



DISMANTLING THE COLONIAL-CAPITALIST GAZE: THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR EARTH-COMMONS AND PLANETARY LIBERATION

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This paper argues that contemporary ecological and social crises stem from a colonial-capitalist gaze, an epistemic orientation that reduces creation to resources and souls to consumers. This gaze, woven into Western theology, now structures theological education, rendering it incapable of addressing planetary collapse. We trace how theological formation became a disembedded academic discipline and dissect the gaze's four logics within theology: a subject-object dichotomy that desacralizes nature; an extractive logic that commodifies knowledge; a logic of separation that fragments the commons; and a teleology of conquest that sacralizes domination. These logics produce a curriculum of disconnection: a Eurocentric canon, anthropocentric paradigms, and an extractive pedagogy within corporatized institutions. In response, we propose refounding theological education on the vision of the Earth-Commons, the sacred, interdependent web of life, and the project of planetary liberation. This demands four pillars: an ethos of radical interdependence, a praxis of reciprocity, a commitment to de-enclosure, and a teleology of collective flourishing. The resulting pedagogical praxis involves place-based learning, apprenticeships in communities of struggle, and assessment by co-created life. Finally, dismantling this gaze is a decolonial imperative, transforming theological education from a curator of a dying paradigm into a seedbed for cultivators of the Earth-Commons.

Keywords: colonial-capitalist gaze, decolonial theology, earth-commons, planetary liberation, theological education

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"Speaking of consciousness, the main job is not to convince climate deniers and the indifferent (and there are a lot fewer in either of those categories than there were a decade ago). It's to engage and inspire those who care but don't see they can and should have an active role in this movement, that what we do matters—that it's not too late, and we are making epic decisions now. Understanding that the consequences of activism are often indirect or slow to appear or require an informed overview—but matter nevertheless—is part of the equipment we need to see our own power and possibility."

Rebecca Solnit, "Difficult Is Not the Same as Impossible," in *Not Too Late*, eds. Rebecca Solnit & Thelma Young Lutunatabua (2023).¹

Rebecca Solnit's statement suggests that the primary goal of raising climate awareness is "to engage and inspire those who care" about the impending ecological crisis. However, Solnit observes that these people often feel powerless because they view impactful actions as having "indirect or slow-to-appear" consequences.² Her crucial insight is that cultivating this long view—an "informed overview" that recognizes the profound, if deferred, impact of collective action—is essential "equipment" for empowerment.³ This framework provides a vital key for the urgent theological task of our time. For centuries, a particular way of seeing—a colonial-capitalist gaze—has framed the dominant theological imagination in the West.⁴ This gaze is not merely an economic

system or a historical period but an epistemic and spiritual orientation.⁵ This worldview reduces reality to resources, souls to consumers, lands to property, and the sacred cosmos to a mechanistic warehouse.⁶ It is a vision born of the entwined projects of colonial expansion, racial hierarchy, and capitalist accumulation, which have profoundly shaped even our most sacred institutions, including theological education.⁷ We must first diagnose and then dismantle this gaze to confront the intertwined crises of ecological collapse, racialized violence, and spiritual alienation of our time.⁸ In its place, we must cultivate a theological education explicitly oriented toward the Earth-Commons and committed to planetary liberation. Such an endeavor is not a mere curriculum adjustment but a radical re-founding of theological purpose, a decolonial turn toward a theology of life in communion.

This necessary decolonial turn, however, finds its most urgent and concrete catalyst in the immediate pressure of ecological collapse. The planetary crisis is the inescapable horizon, the *Kairos*, that tests any proposed refounding. Thus, the project of dismantling the colonial-capitalist gaze cannot remain a theoretical critique; it must be realized through the specific dual project of deconstructing the theological frameworks that sanctified that gaze and reconstructing a theological formation capable of mending the rupture within the *oikos* of God.

Within the contemporary horizon of theological *bildung* (education), the anthropogenic ecological collapse functions as an *a priori* non-negotiable.⁹

¹ Rebecca Solnit, "Difficult Is Not the Same as Impossible," in *Not Too Late*, eds. Rebecca Solnit & Thelma Young Lutunatabua (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2023), 4.

