Pietas : Jurnal Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya
Vol.4, No.1 December 2026, hal.38-50
e-ISSN: 3031-4836
DOI: 10.62282/pj.v4i1.38-50
https://jurnal.yayasanyutapendidikancerdas.com/index.php/pietas

Submitted on 16/09/2026;
Revised on 12/10/2026;
Accepted on 20/10/2026;

Liberation Theology and Structural Poverty: A Conceptual Analysis of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Ali Shariati's Thought

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Abstract
Liberation theology has produced influential critiques of structural injustice across civilizations, yet comparative scholarship connecting Catholic and Islamic liberation thought remains limited. This study compares the theological frameworks of Gustavo Gutiérrez, a founding figure of Latin American liberation theology, and Ali Shariati, an Iranian Islamic thinker, with attention to their conceptualizations of structural poverty and social justice. Using a qualitative comparative textual study and conceptual analysis guided by contextual hermeneutics, the study analyzes their principal works and a screened body of secondary literature through a codebook of seven analytical dimensions. The results show functional-ethical convergence: both thinkers treat religion as an emancipatory force, prioritize praxis, criticize institutional complicity in poverty, and emphasize the agency of the oppressed. They diverge in ontological premises (Christology versus Tawhid), epistemological sources, and political vision. The study contributes a conceptual synthesis and an integrative model that links a shared understanding of social justice to coordinated responses to structural poverty, moderated by national context. The model is offered as a conceptual proposition for Southeast Asia and requires empirical testing. The findings support interfaith discourse on religion-based social justice while preserving the doctrinal differences between the two traditions.

Keywords: Ali Shariati; comparative theology; Gustavo Gutiérrez; liberation theology; structural poverty

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INTRODUCTION

Structural poverty remains one of the most persistent and morally urgent challenges of the twenty-first century. Unlike poverty that results from personal circumstances, structural poverty is embedded in political, economic, and social institutions that systematically disadvantage particular populations (Farmer, 2004; Pogge, 2008). The World Bank (2022) estimated that approximately 700 million people continue to live in extreme poverty, concentrated in regions shaped by colonial legacies, unequal economic policies, and weak institutions. This systemic character demands analytical frameworks that move beyond individual-level explanations, a demand that religious traditions have historically met in part by offering both theological diagnosis and prophetic resistance.

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Religion has occupied a paradoxical position in relation to structural inequality, functioning both as a legitimator and a challenger of unjust systems. Marx's (1844/1970) description of religion as the "opium of the people" captured one side of this paradox, while liberation theologians have articulated its emancipatory potential. Latin American liberation theology, catalyzed by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Medellín Conference of Latin American Bishops (1968), and dependency theory (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; Frank, 1967), insisted that Christian faith requires a "preferential option for the poor" and active engagement in dismantling structures of oppression (Berryman, 1987). Its intellectual architecture combined a rereading of Scripture centered on Exodus, the prophets, and the ministry of Jesus among the marginalized; the analytical categories of dependency theory; and European political theology, particularly Metz's (1980) notion of the "dangerous memory" of suffering (Ellacuría & Sobrino, 1993).

Gustavo Gutiérrez articulated this vision most comprehensively in *A Theology of Liberation* (1973/1988). He proposed that theology begins with the lived experience of the poor and that sin is also a structural and social reality, constructing a theological anthropology centered on integral liberation: spiritual, social, and political. His influence extended to analogous movements in Africa and Asia (Rowland, 2007). A parallel liberation discourse emerged in Islamic thought, most notably in the work of Ali Shariati (1933–1977), the Iranian sociologist and thinker whose ideas shaped the ideological landscape of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Shariati synthesized Shiite theology, Marxist sociological analysis, and existentialist themes into a framework that positioned authentic Islam as a force against tyranny, exploitation, and class oppression (Dabashi, 2008; Rahnema, 2000). Central to this framework is the Quranic concept of *mustadh'afin* (the oppressed or dispossessed), which he deployed as both a sociological category and a theological imperative (Shariati, 1979/1986a, n.d.).

