

THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Topic:	The Theology of Religions Discipline in Light of the Latino/a Experience
Convener:	Francis X. Clooney, Boston College
Presider:	James Fredericks, Loyola Marymount University
Presenter:	Orlando Espin, University of San Diego
Respondents:	Francis X. Clooney, Boston College Nancy Pineda-Madrid, St. Mary's College of California

In the U.S. where half of all Catholics are Latino/a, theologies of religion have not been undertaken by Latino/a theologians or by Latino/a Catholics, in large part because theologies of religions have usually seemed so foreign. It is striking that U.S. Latino/a theology has not reflected (in any significant and sustained manner) on the other faith traditions that flourish within the Latino/a cultural world. In contributing to the needed response, Espin presented a broad sketch of what might become a Latino/a theology of religions in dialogue with the main other religion in the Latino/a cultural backyard, Lukumí, a religion of African origins known as Candomblé in Brazil, and unfortunately still often called Santería, by an early 20th century misnomer.

Lukumí is a flourishing tradition with richly developed categories of theological interest, such as in *Olòdùmaré* (the supreme God), *ashé* (vitality, "grace"), and *orishás* (spirits). Regarding the possibilities Lukumí places before the theologian, Espin made several suggestions. Lukumí offers the Latino/a Catholic theologian a challenging dialogue partner—one that can uncomfortably call into question some naïvely held beliefs about both Latino/a identities and about non-Christian religions. Thus, U.S. Latino/a Lukumís are Latinos/as, but they are neither Catholic nor Protestant. Because they are authentically Latinos/as, Latino/a Lukumís participate in the complex processes of Latino/a identity construction, in terms of identities that are neither white, nor mestizo/a, nor Christian. There is already a long-standing interreligious dialogue that we have often subsumed or hidden under the categories of popular Catholicism, *mestizaje*. Lukumís remind us that our Latino/a "identity scholarship" needs to deal with *latinidad* in a manner that honestly acknowledges the diversity and reality of non-Christian Latinos/as, and remembers the ugly side of racism, slavery, Christian support of genocide, etc. By dialogue with Lukumí Latinos/as, we are challenged to deal with our own idols and sins, and not pretend that sinfulness is the exclusive monopoly of Spaniards and/or European Americans.

Dialogue with Lukumí should contribute to a Latino/a Catholic theology of religions that affirms, with Vatican II, that there indeed is "the spark of truth and wisdom" in Lukumí and other non-Christian Latino/a religions, a spark shining definitively in Jesus Christ. Lukumí can help Catholic theologians of religions reflect anew on the universal appeal and resonance of the Christian doctrines on original sin, redemption, salvation, etc.—so critical to the very core of the

Christian religion. We may also broaden the Christian theology of grace if we seriously dialogue with the Lukumí theology of *ashé*—which is not simply the equivalent of grace, although there are similarities and points of contact between the two doctrines. Espin observed in conclusion that as third generation Latino/a theologians start crafting a theology of religions *latinamente*, this will most profitably be done in sincere dialogue with Lukumí, Vodoun, Abakuá, Palo Mayombe, and the several other African religions in our midst, as well as in dialogue with the Latin American native religions that have now arrived in the U.S. and/or that are part of the heritage of so many U.S. Latinos/as.

In a first response, Pineda-Madrid (St. Mary's College) praised Espin's paper as "a wake up call to those of us producing U.S. Latino/a theology," lest "we use categories like 'popular Catholicism,' *mestizaje*, and 'cultural identity,' to subsume non-Christian religions" and thus perpetuate "a sinful, imperial agenda that we cloak behind the banner of Christianity." Rather, Latino/a theologians must take seriously the integrity of religions such as Lukumí, and on that basis construct a U.S. Latino/a theology of religions. In light of Espin's emphasis on *lo cotidiano* (knowing emergent from daily life and experience) Pineda-Madrid reflected first on Lukumí and Christian dialectics of need and ideal—for example, the Lukumí experience of the stifling of *ashé* and its free flow compared with the Christian experience of sin and salvation—and then emphasized the value of mutual learning. Finally, she voiced concerns about the marginalization of women in Lukumí, and also pondered the criteria for a true (Christian or Lukumí) theology done *latinamente*.

In a similarly appreciative response, Clooney reflected on how Lukumí challenges us to engage oral traditions (and their rituals) and to notice how they require of the observer skills and commitments different from those required for textual work. He wondered if it is really clear (as Espin implies) that there are Latino/as who are solely Christian and not at all Lukumí, or entirely Lukumí and not Christian; and can a theologian who really gains access, coming to understand Lukumí by entering its world, remain entirely "a Catholic Latino/a" who is not somehow also a "Lukumí Catholic Latino/a"? While it is true that with Lukumí, doctrinal comparisons must remain posterior to engagement in conversation, nonetheless oral traditions can still imply doctrines: for example, Lukumí as Santería might be taken as suggesting a Lukumí "theology of Christian saints;" Lukumí animal sacrifice may be a fresh resource for understanding sacrifice in a Christian context.

The paper, responses, and discussion demonstrated the value of a more diversely based theology of religions, attentive to really varied religions and also to differing Christian ways of being and theologizing. We hope that other such sessions can engage other voices in the U.S. Church—African American, Native American, Asian American, for example—in constructing a more truly catholic theology of religions that will in turn affect how we understand our relation to Judaism, Islam, and the religions of Asia too.

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, S.J.

*Boston College**Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

* * * * *

THE CATHOLIC COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

- Topic: The Challenge of Reconciliation:
Analyses of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative
- Convener: Angela Senander, Boston College
- Moderator: Juliann Heller, St. John's University
- Presenters: Catherine Patten, National Pastoral Life Center
Robert Imbelli, Boston College
Katarina Schuth, St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity

Given growing divisions in the Catholic Church in the United States, this session examined the Catholic Common Ground Initiative as a means of reconciliation from historical, pastoral, spiritual and theological perspectives.

Catherine Patten identified the origin of the initiative with Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's 1992 letter "The Parish in the Contemporary Church," which recognized the need to move beyond the liberal/conservative divide so that parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago could be common places where all come together. At the National Pastoral Life Center, this letter was the impetus for semiannual meetings, which resulted in the development of *Called to Be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril*. In response to Bernardin releasing this statement at a press conference August 12, 1996, four cardinals (Maida, Bevilacqua, Law and Hickey) issued critical press releases which were a public expression of division among Catholic leaders.

Patten identified participation by "the right" as a challenge because of a lack of perceived need to dialogue about truth and the perception that dialogue is a liberal project. She also highlighted the need for listening to the other, a challenge for those on either side of the divide. The Catholic Common Ground Initiative works to remain centrist, encourages others to sponsor dialogue, organizes an annual Cardinal Bernardin Conference (to which 25 people are invited to participate in dialogue with committee members about papers on a particular topic), sponsors an annual lecture and publishes a quarterly newsletter entitled *Initiative Report*.

Katarina Schuth described "the context of the Church today that gives rise to the great need for reconciliation and dialogue" in terms of five observations. First, as the Church experiences the influence of religious pluralism and multiculturalism through immigrants, refugees and global communication, people disagree about whether unity comes from embracing diversity or from uniformity. Second, ideological and theological difference often results in intolerance expressed in