

DOMINUS IESUS: A PANEL DISCUSSION

- Topic: *Dominus Iesus*: A Panel Discussion
Moderator: John T. Pawlikowski, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago
Panelists: Paul Griffiths, University of Chicago
Francis X. Clooney, S.J., Boston College
Robert Cathey, McCormick Theological Seminary
Mary C. Boys, S.N.J.M., Union Theological Seminary

MODERATOR'S REMARKS

Peter Phan has asked me as chair to present some background to the controversy over *Dominus Iesus*. This I will now do, adding a bit of commentary of my own before we move to our panelists.

A few days after *Dominus Iesus* appeared I was in Geneva for a meeting with the leadership of the World Council of Churches. I can tell you that the WCC General Secretary Dr. Konrad Raiser was extremely upset over the document. He indicated that he had been in several phone conversations about the document with Cardinal Edward Cassidy who apologized to him over the tone of the document. From what Dr. Raiser reported and from what became evident in other situations, Cardinals Cassidy and Kasper decided right after the issuance of *Dominus Iesus* to mount an effort to limit the damage it might cause to Inter-Christian and Christian-Jewish relations. Addressing an interreligious gathering in Lisbon Cardinal Cassidy questioned whether *Dominus Iesus* was really a document supported by the Pope. Soon after Cassidy's statement the Pope did embrace *Dominus Iesus* as his own, but then John Paul II went on to praise interreligious dialogue and asserting that Catholics can gain important religious insights from the texts of other religions. Cardinal Kasper, in several addresses, questioned the thrust of the document and claimed it was a minor document in terms of the inter-Christian and Jewish-Catholic relationship and that he had strongly recommended to Cardinal Ratzinger that it not be issued. In an address in early May, at the Vatican-Jewish International Dialogue, Kasper insisted that there is no mission to the Jews in the strict sense, though he indicated that certain theological issues still need resolution in light of the claims of *Dominus Iesus*. It is clear that both Cardinals Cassidy and Kasper have done everything possible to marginalize the impact of *Dominus Iesus* on ecumenical and interreligious affairs. For them it is not the controlling document in terms of the framework for either inter-Christian or Jewish-Catholic relations.

As for me, while I acknowledge that *Dominus Iesus* raises some important questions that we cannot ignore, it falls short in several areas. First of all, in my

judgment it interprets the significance of non-Catholic Christian churches in a way that does not do full justice to the Vatican II perspective. This point was made some years ago by the late Cardinal Willebrands in response to a speech by Cardinal Ratzinger which moved in the same directions as *Dominus Iesus*. Willebrands insisted, as do I, that Vatican II's vision saw the other Christian churches as integral to the full definition of the church in a constructive way that is rather lost in the formulation presented in *Dominus Iesus*.

Secondly, the failure of the document to reference the other important ecumenical and Catholic-Jewish documents is inexcusable. The tone of the document is also very problematical for me. Dialogue is very much a personal encounter of believers. I could not speak some of the language of *Dominus Iesus* to my dialogue partners. Nor could the Catholic monks in the intermonastic dialogue who have lived and prayed together for months at a time speak those words. *Dominus Iesus* remains totally oblivious to the personal side of the dialogue. While dialogue cannot be based totally on personal experience, it cannot remain exclusively on the "objective" level as *Dominus Iesus* does.

Given the use of *Dominus Iesus* in the decision regarding Fr. Jacques Dupuis, S.J., and in the critical letter addressed to the Catholic Bishops of Germany, it remains an open question how significant *Dominus Iesus* will remain in the future in defining the parameters of inter-Christian and interreligious dialogue. Clearly it was a public document, contrary to what some have argued, since the Vatican staged an elaborate press conference for its release.

Now to our panelists.

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