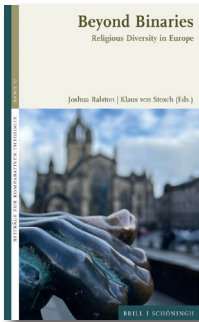


## BOOK REVIEW

***Beyond Binaries: Religious Diversity in Europe.*** Edited by Joshua Ralston and Klaus von Stosch. Leiden: Brill, 2023. xvi+187 pages. Hardcover \$100; ISBN 978-3-506-79155-9.



This volume addresses intersections between politics and religious discourse in Europe. Based on the assumption that religion and secular society are traditionally conceived as two opposing binaries, the editors and contributors of this volume aim to show how comparative theological inquiries, as well as critical theological engagement, can move the discourse beyond these perceived binaries (x). The editors offer three case studies with contributions from renowned scholars from Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish traditions.

These aim to show that the binaries of secular versus religious spheres do not treat religious discourse accurately.

Case Study 1 seeks to define a nuanced understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in Europe. In his essay “Muslim Migration and Borders of (Christian) European Identity,” Joshua Ralston highlights inconsistencies in the political discourse regarding Muslim immigration and the Christian identity of Europe. The recent migration crisis (2015–2018) shows, according to Ralston, that cultural and religious arguments mark the political discourse. These arguments cannot be understood through the existing secular-religious binary lens but must be viewed within the larger context of tensions within political liberalism (4). Political parties construct Christian-nationalist identity politics to counter a perceived danger from Islam. A comparative theological approach to Islam and the liberal traditions of Europe that refuses the binaries and reimagines the relationship between Europe, Islam, and Christianity can help deconstruct the ongoing tensions.

Johannes Süßmann’s contribution—“When did Europe become Identified with Christianity?”—takes a historical approach to the European identity as Christian by looking at how the motif of Christian Europe was

used in the past. Contrary to many political claims, Süßmann argues, the term was not used to define Europe against the rising Islam. Rather, the political debate utilizes the terminology as a means to “other” Islam. In his contribution “Bioethical Questions in the Perspective of Comparative Theology,” Karsten Lehmkuhler proposes to utilize comparative theological hermeneutics in the field of Christian ethics that would provide “better *mutual knowledge and comprehension*” in the political discourse (33). Through the question of whether the human embryo has a soul in engagement with Islam, he shows how Islamic perspectives enrich the public debate and could advance policy changes in European countries.

Case Study 2 deals with analyses of idolatry from various theological perspectives. Klaus von Stosch’s contribution “Kampf der Idolatrie” defends a modern approach to criticizing idolatry. Contrasting Jan Assmann’s remarks against idolatry critique, von Stosch offers the perspective of how the critique against idolatry from political-theological and liberation theological standpoints can stabilize minorities in society (63). Daniel H. Weiss offers a view on the critique of idolatry through rabbinic understandings in the Mishnah. His essay “Idolatry and Pluralism in Jewish Traditions” analyzes teachings in Mishnah Avodah Zarah that show that the rabbinic stands in the Mishnah are not a mere “watering down” of violence against idols and idol-worshippers compared to the Bible. Instead, arguments emphasize that as God orders the universe as God sees fit (74), likewise, Israel does not need to intervene in the practice of idol-worshippers. Weiss shows measures where rabbinic thought emphasizes a peaceful, non-violent convivence.

Case Study 3 deals with questions of a future of tolerance and religious diversity. The essay titled “Der friedensfördernde Konflikt mit Gott” by Elisa Klapheck is dedicated to the relationship dynamics between humans and God. Klapheck presents five key rabbinic concepts that implicitly or explicitly contribute to a Jewish worldview of democratic, secular understanding with other traditions. She argues that the Jewish traditions have a potential for a “theology of secular society” (107), in which the struggle with God is not only a prerequisite for a relationship with God but also “a possibility for building bridges to other religions” (107).

Another case for living diversity in the future is Roland Stolte’s presentation of the concept of the project “House of One,” which is currently under construction in Berlin. Stolte argues that the House of One has the unique potential to shift the binaries of religion in society in two ways. First, religions come into public focus as co-builders of the project. At the same time, this house becomes a place of interest for various societal

systems. Stolte states this new public view is a paradigm shift in interfaith dialogue. Second, dialogue happens in a new spatial environment through this House of One. Religions do not merely “come together” for dialogue but are already together in one place.

Marianne Moyaert’s contribution, “Aktive Toleranz und der politische Umgang mit religiöser Gewalt,” concludes this section. Moyaert attests that there is a broad interest in educating students, emphasizing plurality and religious tolerance. She argues that such emphasis can potentially train young people to become “citizens of the future” ready to live in a pluralistic society (137). However, Moyaert also cautions that political rhetoric that promotes active tolerance may “flatten” the general discourse (147). Such a generalization may emphasize similarities but smooth out cultural differences. The overarching goal of educating students, Moyaert asserts, is, then, to equip students to critically reflect and question the status quo of society, as well as its social prerequisites and its power dynamics (158).

The present volume successfully provides a range of angles from which comparative theological methods can address lived interreligious experiences in society. This compilation shows that comparative theological inquiry is a useful way to address the contemporary challenges of lived religion in a secularized society. Thus, its findings are also valuable in the North American context, where the dynamics of secularism and an increasing influence of conservative-nationalist Christianity on the political debate influence identity politics and diversity.

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