

A RESPONSE TO PAUL LAKELAND

After reading Paul Lakeland's paper the first thing I felt was relief that I am not an ecclesiohistorian. I admit that writing about the life of the institutional Church is not something that has ever interested me, due not only in part to my own intellectual passions, but also to the suspicions about ecclesiohistorians that he highlights in his introductory comments. I also confess that I was surprised to read such an ecclesiological meditation, given the broader conference's emphasis on the saints. As someone who has studied devotion to the saints primarily through the lens of everyday lived religion, this institutional emphasis of this paper seemed odd to me.

And yet Paul proves me wrong. His emphasis on ecclesial humility is a challenge to all of us in this room because I believe that not only do we need ecclesial humility, but I would also push his point further and argue that we could also use some theological humility as well. I will return to this point later in my remarks.

It was with great pleasure that I read Lakeland's caution toward an ecclesial hubris that would deny salvation outside of the Church. I find his incorporation of the parable of the Good Samaritan to be an important entry point into a discussion of the need for a greater ecclesial humility today. The challenge he poses to us with the question "Who is our neighbor?" is one that has been asked many times by many people, and yet we must continue to ask it. Building on Congar's image of the Church as the Good Samaritan, Lakeland reminds of us the significance of the Church as consoler in active solidarity with marginalized peoples. And yet Lakeland does not allow us to equate the Church merely with the Good Samaritan smugly, as if we are, to use his words, "star of the soteriological show."

I have read this parable dozens of times growing up and later in my graduate work and teaching. However, it was not until I lived for two years in Guatemala that I truly immersed myself in the parable. You see, where I lived in San Lucas Tolimán one of your biggest worries is roadside assaults. I cannot tell you the stress and dread I would feel any time I would get into a car to leave town. I would hold my breath as we drove down the mountain to get to the main road to Guatemala City, and would only relax once we had passed all the "usual" spots for roadside assaults. You had to be strategic in preparing for these drives, hiding most of your money but leaving just enough out to appease the robbers. And then again I would go through the same ritual of anxiety when we returned.

It is one thing to read the parable of the Good Samaritan in my office in Miami and quite another in San Lucas, where the parable comes alive because it narrates a reality that is part of one's daily life. Not only did the possibility of roadside robbery become a reality, but more importantly, and perhaps sadly, when

I now read the parable in its concreteness I too would have left the man on the roadside. Until then I always arrogantly identified with the Samaritan. I saw myself as the hero in the story. It was perhaps one of the most difficult moments in my life to come to terms with the fact that I was not the Samaritan in the story. However, I now know too well the concrete dangers surrounding this parable. Stories of famine, abundant water, and plagues take on new meaning in societies where access to water and food are limited and where illnesses infest communities with the fervor of biblical plagues.

Lakeland persuasively argues that common humanity must be the foundation of authentic solidarity. He poses a strong challenge to Catholic constructions of the neighbor. Therefore, while the Catholic Church has a concrete history of reaching out to the suffering regardless of their religious background, I am not sure such an inclusive vision of our common humanity is present in many ecclesial documents and teachings. In addition, as I arrogantly imagined myself as the Good Samaritan in the past, so the Church has seen itself as the savior in the story, not the wounded victim.

Lakeland's paper also reminded me of another famous Samaritan in the gospels, the Samaritan woman at the well. From this encounter, I gather some ecclesial lessons that I hope would resonate with and complement the ecclesial humility highlighted by Lakeland. This encounter calls for the Church to stop shaping its life according to those who are deemed acceptable by the dominant society and instead listen to the unlikely evangelizers in our midst. It teaches us that we must expect God in the unexpected; that we must listen to those who are socially unacceptable and allow ourselves to be evangelized by them. After all, as Lakeland highlights, Jesus himself was corrected by a Canaanite woman. A second ecclesial theme I would like to lift from the story is its implications for the missionary enterprise, because the story of the Samaritan woman teaches the Church that evangelization must always be in the voice of the evangelized. A final theme that emerges from a reading of the Samaritan woman is the call for the Church to cross boundaries and enter into those spaces where the undesirables of society live and struggle to survive. We must move out of our comfort zone. We need to do this ecclesially and intellectually.

