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Review: Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness

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Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness. By Clark H. Pinnock. Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001, xiii + 202 pp., \$16.99 paper.

Clark Pinnock is a household name in wider evangelical theological circles. In the preface to *Most Moved Mover*, he refers to his life as a theologian as "a journey of discovery" and to himself as "a pilgrim" (p. ix). To those who have followed his now thirty-five-plus year career, from New Orleans Seminary to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School to Regent College to McMaster Divinity College, and from Calvinism through Arminianism to his present open theism stance, this self-characterization is an understatement.

Most Moved Mover (the title contrasts with the Aristotelian "unmoved mover" concept) contains four chapters, originally the 2000 (or 2001 [?]; see p. 204) Didsbury Lectures at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, England. In his introduction (written for this published version), Pinnock provides a crash course in the main tenets of open theism, the volatile history of the controversy (from an open theist viewpoint), and open theism's methodology and philosophy of biblical interpretation (a tweaked "quadrilateral" approach). There is also a stirring appeal for tolerance and fair treatment towards open theism within evangelicalism.

Chapter 1, "The Scriptural Foundations," is an accumulating framework of principal concepts contained in openness theology. The more weighty issues, which Pinnock unpacks as the chapter progresses, include God's personal relationship with the world, God's "partners" (oddly overlooking the church, though Israel is treated), the partly settled future, God's passion and suffering, and the problems with "traditional" hermeneutics. It should be noted that Pinnock's approach to laying these foundations is basically proof-texting; substantial exegetical work is noticeably absent.

Chapter 2, "Overcoming a Pagan Inheritance," develops three key ideas. First, following previous openness volumes, Pinnock claims that classical theism has been infected by Greek philosophical thought (hence, the "pagan inheritance") since the late patristic era. Second, the shape of evangelical theology today is addressed, along with needed revisions in the doctrine of God according to the open theism model. Third, proper relationships among Scripture, tradition, and culture are explained as Pinnock attempts an apologetic for open theism and its theological agenda.

In chap. 3, "The Metaphysics of Love," Pinnock moves into the realm of philosophy/philosophical theology. With the subheading, "The Two Horizons," Pinnock pits the philosophy of "the ancients" against that of our present day; through the alleged disparity, he defends the philosophical reasonableness of open theism. He then sketches a "biblical philosophy," treating such topics as the future, the problem of evil, and the purpose of creation. The most intriguing section of the chapter, however, addresses the relationship between process theology and open theism, with Pinnock taking care to accentuate the differences over the similarities (though expressing real appreciation for process thought).

Chapter 4, "The Existential Fit" (an appropriately postmodern title), is a look at the practical ramifications of open theism, handling topics ranging from the "friendship of the Lord" to sanctification to prayer. Here, Pinnock is appealing to the complementary relationship between theology and experience, which he, in virtually the same manner as openness proponents before him, claims open theism better fulfills.

In the conclusion, Pinnock essentially poses the rhetorical question, "Will the open view of God be widely accepted?" Picking up where the introduction's emotional appeal leaves off, he continues to challenge evangelical scholars to consider seriously the open view of God and its proposed contributions to theology as a whole. The book is crowned by an extensive bibliography.

In terms of the strengths (i.e. intended here as perceived positive contributions) of *Most Moved Mover*: (1) The biggest name and senior theologian of the openness movement has weighed in with a book-length treatment, in his own inimitable style. (2) There

is a more forthright “showing of the hand” here in regard to hermeneutical/theological starting points/methodology than in the previous openness works. (3) There is worthwhile discussion of certain important theological areas (e.g. immutability and impassibility), as well as a bit more realistic acknowledgement of the anthropomorphic nature of some of the key passages in the openness debate. (4) In his plea for openness to be allotted some foothold on evangelical turf, Pinnock honestly admits that Calvinists, mainline Arminians, and other evangelicals are not receptive to this movement. As a result, Pinnock hones in on the Pentecostal wing as the remaining promising haven for openness theism in the growing evangelical storm. (Looking ahead to where the openness controversy will go from here, there is no guarantee, however, that wider Pentecostalism will sympathetically receive it.) (5) The bibliography, though selected, is the most up-to-date listing of works concerning the openness of God viewpoint and related questions that we have seen in print and is, thus, a helpful starting point for research.

