

## **At the Crossroads of Liberation Theology and Liberation Philosophy: José Carlos Mariátegui's "New Sense" of Religion**

by Christopher D. Tirres

### **English Abstract**

Peruvian social theorist José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) is widely recognized as one of Latin America's most significant organic intellectuals of the 20th century. As is well known, Mariátegui espoused a mixture of Peruvian indigenism and non-dogmatic Marxism. What may be less familiar to readers, however, is Mariátegui's unique take on religious faith. Critical of doctrinaire forms of religion but never completely antireligious, Mariátegui wove together a religious vision that drew upon his mother's Catholic mysticism, Georges Sorel's understanding of revolutionary myth, and various articulations of Pragmatism. Significantly, Mariátegui's faith in a new, revolutionary belief system helped to lay the groundwork for the liberation theology of Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez. This paper offers a framework for understanding and appreciating Mariátegui's distinctive spiritual vision, which intimately links him to liberation theology. Special focus is given to Mariátegui's critique of religious traditionalism, his critique of rationalism and scientism, and his understanding of myth.

### **Resumen en español**

El pensador peruano José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) es ampliamente reconocido como uno de los intelectuales orgánicos más significativos de América Latina del siglo XX. Como muchos saben, Mariátegui adoptó una mezcla de indigenismo peruano y marxismo no dogmático. Lo que puede ser menos familiar para los lectores, sin embargo, es la interpretación de Mariátegui de la fe religiosa. Crítica de las formas doctrinarias de la religión, pero nunca completamente antirreligiosa, Mariátegui tejió una visión religiosa que se basó en el misticismo católico de su madre, en la interpretación de Georges Sorel del mito revolucionario y en diversas articulaciones del pragmatismo. De manera significativa, la fe de Mariátegui en un nuevo sistema de creencias revolucionario ayudó a sentar las bases para la teología de la liberación del sacerdote peruano Gustavo Gutiérrez. Este artículo ofrece un marco para comprender y apreciar la visión espiritual distintiva de Mariátegui, que lo vincula íntimamente a la teología de la liberación. Veo la crítica de Mariátegui al tradicionalismo religioso, su crítica del racionalismo y del cientificismo, y su comprensión del mito.

### **Resumo em português**

O pensador social peruano José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) é amplamente reconhecido como um dos mais importantes intelectuais orgânicos do século 20 na América Latina. Como muitos sabem, Mariátegui defendia uma mescla de indigenismo peruano com marxismo dogmático. O que, porém, talvez ainda seja pouco conhecida é sua interpretação da fé religiosa. Crítico das formas doutrinárias da religião, mas jamais

completamente antireligioso, Mariátegui elaborou uma concepção religiosa baseada no misticismo católico de sua mãe, no entendimento de Georges Sorel sobre o mito revolucionário e nas várias articulações do Pragmatismo. De maneira significativa, a fé de Mariátegui em um novo e revolucionário sistema de crenças ajudou a assentar as bases para a teologia da libertação do sacerdote peruano Gustavo Gutiérrez. Este artigo dá elementos para compreender e avaliar a especial visão espiritualista de Mariátegui, a qual liga-o intimamente à teologia da libertação. Atenção particular é dada à crítica de Mariátegui ao tradicionalismo religioso, sua crítica do racionalismo e do cientificismo e sua compreensão do mito.

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In many ways, the papal tenure of Pope Francis (born Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina, 1936- ) has signaled some significant changes in the Vatican's approach to liberation theology. Prior to Francis's election in 2013, the Vatican had approached liberation theology with deep suspicion. Beginning in the 1980s, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) issued two indictments of this burgeoning theological movement. Under the auspices of Cardinal Joséph Ratzinger of Germany (who later served as Pope Benedict XVI from 2005-2013), the CDF critiqued liberation theology for its use of Marxist analysis, which, it believed, reduced faith to politics. Informed by the CDF and his own Cold War fear of communism, Pope John Paul II of Poland, who served as pope from 1978 to 2005, initiated a major restructuring of the Catholic church in Latin America, replacing progressive-leaning bishops and archbishops with more conservative ones. The CDF called several leading liberation theologians to Rome to defend their positions and in some cases silenced them, Leonardo Boff of Brazil perhaps being the most famous case of all.[1]

With the election of the first Latin American pope, however, the tide has changed considerably. Without mentioning liberation theology directly, Pope Francis has consistently highlighted many of its core tenets, including the need for a preferential option for the poor, a critique of self-serving forms of Christianity, and a critique of various forms of institutional sin, ranging from global capitalism to environmental degradation. Although Bergoglio did seem to have a more ambivalent opinion of liberation theology earlier in his career,[2] since becoming pope, he has done much to revive relations with liberation theologians from his native continent. Quite significantly, for example, Francis re-opened and actively advanced the campaign for the sainthood of Archbishop Óscar Romero of El Salvador, who is arguably liberation theology's most revered martyr. Previous to Francis, both Benedict and John Paul II had stalled such an effort.