The theological humility I mentioned earlier is one that recognizes that we must become more intentionally inter-disciplinary in our work. If the emerging reign of God, as Lakeland highlights, is as wide as the world, then surely theology is not the only academic discourse that has intellectual access to the study of it. Similarly, in his discussion surrounding the ecclesial self-referential hermeneutic, I could not help but be reminded of our academic self-referential hermeneutic that limits not only our understanding of theology, but also of Catholicism as well.

Lakeland challenges the Church to open itself to the Spirit of God working in the world. He highlights the story of the Good Samaritan that pushes us to break boundaries. I am a scholar that early in my career very centrally self-identified as a Catholic theologian. I no longer can claim that. This is not due to any sort of rejection of Catholicism or theology. As my interests in studying Afro-Caribbean

populations and Caribbean Hispanics in the United States grew, I found that their religious faith lives pushed me to those boundaries beyond institutional Catholicism. Their faith is not one that can be rigidly contained by institutional Catholicism as a whole for it is contoured by the strong presence of African Diaspora religions. The same can be said of the work I have done with Mayan Catholics in Guatemala, who often simultaneously maintain their Mayan religious worldview and their Roman Catholic beliefs. This past March, I took a group of students to Guatemala. As part of our time together, I had one of my friends and informants, a Mayan priest, take them to a sacred Mayan shrine up in the volcano that looms over the town. He spoke of candles, sacrifices, the earth, the land, the rain. And he spoke of Jesus. My students were utterly shocked by his ability to move from traditional Mayan religious beliefs to Jesus' redemptive suffering in one sentence. He was utterly confused by their questioning of what they described as his two parallel or conflicting belief systems. For him they are one and the same.

Therefore, while Lakeland refers to the dangers of an ecclesial us and them, something I take very much to heart, I am also concerned about the theological us and them. Is there a line that is drawn regarding who is and who is not a theologian? As a Ph.D. student and then in my first few years teaching I spent weeks and months reading "classic" Christian theologians that I needed to master to ensure my pedigree as a well-trained Roman Catholic theologian. I then spent years trying to fit the everyday faith and religious practices of Latino/as into their understanding of God, the Church, and the human. I did this in spite of the fact that I was very aware that when these authors were writing their multi-volume works, they had no awareness of or interest in Latino/a Catholicism in all its complexity. I was aware, as all of us are, that the culture and context of the author shapes and limits his or her work in profound ways. When I think back at this, I am reminded of a toy that both my sons played with when they were younger, placing wooden shapes into a box that would only pass if you enter each through its identical shape. I was trying to put a square through a round opening.

I am not calling for the end of theological canons or the rejection of many foundational writers in the field as irrelevant today. However, I do think we need to become less exclusive in our intellectual genealogies. We also have to come to terms with the fact that to speak of Catholicism in the Americas today is to speak of a majority population whose religious life, culture, and race is radically different from the majority of the Catholic theologians that we read and the people sitting in this room. I am no different. Being a Latina does not give me the theological birthright to speak ontologically for Latino/a Catholicism as a whole, although I admit I used to. I now realize that it is through engaging concrete communities that I can speak authentically for them.

Lakeland reminds us that a critical ecclesiology must take into account the limitations of the Church. I agree wholeheartedly with him, and I would add that a critical theology must take into serious consideration the limitations of theology. By the end of his paper, Lakeland had me convinced of the significance of this

discussion in light of the saints. I find it fitting that a discussion about ecclesial boundaries would occur within a conference on the saints. After all, do not the saints challenge us with their spirituality, their concrete connectedness to the sacred, and their often-dramatic life narratives? Does not the existence of popular saints that are not recognized by the official Church yet have thousands of devoted followers that identify as Catholic challenge our understanding of Church and sainthood? I thank Paul for raising the challenges he has to all of us today in his presentation, and I hope that he provokes a much-needed discussion among us that will continue well beyond this weekend, a discussion that must occur with a healthy dose of ecclesial, and I would add theological humility.

MICHELLE A. GONZALEZ MALDONADO

University of Miami

Miami, Florida