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Karkkainen's "Doing the work of comparative theology" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Kärkkäinen, V. (2020). *Doing the work of comparative theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 321 pp. \$35.00. ISBN 9780802874665

Written by a professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, this scholarly work of comparative theology is presented from a Christian perspective, while engaging in interfaith dialogue between four other living faiths, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. It claims to differ from other works of similar nature by actually conducting comparative theological work, rather than just listing ideas of how this could be done. Thus, it complements any works containing such aforementioned methodological explanations. Comparative theology in this primer asserts to aid our understanding of diverse faith traditions by revealing the ways these living faiths approach the divine through careful assessment and reflection.

It contributes to the larger, more neutral field of study known as comparative religion, as well as to the discipline known as Christian theology of religions, which is more confessional in nature. Comparative theology is meant to glean from both of these areas by investigating the beliefs and practices found in two or more religious traditions in a more detailed approach, while still remaining loyal to Christian tradition and expression. Each chapter addresses parallels and differences within these particular religions through a doctrine-by-doctrine comparison. Christian doctrines such as revelation and scripture, the triune God, creation, humanity, Jesus Christ and other savior figures, atonement and reconciliation, Holy Spirit and other spirits, salvation, religious communities, and eschatology are all addressed.

Structurally, it does not follow a consistent process in the way it addresses doctrines within traditions, as headings and order vary, so comparisons can be hard to track at times. However, it does achieve its purpose to hospitably enlighten the reader to nuances between Christianity and other highlighted belief systems through its sympathetic-critical dialogue on matters of life and death. Thought provoking throughout, it concludes belief in God through surrender to Christ is a risk worth taking. Not designed to be comprehensive in nature, it attempts to make the technical and complex work of comparative theology more accessible to theology students and others interested in this field of study. An introduction to the subject, it remains committed to clarity and accuracy, and is well-documented with footnotes, a bibliography, and an index of subjects. Designed with classroom use or practitioners in mind, it is highly recommended for all church, seminary, and academic libraries.

Reviewer

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