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The Blanqueamiento of Ecuador:
Liberation in the Black Christ of Daule

by

Jessica Leu

A thesis presented to the

Faculty of the Department of
Theological Studies
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Theological Studies

May 6, 2021

Dedication Page

I humbly dedicate this labor of decolonization to the members of my family, living and dead, both in the United States and in South America. To my bisabuela Guillermina, who passed before my birth, you have guided us every step of the way through your legacy. To my abuelito Guillermo, your determination and talent brought us not only to new lands, but also opened to us new worlds. Without you, my legacy as a writer would never have been born at all. To my abuelita Rosa, clever and sharp, who propelled my family forward into education and success she herself had stolen from her. Your fire will continue to fuel us for generations to come. To my mother, Monica, who arrived to this country an immigrant, built a small company into an empire, and created safety for us all. Your kindness, dedication, and nurturing have always been the greatest proof of God present in my life. My ancestors have been overworked, oppressed, powerful men and women, who have always bled ambition from the stars. Your sacrifices have allowed me to achieve success in spaces I could have never dreamed existed.

Thank you.

Canto al Cristo Negro de Daule

En los años 1600 este hecho sucedió,
no ocurrió en tierras lejanas
sino en el Ecuador.

Eran tiempos de colonia
tiempos de cañaverales
tiempos de caña de azúcar
y maltratos sin que paren.

*Ay Cristo, mi cristo Negro,
Te hiciste Afroamericano
para que todos entiendieran
que todos somos hermanos.*

Gran Señor de los Milagros,
bendice a nuestro Ecuador
para que toda la gente actúe siempre mejor.
Justicia, amor y paz,
respeto y mucho perdón,
expresiones muy humanas
que el hijo de Dios dejó.

Ahora queda comprobado
que el amor de Dios es grande,
no puede estar encerrado en una raza y lenguaje.
Jesucristo de mi raza,
de nuestra historia tan linda,
historia de cimarrones,
resistencia y alegrías.

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Prologue

My family's story of social mobility in Ecuador began with my bisabuela Guillermina. Her mother, the daughter of a wealthy Spanish land owner, was disowned from her family after falling in love with an Afro-Ecuadorian plantation worker. Although we know very little else about my bisabuela's parents, we know they subsequently lived in poverty, such was the price of their union in Ecuadorian society at the time. Their love was seen as a taboo not only because of their races, but also because of the immense disparity between their social classes. This left a lasting impression on my bisabuela, who was the darkest and most phenotypically Black of her siblings. While sewing suits and dresses for "la gente buena" of the time, she stopped at nothing to see her children also move forward in Ecuadorian society. She sewed my abuelito Guillermo, her only son whom she named after herself, only the best suits while telling him: "To succeed you must dress even better than la gente buena. You're already Black. To be someone, you must be more." The echoes of the caste system enforced by Spanish remain prevalent in Ecuador, and my abuelito understood it first hand while he experienced the challenges associated with being dark-skinned throughout his career. Despite these obstacles he persevered until he became a world traveling sports journalist, covering multiple World Cups. For an Ecuadorian of originally modest means, this was considered incredible success.

My indigenous abuelita was also no stranger to the struggle of escaping poverty. Born one of twelve children in Santa Lucía, my abuelita's family were poor farm workers who grew mangos, rice, tobacco, and sugar cane beside the river. She was born in a shack made of sticks before her family could afford a home of cement, and when the opportunity arose to send a child of the farm to the city, my bisabuelos Jose and Felicita took it. My abuelita Rosa was the only one of her

siblings sent to the city in the hopes of receiving an education. But, when the time came for the wealthy Spanish Señora to send her to school, the Señora refused. Instead, my abuelita was employed as a personal domestic servant for the Señora: dressing and bathing her, running her errands, and caring for her animals. My abuelita never received an education beyond the third grade, but the exposure to the life of “la gente buena” fueled her desire for that same better life, to become a *Señora* herself, and not a *Mujer*. Although her siblings who remained behind in Santa Lucía did not share this burning desire, my abuelita was determined to leave behind her life of poverty. Without an education and with limited means, my abuelita moved upward within Ecuadorian society after marrying my abuelito, who had already found success himself. No longer considered a *montubio* from the campo, she raised six children with the help of her own domestic. She tended carefully to various businesses she opened even without the ability to read beyond a third-grade level, using only her ambition and her tenacity.

Although my abuelos achieved great success by an Ecuadorian standard, the ultimate goal for many Ecuadorians is to ultimately immigrate to the United States: the land of dreams, success, and wealth. In the 1980s a wave of Ecuadorian citizens immigrated to the United States in search of better opportunities for themselves, and my family was part of this wave. It was only after arriving to the U.S that my family was exposed to even more complex layers regarding assimilation and the *blanqueamiento*, the whitening synonymous with success in Ecuador. Like the experiences of many immigrant families, the struggle of retaining our cultural heritage or assimilating into American culture was a battle in and of itself. My family began to assimilate into the dominant White culture they found here, even unconsciously. *Mejorando la raza* was a concept not so much said out loud as it was an expectation for us all, hidden in teases about marrying the “right” (or,

white) person. In Ecuador, America meant success and prosperity. But more importantly, for my family, Whiteness meant success and prosperity.

My abuelito encouraged his family to marry successful White Americans or Europeans and many of them did, leading to a biracial heritage in myself and many of my cousins and second cousins. I grew up speaking Spanish even despite the discouragement from my father, and yet my own experiences were different than that of my family, specifically because I was White passing. At the same time, my father's own family struggled with the vast differences between my Latino immigrant culture and my biracial heritage, making me cling even more to my identity as an Ecuadorian-American. *Ni de aqui ni de alla*, not this or that, never fully belonging to one community or the other. For my father's family, my lack of blonde hair and blue eyes simply screamed *different*. For my mother's family, I was teased for being "Igualita a Monica, pero blanca." A replica of my mother, but white. Existing in this no mans land allowed me to consider larger questions about my identity I may not have previously considered had I not been born biracial to begin with. Experiencing these moments of alienation from both cultures prompted me to ask many questions about myself, my identity as a biracial person, and my identity as a Latino in the U.S.

I. Introduction

There was an unspoken similarity within the story of my grandparent's progression into upper Ecuadorian society. For my abuelito, his own biracial heritage was a hindrance, one that needed to be masked and abandoned in order to achieve success. For my abuelita, the farming culture of her upbringing and her Indigenous heritage were also relinquished, and she was quickly forced to adjust to the culture and etiquette of "elite" Ecuadorian society in order to join it herself. Both my grandparents, even unknowingly, were subjected to the *blanqueamiento*, the whitening necessary to achieve social mobility. The "whiteness" of the *blanqueamiento* is not only a phenotypical appearance one seeks to achieve, but an entire manner of living, speaking, and "being" within society. In other words, in the decades following colonization, the people of Ecuador were exposed to White Supremacy at the hands of the Spanish and oppressed under its weight. The idolization of Euro-centric features like *ojos claros* or *pelo rubio*¹ pervades even into the religion of the people, in which Mary and Jesus are often depicted as Europeans. If "God" is White, what does that mean for those of us who are not?

It was only four years ago when my abuelita Rosa told me the story of the Black Christ of Daule. She was eight years old and still living beside the Daule river, which is sacred to the Black Christ, when she first heard it. Separated into three main parts (with some small variations here and there that I will explore later), the legend always has within it one central event: a statue of a White Christ miraculously turning Black in solidarity with a slave, who was flogged in punishment for entering the chapel to pray. I was stunned. Although I had eagerly documented Black Christs throughout Latin America, it was the first time I had heard such a racialized origin story for a Black Christ. Rather than turning black from years of smoke exposure or the touch of human

¹ Light eyes and Blonde hair

hands, this Christ is transformed in direct reply to the oppression of a Black slave in 17th century Ecuador. Although hundreds of years have passed, the devotion to the Black Christ of Daule has not ceased in the Guayas region of Ecuador, which is the home of countless Mestizo, Indigenous, and Black farmworkers.

Why was there a pastoral need in the first place for such a Christ? Why does it matter that this image of Christ is different from more popular devotions, such as the blonde and blue-eyed image of the Sacred Heart? Further understanding of “mestizaje” in Ecuador will make it clear. It is my understanding that the Black Christ of Daule filled a pastoral need for the oppressed Ecuadorians of color in the Guayas region, who see the crucified Black Christ as sharing their own suffering. This Christ was not the image of the Spanish in elite society, or an image of “*la gente buena*,” to whom the poor farmworkers could not relate. Instead, they found a Christ who was considered the lowest of the low in Ecuadorian society at the time: a Black slave.

The rhetoric used to justify the *blanqueamiento* process continues to play an enormous role in Ecuadorian social mobility, and also determines how various ethnicities in Ecuador are governed and treated. The Indigenous and Afroecuadorian populations of Ecuador are subjected to significantly higher rates of violence, poverty, and disease than their Mestizo and White counterparts. Suddenly, the pastoral need a Black Christ fills is one that carries a heavy theological weight.

