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God in Our Image: Race Reflected in the Black Christ of Daule

By Jessica Leu

Abstract: This paper examines El Cristo Negro de Daule in the context of theological aesthetics. It explains El Cristo Negro as a religious symbol that evokes *asombro*, or wonder, that then dismantles the illusion of control and omnipotence in us as described by Cecilia González-Andrieu's *Bridge to Wonder: Art as the Gospel of Beauty*. As a religious symbol that reconstructs perceptions of the world and one another, this is a paper influenced heavily by liberation theology. The paper also analyzes the impact of a White Christ on Black peoples of the U.S, and it operates within the framework of Black Christology and Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Keywords: El Cristo Negro de Daule, Black Christ, Ecuador, Theological Aesthetics, Asombro, Wonder, Black Theology, Critical Race Theory

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*When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.*
--Isaiah 43:2 (NIV)

I. Introduction

As a biracial child born in the United States, my identity was determined heavily by the experiences of my family. *Mi familia*, all immigrants from Ecuador, arrived to the U.S and immediately began to assimilate into the dominant White culture they found here. In Ecuador, America meant success and prosperity. For my family America was synonymous with Whiteness. I grew up speaking Spanish (against the will of my father) and yet my own experience was different than that of my family, specifically because I was White passing. At the same time, my father's own family alienated me as a result of my biracial heritage, making me cling even more to my identity as an Ecuadorian.

My abuelito, an Afro-Ecuadorian man famous in Ecuador for his sports journalism, suffered greatly as a result of the systemic racism and oppression that targeted his features in South America. Colorism is prevalent in Ecuador, and my abuelito understood it first hand while he experienced challenges associated with being dark-skinned throughout his career. How ironic I found it then that my abuelita was ten years old the first time she had heard the story of El Señor de los Milagros, el Cristo Negro de Daule. My abuelita was one of fourteen children, born in Santa Lucía to poor farmers who grew mangos, rice, tobacco and sugar cane beside the river. "Aprendí a nadar en el río Daule," she would tell me proudly, because the Daule river is sacred to the Black Christ, evident especially in the procession performed in September by the locals who carry the statue of the Black Christ in boats down the river.

II. Defining Questions and Thesis

Within the relationship of my grandparents, I saw a dichotomy begin to arise. My abuelito still, to this day, holds the same sentiments about Black bodies (both in Ecuador and in

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the U.S) as he did the day he sent his children here. He was taught, through social structures that exist as a result of Ecuador being colonized, that ‘Whiteness’ was superior. In the homes of my family, Jesus and Mary remained depicted with blonde hair and blue eyes. These images continued to perpetuate an internal prejudice towards *los morenos*, specifically because Whiteness was reflected in divinity. And yet, my own abuelita had been exposed at a young age to an alternative view of Blackness, a Black Christ. How would my grandfather have fared as a child seeing an image of divinity that looked like him, rather than an impossible standard that associated Whiteness with God? Would he still feel the same way he does today?

This is the context in which I found myself writing this paper, wishing to understand more fully the story of El Cristo Negro and also, my own current experience as a biracial Latina in the United States. I ask myself: How does the image of a White Jesus harm communities of color? How has a White Christ been used to oppress and justify colonization and slavery? How can depicting Christ as a specific race serve as a revelatory experience not only for the immediate community but Christians as a whole? In this paper, I will argue that the Black Christ of Daule has become a medium of prophetic revelation for the people of the Guayas region of Ecuador, while simultaneously calling us in the Americas to respond with action in the face of systemic injustice.

III. Methodologies

In this paper, I will be exploring El Cristo Negro de Daule in the context of theological aesthetics. I will specifically be explaining El Cristo Negro as a religious symbol that evokes *asombro*, or wonder, that then dismantles the illusion of control and omnipotence in us as described by Cecilia González-Andrieu’s *Bridge to Wonder: Art as the Gospel of Beauty*. As a religious symbol forcing us to reconstruct our perceptions of the world and one another, this is a paper influenced heavily by liberation theology. Because I am also analyzing the impact of a White Christ on Black peoples of the U.S, I am also operating within the framework of Black Christology and Critical Race Theory (CRT).

