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# DR. PINNOCK AND INERRANCY

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*A Document Charging that Dr. Pinnock  
In His Most Moved Mover  
Has Violated the ETS Doctrinal Basis*

# **A DOCUMENT CHARGING THAT DR. PINNOCK IN HIS MOST MOVED MOVER HAS VIOLATED THE ETS DOCTRINAL BASIS**

Pursuant to the mandate of the ETS Executive Committee, I hereby seek to articulate the charge that “Open Theism” as presented by Dr. Pinnock in his *Most Moved Mover* (regularly abbreviated as MMM in this paper) has at several places violated the doctrinal basis of the ETS: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is, therefore, inerrant in the autographs.”

There are many other areas of Christian faith beside the inerrancy of Scripture in which many members of ETS differ with Dr. Pinnock as to whether the Bible does in fact teach what he claims it teaches, but the concern here is to focus on this single question: “Is the way in which Dr. Pinnock handles the Scripture compatible with its inerrancy?”, or to put it in other words: “Are there statements made or traditions advocated in Dr. Pinnock’s volume that constitute a denial of the inerrancy of God, and therefore of Scripture as the Word of God?” It is the single purpose of this paper to prove that there are such statements and that therefore Dr. Pinnock’s view is incompatible with inerrancy.

The passages of Scripture to be discussed do relate to the nature of God’s foreknowledge, on which the members of ETS at the 2001 annual meeting have voted: “we believe the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete, accurate and infallible knowledge of all events past, present and future, including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents.” This paper, however, is not a discussion of God’s foreknowledge, but an investigation of the question whether Dr. Pinnock has stated or implied that God, lacking in comprehensive foreknowledge, has in fact made erroneous statements.

Naturally, members of ETS will be eager to show that on the passages of Scripture discussed they have plausible interpretations that do not conflict with inerrancy, but the vindication of such interpretations is not the subject of this paper and not a prerequisite for a vote concerning the propriety or impropriety of Dr. Pinnock’s statements.

The present paper has been prepared by Roger Nicole, who has repeatedly sought the advice of Dr. Kenneth L. Barker, Dr. John Frame, Dr. Simon J. Kistemaker, Dr. Robert E. Picirilli, Dr. Bruce A. Ware and others, and who has in this way received invaluable help in the process. These members of ETS are not responsible for any failings in detail, but have expressed their concurrence in the main charge presented here.

It must be noted that, while I am known as embracing Reformed views of divine sovereignty, the present paper has been written in such a way that an Evangelical Arminian can concur in what is stated. Indeed Dr. Robert Picirilli, of Free Will Baptist Seminary, a well-known Arminian scholar and ETS member, had the kindness to examine this paper and declare his agreement to the charges preferred.

## **I. INCIDENTS ALLEGEDLY ARTICULATING GOD’S CHANGE OF MIND.**

1. In 2 Kings 20:1 – 10 we have an account of Hezekiah’s sickness and healing. This case is adduced by Dr. Pinnock in MMM, 48. God’s original statement through the prophet Isaiah was “Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover” (v. 1). Then Hezekiah prayed and wept (vv 2, 3) and God sent Isaiah to tell him: “I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.” (v. 5) and “I will add fifteen years to your life” (v. 6).

Dr. Pinnock comments “The time of the King’s death was shifted to a date more remote in time.

This shows that the exact time of death was not forever settled in God's mind." This in Dr. Pinnock's mind justifies the statements:

"God changed his mind" MMM p. 43

"God is willing to change course" p. 43

"God is free to adjust plans" p. 43

"God would... alter his plan" p. 44

"God is said to change his mind" p. 48 cf. also 27, 41, 50, 58, 61, 63, 64, 68 – 73, 75, 76, 85 – 88, 94, 186.

But from the moment God said "You are going to die; you will not recover" God made his plan known, and an extension could not be granted without nullifying the original setting of the date. There is a flat contradiction between "you will not recover" and "I will heal you." Viewing this incident as Dr. Pinnock views it denies God's inerrancy, and that of the Scripture as well, since it presents as God's statement something that is palpably false: "You will not recover."

Fortunately, in this context, Dr. Pinnock had a parenthesis: "Evidently the initial prediction had been conditional without being stated." (p. 48). But, if this be true, the whole incident does not demonstrate a divine change of mind at all. Dr. Pinnock avers, "God knows absolutely everything, including the possible as possible, and the indefinite as indefinite" (p. 49). But this in no wise justifies God in announcing the merely possible as definite, as would be the case in saying "Your death is imminent; you will not recover."

A proper Biblical understanding of this incident would start by a recognition that God had promised Hezekiah at least three more years of life (2 Kgs 19:29) and that the birth of his son Manasseh, necessary for the fulfillment of God's promise to David (2 Sam 1:12 – 16), also took place three years later than this sickness in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (2 Kgs 21:1). But as stated in 2 Chron 32:25, "Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown to him." Therefore God revealed to him through Isaiah that if he persisted in this self-sufficient pride, death would overtake him in short order. Hezekiah then repented, wept and prayed and God, by a miracle, extended his life by fifteen years. This is articulated beautifully in Hezekiah's song, preserved for us in Isaiah 38: 10 – 20. In verses 10-14, Hezekiah laments about the imminency of his death as revealed to him by Isaiah's first prophecy, and then celebrates the goodness of God manifested in his miraculous healing and announced in the second prophecy (15-20). God did not change his mind at all; by his warning he intended to move Hezekiah to repentance, and his miraculous healing, announced also by Isaiah, was the means of accomplishing what God's plan had included from the start.