² Solnit, "Difficult Is Not the Same as Impossible," *ibid.*

³ Solnit, "Difficult Is Not the Same as Impossible," *ibid.*

⁴ Luciana da Costa Dias, "Unlearning the Colonial Gaze: Grada Kilomba and the Poetics of Disobedience," *Arts* 14, no. 5 (2025): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts14050124>; Robert L. Nelson, review of *Emptiness in the Colonial Gaze: Labor, Property, and Nature*, by Mary Louise Pratt, Barbara Arneil, Stuart Banner, Cole Harris, and Bruce Braun, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 79 (2011): 161–174, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41306914>; Jeanne van Eeden, "The Colonial Gaze: Imperialism, Myths, and South African Popular Culture," *Design Issues* 20, no. 2 (2004): 18–33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1512077>.

⁵ Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015), 1–90.

⁶ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, 96, 305.

⁷ Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 15–17.

⁸ Celia Deane-Drummond and Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser, eds., *Theology and Ecology across the Disciplines*, T&T Clark Religion and the University Series (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 1–6.

⁹ World Bank, *Education and Climate Change*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2022. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/523b6ac03f2c643f93b9c043d48eddc1-0200022022/related/WB-education-and-climate-11-08-22-e-version.pdf>.



It requires a dual project of critique and reformulation targeting the metaphysical and ethical foundations of the Christian theological tradition.¹⁰ Numerous scholars and scientists assert that this phenomenon endangers the survival of all humanity and the entire created order.¹¹ This planetary destabilization and biospheric attenuation constitute a theological *Kairos*.¹² It is a fulcrum moment that demands the radical re-interrogation of foundational doctrinal loci, including theological anthropology, cosmology, soteriology, and eschatology.¹³ The integrity of the *oikos* of God, understood as a divinely ordained web of interdependent relationships, is in crisis.¹⁴ It is undergoing a rupture so severe that it threatens the conditions of possibility for flourishing for both human and non-human creatures.¹⁵ Consequently, institutions of theological and ministerial formation are summoned to a critical hermeneutical and pedagogical reckoning.¹⁶ Their mandate goes beyond the simple dissemination of traditional dogmatic content to include the critical task of diagnosing the pathologies of anthropocentrism and the socio-economic structures that give rise to ecological violence.¹⁷ This necessitates a thoroughgoing re-examination of curricular architectures, hermeneutical frameworks, and the very *telos* of formation. The objective must be to cultivate a theological habitus equipped for *metanoia*, a transformative reorientation of thought and practice.

This statement is grounded in a creation doctrine that affirms the intrinsic value of beings beyond mere utility, incorporates a Christology that acknowledges the cosmic scope of reconciliation (cf. Col 1:15-20), and centers on an ecclesiology of diakonia that extends to all aspects of life. Accordingly, the ecological imperative elevates the intellectual and formative endeavors of these institutions to a locus of profound theological responsibility.¹⁸ To fail to integrate this crisis as a central, rather than peripheral, concern risks a profound failure of prophetic witness and epistemic relevance. Conversely, to embrace this task is to participate in the generative work of reconstructing a theological vision. This vision must be adequate to address the profound dislocation between humanity and the rest of creation. This re-grounds the church's mission in the imperative of eco-justice and planetary stewardship.

REVISITING THE ROLE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

In *The History of Theological Education* (2015), Justo L. González masterfully traces the transformation of Christian ministerial formation across two millennia.¹⁹ González argues that Christian ministerial formation, which began as an integrated practice within the faith community, has evolved into a specialized, often isolated academic field.²⁰ For the majority of Christian history, theological training was not a separate institutional pursuit but was woven directly into the life of the church.²¹ The early model was one of relational discipleship, exemplified by Paul's mentorship of Timothy and the rigorous, holistic formation of the catechumenate.²² This approach is what

¹⁰ David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London: Routledge, 2014), 3-10; David G. Horrell, "The Ecological Challenge to Biblical Studies," *Theology* 112, no. 867 (2009): 163-171, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X0911200302>.

¹¹ Arnold Donozo, "Environmental Crisis as the Ultimate Life Issue," *Scientia - The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 7, no. 1 (2018): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.57106/scientia.v7i1.83>.

¹² Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology*, 60-61.

¹³ Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Posman Pangihutan and Demy Jura, "Ecotheology and Analysis of Christian Education in Overcoming Ecological Problems," *International Journal of Science and Society* 5, no. 1 (2022): 13-27, <http://ijsoc.goacademica.com>.

¹⁵ Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 28.

¹⁶ Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 60-61.

¹⁷ Hadje Cresencio Sadje, "Anthropocene' or 'Global Coloniality'? A Decolonial Theological Reflection," in *Facing Climate Collapse: Ecology, Theology and Capitalocene* (UK: SCM Press, 2025), 22-39.