IV. The Black Christ of Daule

El Centro Pastoral Afroecuatoriano de Guayaquil describes the context for the Black Christ in their guide for African Pastoral Ministry by saying,

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Sabemos que nuestros antepasados fueron de explotación y de desprecio. ‘*Los negros no tienen alma*’, se decía, ‘*y sus religiones son del diablo.*’ En el sistema esclavista el negro se convertía en ‘mercancía humana’, que podía ser vendida y comprada en cualquier momento, y sometida a todo tipo de sufrimiento y de maltrato. En este contexto Jesús se hizo presente de manera concreta para ponerse al lado de su pueblo oprimido.¹

It is difficult to find written work revolving around this image of Christ. What little I do have is in Spanish, and the rest is from the stories of my abuelita. The origins of the Black Christ are found in various legends. While some say that the originally White statue came from a slave ship sometime after the 16th century, others (including my abuelita) claim that the statue came directly from the river Daule. In the 17th century, a Black slave entered the church of Daule to pray for his wife, who was gravely sick. It was illegal for a slave to do so at this time. Although his hands were covered in dirt from his work, he touched the statue of the White Christ and left a mark. The legend continues,

El sacristán se dio cuenta y llamó al doctrinero dominico que catequizaba en aquella zona: los dos, escandalizados, decidieron azotar públicamente en la plaza al esclavo, prohibiéndole volver a entrar y a tocar al Cristo. Todos los blancos y mestizos aprobaron los latigazos con que se castigó al pobre esclavo. Al día siguiente, cuando el sacristán abrió la Iglesia, el Cristo había cambiado de color: se había vuelto negro, tal como lo vemos ahora.²

This is the main legend in which the origin of the Black Christ is stated. We see here a clearly political message in which, in the face of oppression by a dominantly White society, Christ takes a stand in solidarity with the oppressed— a Black slave. When the sacristans saw the Christ, they assumed it had been painted Black and attempted to clean it. However, “mientras más lo limpiaban más negro se hacía”³, and even the Christ’s feet are noted to be calloused and swollen, exactly like the feet of many slaves.⁴ This image is particularly important to the poor of the region, especially those of African descent. The White sacristans “no querían que los esclavos tocasen al Cristo, pero los esclavos reconocían en aquel Jesús azotado, maltratado,

¹ *El Cristo Negro de Daule: Patrono de la Pastoral Afro* (Guayaquil: Misioner@s Afroecuatorian@s de Guayaquil), <https://centroafrobogota.com/attachments/article/7/El%20Cristo%20de%20Daule.pdf>, 3.

² Ibid., 4.

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Ibid.

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clavado a la cruz y sangrando con dolor una persona muy cercana y muy parecida a ellos.”⁵ The suffering of Christ is an image that continues to speak and appeal to the poor, who find themselves mistreated by the dominant oppressors of the societies in which they live. In the Black Christ, they find solidarity and strength, and someone who sympathizes with their plights. Some 60—70 years after this miraculous change of color, another miracle occurs with the now worn statue. Between 1684 and 1694, a Spanish land owner named Isidro de Veinza y Mora had gone almost completely blind, y se hizo una promesa:

se comprometía a restaurar los restos del Cristo Negro, y al mismo tiempo pedía a Jesús que lo curara. El Señor lo escuchó: don Isidro recuperó la vista y después de poco tiempo presentó al pueblo la nueva Imagen restaurada del Cristo Negro... A partir de este momento el Cristo Negro obró muchos milagros, y por eso el pueblo lo llamó ‘Señor de los Milagros’.⁶

