

Where did Jesus Go?  
The Black Christ of Esquipulas

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José Milla, the renowned nineteenth-century Guatemalan novelist, dabbled with a bit of theology through his fallen character, el señor don Juan de Palomeque y Vargas, in his 1867 novel, Los Nazarenos. Palomeque bargained with the “Lord of Esquipulas”, the sixteenth-century image of the Crucified Christ in order to regain his sight now lost to old age and a progressive disease. Milla described how Palomeque journeyed to Esquipulas and, in penitent form, crawled on his knees and placed a gold chain on the feet of the sacred image and begged for the clarity of vision he once enjoyed. Immediately, the malcontent Palomeque experienced a miracle and regained his precious sight. However, Palomeque abused his experience of grace by thanking his gold chain in a cynical tone for his recovered sight and not the power represented by the shrine. Instantly, darkness covered the eyes of the depraved protagonist.<sup>1</sup>

José Milla presents a concise picture of the Guatemalan theological landscape in mid-nineteenth century through Palomeque’s blessing and curse. Milla appealed to the power of the image of the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas to pass judgment on his aristocratic Palomeque. Milla drew on an unmeasured reservoir of devotion to the “Crucified Lord of Esquipulas” in his portrayal of the providential judgment of God on the ordinary actions of his fellow Guatemalans. The fool Palomeque had violated the sacred pact he had made with his precious gift to the image of Jesus of Nazareth. In familiar terms to his nineteenth century readers, Palomeque had broken his covenant with the Almighty and deserved his blinded state.<sup>2</sup>

Palomeque’s travail encapsulates how clerics and laity constructed meaning during the years of conservative dominance in Guatemala. Milla’s prose emerged during the few years remaining of a political order that had brought a certain stability to the anarchic years first experienced after Independence from Spain. Rafael Carrera, the mestizo caudillo from the eastern Guatemalan town of Mataquescuintla, rose on the power of mass discontent with a classic liberal regime that had arbitrarily given land away to foreign colonizers, had harassed leaders and common priests of the Catholic church, and had imposed quarantines during the fearful cholera epidemic in 1837. The secularizing power of the State in Guatemala City had provoked the wrath of Guatemala’s eastern inhabitants, and Carrera cultivated that political fury to gain power by military force in 1839.

For the next thirty two years, Carrera and allies would forge a certain political stability. From the early 1850s until the death of the caudillo in 1865, the political chaos of Guatemala subsided and the economy rebounded during the latter years of the

cochineal boom and the first years of coffee's introduction. The Catholic church regained a certain prominence during the conservative years as clerics and faithful, especially Spanish-speaking mestizos (ladinos) from eastern Guatemala followed prominent rural clerics to support the Carrera regime from internal and external threats. Strong evidence suggests that a theological discourse emanated from churches in the capital and countryside that affirmed that God had chosen Guatemala as His own. Like Israel, if the people of Guatemala obeyed and protected the Church, then God would continue to grant them peace and prosperity. If they disobeyed, God would certainly punish. Even José Milla proclaimed that Guatemala's journey mirrored Israel's flight from captivity in Egypt in a 1846 speech. Catholic discourse during the conservative years coalesced in and through these events to create a sense of nation, especially among the inhabitants of the capital and ladinos in eastern Guatemala.<sup>3</sup>

Historians still have not ascertained to what degree devotion to the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas, or in twentieth-century vernacular, the "Black Christ", played during this vivacious struggle over politics, national identity, and religiosity during the Carrera years. Except for Milla's literary reference, the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas never assumed a prominent role in sermons during the conservative era. The religious identity constructed by Catholic clerics in Guatemala created a sense of uniqueness based on events that favored "Guatemala", not on a particular shrine held in honor by most. In the eyes of these religious interpreters, Independence came without bloodshed; factious civil wars declined as Guatemalans revered their religion; Guatemalan troops expelled the Protestant invasion of William Walker in concert with other troops; and Carrera's forces liberated the Salvadorans and their church from their liberal oppressors in 1863. Thus, Guatemala's "story" paralleled Israel's story: their journey from captivity to liberation depended upon Guatemala's loyalty to the divine agreement.