Comparing Gutiérrez and Shariati carries significance beyond the academic. In an era in which religion is often instrumentalized for exclusionary politics, recovering the emancipatory dimensions of Christianity and Islam has practical relevance (Bayat, 2007; Novak, 1986). Comparative theology, as articulated by Clooney (2010) and Tracy (1987), provides a methodological frame for such work: rather than imposing external categories, it proceeds through close engagement with the primary texts of another tradition, seeking understanding rather than assimilation. The existing literature on liberation theology has largely remained confined within single traditions, with Christian and Islamic studies proceeding along parallel tracks (Engineer, 2001; Esack, 1997). Several scholars have noted similarities between Gutiérrez and Shariati (Dabashi, 2008; Sachedina, 2001), but sustained conceptual analysis of their convergences and divergences on structural poverty and social justice has not been adequately undertaken. This gap matters because interfaith dialogue on justice and poverty is increasingly seen as essential in religiously plural contexts (Knitter, 2013; Wielenga, 1999).

This study addresses the gap through a comparative analysis guided by three research questions: (1) What are the key theological concepts developed by Gutiérrez and Shariati regarding structural poverty? (2) How do their ontological and epistemological premises

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compare? (3) What conceptual implications do both frameworks hold for contemporary Southeast Asia? Southeast Asia is chosen as an applied context because it includes the world's largest Muslim-majority nation (Indonesia), a predominantly Catholic country (the Philippines), and several religiously plural societies, all facing persistent inequality (Cornelio, 2016; Hefner, 2021). The novelty of the study lies in a systematic, codebook-based comparison of the two thinkers on structural poverty and in an integrative model that connects their shared conceptualization of social justice to coordinated responses to poverty. Its contribution is theoretical, to comparative theology, and conceptual, to religion-based discourse on poverty alleviation in the Global South. The Southeast Asian application is explicitly treated as a conceptual proposition rather than an empirical finding.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive design using a comparative textual study and conceptual analysis (Clooney, 2010; Tracy, 1987). It draws on contextual hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1981), which holds that texts must be interpreted within their socio-historical contexts of production. No human or animal participants were involved; therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required, and no participant-based validation procedure was used. The overall analytical workflow is shown in Figure 1.

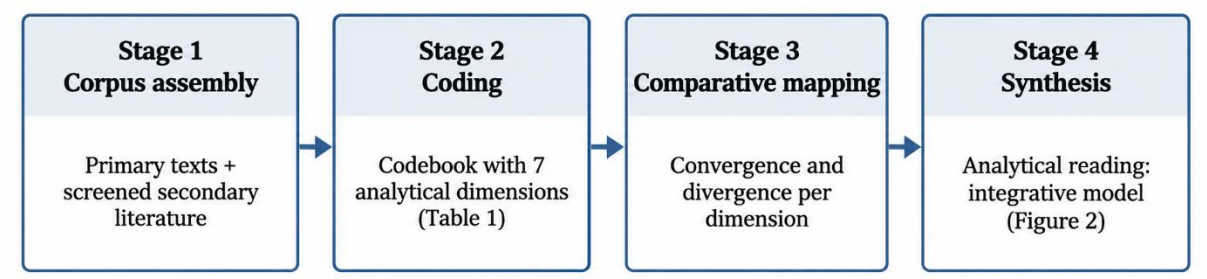


Figure 1. Analytical Workflow of the Study
Source: Authors' analysis, 2026.

The primary corpus consists of the following works. For Gutiérrez: *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (1973/1988) and *The Power of the Poor in History* (1983). For Shariati: *Islamology* (*Islamshenasi*; Shariati, n.d.), *On the Sociology of Islam* (1979/1986a), *Fatima Is Fatima* (1971/1981), *What Is to Be Done* (1986b), and *Religion vs. Religion* (2003). *Islamology* is treated as the principal source for Shariati's account of the Quranic concept of *mustadh'afin* and of *Tawhid*. Secondary sources were identified through database searches in Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR conducted in March 2026. The search string used was: ("liberation theology" OR "Islamic liberation theology") AND ("structural poverty" OR "structural injustice" OR "social justice") AND (Gutiérrez OR Gutierrez OR Shariati OR Shari'ati). The search was applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords. The searches initially retrieved 128 records (52 from Scopus, 41 from Web of Science, and 35 from JSTOR). After removing 26 duplicate records, 102 records remained for title and abstract screening.

