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# Awakening to a New Consciousness

*Listening to the Cry of Earth  
and the Cry of the Poor*

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Mercy's Theological Reflection Process

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## Ecoliberation Lens

### Background

Dr. Daniel Castillo earned his doctorate at the University of Notre Dame in 2014. While at Notre Dame, he was a National Science Foundation-funded GLOBES fellow and a Hispanic Theological Initiative fellow. He is currently an assistant professor of theology at Loyola University Maryland and a Bunting Peace and Justice fellow. He teaches courses in ecoliberation theology and environmental ethics.

Castillo has written extensively on *Laudato Sí*, including the essay “Integral Ecology as a Liberationist Concept” published in the journal *Theological Studies*. In his book, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology*, Castillo aligns his work with the works of Gustavo Gutiérrez and with Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Sí*. He discusses the significance of integral ecology in the work of liberation and provides the groundwork for an eco-theological spirituality.

Castillo explains how colonialism and the ideology of plunder shaped the global north’s destructive 500-year plunder of the global south. In addition to the plunder of material and resources, colonialism promoted and perpetuated racism, misogyny and cultural superiority, often decimating indigenous languages, spiritualities and cultures. And this colonial plunder was sanctioned in a variety of ways by Christian theology.

After World War II, the old form of colonialism began to collapse. But a new form of colonialism, called neo-colonialism, was on the rise. U.S. President Harry S. Truman sought to “improve” underdeveloped regions by introducing scientific advances as well as industrial development. This approach to the global south was and continues to be devastating to indigenous peoples, cultures, traditional ways of living and the environment. ***Neo-colonialism became as destructive as the first colonialism as corporations aligned with national governments to extract resources at the expense of indigenous populations.***

During the devastating and violent era of neo-colonialism *Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian philosopher and theologian, put forth the ideas of liberation theology calling for a radical shift toward liberation and urging a break from the developmentalism.* The core principle of Liberation theology centered on “the preferential option for the poor.” By the late 1960s, Gutiérrez’s liberation theology took hold in Latin America and played a significant role in compelling communities to respond to oppressive, often deadly injustices perpetrated against the economically poor and dispossessed.

Today, Gutiérrez challenges us to seek liberation from sociopolitical and cultural structures of development. *The escalation and urgency of the climate crisis and its effects on the most vulnerable communities demands an imminent conversion, according to Gutiérrez.* He believes that it would be devastating to delay our responses into the distant future.

## Major Points of Castillo's Ecoliberation Lens:

1. Builds off the three essential beliefs of Gustavo Gutierrez' liberation theology:
  - a. Salvation occurs in the here and now through experiences of communion and in solidarity with the vulnerable and marginalized.
  - b. Jesus' teachings urge us to care for our neighbors, most especially those who are poor and oppressed.
  - c. Our task is to transform all social, economic and political structures that produce and perpetuate poverty, oppression and death.
2. Adds ecological underpinnings to Gutierrez's liberation theology linking the cries of Earth to the cries of the poor and expanding our understanding of "neighbor" to include Earth. Supports the notion of integral ecology as described by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*.
3. Calls us to reexamine our understanding of the world. How do we describe the story of the universe? Evolution provides a new way of looking at creation and our place within it. Like Ivone Gebara, challenges us to shift away from understandings of God that lead us to dominate, marginalize and oppress others.
4. At its heart, liberation theology, requires "a community of believers to practice works of charity and mercy, but also and importantly, to confront and transform the socioeconomic, political and cultural forces that produce injustices, material poverty and oppression (*An Ecological Theology of Liberation*, 919)."
5. Calls Christians to respond to our planetary emergencies in a way that is grounded *both* in the preferential option for the poor *and* Earth. Our response must reflect our belief in who God is and in what God desires.
6. Calls us to new consciousness. We are called to see the world with new eyes and create structures and practices that create conditions for all to thrive.

## Questions:

- What does the phrase: "Salvation occurs here and now in the experiences of communion and solidarity with the vulnerable and marginalized" mean to you?
- If we are called to a preferential option for Earth, what reorientation of our lives is required of us?
- What does this say to us about corporate decision making regarding the impact of extractivism, especially given climate justice as the intersection of environmental justice and racial justice?
- What from the lens of ecological liberation theology is important for you to keep in mind and heart as you grow in awareness of the impact of extractivism on people, communities and Earth?