In contrast to Guatemala, religious and political leaders in Mexico assigned the Virgin of Guadalupe a central role in the making of a national identity. With roots in the mid-seventeenth century, urban clerics and Creoles looked to the brown-skinned representation of the Mother of Jesus as a crucial story in the making of the nation. According to some witnesses, Hidalgo appealed to the Virgin of Guadalupe to protect his rebels and justify his cause. The retelling of Mexican history included the holy shawl as an integral part of the Independence movement and proved unique to Mexican religious identity.<sup>4</sup>

A lacuna of evidence haunts the historian of the nineteenth century in Guatemala in the search for the Jesus of Esquipulas. Save for Milla's literary insight, few references highlight devotion to the Christ of Esquipulas during the first seven decades of the nineteenth century. Writing in 1829, the cleric Miguel Muñoz, interim cleric of the Esquipulas parish, lamented that the laudable custom of pilgrimages and processions to the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas "had disappeared among whites while only the Indians remained faithful to tradition." Muñoz also added that faithful attended to the homage and pilgrimage of the shrine between January 6 and 15th of each year.<sup>5</sup> Around 1840, during first years of Carrera's dominance, a second annual pilgrimage commenced during

Holy Week. Citing no evidence, the priest of Esquipulas, Juan Paz Solórzano, curiously concluded in 1914 that the second fiesta grew out of economic necessity given the growing importance of Esquipulas' commercial centrality to the Republics of El Salvador and Honduras.<sup>6</sup> His economically-determined conclusion conflicts with one drawn from a more important struggle advocated by Carrera. As part of his popular insurrectionary platform, Carrera had promised to give back to the people their religion and protect their customs. The caudillo's demands conflicted with the Guatemalan Vicar General's written wishes to Rome to reduce the number of fiestas in Guatemala, a wish Rome granted and provoked the ire of the popular military leader.<sup>7</sup> One can easily surmise that "the people" took advantage of Carrera's political victory and expanded their devotion from the celebration of Epiphany to the week of Easter.

Sermons emanating predominantly from the capital, correspondence from eastern Guatemala during the Carrera years, and pastoral visits by the Archbishop and his entourage hardly mention the popularity or problems with the sacred image of Esquipulas.<sup>8</sup> Isolated anecdotes give witness to the regional power of the holy shrine in this difficult period. Jesús María Gutiérrez served the parish of Esquipulas for almost twenty-five years and favorably impressed the traveling U.S. diplomat, John Lloyd Stephens in 1839. The North American admired how Gutiérrez devoted himself to the people under his charge. Stephens also described the attendees of the famed Esquipulas church.

The church for everyday use was directly opposite the convent, spacious and gloomy, and the floor was paved with large square bricks or tiles. Rows of Indian women were kneeling around the altar, cleanly dressed, with white mantillas over their heads, but without shoes or stockings. A few men stood up behind or leaned against the walls.

We returned to breakfast, and afterward set out to visit the only object of interest, the great church of the pilgrimage, the Holy Place of Central America. Every year, on the fifteenth of Jerusalem, pilgrims visit it, even from Peru and Mexico; the latter being a journey not exceeded in hardship by the pilgrimage to Mecca. As in the East, "it is not forbidden to trade during the pilgrimage;" and when there are no wars to make the roads unsafe, eighty thousand people have assembled among the mountains to barter and pay homage to "Our Lord of Esquipulas."<sup>9</sup>

Stephens noted that "in front of the altar, in a rich shrine, is an image of the Saviour on the cross, 'our Lord of Esquipulas,' to whom the church is consecrated, famed for its power of working miracles." Usually given to vivacious portraits of landscapes and people, Stephens modestly bypassed the ornately darkened and passionate figure of the Christ. Instead, Stephens noted that "every year thousands of devotees ascend the steps of his temple on their knees, or laden with a heavy cross, who are not permitted to touch the sacred image, but go away contented in obtaining a piece of riband stamped with the words, 'Dulce nombre de Jesus.'"<sup>10</sup>

According to Ralph Lee Woodward, Rafael Carrera made at least two prominent visits to the holy shrine at Esquipulas. In December 1845, Carrera visited the eastern region to quell disturbances and pay a visit to the shrine; and in 1853, Carrera accompanied Archbishop Francisco García Peláez to Esquipulas. Finally, Woodward noted, officials held the January fiesta celebrating Epiphany in 1858 in Esquipulas after the great 1857 cholera epidemic. People from Honduras and El Salvador joined in as the commercially important city attracted many for the religious celebration.<sup>11</sup>