In another extraordinary gesture of reconciliation, Pope Francis also invited the father of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, to a private meeting at his Vatican

residence in September 2013. Whereas thirty years earlier Gutiérrez was one of the many theologians called to Rome to defend his position in front of the CDF, Gutiérrez was now being invited by the head of the church as a guest and theological equal. For many liberation theologians, Francis represents nothing short of "a new springtime for the church." [3] As one respected scholar of liberation theology cleverly notes, "It is not liberation theology that is being rehabilitated. It is the church that is being rehabilitated." [4]

As this paper will argue, the revival of liberation theology has implications not only for theology and communities of faith, but for philosophy as well. Daniel Pilaro, a Filipino theologian and expert on the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, makes explicit the link between theology and philosophy: if theology is "classically defined as *fides quaerens intellectus*, i.e., faith seeking understanding," Pilaro writes, "then one must recognize that *intellectus* has been mediated by different sciences, mostly by philosophy, in the various moments of its history." [5] After all, there can be no St. Paul without Greek thought, Augustine without neo-Platonism, Thomas Aquinas without Aristotle, Rahner without Kant and Heidegger, and Tillich without existentialism. So, too, is the case with liberation theology, which is most often associated with Marxism and dependency theory.

If one looks closely at liberation theology's philosophical influences, one will inevitably encounter other currents as well. This is not surprising given that one of liberation theology's principle sister discourses, liberation philosophy, emerged in Latin America at about the same time. Inspired, in large part, by the work of Peruvian philosopher Augusto Salazar Bondy (1925-1974) and Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea (1912-2004), liberation philosophy emerged as a twin discourse to liberation theology in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The beginnings of liberation philosophy in Latin America can likely be traced back to the five-volume work, *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana (Towards an Ethics of Latin American Liberation)*, written between 1970 and 1975 by the Argentinian-born philosopher, Enrique Dussel, who was also quite instrumental in the early development of liberation theology. Just as Gustavo Gutiérrez's seminal 1971 *Teología de la liberación (A Theology of Liberation)* began gaining traction in Latin America and beyond, a group of liberation-minded philosophers emerged at the Second National Congress of Philosophy in Cordoba, Spain, in 1972. Their concern was Latin America's massive poverty and its dependency upon the first world. As Dussel points out, this group emphasized a method of empiricism ("in the way that pragmatists did from the perspective of the process of *verification*"); it highlighted the need for liberation and not simply freedom; and it sought to utilize a process of *conscientización* to help give rise to concrete historical projects. [6] From its early beginnings, liberation theology has followed a number of different trajectories, with links to Levinas and Marx (Dussel), indigenous hermeneutics (Rodolfo Kusch), popular wisdom (J.C. Scannone, Carlos Cullén), ideological deconstruction (Hugo Assmann), the critique of utopian reason (Hinkelammert), intercultural exchange (Raul Fornet-Betancourt), a philosophy of erotic liberation and feminism (Vaz Ferreira and Graciela Hierro), and, of course, a pedagogy of liberation (Paulo Freire). [7]

For the purposes of this paper, I am particularly interested in the points of convergence between liberation theology and liberation philosophy and the ways in which these two parallel discourses may continue to inform one another. A number of contemporary scholars who have dual interests in liberation theology and liberation philosophy (and/or who have significant training in theology or religious studies) have made substantial contributions in this regard. One notes, for example, the work of Eduardo Mendieta on Karl Otto-Apel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres on Franz Fanon, Christopher Tirres on John Dewey, and Alex Stehn on Enrique Dussel.[8]

This paper thus looks at a pivotal, yet often overlooked, resource for both liberation theology and liberation philosophy alike: the contributions of Peruvian intellectual and social critic José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930). Whereas many critics often highlight the European influences on Gustavo Gutiérrez (in particular, the influence of 'the two Karls,' Karl Marx and Karl Rahner), I will show that the Peruvian-born Mariátegui played perhaps the most significant role in shaping Gutiérrez's own non-dogmatic approach to Marx. Furthermore, I will explore Mariátegui's own heterodox approach to religious faith. As I will argue, Mariátegui's conception of religious faith — which has some noticeable links to Pragmatism — stands as a useful point of reference for ongoing conversations between liberation theology and liberation philosophy. Towards this end, the first section of this essay offers a brief overview of Mariátegui's career, the second section establishes the connections between Mariátegui and Gutiérrez, and the final section will highlight some of the central Pragmatic features of Mariátegui's conception of religious faith, which find resonance in liberation theology at large.