IA. Thesis

The dominance of the White Christ in Latin America has been used to lend “theological” support for social, racial, and colonial hierarchies of the Spanish in Ecuador. Against the tide of this theological distortion, I will argue that the Black Christ of Daule subverts the dominant image

of a White Christ along with its implied oppressive hierarchies, instead paving the way for a vision of liberation for Ecuadorian Catholics. The idolization of Christ as a particular race, especially White, is detrimental not only to the spiritual lives of Christians of color but also to Christians as a whole. This continued prioritization of White, cisgender masculinity causes direct harm to any individual who does not meet these same three qualities, especially as reflected visually by the majority of Western art. This subconscious association of divinity with Whiteness can cause harm on a personal level for people of color, who do not find themselves reflected in the words *imago dei*. On a larger scale, Christ depicted exclusively as a White man becomes so culturally unspoken that it becomes the foundation for systematic inequality against people of color on social, political, and economic levels. Without the deliberate decolonization of Christ's image, White Christians will remain in bondage to a harmful and oppressive tool of White Supremacy, and Christians of color will continue to suffer under the weight of this tool. In Ecuador especially, Afro and Indigenous Ecuadorians continue to suffer violence and or inequality at the hands of the police, government, and media.

IB. Methodologies

In this paper, I will use a number of distinct disciplines to provide a framework for my argument. Latin American Liberation Theology provides a foundation for much of my argument and theological analysis within the context of Ecuadorian culture and society. Understanding Gustavo Gutiérrez' *A Theology of Liberation (1973)* as a political praxis through which classism is condemned and social responsibility is emphasized is a medium through which the social and political implications of the legend of the Black Christ as best understood. Social concern for the

poor and seeking to liberate the oppressed in this 17th Century narrative takes the form of abolition and the condemnation of slavery.

Taking into account the racial and ethnic complexities of South America, I also rely on Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCRT) to analyze the fluidity of these two categorizations in Ecuador, thus pointing out their superfluousness. LatCRT seeks to illuminate the intersectionality in which inequality is directly determined by the relationships between race, gender, class, and mental/physical disability. Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCRT) expands upon CRT while also taking into account the racial identities of Latinas/os, Chicana/os, Indigenous peoples, and other groups of color. To do so for an Ecuadorian context, I heavily rely on Karem Roitman and her book *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in Ecuador: The Manipulation of "Mestizaje"* (2009).

Additionally, Black Liberation Theology is used within my paper to emphasize the qualities of Jesus as a Black man. In this particular devotion, Christ cannot be removed from his direct identification with the enslaved peoples of colonial Ecuador. To do this, I rely heavily on Shawn Copeland and her book *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Human Beings* (2009). Copeland provides an understanding of race, embodiment, and the relationship between the physical and social bodies that exemplifies the complexities of race and ethnicity in Ecuador. Later, Albert Cleage Jr is referenced within Jawanza Clarke's *Albert Cleage Jr and the Black Madonna and Child* (2016) to unpack the theological implications of Christ's race, his depiction as a Black man (specifically a slave), and the decolonization of Christ's image with Whiteness for the benefit of Black spirituality and liberation. To analyze the image of Christ himself and his historical depictions within visual art, I rely on Cecilia González-Andrieu's book, *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty* (2012) and the framework of theological aesthetics to point out the weight the

image of a Black Christ conveys through sight alone. Theological aesthetics also attempts to articulate how symbols become mediums of revelation for a larger Christian community.

IC. Structure

In this paper, I will begin by providing historical context for early Ecuadorian society before, during, and after colonization by the Spanish. By first exploring the context within which the legend appears in the first place, we can better understand why this particular devotion of Christ fulfills a pastoral need. Although I rely both on scarce written documentation of the legend as well as oral accounts from family, historical context provides a foundation for which we can analyze this legend and its impact from a theological perspective. Following this context, I will explore the legend of the Black Christ of Daule in its current written documentation as used by *El Centro Pastoral Afroecuatoriano de Guayaquil* and thoroughly explore its contents and variations. Afterwards, I will analyze the theological themes and interpretations of this legend, its relevance within Liberation Theology and the importance of revelation through Theological Aesthetics. After thoroughly exploring the narrative and its implications, we can then build upon a contemporary understanding by further assessing the Ecuadorian perception of race and ethnicity as it affects society in the 21st century. To do so, I will also investigate how *mestizaje* has been used in Ecuador, how a White/European Christ has been used as a tool of European colonization and White Supremacy, and the status of Afro-Ecuadorian citizens today. Finally, I will explore why the revelation of the Black Christ of Daule continues to maintain theological weight, not only in modern Ecuador but in the Americas as a whole.

II. Colonization and the Caste System in Ecuador

The arrival of the Spanish to Ecuador in the 16th century dramatically changed the culture, society, economy, and language of Ecuador. A racial hierarchy quickly emerged as the Spanish began to categorize individuals based on their perceived biological make-up, and the prioritization of European Whiteness began to the detriment of non-White Ecuadorians. In this section, I will explore how the colonization of the Spanish solidified the caste system in Ecuador, negatively impacting the lives of non-White Ecuadorians. The caste system directly created the foundation for the social, political, and economic practice known as the *blanqueamiento*, or literally “whitening”.

The culture and make up of Ecuador, like the majority of the countries in Latin America, was drastically changed after the arrival of the Spanish. Prior to European colonization Ecuador was home to a vast number of diverse Indigenous groups who themselves had avidly fought against colonization by the Inca. Some of these notable groups included the Highland Kichwa, the Amazonian Kichwa, the Achuar, the Cañari, the Huancavilca, and so on. When the Spanish arrived to Ecuador in 1530, the Inca Civil War between the brothers Huáscar and Atahualpa had already begun, weakening their claim to the Ecuadorian territory they had only recently managed to colonize. The Indigenous Ecuadorians such as some of the Huancavilca-Manteño people of modern day Guayas fought alongside the Spanish in an attempt to remove the Inca from their land. Others, like the Cañari of modern day Cuenca, burned their entire city to the ground rather than let it be occupied by the Spanish. Even the name of Ecuador’s largest port city, Guayaquil, is the combination of the given names of a married Huancavilca-Manteño couple who, according to oral tradition, committed suicide together after being imprisoned by the Spanish.²

² See the monument of Guayas and Quil at Pedro Menendez Avenue junction, before the National Unity Bridge, north of the city of Guayaquil.

As the various Indigenous groups (most notably the Huancavilca and the Cañari) fought against both the Inca and the Spanish, the first enslaved Africans arrived in 1533. After a slave boat capsized on the shores of Ecuador, the now free survivors of the wreck swam to the northern coastal shore and settled in Esmeraldas, creating a maroon settlement for themselves to live in. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Jesuit priests began to import enslaved African laborers to increase their production of cotton and sugar cane.³ Because the Indigenous populations were often scarce on the coast and rebellious in the sierra, other Spanish land owners began to follow suit. Ultimately, both the Indigenous Ecuadorians and the enslaved Africans were colonized by the Spanish, forcing a variety of new ethnic groups to emerge as a result of the intermixture between the races.

After the Inca Civil War and the colonization of the Spanish, all indigenous groups in Ecuador were automatically homogenized as “indigenous/*indios*” regardless of their previous cultural identities. Subsequently, “Indios” were not permitted to work particular jobs that society deemed only appropriate for mestizos or whites. An ethnicity-based division of labor was established by this discrimination, creating a caste system in post-colonial Ecuador. During early periods of Spanish colonization, all those living in Spanish colonies of mixed heritage were called “castas,” but eventually “casta” was used to designate a particular racial group in the Spanish hierarchy of caste.⁴ The hierarchy established by the Spanish prioritized the Spain-born first, then the Creoles (Spaniards born in the Americas), Castas (or what we would now identify as Mestizos), Indios, Mulattoes (a mixture of Black and White), Blacks, and finally Sambos/Zambos (a mixture of Black and Indian), in that order.⁵ Slavery was also significantly more prevalent in territories

³ Karem Roitman, *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in Ecuador: The Manipulation of “Mestizaje”*, 111

⁴ *Ibid.*, 97

⁵ *Ibid.*, 97

where the Indigenous populations were lower in number, and as a result a large majority of the enslaved Africans worked harvesting plantains, cocoa, sugar cane, cotton, and tobacco in the coastal regions.⁶ Modern Ecuador, therefore, is a country built upon the intermixture of three racial groups: Indigenous, Black, and Spanish.

Understanding the categorizations of race that were created by the Spanish post-colonization is imperative to understanding the context within which the legend of the Black Christ emerges in the first place. As a result of the domination of the Spanish who oppressed and enslaved both Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians, significant disparities were created amongst the *castas* in the *casta* system. When the legend of the Black Christ occurred in the 17th century, a large majority of Afro-Ecuadorians were enslaved peoples forced to work as plantation labor. Additionally, many Indigenous Ecuadorians were subjected to “re-education” that stripped them of their language, religion, and dress. Often, they were trapped in *concertajes* with wealthy Spanish land owners that imprisoned them under a growing mountain of debt.⁷ In this period of severe inequality, the legend of the Black Christ first emerges in the Guayas region of Ecuador. In the following section I will analyze the main legends of the Black Christ of Daule, and then assess the theological and societal implications of the transformation. By unpacking the layers of these implications, we can understand the importance of the legend of the Black Christ as well as the political, themes of liberation it contains.

⁶ John Anton Sanchez, *Religiosidad Afroecuatoriana*, 21

⁷ A *concertaje* is a system of contracted debt which confined Indian laborers (*conciertos*) to a hacienda/campo under the threat of prison time for leaving.

