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Miguel A. De La Torre. *The Quest for the Cuban Christ: A Historical Search.* Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002. xvi + 205 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2547-6.

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The Quest for the Cuban Christ, the most recent work of Miguel A. De La Torre, is an exceptionally concise exploration of the ways in which Cubans have both conceived and perceived religion in general and Jesus Christ in particular, over the last five centuries. Specifically, the author examines religion and spirituality from the point of view of both subaltern and dominant groups throughout the history of Cuba. The real focus, however, is on the role of faith in the formation of the identity of Cubans resident and in exile that have been historically subordinated to the interests of hegemonic powers like Spain, the United States, and successive Cuban (including revolutionary) governments.

By structuring his study chronologically, and using the idea of Christ as an analytical vehicle, the author provides a good sense of the trajectory of Cuban identity as it evolves and is shaped by formative experiences under Spanish imperialism, U.S. hegemony, and social revolution. At the same time, the idea of Christ as presented here is much more than an analytical instrument for understanding Cubans' struggle over identity. Christ is at the heart of the matter. De La Torre argues that religion is essential to an understanding of Cuban heritage (or anyone else's, for that matter), and that the way in which Christ and Christianity are, through history, understood by a people can greatly facilitate understanding about the cultural development of that group. The author cites Albert Schweitzer's classic, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, as being part of the inspiration for the present work (Gustavo Gutierrez also, of course). While De La Torre claims to attempt a more modest project, the effort in so concise a format is impressive.

The author breaks down his analysis into chapters which correspond roughly to distinct, formative periods in the emergence of Cuban identity as influenced by distinctive, but also evolving, ideas of Christ extant during each of those eras. Accordingly, the first chapter on the "Conquistador Christ" addresses the historical Christ and Cuban identity from the perspective of Spanish imperialism and the "Catholic Monarchs," Ferdinand and Isabela, for whom Christianity was an imperial, if somewhat, enlightened enterprise. The product of such an enterprise in colonial Cuba was a struggle between an imperialistic Christianity and los humildes, or indigenous Cubans, starting with the Tainos. As De La Torre (and Gutierrez) point out, important byproducts of the imperial enterprise in Cuba were Bartolome de Las Casas and his conception of the more humble aboriginal Cubans as the real Christ-bearers, in opposition to a very unChrist-like Spanish Crown and colonist population.

In this and other ways, Spanish imperialism helped establish the foundations for both Cuban nationalism and a new understanding of Christ, as represented in the likes of Felix Varela and then Jose Marti. Unlike Las Casas, Marti rejected Spanish–and U.S.–imperialism in principle. Like Las Casas, however, as the author explains in his chapter on the "Marti Christ," Marti also promoted a vision of Cubans as los humildes: oppressed yet striving for self-determination. De La Torre argues that Marti not only became a symbol for Cuban nationalism but was also "a metaphor and catalyst for the quest for the Cuban Christ." The African-Cuban faith Santeria provides yet another source for the understanding of the Cuban Christ, here based in the struggle and contribution of Black Cubans, and the role of popular religion in the evolution of Cuban nationalism, as the author explains in the chapter, "The Black Cuban Christ." Next to

African-Cubans, among the most historically disenfranchised and therefore in solidarity with a Christ who exercised a "preferential option for the poor"–are women. In "The Female Cuban Christ," De La Torre relates the ways in which, historically, the "suffering servants" contributed to the quest for the Cuban Christ along with the role of Marianism as expressed through the veneration, by both men and women, of La Virgen del Cobre.

De La Torre incorporates all of the above considerations into a discussion of the "Three Christs of the Twentieth Century": the Euroamerican, Protestant Christ; the Christ of Revolution; and the Christ of the Cuban exiles. Not unlike earlier epochs, U.S. imperialism also spawned diametrically-opposed conceptions of being Christian, further influencing conceptions of a Cuban Christ, as represented by Cuban exiles and revolutionaries. The culmination of the Cuban historical, spiritual and therefore cultural experience is presented in "The Ajiaco Christ," the author's concluding chapter. By including a creative analysis of Cuban art, the author provides a vivid illustration of the ways in which the collective roots of the Cuban experience(s) continue to shape the quest for the Cuban Christ and inform Cubans' understanding of themselves.

The Quest for the Cuban Christ addresses questions of great significance in the study of the historical Christ in general, and its meaning for the history of Cuban culture and identity in particular. The book seemed to end almost too abruptly, leaving one wishing for more elaboration, for example, of the implications of the "Ajiaco" or collective indigenous experience. Overall, however, De La Torre is to be commended for such an effort, one that brings to the surface the considerably nuanced and complex culture and spirituality of a Cuban people considered historically as "nominally Christian."

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