If Dr. Pinnock denies the conditional nature of the first warning and treats it as a declaration by God of what the future would [not might] be, he has violated the doctrine of God's inerrancy by making this warning to contradict God's earlier statements to David and to Hezekiah, and the second statement to contradict the first. This approach would make Isaiah as liable to death as a false prophet and assimilate God himself to false prophets.

If Dr. Pinnock acknowledges a conditional nature for this warning, his proof for a change of God's mind vanishes utterly, and he should be expected to publish corrections of his language unless it be better supported than here.

2. Another case advanced by Dr. Pinnock (MMM 44, 45) concerns the prophecy of Jonah to Nineveh. "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned". (Jonah 3:4). Here also it is the repenting attitude of the Ninevites that enabled God to "alter his plan" and to cancel the threat issued against them. Dr. Pinnock on that basis expands at some length how God does not fulfill his desires by a strict control of the creatures but makes himself "vulnerable" by remaining "open" to input from creatures.

If we accept this approach we are here again faced with an announcement that failed to eventuate. Forty days passed and Nineveh subsisted in great power for another 150 years or so. This way of looking at the matter would involve God as making an erroneous statement, thus destroying God's inerrancy.

Fortunately Dr. Pinnock interjects that "Mercy may have been implicit in the original call and Jonah knew it," and we would add not only Jonah, but the Ninevites knew it as well. The meaning of the prophecy, therefore, was not "Whatever you do Nineveh will be destroyed in forty days", but "Forty more days of your rebellion and I will hit you with destruction." The Ninevites understood that and their repentance permitted a postponement of the doom, precisely as Jonah had anticipated (Jonah 4:2). In his patriotism for Israel, he had at first fled in the opposite direction, not being willing to bring to Nineveh a message that would prompt them to repent and to receive an extension of time from God.

It is significant that in both of these cases, the only ones in Scripture where one prophecy seems to cancel out a well-documented earlier one in the immediate context, Dr. Pinnock includes the words "conditional" or "implicit mercy" in the original announcement, thus avoiding an obvious contradiction. But then he proceeds to argue the case for a divine "change of mind" as if these words were not applicable. He is so eager to give evidence for God's "change of mind" that he did apparently not perceive that he had voided his own argument by acknowledging the possibility of a conditional warning in both cases. It is this alleged "change of mind" on God's part that is incompatible with inerrancy; although his argument on the basis of these two incidents is null and void, his own defection from inerrancy is not attenuated.

Five other incidents are advanced by Dr. Pinnock to substantiate a divine change of mind. They are actually counterproductive in this respect and need not retain our attention for long.

3. Dr. Pinnock claims that "the fate of Sodom had not yet been decided" (MMM 102) when God said 'shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? (Gen 18:17). It is preposterous to imagine that God's administration of justice was dependent on the number of righteous people that Abraham mentioned 50, 45, 40, 30, 20 and 10. In any case, as Abraham testified, "the judge of all the earth would do right" (18:25). This was not a case where God learned from Abraham how many just people would warrant a delay in the catastrophe, but rather a case where Abraham learned to perceive increasingly the extent of God's mercy. As it was, there were not even ten righteous one in Sodom but only four (with a question mark on three of them 18:26, 30-36). So Abraham stopped too soon in posting a minimum of ten! In any case, no change of God's mind is in evidence here.

Dr. Pinnock is prepared to confess God's exhaustive knowledge (MMM 49) of the past and the present, but in this passage God speaks as "going down to see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know" (Gen 18:21). This is precisely the kind of anthropomorphic language for the present which God at times also uses with respect to the future, and which Dr. Pinnock insists must be understood literally and not metaphorically.

4. On God's testing of Abraham's obedience and faith by requiring him to sacrifice his son Isaac, Dr. Pinnock writes "God and Abraham learned from it: Abraham learned to trust God more deeply and God learned what Abraham would do under those circumstances (Gen 22:12)." MMM, 42. This is Dr. Pinnock's interpretation of God's words "Now I know." But if God up to that time was indeed ignorant or even unsure in this respect, it was pure folly to give Abraham five times the promise recorded in Gen 12:2, 3; 13:14-17; 15:4, 5, 18; 17:2, 4-8, 19-21; 21:12. The demonstration was important to Abraham himself and to his descendants, but God, knowing the present in full even to the disposition of free agents (Dt 31:21; Jer 17:10; Ps 139:2, 3; John 2:25) did not need this test to find out Abraham's true orientation.

Abraham himself certainly did not entertain "open theistic" views of God and his promises, since he was so certain of God's promise "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned" (Gen 21:12) that he could tell the servants "We will come back to you" (22:5), and reason that God could

raise the dead, “and, figuratively speaking he did receive Isaac back from the dead” (Heb 11:19). Here again to take a literal view of God’s nescience of future decisions is to involve him in self-contradiction of past promises and thus rule out his inerrancy.

