

Klaus von Stosch

Comparative Theology As an Alternative to the Theology of Religions

The Dilemma of a Theology of Religions

In what follows, I offer a critical response to Perry Schmidt-Leukel's paper "Limits and Prospects of Comparative Theology," in which he attempts to reveal the mistaken efforts in the pretension of comparative theology to find a "way beyond the current impasse in the theology of religions."¹ Schmidt-Leukel's "bad news" for comparative theologians is that "comparative theology" will not lead out of the impasse of theology of religions but straight ahead into it. Schmidt-Leukel tries to console comparative theologians with the "good news" that the theology of religions (and especially his pluralist option) "is not at all an impasse," but "a promising path into the theological future."²

My bad news for adherents to the theology of religions, as it is understood by Schmidt-Leukel, is that no theoretical solution of this dilemma is possible within their current philosophical framework. My good news is, *pace* Schmidt-Leukel, that comparative theology is a "way beyond the current impasse in the theology of religions."

Before elaborating on this second point, let's look for a moment at Schmidt-Leukel's "promising path into the theological future." I do not think that religious believers can accept a pluralist answer to the problems of a theology of religions. One simply cannot insist on the truth of one's beliefs while accepting that the opposite of one's beliefs is equally true. One must hold that one's own beliefs are at least closer to the truth than the beliefs of those who disagree with those beliefs – otherwise one should change one's beliefs. In Keith Ward's words: "It may sound arrogant to say that a particular view that I happen to hold is more adequate than another; but it is an inescapable claim for anyone who reflects on what truth claims logically require."³

¹ J.L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York, 1999), 10.

² Cf. P. Schmidt-Leukel, "Limits and Prospects of Comparative Theology," in this volume, 493-505.

³ K. Ward, *Divine Action* (London, 1990), 201.