

*An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003. Pp. 372. \$29.00 paper.

Perhaps one of the most difficult items on the agenda of contemporary theology today is the relationship of the gospel and the Christian faith to other religions. Our pluralistic environment and shrinking globe make the task urgent. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, associate professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, offers a significant contribution to this ongoing discussion. What is immediately striking is the amount of ground Kärkkäinen attempts to cover in one book. There are three major parts to the book. Following an introduction, part 1 offers biblical perspectives on a theology of religions in four chapters. Part 2 traces historical developments of the church as it has wrestled with a theology of religions. In six chapters he moves from the early church fathers to the twentieth century. In parts 3 and 4, Kärkkäinen surveys the current scene. Part 3 summarizes the responses to world religions of various confessional communions—Roman Catholic, Anglican, mainline Protestant, Free Churches, evangelical, and ecumenical. Part 4 offers an introduction to the way various individual theologians have approached this issue. Rejecting the more common division of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, he offers an alternate taxonomy—ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism, and theocentrism. In part 4, Kärkkäinen gives introductory summaries of no less than twenty-one major thinkers in the last hundred years. Truly this book represents an ambitious undertaking!

This is the fifth such broad survey book by Kärkkäinen, the first four mapping out approaches to a doctrine of God, Christ, the Spirit, and the church. This book has all the hallmarks that have become characteristic of his work—good compact summaries, lucid writing, comprehensive scope, ecumenical tone, and fair treatment. This most recent book is a welcome addition and will be valuable in helping to get hold of the complex discussion taking place today. It is to be commended as a helpful guide for making our way through the difficult terrain of contemporary theology of religions, and I hope it gets a wide reading.

One may take issue here and there with various interpretations of theologians or traditions, or why theologians were placed in certain categories. However, I am left with three more general questions about Kärkkäinen's approach. First, he interprets his own project in his introduction in the following way: "In this book, I am not presenting my own or any particular view of theology of religions. This is meant to be a neutral introduction to the topic and does not advocate any particular persuasion" (27). Can there be a neutral introduction to this topic? Will not one's selection and arrangement of material, along with labels used to designate positions and eras ultimately offer a certain vantage point on the subject? Indeed Kärkkäinen's treatment of Scripture and history is telling. In both cases, he acknowledges that by far the majority of material is negative toward other religions. Yet, he is at pains to emphasize the more positive and inclusivist strains in the New Testament and in various adher-

ents in church history. No doubt this is a worthwhile venture, but it makes both the biblical witness and record of the church appear more ambiguous about religions than it is. One also finds similar interpretive clues in the way he interprets Scripture, as well as the labels he uses to categorize various theologians (ecclesiocentrists, christocentrists, theocentrists).

A second question revolves around the content of a theology of religions. For Kärkkäinen, the parameters are made up of two basic affirmations: “God desires all people to be saved,” and “only in Jesus Christ can salvation be found” (26-27). He believes that how one puts these two affirmations together determines one’s theology of religions. In much of what follows (not all) this clue guides his choice of material to include in his survey. Are these really the two most important affirmations for a theology of religions? No doubt these two affirmations are an important part of a theology of religions, but if one were to analyze, say, J. H. Bavinck’s and Hendrik Kraemer’s theologies of religions, these would not be the most important issues at all. Along with the finality of Jesus Christ, God’s revelation in creation and the response of humanity to that revelation, the religious core of religions and their cohesive unity would be much more prominent. These issues are not absent in Kärkkäinen’s treatment, but they remain in the background.

Finally, this question about this kind of book: Can one do justice to the complexities and nuances of biblical interpretation, ecclesial traditions, and individual theologians in one book? Kärkkäinen is well aware of the problem, and I have already affirmed the value of this kind of survey that maps out various positions. One must be aware, however, when reading the book that such breadth does not allow for nuanced treatment. One becomes aware of this especially when reading the description of a theologian one knows well. I was left with many questions after reading the summaries of Kraemer and Newbigin, the two thinkers I know best. The genius of Kraemer’s position expressed best in his term *subversive fulfillment* does not come through. Newbigin’s very insightful handling of world religions and religious pluralism in a number of articles in the last two decades of the twentieth century is virtually ignored; it is his project of mission in Western culture, dealing more with culture and epistemology, that is the focus of attention. Questions of this sort though, will arise as a matter of course in reading a book that surveys vast amounts of material and covers many movements, traditions, and thinkers. Generally Kärkkäinen has surveyed the scene well. One just needs this final caution to remember that no summary can handle all the intricacies, or perhaps even take hold of the genius of a position.

—Michael W. Goheen

*The Lord’s Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* by Jeffrey J. Meyers. Moscow, Ida.: Canon Press, 2003, Pp. 448. \$21.00 paper.

Books and essays about worship written by conservative Presbyterians are often predictable: The congregation should follow the dictates (called “The Regulative



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