### **José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930)**

José Carlos Mariátegui, who has been hailed as "undoubtedly, the most vigorous and most original [Marxist] thinker from Latin America,"[9] was born in the southern part of Peru to a poor *mestizo* family. Abandoned by his *criollo* father (of Spanish descent) and raised by his Quechua Indian mother, he was forced to leave primary school after a few grades and support the family through work. When he was eight, Mariátegui suffered a leg injury, crippling him for life. (His leg was eventually amputated in 1924.) Despite persistent problems with his leg and with chronic osteomyelitis (a bone disease from which, coincidentally, Gustavo Gutiérrez also suffered), the young Mariátegui apprenticed at a major newspaper business in Lima. He quickly worked his way up the ladder, becoming a respected journalist and editor. He did most of his writing for newspapers and political journals, including the cultural and political journal *Amauta* (1926-30), for which he served as founding editor. As a reporter in Lima, Mariátegui became increasingly critical of Peru's social structures. These views eventually led to an exile in Europe from 1920 to 1923. While there, he befriended Benedetto Croce, who encouraged him to read the work of Georges Sorel. Mariátegui also became enamored with the thought of Antonio Gramsci, and he returned to Peru as

a Marxist, remaining active in socialist politics until his death early death at the age of 35 in 1930.

Before he turned to Marxism, Mariátegui grew up in a fervently Catholic household, owing largely to the influence of his mother. Mariátegui was greatly influenced by the examples of the sixteenth century Spanish mystics, Saint Teresa of Ávila and Saint John of the Cross, founders of the Order of Descalced Carmelites.[10] In his late teens, he made a retreat with the Carmelites, which had a significant impact on him. Although his search for direct knowledge of God proved inconclusive, according to one interpreter, he nevertheless "became conscious of the need for what he called 'faith,' a belief in people's potential to create a new, more just social order. He understood the message of Jesus as both a call to interior conversion and social action incumbent on all, but particularly the poor." [11]

As Mariátegui became more politically involved in his twenties, he left the institutional church, which, he believed, had betrayed its basic gospel value of serving 'the least of these' in exchange for its own worldly power. Such a sentiment is conveyed, among other places, in Mariátegui's discussion of religion in his most important work, *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (*Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*). As Mariátegui notes, the current representatives of institutional religion — "unlike their distant, how very distant, teachers" — are "not concerned with obtaining a new declaration of the rights of Indians.... [T]he missionary is merely assigned the role of mediator between the Indian and the [land-owning] *gamonal*." [12]

Despite his harsh (but largely accurate) critiques of the institutional church of his day, Mariátegui, however, never became fully anti-religious. Rather, he interjected his heterodox understanding of faith and myth into his version of indigenous socialism. Before looking at what Mariátegui refers to as his 'new sense' of religion, let us consider Mariátegui's influence on the theology of another towering Peruvian, Gustavo Gutiérrez.

### **Mariátegui and Gutiérrez's Theology of Liberation**

A Peruvian *mestizo* like Mariátegui, Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928- ) is widely recognized as the father of liberation theology. His seminal 1971 text *Teología de la liberación* stands as one of the most creative applications of the theology of Karl Rahner to the Latin American context. In this work, Gutiérrez emphasizes some of the central tenets of Rahnerian theology, such as the intrinsic connection between nature and grace, salvation and history. Gutiérrez builds upon Rahner's insights by moving beyond Rahner's generalized anthropological subject to look at the concrete subjects of Gutiérrez's own place and time — the Latin American poor. Furthermore, Gutiérrez moves beyond Rahner by concretizing what it means to approach salvation in history. For Gutiérrez, this task involves a concrete commitment to help liberate the poor.

For better or worse, Gutiérrez's groundbreaking work is also commonly associated with the philosophy of Karl Marx. Gutiérrez affirms the need to use the social

sciences to 'read the signs of the times,' and he turns to the sociological contributions of Marx to help explain the persistent inequalities between social classes. Gutiérrez does indeed gesture in the direction of a Latin American socialism, but he is very careful to avoid any uncritical or dogmatic use of Marx. "As in the case of Mariátegui," writes Gaspar Martinez, "Gutiérrez argues it must be a Latin American socialism, able to take into account the complex reality of the continent." [13] For Gutiérrez, as for Mariátegui, the end point is not so much a political order as it is a new society and a new human being. Socialism is thus a means, not an end, to a more integral form of liberation.

While the influence of European thinkers like Rahner and Marx (and, one could add, Ernst Bloch) on Gutiérrez are readily apparent, the specifically Peruvian influences that shaped Gutiérrez's thought are often under-appreciated. Around 1920 a group of intellectuals (often referred to as the 'Generation of 1919') emerged in Peru that sought to overcome class divisions and forge a more inclusive society so as to 'Peruvianize Peru.' Outstanding figures of this generation include political figures like Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre (1895-1979), poet César Vallejo (1892-1938), novelist and anthropologist José María Arguedas (1906-69) and Mariátegui. "The influence of this generation on Gutiérrez can hardly be overemphasized," writes Gaspar Martinez. Gutiérrez is "clearly heir to them and the one who has established a most fruitful dialogue with that generation." [14]

Of all the European and Peruvian figures mentioned above, Arguedas and Mariátegui are arguably the most important for Gutiérrez. As Kurt Cadorette unequivocally states, "Gutiérrez studied primarily in Europe, yet no one has influenced his thinking more than two fellow Peruvians: José María Arguedas and José Carlos Mariátegui.... Their ideas and words are part of Peru's intellectual heritage and constantly surface in Gutiérrez's theology giving it a unique pathos and frame of reference." [15]