III. The Black Christ of Daule

IIIA. The Written Legend

It is difficult to find written work revolving around this image of Christ in the United States, and even in Ecuador, as much of the legend was oral tradition for some time before it was written down. It is even more difficult to find work written in English, and thus the origin story known most commonly will be provided in Spanish by *El Centro Pastoral Afroecuatoriano de Guayaquil* in their guide for African Pastoral Ministry. The legend contains within it three parts: the first in which the initial change in color occurs, the second in which a wealthy land owner is cured of his blindness, and the third when slaves are freed in the name of the Black Christ. My abuelita Rosa has also noted some variations within the legend, which I will also explore.

The preface of the legend explains:

We know that our ancestors were exploited and scorned. ‘Black have no soul,’ it was said, ‘and their religions are of the devil’. In the slave system, Blacks became “human merchandise” which could be bought and sold at any time, and subjected to all kinds of suffering and abuse. In this context, Jesus made himself present in a concrete way to stand beside his oppressed people.⁸

According to this passage, in a life characterized by the constant fear of being bought and sold like property, the enslaved Africans of Ecuador were also believed by the masses to be devoid of souls and feeling. Their ancestral religions were condemned as devil worship, and they were subjected to cruel suffering and mistreatment as enslaved peoples.

During the seventeenth century, a Black slave is said to have entered the chapel of Daule to pray for his wife, who was gravely ill. It was illegal for a slave to enter the chapel at the time. Although knowing he could be punished, the enslaved man prayed to the statue of the White Christ

⁸ *El Cristo Negro de Daule: Patrono de la Pastoral Afro (Guayaquil: Misionera/os, Afroecuatoriana/os de Guayaquil, 3*
Translation mine

and begged for his wife to be cured. Before leaving he touched the cheek of the statue and left a mark from the dirt of his hands. This mark was quickly discovered by the sacristan.

The sacristan realized and called the Dominic priest who catechized the area: the two, scandalized, decided to publicly flog the slave in the square, forbidding him to enter into the chapel and touch the Christ. All the Whites and Mestizos approved of the lashes with which the poor slave was punished. The next day, when the sacristan opened the Church, the Christ had changed color: he had become black, as we see him now.⁹

This particular account of the legend notes that while the slave was flogged in public, both the White and Mestizo townsfolk approved of the punishment. This occurrence in the account by El Centro Pastoral Afroecuatoriano de Guayaquil adds a complex layer of ethnic discrimination between the Mestizo population of Daule and the enslaved Africans. This discrimination echoes the hierarchy of the *casta* system explored in Section II, highlighting the disparity between ethnicities in early colonial Ecuador. Although the Indigenous people of Ecuador are not explicitly mentioned in this account of the legend, we know historically that they too were oppressed and marginalized by the Spanish.

The next day, when the sacristan opened the church doors, the Christ had miraculously changed color from White to Black. The sacristans assumed that the statue had been painted Black and attempted to clean it. However, “mientras más lo limpiaban más negro se hacía,”¹⁰ and even the Christ’s feet are noted to be calloused and swollen, exactly like the feet of many of the slaves at the time.¹¹ The enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians understood this change in color as a clearly political

⁹ Ibid., 4
Translation mine

¹⁰ Ibid., 7
“the more they attempted to clean the statue, the blacker it became”
Translation mine

¹¹ Ibid., 7

message that spoke to them of their own lived conditions. In the face of oppression by a dominantly White society, Christ takes a stand in solidarity with the oppressed— a Black slave.

Second Miracle

The second addition to the legend occurs some 60-70 years after the initial miracle. After many years in the Daule chapel, the statue of the Black Christ had become worn down by age and by exposure to moths. The community debated removing the statue and burning it. However, in the years between 1684 and 1694, a wealthy land owner named Isidro de Veinza y Mora makes a petition to the Black Christ. If the Black Christ will cure him of his almost complete blindness, Isidro promises to restore the statue of the Black Christ and save it from destruction by fire.

Isidro de Veinza y Mora — almost completely blind — made a promise: he promised to restore the remains of the Black Christ, while asking Jesus to cure him. The Lord heard him: Isidro recovered his sight, and after a short time he presented to the people the newly restored image of the Black Christ, the same one preserved today in the Church of Daule. From this moment on, the Black Christ worked many miracles, and became called “The Lord of Miracles”.¹²

After being cured of his blindness, Isidro fulfills his agreement with the Black Christ and restores the statue supposedly to the same condition it remains in today. From the moment Isidro’s sight returns, the Black Christ is called by the town: “El Señor de los Milagros” or “The Lord of Miracles”. But, this second miracle merely serves as a catalyst for larger social change, which leads us into the final and third part of this legend.

Third Miracle

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Isidro de Veinza y Mora comes to a realization. Gazing upon the crucified Black Christ who healed him, Isidro “se dio cuenta que seguir esclavizando a los negros quería decir seguir encadenando al mismo Jesús, y eso no podía

¹² Ibid., 7
Translation mine

hacerlo.”¹³ Isidro realizes that to keep human beings enslaved is the same as keeping the Black Christ who cured his blindness enslaved. Unable to live with this realization, Isidro decides to free all of his slaves more than an entire century before Ecuador would make slavery illegal in 1852. Despite the social framework of his time that continuously oppressed and enslaved Afroecuadorians, Isidro is moved to create social change and free those in bondage because he views them as the same as Christ. The legend then reads,

Jesus had freed him from blindness, and the greatest blindness is slavery, not realizing that we are all brothers. The true miracle that the Black Christ of Daule wants to work, then — today as yesterday — is to open our eyes, make us see reality with the gaze of God, push us to go against the slave and racist mentality, and make us agents of justice and freedom for all.¹⁴

Jesus as the Black Christ of Daule did indeed “cure” Isidro’s blindness, or at the very least made him aware of it, but did not stop merely at his physical blindness. Instead, the Christ also removed the “greater blindness” from him: that of racism in its entirety. The “true” miracle of this story then, as this text explains in Spanish, is the opening of our eyes to the equality of humanity and the condemnation of an Imperialist framework that can justify slavery and racism.

El Centro Pastoral Afroecuatoriano de Guayaquil also insists that by intervening on behalf of the slave, Jesus as the Black Christ displays clear compassion and concern for the political status of the oppressed Black people in Ecuador. By changing color in this legend, Christ also demonstrates to the Church and the then ‘Christian’ community that the Gospel and the whip are incompatible with one another, and that slavery has no right to exist in a society that truly desires

¹³ Ibid., 5

“He realized that to keep enslaving black people would mean to continue enslaving Jesus himself, and that he could not do.”

¹⁴ Ibid., 6

Translation mine

to put the Good News into practice.¹⁵ Despite being considered the patron of Afroecuadorians, the Black Christ of Daule is well known for being a source of healing and hope not only to Afrodescendants but also to White, Mestizo, and Indigenous Ecuadorians. As a popular prayer to the Black Christ goes: “En tu cruz nos hermanaste con tus dos brazos abiertos, y en Daule nos enseñaste a rezar el 'Padre Nuestro’,” or “On your cross you became our brother, with your open arms, in Daule you showed us how to pray the Our Father’.”¹⁶

Indigenous Narratives of the Black Christ

Although the legend by El Centro Pastoral Afroecuadoriano de Guayaquil mentions White and Mestizo citizens of Daule witnessing the flogging of the slave, the Indigenous population is not included in the surviving written narrative from the Afro-Ecuadorian perspective. However, this does not mean that the Black Christ did not also hold significant theological and cultural weight for the Indigenous population of Daule.

The true origin of the statue is disputed, even if the later miracles of the legend have remained relatively the same. According to the written source by El Centro Pastoral Afroecuadoriano de Guayaquil, the statue (which was originally White) was brought to Ecuador by the Spanish on a slave ship. This seems to be the most common and accepted origin story for the statue itself. However, according to my abuelita, a second origin story is also known. To many of the Indigenous descendants of the Daulis tribe,¹⁷ and according to my abuelita, the statue was said to have washed ashore one day directly from within the river Daule.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9

Translation mine

¹⁷ The Daulis are considered the Pre-Hispanic people who inhabited the Daule River before the arrival of the Spanish, although little more information can be found outside of Ecuador.

¹⁸ Rosa Margarita Valencia-Campaña

It is rumored by my abuelita that prior to Spanish colonization, many Indigenous populations of the Andes and in the Guayas region in particular perceived the communication of the divine through water. In other words, rivers were the means of communication between the Indigenous people and their deities. This seems, to me, to be reinforced by the origin story of a Colombian Black Christ, El Señor de los Milagros de Buga. Also called “The Lord of Miracles,” this Colombian Christ is known for a legend in which he washed ashore from directly within the Guadalajara River, and was discovered and brought home by a poor Indigenous laundress who then discovered its miraculous abilities.¹⁹

A Pre-Hispanic divinity of the Daulis tribe was called “El Señor de las Aguas” or “The Lord of the Waters”. This same epithet continues to be used for the Black Christ of Daule alongside “El Señor de los Milagros,” pointing to a direct association with water that continues to be reinforced during the month of September when the feast of the Black Christ arrives. During this celebration, the locals will remove the statue from the chapel and carry it in a procession of boats down the Daule River. Locals participate by gliding down the river in boats themselves, and take turns carrying smaller replicas of the icon through town. Even my abuelita recounts the festivities from her own simple wooden canoe, which was the main means of fishing and traveling for her family during her childhood. I point out these associations with Indigenous spirituality and the Black Christ to make clear that the relationship between this Christ and the Indigenous Ecuadorians is also an intimate one, even if they are not mentioned in the surviving written legend.