¹⁸ Pangihutan and Jura, "Ecotheology and Analysis of Christian Education in Overcoming Ecological Problems," 19-25.

¹⁹ Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2015).

²⁰ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 113, 127.

²¹ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 68.

²² González, *The History of Theological Education*, 9-14.



prepared all converts through doctrinal, moral, and liturgical instruction over several years. As the church expanded after Constantine, pastoral manuals like Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* provided guidance, while monastic communities became essential repositories of learning and spiritual discipline during the so-called Dark Ages.²³ Theological understanding was cultivated within the context of worship, community life, and practical service, ensuring a direct connection between belief and practice.²⁴

This integrative model began to shift decisively in the Middle Ages with the rise of formal schools. Monastic and cathedral schools provided foundational education, but the emergence of universities in the twelfth century marked a pivotal turn.²⁵ Theology became a specialized academic discipline, subjected to the scholastic method of rigorous dialectical reasoning.²⁶ While this approach produced towering intellectual syntheses, such as Thomas Aquinas's work, it also fostered a growing detachment between the theological academy and the pastoral needs of the local parish.²⁷ The Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation were, in part, reactions to this disconnect. Reformers like John Calvin established academies to train pastors in biblical languages and practical ministry.²⁸ The Council of Trent mandated the creation of seminaries to ensure disciplined spiritual and intellectual formation for priests.²⁹ However, these reforms were often followed by periods of Protestant Scholasticism, which reintroduced a rigid, polemical intellectualism, prompting movements like Pietism to re-emphasize heartfelt faith and practical piety.³⁰

The modern era further entrenched theology within the academy. Influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher, theology was reconceived as a "science" (*Wissenschaft*) within the modern research university.³¹ This institutionalization requires theology to adopt historical-critical methods and objective analysis.³² This institutionalization caused more fragmentation into sub-disciplines like biblical studies, systematics, and practical theology and increased the divide between theological scholarship and everyday life in the church.³³ González argues that this historical trajectory has precipitated a contemporary crisis.³⁴ Today's traditional seminaries, often built on a residential, Euro-American model, are struggling with financial sustainability and declining relevance.³⁵ They are ill-equipped for a global, multi-ethnic church and face competition from more agile, affordable, and contextually attuned options, such as Bible institutes, online programs, and non-denominational training networks.

González concludes with an urgent call for radical reimagination.³⁶ In his view, the future of theological education rests on its capacity for renewal.³⁷ That renewal requires breaking away from elitist and fragmented approaches.³⁸ It must recapture its original purpose as formation for the whole people of God, not just professional clergy. This entails embracing demographic diversity. The first step is to adopt practice-based pedagogies that connect theory to real-world ministry.³⁹ The second is to partner with vibrant, often non-accredited training movements already serving evolving communities. In the end, González challenges institutions to move

²³ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 16.

²⁴ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 20, 22.

²⁵ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 22, 24, 29-30.

²⁶ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 26, 108.

²⁷ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 39, 47, 48, 51.

²⁸ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 59, 124.

²⁹ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 79, 80-81, 85.

³⁰ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 32, 91, 93, 98, 100.

³¹ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 107.

³² González, *The History of Theological Education*, 108-120.

³³ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 87.

³⁴ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 131, 132, 137.

³⁵ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 133-134.

³⁶ González, *The History of Theological Education*, *ibid.*

³⁷ González, *The History of Theological Education*, *ibid.*

³⁸ González, *The History of Theological Education*, *ibid.*

³⁹ González, *The History of Theological Education*, *ibid.*



beyond preserving an academic heritage and to dynamically realign themselves with the mission of a living, global church.⁴⁰

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

It is worth noting that the objectives of medieval theological education extended beyond the inculcation of sacerdotal functions to encompass the social competencies required for ministry. Thus, clergy formation was inherently oriented toward preparing ordinands for the public, pastoral, and communal obligations of their vocation. González contends that their final purpose is to see God in the eternal kingdom of peace and justice.⁴¹ Centuries later, particularly by the dawning of the 21st century, the social dimension of theological education has further strengthened. As an Australian biblical scholar and theologian, Robert Banks challenges a utilitarian view where education *leads to* justice work. He proposes a formative view where education *is* an act of justice.⁴² By making justice integral to the *process* (how students learn, debate, and relate), not just the *content*, theological education models the kingdom it proclaims.⁴³ It becomes a practice of what it preaches, ensuring that graduates don't just *know about* justice but are shaped to *think, minister, and lead* justly in every sphere of life. Justice ceases to be a topic and becomes a hallmark of the educational culture itself. In essence, Banks calls for the reintegration of justice into the heart of theological discourse, moving it from the margins of the syllabus to its core identity.⁴⁴ Banks emphasizes that education for justice should not merely be an addition to