Given the focus of this essay, we would be well served to take a closer look at Mariátegui's influence on Gutiérrez. In a 1980 interview in the Peruvian journal *Quehacer*, Gutiérrez describes Mariátegui's influence. "Mariátegui is especially significant for Peruvian culture," Gutiérrez notes; "It is he who, for the first time, tries to think out of the Peruvian historical process and the Peruvian reality of his time with new and distinct categories which have had an enormous impact on the way we understand our society." [16] Although Gutiérrez does not state so explicitly, the "new and distinct categories" are no doubt a reference to Mariátegui's use of Marxist analysis. Gutiérrez elaborates: "I have had the opportunity to work through Mariátegui for academic reasons. For several years at the University [Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú] I taught a course dedicated entirely to Mariátegui's ideas. . . . In my opinion he combines many qualities. He is significant because his action and thought arise from his experience of the popular classes." [17]

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez further elucidates Mariátegui's contributions. In Latin America's "search for indigenous socialist paths," Gutiérrez

writes, Mariátegui is "the outstanding figure" who "continues to chart the course." [18] Gutiérrez quotes this famous passage from Mariátegui:

We certainly do not wish for socialism in America to be an exact copy of others' socialism. It must be a heroic creation. We must bring Indo-American socialism to life with our own reality, in our own language. This is a mission worthy of a new generation. [19]

Gutiérrez then adds the following analysis:

For Mariátegui, as for many today in Latin America, historical materialism is above all "a method for the historical interpretation of society." All [of Mariátegui's] work, thought and action — although not exempt from understandable limitations — was characterized by these concerns. He was loyal to his sources, that is, to the central intuitions of Marx, yet was beyond all dogmatism; he was simultaneously loyal to a unique historical reality. [20]

As Gutiérrez makes clear from passages like these, the non-dogmatic nature of Mariátegui's Marxism was one of his greatest strengths, not weaknesses. Like other non-dogmatic Marxists of his time such as Georges Sorel and Antonio Labriola, Mariátegui did not let his use of Marxism overtake his commitment to remain true to the specific historical reality of Peru at that time. Economic inequalities between Peru's social classes were indeed a major problem. But Mariátegui also knew that issues of race and ideology compounded Peru's most intractable problem, namely, the problem of the land-tenure system, or *gamonalismo*. As he explains, the term *gamonalismo* "designates more than just a social and economic category: that of the *latifundistas* or large landowners. It signifies a whole phenomenon. *Gamonalismo* is represented not only by the *gamonales* but by a long hierarchy of officials, intermediaries, agents, parasites, et cetera. The literate Indian who enters the service of *gamonalismo* turns into an exploiter of his own race." [21]

Stepping back a moment from these two thinkers, we may note several commonalities. First, both Mariátegui and Gutiérrez are critical of colonial forms of Christendom, while remaining appreciative of more authentic and liberating forms of faith. Second, both are consummate contextualist thinkers insofar that they ground their theoretical reflections in concrete experience. This applies not only to contextualist (i.e. indigenous) form of socialism, but also to native forms of religious expression. Both thinkers therefore appreciate the integrity of what has become known as "popular religion." Third, both remain committed to the plight of the indigenous poor. In their own ways, they espouse what Gutiérrez refers to as "a preferential option for the poor."

All this being said, it may be noted that anyone, regardless of religious affiliation, may subscribe to such positions. Gutiérrez, an avowed Christian, uses these positions to inform his understanding of faith and God. But one may ask: Does Mariátegui, a Marxist who left organized religion in his early twenties, do something similar? In what ways may Mariátegui's religious vision qualify as "religious"? Is it possible to discern a

theory of religion in Mariátegui's philosophy? The remainder of this essay will explore this possibility.

### **Mariátegui's "New Sense" of Religion**

Perhaps the closest Mariátegui ever comes to addressing these questions is in his best known work, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, published in 1928. Mariátegui was highly influenced by the Peruvian intellectual Manuel Gonzalez Prada (1844-1918), who voiced deep concern for the condition of the indigenous peoples of Peru and who criticized Peru's ruling elite for their inattention to the plight of the indigenous poor. As part of this critique, Gonzalez Prada attacked the Church as a political and social institution. According to him, this potentially powerful force for good had violated its own tenets and had become a corrupting force in Peruvian society.[22]

As I have already noted, Mariátegui shared Gonzalez Prada's critique of the institutional church, but he did not go as far as Gonzalez Prada to denounce religiosity altogether. In the essay entitled "Literature on Trial" from the *Seven Essays*, Mariátegui explains that Gonzalez Prada deceived himself when he preached antireligiosity. "Today," Mariátegui explains, "much more is known than in [Gonzalez Prada's] time about many matters, including religion." [23] In a pivotal passage, he adds:

We know that a revolution is always religious. The word religion has a new meaning, a new sense. It serves to do more than designate a ritual or a church. It matters little that the Soviets write in their propaganda posters that "religion is the opium of the people." What still misleads many is the old meaning of the word.[24]

According to Mariátegui, Gonzalez Prada preached the demise of all religious beliefs without realizing that he himself was the bearer of a certain kind of faith.