Despite the account by El Centro Pastoral Afroecuatoriano de Guayaquil only explicitly mentioning the White and Mestizo townspeople of Daule, the existing oral tradition associated

¹⁹ See El Señor de los Milagros de Buga, Colombia. Although this Christ is also identified as a Black Christ, its color is believed to be the result of a burn attempt by the Bishop of Popayan. <https://www.milagrosodebuga.com/el-milagroso/>

with water that continues to be used especially during the month of September points to the Indigenous population of the Guayas region also finding salvation within the Black Christ. This alternative origin story and continued association with water makes clear that the Black Christ holds significant importance not only to Afro-Ecuadorians throughout the country, but also to the Indigenous people of the Guayas region, who may have alternative interpretations of the Christ.

IIIB. Theological Analysis

In this section, I begin with the historical Jesus and his identity as a Jew in 1st Century Palestine. By contextualizing Jesus' life, his ministry, and his death within the confines of Roman occupation we understand the political nature of his preaching as well as his death as an event which sparked a movement for liberation. By turning to the subject and beginning with the lived experience of the characters within the legend, we are also able to more clearly define the importance of the unnamed Black slave, who's suffering was responsible for the initial miracle. Additionally, there is a message within the interpreted legend that is for a larger Catholic audience. Beyond the small town of Daule in the Guayas region of Ecuador, the Black Christ invites us to participate concretely in liberation from the social sins of racism.

The Historical Jesus

To analyze the legend of the Black Christ of Daule, we must first start with an ascending Christology that begins with Jesus as a historical person. As a historical person, Jesus cannot be removed from the particular cultural context and society in which he lived. In Biblical Scripture God is known to continually “[choose] what the world rejects.”²⁰ Jesus is a “Jew of questionable parentage” who lived “in an insignificant region of the country (Galilee)” and who fraternized

²⁰ Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective*, 61

“with social outcasts and women— in order to bring about reconciliation and salvation.”²¹ Although the majority of our understanding of who Jesus was is dependent on the Biblical Gospels, we know that Jesus was ultimately a dark-skinned man who belonged to an oppressed religious minority. He lived at one point as an illegal immigrant fleeing persecution, and as an adult he was executed by the Roman government by crucifixion, a shameful punishment reserved by the Romans exclusively for insurrection. The historical Jesus was an individual who revolted against inequity in his society, who commanded his followers to take care of one another by feeding the poor and condemning human greed, and ultimately became a martyr of this fight for liberation. This struggle is one intimately understood by Latin American Christians, especially those of color. Beginning with the understanding that Jesus was truly a revolutionary in 1st Century Palestine, the weight of this change in color is highlighted for its rebellion against the status quo upheld by an oppressive regime.

Turning to the Subject: Analysis of the Legend

As Cone explains in *God of the Oppressed*, “There can be no Black Theology which does not take the black experience as a source for its starting point.”²² For Cone, Black theology is fundamentally different from that of White theology, specifically because Black theology is rooted in the oppression experienced by Black people at the hands of White oppressors. Black theology cannot be separated from this struggle for liberation because God exists within the struggle for freedom itself— by Black people.²³ I acknowledge that Cone writes specifically about American Black theology and the effects of slavery in the United States, but argue regardless that his

²¹ Ibid., 61

²² James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 40

²³ Ibid., 72

understanding remains applicable to the shared experiences of slavery and oppression in South America. Cone says,

The theme of liberation expressed in story form is the essence of black religion. Both content and form were essentially determined by black people's social existence. Because black people were oppressed but not destroyed by it, they intuitively knew that servitude was a denial of their essential worth. They therefore looked for religious and secular themes in their social existence that promised release from the pain of slavery and oppression.²⁴

The European Christians who arrived to both North and South America did not operate from the same theological understanding as the Africans whom they dragged in chains to serve them. Subjugation in slavery shaped Black theological thought, especially in regards to Black understandings of freedom and liberation. Although the Latin American understanding of race, ethnicity, and nationality are different than that of the United States, ultimately Afrodescendants throughout Latin America have also been enslaved, abused, and marginalized by a White oppressor who directly benefited from their enslavement.

Cone notes that for Black Americans “Yahweh is known and worshiped as the One who brought Israel out of Egypt, and who raised Jesus from the dead. God is the political God, the Protector of the poor and the Establisher of the right for those who are oppressed. To know God is to experience the acts of God in the concrete affairs and relationships of people, liberating the weak and the helpless from pain and humiliation.”²⁵ Although Cone and the various theologians I rely on explore the racial contexts of Black Americans in the United States, the racism experienced by Black Americans is shared with South Americans, especially Afro-Ecuadorians. Naturally, it seems to follow that early Afro-Ecuadorian understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection was similarly impacted by their experience of slavery and oppression. Just as in the United States, there

²⁴ Ibid., 78

²⁵ Ibid., 81

is great emphasis within this Ecuadorian legend on “God” as a political God, who protects the marginalized and establishes the priority of the poor and oppressed in his eyes. According to Cone, it is “impossible to interpret the Scripture correctly and thus understand Jesus unless the interpretation is done in the light of the consciousness of the oppressed in their struggle for liberation.”²⁶

Theology is ultimately a “political language. What people think about God, Jesus Christ, and the Church cannot be separated from their own social and political status in a given society.”²⁷ Shawn Copeland also notes this within her book *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. For Copeland, the body is one of two sites (the other being soul/spirit) for divine revelation, and through our embodiment as human beings we realize “our essential freedom through engagement and communion with other embodied selves.”²⁸ However, this freedom “in large measure hinges upon cultural perceptions and social (political, economic, technological) responses (affirmation or rejection or indifference) to the physical body.”²⁹ An individual’s “social body” is defined by their physical one and their society: their race, sexuality, gender, phenotypical appearance, and so on “influences, perhaps even determines, the trajectories of concrete human lives.”³⁰

To truly make a theological analysis of the legend of the Black Christ of Daule, we must “unravel the relationship of Christ to culture”³¹ and start with the experience of the enslaved Afro-Ecuadorian with whom the legend begins. The enslaved man is unnamed. But, the legend tells us that despite the law which forbade slaves to enter the Daule chapel, this man does so anyway in the hope that Jesus Christ will save his ill wife from death. This alone is a risky decision on his

²⁶ Ibid., 56

²⁷ Ibid., 64

²⁸ Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 8

²⁹ Ibid., 8

³⁰ Ibid., 8

³¹ Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective*, 7

part, but the decision is clearly born from selfless love and belief in Christ. The evidence of his “crime” is dirt left by the caress of his hand on Christ’s cheek, a loving and tender gesture. Even before the statue’s miraculous change in color, it is clear that the enslaved man not only believed in Jesus Christ and his resurrection, but loved him profoundly enough to touch him tenderly when making a request. As Copeland notes, “For these exploited and suffering poor, the Prophet from Nazareth was the incarnation of divine compassion. His life and ministry exemplify what it means to take sides with the oppressed and poor in the struggle for life — no matter the cost.”³²

The Spanish sacristans, and even the White and Mestizo citizens of the town, operated from a completely different theological perspective than this unnamed enslaved man. They did not perceive him as fully human, nor did they think of him as a part of their faith, as evidenced by the law which forbade slaves from entering the chapel in the first place. The religious spaces of the town were off limits to the enslaved Africans, who were simultaneously abused for farm labor which supported the people who were rejecting them. The Spanish sacristans as well as the White and Mestizo citizens were all trapped in spiritual bondage to the image of a White Christ. Unable to associate Christ in any way with a Black slave, the humanity of the slaves is denied in its entirety. The idolization of the White Christ within the parish was quite literally used to exile enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians from the religious body of the town. This deliberate exclusion and inequality is the grounds for which the miracle occurs.

The unnamed slave is flogged in punishment for even entering the White Christ’s space, and we know nothing more about the man or his sick wife. We receive no closure on his or her behalf, nor do we know how the miracle was immediately perceived by the 16th Century Ecuadorians. All we know with certainty, after understanding the racial and ethnic hierarchy

³² Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 87

enforced by the Spanish in Ecuadorian society at the time, is that this man was considered one of the lowest *castas* in the Spanish *casta* system. The White and Mestizo citizens of Daule approved of his punishment, as though to say “Serves him right.” They too understood the church itself as a space enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians were not permitted, benefitting directly from the subjugation of an ethnic group even lower than themselves.

In direct response to the flogging of the enslaved man, the miracle occurs. When the sacristans arrive to the chapel the next day the statue of Christ is miraculously transformed from White to Black. Suddenly, the image of Christ as a Black man carries within it entirely new meaning for the immediate community. The Black Christ embodies the experience of the Afro-Ecuadorian slaves who were oppressed by the Spanish and suffering greatly. His feet are calloused and worn, he is bleeding and scourged, crucified unjustly by the dominant powers of society: exactly what had happened to the punished Black slave. In this case Christ is “not merely sympathetic with the social pain of the poor but becomes totally identified with them in their agony and pain. The pain of the oppressed is God’s pain.”³³ This is exemplified perfectly in this legend, in which a miraculous change in color immediately conveys a theological message on a social, political, and economic level.

