

FORUM: IS JESUS CHRIST THE UNIQUE MEDIATOR OF SALVATION?

This session occurred on Friday evening, June 12. The four presenters, in order, were Joseph A. DiNoia (Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C.), Paul F. Knitter (Xavier University, Cincinnati), Mary N. MacDonald (LeMoyne College), and Ignatius Madumere (Duquesne University).

The presenters had a daunting task before them. Time factors limited them to fifteen minutes each; none of the four had the task or opportunity to establish the "state of the question"; none had the opportunity, in so brief a time, even to set forth the range of issues in the way she or he saw them in coming to the question; the four had different perspectives on the issues, and so were provocatively different, rather than contributors to a neatly growing consensus.

In the course of their spirited and perceptive presentations, each presenter questioned the question, and did so from a perspective appropriate to her or his work. Joseph DiNoia, who has done extensive work in the philosophy of religion, analyzed the very use of the term "salvation," and argued that the term is deeply imbued with significance given it in the Christian theological tradition, including a deeply trinitarian aspect. It is not easily or appropriately put forward as a central issue for Buddhists or Hindus, for example, who have their own technical terminology; there is no point, he argued, in claiming that other religions have saviors just like Christ, or even that they arrange their religious worlds in a manner in which such a claim would make sense.

Paul Knitter, drawing on his work in the theology of religions and in interreligious dialogue, stressed what one might call the "ethics" of possible answers, and the importance today of talking about Christ and the work of Christ in a way that recognizes and respects both the dynamics of other faiths, and the common needs people of all religions share; answers do not occur in isolation or abstraction.

Mary MacDonald, who has a strong background in the history of religions and has worked extensively in Papua-New Guinea, called attention to the ways in which the title question would—and would not—be pertinent or even intelligible in the context of the indigenous people's view of life and religion; she speculated on possible translations of the question in light of their differing evaluations of the world and their differing vehicles of religious meaning, such as the interpretation of dreams.

Ignatius Madumere, who is from Nigeria, spoke from the context of his understanding of religion in Africa, and from his experience of Christian-Muslim relations—both formal, and (more importantly) on a day-to-day level in ordinary life. He stressed that efforts to rephrase Christian views to make them acceptable

in dialogue situations are often abstract, and dangerously out of touch with the concrete situations in which religious values—such as faith in Christ—are lived and died for.

Though venturing tentative answers to the question, none of the presenters was willing to put forward a simple and undifferentiated "yes" or "no." The brief but vigorous question period served mainly to introduce still other views on the proper context in which the question should be addressed, and the formal part of the evening ended with an awareness that the question as to the unique role of Jesus Christ as savior is of course a vital one in today's situation of pluralism, yet one which cannot be asked or answered except in the context of a much broader reconsideration of the categories and presuppositions of almost every area of theology, and in the various cultural settings in which that theology is being composed.

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