As Michel Löwy notes, Mariátegui does not venture a new definition of religion, one that goes beyond the 'old connotation' and explains its 'new sense.' Accordingly, we are left to infer its meaning. Like Löwy, Ofelia Schutte comments on Mariátegui's fluid understanding of religion. As she points out, Mariátegui's Marxism is premised on the three interactive levels: Marxism as a science, Marxism as an aesthetic impulse, and Marxism as a faith. Both authors argue that Mariátegui's sense of religiosity is deeply enmeshed with other areas of his thought and is thus difficult to pin down.

This being said, I believe that both Löwy and Schutte set us in the right direction for better understanding Mariátegui's 'new sense' of religion. Löwy suggests that this new sense is likely related to humankind's "need of the infinite" and its quest for a heroic myth that provides meaning and "enchantment" to life.[25] Schutte argues that Mariátegui's concept of religiosity should be linked to his interest in the psychological dynamics of religious belief and to his aesthetics.[26] In what follows, I would like to develop these promising insights further by way of three theses that I believe implicitly undergird Mariátegui's "new sense" of religion.



*a. Religious Faith is a Quality, not Type, of Human Experience*

The first implicit presupposition may be stated as follows: for Mariátegui, the religious dimension of human experience is a quality — and not a discreet type — of human experience. Whereas philosophers and theologians are often prone to treat 'religious experience' as categorically distinct from other forms of human experience, Mariátegui was interested in showing how the religious dimension of human experience could color and shape all kinds of experience, be it political, artistic, or scientific. Mariátegui thus approached religion less as a noun — a church, a set of rites, an object of devotion — and more as an adjective or adverb — as in how we do things in a 'religious way.'

While it is clear that Mariátegui does not want to limit the meaning of religion to a particular institution, what would he say about the meaning of 'religious experience'? How are we to understand an experience that someone refers to, for example, as mystical, or ecstatic? While Mariátegui does invoke the term 'mystical' with some frequency, I think it is instructive to note that he rarely, if ever, uses it to answer the question: What is the essence of religious experience? Rather, he invokes the term to show how the mystical is in continuity with human experience at large. "Revolutionary emotion... is a religious emotion," Mariátegui writes.[27] For him, religious faith is coterminous with revolutionary action. Ultimately, Mariátegui was less interested in the question of religious essence and more interested in the function of religion, which yields revolutionary *praxis*.

To underscore what is at stake here, we would be well served to note that around the turn of the 20th century mystical or ecstatic experience was often thought to be an experience unlike any other. Such an experience was believed to be entirely *sui generis*, as Rudolf Otto famously put it. It was thought to exist well outside of the common experiential frameworks of the true, the good, or the beautiful. In such a case, 'religious experience' is taken to be not so much a dimension of human experience as it is an experience that breaks itself off *from* everyday human experience. Indeed, this belief persists to the present day. It is virtually the antithesis of the kind of experience proffered by more contemporary emergentist and relational approaches to faith, such as seen in process thought, feminist theology, and Pragmatism.[28]

*b. Religious Knowledge is not Rationalistic*

If Mariátegui's approach to experience may be described as integral and unitive insofar as he connects religious, political, and ethical concerns along a common continuum of experience, so too may the same be said of his anthropology and epistemology, which are also intimately connected. As Ofelia Schutte incisively notes, the human being is for Mariátegui a "unity of thought and feeling rather than... a composite or combination of both." [29] Mariátegui understands functions like acting, feeling, and struggling as equally descriptive of what it means to be human.

Such an integral approach to anthropology and epistemology is quite significant in light of the Western tendency to toward rationalism, which places reason over and above all other human faculties and activities. Traditional forms of both philosophy and theology have often "produced a divided (if not dualistic) view of the self and thus have contributed to the fragmentation of human consciousness," writes Schutte.[30] Feminist philosophy and theology have been especially insightful in showing the many limitations of such a position. As ecofeminist and liberation theologian Ivone Gebara argues, for example, we must now begin "to affirm relatedness as a primordial and foundational reality [that] requires us to eliminate dualisms and other forms of separation." [31] Such an affirmation also requires us to affirm a new vision of human rationality, one that is "connected, integrated, independent, creative, open, and willing to engage in dialogue." Emotions, Gebara adds, "are as much rationality as analytical rationality is emotion." [32]