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Following the screening process, 28 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, and 18 sources were retained for the final analysis. Inclusion criteria were (a) peer-reviewed articles or scholarly monographs, (b) substantive engagement with liberation theology, Islamic political theology, structural poverty, or comparative religious ethics, and (c) publication in English. Items focused solely on unrelated topics were excluded. Sources outside the database search (e.g., the papal documents *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Evangelii Gaudium*) were added through citation chaining because they document the magisterial reception of the concept of structural sin.

The analysis followed three stages. In Stage 1, the first author read all primary and secondary sources closely and extracted passages relevant to structural poverty and social justice. In Stage 2, the passages were coded using a codebook of seven analytical dimensions (Table 1). The dimensions were derived abductively: the first four follow the conceptual structure of the research questions (the theological grounding, the definition of the poor, the diagnosis of sin or oppression, and the epistemological starting point), and the remaining three were added after a pilot reading of the primary texts showed that the two thinkers also differ in their account of religion's social role, vision of justice, and method of liberation. Each dimension has an operational definition and coding indicators to limit subjective drift. Coding consistency was examined through an intra-coder procedure. A subset of approximately 20% of coded passages was re-coded after a four-week interval to evaluate consistency between the initial and subsequent coding decisions. Any discrepancies were reviewed by returning to the original texts and refining the interpretation according to the operational definitions in the codebook. Coding was conducted manually using a structured spreadsheet containing the seven analytical dimensions, operational definitions, and coding indicators. In Stage 3, the coded material was compared dimension by dimension to identify convergence and divergence, and the results were synthesized through analogical reasoning (Clooney, 2010) into an integrative model.

Table 1. Codebook of the Seven Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Operational definition	Coding indicators
Theological source	The scriptural, doctrinal, and intellectual sources a thinker invokes to ground the analysis of poverty.	Explicit appeals to Scripture/Quran, tradition, or social theory as warrants.
Concept of the poor	The category used to name the poor or oppressed and the status assigned to them.	Terms and definitions (e.g., "the poor", *mustadh'afin*); whether the category is theological, sociological, or both.
View of sin and oppression	The account of how injustice originates and is sustained.	References to structural sin, *shirk*, class domination, or institutional complicity.
Epistemological starting point	The point from which theological knowledge begins and how it is validated.	Statements on praxis, experience, textual return, or consciousness.
Role of religion	The function attributed to religion and	Statements on religion as

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	religious institutions in relation to injustice.	emancipatory, legitimating, or both; the role of the church or *ulama*.
Vision of justice	The envisioned just social order and its theological basis.	Descriptions of the Kingdom of God, the *umma*, equality, and political-economic arrangements.
Method of liberation	The means proposed to achieve liberation.	Prescribed practices, organizations, forms of mobilization, and relations to authority.

Source: Authors' codebook, 2026.

Trustworthiness was pursued through strategies suited to a hermeneutic study. First, triangulation of primary and secondary sources ensured that interpretive claims do not rest on a single textual reference. Second, interpretations were cross-checked against established scholarly readings of both thinkers, which is a form of peer-literature corroboration and not member checking, since no participants were involved. Third, following Geertz's (1973) notion of thick description as applied by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the socio-historical contexts of each thinker were documented: for Gutiérrez, the developmentalist modernization and military dictatorships of 1960s–1970s Latin America; for Shariati, the Pahlavi modernization program, political repression, and disillusionment with both Western liberalism and Soviet Marxism (Abrahamian, 1982; Rahnema, 2000). Given the interpretive nature of the study, we claim analytic transparency, traceability, and auditability rather than strict replicability: the corpus, search protocol, codebook, and coding decisions are reported so that readers can follow and evaluate each interpretive step, although a different reader may legitimately arrive at different readings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in four steps: the coded framework of each thinker, a single comparative analysis organized by the seven dimensions of the codebook, an integrative model, and its conceptual relevance for Southeast Asia.

Gutiérrez: Structural Sin and the Preferential Option for the Poor

Gutiérrez reorients Christian theology from metaphysical speculation toward the material conditions of human suffering. At the core of his project is the "preferential option for the poor," which he distinguishes from a sociological observation by insisting that it is a theological category rooted in the character of the God of Scripture, who takes the side of the marginalized not out of partiality but out of justice (Gutiérrez, 1973/1988). Poverty, in this view, is not a result of internal deficiencies but a product of exploitative global relations, which he analyzed with the help of dependency theory (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; Frank, 1967).