Despite Isidro’s vision returning, his miraculous healing is not the most incredible part of this second miracle. Rather, Isidro’s *response and action* to the miracle are. After he is cured of his sight, he decides to free all of his slaves, an entire century before Ecuador would make slavery illegal. He does so because, “mirando al Cristo Negro - se dio cuenta que seguir esclavizando a los negros quería decir seguir encadenando al mismo Jesús, y eso no podía hacerlo.”⁷ Despite the social framework of his time, as a result of this Black Christ, Isidro chooses to free those in bondage because he views them as the same as Christ. The text then reads:

Jesús lo había liberado de la ceguera, y la ceguera más grande es la esclavitud, el no darse cuenta de que somos todos hermanos. El verdadero milagro que quiere obrar el Cristo Negro de Daule, entonces, - hoy como ayer - es abrir nuestros ojos, hacernos ver la realidad con la mirada de Dios, empujarnos a ir en contra de la mentalidad esclavista y racista, y hacernos agentes de justicia y libertad para todos.⁸

⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 6.

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The true miracle of the Black Christ was not just within the miraculous skin change or the healing of Isidro. Rather, it is the miracle as a trigger for social change that is the most impactful. El Cristo Negro de Daule opens our eyes to the truth. He asks us to look at the world not with our own perceptions but through the eyes of God, and then demands we fight as agents for justice and freedom in the face of oppression. While I acknowledge that the experience of the Black peoples of Ecuador is *not* the same as the Black peoples in the U.S, this miraculous story contains a message that transcends borders. This is a powerful revelation not only for those in the Guayas region of Ecuador, the majority of whom are poor farmworkers of color, but for Christians as a whole.

V. Theological Aesthetics — The Black Christ of Daule / The White Christ of D.C

In *Bridge to Wonder: Art as the Gospel of Beauty*, Cecilia González-Andrieu explains that an image, or in this case a statue, is not just an image. Rather, quoting Yeats, a symbol “is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame.”⁹ There is a deeper message that is expressed through a symbol, through this essence. A symbol, as Cardinal Dulles explains, is “an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define.”¹⁰ The image of a Black Christ is one that can evoke a number of reactions from those perceiving it.¹¹ Surprise, happiness, horror, and so on. The image of a White Christ is so prevalent in Catholic art that many instinctively describe Jesus as ‘a White man with a beard holding a lamb’. To see a Black Christ crucified can be alarming, especially for those who may have never before been exposed to iconography of this kind.

Christian imagery has played an enormous hand in our understanding of both culture and history, and in the U.S our immediate perception is to view Christ as a White, cisgender male.¹² One such depiction pointed out to me by Dr. González-Andrieu is the mosaic in the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C:

⁹ Cecilia González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder: Art as the Gospel of Beauty* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

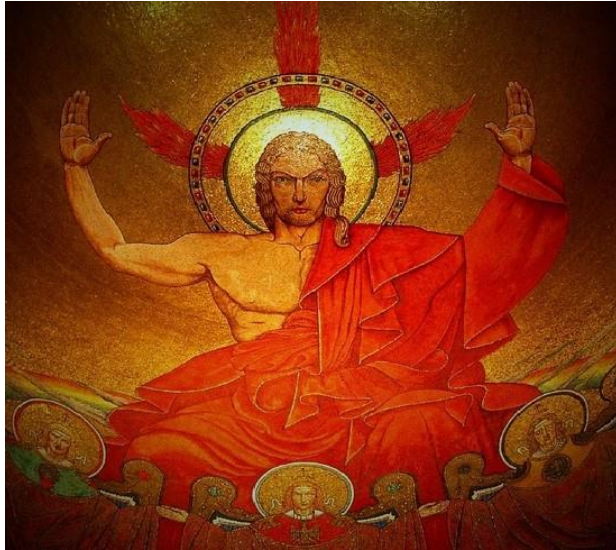
¹¹ Jose Olmos, “Cientos De Fieles, La Mayoría Campesinos, Participaron De Procesión Fluvial De Daule,” *El Universo*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.eluniverso.com/guayaquil/2018/09/08/nota/6944372/cientos-fieles-mayoria-campesinos-participaron-procesion-fluvial>. See Figure 1.0.