If the Western tendency has been to divorce reason from other forms of human consciousness — such as imagination, perception, feeling, emotion, passion — then Mariátegui moves decisively in the opposite direction toward their unity. In order to forge a unity between knowing and feeling, Mariátegui first distances himself from overly-rationalistic approaches to knowledge, such as found in certain scientific and dogmatic versions of Marxism and positivism. Mariátegui does not oppose reason and science, but he does hold that "[n]either Reason nor Science can meet the need of the infinite that exists in man." [33] Mariátegui laments bourgeois civilization's "lack of myth, of faith, of hope" which has resulted in the "crisis of bourgeois civilization." [34] He shares Ernest Renan's melancholy toward positivism. "Religious people live in a shadow," writes Renan. "On what will those who come after us live?" This despairing question, notes Mariátegui, "still awaits an answer." [35]

If one were to take these comments out of context, one might very well be inclined to believe that Mariátegui would likely want to return to the "old myths" of religious belief, to the time when people "live[d] in a shadow," or to "the prestige of the ancient religions." [36] It is true that Mariátegui wants to restore humankind's faith in myth, for "myth moves man in history" and "without myth, the history of humanity has no sense of history." [37] Yet, it should be equally clear that Mariátegui does not want to return to an "old" sense of religion. Rather, he wants to retain the direction and meaning that religion and religious myth offer without returning to a 'single church' or a 'single rite.'

### *c. Instrumentalism*

So far, I have commented on Mariátegui's conception of the religious dimension of human experience as it applies to his metaphysics, anthropology, and epistemology. We saw that Mariátegui understands religious experience as a quality of experience, rather than a *sui generis* type of experience, and we noted that Mariátegui makes room for religious knowledge and expression by pointing to the inherent limits of rationalism. If we are to make Mariátegui's "newer sense" of religion even more explicit, we may note a third crucial building block, which I will refer to as Mariátegui's instrumentalism. For

Mariátegui, the religious dimension of human experience functions as a regulative guide for our actions. Embedded in this insight are two related considerations: Mariátegui's voluntarism and his desire to overcome the dualism between the material and the ideal. Significantly, all of these insights are connected to Mariátegui's interest in Pragmatism.

Let me unpack these ideas by first turning to Mariátegui's anti-foundationalism, which is articulated well in his 1925 essay "Pessimism of Reality, Optimism of the Idea." In this essay, Mariátegui expresses his appreciation for Pragmatism as a philosophical approach that not only effectively moves people to action but also "is in fact a relativistic and skeptical school." [38] As Mariátegui notes, for Pragmatists "there are no absolute truths." However, Mariátegui adds: "But there are relative truths that govern people's lives as if they were absolute." [39] Mariátegui is drawing here on the philosophy of Hans Vaihinger, a neo-Kantian whose 1911 *Philosophie des Als Ob (The Philosophy of Either/Or)* was "immediately perceived as having similarities with pragmatism." [40] But Mariátegui could have well drawn on the *Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, whom Mariátegui cites elsewhere in his writings. As James argues in the *Varieties*, while words like 'soul,' 'God,' and 'immortality' "cover no distinctive sense-content whatever, it follows that theoretically speaking they are words devoid of any significance. Yet strangely enough they have a definite meaning *for our practice*. We can act *as if* there were a God; feel *as if* we were free; consider Nature *as if* she were full of special designs; lay plans *as if* we were immortal." When we do so, "we find then that these words do make a genuine difference in our moral life." [41] For James, as for all Pragmatists, the meaning of an idea is to be determined not by antecedent causes, but by its conceivable practical effects.

Mariátegui is clearly drawn to this idea, and he offers his own summary of the Pragmatic position, which I would like to quote here in full. "This philosophy," Mariátegui writes:

... does not call us to abandon action. It only seeks to deny the Absolute. But it recognizes in human history the relative truth, the temporal myth of each time, the same value and the same effectiveness as an absolute and eternal truth. This philosophy proclaims and confirms the need of the myth and the usefulness of the faith. [42]

I think Mariátegui's discussion of anti-foundationalism and regulative ideals provide some important clues to his "new sense" of religion. Mariátegui does not take refuge in any *a priori* understandings of God, 'the sacred,' or 'the divine.' He is not convinced that faith is primarily about the search for 'the Absolute.' Rather, Mariátegui understands that faith is first and foremost an *active* endeavor, a complex process of constructing, honoring, and giving oneself over to ideals and myths. Furthermore, like Marx, he is interested not merely in describing experience, but rather, in changing it.