Sin is therefore reconceptualized as a structural and social reality, synonymous with the structures, institutions, and ideologies that perpetuate dehumanization (Gutiérrez, 1973/1988). Because poverty is structurally produced, its remedy requires structural transformation and not only individual charity. This position was later recognized in Catholic magisterial teaching:

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John Paul II (1987) named "structures of sin" in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and Francis (2013) reaffirmed the concern for the structural causes of poverty in *Evangelii Gaudium*. The reception of Gutiérrez was nevertheless contested. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued two instructions (1984 and 1986) that accepted the concern for the poor but warned against uncritical use of Marxist categories (Hennelly, 1990), and Novak (1986) argued that liberation theology underestimated the poverty-reducing potential of democratic capitalism.

Epistemologically, Gutiérrez gives primacy to orthopraxis: theology is "critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God" (Gutiérrez, 1973/1988, p. 11). This reversal draws on Freire's (1970) *conscientização*, the idea that the oppressed must become subjects and not objects of their own liberation. Its ecclesial expression was the Base Ecclesial Communities (*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*, CEBs), where the poor read Scripture in light of lived experience and develop both theological understanding and political agency (Boff, 1986). The Kingdom of God is accordingly a historical reality to be actualized through liberating praxis, and not only an eschatological hope (Sobrino, 1993).

Shariati: Mustadh'afin, Tawhid, and Revolutionary Islam

Shariati's project, though emerging from a different civilizational context, shows an analogous concern with the emancipatory capacity of religion. Its foundation is the Quranic concept of *mustadh'afin* (Surah Al-Qasas 28:5), those weakened and dispossessed by the powerful (*mustakbirin*). In *Islamology* and *On the Sociology of Islam*, Shariati transforms this category into a comprehensive sociological and theological concept, arguing that the mission of Islam, from the Prophet Muhammad to the martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala, is the liberation of the *mustadh'afin* from political, economic, and cultural domination (Shariati, 1979/1986a, n.d.).

Shariati's synthesis drew on three currents: Shiite theology, Marxist sociology, and existentialism (Rahnema, 2000). From Shiism he took the Karbala paradigm as a symbol of resistance to tyranny, recasting Muharram mourning as a call to action. From Marxism he borrowed class analysis, alienation, and structural critique while rejecting historical materialism's atheism. From existentialism he took the emphasis on responsibility and authentic choice (Dabashi, 2008). This synthesis is expressed in his distinction between "Red Shi'ism," the revolutionary Shi'ism of Ali and Husayn, and "Black Shi'ism," the institutional Shi'ism of a clerical establishment that legitimated oppressive rulers (Shariati, 1971/1981).

Theologically, Shariati interprets *Tawhid* (divine unity) as a socio-theological principle demanding the unity of humankind in a classless and just society, the ideal *umma*. Any social order that contradicts this principle is in a state of *shirk* (idolatry), because it elevates human-made structures of power to ultimate authority (Shariati, 1979/1986a, n.d.). His critique of the *ulama* parallels liberation theology's critique of institutional Christianity's alignment with colonial and economic power (Engineer, 2001). His legacy was also contested: after 1979, the clerical establishment under Khomeini marginalized his anti-clerical vision in favor of *velayat-e faqih* (Abrahamian, 1982). Outside Iran, Esack (1997) and Engineer (2001) developed Islamic

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liberation theologies that draw in varying degrees on his work, and Dabashi (2008) regards Shariati as the most significant attempt at a systematic Islamic liberation theology.

Comparative Analysis: Convergences and Divergences

Table 2 summarizes the comparison across the seven dimensions of the codebook. The discussion that follows is organized by type of relation, functional-ethical convergence first and ontological, epistemological, and political divergence second, and does not restate the table cell by cell.

