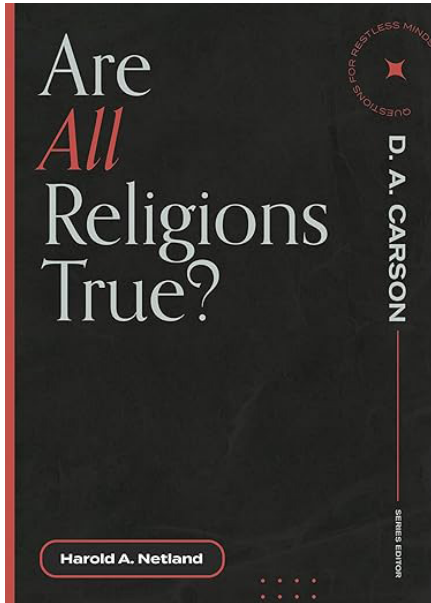


BOOK REVIEW:
Are All Religions True?
Questions for Restless Minds Series.

Keith Ramses E. Deloria



Are All Religions True?
by Harold A. Netland
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The discussion around the coexistence of multiple religions has been a central topic in theology and philosophy, particularly as religious pluralism continues to gain prominence in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. Harold A. Netland's *Are All Religions True?* offers an in-depth exploration of religious diversity and Christian commitment, critically examining the implications of religious pluralism. Netland addresses the intricate relationship between Christianity and other world religions, exploring key issues such as religious diversity, truth claims, and the nature of salvation. This essay draws upon selected excerpts from Netland's book to explore these themes, highlighting the challenges and implications of religious pluralism for Christians.

One of the foundational points that Netland makes is the persistence of religion in the modern world, despite predictions to the contrary. He states that "eighty percent of people worldwide profess some religious affiliation" (7), underscoring the continued relevance and influence of religion in contemporary society. This observation is critical in framing the discussion about religious pluralism because it highlights that religion remains a vital force shaping human lives, beliefs, and practices. Netland's acknowledgment of the persistence of religion invites reflection on how Christians should engage with this

reality. While Christianity holds to the belief that the fullest expression of God's truth and revelation is in Jesus Christ and the Christian Scriptures, Netland suggests that other religions can be "accepted positively as part of God's plan for humankind" (8). This perspective opens the door to considering other faith traditions as potentially contributing to a larger divine purpose, even if they do not hold the fullness of Christian revelation.

However, Netland also recognizes that the relationship between Christianity and other religions is not a singular issue but a set of "interrelated issues" (17). This is important because it acknowledges the complexity of religious diversity. Religious pluralism, as Netland notes, is not merely a matter of tolerance but a deeper celebration of diversity. He defines religious pluralism as the view that "all of the major religions are (roughly) equally true and provide equally legitimate ways in which to respond to the divine reality" (19). This definition reflects a significant shift from mere coexistence to an acceptance of multiple paths to the divine. Yet, this is where a critical distinction arises in Christian theology, particularly regarding the identity of Jesus Christ. For pluralism to be consistent with its claim, Netland points out, it must view Jesus as "not significantly different from other religious leaders" (20). However, for Christians, this presents a significant theological problem.

The centrality of Jesus Christ in Christian faith cannot be understated. According to the Christian belief, as Netland emphasizes, "in the human person of Jesus of Nazareth, the one eternal God assumed human nature: God became incarnate in Jesus, fully God and fully man" (88). This doctrine of the incarnation is fundamental to the Christian understanding of salvation, as it positions Jesus not just as one religious leader among many, but as the unique, divine revelation of God. This exclusivity forms a significant point of tension with religious pluralism, which seeks to relativize all religious leaders, including Jesus, to the same level. Thus, Netland argues, religious pluralism is "incompatible with Christian commitments concerning the reality of God and the person of Jesus Christ" (90).

In further examining religious pluralism, Netland draws attention to philosopher John Hick's model of pluralism, which proposes that all religions are legitimate responses to an ultimate divine reality. Hick's pluralism rests on three claims. First, there is an ultimate religious reality to which all religions respond. Second, the various religions are historically and culturally conditioned interpretations of this reality. Third, salvation or enlightenment involves moral transformation from

self-centeredness to reality-centeredness. While this model is appealing in its attempt to harmonize different religious traditions, Netland critiques it for its internal inconsistencies, particularly in its inability to account for the unique claims of Christianity regarding the person and work of Jesus.

Netland also touches on the problem of conflicting truth claims between religions. While diversity does not necessarily imply disagreement, religious traditions offer fundamentally different answers to questions about the nature of the divine, the human predicament, and the path to salvation. For example, classical Hinduism teaches that the human predicament is reincarnation, while Islam focuses on divine judgment at the end of time. These different perspectives reflect deep theological differences that challenge the notion that all religions are equally true. Netland reminds readers that “there is an important distinction between rejecting a belief or principle and refuting it” (104). Just because one rejects the beliefs of another religion does not mean one has disproven them. However, for Christians, the truth revealed in Jesus Christ necessitates a particularist stance that conflicts with the relativism of religious pluralism.

Finally, Netland addresses the potential dangers inherent in religious diversity. While it is overly simplistic to attribute all religious phenomena to demonic influence, he argues that it is equally naïve to deny that Satan can be active through religions. Religions, according to Netland, contain “varying degrees of truth and goodness along with much falsehood and evil” (130). This is where Christians must be discerning, recognizing that while there may be truth in other religions, there is also the potential for deception. Insofar as religions “distort God’s truth

as revealed in Scripture” (130), they must be rejected as idolatrous. This underscores the challenge for Christians in navigating religious pluralism: how to engage with respect and love for people of other faiths while holding firm to the truth of the gospel.

In conclusion, Harold A. Netland’s *Are All Religions True?* offers a nuanced examination of religious pluralism and its challenges for Christianity. While acknowledging the continued significance of religion in the modern world and the complexity of religious diversity, Netland ultimately argues that religious pluralism is incompatible with core Christian beliefs about the person of Jesus Christ and the nature of salvation. For Christians, the challenge is to navigate this pluralistic world with grace and conviction, affirming the truth of the gospel while engaging respectfully with those of other faiths. Netland’s work calls for clarity, discernment, and a deep commitment to the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ.



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