Thousands made holy pilgrimage to “our Lord of Esquipulas”, as Stephens and others asserted, yet, the shrine assumed marginal prominence within the writing and correspondence of Guatemalan clerics in the capital city and in the countryside during the Carrera period. A religious identity of the nation did not necessarily include the shrine at Esquipulas. Some might be quick to argue that the elite dimension of the archives, those who write make the history, explains the dearth of reference. Geographical features and historic considerations explain the near absence of the “Lord of Esquipulas” in the growing narrative of Guatemalan Catholics in the nineteenth century. Devotion to the shrine transcended in limited fashion the local boundaries of Esquipulas.

Located in the far eastern corner of Guatemala, the town of Esquipulas serves as a principal border town to both Honduras and El Salvador. Whereas the Virgin of Guadalupe resided within the colonial and national circumference of Mexico City, the patron saint of Esquipulas transcended the immediate nineteenth-century borders of the Central American nations, and did not lend itself to the creation of a religiously-inspired national or Central American identity. Aware of its peripheral location, and perhaps sensitive to the issue at hand, parish priests recorded the legend that Providence intervened to block the attempt to move the sacred image of Esquipulas to the capital city of Guatemala. A torrential downpour prevented the sacred image of the Crucified Christ from leaving, and the faithful interpreted the deluge as Divine will protesting such a move.<sup>12</sup>

Church cordilleras, or chain letters, sent by the capital hierarchy evidence the geographical impediments which enhanced the distance between Esquipulas and Guatemala City. Significant mountains and rivers surrounded the famed city, and combined with human slothfulness and unrest, correspondence directed to the isolated region of Esquipulas arrived much later.<sup>13</sup> Cordilleras directed to the parish of Esquipulas from the ecclesiastic headquarters in Guatemala City regularly required the same time period for the same circular directed to the western highlands. A circular concerning the reinstatement of tithes in August 1841 arrived in Esquipulas two days later than the same circular sent to Huehuetenango. A similar chain letter sent in 1845 to the vicariate of Quezaltenango made the rounds in one month while the same letter sent to the vicariate of Chiquimula required two months to make the rounds to various clergy.<sup>14</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas began to feature prominently in the religious identity of the Guatemalan Catholic church. With the natural death of Carrera in 1865 and the collapse of the conservative regime to the Winchesters and Remingtons of its liberal opponents, the Catholic church suffered a

new round of public pressure and harassment. The growth captured during the Carrera years quickly diminished as the Barrios regime systematically enforced classic Latin American liberal measures against the religious institution and its representatives. General Barrios pursued a secularizing policy against the Church, exiled the Archbishop and closed down most of the regular orders. Church officials adjusted to even harsher reality than experienced during the years of the Central American federation.<sup>15</sup>

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, parish priests began to record an increasing number of miracles attributed to the shrine at Esquipulas. With publications in 1904 and 1914, the parish priest Juan Paz Solórzano charted the history and attraction of the “Crucified Lord of Esquipulas.” According to his written records, soon after its sculpting, witnesses gave credit to the holy shrine for ten miracles in the 1600s and seven in the 1700s. Records from 1800 through end of the Conservative era, the 1870s, indicate only four miracles. Beginning with the 1880s, a marked change took place. From 1880 through 1911, parish priests recorded twenty-eight different miracles attributed to the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas.

Given the increased notoriety of the shrine, Paz Solórzano and other parish priests petitioned the Archbishop to consecrate and declare that the Holy Christ of Esquipulas would be the Principal Patron of the Ecclesiastical Province of Guatemala (Patrón Principal de la Provincia Eclesiástica de Guatemala). In 1916, Archbishop Riveiro accompanied Juan Paz Solórzano and a host of other priests, anointed the shrine and consecrated it.<sup>16</sup>

