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What can Buddhist Artistic Traditions Learn from Christian Iconography

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On October 8, 2017, a major forest fire broke out in Redwood Valley, CA. The fire burned 70% of the forest around the monastery, but the monastery itself suffered only minimal structural damage. Unfortunately, 9 of our neighbors lost their lives and 450 of our neighbors' homes were destroyed.

This Buddha image is from one of our neighbors who lost her house. The hands and one of the knees were burned off, and the image was encased in ash. This painting says to me, "Yes, we can be scarred, but we can also be beautiful." Or, the scars might be the thing that makes us beautiful.

Jotipālo Bhikkhu

Jotipālo Bhikkhu is a Buddhist monk, starting his training at the Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in Redwood Valley, CA in June 1998. Jotipālo is a graduate of Wabash College where he majored in Art and Classics. During his year-long residency at the Collegeville Institute, Jotipālo is working on a project titled "What can Buddhist Artistic Traditions Learn from Christian Iconography." The images of icons in this issue are a part of that work.

redeemed Him. Two symbols demonstrate this reciprocity: (1) Jesus as co-sufferer; and (2) Jesus as equalizer. First, one of African-Americans' foremost experiences of Jesus was that He was a divine co-sufferer who empowered them in situations of oppression. Their cross experience was the daily abuses, dehumanization, pain, suffering, and the loss of family, friends and community. Second, they experience Jesus as equalizer. Black women have been told they are an inferior servant class. However, Jesus served as an equalizer both in the white and black world in that He renders all human oppression invalid. Freedom was central to the message of the Gospel, in that being a follower of Jesus involves a commitment to the struggle for freedom. The liberating activities of Jesus empowered African-American women to be significantly engaged in the struggle for freedom.⁴²



The shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe is the most visited Catholic pilgrimage destination in the world. On Friday, December 11 and Saturday December 12, 2009, a record number 6.1 million pilgrims visited the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City to commemorate the anniversary of the apparition.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is considered the Patroness of Mexico and the Continental Americas. She is also venerated by Native Americans on the account of the devotion calling for the conversion of the Americas. Replicas of the tilma can be found in thousands of churches throughout the world, and numerous parishes bear her name.

42 Grant, "Come to my help Lord," 69.



Saint Mary Magdalene was called the “Apostle to the Apostles” because she brought them news of Christ’s Resurrection. She was one of the Myrrh-Bearing Women who came to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with fragrant oils and spices, but found him gone and the grave clothes still lying there. She met Jesus early that same day, but didn’t recognize Him, thinking He was just the gardener until He called her by name.

I first saw this image at the Russian Icon Museum in Clinton, MA in July 2018, and decided to attempt my own icon. In the original, everything that was not Mary’s face or clothing was covered by an engraved gold sheet. The practice of using metalwork dates to the 12th century but didn’t become widespread until the 16th century, and then mainly in Russia.

The Eucharist: Solidarity at Table

The themes expressed in black theology - liberation and oppression, solidarity, identifying with Jesus, and the cross and resurrection of Christ - are reflected in the Eucharist, which itself embodies liberation and solidarity. The Eucharist demonstrates the great mystery of the very presence of Christ in the sacrament. Through the compassionate love of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit, the body and blood of Jesus Christ are present with us and to us. Thus we pledge to incarnate the triune love of God through acts of concrete compassion in our present reality. The Eucharist signifies the Body of Christ raised up for Himself within the body of humanity, the mystical body. M. Shawn