

## Drew Collins, *The Unique and Universal Christ: Refiguring the Theology of Religions*

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Since the first appearance of Alan Race's tripartite theology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism in *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, it has become a widely circulated – perhaps the most recognisable, if not the dominant – conceptual grid in thinking about the relation between Christianity and other religions. Author Drew Collins, who is Associate Research Scholar and Lecturer for the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, provides a critical analysis of Race's typology of religions and then sets it in conversation with the work of Hans Frei, especially the latter's typology of Christian theologies, which the author uses to shed light on contemporary ecumenical theology of religions.

Following his introductory chapter, Collins offers a detailed account of Race's three major interlocutors: Ernst Troeltsch, John Hick and W. C. Smith. Race grapples with Troeltsch's historical criticism that made religious claims, such as incarnation, not metaphysically impossible but rather improbable. Along with this rejection of metaphysical particularity comes an epistemological relativism that reduces religion to humanity's intrinsic search for the transcendent. To address Troeltsch's historicism, Race turns to Hick's neo-Kantian epistemology to defend the validity of religious beliefs and experience. Race finds Hick useful because, while being mindful of historical criticism, he justifies religion at the level of internal experiences of the divine that find expression in diverse religious beliefs. Neo-Kantian epistemological perspectivism is hard at work here to safeguard the possibility religious experience, though this ushers in metaphysical and moral relativity. But the problem of relativism is not debilitating because Smith's phenomenology of faith opens the door to the possibility that God, as infinite being finitely experienced, can be shown to be present in all major religions. Smith's phenomenology fulfills a critical function as an integrating system that discerns faith in the universal transcendent underneath the diversity of world's religions.

While Race's apologetic attempt to make religions intellectually tenable and overcome the threat of relativism is not without good intentions, Collins determines that ultimately such a personalist account of theology of religions does injustice to the question of history as faith retreats to the interior life as the locus of religion. Furthermore, such prioritising of epistemology, anthropology and phenomenology anchors theology in philosophy as the final arbiter of truth claims.

Therefore, to cast an alternative vision of a theology of religions, Collins turns to Frei's work. He argues that Frei's approach does not sidestep the challenge of modern historical inquiry, but faces it squarely by turning to the church's reading of biblical narrative, which renders the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ and his presence in the world as God's universal love. Frei does not construe the relation between text and historical reality as identical, but nevertheless does recognise them to be indispensable

to each other. Furthermore, in contrast to Race, Frei's approach does not automatically privilege the constellation of historical criticism, epistemology and phenomenology in service of apologetic aims, but instead engages diverse conceptual tools *ad hoc* to articulate the church's own hermeneutics, Christology and mission in the world.

Collins then introduces Frei's five types of theology in chapter 4 and tests its usefulness by pairing each type with a specific theology of religions that emerged in the ecumenical assemblies of the twentieth century in the following way: Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry (1932) as type one, WCC Missionary Structure of the Congregation (1967) as type two, IMC Assembly of Jerusalem (1928) as type three, IMC Assembly of Tambram (1938) as type four, and the Wheaton Declaration (1966) as type five. In the closing chapter, Collins draws upon Peter Ochs, Willie James Jennings, and Frei to propose how a theology of religions may be hospitable to the comprehensiveness of God's concern for creation in light of the particularity of Jesus Christ.

There are at least three obvious contributions to be noted. First, Collins offers a comprehensive and insightful analysis of Race's presuppositions, rationales and priorities that fund his pluralist theology of religions. Second, while 'postliberal' theologians already have contributed to the development of theology of religions, this is the first substantive treatment that has brought Frei's work to bear upon the topic. And lastly, while these two trajectories of inquiry are significant in their own right, utilising Frei's typology for illuminating theologies of religions embodied in the ecumenical assemblies is especially creative and useful. Collins has rendered a great service in these regards, though the relevance of Frei's work to inter-religious and comparative theology remains to be explored. He demonstrates throughout the book remarkable knowledge of a wide range of primary and secondary resources, a deep reservoir of expertise needed in addressing the major questions in Race's typology, Frei's project, and the various ecumenical theologies of religions with enormous clarity and depth.

Without doubt Frei's contribution to theology is immense and continues to remain relevant and useful to contemporary theology as this work nicely demonstrates. Collins has taken Frei's hermeneutics, Christology and theological method and extended them in a creative way to think about theology of religions, indeed a welcome addition to Frei scholarship.

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## **Gregory D. Wiebe, *Fallen Angels in the Theology of Saint Augustine***

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When we consider Saint Augustine's status in the history of Christian theology, it is remarkable that so little attention has been given to his theological vision of fallen