The White sacristans “no querían que los esclavos tocasen al Cristo, pero los esclavos reconocían en aquel Jesús azotado, maltratado clavado a la cruz y sangrando con dolor una persona muy cercana y muy parecida a ellos.”³⁴ In this Christ, the enslaved Africans of the region saw themselves. An intimate partner who understood and shared in their pain, and through his

³³ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 185

³⁴ *El Cristo Negro de Daule: Patrono de la Pastoral Afro* (Guayaquil: Misionera/os, Afroecuatoriana/os de Guayaquil, 8

“[they] did not want the slaves to touch Christ, but the slaves recognized that the whipped, mistreated, Jesus nailed to the cross and bleeding with pain was a person very close and very similar to them.”

crucifixion promised them freedom from enslavement. Copeland notes, “Through his death on the cross, Christ “identifies God with the victims of violence” and identifies “the victims of violence with God, so that they are put under God’s protection and given the rights of which they have been deprived by human beings.”³⁵ Christ is clearly identified here with the least of Ecuadorian society in direct reply to their oppression. In Jesus’ suffering and death, he “unites the real suffering of black bodies to his own. His embrace neither diminishes nor empties, neither justifies nor obscures, the horror and misery of black suffering.”³⁶ Taking the form of a whipped, beaten, and suffering slave is an act of love and solidarity. In this one miracle, the enslaved Africans of Ecuador heard: “I am with you, I suffer with you, and you are not alone.”

Some 60—70 years after this first miracle, the Black Christ cures Isidro de Veinza y Mora of his blindness. But this physical healing is not the most miraculous part of Isidro’s story. Rather, his *response and action* to the miracle are. By understanding the slaves of Ecuador as the same as the Black Christ, Isidro frees his own, knowing that keeping human beings in chains is the same as enslaving Jesus Christ. Copeland notes, “Only those who follow the example of the Crucified and struggle on the side of the exploited, despised, and poor ‘will discover [Christ] at their side.’”³⁷ This seems to have occurred within Isidro, who chooses to stand beside the exploited he himself had been exploiting. More than one hundred years before Ecuador would make slavery illegal, the divine revelation of the Black Christ is the trigger for social change in Daule. Isidro is merely a tool for this liberation, and in complete awareness of his social sin of slavery, elects to stand with the oppressed instead of over them. The Black Christ does not merely ask us to look at the world

³⁵ Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 88

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 99

through the eyes of God. He simultaneously demands social action to fight for justice and freedom in the face of oppression. Cone explains,

Truth is more than the retelling of the biblical story. Truth is the divine happening that invades our contemporary situation, revealing the meaning of the past for the present so that we are made new creatures for the future. It is therefore our commitment to the divine truth, as witnessed to in the biblical story, that requires us to investigate the connection between Jesus' words and deeds in first-century Palestine and our existence today.³⁸

This legend perfectly exemplifies Cone's thoughts. The message of the Black Christ "invades" the social and political climate of 17th Century Ecuador, and demands commitment to the divine truth that prioritizes the protection of the marginalized in society. The miracle is clear: the hierarchy of the *casta* system does not belong in Christianity, nor does slavery or racism of any kind. In this legend to enslave and abuse a human being is to do the same to Christ.

Liberation beyond Daule

This legend and its themes are a precursor for the movement that would become Liberation Theology. Not only is there emphasis on the liberation (both theological and literal) of enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians, but there is also immense implication surrounding our social sins. As Gustavo Gutierrez notes,

The liberation of our continent means more than overcoming economic, social, and political dependence. It means, in a deeper sense, to see the becoming of humankind as a process of human emancipation in history. It is to see humanity in search of a qualitatively different society in which it will be free from all servitude, in which it will be the artisan of its own destiny. It is to seek the building up of a new humanity.³⁹

The liberation found in this legend is not only a literal one in which enslaved people are freed. It is also a testament to human emancipation as a whole, specifically from the social sin of racism. In his *Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez provides a new method of doing theology that begins with the lived experiences of the poor in Latin America. Although he does not dive too

³⁸ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 122

³⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 56

deeply into the dynamics of race and ethnicity, he condemns social sin in its entirety, thus leaving no room for any system of power used to exploit or oppress others. For Gutierrez, sin is not only an obstacle to our salvation. Sin is also a “historical reality,”⁴⁰ a breach of contract with God and with our fellow human beings. Whether this sin takes the form of racism, capitalism, sexism, and so on— sin in society actively defines a human being’s social body and their subsequent treatment. The Kingdom of God is not merely a distant eschatological concept, but a reality created through concrete actions that either build or destroy this fellowship of humanity. In this particular case, sin takes the form of oppression through the *casta* system and slavery, creating a tangible reality that categorizes and oppresses the vulnerable within Ecuadorian society: those not phenotypically, linguistically, or culturally European.

According to Gutierrez the human person must actively “participate in the struggle for the liberation of those oppressed by others”⁴¹ in order to truly achieve communion with God and all other people. We are saved individually by God so that we can in turn actively choose to save one another from the sin that has infiltrated human society on a social, political, economic, and cultural level. As a historical person Jesus chose again and again to associate with the literal and metaphorical lepers of society, and in this case the Black Christ does so to stand beside the oppressed of colonized Ecuador. Although this miracle is a direct reply to the oppression faced by an Afro-Ecuadorian man in the 17th century, Ecuador has not accepted this divine revelation in its entirety. The prioritization of European features, language, and culture are not only evident in a three hundred year old legend, but continue to define the lives of Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians in contemporary Ecuadorian society.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 85

⁴¹ Ibid., 116

In section III, we have explored both the written legend of the Black Christ as documented by El Centro Pastoral Afroecuatoriano de Guayaquil as well as various interpretations of the legend. Most importantly, I feel, is the active call for social change in the face of oppression and exploitation. Through his color change, the Black Christ of Daule overthrows the idol of a White Christ that has caught hold of the Spanish, White-Mestizo, and Mestizo citizens of the town. Although the Whiteness of the Christ was used to exploit and abuse the enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians, the proclamation of Christ's Blackness points out this hypocrisy by saying, "Yo soy tu otro yo."⁴²

IV. Theological Aesthetics

Building upon sections I-III, section IV. Theological Aesthetics seeks to uncover why Christ's depiction as a particular race matters at all. The Black Christ is loved for this change of color, for his hand in performing miracles for the immediate community, and additionally for his embodiment of the experience of the enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians. However, the significance of his change in color is deeper than a theological analysis of the legend. By clarifying the theological weight a symbol can have and additionally pointing out where we may inappropriately cling to a symbol, we can better understand how the subversion of these images can lead us towards a more full understanding of the divine.

The Black Christ as a Symbol of Revelation

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 merely an image. An image as a symbol is instead "the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame."⁴³

⁴² Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 82

⁴³ Cecilia González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty*, 14

A deeper message is expressed through the symbol by this invisible essence, it is “an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness.”⁴⁴ The Black Christ of Daule and his deliberate change of color conveys within it an invisible essence. By establishing Jesus Christ the Liberator and Savior as a Black man, the previously maintained racial hierarchy enforced by the Spanish that continually prioritized whiteness is reversed. For individuals who are not familiar with this kind of iconography, a crucified Black Christ can evoke surprise, alarm, inspiration, and so on.

Christian imagery has played an enormous hand in our understanding of both culture and history in the West. In the Americas, Christ has been so far removed from his original historical context as a brown man that the dominant perception is not only to depict Christ as a White, cisgender male, but also to believe he is one.⁴⁵ As Ruben Rosario Rodriguez points out, “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.”⁴⁶ Although he writes specifically about the racial dynamics of the United States, the racism within Christianity is also prevalent in the Americas.

As a symbol, the Black Christ represents the dismantling of our previous conceived images of Christ, especially those that have shackled him within Whiteness. A Black Christ might only evoke alarm and disgust to an individual who has never conceptualized Christ as a race other than European, regardless of his historical identity as a Palestinian man. The explicit context of the Black Christ’s color change ignites a flame within us to act against injustice. It is also a devotion that speaks eloquently of our liberation from the shackles of racism. A revelatory experience

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14

⁴⁵ Ibid., 51

⁴⁶ Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective*, 42

occurs to those who perceive him, intent on revealing to us a deeper truth: we are equal in our humanity and we should never be persecuted for 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. Some three hundred years have passed, and yet, the Christian community of Daule continues to 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 freedom and liberation through him. There is no doubt that his image accompanies the poor of color in Daule.

González-Andrieu, explains that “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.”⁴⁷ 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 and usher in social change.

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.”⁴⁸ Yet, this image is far from merely illustrative. The Black Christ is deliberate in his political message, accessible to the oppressed, and the representation of this cry of resistance by Afro-Ecuadorians. His legend and his image go hand in hand, wrestling with the injustices of racism and subjugation in Ecuadorian society. In reply to the cruel mistreatment of another human being, he resolves the source of our violence in a single

⁴⁷ Cecilia González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty*, 25

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 50

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.”⁴⁹ These legends and the Christ’s image are then indeed prophetic for us. We are compelled to care about a suffering Savior who is, without question, Black.