5. About Exodus 32:11-14, Dr. Pinnock writes: “when the people made a golden calf, God became exasperated and threatened to give up on Israel altogether. He thought of putting them aside and beginning again with Moses, but Moses interceded in prayer and God “changed his mind” [NRSV translation for *niham* (MMM p. 43; cf also pp 50, 89). To suggest that God had not thought of the consequences and that Moses needed to remind God that his own reputation was at stake, that the Egyptians would be thrilled and that God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be invalidated, is so paradoxical as to imply that God not only lacked foreknowledge but was positively stupid! It seems obvious that God was putting Moses to the test, so that he could demonstrate his concern for God and his patriotism for Israel as having precedence over any personal or familial ambition. If God had really meant to destroy the twelve tribes he would have placed himself in contradiction to the detailed predictions given about them through the mouth of Jacob (Gen 49:2-27). This interpretation denies God’s inerrancy and must be ruled out by any one who confesses it.
- 6, 7. There was a shift in the destinies of Eli’s family (1 Sam 2:30-33) and the kingship of Saul (1 Sam 15:11), but in both cases it is apparent that God’s blessing was conditional to a proper honor of God (1 Sam 2:30) and obedience to him (1 Sam 15:19, 22, 23). Their destitution is not an indication that God “changed his mind.” (MMM 43). Dr. Pinnock hints that some prophecies are conditional, and perhaps he would want to treat the divine announcements the same way in passages like Gen 12:2-3, 13:14-17, 49:2-27. But nothing in these passages hints at conditionality. Rather, Scripture presents the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the sure basis of redemption.”

I conclude this section by observing that in none of these seven cases there was a “change” in God’s mind and that the claim that one occurred is incorrect. In arguing that there was such a change Dr. Pinnock annulled a prophecy that God has given respectively to Hezekiah and to the Ninevites so that an earlier statement was superseded by a contrary later statement: that is a violation of inerrancy of God, in the first place, and of Scripture as recording this instance of God’s alleged error.

If conditionality is involved as Dr. Pinnock parenthetically concedes, the validity of these incidents as proving a “change” of mind in God is destroyed. In cases 1, 3, 4 and 6 the word “*niham*” repent is not even used in the Biblical text.

## II. PROPHECY

A denial of God’s foreknowledge of the future decisions of free moral agents manifestly casts an aura of doubt on the whole prophetic sections of Scripture that relate to the future. In contrast to the inerrantist distinctions, Dr. Pinnock adopts a four-fold distinction, (MMM 50, 51).

### 1. Inerrancy distinctions

- a. The word prophecy may be used of a message from God that is not particularly related to the future. The prophet speaks forth in God’s name, not necessarily concerning future events. In that sense the whole canonical Scripture is prophetic because all of it is addressed by God to humans. 2 Peter 1:20.
- b. In some Scriptures relating to the future the fulfillment depends on circumstances. Examples of this can be found in abundance in Scripture, as in the third, fourth and fifth commandments or

again in Mat 6:15:16. This appears to be the case in 2 Kings 20:1-10 and in Jonah 3:4 as explained above. This is also the case in Jer 18:8-10 and 26:3, 13, 19 where the occurrence of an announced disaster or blessing is predicated on the continuance of human rebellion or obedience. Cf also Ezekiel 18.

- c. Unconditional prophecy states in advance of the event not what may happen, but what will happen. There are a great many examples of it from Genesis to Revelation.

The correlation with Dr. Pinnock's distinctions is as follows:

Inerrantist	Dr. Pinnock
a _____	Not considered
b _____	B
c _____	A
Unacceptable _____	C, D

2. *Dr. Pinnock's distinctions are as follows:*

A. Prophecies announcing "what God is planning to do and what He will bring to pass. Of course God knows aspects of the future that he has predetermined" (MMM 50) and the "future is settled to whatever extent the Lord decides to settle it." (MMM 147).

This category might seem to correspond to the category c of the inerrantist. But the impact of the denial of God's foreknowledge of the future decisions of free moral agents involves a profound difference. The only prophecies that can belong to category A according to Dr. Pinnock's outlook are those in which human decisions are not involved. Examples could be a collision between two of Jupiter's satellites, or again the crash of an asteroid upon our planet before the existence of humans. As soon as human beings are involved the decisions of God are depending on some prior decision of humans. For instance God's decision to create Eve was contingent on Adam's not previously committing suicide. If God had decided that Adam would not do that he would have encroached on Adam's freedom!

Even the miracle of the opening of the Red Sea, which appears to be purely in the physical sphere, would not have been effective if free-will people, Israelites and Egyptians, had not freely decided to cross it. All the prophecies of Scripture are related to human life in one way or another and therefore there are none in which God is simply "announcing what God is planning to do and what he will bring to pass." MMM 50. We may be pleased that Dr. Pinnock should acknowledge, and that fairly frequently, that there are such prophecies, but this admission could logically be extended to any prophecy where conditionality is not indicated either in the announcement or by the circumstances of the implementation. Yet he does not explain how some elements of the future have suddenly become objects of knowledge, nor how God here avoids violating the free will of the creatures involved. In terms of his own principles Dr. Pinnock has debarred himself from listing any concrete prophecy of Scripture as belonging to this category. How could God promise fifteen additional years to Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:6) when all kinds of free acts might interfere before this deadline?

In view of the fact that Dr. Pinnock holds that the future decisions of free moral agents are not a proper object of knowledge, are unknowable prior to the decision itself, the extent of this category should be zero.