¹² González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*, 51.

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In this image, Christ is depicted as a muscular White man with blonde hair and blue eyes in a Roman toga. He has his arms outstretched, the flaming fire of the Holy Spirit behind him.¹³ This image carries with it specific implications for the parishioners sitting underneath him, forced to gaze up. They see here a Christ that is White, seated in power, muscular and strong, undeniably intimidating, and waiting to pass judgement on them all. If this depiction of Christ is the expression of an invisible essence, it is that of White power and White authority gazing down upon us all. It is not difficult to imagine why a person of color would perceive this image differently from their White counterpart in the pews.

¹³ Charles Pope, “Awesome or Awful? A Reflection on the Mosaic of Christ in Majesty at the Basilica in Washington,” *Community in Mission*, November 26, 2018. <http://blog.adw.org/2018/11/awesome-or-awful-a-reflection-on-the-mosaic-of-christ-in-majesty-at-the-basilica-in-washington-2/>.



Similarly, El Cristo Negro also contains within it an invisible essence. El Cristo Negro is a symbol that asks us to dismantle our previously conceived images of Christ. The context of his color ignites the flame within us to act against injustice. It is also a devotion that speaks eloquently of our liberation from the shackles of racism. In this narrative there is a reminder that Christ was a Jewish man executed at the hands of the Roman government, and that the Black experience of persecution in the United States is this same plight. El Señor reminded the people of Daule what it means to be *imago dei*, to be made in the image and likeness of God. In the face of racism and injustice, the miracle of this narrative birthed social change. As González-Andrieu explains, theological aesthetics proposes that “even while on this side of the veil of eternity, we have access to revelatory experiences of truth and goodness and we can bring near the insights others have about truth and goodness.”¹⁴ Within the legend of El Cristo Negro, a revelatory experience occurs intent on showing us a deeper truth: that we are equal in humanity, and that we

¹⁴ González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*, 23.



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should never be persecuted because of the color of our skins. Regardless of whether or not the statue of Christ was at one point painted or did in fact miraculously turn Black is besides the point. The legend has ingrained itself into the people of Daule and those who rely on the Daule river, like my abuelita, from the 17th century to the present. Some three hundred years have passed, and yet, we still cling to this divinity and the message he translates to us by sight alone. This image of Christ is the *compañero* of suffering, he who shares in our pain and simultaneously offers us the promise of love and liberation through him. There is no doubt that his image accompanies the poor of color in Daule.

“The power of revelation is evident when art has the capacity to participate in communicating the divine in-breaking into human history and its concomitant invitation to respond.”¹⁵ Not unlike the apparition of La Virgen de Guadalupe, who appeared as a mestiza woman, the divine enters into human history in a period of racial tension in Ecuador and interacts with us. We are asked to reflect on Christ the liberator as a Black man — not above the slaves, but with them, as them. In turn, like Isidro, we are commanded to act upon this revelation.

There is a message here for the wider Christian community that has been born in the small rural region of Guayas. Even in a merely illustrative work, an image “can be the site of resistance and a cry against a dehumanizing status quo”¹⁶. Yet, this image is far from merely illustrative. The Black Christ is visible, accessible to the oppressed, and the representation of this cry of resistance. His legend and his image go hand in hand, wrestling with the injustices of racism and subjugation in our society. In reply to the cruel mistreatment of another human being, he resolves the source of our violence in a single image: To harm them is to harm me. But, he also takes on a prophetic role for the rest of the world. González-Andrieu describes the prophetic “as a call to repentance, but when we look at the terms of seeing and imagining joined in love we can see it more dynamically as a call for life-affirming transformation. Once we see, we must care.”¹⁷

These legends and the Christ’s image are then indeed prophetic for us. We are forced to care about a suffering Savior who is, without question, Black. As she explains, we become *asombrados*: “we are no longer able to cling to the illusion of control and omnipotence”, and we are filled with a profound awe that calls us to “wake up and see.”¹⁸ A Black Christ fills us with

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Ibid., 50.

¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸ Ibid., 40.

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asombro because he has challenged the instinct to immediately view Christ as a White man and a White savior. Instead, the image tells us a revelatory truth: we are equal in the eyes of God.

This Christ is an example of the popular expression of faith González-Andrieu speaks of in her book,¹⁹ especially because his story is less well known compared to more popular Black Christs, such as El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas.²⁰ However, the story and the image of Black Christ of Daule is one of the few Black Christs I have encountered with a very specific racial message. Rather than turning Black by years of smoke exposure from candlelight, this change is intentional. By bringing awareness to this specific story born in rural Guayas, those also struggling with the overwhelming Whiteness of Christ's depictions can receive solace in an alternative iconography and narrative. In other words, as González-Andrieu comments in her book, *estoy intentando acercar a la gente al Cristo Negro de Daule*. To *acercar* is "to bring something near, or to move ourselves to a point of nearness", and so "the acercamiento, named for this movement from far to near, is the noun we use to designate this kind of critical work."²¹ By bringing others near El Cristo Negro in the context of U.S injustice and racism, I am inviting my audience to reconsider the images that may have instinctively come to mind when thinking of Christ as portrayed by White authority, and subsequently shedding light on an alternative perspective.

V. Racism and Blackness in the US

Now that we have understood El Cristo Negro as a revelatory symbol regarding race, this then leads me to examine the constructs that El Cristo Negro has come to dismantle in the first place. While my abuelito was ultimately affected by racism and prejudice in South America, as a biracial Latina in the U.S I see the subsequent effect of racism against Black Americans. The image of Jesus, as we saw in the main altar mosaic in the capital of the country, is that of a White man in power. Rubén Rosario Rodríguez says in *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective* that "every theology must unravel the relationship of Christ to culture."²² In this context El Cristo Negro is relevant to the people of Ecuador, but I argue that he transcends borders to share relevance with the experience of Black Christians in the U.S.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰ See the Black Christ of Esquipulas.

²¹ González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*, 91.

²² Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 7.

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Is our current understanding of systematic theology in the U.S truly in service of “the divine word or is [it] governed by lesser cultural, historical, and political idols?”²³ We have indeed seen that U.S society has idols: the White male image of superiority over women, people of color, LGBTQ people, and the disabled. This is echoed also by Albert Cleage Jr and Malcolm X, who “essentially argue that the symbol of a White Christ is an idol and an imperial weapon used to perpetuate and legitimize White power and White authority wherever and whenever they encountered African-descended people and sought to control them.”²⁴ The tool of the White Christ has been used to oppress people of color: mentally, physically, and spiritually. The association of a White man with the *imago dei* would ultimately “render non-European populations as without this image and therefore less than human (which allowed European Christian nations to legitimize colonialism and slavery).”²⁵ There is great racial diversity in Latin American communities as a result of colonization. *Blanco, indio, moreno, negro, mestizo* — The Spanish had many words to categorize the population based solely on our phenotypical appearance. Rodriguez notes these words in his own Puerto Rican background, saying “the concept of race does not refer to any singular identifying trait” but includes anything from national origin to skin color.²⁶ I have heard these same words just as often to categorize Ecuadorians.

The connotations of White with positive/good and Black negative/bad is ingrained into the West, originating from the early Christian Greco-Roman experience. Though early Christian literature did not connect this color prejudice with race,²⁷ the associations continued to exist and transcend religion into society. Rodriguez says, “Without a doubt Christian theological construction has been tainted by racism, and sadly Christian practice has often contributed to the legitimization of racially stratified societies.”²⁸ And in truth, we can see this clearly in our own prison systems that house a disproportionate number of people of color, as well as the violence people of color are continually subjected to at the hands of police. For the majority of Western history people of color, more specifically Black people,

²³ Ibid., 9.

²⁴ Jawanza Eric Clarke, *Albert Cleage Jr. and the Black Madonna and Child* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3.