This emphasis on human praxis is taken up explicitly in Mariátegui's discussion of a poem written by Henri Franck in 1912 called *La danse devant l'arche (Dance in Front of the Ark)*. The poem mirrors in many ways Mariátegui's own faith journey. Like

Mariátegui, the poet is in search of a faith. He doesn't find it in the faith of his forebears, which in Franck's case, is Judaism, or in any absolute idea of infinity or eternity. But just when the poet is on the brink of a full-blown skepticism and relativism, the poet realizes that although there may be no truth outside of humankind, we may nevertheless carry truth inside ourselves. What's more, human beings must willingly activate this truth. Mariátegui ends his discussion of Frank's poem by quoting the poem's most evocative line: "If the Ark is empty where you hoped to find the law, nothing is real but your dance." [43]

Mariátegui's point here seems to be this: although we may no longer find truth in the conventions of institutional religion, we may well find it in our creative acts, which are guided by their own myths and ideas. Faith, then, is not limited to the churches. Rather, it may be constitutive of human action and imagination at large. Mariátegui's faith is indeed a faith that has more to do with orthopraxy (right action) than orthodoxy (right belief). While there is good reason to be pessimistic about the social realities we have created, Mariátegui reminds us that our unrest and dissatisfaction with this reality is fueled by a deeper optimism — a melioristic faith in our ability to change reality with the help of powerful ideals and heroic myths. Part of Mariátegui's great contribution, I believe, is to help us see more clearly that our creative praxis is made possible through our faith in powerful ideals and heroic myths.

In regards to Mariátegui's thoughts on revolutionary faith, Mariátegui has not been without his critics. Within his own lifetime, the Communist International discredited Mariátegui for his nationalism and for refusing to identify his own socialist political party as "communist." No doubt that Mariátegui's unorthodox religious views, along with his unwavering attention to questions of race, added to the Comintern's suspicion of him. A second possible critique arises when looking at Mariátegui's faith in revolutionary myth. The problem is one that Sorel faced: what was to guard against revolutionary myth being used for fascist and other right-wing purposes? After all, fascist leaders in the 1920s, such as Mussolini, put into practice Sorel's belief in the need for a deliberately conceived myth to sway the masses. Although Sorel himself believed that the "energizing myth" of the general strike would promote a sense of solidarity and class consciousness among the working class, fascists would appeal to the same myth to bolster ideas of race, nation, or people, as defined by the state.

Philosopher Kim Díaz offers a third critique of Mariátegui's use of myth. Although she praises Mariátegui for working tirelessly to secure the rights of Indigenous peoples, she argues that Mariátegui is "ultimately inconsistent in the way he relates to Indigenous people." "On the one hand," Díaz writes, "he believes Indigenous people are human beings, deserving of recognition as rational autonomous agents. On the other hand, Mariátegui also believes that Indigenous people are not sophisticated enough to understand scientific and philosophical subtleties." [44] Díaz bases this critique on a passage in "Man and Myth" in which Mariátegui states that "relativist language [of the philosophers] is not accessible or intelligible to the common people." [45] Unlike Díaz, however, I read this passage less as an indictment of common people and more as a

lament on shortcomings of philosophy's prosaic use of language. Such an interpretation is corroborated, I believe, by Mariátegui's subsequent insight: "Professional intellectuals will not find the path of faith; the masses find it." [46]

This difference of interpretation notwithstanding, I believe that Díaz raises some points worthy of consideration. To what extent, if at all, does Sorel's willingness to "deceive" the proletariat figure into Mariátegui's own thinking? And how much trust is Mariátegui willing to place in revolutionary forms of education? I think that Díaz's own work on the potential contributions of Paulo Freire to Mariátegui's thought are right on target. [47] If nothing else, this pairing helps to make more explicit the need for authentic forms of conscientization within any revolutionary struggle. Indeed, this is also precisely the pairing that Gustavo Gutiérrez makes in his *A Theology of Liberation*. Having discussed Mariátegui, Gutiérrez turns immediately to Freire: in order for liberation to be "authentic and complete," Gutiérrez writes, "it has to be undertaken by the oppressed people themselves and so must stem from values proper to these people." "From this point of view," Gutiérrez continues, "one of the most most creative and fruitful efforts which has been implemented in Latin America is the experimental work of Paulo Freire." [48]

As worthy as all of these criticisms are, the larger question still remains: What does Mariátegui's "new sense" of religion have to contribute to the realities and discourses of our own time? As I have shown, Mariátegui has already played a significant part in the development of Latin American liberation theology through the work of Gutiérrez. Mariátegui's philosophical contextualism and his overriding concern for the indigenous poor are two hallmarks that can be easily seen Gutiérrez's many writings. But as I have also tried to show, Mariátegui's influence on liberation theology (and liberation philosophy) extend even more deeply. By looking at the contours of Mariátegui's "newer sense" of religion, which shares some significant affinities with Pragmatism, I have hoped to elucidate an important shared point of reference for liberation thought in the Americas.

Dr. Christopher D. Tirres  
Associate Professor of Religious Studies  
Depaul University, Chicago  
ctirres@depaul.edu

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## Notes

[1] For an extensive look at Boff's case, see Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1988).

[2] As head of the Jesuits in Argentina, Bergoglio expressed some hesitancy about liberation theology, fearing it was too political. At the time, he was also criticized by some on the Left for failing to prevent the kidnapping and torture of two priests sympathetic to liberation theology.

[3] This phrase is taken from the subtitle of a recent book on Pope Francis by the once-besmirched Leonardo Boff. See *Francis of Rome & Francis of Assisi: A New Springtime for the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2014).