Within four decades of that consecration, Esquipulas would contribute one of its sons to lead the Guatemalan Catholic Church, Monseñor Mariano Rossell y Arellano. The shrine featured prominently in Archbishop Rossell’s challenge to the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz and his political goals. Archbishop Rossell initiated a national campaign 1953 to confront “atheistic communism”, and carried the Crucified Lord of Esquipulas from town to town to pursue his theological and political message. In addition to his very prominent role, Rossell also energized the decaying Catholic institution, and the number of clerics and lay leaders more than tripled within Guatemala.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the shrine of Esquipulas, given pressure from the secularizing State apparatus, increased devotion and praise for the miracles performed, and the intentional hierarchical support at the local and national level, assumed a greater part of the Guatemala religious identity. Additionally, hostile Protestant presence now significant in voice and number in some way enhanced the prestige and identity of Guatemala’s Catholicism. Beginning in 1889 and throughout the twentieth century, any historic analysis of the shrine from the apologetic perspective of the Catholic officials necessarily included a conceptual and theological defense of Catholic shrines and a subsequent theological challenges to Protestant views.<sup>18</sup> In sum, by the twentieth century, the shrine of Esquipulas equaled the heart and soul of Guatemalan Catholicism, a reality born of political and theological pressure.

Any discussion of the Esquipulas shrine necessarily entails an inquiry into the “popular religiosity” of the “people.” The historiography of this conceptual tool -- still incomplete -- suggests at least three different approaches to the study of religion.<sup>19</sup> Historians or other social scientists who accepted the philosophical assumptions of modernization understood that society divided between the civilized and uncivilized, between the folk and the elite. Thus an implicit secularizing notion of religion and religiosity underscored any analysis. Euclides da Cunha’s masterful rendition of The Rebellion in the Backlands (1904) offers a clear perspective of this approach. The “atavistic” Conselheiro and his religious “fanaticism” fueled the rebellion in the Brazilian backlands and forced the collision of two cultures. The modernist perspective yielded to a significant philosophical shift that valorized “the people” vis a vis the dominant elite and its representative institutions.

Given the broad analytical movement beyond the modernist perspective, historians and other scientists shifted their analytical eye to capture how ordinary people contested State.<sup>20</sup> Eric Wolf’s Sons of the Shaking Earth (1959) and Richard Adams’ Crucifixion by Power (1970) reflect such a shift among anthropologists. Part of the post-modernist impulse manifested a related inquiry within those studying “religion.” Not only did analysts study the structure of power in non-elite communities, they followed Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner to see how people created meaning through ritual and celebration. Interestingly, this broad-base movement transcended both the secular and religious University given the implicit assumption to not reduce “religion” or “religiosity” to some material or psychological lament. William B. Taylor and Enrique Dussel reflect this change within the discipline of Latin America history. Taylor’s work on eighteenth-century clerics in Mexico reflects a philosophical commitment to look at “local religion” while Dussel noted how the peoples who identify with the faith of Christianity of Latin America exhibit a “chiaroscuro”, an blend of two worlds impossible to distinguish.<sup>21</sup>

Given the difficulty to distinguish the European from the Indian worlds three centuries after contact, analysts now invoke the term “popular religiosity” or “popular religion” to describe how the people or masses produce culture. Ricardo Bendaña called the Christ of Esquipulas the “center of Central American popular religiosity.” In this case, Bendaña assumed a classic notion of “popular religiosity,” a broad-based culture of those who practice the faith that impinges upon the elite prescribers of the faith. Given certain moments of conflict, the faith of the people might even democratize that somewhat aloof and dominant culture.<sup>22</sup>

Sensitive to the notion of power and self-representation does however occult the change taking place within the people and between dominant and marginal groups. A popular representation becomes popular through a process, and the dynamic between the “elite” and the “masses” becomes very fluid. The Crucified Lord of Esquipulas denotes one such case: conceived by the clerics and paid for by the local Indians in 1595; enhanced by Archbishop Pedro Pardo’s personal involvement when cured at the shrine the early 1700s; maintained by the multicultural people of Esquipulas through the 1800s;

and then vaunted to national prominence again in the twentieth century by a combination of various social groups.<sup>23</sup>

Both the clerics and the people maintained the vivaciousness of the shrine. It may even be argued that people forced the rural priests to make it even more accessible to the people through the multiplication of miracle stories in the late nineteenth century and the priests preserved this history for future pilgrims. Both pilgrims and priests actively molded the statue by guarding it, by maintaining it, even changing it!. Father Juan Paz Solórzano actually removed a hair piece from the head of the statue bequeathed by some anonymous pilgrim!<sup>24</sup>