This outlook is absolutely catastrophic for the whole concept of prophecy as it relates to the future. The Bible abounds in prophetic materials from Genesis to Revelation, e.g. the dreams

of Joseph and others around him; God's promises to Abraham and David; the detailed destiny of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen 49); the length of the Jewish captivity in Babylon (Jer 29:10; Dan 9:2); substantial part of the prophetic writings from Isaiah to Malachi; the many details of the career of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Old Testament; the many statements about the future from Christ and the Apostles; the whole books of Daniel and Revelation, and many more examples. Future prophecy was such an important part of Scriptures that for centuries it was viewed, along with miracles, as a major evidence of the divine origin of special revelation. It is in good part because they did not believe in the possibility of specific prophecies like that of Cyrus (Isa 44:28 – 45:13) and that of the kingdoms viewed in Daniel 7 and 11, that Biblical critics have chosen to revamp the chronological place of these writings so that their affirmations about the future turned out to be just a rehearsal of the past. More than 45 different events tied to the coming of Christ and the beginning of the Christian Church are seen by Jesus and the New Testament writers as prophesied in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup>. Jesus said "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). He said: "Moses wrote about me." (John 5:46). Luke tells us that on the day of his resurrection Jesus walked with the two disciples of Emmaus "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:27). If God does not know the future this discourse must have been a long silence. I have said that I would give my whole library to have a tape of this presentation. Judge of my disappointment in finding it to be a blank!!

Dr. Bruce Ware has an excellent section of his book *God's Lesser Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000) where he considers in some detail a number of passages that manifest a divine knowledge of future actions of free agents in Isaiah, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Daniel and John's gospel. His treatment of Daniel 11 is an example of an argument that could be developed from Genesis to Revelation. He wrote, pp126, 127:

*"Daniel 11 contains, by itself, an amazing array of instances in which God predicts, and hence foreknows, many future events and many future free creaturely actions. For example, Daniel, prophesying in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia (ca. 539 B. C.), predicts three kings to come after Cyrus, followed by a fourth (11:2). This fourth king, likely a reference to the coming Alexander the Great (reigned ca. 336-323 B. C.), died young, and his sons were murdered. Daniel predicts this, along with the fact that his kingdom would be divided into four parts (11:4). Amazingly, as history unfolds, Alexander's four generals vie for control and split the kingdom into the four regions of Egypt (south), Syria (north), Asia Minor, and Greece proper. The general of the south (Egypt), Ptolemy, began the line of the Ptolemies, while Syria's king, Seleucus I, began the line of the Seleucids. Daniel 11:5-35 then describes predictively roughly 155 years of warfare between the Seleucids and Ptolemies, with special focus given to the despicable reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (11:21-35), an unrightful heir to the throne. All these events, the people who fulfill them, and many more details than here described, are predicted with amazing accuracy by Daniel. Furthermore, it must not be missed that most, perhaps all, of the items prophesied required for their fulfillment enormous numbers of future free human choices and actions. God knew that three kings, then a fourth, would come to power. He knew the kingdom of this fourth king would be divided and that its four parts would be ruled over by kings other than his descendants. He knew of the battles that would take place between two of these powers and of the ultimate victory of one.*

*He knew of the devastation that would come to Israel through this last wicked king, and he knew that this wicked king would not be the rightful heir to the throne. The fulfillment of each one of these predictions involves a multitude of future free human actions. It is no wonder that liberal scholars date this portion of Daniel very late! So many details, involving future free choices, with such precision—this is truly overwhelming evidence, in one chapter of the Bible, of the reality of God's foreknowledge.*

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<sup>1</sup> R. Nicole, "The Old Testament in the New Testament" in F. C. Gaebelein, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 1979) I, 618, 619.

By contrast with God's unconditional prophecies which always come true, the claims of false prophets are sometimes revealed as fraudulent by the fact that what they announced does not come to pass (Dt 18:22; Isaiah 44:25). This false claim is so grievous a sin that the false prophet had to be put to death for his presumption (Dt 18:20). Now if all prophecy were conditioned by the decisions of free agents so that prophecy should really declare only "what might be" rather than "what will be" there would never arise a situation where the false prophets would be unmasked!

The principle of open theism really ruins the Biblical outlook on unconditional prophecy. In its terms James' warning to people who rashly anticipate the future (4:3-15) could apply to God himself: "Don't say 'I will do this or that at such a time.' Instead you ought to say 'if human free will allows, I might do this or that!'"

B. Conditional prophecies "leaving the future open" (MMM 50 exemplified by Jer 18:8-10).

These prophecies don't strictly leave the future "open", but indicate that if certain conditions prevail or continue to prevail, certain visitations by God must be anticipated.

The contents of this category B might correspond to the inerrantist category b. It must be emphasized, however, that this in no way spells a shift in God's mind; rather it spells continuity in God's dealing with humans in terms of their responsible decisions. God no more changes his mind in view of human action than the sun changes its course in relation to the earth. To say "look how God has changed" is the equivalent of the Church's decision against Galileo, insisting that the alternation of day and night on the earth was due to the movement of the sun rather than the rotation of the earth on its axis. An anti-Copernican approach is no better in theology than in astronomy!

C. "Imprecise prophetic forecasts based on present situations, as when Jesus predicts the fall of Jerusalem" (MMM 50).

Here we must distinguish between "imprecise" and "inaccurate".

Here, we can agree with Dr. Pinnock that some prophecies are vague in the sense that they do not specify precisely how they will be fulfilled. With these, several forms of fulfillment may be appropriate. For example, when Jesus told Peter 'someone else will... lead you where you do not want to go (John 21:28), he did not specify whether that person would be a Jew or a Roman. "Inaccurate implies that in some respect it was false but John tells us that this was a prophecy of Peter's death, so it was precise enough to specify that Peter would die, and die involuntarily rather than voluntarily. Dr. Pinnock, however holds that Jesus could not have known of these future events with certainty, because Peter's suicide would have defeated it.