Table 2. Comparative Framework: Gutiérrez and Shariati on Structural Poverty and Social Justice

Dimension	Gutiérrez	Shariati
Theological source	Bible (Exodus, Prophets, Gospels); Vatican II; dependency theory	Quran (Al-Qasas 28:5); Shiite tradition (Karbala paradigm); Marxist sociology
Concept of the poor	Preferential option for the poor; the poor as theological locus	*Mustadh'afin* (the oppressed); Quranic-sociological category
View of sin/oppression	Sin as structural and social reality; institutions as sinful	*Shirk* manifest in class structures; institutional religion as complicit
Epistemological starting point	Orthopraxis; critical reflection on praxis (Freire's *conscientização*)	Return to authentic textual sources; revolutionary consciousness through Karbala
Role of religion	Emancipatory; Church as agent of liberation through CEBs	Emancipatory; Red Shi'ism as revolutionary force against tyranny
Vision of justice	Kingdom of God as historical reality; compatible with democratic socialism	*Umma* as classless community reflecting *Tawhid*; Islamic social order
Method of liberation	Praxis: CEBs; *conscientização*; structural reform	Praxis: return to authentic Islam; revolutionary mobilization; bypassing clerical authority

Source: Authors' analysis, 2026.

The convergence is functional and ethical. Both thinkers reject the reduction of religion to otherworldly escapism and hold that the core message of their traditions demands solidarity with the marginalized and structural transformation. For Gutiérrez this rests on Exodus and the prophetic denunciation of injustice (Gutiérrez, 1973/1988); for Shariati, on the Quranic vision of a just community and Husayn's resistance to Yazid (Shariati, 1979/1986a). Both use a common hermeneutical strategy, the retrieval of suppressed liberating traditions within their own canons against readings that accommodated institutional power (Esack, 1997). Both also place praxis before contemplation, which distinguishes them from mainstream traditions that privileged doctrinal orthodoxy (Engineer, 2001; Segundo, 1976), and both criticize institutional complicity, Gutiérrez targeting the Church's historical alliance with landed elites and Shariati the legitimation of monarchy by the Safavid and Qajar-era *ulama* (Abrahamian, 1982).

A third point of convergence concerns agency. The poor are not passive recipients of liberation but subjects of their own emancipation: through conscientization in CEBs for Gutiérrez (Freire, 1970; Gutiérrez, 1983), and through the enlightened thinker (*rowshanfekr*)

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who catalyzes revolutionary consciousness, together with the Quranic principle that God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves, for Shariati (Shariati, 1986b). This emphasis separates both from fatalistic or quietist currents in their traditions.

The divergences lie at a deeper level. Ontologically, Gutiérrez's framework is grounded in Christology, with Jesus Christ as the definitive revelation of God's solidarity with the poor, whereas Shariati's is anchored in *Tawhid*, the divine unity that demands social unity and egalitarianism. These foundations yield different anthropologies: human dignity rests on the *imago Dei* confirmed in the Incarnation for Gutiérrez, and on *khalifah* (vicegerency) for Shariati (Sachedina, 2001). Epistemologically, Gutiérrez begins with the experience of the poor and moves in a hermeneutical circle between social reality and biblical text, while Shariati begins with a radical return to what he considers the authentic sources of Islam, purified of clerical interpretation (Rahnema, 2000). Institutionally, Gutiérrez sought reform within the Church, whereas Shariati was confrontational toward the *ulama* and called for their authority to be bypassed (Dabashi, 2008). Politically, Gutiérrez accepts the differentiation of religious and political spheres while insisting on the Church's prophetic voice, whereas Shariati seeks to reconstitute the public sphere on Islamic foundations, a difference tied to the contested status of the secular public sphere in Islamic contexts (Bayat, 2007; Zubaida, 2011).

These divergences do not make the frameworks incommensurable. In comparative theology, understanding across traditions requires not identity of premises but the identification of structural analogies, shared patterns of reasoning and commitment that hold despite differences in foundational categories (Clooney, 2010; Tracy, 1987). The preferential option for the poor and the Quranic mandate for the *mustadh'afin* form such an analogy: both express the conviction that divine justice privileges those whom human injustice has marginalized, although the theological grammar differs. This analogical reading permits dialogue that neither reduces one tradition to the categories of the other nor abandons the search for common ground.

An Integrative Model of Social Justice and Structural Poverty

Building on the analogy above, this study proposes the integrative model in Figure 2. The model has four components. First, each tradition contributes its own theological resources (Gutiérrez's option for the poor and Shariati's *mustadh'afin* and *Tawhid*). Second, the functional-ethical convergence supplies a shared conceptualization of social justice. Third, this shared conceptualization informs a coordinated response to structural poverty, such as interfaith dialogue, shared educational programs, and joint advocacy for structural reform. Fourth, the ontological and epistemological divergences are preserved and not dissolved, and the national socio-historical context moderates how the model is applied. The model is derived from the textual comparison and is a conceptual construct; it has not been tested empirically.