the curriculum but must fundamentally underpin all instruction.⁴⁵ His observation reveals a long-term evolution in theological education from the Middle Ages onward.⁴⁶ As part of that evolution, institutions have given greater priority to the social responsibilities inherent in ministry.⁴⁷ The primary point is that, from the medieval period to the contemporary era, theological institutions and ministerial training centers have progressively emphasized the social dimension of ministry.

In light of the above, future ministers should possess the knowledge and skills necessary to lead and motivate the church community effectively, ensuring a relevant and impactful witness in the world. This emphasis is due to the fact that "there is a growing fusion of ethics and theology in dealing with lifestyle, social, and environmental issues."⁴⁸ One of the most urgent issues at present, for which future ministers need adequate knowledge and understanding, is the life-threatening ecological crisis. In addition to apprising them of the gravity of the environmental predicament, prospective ministers must cultivate theological sensitivity that enables them to examine the issue from socio-cultural and theological perspectives, thereby fostering sustainable solutions. Given this critical need to equip ministers with ecological-theological understanding, the responsibility for this formation falls directly on theological institutions. It is imperative that theological schools and ministerial training centers address the ecological crisis to remain relevant and responsive to contemporary needs. As Swiss Mennonite theologian and theological educator Bernhard Ott emphatically declares, "Programs of theological education must be designed with deliberate reference to the

⁴⁰ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 90.

⁴¹ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 128.

⁴² Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 34-45.

⁴³ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring Missional Alternative to Current Models*, 46.

⁴⁴ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 29, 30, 40, 55.

⁴⁶ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 30.

⁴⁷ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 53.



contexts in which they serve.”⁴⁹ Thus, theological schools and ministerial formation centers should establish training programs to foster ecological awareness among their students. Such awareness should foster a profound understanding that a fundamental aspect of pastoral work is inspiring and guiding congregants to undertake tangible actions to preserve and restore God’s damaged creation.

Therefore, it is imperative to equip prospective ministers with ecological and theological awareness. Such training must involve a critical examination of the very theological and philosophical foundations that authorized the crisis in the first place. It requires moving beyond adding ecological topics to curricula and instead interrogating the deep-seated worldview. Such beliefs enabled the desacralization and exploitation of creation. Therefore, it leads us directly to a necessary, foundational analysis: deconstructing the colonial-capitalist gaze that has shaped modern theology and remains embedded in many of its assumptions.

ANATOMY OF THE COLONIAL-CAPITALIST GAZE IN THEOLOGY

To dismantle a structure, one must first understand its logic. The colonial-capitalist gaze is not a singular idea but a pervasive worldview, an epistemological and spiritual orientation.⁵⁰ It emerged from the violent confluence of European colonial expansion, the transatlantic slave trade, and the rise of industrial capitalism.⁵¹ It is a way of seeing that reduces reality to resources,

relationships to transactions, and the cosmos to a machine. For instance, in their chapter, “Mapping as Tacit Representations of the Colonial Gaze” (2020), Tamara Bellone, Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro, Francesco Fiermonte, Emiliana Armano, and Linda Quiquívix write that the colonial gaze is a mode of perception and representation rooted in European colonialism that frames the world through a lens of hierarchy, control, and domination.⁵² It asserts the superiority and universality of Western knowledge while presenting non-European peoples and territories as objects to be studied, categorized, and ruled.⁵³

This gaze is deeply embedded in the history of cartography, where maps have served not as neutral reflections of reality but as tools of power that legitimize conquest, impose artificial borders, and erase indigenous ways of knowing.⁵⁴ From medieval T-O maps placing Jerusalem at the center to Mercator’s projection, which enlarges the global North, cartography has historically advanced a worldview that separates “civilized” spaces from “terra incognita,” reinforcing the colonial ordering of space. Thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said have shown how this gaze extends beyond geography into broader systems of knowledge, enabling the colonizer to define, contain, and exploit the “Other.”⁵⁵ Crucially, the colonial gaze persists today in neocolonial forms, through cartographic practices that silence marginalized histories, in digital mapping that commodifies space and data, and in institutional representations that naturalize global inequalities.⁵⁶ Thus, the colonial gaze is not merely a historical perspective but an

⁴⁹ Bernhard Ott, *Understanding and Developing Theological Education* (International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) Series, 2026), 37.