D. Unconditional prophecies in which "the fulfillment of prophecy may differ from what the prophet had in mind" (MMM 51).

It is true that the fulfillment of prophecy may be different from what the prophet had in mind. The reason is that prophets were not always able to anticipate the later developments of the history of redemption (1 Pet 1:10-12). But what matters to the inerrantist is what God had in mind (John 11:49-52). The claim that Jesus viewed his resurrection (John 2:21) as a fulfillment of Ezek 40-48 is certainly not indisputable, and Dr. Pinnock provides still another explanation!

In this connection there is a disastrous footnote in which Dr. Pinnock lists prophecies that in his judgment were not fulfilled. He is so bold as to list here the fact that some stones "were left one on another" in the destruction of Jerusalem, contrary to the prophecy spoken by Jesus himself (Mt 24:2). Here we find a disastrous willingness to claim an error in a statement of



Jesus, together with a failure to understand the use of language metaphorically rather than literally. The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem certainly does not provide a suitable temple for the Jewish believers, and that is obviously what Christ had in view. Meanwhile, it is sad to see a man claiming to be an inerrantist listing what he views as failed prophecies, as if he were writing against inerrancy!

### 3. *God's promises imperiled*

One especially regrettable implication that would logically follow from Dr. Pinnock's view of God's changeable mind—and which fortunately he does not in fact too often draw—is that God's promises as well as his prophecies are subject to cancellation by virtue of later developments. This occurs in the passages studied here in relationship to the promises made to Abraham, Moses and David. This is directly contrary to 2 Cor 1:20 "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ and also 'Amen'".

I conclude this section by observing that Dr. Pinnock's denial of God's foreknowledge of future decisions of free moral agents is catastrophic to the Biblical outlook on prophecy. It undermines the realization of any but conditional prophecy, and it constitutes an outright denial of inerrancy in its claim that some divine prophecies (not related to the eschaton) were and do remain unfulfilled.

## III. DR. PINNOCK'S REFERENCES TO SCRIPTURE

### 1. *Inadequate coverage*

There is such a massive gap in the responsible handling of Scripture that one is left to wonder why Dr. Pinnock desires to be counted among those who confess biblical inerrancy. The Most Moved Mover contains 169 references to 157 different passages of the Bible. The overwhelming number of these is adduced to establish Dr. Pinnock's thesis. He confines his discussion of apparently adverse Scriptures to 6 pages (MMM 49-51, 54, 55, 128), with a maximum count of 13 passages. By contrast Prof. John Frame in his book No Other God has 1022 references to 865 different Scriptures. Dr. Bruce Ware in God's Lesser Glory has 369 references to 250 different Scriptures. Would you believe that Dr. Pinnock refers only 5 times to Romans, only twice to Romans 8 without any mention of 8:29-39; only in a brief paragraph to Romans 9 – 11? Would you believe that there are only 4 references to Ephesians, one to 1:11 in which he manages not to mention election but resistance to God's counsel? Would you believe that there are only 4 references to the Gospel of John, one in 15:15 where Jesus calls the disciples "friends", but which overlooks John 15:16? "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Would you believe that to my knowledge, the word "elect" never appears in the book and the word "predestined" only once to describe those who differ from him? MMM 161.

As we view the matter, he has functioned as a customer who has received a watch in the form of all its parts disconnected, and in the process of mounting it as a time-piece has indeed used some of the pieces but has also left a great many parts unused. This has been my predicament in my youth whenever I tried to correct something in my watch: I always seemed to have more parts than I could use, and the result was that the watch I had rebuilt never seemed to mark the time.

By contrast Dr. Pinnock does have 437 footnotes to a wide variety of authors and a 16 page bibliography of 380 titles, which manifests his extensive acquaintance with modern theological literature. He has 10 references to works first published before 1900 (Calvin<sup>2</sup>, Charnock, A. M. Fairbairn, Hatch, Heppe, C. Hodge, McCabe<sup>2</sup>, H. Schmid), 9 more from 1900-1949, 10 of the 1950s, 27 of the 1960s, 32 of the 1970s, 81 of the 1980s and 211 published after 1990. This represents a massive disregard of the Christian tradition which parallels the massive disregard of the Scriptures that his adversaries have quoted in contrast to his views.

## 2. Hermeneutical presuppositions

Dr. Pinnock makes the following statements:

*“I accept diversity among the biblical witnesses and recognize the dialogical character of the Bible. Being open to its overall drift, I try to enter into the struggle for truth that is going on there. The Bible does not speak with a single voice; there is a dialogue between the different voices. The writings contain a long and complex search for the mind of God and in this struggle various points of view compete and interact. In constructing a doctrinal model, therefore, it is important to remember that the Bible is a complex work by many authors whose views may vary and that the text is open to various plausible interpretations. (MMM 23).*

The ETS position is that the “Bible in its entirety is the Word of God written”. It is not so much a search for God as a revelation of God whose primacy of authorship guarantees a fundamental unity reflected through the various personalities and voices of the human authors.

In any case Dr. Pinnock’s book has the appearance of a monologue rather than a dialogue. It is surprising that one who rejects antinomies (MMM 55) in theology would so readily accommodate the concept of a Babel of voices in Holy Writ.

## IV. NIHAM

1. The positive biblical evidence advanced by Dr. Pinnock to support his view of a limited divine foreknowledge consists of passages that show God as surprised or disappointed (Is 5:1-4; Jer 3:7; 7:31, 19:5, 32:35), as testing people to find the truth about their orientation (Gen 22:12; Ex 32:9-14), as speaking of the future in conditional terms (Ex 13:15; Jer 26:3; Ezek 12:3), as asking questions about the future (Nb 14:11; Hos 8:5), and especially as “changing his mind,” particularly in the use of the word *Niham* “to regret, to repent.”