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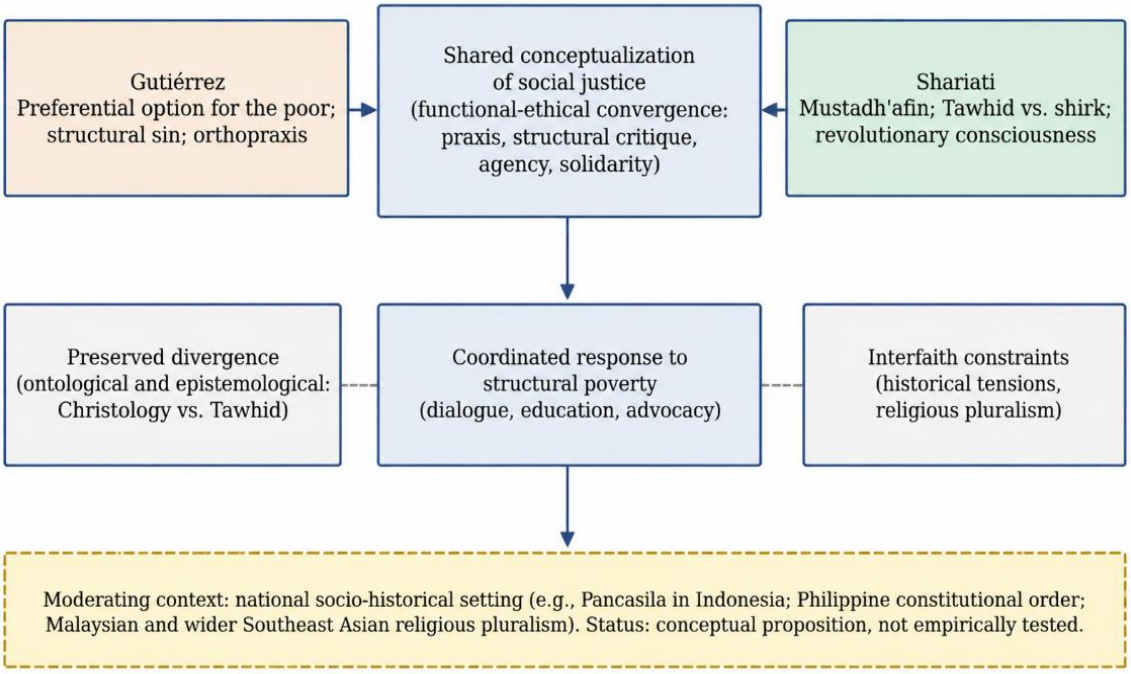


Figure 2. Integrative Model of Liberation Thought and Structural Poverty for Southeast Asia
Source: Authors' analysis, 2026.

Conceptual Relevance for Contemporary Southeast Asia

The relevance of the two frameworks for Southeast Asia is discussed here as a conceptual extension of the textual findings. Southeast Asia is a fertile setting for cross-civilizational reflection because it combines the world's largest Muslim-majority nation (Indonesia), a predominantly Catholic country (the Philippines), and several religiously plural societies, while facing persistent structural poverty reflected in inequality, large informal economies, land disparity, and urban-rural divides (Asian Development Bank, 2023; Hefner, 2021).

Gutiérrez's framework resonates with the Philippine context, where the Catholic Church has been both a pillar of colonial power and a source of social justice movements. Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines adapt the CEB model as spaces of spiritual formation and conscientization, and the Asian theology of liberation developed by Pieris (1988) shows that liberation theology can be mediated contextually beyond Latin America, provided it engages religious plurality as well as material poverty (Cornelio, 2016; Wielenga, 1999). Shariati's framework offers analytical resources for reading Islamic social movements in Indonesia and Malaysia, though in a different register. Organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah mobilize religious resources for social welfare and economic justice through *pesantren* networks and social service infrastructure, without the revolutionary confrontation of Shariati's Iranian context (Burhani, 2013; Hefner, 2021). The concept of *mustadh'afin* is not always invoked explicitly, but it can be compared with Indonesian discourse on *keadilan sosial* (social justice) and *pemberdayaan masyarakat* (community empowerment).