²⁵ Sían Melvill Hawthorne, *Gender: God* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2017), 4.

²⁶ Rodriguez, *Racism and God Talk*, 25

²⁷ Ibid., 29.

²⁸ Ibid., 42.

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have been treated as less than human, and their cultural contributions to human history have been ignored, marginalized, or silenced. For much of that history Christianity has been woefully silent about the sin of racism if not outright complicit in perpetuating racist social structures.²⁹

Resisting these racist ideologies that have been taught can only be done by interpreting Western thought from the perspective of the oppressed. Our voices have long been ignored, thus birthing the need for Black Christology, Latina/o Theology, and so on. “According to the discourse of racialism, successful integration into mainstream U.S culture has been achieved only by sacrificing ethnic and cultural identity,”³⁰ and I find this to be especially true to my own experience. Had my family assimilated completely into White culture, not passed down our ability to speak Spanish, or this regional icon, I may not have ever known El Cristo Negro de Daule at all.

Critical Race Theory has been key to understanding our biases of race in the US, especially in its critique of color blindness. Given the history of racism in the US, the concept of color blindness is dangerous for us as a society as it tries to dismiss our inequalities in favor of a more dismissive approach to personal culpability and racism. Rodriguez explains, “The reality uncovered by critical race theory is that the United States is foundationally structured and organized to benefit the dominant White majority.”³¹ Therefore, while the Cristo Negro’s story could be used as an example of Christ being ‘beyond’ race, it is vital to understand the necessity for the racial context of his story. Race *does* matter here. Race was used as a justification to oppress and to mutilate in 17th century Ecuador, and continues to be used in the U.S to incarcerate and discriminate against people of color. But this symbol can also be our saving grace, because here race is used as a tool of revelation. The suffering Christ of Daule accompanies devotees through the medium of race in his depiction, they are comforted by a Savior who understands their suffering at the hands of a White oppressor. In that same way, learning to love one’s own image can be the ultimate form of resistance and decolonization.

Rodriguez notes that it is with intention that “God chooses what the world rejects”. Jesus is “a Jew of questionable parentage” who lived “in an insignificant region of the country (Galilee)”, and who fraternized “with social outcasts and women — in order to bring about reconciliation and salvation.”³² God continually chooses to stand with the oppressed and the

²⁹ Ibid., 51.

³⁰ Ibid., 64.

³¹ Ibid., 61.

³² Ibid.

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poor, as Virgilio Elizondo says, “not to bring them comfort in their oppression, but to enable them to confront, transcend, and transform whatever in the oppressor society diminishes and destroys the fundamental dignity of human nature.”³³ In this same way, the Black Christ asks us to transcend the oppressing and harmful ideology that dominates society in the Americas— that of White power. Not only is Christ present for us in the incarnation of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but he is also present in our history “through our acts of love.”³⁴ Taking the form of a whipped, beaten, and suffering slave is an act of love and solidarity. In this one story, we hear: “I am with you, I suffer with you, and you are not alone.”

VII. Wrestling with a White Jesus

In the early history of the United States, a White Christ was used as a tool in “slave Christianity”, an “instrument of control to convince Blacks that their racial inferiority was a divine mandate.”³⁵ Our understanding of Christ as White, although this is not grounded in any historical authenticity, has shaped our entire perception of Christianity in the West. “Because the norm in America has been to see God as White,” Lee Butler writes, “it is not only thought to be abnormal to change the color of God, but it has been considered a blasphemous desecration to imagine God as other than White.”³⁶ Thus, we see how strong of a statement the miraculous transformation of El Cristo Negro is, not only for a racially charged Ecuador— but also for Catholic understanding of Christ as a whole. For White Christians, this image will challenge many internal biases enforced by U.S society. For Black Christians, to envision Christ as a Black man is imperative to self-revelation and prophetic understanding. As Albert Cleage Jr notes,

Until Black Christians are ready to challenge this lie [a White Christ], they have not freed themselves from their spiritual bondage to the White man nor established in their minds their right to first class citizenship in Christ’s kingdom on earth. Black people cannot build dignity on their knees worshipping a White Christ. We must put down this White Jesus which the White man gave us in slavery and which has been tearing us to pieces.³⁷

³³ Ibid., 88.