It may be observed at once, as was suggested from the earliest commentators, that all these expressions are “anthropopathisms”, that is descriptions of God in terms that would apply to human beings in similar circumstances, but which are only metaphorically applicable to God, as would be the remark of the vineyard owner in Mt 21:37: “They will respect my son”, where God in sending the Son as redeemer never had any misgivings as to how he would be received. This approach, when used with appropriate care, does parallel the many anthropomorphisms of Scripture, when describing God’s activity in terms of part of a physical body: eyes, ears, mouth, arms, hands, finger, heart, etc.<sup>2</sup> Except in rare cases, these terms are not construed to indicate a divine material body or bodies in the triune God (although the Mormons and Miles Grant have thought so, and Dr. Pinnock seems to open the door to a corporal divine existence MMM 34, 35, 81). In the same way certain divine attitudes may be described in terms of human feelings. One word that needs to retain our attention more fully is the Hebrew word *Niham*.

The root *nhm* occurs 119 times in the Hebrew canon, 11 times in 5 different nouns meaning “comfort”, “consolation” and 107 times in verbal forms meaning comfort (*Niphal*, *Piel*, *Pual* and *Hithpael*) and “repent” or its equivalent (*Niphal* 38, *Hithpael* 3). In the latter sense God is the subject of the verb 35 times and 9 of these indicate that God does not repent (Nb 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29 twice; Ps 110:4; Jer 4:28; 15:6; 20:16; Ezek 24:14; Zech 8:14).

The meaning in Hebrew Dictionaries is as follows:

BDB 1. “be sorry”, “moved to pity”, “have compassion”. 2. “be sorry”, “rue”, “suffering grief”, “repent”.

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<sup>2</sup> A. Bavinck *The Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) Pp 86-89.

Köhler-Baumgartner “be sorry”, “repent”, “rue”, “be sorry for”. New edition “regret”, “be sorry”, “console oneself”.  
M. Butterworth, in van Gemenen, ed. NIDOTTE. III, 82. “be sorry”, “repent”, “change one’s mind”.  
M. R. Wilson, in Harris, Archer and Waltke, TWOT I, 571 writes as follows:

*The KJV translates the Niphal of nhm “repent” thirty-eight times. The majority of these instances refer to God’s repentance, not man’s. The word most frequently employed to indicate man’s repentance is shûb (q.v.), meaning “to turn” (from sin to God). Unlike man, who under the conviction of sin feels genuine remorse and sorrow, God is free from sin. Yet the Scriptures inform us that God repents (Gen 6:6-7; Ex 32:14; Jud 2:18; 1sam 15:11 et al.), i.e. he relents or changes his dealings with men according to his sovereign purposes. On the surface, such language seems inconsistent, if not contradictory, with certain passages which affirm God’s immutability: “God is not a man... that he should repent” (1 Sam 15:29 contra v. 11): “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind” (Ps 110:4). When nâham is used of God, however, the expression is anthropopathic and there is not ultimate tension. From man’s limited, earthly, finite perspective it only appears that God’s purposes have changed. Thus the O. T. states that God “repented” of the judgments or “evil” which he had planned to carry out (1 Chr 21:15; Jer 18:8; 26:3, 19; Amos 7:3, 6; Jon 3:10). Certainly Jer 18:7-10 is a striking reminder that from God’s perspective, most prophecy (excluding messianic predictions) is conditional upon the response of men.*

A. J. Botterweck, *et al*, ed. TDOT IX, 340-53. Their very extensive article does not identify one translation, but it is consistent with a changed situation due to the unchangeable character of God.

In translations it is as follows:

- LXX** 11 different renderings. The most frequent being *metamele’i/n*<sup>(8)</sup> and *metanoiei/n*<sup>(19)</sup>
- Vulgate** A variety of rendering, once only “mutare”
- Luther’s German Bible** “reuen” or “gereuen”
- KJV** Always “repent” or “have compassion”
- RSV** Generally “repent”; “change his mind” when negated Ps 110:4
- NIV** Usually “relent; “change” in Ex 13:17; Nb 23:19; Ps 110:4; Heb 7:21
- NIRV** “sorry”, “sad”, “pity”; as change NIV + 1 Sam 15:29
- NLB** A variety; 9 times “change” 6 of them with negative
- NAS** A variety; 9 times ‘change” 4 of them with negative
- NRSV** “change his mind” 13 times out of 35, 4 of these are negative Nb 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29 twice; Ps 110:4. The others are Ex 32:12, 14; Jer 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13, 19; Jon 3:9, 10 about which comments are found above. Ex 13:17 has “the people may change their minds.”
- NAB** “regret”, “relent”; “change his mind” only in Nb 23:19.

It is apparent that the translation “change one’s mind” is hardly supported by the dictionaries and finds weak support in most translations considered. According to Young’s Concordance, the word “change” as a noun or a verb is found 78 times in the KJV to translate 12 different Greek roots. The only time this term is applied to God is in Mal 3:6 “I the Lord do not change.”