Like the three European apparitions of the Virgin Mary -- Lourdes (1858) and Marpingen (1876) and Fátima (1917) -- the people pressured clerics to give the place more prominence. Unlike all three, Church officials effectively controlled and reproduced the history of the statue of Esquipulas. No popular tradition effectively challenged the history of the shrine's construction by a Portuguese immigrant from 1594 to 1595. Unlike Marpingen that withers without official sanction, and like Lourdes and Fátima, the holy shrines receive Papal blessing through pressure from people and the local clergy.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the fluidity between official and unofficial, between priest and parishioner make the Christ of Esquipulas significant. Evidence indicates a change in the nature of support among the people toward the shrine from its inception in the late sixteenth century and to its renewed religious charisma of the early twentieth century. No greater evidence exists that the changing name of the shrine itself! Sixteenth century documents indicate the name of the shrine to be the "Santissimo Crusifixo que está en la Yglesia y Santuario de este dho. Pueblo." In the seventeenth century, the renowned Archbishop of Guatemala, Francisco Joseph de Figueredo y Victoria made plans to move the shrine to a new temple in 1758. Figueredo venerated the statue as "Christo Nro. Señor que se venera en la Yglesia de el Pueblo de Santiago Esquipulas". Before it was moved, the Archbishop died and the Bishop of Comayagua assumed control and moved the "Ssma. Ymmagen de Christo Crucificado que se venera en este Pueblo" on January 6, 1759. The parish priest of Esquipulas, Miguel Muñoz, put to rest in 1830 any apparition legends behind the construction of the "Jesús Crucificado de Esquipulas." By 1904, the parish priest, Juan Paz Solórzano meticulously transcribed miracles and the history associated with the "Señor Crucificado de Esquipulas." A group of priests who had gathered to aid Father Solórzano with the January festivities formally requested that the Archbishop seek Papal approval for the consecration of the shrine. Given the increased devotion to the shrine and the current needs that "afflict Central America," the priests requested the consecration of "Señor de Esquipulas Patrono Principal de estas Provincias Eclesiásticas de Centro-América." Evidently, the Archbishop fulfilled the majority of their wishes, consecrating the venerated image of the "Señor Crucificado del Santuario de Esquipulas en la Arquidiócesis de Guatemala."<sup>26</sup>

Solórzano's historic rendition of the name of the holy shrine became official in the Papal consecration in 1916. In his analysis of the origin of its dark color, Solórzano subtitled his analysis "Encarnación" to explain the darkened color of the Crucified Christ.

In a sensitive and ingenious explanation, Solórzano gave reason to the Portuguese sculptor's thinking: the pathos of the Passion made Jesus dark with agony, and the wounds inflicted upon him reduced him to this empathetic color. Citing other European images, Solórzano underscored and justified the "obscured" color of the shrine despite the fact that "some ironically concluded that Jesus [was] black (*negro*)."<sup>27</sup> Solórzano wrote:

Es necesario declarar todas esas circunstancias para poner de manifiesto que ese color, no proviene, ni de la antigüedad, ni del bálsamo, ni del incienso que se quema (solo durante la misa), ni del humo que despiden las velas (como algunos sin reflexionar afirman), sino que, como extensamente expliqué, fué encarnación ó colorido dado expreso, que ningun pintor podría hoy imitar, destruyéndose con estas razones, aquel error craso que algunos irónicamente propalan, diciendo que el Señor es negro, pues no es tal, sino que su color obscuro imita la sangre muerta como en realidad debió aparecer."<sup>28</sup>

Protestant diatribes against Catholics focused on the images. Denouncing the shrines as "idols", Protestants attacked the shrine at Esquipulas and focused on its color. One foreign Protestant called the shrine the "black and repulsive image of Nimrod", the false prophet of the Babylonians. Another foreign Protestant, John Thomas Butler could not fathom why the crucified Jesus was black "when everyone knew he was a Jew." "What a difference," Butler concluded, "there is between Jesus and a black idol."<sup>29</sup>