³⁴ Ibid., 201.

³⁵ Clark, *Albert Cleage Jr. and the Black Madonna and Child*, 9.

³⁶ Ibid., 165.

³⁷ Ibid., 3.

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I find this to be especially true as I reflect on my abuelito's own internalized biases surrounding colorism in Ecuador. To reach the Christ of love and solidarity, we must look beyond the images we have been spoon fed from infancy and see an alternative narrative. A Christ who understands the plight of persons of color because he *is* a person of color, a Christ in which not only do we receive prophetic revelation— but also a call to act. “In the words of Cleage, when ‘we despise ourselves’ we are unable to even conceive of God as willing to use Black people for God’s purpose.”³⁸ Yet, here Christ has become a Black man not only to make a point, but also to demand justice and show love. The image of Christ as White, when he was in actuality a Palestinian man who lived some 2,000 years ago, is fundamentally harmful towards people of color.

The White Christ of the D.C basilica continues to keep us in ‘spiritual bondage’. Malcolm X argued similarly, saying that “Christianity is a religion of White supremacy, and that White images of divinity, including ‘a White Jesus, White virgin, and White angels’ are “designed to fill [Blacks] hearts with the desire to be White.”³⁹ The nature in which a White Christ has been used to oppress is an agent of this ideology. Subsequently, a White image of Jesus is detrimental for people of African descent in all of the Americas, not merely in the U.S. The White Christ has become an idol representative of more than just America as a whole, but also of White authority and oppression. It is no surprise then that the struggles of racism in North and South America are shared, despite differences in history and geographic location. Black people of the Americas continue to suffer as a result of White power, be it within American assimilation at the expense of relinquishing one’s culture or choosing to Americanize in search of wealth and success in a White land. Clark points out that it is “only necessary to mention Jesus’ Blackness as an act of resistance to a society that overvalues White identity.”⁴⁰ The U.S is one such place in which it is necessary to dismantle our understanding of race and Christology for the benefit of people of color like my abuelito, who fail to see themselves within the words *imago dei*. Lee Butler explains that:

For a Black person to unquestionably embrace the image of a White God, with long flowing White hair, a long White beard, all dressed in White, seated upon a White throne, surrounded by White light, with White angels,..... then that Black

³⁸ Ibid., 180.

³⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

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person always sees herself or himself as a degraded being who must become White in order to reflect the image of God.⁴¹

V. Conclusion

How do we reconcile the White Christ of D.C with our own identities as people of color? The image of a fiery judge with blonde hair and blue eyes is not necessarily a comforting one. The answer lies in our ability to deconstruct the already existing systems around us in favor not only of a more inclusive theology, but a fuller understanding of ourselves. González-Andrieu says, “theologically powerful arts must do more than expose problems; they must also make us *asombrados*, grateful and wonder-filled beings, and in this the arts’ answer to the question of something being revealed is the opposite of “nothing” but is instead an ever-expanding fullness.”⁴²

When I encountered the Black Christ, I was struck with *asombro*. This single statue has served as a revelatory symbol for the people of the Guayas region, but speaks beyond that to our current struggles in the U.S. Exactly as Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by a dominant authority for threatening the “political and cultural domination of the established powers”⁴³ of the time, Black people in the U.S continue to be crucified based solely on their race. This crucifixion happens in direct consequence of the systemic racism that has infiltrated our society, and continues to demand active deconstruction to combat. In the Black Christ of Daule, we see a Christological response to racism in Ecuador but also racism as a whole in the Americas. As a revelatory and prophetic symbol, El Cristo Negro has invited his devotees to “see clearly” with the eyes of God. I ask my readers to do the same.

⁴¹ Ibid., 165.

⁴² González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*, 165.

⁴³ Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk*, 202.

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