In the New Testament there are 62 instances of words related to repentance. None of these relates to God as the subject, except:

Rom 1:29 “gifts and calling... without repentance”

Heb 7:21 “the Lord swore and will not repent” quoting Ps 110:4

The impact of all this is that God’s intention does not change. A change of mind implies that an earlier position is replaced by a later one that invalidates the former. The mind of God, being fully informed at all times is not subject to change, although the relation of God to other agents may change when their attitude improves (2 Chron 32:26; Jonah 3:5-10; Jer 18:8; 26:3, 13, 19) or deteriorates (Jer 18:10). The change is not in God’s mind but in the relationship that the human person sustained toward God.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore precarious to ground the view of God’s change of mind on the use of *niham* in the Old Testament, the more so since this kind of expression is never found in the New Testament that even more than the Old is ample in its description of God’s lovingkindness and compassion.

## 2. Scriptures indicating the Fixity and Stability of God’s Mind.

Ps 33:11 The plans of the Lord stand firm forever

**PROV 19:21** Many are the plans of a man’s heart  
But it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails

**IS 14:24** Surely, as I have planned, so it will be and as I have purposed, so it will stand

**27** The Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him?

**31:2** [the Holy One of Israel] does not take back his word.

**46:9, 10** I am God, and there is no other  
I am God, and there is none like me  
I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient time  
what is still to come  
I say: My purpose will stand and I will do as I please

**MAL 3:16** I the Lord do not change

**HEB 6:17, 18** God wanted to make the unchanged nature of his purpose very clear...  
It is impossible for God to lie

**JAMES 1:17** [The Father]... who does not change like shifting shadows

## V. AN ATTACK ON THE NATURE OF INSPIRATION

The assumption that the divine agency and the human agency do not overlap undermines the doctrine of the Scripture’s inerrancy. In this outlook the divine inerrancy applies only to the divine aspect of the Bible. At the point where the human individuality of the writers enters in, the divine control is suspended and inerrancy is no longer assured. This conflicts with the ETS doctrinal foundation: “The Bible alone, and the

<sup>3</sup> An important “Semantic survey of *NHM* by H. V. D. PARUNAK has appeared in *Biblica* 56 (1975) 512-532. His conclusion is that in the *Niphal* and *Hithpael niham* simply means “to suffer emotional pain.” 532.

Bible in its entirety is God's Word written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs." This difficulty is presented more fully in S. J. Vellum, "The Inerrancy of Scripture" in John Piper, et al, eds, *Beyond the Bounds*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003. pp 239-74.

## VI. THE EXTENT OF GOD'S FAILURE ON THE OPEN VIEW

Some might think that the open theist view is of little consequence because the errors it attributes to God are minor and easily remedied. In fact, open theism ascribes enormous risks to God and, correspondingly, enormous failures. So although Dr. Pinnock as well as those who disagree with him are seeking to magnify God and render a proper homage to his glory, the picture that emerges from the God who takes risks as Dr. Pinnock contends is hardly favorable.

He took risks in creating free angels and lo!, a significant number introduced sin in creation and disrupted things so badly that a cosmic war of enormous size emerged.

In creating Adam and Eve as free agents to counteract the fall of the angels, he immediately lost both of them in the original sin.

As a result of this initial rebellion, God had to face murder in the second generation, and evil proliferated particularly in the descendants of Cain. (Gen 4:17-24)

By the tenth generation mentioned in Genesis 5, humanity had become so ensconced in evil that nothing could seem to remedy the situation but the wiping out of it in the flood. (Gen 6)

God took a chance in saving eight descendants of Seth in the ark of Noah. But no sooner had they landed on solid ground than Noah got drunk and Ham dishonored his father. (Gen 9:20-25)

The new humanity became so idolatrous and corrupt that God had to confuse the languages at Babel. (Gen 11)

Idolatry became so prevalent that God had to separate Terah and a small family group away from Ur. (Gen 11:31)

Even in Haran idolatry prevailed (cf Gen 31:34) to such an extent that God had to separate Abraham and Lot (Gen 12:1-5), and later Abraham from Lot (Gen 13:14-17), and later Abraham from Ishmael, his son (Gen 21:8-14), and Jacob from Esau (Gen 27:41-46).

In spite of all these separations the descendants of Jacob got snarled up in Egypt, and even though they were miraculously removed from that land, they proved that they ingested more Egypt than anybody could have imagined!

In taking a chance with the people of Israel God had to face a continual battle: in Judges, Samuel and Kings, and in the messages of the prophets we see alas the justice of Stephen's momentous summary: "You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit. (Acts 7:51)

Indeed when the Son became incarnate and dwelt among us in fullness of grace and truth" he was reviled and crucified. It took the momentous miracles of the resurrection and Pentecost to establish the Church.

And the Church... shall I continue through the religious wars, the crusades, the heresies, the formalism, the sleep and the paralysis of sin...?

As a risk taker God does not seem to have a very good record! I would sooner say this was God's plan from the start and I don't understand why he permitted all these failures, and mine to boot, than to have to

say God decided to take risks and the unforeseen effect was this frightful succession of defeats, resulting among other things in the ultimate separation from God of millions of free agents created for union with him.

What about the Lamb of God chosen and slain before the creation of the world (1 Pet 1:19; Rev 13:8)? Surely this is not an afterthought, whether in Rev 13:8 the term “from the creation of the world” applies to the lamb or to the manes written in the book of life.