Protestants touched and maybe even cultivated priestly concern over the "blackness" of the Esquipulas shrine. The worry associated with the shrine's "blackness" grew more evident by mid-twentieth century. In the height of Rossell's emergence and the transcendence of the shrine in Guatemalan politics in the late 1940s, the Catholic church republished Solórzano's historic analysis with a few significant additions. Rossell's edited version of Solórzano's subtitle read not "Encarnación", but "La Imagen No Es de Color Negro." Clearly Rossell's camp took offense of the growing popularity of the name, "the Black Christ of Esquipulas." In the significant change, Rossell's editors marked the transition of the "Señor Crucificado de Esquipulas" to the "Cristo Negro de Esquipulas."<sup>30</sup>

The racial implications could not be clearer. The official hierarchy took offense at the use of the term "negro" in a very provocative political climate, and anyone at least familiar with Guatemala knows personally and professionally the challenges facing this multi-ethnic society. Though Rossell's editors did their best to stop the ever-changing name to the Black Christ, by 1994, Catholic officials appeared to accept begrudgingly the new name. The Reverend Padre Luis Diez de Arriba wrote in commemoration of the shrine's 400 years a new and popular account of the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas. He entitled his work, *Esquipulas - 400 años. "Fe Blanca en Un Cristo Negro."* Intending to create a heuristic device to explain Esquipulas, Diez reflected the ever tender ethnocentricity facing Guatemalans. A "white faith" meant to Diez that the person of faith encountering the very real and human appearance of the Black Christ would leave with a "humble heart and clean mind."<sup>31</sup>

The history and historiography concerning the Black Christ of Esquipulas could not present a clearer picture of change and continuity. Given the historic meetings of two cultures in the sixteenth century -- themselves a product of great change and continuity -- peoples constructed meaning in a particular historic moment. Creole clerics, a Portuguese sculpture and a multicultural village in eastern Guatemala produced a shrine whose sacredness ebbed and flowed with the making of history. Measuring that ebb and flow becomes the task of the historian and the source of much inspiration.

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<sup>1</sup> Salome Jil (José Milla), Los nazarenos, 4a. edición (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1935), 1-36.

<sup>2</sup> In Doug Sullivan-González, Piety, Power, and Politics: Religion and Nation Formation in Guatemala, 1821-1871 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 60-80.

<sup>3</sup> See Piety, Power, and Politics, 71. Also see Flavio Rojas Lima, editor, José Milla. Un historiador centroamericano, 1822-1882 (Guatemala: Editorial José de Pineda Ibarra, 1982), 37-40.

<sup>4</sup> See David A. Brading, The Origins of Mexican Nationalism (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1985), 90; and William B. Taylor, Magistrates of the Sacred. Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 278-287.

<sup>5</sup> Miguel Muñoz, “Noticia de la imágenm sacratísima y admirable de Jesús Crucificado de Esquipulas” in Doctrina cristiana sobre el culto de las imágenes, y noticia verdadera de la imágen milagrosa que se venera en el santuario del pueblo de Esquipulas con una novena al fin dedicada al dulcísimo nombre de Jesús, año de 1830 (Guatemala: 1889), 18 and 23.

<sup>6</sup> Juan Paz Solórzano, Historia del Santo Cristo de Esquipulas, 2a edición [edited and amplified by special charge of Archbishop of Guatemala, Monseñor Mariano Rossell Arellano] (Guatemala: <1914> 1949), 85.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Larrazábal, Edicto, con el breve pontificio relativo á la disminución del número de dias festivos (Guatemala: Imprenta del Ejército, 1840); and Rafael Carrera, Rafael Carrera teniente general y general en gefe del ejército del estado de Guatemala, a sus conciudadanos, December 12, 1840.

<sup>8</sup> Few records of the famed Christ of Esquipulas surfaced in Archdiocese Archives in Guatemala. Historians carry certain questions in the reading of any document that illumine and block pertinent analysis. I did, however, seek to understand the support base of the Catholic church in the countryside, especially those churches in eastern Guatemala. The parish of Esquipulas featured prominently in that regional focus. The parish priest, José María Gutiérrez, served the Esquipulas parish from 1835 through 1860, the longest tenure of any cleric in Guatemala during this period.

