

PREFACE

The purpose of the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum in Faith and Culture is to provide a venue for fair-minded dialogue to take place on subjects of importance in religion or culture. The intention is to have a respected Evangelical scholar dialogue with a respected non-Evangelical or non-Christian scholar. The forum is intended to be a dialogue rather than a debate. As such, it is a bit more freewheeling than a traditional debate, and it is not scored. The goal is a respectful exchange of ideas, without compromise. So often in our contemporary culture, the sorts of issues that the forum addresses stoke the emotions, and consequently the rhetoric is of such a nature as to ensure that communication does *not* take place. There may be a place and time for such preaching to the choir, but minds are rarely changed as a result of such activity—nor are better arguments forthcoming. The result often is that what passes for argument is really nothing more than a prolonged example of the straw-man fallacy.

The subject of the 2009 Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum in Faith and Culture was “Pluralism: Can Only One Religion Be True?” In our post-9/11 culture, this is a hugely important question for all persons, whether they are religious or not. The dialogue partners were Paul F. Knitter of Union Theological Seminary in New York City and Harold A. Netland of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

The dialogue took place March 27–28, 2009, in the Leavell Chapel on the campus of the host institution, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. On a stormy March evening, the chapel was filled with an enthusiastic and appreciative crowd of approximately seven hundred people who had come to hear the exchange. The discussion between Knitter and Netland was spirited but extremely civil and frequently punctuated with good-natured humor. Knitter and Netland are passionately committed to their positions but also good friends with deep respect for the other’s scholarship. Such was obvious. One

of the consistent fruits of the forum has been the realization that disagreement does not have to be shrill or heated, and that one does not have to check one's convictions at the door in order for respectful dialogue to take place.

Along with my introductory chapter, this book includes a transcript of the March 27–28, 2009, dialogue between Knitter and Netland (including audience Q&A), as well as the papers presented the following day by S. Mark Heim, R. Douglas Geivett, and Terrence W. Tilley. In addition to the papers that were presented at the Greer–Heard Forum, other essays are included. Keith Yandell was scheduled to speak, but illness at the last moment kept him from being able to attend. Nevertheless, his paper was read at the conference and is part of this book. In addition, there are essays by Millard J. Erickson, Paul Copan, and Paul Rhodes Eddy, who were present and read these papers for the EPS event. Nancy Fuchs Kreimer and the late John Hick also were willing to contribute chapters for the book.

While one could easily note issues that are still not addressed in this volume or think of significant scholars who are not included, we believe these chapters make for a rich treatment of the issue. No doubt readers will have to judge for themselves whether this is, in fact, the case.

I am grateful that Fortress Press has seen fit to allow us to present the fruit of the 2009 Greer–Heard Forum. I trust that you will read it with an open mind and carefully consider what each author has to say. If you will, I have no doubt that you will be the richer for having done so.

Robert Stewart

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New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary