion in our theologizing in order to experience a divine self-disclosure that may enrich our knowledge.

Comments on Pinnock's Insightful Ideas

Flame of Love begins with a quite insightful and lengthy discussion on the nature of God. Here, Pinnock argues that a relational model of God is the better way to understand Godhead. This is surely not in line with Reformed evangelicals' classical model of God that sees God as perfectly immutable and therefore allows no room for the reciprocity and openness of God. I surely affirm Pinnock's relational model of God, for it brings to surface the picture of God, namely the loving God who acts and interacts, who initiates and responds, that often times is missing or de-emphasized in the classical model of God.

Furthermore, Pinnock's relational model of God is very useful for Pentecostals, since it helps them to provide theological rationale behind their praxis. In prayer for example, Pentecostals seldom have "if it is your will" kind of attitude. On the contrary, they often pray just like a widow who pestered the judge to give justice in Jesus' parable (Lk. 18:1-8). Such an attitude surely is not compatible with the classical theism developed in typical evangelical-reformed traditions which stress the sovereignty and immutability of God. Such an attitude however is affirmed when the relational model of God being applied since the relational model of God allows a considerable degree of flexibility in the Godhead as a logical consequence of his nature as a personal, loving and dynamic God.

Pinnock's discussion on the work of the Spirit outside the Church is another insightful section that deserves special attention since this seems to be "persona non-grata" in Christian theology. The biblical records however make it clear that all people (whether they are Christians or not) are endowed with the Spirit (Gen 2: 7). In fact, all living creatures live because the *Creator Spiritus* is in them. If God draws his Spirit back, they die (Job 33:4; 34:14-15). This is surely not confined to Christians.

Unfortunately, Pinnock does not fully develop the implication of the work of the Spirit outside the Church. It would have been better, if Pinnock had mentioned some implication of the active presence of the Spirit outside the Church, such as (1) the necessity of dialogue with other religion, since they are not totally void of divine revelation; (2) the necessity of contextualization, since culture is the arena in which the *Creator Spiritus* works; (3) the necessity to engage in environmental preservation and so on.

Following his idea on the work of the Spirit outside the church, Pinnock suggest the continuity of the spirit of creation and the spirit of redemption. For Pentecostals, this insightful idea is helpful since it pinpoints their "blind-spot". Pentecostals generally are interested in declaring the Spirit's work in bringing salvation of the soul, holiness, and miraculous healing to human body, and yet seem to be less interested in working together with the Spirit to heal our broken earth. This is off course one-sided reading of the works of the Spirit in the Bible. Paul, the Apostle, for example, while elaborating the work of the Spirit within the believers, does not forget to see its relation to the cosmic work of the Spirit in bringing a new creation (Romans 8). If Pentecostals wants to be called as "the Full Gospel" type of Christianity, they should not see the Spirit's work of redemption as distinct from the Spirit's work of creation.

On matters of "Spirit and Truth", Pinnock's willingness to regard as revelation the ongoing illumination has liberated evangelicals from the language game of "revelation" and "illumination". Traditionally, these two terms are considered not identical, yet in praxis, they are hardly differentiated. What is more important, however, Pinnock' position on "Spirit and Truth," in some way has encouraged Pentecostals not to give way their typical Pentecostal hermeneutics which always

allows prophetic and intuitive insights to shed light on the process of getting the meaning of biblical texts.

Final Comment

Despite the minor deficiencies, Pinnock's *Flames of Love* is one of important books on pneumatology which complements other important works on pneumatology such as Hendrikus Berkhof's *the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (John Knox, 1964), and Jurgen Moltmann's *The Spirit of Life* (Fortress, 1992).

Most importantly, this book, as Roger Olson said, "prophetically challenges tendencies toward quenching the Spirit and toward excessive enthusiasm that have plagued this spiritual renewal." (see in the jacket of *Flame of Love*). Therefore it should be a must reading for anyone involved in the church ministry.