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These readings are analytical comparisons made by the authors, not findings of fieldwork.

The integrative model must also contend with contextual constraints. Unlike Latin America, where liberation theology emerged within a dominant religious tradition, Southeast Asia's plurality requires any religion-based approach to navigate historical tensions between Christian and Muslim communities, for example in Mindanao, Maluku, and southern Thailand (Hefner, 2021), and to work within state ideologies such as Pancasila in Indonesia. An appropriation of Gutiérrez and Shariati would therefore need to be doubly contextual, addressing both the structural roots of poverty and the interfaith dynamics that shape collaboration (Pieris, 1988).

Existing interfaith initiatives offer only tentative illustrations of the model's plausibility. The literature used here describes dialogue forums in Indonesia and Catholic-Muslim engagement in Mindanao that have turned toward shared concerns such as land rights and economic marginalization (Burhani, 2013; Gaspar, 2010). However, these two sources are over a decade old, are secondary, and do not test the model. They are therefore treated as illustrative context and not as empirical support. Current evidence on whether such initiatives address structural poverty is needed and is identified as a research priority.

Digital transformation is a further dimension that is raised here as a hypothesis. It is plausible that social media and online religious education platforms provide new spaces in which Muslim and Christian scholars and activists can encounter liberation-oriented thought across religious and national boundaries. This study did not examine digital sources, and the literature it draws on does not address digital practices; the point is therefore presented as a conceptual proposition to be tested through digital ethnography or content analysis of online interfaith discourse, and not as a finding.

The theoretical implication is that structural analogy, and not doctrinal identity, can serve as the basis for comparative work on poverty across religious traditions. The practical implication is that a shared language of justice, dignity, and solidarity can support interfaith dialogue, shared education, and joint advocacy, while the preserved ontological and epistemological differences guard against a flattened universalism. The main limitations are the focus on two thinkers, the omission of other voices in both traditions, reliance on texts available in English, the interpretive and single-analyst character of the coding (as reported in the Methods), and the absence of empirical testing of the Southeast Asian application.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Gustavo Gutiérrez and Ali Shariati, working within different civilizational and theological traditions, arrived at convergent conclusions about the role of religion as a force of structural emancipation. Both reinterpreted their traditions as oriented toward justice and the liberation of the oppressed, criticized institutional religion's complicity in poverty, and retrieved the emancipatory resources of their sacred texts. The preferential option for the poor and the concept of mustadh'afin form a structural analogy rooted in the conviction that divine justice demands solidarity with the dispossessed.

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Methodologically, the study shows that contextual hermeneutics combined with a codebook of seven analytical dimensions allows a transparent and traceable cross-civilizational comparison. Convergence is most pronounced in the functional and ethical domains, namely praxis, structural critique, agency, and solidarity with the poor, while divergence is most significant in the ontological and epistemological domains, reflecting the distinct doctrinal architectures of Catholic Christianity and Shiite Islam. The integrative model contributes a conceptual framework that links a shared understanding of social justice to coordinated responses to structural poverty while preserving these differences.

The study is limited by its focus on two foundational figures, which omits the wider ecology of liberation thought in both traditions, including the work of Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Farid Esack, and Asghar Ali Engineer. The Southeast Asian application is conceptual and has not been tested empirically, and the observations on digital transformation are hypotheses. Future research should examine how liberation frameworks are operationalized in specific Southeast Asian contexts through ethnographic studies of interfaith social justice initiatives, assessments of religion-based poverty programs, studies of digital interfaith discourse, and comparative policy analyses. Such work would test the integrative model and clarify the conditions under which interfaith dialogue can address the structural roots of poverty.

Funding
This study received no external funding.

Author Contributions
Rini Sumanti Sapalakkai; Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, and writing, original draft. Mohd Kasturi Nor Abd Aziz; Methodological supervision, validation, critical review, and writing, review and editing. Yunardi Kristian Zega; Conceptualization, research coordination, supervision, validation, manuscript review and editing, and correspondence with the journal. Talizaro Tafonao; Literature review, theoretical analysis, manuscript review and editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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