## VII. DR. PINNOCK’S VIEW OF TRADITIONAL EVANGELICALISM

Dr. Pinnock views those who confess exhaustive divine foreknowledge, and especially all-embracing divine foreordination, to be incapable of giving a proper place to the moral responsibility of free agents. He therefore imagines, contrary to their express statements and attitudes, that they violate the Scriptural doctrine of human and angelic freedom and responsibility. He holds that such an approach must lead to the concept of a cold, insensitive, unresponsive deity, frozen in immobility and lacking in relationality with his creation: an abstract deistic being, “a cosmic stuffed shirt” (MMM 41); “an all controlling despot who can tolerate no resistance” MMM 4; “a solitary narcissistic being, who suffers from his own completeness.” MMM 6, 79. Needless to say, those who hold “traditional” theism do not recognize themselves in this picture.

It appears evident that Dr. Pinnock does not understand the faith of traditional theism, and that his understanding of the God they worship as a kind of deistic abstraction does not at all correspond to the reality of their religion. Here we would say with Pascal the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and David, and Isaiah, and Jesus, who was God and man, of Paul and John, not the deistic lucubration of some philosophers! Cf MMM 66.

We could learn from Dr. Pinnock’s emphasis that we must suitably emphasize the relational and personal characteristics of the God of the Scripture, supremely revealed in Jesus Christ. If our view were what Dr. Pinnock thinks it to be, it would be truly quite detestable. So much so that it appears strange that he would want to perpetuate his membership in an organization that has declared by a very strong majority that the Bible clearly teaches God’s foreknowledge of the future decisions of free agents.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In view of what we have attempted to say here it is not surprising that the New Testament, the richest expression of divine grace, should never have even used the language of repentance or change with reference to God.

It is not surprising that there is no questioning of unlimited foreknowledge of God in the first three centuries of the Christian Church.

It is not surprising that Augustine in his struggle against Pelagianism should have asserted God's exhaustive knowledge, but it would be surprising if this element of his belief had managed to secure such an overwhelming influence on the West and the East, where free will was surely well-established, that one year after his death the ecumenical council of Ephesus (431) should condemn Pelagius as it did.

While the beneficent influence of Augustine on theological thinking in the West may be acknowledged, it would be surprising if the tenet of exhaustive foreknowledge had managed to secure a quasi-unanimous approval, when so many other views that he held were not endorsed either in the Roman Catholic Church or in Protestantism in spite of the energetic Augustinian emphasis in the origin of the latter in the Reformed, Lutheran and Anglican reformations.

It is not surprising that it is in a deviant sect, Socinianism, recognized by all orthodox or evangelical people to be such, that the idea of a denial of God's foreknowledge of the decisions of free moral agents flourished.

It is not surprising that scholars from France, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands and England took the cudgels in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to repel Socinianism.

It is not surprising that the Arminian movement in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and since that time, did not yield to the temptation to deny foreknowledge in order to promote free will, but placed the foreknowledge of God at the foundation of God's whole counsel for humanity.

It is not surprising that all the founding and charter members of ETS, who were still with us in 2000, signed the statement "The denial of God's foreknowledge of the decisions of free agents is incompatible with the inerrancy of Scripture." These are Burton Goddard, Laird Harris, Carl Henry, Roger Nicole and Samuel Schultz, founders; Gleason Archer, Robert Culver, Lloyd Kalland, Harold Mare, Charles Ryrie and John Walvoord, charter members who joined the society in the first year 1949-1950.

It is not surprising that ETS at its annual meeting in 2001 voted by a vote of 253 Yes against 66 No (with 41 Abstain), that is 79.3%, that "We believe the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete, accurate and infallible knowledge of all events past, present and future including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents."

It is not surprising that in its annual meeting of 2002 the ETS by majority vote decided to have the charges against Dr. Pinnock investigated by the Executive Committee.

It is not surprising that the appearance of Dr. Pinnock's books and that of other open theists has produced a strong negative reaction among evangelicals.

Robert Morey, The Battle for the Gods. Southbridge, MA: Crown, 1989, 316 pp.

R. K. M. Wright, No Place for Sovereignty. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996, 249 pp.

Norman Geisler, Creating God in the Image of Man. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1997. 191 pp.

Millard Erickson, God the Father Almighty. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. 301 pp.

Bruce Ware, God's Lesser Glory. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000. 240 pp.

John Frame, No Other God. Phillipsburg, NJ: R & R, 2001. 235 pp.

John Feinberg, No One Like Him. Minneapolis, MN: Crossway, 2001. 8879 pp.

Norman Geisler and H. Wayne House, The Battle for God. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2001. 336 pp.

Douglas Wilson, et. al., Bound Only Once. Moscow, ID: Crown, 2001. 230 pp.

Douglas Huffman, et. al, eds. God Under Fire. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002. 325 pp.

John Piper et. al, eds. Beyond the Bounds. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003. 416 pp

Not to speak of numerous articles and book reviews.

In summary I conclude that Dr. Pinnock has in his "open theism" writings violated the inerrancy clause of ETS, by representing God as canceling some prophetic statements that he made, by allowing that some prophecies remain incompletely fulfilled or ever permanently unfulfilled, by stretching the meaning of *niham* to contradict clear statements of Scripture, and by asserting human independence to the point of jeopardizing the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture.

I do so with a heavy heart and with the prayer that God would enlighten him and us and lead the Executive Committee and the ETS to do what is right in honoring his inerrant Scripture.

Signed:

Roger Nicole, Chairman



## DOCUMENTS

1. Dr. Pinnock's Assumptions
2. ETS Assumptions
3. My paper for ETS 2002
4. An essay on the nature of inerrancy in ETS
5. Marked pages Xeroxed from MMM
6. "Semantic Survey of *NIHAM*" BY H. V. D. Parunak