The Black Christ not only subverted the dominant racial hierarchy of the *casta* system through his color, but even today, he evokes *asombro* from us. *Asombro*, which translates to astonishment or amazement, calls us to relinquish our “illusion of control and omnipotence.”⁵⁰ We are filled with an awe that calls us to “wake up and see,” just as Isidro’s blindness was cured. A Black Christ fills us with *asombro* because he has challenged our subconscious understanding of Christ as a White man and a White savior. Instead, the blackness of Christ tells us a revelatory truth: that God will always stand alongside the vulnerable, and that he intimately exists everywhere around us, asking us to respond. Whether or not we do reply lies in the palms of our own hands.

It is true that there are a number of Black Christ’s throughout Latin America. One of the more popular names includes El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas. However, the Black Christ of Daule and his color are unique to 17th Century Ecuador. Rather than turning Black by years of smoke exposure or from candlelight, or any number of magical transformations, this change in color is deliberate, political, and racial. His Blackness is racial, not merely phenotypical. Although the Black Christ of Daule could be used to argue that Christ exists ‘beyond ’race, it is vital to understand the necessity of the racial context of this legend that does not exist in the narratives of other Black Christs. Race *does* matter here. Race was used as a justification to oppress and mutilate

⁴⁹ Ibid., 36

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40

in 17th Century Ecuador, and continues to be used throughout the Americas to incarcerate and discriminate against people of color. By changing his color and therefore his race, the Black Christ subverts not only the racial hierarchy of the Spanish *casta* system, but also the various social-political systems that benefitted from slavery.

The White Christ of Colonization

In the early history of the United States, the White Christ was used as an agent of “slave Christianity,” an “instrument of control to convince Blacks that their racial inferiority was divine mandate.”⁵¹ In the hands of the dominant White oppressors, Christ was made into an idol of whiteness that was then used to subjugate Black people in the U.S.

Although the experiences of slavery in the United States and in South America are different, the subjugation of Afrodescendants under a White Christ is shared. 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 both in North and South America. “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.”⁵² Thus, we see how strong of a statement the miraculous transformation of The Black Christ is, not only for a racially charged Ecuador— but also for Catholic understanding of Christ as a whole. For White Christians, the image will challenge many internal biases that have historically been reinforced by those in power. For Black Christians, to envision Christ as a Black man is imperative to self-revelation and prophetic understanding. 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

⁵¹ Jawanza Eric Clarke, *Albert Cleage Jr. and the Black Madonna and Child*, 9

⁵² *Ibid.*, 165

must put down this White Jesus which the White man gave us in slavery and which has been tearing us to pieces.⁵³

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. Although Christ was a dark skinned Palestinian Jew, the nature of Christ extends beyond the historical man Jesus, and transforms throughout history to enter into communion with us. Not only do we receive prophetic revelation through this Black Christ, 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.”⁵⁴ Yet, here Christ has become a Black man not only to make a point, but to demand justice and express divine love. The image of Christ as White, when he was in actuality a Palestinian man, is fundamentally harmful towards people of color.

The idolization of a White Christ continues to keep Christians trapped in ‘spiritual bondage,’ regardless of their own racial or ethnic identities. Cleage Jr notes that “it is only necessary to mention Jesus’ blackness as an act of resistance in a society that overvalues White identity or whiteness, by privileging it and conferring power over all racial identities.”⁵⁵ In a society that oppressed and abused enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians, Christ takes a stand to deliberately show his solidarity with them. A White statue or image of Christ is not in itself an idol. However, a White Christ becomes an idol when his Whiteness is used as a tool to oppress people of color. Dismantling our understanding of race within Christology and the idea that Christ is one particular race is necessary to avoid idolatry and abuse of his image.

In this section, I have explored the significance of imagery and the messages this imagery can convey. Christian imagery has directly impacted not only Western artistic depictions of

⁵³ Ibid., 3

⁵⁴ Ibid., 180

⁵⁵ Ibid., 5

significant religious figures such as Jesus and Mary, but has simultaneously used these images to maintain a status quo in which Whiteness dominates over all others. Visually, the Black Christ replies to this abuse and subverts it through the combined associations of both Jesus Christ as a Messiah and Jesus Christ as an enslaved Black man. This *asombro* we experience is the direct release of our spiritual illusions because this image challenges a dominant narrative we have been spoon fed, even unintentionally, by the overwhelming White majority of Christian art. It is only after unpacking Christ from this cage of Whiteness that we can truly achieve self-revelation as people of color. Additionally, it is only after this same unpacking that White Christians can also achieve a more full understanding of themselves and their faiths.

V. Prioritization of Whiteness in Contemporary Ecuador

In this section, I will explore the complexities of race and ethnicity in contemporary Ecuador. Although echoes of the *casta* system continue to exist within Ecuadorian society, ethnicity is significantly more nuanced in Ecuador and is subject to change. I challenge the category of “race” in its entirety, identifying it as a social construction used to categorize human beings. Despite this, Ecuadorians are frequently categorized and identified by various factors in society: phenotypical appearance, language, education, mannerisms, social class, financial status, and even geographic region. There have been attempts to homogenize Ecuador under one unified national identity as Mestizos, at the heavy cost of ignoring the inequalities experienced by Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians. These social hierarchies have been directly impacted and created around the echoes of the *casta* system, continuing to impact the treatment of Ecuadorian citizens in the 21st century.

The Double-Edged Sword called Mestizaje

Although the *casta* system is no longer enforced officially on a societal level, the echoes of the hierarchy continue to define Ecuadorian contemporary society. This can be seen even within the attempt to homogenize Ecuadorian ethnic groups through the concept of “mestizaje”. According to Nestor Medina, the concept of “mestizaje” originally “functioned as a catalyst for appreciating the amalgam of indigenous, Spanish, and African elements in their diverse religious expressions.”⁵⁶ It has been understood in both positive and negative lights throughout Latin America, particularly in U.S Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). In some Latin American countries such as Mexico, mestizaje can be understood as an ethnic identity independent from that of the categories Spanish and Indigenous, and can also be associated with great pride.

In Ecuador, mestizaje was used to identify the intermixture of Spanish, Indigenous, and African. But more notably, the rhetoric of mestizaje was appropriated directly by the Ecuadorian government in an attempt to homogenize the country into one national “hybrid” identity. Rosario Rodriguez notes that race in itself “does not refer to any singular identifying trait, but encompasses such diverse factors such as national origin, skin color, cultural traditions, and familial bloodlines.”⁵⁷ Race as we understand it in Latin America is determined and influenced by these countless factors, making identities fluid and dependent on any number of factors. Thus, Ecuador’s attempt to unify countless racial and ethnic groups under the label ‘mixed’ is insufficient. Simultaneously, this homogenization established a disparity in power amongst various ethnicities within the *casta* system.

Mestizos, suddenly the majority ethnic group in Ecuador post-colonization, were viewed as a means of unifying the country through their ethnic ambiguity. However, the continued

⁵⁶ Nestor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism*, 21

⁵⁷ Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective*, 25

prioritization of Spanish heritage and phenotypical appearance continued regardless, becoming the deciding factor of one's worth in society. For an individual to be mestizo, they would be identified as a mix of Spanish and Indigenous. Arguably, Ecuadorian society both during Spanish occupation and today continue to favor European culture, language, and phenotypical features. As Nestor Medina points out,

Mestizaje is a very fluid, ambiguous, and porous category. The people most subject to racism and discrimination are those who display certain sociocultural and phenotypical characteristics by which they are identified as indigenous and/or African descendants, regardless of the "degree" to which they are mixed. The opposite is also true: people whose physical features are more European often identify themselves as white and reject any connection to indigenous or African ancestry, or to mestizaje.⁵⁸

Rather than focusing on one's individual heritage, phenotypical appearance becomes the starting point for the categorization of the social bodies of Ecuadorians. Ecuadorians are oppressed racially to the extent that they appear phenotypically Indigenous or African, regardless of their "biological" makeup. Colorism, the discrimination against those with darker skin tones even within the same ethnicity, is prevalent. It is also worthy of note that the identification of an individual can vary from generation to generation, with a parent identifying in one way and the child in another, which can even cause unrest within an Ecuadorian household. By focusing on the intermixture of "Mestizaje" as a national identity but simultaneously prioritizing Spanish-European appearance, culture, and language, Indigenous Ecuadorians and Afroecuadorians are significantly excluded from Ecuadorian society and national unity.

Acculturation into "mestizaje" also became a means of social mobility for the Indigenous people of Ecuador. An Indigenous person could claim a mestizo identity in order reap benefits and opportunities restricted to mestizos, but at the cost of relinquishing the cultural markers of their Indigenous heritage. This relinquishment could include an Indigenous person's clothing, hairstyle,

⁵⁸ Nestor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* 116

language, geographic region, religion, and so on. Roitman explains that new terminology emerged in order to describe Indigenous people who adopted non-Indigenous identity markers in order to claim a mestizo identity. Indigenous people “who appropriated Spanish dress and custom were termed ‘peinadillos ’(referring to a change in hair style) in the sixteenth century.”⁵⁹ An understanding of race *as* ethnicity emerged in direct result of this acculturation.