⁵⁰ Adam Beyt, “Afrofuturist Worlds: The Diseased Colonial Imagination and Christian Hope,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 13, no. 1 (2024): 78–101.

⁵¹ George Ciccariello-Maher, “The Internal Limits of the European Gaze: Intellectuals and the Colonial Difference,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 9, no. 2 (2006): 139–165.

⁵² Tamara Bellone, Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro, Francesco Fiermonte, Emiliana Armano, and Linda Quiquívix, “Mapping as Tacit Representations of the Colonial Gaze,” in *Mapping Crisis: Participation, Datafication and Humanitarianism in the Age of Digital Mapping*, ed. Doug Specht (London: University of London Press, 2020), 17–37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv14rms6g.9>; Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 112.

⁵³ Bellone et al., “Mapping as Tacit Representations,” 19–21.

⁵⁴ Bellone et al., “Mapping as Tacit Representations,” 31.

⁵⁵ Bellone et al., “Mapping as Tacit Representations,” 19.

⁵⁶ Bellone et al., “Mapping as Tacit Representations,” 34.



enduring logic that shapes how territory is seen, managed, and dominated, making its critique essential for any project of decolonization.

This gaze did not merely influence theology from the outside; it became subtly, profoundly theologized, weaving its logics into the very fabric of Christian doctrine, biblical interpretation, and institutional formation.⁵⁷ Its anatomy can be dissected into four interlocking, reinforcing logics: the subject-object dichotomy, extractive logic, the logic of separation and enclosure, and a teleology of progress and conquest.

1. THE SUBJECT-OBJECT DICHOTOMY: FRACTURING THE SACRED WEB

The foundational move of the colonial-capitalist gaze is the creation of a radical and hierarchical separation between the knowing, possessing Self and the knowable, possessable Other.⁵⁸ The gazing “I” is constructed as the universal subject: rational, autonomous, and disembodied (often coded as white, European, male, and Christian).⁵⁹ This subject stands over against a world rendered into inert objects for its use. Indigenous peoples were objectified as “pagans” or “savages” without history or soul; enslaved Africans as “chattel” and instruments of labor; women as adjuncts to men; animals as automata; forests as timber; and rivers as hydraulic power.⁶⁰ First, the theological

consecration.⁶¹ This dichotomy found powerful theological sanction. A particular reading of the *imago Dei* (image of God) in Genesis 1:26–28 was weaponized to signify not a relational vocation of care within creation, but a metaphysical license for domination.⁶² If only humans (and often, only certain humans) bore God’s image, then the non-human creation was ontologically inferior.⁶³ This is a passive stage for human drama. The potent, animist sense of a world alive with spirit and agency.⁶⁴ This potent, animist sense of a world alive with spirit and agency was found in many indigenous cosmologies and biblical psalms, where mountains sing and trees clap, but was systematically purged.⁶⁵ This desacralization of nature was, as historian Lynn White Jr. argued, Christianity’s most fateful contribution to the ecological crisis.⁶⁶ God, in this schema, was reimagined in the image of the colonial sovereign: a distant, transcendent, legislating monarch who delegates dominion to his earthly representatives.⁶⁷ This theological shift did not merely reflect colonial power; it actively authorized it, providing a divine mandate for the objectification and exploitation of the entire natural world.⁶⁸

⁵⁷ Zahir Kolia, “Colonial Theology: John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Darwin and the Emergence of the Colonial-Capitalist World System, 1500–1900” (PhD diss., York University, 2015), 1–20.

⁵⁸ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (March/May 2007): 168–178, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>.

⁵⁹ Margaret Ann Newton, “Place-in-Being: A Decolonial Phenomenology of Place in Conversation with Philosophies of the Americas” (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2022), 34–41; Martin Mujinga, “A Colonial-Decolonial Critique of Theological and Religious Research in South Africa (1975–2025),” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 46, no. 3 (2025): 34–41, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v46i3.3346>.

⁶⁰ Anetoh Bonaventure Chike and Ezeilo Paschal Ifenna, “A Critique of Hegel’s Concept of Africa,” *Igwebiike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (January 2019): 1–13; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 174.