<sup>9</sup> John L. Stephens, Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications <1841> 1969), 168-169. Henry Dunn, in his visit to Guatemala in 1827, twelve years before Stephens’ visit, noted 80,000 have been known to visit the shrine but “at the present day the number is greatly decreased, and not more

than ten to twenty thousand congregate.” Curiously, both Dunn and Stephens cited “80,000” visitors without referencing a source. Dunn’s early visit and current observation outweighs Stephens’ unmeasured generalization. See Henry Dunn, Guatemala, or the Republic of Central America, in 1827-8; being sketches and memorandums made during a twelve-month’s residence (Michigan: Ethridge Books <1829> 1981), 124.

<sup>10</sup> Stephens, Incidents of Travel, 170.

<sup>11</sup> Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 182, 273, and 298.

<sup>12</sup> R. P. Luis Diez de Arriba, Esquipulas - 400 Años. “Fe blanca en un Cristo Negro (Guatemala: n.p., 1995), 104. The author provided no date to the legend.

<sup>13</sup> R. Lee Woodward noted that record rainfall in 1847 caused considerable damage in the Department of Chiquimula along the banks of the Río Motagua and at Esquipulas. See Woodward, Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 191.

<sup>14</sup> See the Cordillera to Clergy, concerning the Tithe, August 16, 1841, Archivo Histórico Arquidiocesano “Francisco de Paula García Peláez” de Guatemala (AHAG), Box T3 60, no. 141, and the Cordillera directed to clergy on the Vatican’s Encyclical against Protestants, February 3, 1845, AHAG.

<sup>15</sup> H. J. Miller, La iglesia católica y el estado en Guatemala, 1871-1885 (Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1976), 117-183.

<sup>16</sup> Juan Paz Solórzano, Segunda parte de la historia del Señor Crucificado del Santuario de Esquipulas (Guatemala: Tip. Arenales Hijos, 1916), 8-11. See also Agustín Estrada Monroy, Datos para la historia de la iglesia de Guatemala, Tomo III (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1979), 364.

<sup>17</sup> R. Bendaña, “Guatemala,” América Central: Tomo VI in Enrique Dussel’s Historia General de la iglesia en América Latina (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1985), 365-372. See also José Luis Chea, Guatemala: la cruz fragmentada (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1988), 71-87.

<sup>18</sup> See Muñoz, Doctrina cristiana sobre el culto de las imágenes, 5-25; and Paz Solórzano, Historia del Señor Crucificado de Esquipulas (1914), 104-129.

<sup>19</sup> In my commitment to write a historiography of “popular religion” in Latin American history, I discovered some key sources that transcend discipline and region. Charles Long’s article, “Popular Religion” and William A. Christian, Jr.’s article, “Folk Religion,” accomplish a masterful job of setting up the strengths and weaknesses of this tool. See Long in The Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v., “popular religion,” and Christian in The Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v., “folk religion.” Two long-standing critiques of the notion of “popular religion” surface in the writings of Peter Brown and Natalie Davis. Brown, in his The Cult of Saints (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), lays out a devastating critique of the notion of popular religion. Brown argues that the tool disguises change within history and reifies the popular among the people. Natalie Davis suggests the notion of “religious cultures” instead of popular religion. She wrote that the relational dynamic among participants -- prescribers and practitioners -- forms a culture in itself.

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See Natalie Zemon Davis, “From ‘Popular Religion’ to Religious Cultures” in Steven Ozment’s Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research (St. Louise: Center for Reformation Research, ) 321-341.

<sup>20</sup> Euclides da Cunha, Rebellion in the Backlands, trans. by Samuel Putnam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, <1902>1944).

<sup>21</sup> Eric R. Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); Richard Newbold Adams, Crucifixion by Power. Essays on Guatemalan National Social Structure, 1944-1966 (Texas: University of Texas at Austin, 1970); William B. Taylor, Magistrates of the Sacred, 47-48. Taylor acknowledged his conceptual indebtedness to William Christian’s view that the “practical impingement of the institutions of a central religion on the religious life of peasants” is as much a part of this history as the ways in which local practices may have departed from and challenged doctrine. See William Christian, Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Bendaña and many within the CEHILA fold follow the remarkable lead of Enrique Dussel who has reshaped the way historians and other analysts treat religion, religiosity and the institutional Catholic church in Latin America. For Dussel, popular religiosity began within the Christian faith began the moment Constantine raised Christianity from its pluralistic and marginalized position to one of recognition and protection by the Crown. Thus a Greek-Roman world began to absolutize historic models of the faith. See Enrique D. Dussel and Maria Mercedes Esandi, El catolicismo popular en Argentina (Buenos Aires: Editorial Bonum, 1970), 31-32.

