



STATEMENT DP105

BOOK REVIEW

Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity at Truth

by Mortimer J. Adler

(Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990)

When it comes to the fields of philosophy and classical literature, Mortimer J. Adler is considered nearly an institution. During his illustrious academic career Adler has written some 46 books (many of them best sellers) and was the associate editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World*. Adler's writings are well known for their lucidity and persuasive reasoning.

While low-key about his personal religious beliefs, Adler is nevertheless a self-professing Christian. In one of his books he argues that the existence of a single Supreme Being can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Many conservative Christians have been greatly interested in Adler's thoughts concerning religion.

In his most recent book, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religion and the Unity of Truth*, America's foremost philosopher tackles the troublesome issue of religious pluralism. As the subtitle of the book indicates, Adler is concerned with applying the principle of the unity of truth (i.e., all the diverse parts of truth fit into a compatible whole) to the numerous and contradictory truth claims made by the world's great religions. While the book covers a lot of ground, the central question of the book is, Where does the truth lie among the plurality of the world's organized and institutionalized religions?

In addressing pluralism, Adler argues first that pluralism is desirable and tolerable in all areas of life that are merely matters of taste and personal preference (e.g., dress, social manners, artistic styles, public policy, etc.). When it comes to matters of factual truth, however, Adler argues that pluralism in perpetuity becomes intolerable. In matters of truth the ultimate goal to be sought is agreement, not diversity of opinion. He reasons that the question of truth in religion is obviously a matter of truth, not a matter of taste or personal preference.

Adler argues persuasively that since the truth claims of the various religions contradict each other, logically they cannot all be equally true. As contraries they might all be false, but they could not all be equally true. Particular religions might share certain truths in common (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all monotheistic); nevertheless, because of the real differences that exist, only one religion would be completely true or at least truer than the rest.

For Adler, the religions of the East do not conform to the principle of the unity or truth. His point is that Eastern religious thinking is in direct contradiction with other recognized truths such as science, mathematics, and logical inference. Adler believes that truth in religion will be compatible with the truths found in other fields. He therefore reasons that religious truth must be found in the great monotheistic religions of the West (or Near East). While he does not specifically discuss the differences between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, he does give brief criteria which could be used in ascertaining which of these religions is truer than the other two. One criterion that is especially important is that religious truth correspond to the state of affairs in the world.

The question of religious pluralism may be the Christian church's greatest apologetic challenge yet. *Truth In Religion* is the most sophisticated and thoughtful book on this subject that this reviewer has come across. I recommend it to all who are thinking through the problems of religious pluralism. — *Kenneth R. Samples*

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299