As far as weaknesses are concerned: (1) Pinnock has woven a disconcerting hermeneutical pattern, employing a sentimentalized “biblical” collage approach wherein the OT is heavily accentuated (a ratio of 93 OT passages to 28 NT passages) in the first two chapters to make the biblical and theological case for open theism. Then, ironically, in the arena of practical implications (the last two chapters), Pinnock reverses the proportion to accent NT passages (52 NT passages to 13 OT passages). In other words, the openness position comes off as a top-heavy old covenant construct, which then is brought across and applied to the new covenant. Even though, admittedly, much evangelical theological reflection is overbalanced toward the NT, Pinnock’s reverse proportioning does not succeed in balancing the biblical/theological scales. (2) Here is yet another openness work *assuming* that the kind of world that God created is one of libertarian freedom with love as the be-all and end-all, then extrapolating from there. Biblically and logically, how does this procedure differ from and improve on that which draws the ire of openness theologians—the Calvinist starting point of a created order ruled by meticulous sovereignty/providence, from which extrapolations are made? (3) Besides the distance he attempts to insert between process thought and open theism, Pinnock fails to address the major criticisms of openness theology. He just hammers evangelical critics for being blindly captive to Greek thought, with little corresponding admission of openness’s own reliance on postmodernism. (4) The epidemic spelling, punctuation, and style errors may reflect careless editing. However, the possibility must be considered that the errors are the result of a rush to publication so as to influence the 2001 national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, whose theme of “Defining Evangelicalism’s Boundaries” spotlighted openness as the hottest boundary issue. (5) At the end of the day, while Pinnock does update the debate, he does *not* notably advance the argument for open theism. Beyond occasional creative nuances or implications, this is more of the same as earlier openness volumes. One begins to wonder if openness thinkers believe that saying the same thing over and over will have a mantra effect. One also wonders why they seem reticent to tease out in print the (likely even more radical) implications of their position in regard to other major doctrines beyond theology proper (and angelology, for Greg Boyd).

As for a recommendation: if you have already read *The Openness of God*, *The God Who Risks*, or *God of the Possible*, what you will get in *Most Moved Mover* is a slick re-packaging as a passionate “political” plea (Pinnock’s term certainly applies as much to him as to evangelicals he roasts as “politically” motivated). Still, this is vintage Pinnock: At once the winsome wooer of the evangelical rank-and-file and gadfly of the far left, with shrewd selectivity he has presented the openness view attractively and as sympathetically as possible, while “pushing the buttons” of his critics all along the way. Bottom line: we urge cautious, attentive engagement by evangelical readers. They must recognize that Pinnock is proceeding from assumptions with a postmodernist, existential fit, that his argumentation is one-sided, and that his position has exceedingly

far-reaching (most disturbing) implications. Otherwise, *Most Moved Mover* may seem "much more moving" rhetorically and emotionally than what it packs in actual theological substance.

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Portraits of God: A Biblical Theology of Holiness. By Allan Coppedge. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001, 432 pp., \$29.99.

This book has three purposes: (1) to identify and examine the major portraits or roles of God in order to understand how they illuminate our knowledge of and relationship to him; (2) to show how these roles connect biblical studies with systematic theology; and (3) to show the centrality of holiness for understanding God's nature. Coppedge also hopes to create fresh dialogue across Christian traditions and show the practical implications of theology.

Coppedge argues that "in using the language of this world to talk about a transcendent God, the best way to describe God in relation to reality is by the use of *analogical language* (using terms that are alike in some ways, but not in all ways)" (p. 23). Metaphor is the analogical language used to describe God. The personal metaphors used are portraits or roles; they are helpful for understanding God's being, actions, and relationships to humans. Eight divine roles are primary: creator, king, personal revealer, priest, judge, Father, redeemer, and shepherd. Each role is described by explicating the theological themes of the triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit respectively), man and woman, sin, salvation, atonement, growth, Church, full sanctification, and glorification. The divine attributes that relate to each role are also introduced.

Coppedge argues that holiness is the central and most pervasive concept of God in Scripture. While sovereignty is significant, holiness better unifies the attributes and roles of God. Holiness is ceremonial and moral, with six components of meaning: separation, brilliance, righteousness, love, power, and goodness. These components correspond to the eight roles (separation and brilliance each apply to two, while the other four apply to one role each).

Following two introductory chapters, chapters three through ten unpack the roles. The fourth chapter, "Holy God as Sovereign King," provides a good example. The role of God as sovereign king relates to the concept of holiness as separation and the language figure for the role relates to royalty. God the Father is understood as king over Israel and one who institutes the monarchy in Israel. Terms such as "Lord" and "warrior king" illuminate this metaphor. The Son is Messiah, Christ, King, Prince, Lord, and Head, and the Holy Spirit is the executive of the Godhead. Men and women are servants or subjects of the king with Jesus as a model. Sin as act is rebellion and rebelliousness is the state of sin. Salvation is pardon through repentance and faith, and the satisfaction and governmental atonement theories fit here. Growth results from increasing obedience, but salvation can be lost. The Church is the people of God under divine kingship, sometimes referred to as a kingdom or nation. Full sanctification is total submission and entire consecration to Christ's Lordship, and glorification is seen as the eternal heavenly kingdom. Omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience are the attributes related to the kingly role. Each chapter on the divine roles takes a similar course. The final chapter shows the theological and practical implications of the roles and admirably succeeds in showing how there can be a bridge between biblical studies and systematic theology.

Does Coppedge accomplish his three purposes? Yes, in a very thorough fashion. Written with a distinctive Wesleyan flavor, this book is useful across the Christian tra-