“Language, dress, and other social customs could ‘make a mestizo from an Indian ’or make ‘an Indian into a mestizo,’”⁶⁰ says Roitman. An Indigenous person could abandon their clothing and language in order to become “mestizo,” in the hopes of integrating into society for benefits not previously allotted to them because of their Indigeneity. The ethnicities of the upper elites or “la gente buena” in Ecuador align strongly with Spanish culture and society, but this does not *exclusively* mean a particular phenotypical appearance. A mestizo could attempt to join “la gente buena” if they received the proper education, manners, and social standing necessary to do so, but this remains difficult for individuals phenotypically presenting as Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian citizens.

Assimilation into Spanish Culture for Social Mobility

In Ecuador’s case, the clear power disparity between the Indigenous and the Spanish created a societal preference for those perceived to be ‘more Spanish ’be it culturally, ethnically, phenotypically, or linguistically. By “defining who is or is not mestizo, a state built on the idea of a mestizo identity, like Ecuador, can either exclude parts of its population from full civic participation or muffle unrest under an apparently all-encompassing umbrella, even if it also promulgates the maintenance of essentialized non-mestizo identities.”⁶¹ Indigenous and Afro-

⁵⁹ Karem Roitman, *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in Ecuador: The Manipulation of “Mestizaje”*, 97

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 101

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 57

Ecuadorians are often subsequently pushed to the margins, if they are acknowledged at all. Simultaneously these marginalized groups are then perceived as direct threats to the homogeneousness of mestizaje in Ecuador, and are especially threatening to Whites and White-Mestizos.

Roitman also explains that the white-mestizo population in Ecuador “has maintained its cultural, social, and [general] economic power by defining acculturation as the road to progress, and themselves as the models whom others should emulate.”⁶² The only means for an Indigenous person to achieve acculturation into a Mestizo identity is to relinquish their cultural markers. This is not unlike “successful integration into mainstream U.S culture,” which is “achieved only by sacrificing ethnic and cultural identity.”⁶³ Like the “re-education” of Native Americans in the United States, this colonial propaganda of the savage Indian becoming “civilized” or “peinadillos” (“those who comb their hair”) is an agent of White supremacy that transcends borders. And unlike the Indigenous Ecuadorians who to some degree may have success becoming “peinadillos,” Afro-Ecuadorians find no similar opportunity for mobility on a social, political, or economic level.

Because Ecuadorian society prioritizes Spanish-European culture, language, and dress, the Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians who did not comply were simultaneously painted as “fearsome beings— as possible assailants threatening the order of the new state.”⁶⁴ The Spanish debated whether or not the Indigenous needed aid or punishment in order to become civilized, harmless laborers. Both of these views can “be found in the nineteenth-century debate over whether ‘dangerous Indians, ’who might attack villages, rape, and pillage, were best civilized within or outside *concertajes*.”⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., 2

⁶³ Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective*, 64

⁶⁴ Karem Roitman, *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in Ecuador: The Manipulation of “Mestizaje”* 17

⁶⁵ Ibid., 17

Even during Indigenous mobilization for inclusion, very rarely were the lower *castas* permitted to represent themselves politically within society, or to present demands themselves. Instead, “ventriloquists” of the upper classes did so on their behalf. In the 16th and 17th century, the Indigenous and Black populations began to work together in order to form strategic alliances for survival and resistance against conquest and colonization of the Spanish.⁶⁶ This unification was perceived as an explicit threat to the homogenous mestizaje of dominant Ecuadorian society, perpetuating Spanish Supremacy.

In this section, we have explored the use of the rhetoric surrounding mestizaje and how Ecuador has historically used it in an attempt to unify the country under one ethnic identity. However, this has occurred to the detriment of Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian populations, who are pushed away Mestizo identification. Only by deliberately relinquishing their Indigenous culture can an *indio* become a *mestizo* for better educational, financial, and social opportunities. Unable to receive these benefits through the means of assimilation, Afro-Ecuadorians become subjected to the *Mejorando la raza* rhetoric. Only by marrying individuals of lighter complexions and producing lighter offspring can this same social mobility be achieved, deliberately participating in the blanqueamiento of one’s descendants.

VI. The Invisible Citizens: Afro-Ecuadorians and Exclusion from Mestizaje

In this section, I will explore the current cultural and political status of Afro-Ecuadorians in Ecuador. Called “The Invisible Citizens,” Afro-Ecuadorians are often dismissed as foreigners even after living in Ecuador for generations. Although Afro-Ecuadorians are known for their contributions to Ecuador’s regional music as well as Ecuador’s soccer teams. they are continually

⁶⁶ John Anton Sanchez, *Religiosidad Afroecuatoriana*, 34

discriminated against within society. Thus, the legend of the Black Christ of Daule and his message has not faded from relevance. Instead, this section highlights the continued inequalities and injustices experienced by the Afrodescendants of Ecuador.

As a result of Ecuador stressing its mestizo identity as a country and placing such emphasis on the mixture between the Spanish and the Indigenous (prioritizing the European-Spanish qualities), little to no room is left for the Afro-Ecuadorian population in terms of national unity. Historically speaking the Afro-Ecuadorian population has received little attention and aid from the government, while simultaneously enduring horrible stereotypes regarding their race/ethnicity. The Ecuadorian understanding of mestizaje has time and time again excluded the presence of Afro-Ecuadorians entirely. Unlike their Indigenous counterparts who were deceitfully promised acculturation through integration into the mestizaje, there is no means for an Afro-Ecuadorian to integrate into Ecuadorian society in the same way. The only true means to do so as an Afro-Ecuadorian is the blanqueamiento, the literal phenotypical whitening that occurs generation by generation. By marrying phenotypically lighter Ecuadorians, the “stain” of blackness can be “whitened” to achieve a mestizo or White-mestizo identity for one’s descendants. Afro-Ecuadorians themselves are merely cast aside as foreign, not only from “la gente buena,” but often from an Ecuadorian identity as a whole.

Afro-Ecuadorian slavery was abolished in 1852 by General José María Urbína, but this did little to ease the inequity that the Afro-Ecuadorians faced in Ecuador. Despite their newfound legal freedom, many slave owners delayed releasing their captives. If they were freed, the Afro-Ecuadorians who had been enslaved were not permitted to receive titles of the lands they had worked for generations. As a result the Afro-Ecuadorian population was “consequently plunged into a state of chronic poverty as they faced ethnic/racial discrimination with few economic or

educational resources. At present Ecuador's Afro-Ecuadorian population is disproportionately affected by poverty and violence."⁶⁷

Historically, Afro-Ecuadorians have only been identified by the government to the extent that they are different from the Indigenous people. They have often been cited as examples of how the Indigenous people should or should not behave. Afro-Ecuadorians are therefore not mestizo and not white, and are also excluded from indigenous identity.⁶⁸ Rahier notes, "In this [mestizo] imagination of Ecuadorianness, there is logically no place for blacks; they remain invisible. Afro-Ecuadorians constitute the ultimate Other, some sort of a historical aberration, a noise in the ideological systems of nationality, a pollution in the genetic pool, the only true alien, the "non-citizen" par excellence; they are not part of mestizaje."⁶⁹

Although previously dismissed as an invisible minority, Afro-Ecuadorians are now receiving more attention in the 21st Century. Afro-Ecuadorians are present throughout the country especially in Guayaquil and Quito, and their presence in numbers can no longer be ignored within the country. However, as Rahier explains, the migration of Afro-Ecuadorians to larger cities "continues to be seen as a threat even when they are moving up in the socioeconomic ladder and do not act according to racist stereotypes."⁷⁰ Even when they are deliberately presenting themselves as different from the common racial stereotypes against Black people in Ecuador, they are subjected to racism and ostracized nonetheless.

Jean Rahier reflects upon his experience as an Afro-European man in Ecuador by saying,

"On numerous occasions in Quito, white, white-mestizo, and mestizo people, after learning about my Afro-Ecuadorianist research interest, spontaneously shared with me their negative views of Ecuadorian blacks. They described them as an

⁶⁷ Ibid., 111

⁶⁸ Ibid., 110

⁶⁹ Ibid., 109

⁷⁰ Jean Muteba Rahier, *Blackness in the Andes: Ethnographic Vignettes of Cultural Politics in the Time of Multiculturalism*, 122

uncivilized people living in remote areas outside of the scope of modernity, where hot climates gave shape to their innate laziness and violence, which they bring with them when they migrate. They did so without ever thinking that I might be offended. The idea that I, a black person from the “developed world,” could identify with Ecuadorian blacks never entered their minds. Such an identification was simply not probable since, in their scale of cultural respectability, what they saw as my “Europeanness” seemingly erased (most of) my blackness. When I pointed out that I did identify as a black person, they invariably responded, sometimes interrupting me, saying that perhaps I was black, but I was a “fine black” (*un negro fino*), an “educated black.” “Como así se va a comparar con esta gente pués?” (How can you compare yourself with these people?) they asked. The way they associated me with Europe was a powerful source of privilege and prestige.”⁷¹

Rahier experienced first hand Ecuadorian understanding of race, ethnicity, and social mobility provided by European education and culture. Despite his phenotypical appearance as a Black man, his European education and status weigh more. So much more that he was immediately considered different than Afro-Ecuadorians. Colorist rhetoric is so prevalent in Ecuadorian news broadcasts and newspapers that Rahier notes, “racial identification is mentioned only when the criminals are black and the victims are nonblacks. When the ethnic or racial identity of a person involved in a crime is mentioned, it is always a black (*moreno*, *raza morena*, *persona de color*, and so forth) and he is always the aggressor, the criminal, the beast, or the savage.”⁷²