[4] Michael E. Lee, quoted in "Pope's Focus on Poor Revives Scorned Theology" by Jim Yardley and Simon Romero, *The New York Times*, May 24, 2015.

[5] Daniel Franklin Pilario, "Mapping Postcolonial Theory: Appropriations in Contemporary Theology," *Hapag* 3, No. 1-2 (2006): 9-10.

[6] Enrique Dussel, "Philosophy in Latin America in the Twentieth Century: Problems and Currents" in *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 33.

[7] Ibid. See also Ofelia Schutte's comprehensive chapter, "The Philosophy of Liberation in Critical Perspective" in *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 175-205.

[8] Eduardo Mendieta, *The Adventures of Transcendental Philosophy: Karl-Otto Apel's Semiotics and Discourse Ethics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: View from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Christopher D. Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith: A Dialogue between Liberationist and Pragmatic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Alexander V. Stehn, "Toward an Inter-American Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Liberation", *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*, 2:2, Dec 2011, 20-36, and Stehn, "Religiously Binding the Imperial Self: Classical Pragmatism's Call and Liberation Philosophy's Response" in *Pragmatism in the Americas*, ed. Gregory Fernando Pappas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 297-314.

[9] Michael Löwy, quoted in Schutte, 19.

[10] John M. Baines, *Revolution in Peru: Mariátegui and the Myth* (University of Alabama Press, 1972), 20.

[11] Curt Cadorette, *From the Heart of the People: The Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1988), 77.

[12] José Carlos Mariátegui, "The Problem of the Indian" in *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 2004), 264.

[13] Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 125.

[14] Ibid., 98.

[15] Cadorette, 67.

[16] Gutiérrez, quoted in Cadorette, 76. The original interview may be found in "Entrevista de Gustavo Gutiérrez con Luis Peirano," *Quehacer: revista bimestral del Centro de Estudios y Promoción del Desarrollo-DESCO* (March, 1980), 116.

[17] *Ibid.*, 76.

[18] Mariátegui, quoted in Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Marynoll: Orbis, 1973), 90.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 90. The phrase that Gutiérrez references here -- "a method for the historical interpretation of society" -- is taken from Mariátegui's *Defensa del marxismo*.

[21] Mariátegui, "The Problem of the Indian," 264.

[22] Baines, 14.

[23] Mariátegui, José Carlos, *Obras* (Barcelona: Linkgua, 2016), 134.

[24] Author's translation. Mariátegui's own language of the "new sense" of religion is not captured in some English translations, most notably, the 1971 University of Texas Press edition. Here is the original passage in Spanish: "Sabemos que una revolución es siempre religiosa. La palabra religión tiene un nuevo valor, un nuevo sentido. Sirve para algo más que para designar un rito o una iglesia. Poco importa que los soviets escriban en sus afiches de propaganda que 'la religion es el opio de los pueblos.' El comunismo es esencialmente religioso. Lo que motiva aún equívocos es la vieja acepción del vocablo." *Ibid.*

[25] Michael Löwy, "Communism and Religion: José Carlos Mariátegui's Revolutionary Mysticism," *Latin American Perspectives*, 35:2, March 2008, 77.

[26] Schutte, 33.

[27] Mariátegui, "Man and Myth" in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), 387.

[28] As I will discuss further momentarily, Pragmatism figures prominently in Mariátegui's approach to religion. On the question of rationalism, he notes at the very end of the *Seven Essays*: "Rationalist thought of the nineteenth century sought to explain religion in terms of philosophy. More realistically, pragmatism has accorded to religion the place from which rationalism conceitedly thought to dislodge it." Mariátegui, José Carlos, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1928/1971), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/mariateg/works/7-interpretive-essays/essay05.htm>

[29] Schutte, 48.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 88.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Mariátegui, "Man and Myth," 383.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid.*, 383-384.

[37] *Ibid.*, 384.

[38] Mariátegui, "Pessimism of Reality, Optimism of the Idea" in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, 397.

[39] Ibid.

[40] John Shook, "F.C.S. Schiller and European Pragmatism" in *A Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 52.

[41] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience in Writings: 1902-1910* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 56, original emphases.

[42] Mariátegui also approvingly quotes the following summary of Vaihinger's philosophy by Italian philosopher Giuseppe Renssi: "Moral principles, just like aesthetic ones, legal criteria, just like those upon which science operates, the very foundations of logic, have no objective existence. They are our fictitious constructions that serve only as regulatory precepts for our actions, which are conducted as if they were true." Mariátegui, "Pessimism of Reality, Optimism of the Idea," 398.

[43] Mariátegui, "Man and Myth," 385.

[44] Kim Díaz, "Mariátegui's Myth," *APA Newsletter. Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 13:1, Fall 2013, 21-22

[45] Mariátegui, "Man and Myth," 387.

[46] Ibid.

[47] See Kim Díaz, "Radical Democracy in the Thought and Work of Paulo Freire and Luis Villoro," Doctoral Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2012, esp. 44-50

[48] Gutiérrez, 91.