<sup>23</sup> The Portuguese sculptor, Quirio Cataño, evidently carved and painted the image of the crucified Jesus according to his own conviction. The only documents, copies of the original contract, do not indicate any preferred design. See Paz Solórzano, Documentos históricos referentes á la sagrada imágen del Señor Crucificado de Esquipulas y de su santuario (Guatemala: Tipografía Sánchez y de Guise, 1904), 3. One cleric wrote that the Indians had planted a field of cotton to underwrite the cost of the image, and today the Sanctuary resides in that field. See Muñoz, Doctrina cristiana sobre el culto de las imágenes, 14. Given Esquipulas’ relative location to the great classic Maya sites of Copan, some analysts have sought a historic connection to the broad-based devotion to the Esquipulas shrine and the pre-conquest faiths. J. Thompson and Borhegy contend such historic continuity between the Esquipulas Christ and the pre-Conquest sites. See Carl Kendall, “The Politics of Pilgrimage: The Black Christ of Esquipulas” in Pilgrimage in Latin America, edited by N. Ross Crumrine and Alan Morinis (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 139-412.

<sup>24</sup> Solórzano, Historia del Señor Crucificado de Esquipulas (1914), 18.

<sup>25</sup> William Thomas Walsh, Our Lady of Fátima (New York: Image Books, 1954), 44-53; David Blackbourn, Marpingen. Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 103-110. The Virgin of Guadalupe, consecrated in 1895, brings to bear an additional Latin American perspective. The Virgin

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of Guadalupe received local support first from clerics and Indians, then increased devotion within Creole circles in the eighteenth century and among a large multi-ethnic following in the nineteenth century and twentieth century. See William B. Taylor, Magistrates of the Sacred, 279-287.

<sup>26</sup> Paz Solórzano, Segunda parte de la historia del Señor Crucificado del Santuario de Esquipulas (1916), 8-11.

<sup>27</sup> Solórzano Paz, Historia del Señor Crucificado de Esquipulas (1914), 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>30</sup> Paz Solórzano, Historia del Santo Cristo de Esquipulas, (1949), 15.

<sup>31</sup> Luís Diez de Arriba, Esquipulas - 400 Años (Guatemala: n.p., 1994), 150. Who gave impetus to the popular name, “Cristo Negro?” Maybe anti-clerical forces mobilizing to undermine the shrine’s popularity among the people used the racial connotation of blackness. Maybe the faithful preferred the simple name, Cristo negro, instead of the ever evolving name of the shrine. Further research will have to shed light on this question.

EconEdLink: Where Did All the Money Go. The Cross of Jesus Christ. The Passion of Jesus Christ. The. PASSION.Â and religiosity during the Carrera years. Except for Milla's literary reference, the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas never assumed a prominent role in sermons during the conservative era. The religious identity constructed by Catholic clerics in Guatemala created a sense of uniqueness based on events that favored "Guatemala", not on a particular shrine held in honor by most. This "biography" of the Black Christ of Esquipulas serves as an alternative history of Guatemala and sheds light on some of the most salient themes in Guatemala's social and political history: state formation, interethnic dynamics, and church-state tensions. Sullivan-Gonzalez's study provides a holistic understanding of the relevance of faith and ritual to the social and political history of this influential region. Excerpt. In January 2001, I traveled to the region of Esquipulas with my good friend Carlos Roca to enjoy the January 15 festivities surrounding the Christ of E... Esquipulas (Nahuatl: Isquitzuchil, "place where flowers abound"), officially Municipality of Esquipulas, whose original name was Yzquipulas, is a town, with a population of 18,667 (2018 census), and a municipality located in the department of Chiquimula, in eastern Guatemala. Esquipulas' main attraction is the beautiful Black Christ located in the Basilica of Esquipulas, making the town an important place of Catholic pilgrimage for Central America. It is also one of the most important towns of the