Afro-Ecuadorians in the 21st century continue to experience discrimination based on their race. They are often rejected from housing by those who do not wish to rent to Black people, they are denied particular job opportunities which may require them to be in public eye, and they often receive less education than their Mestizo and White counterparts. There continue to be geographic areas, restaurants, bars, and schools in which Afro-Ecuadorians are not welcome. Afro-Ecuadorians continue to be subjected to racial stereotypes that portray them as violent, dangerous, and uneducated. Black immigration into major cities such as Quito and Guayaquil are “described

⁷¹ Ibid., 122-123

⁷² Ibid., 125

as a calamity, a plague that dangerously “attacks” the city and civilization at large. Blackness means “naturally bad.” It is even more negatively viewed when it does not stay in its “places.”⁷³ The rejection of the presence of Afro-Ecuadorians is so prevalent in Ecuador that in 1995, when a black woman born in Quito was elected Miss Ecuador, the country erupted in disbelief. “¿*Como así una mujer negra va a representar al Ecuador?* (How can a black woman represent Ecuador?).... This position was until then exclusively occupied by young women whose racial identity and physical features could unequivocally celebrate white-mestizonez as the standard of beauty, in accordance with the still hegemonic ideology of mestizaje.”⁷⁴

Like Black people in the U.S, Afro-Ecuadorians are frequently abused by the dominant oppressors of society. They are denied job and education opportunities, housing, and often villainized by the colorist rhetoric of Ecuadorian media. In opportunities when Afro-Ecuadorians are highlighted for their contributions or talents, such as the Miss Ecuador pageant, they are undermined solely for their phenotypical appearance. Their “Ecuadorianness” is questioned, rejected, and their humanity is denied. Thus, the racism and oppression that birthed the legend of the Black Christ of Daule continues to exist today and is directly experienced by the descendants of the enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians of the 17th Century.

VII. Revelation from the Black Christ Today

Three hundred years have passed since the miraculous color change of the Black Christ of Daule. Only one hundred and seventy years have passed since slavery was made illegal in Ecuador. However, this has not ended the oppression experienced by Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians. The Black Christ of Daule and the message he conveys through his revelatory image have not spread

⁷³ Ibid., 127

⁷⁴ Ibid., 129

into practice within Ecuadorian society. Afro-Ecuadorians, although no longer enslaved, continue to be subjected to the racism, violence, and poverty. The Spanish *casta* system has left its echoes on the understandings of race and ethnicity in South America, echoes that continue to concretely define the lives of Ecuadorians of color.

The message of unity, equality, and liberation found within the Black Christ is still just as relevant and important today as it was hundreds of years ago. Like Afro-Ecuadorians, Indigenous people are also still portrayed as “threatening to take over cities” and needing “to be controlled and contained.”⁷⁵ Without even realizing, the White Christ of Colonization continues to keep Ecuador and its people in a chokehold. The still existing preference for European features, education, language, and culture creates a dangerous and hostile social environment for Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians. Indigenous Ecuadorians have historically been forced to relinquish their cultural identities in order to achieve social mobility, while simultaneously experiencing oppression at the hands of the White Spanish and White-Mestizos. Afro-Ecuadorians, who rejected entirely from the concept of *mestizaje*, are subjected to racism on social, political, and economic levels. For the Afro-Ecuadorians who have internalized this hatred for themselves and their skin color, the only “solution” for them is the *blanqueamiento*. A deliberate whitening of one’s descendants by marrying phenotypically lighter Ecuadorians, in order to provide the social mobility they themselves were not allotted. Ultimately, both of these “solutions” are illusions of integration into an oppressive power system that should not exist in the first place. The Spanish supremacy that is so prevalent within Ecuadorian society continues to hold Ecuadorians in bondage to a social construct that continuously prioritizes a White elite over all else.

⁷⁵ Karem Roitman, *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in Ecuador: The Manipulation of “Mestizaje”* 22

This trap is one that has been symbolically overturned by the Black Christ of Daule in a period of racial inequality that has only changed form today. In his image, in his story of solidarity with a Black slave, Christ incarnates into a period of oppression in Ecuador to show us the light. By removing the illusion of race before our eyes, there is opportunity for us to move beyond our interpretations of race and ethnicity. Ultimately, the story of the Black Christ lacks the agency needed to create and usher in social change. Only those inspired by the narrative can seek to undo the years of oppression and suffering created by the categorizations of human beings. However, understanding this equality of humanity is not enough. This revelation by the Black Christ only takes us so far. His story and image are the divine spark of inspiration within us that demand we act and fight for justice in the face of oppression. But, a hopeful Ecuadorian future in which true equality is found amongst racial and ethnic groups must be fought for every single day. It is a reality built by concrete actions that create political change in society. The Black Christ of Daule can point us to the shared revelation we experience with other embodied human beings, but we must choose to do the rest.

VIII. Conclusions

In this paper, I have deeply explored the Legend of the Black Christ of Daule. I provided the social context of colonized Ecuador and the enslavement of Afro-Ecuadorians in the 17th century, in order to help us better understand why the Black Christ's miracle was necessary in the first place. In love and in solidarity with the most vulnerable of 17th Century Ecuadorian society, Christ deliberately changes his color to provide a divine revelation to the immediate Christian community. In this legend Christ affirms that he exists within the cry of the oppressed, and that he suffers intimately with them. He is the source of their spiritual and physical liberation. But, the

miracle alone is not enough. Rather, social change sparked by the miracle is the true testament to Christ's message. To truly live in accordance with his teachings, the whip and the Gospel are not compatible.

Racism continues to be prevalent in Ecuador, even despite the fluidity of race and ethnicity that exists there. The Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian populations of Ecuador are subjected to significantly higher rates of violence, poverty, and disease than their Mestizo and White counterparts. Although slavery was outlawed in 1852, these vulnerable populations of color continue to be ostracized, discriminated against, and oppressed. The Whiteness of Christ was used as a tool of imperial colonization to keep Ecuadorians of color subservient to their European oppressors. This standard of Whiteness, which has become an idol for "la gente buena" of Ecuador, is so prevalent in the lives of Ecuadorians that even my own has been defined by the blanqueamiento. My abuelita relinquished her farming montubio culture to integrate into the life of Ecuadorian cities, and remarks often how deeply she misses it. My abuelito, driven to succeed, encouraged his children to marry European men and provide the social mobility for us that he himself had fought desperately for.

If we are to truly hear and accept the message of the Black Christ of Daule, we must live it in all aspects of our lives. Not only in the way in which we treat others, but also the ways in which we treat ourselves. The only way to do so is to speak out against injustice wherever we may find it, even the small injustices we dismiss within ourselves. By confining Christ to Whiteness, we place him and ourselves into spiritual bondage, never to truly understand the all-encompassing nature of God's love for humanity. An exclusively White Christ is not only harmful to people of color, but even to White people themselves. The Black Christ of Daule points out this inequity to us, demands we do better, and hope that through his devotion we slowly create a better society

whether that is here in the United States or in Ecuador. In this paper I argued that the White Christ of Colonization lent “theological” support for social, racial, and colonial hierarchies of the Spanish. Against this theological distortion, the Black Christ comes to subvert not only this dominant image of Christ and its oppression, but also points us in the direction of true liberation in God.

IX. Glossary

Afrodescendants/afrodescendientes— Used to refer to the descendants of African slaves who arrived in Ecuador during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

Afro-Ecuadorian— Afrodescendants of Ecuadorian citizenship/nationality. In Ecuador they are also called Blacks and Mulattoes.

Elites/Upper Classes— The upper socioeconomic group of society. “Most specifically, for the case of Ecuador, this term refers to a social group largely descending from colonial land-owners, whose families have historically benefited from social prestige as well as social, cultural, economic, and political influence.”⁷⁶

Ethnicity— Sociocultural characteristics distinguishing one cultural group from another in Ecuador

Indigenous — Used as an umbrella term after Spanish colonization to identify the various ethnic groups/cultures of Ecuador, which consisted of countless individual and unique tribes.

Mestizo— An individual of mixed Spanish/European and Indigenous heritage. According to the 2001 Census, over 70% of Ecuadorians identify as Mestizo.⁷⁷

Mestizaje— The process of mixture between races, specifically Indigenous and Spanish. It is also used by the state to proselytize national unity, to the detriment and erasure of Indigenous and Black populations in Ecuador. In Ecuador, Mestizaje is also a method of social mobility that demands the relinquishment of Indigenous or Black culture from the individual.

Mulatto— An individual of mixed Spanish/European and Black descent.

⁷⁶ Jeffrey Roitman, *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in Ecuador: The Manipulation of “Mestizaje”*, xv

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, xv

Race— Physical characteristics that separate humanity into sub-species

“The Good Folk”/“La Gente Buena”— Used to refer to the elites/upper classes of Ecuadorian society, especially those of Spanish descent, but not always. “Traditional” elites descended from wealthy land-owners are considered separate from “modern” elites, who can vary greatly in material wealth, social manners and etiquette, phenotypical appearance, and cultural heritage.

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