This chapter represents a critical examination of the notion of identity functioning in Latino/a theology and religious studies. It analyses the manner in which Latino/a history and identity have been represented and the notions of mestizaje and mulatez as categories for identity, epistemology, and religiosity. It also provides commentaries on the primacy of Mexican-American experience, identity, and religiosity within Latino/a theology.

Liberation in the Latino/a Americas
Christopher D. Tirres

in The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith: A Dialogue Between Liberationist and Pragmatic Thought

This chapter provides an overview of how a number of U.S. Latino/a theologians, who are indebted to an earlier tradition of Latin American liberation theology, have attempted to answer the question: How may the aesthetics of popular religion be integrally linked to its ethical dimensions? The author argues that while some important inroads have been made, more clarity is needed. The chapter opens with an examination of the largely misguided claim that liberation theology reduces faith to politics. It reviews some of the more prominent critiques issued by the Vatican and Joseph Ratzinger, underscoring the philosophical differences between detractors and supporters. The chapter then moves to a discussion of contributions and possible pitfalls.
latent in U.S. Latino theology’s “aesthetic turn.” The author discusses the work of Alejandro García-Rivera, Roberto Goizueta, María Pilar Aquino, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz, among others. The chapter ends with a consideration of various metaphors for human action. Borrowing from the work of Hans Joas, the author considers how the pragmatic paradigm of “intelligence and reconstruction” can serve to reframe three metaphors that often characterize liberationist discourse: expression, production, and revolution.

Difference, Body, and Race
Michelle A. Gonzalez

in Questioning the Human: Toward a Theological Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century

Latina theologian Michelle A. Gonzalez states that a merely Western theological anthropology will not suffice in a world that is multicultural and globalized. There are various anthropologies, as each generation of Christians reinterprets the meaning of our humanity in the sociocultural, historical, and political context of the day. Non-Western, contextualized anthropologies, rooted in the insights of liberation and constructive theology, bring to the fore the traditionally marginalized concepts of difference, body, and race. The idea of mestizaje within Latino/a theologies shows, for example, how hybridity is not merely typical for Latino/a culture but can be seen as a fundamental characteristic of human existence in general and of Christ as the full image of humanity in particular. Black theology highlights the problematic connection between the image of God and embodiment and thematizes how racism relates to the construction of what is and is not human. Theology must critically investigate how its constructions of humanity privilege certain traits of human existence over others, which hinders us in genuinely considering all human beings as created in the image of God.

The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith
Christopher D. Tirres

The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith
Christopher D. Tirres

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This book explores the methodological connections between two quintessentially American traditions: liberation theology and pragmatism. It examines how pragmatism can lend philosophical clarity and depth to some of liberation theology’s core ideas and assumptions. In turn, it also shows how liberation theology offers pragmatism a more nuanced and sympathetic approach to religious faith, especially its social and pedagogical dimensions. Ultimately, this work seeks to craft a philosophical foundation that ensures the continued relevance of liberation thought in today’s world. Keeping true to the method of pragmatism, the book begins inductively with a set of actual experiences: the Good Friday liturgies at the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas. The author offers a thick description of the way these performative rituals integrate the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of faith. Subsequent chapters probe this integration deductively at three levels of theoretical analysis: experience/metaphysics, sociality, and pedagogy. At all three levels, the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of faith emerge in different yet related ways. The author argues that utilizing the categories of the aesthetic and ethical enables a richer understanding of the dynamic relationship between faith and politics. This book builds new bridges between a number of discourses, including pragmatism, Latin American liberation theology, U.S. Latino/a theology, feminism, ritual studies, and the philosophy of education.

Popular Religion as a Source for Understanding the Church
Michelle A. Gonzalez

in Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture, and Identity
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This chapter explores a Cuban-American ecclesiology informed by the faith expressions of this particular community. It explores the primacy and theological function of popular religion within Latino/a theology and analyses Cuban and Cuban-American popular religious practices, emphasizing two particular expressions: devotion to Our Lady of Charity and to Saint Lazarus. It also describes the key features of a Cuban-American ecclesiology and discusses its contribution to the broader church.
Critics of liberation theology have often charged that it reduces faith to politics. In response, proponents have argued that it advances an encompassing, or integral, sense of liberation. This chapter shows that this debate illuminates a set of basic philosophical differences between supporters and detractors, especially around issues of methodology, hermeneutics, metaphysics, and praxis. The author proposes to explore these issues not through the familiar categories of faith and politics but rather through the categories of the ethical and the aesthetic, especially as they are developed by pragmatic philosopher John Dewey. This approach has the added advantage of reconciling two theological traditions that are closely related: Latin American liberation theology, which in its early years tended to emphasize the ethical and political dimensions of faith, and U.S. Latino theology, which tends to emphasize the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of faith. Though the author draws on Dewey’s religious thought, a case is made that simple recourse to Dewey’s A Common Faith is not enough. Rather, a careful and critical reconstruction of Dewey’s philosophy of religion demands that one looks at other core areas of his thought, including his metaphysics, social psychology, and theory of education.

Pragmatism and Latino/a Religious Experience
Christopher D. Tirres

The colonization of indigenous peoples of the Americas has often involved the introduction of problematic Western dualisms between body and mind, spirit and flesh, life and death, and the sacred and the secular. This chapter discusses how U.S. Latino/a theologians and scholars of religion have attempted to overcome such dualisms, and it argues that
pragmatism may be a useful ally in furthering this effort. In particular, the author looks at the ways in which pragmatism helps to integrate the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of faith, which, in the colonial mythos, are often considered to be two different “types” of religious experience. In contrast, pragmatism approaches both as qualities of experience, and it helps us to see how these qualities interrelate and change dynamically in experience. At the same time, this chapter also shows how contemporary approaches to Latino/a religion help to strengthen pragmatic approaches to faith where they are often at their weakest. This chapter includes a helpful overview on the meaning of pragmatism and a discussion of its engagement with questions of religious faith. These topics are then reframed in terms of contemporary liberationist discourse.