⁶¹ Young Seok Cha, “Theological and Ethical Implications of Creation Care,” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 6, no. 2 (2012): 88–106, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol6/iss2/7>.

⁶² Cha, “Theological and Ethical Implications of Creation Care,” 88–91; Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 79.

⁶³ Cha, “Theological and Ethical Implications of Creation Care,” *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Vicki Grieves, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, The Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health Discussion Paper Series, no. 9 (Darwin: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009), 1–19.

⁶⁵ Grieves, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, The Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 78, 203.

⁶⁷ Tink Tinker, “The Irrelevance of Euro-Christian Dichotomies for Indigenous Peoples: Beyond Nonviolence to a Vision of Cosmic Balance,” in *Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions*, ed. Irfan A. Omar and Michael K. Duffey, 1st ed. (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015), 206–225.

⁶⁸ A. Kiarina Kordela, “Materialist Epistemology: Sohn-Rethel with Marx and Spinoza,” *History of the Human Sciences* 29, no. 2 (2016): 113–129, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695116637281>.



Another example is epistemic violence.⁶⁹ This subject-object framework also structured the pursuit of knowledge itself. Theology, aspiring to the status of a “science,” adopted the posture of the detached observer.⁷⁰ The world, including other cultures’ spiritual traditions, became a specimen that theologians dissected, categorized, and systematized. The *theologian-as-subject* extracted data from *texts-and-world-as-objects*, producing dogma as a form of intellectual property.⁷¹ This approach fractured the holistic knowing of place-based, relational wisdom, where knowledge emerges from reciprocal interaction with a living community rather than from the scrutiny of a dead object.⁷²

2. EXTRACTIVE LOGIC: THE THEOLOGY OF THE MINE AND PLANTATION

If the world is composed of objects, then the logical next step is to mine it. The extractive logic is the operational engine of the gaze, transforming the subject-object dichotomy into a program of systematic plunder.⁷³ Just as colonies were considered repositories of precious metals and lands ripe for monoculture plantations (sugar, cotton, and tobacco), so too were knowledge, spirituality, and even divine favor conceived as commodities to be extracted, accumulated, and

hoarded.⁷⁴ First, the theological extraction.⁷⁵ This logic profoundly shaped Christian practice and thought. Grace risked becoming a spiritual commodity, dispensed by the institutional church and sought through transactional practices (indulgences being the most blatant example).⁷⁶ Salvation history became a narrative of extracting a chosen people (or individuals) from a condemned world, rather than the healing and redemption of all creation.⁷⁷ In theological education, the result manifested as a pedagogy of extraction: the Bible was a quarry from which doctrinal “nuggets” were mined; tradition was a vein of orthodox ore to be refined.⁷⁸ The goal was to produce systematic theologies that were polished, finalized, and proprietary.⁷⁹ Such theologies could be exported and imposed universally, mirroring the logic of capital that disdains the local and particular in favor of scalable, standardized systems.⁸⁰ The next is the colonial-capitalist soteriology. At its darkest, this logic produced a soteriology of divine extraction. The soul was the ultimate precious resource to be “saved” from the worthless husk of the body and the corrupted world.⁸¹ This created a perverse moral calculus that could justify horrific earthly exploitation: if the eternal soul of a slave could be “saved” through conversion, their temporal bodily suffering on the plantation became a

⁶⁹ Saskia Vermeylen, “Special Issue: Epistemic Violence and Environmental Justice,” *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* 24, no. 2 (2019): 89–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2018.1561658>; Kenneth Iain MacDonald, “Epistemic Violence: The Body, Globalization and the Dilemma of Rights,” *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* 12, no. 1 (2002): 65–87.

⁷⁰ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 382–442; Simon Oliver, “Radical Orthodoxy: A Conversation,” in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, ed. John Milbank and Simon Oliver (London: Routledge, 2009), 47; Joanna Leidenhag, “Science-Engaged Theology,” in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al. (St Andrews: St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology, 2024), <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/ScienceEngagedTheology>, accessed January 7, 2026.

⁷¹ Ingrid Andersson, “Sylvia Wynter’s Decolonial Philosophy: How Being Human Needs an Origin Story,” *Educational Theory* 74, no. 5 (October 2024): 780–98, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12662>.

⁷² Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 12, 84, 101, 153, 163.

⁷³ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*, 53, 141.

⁷⁴ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 2, 14, 32, 35, 76.

⁷⁵ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, 76, 88, 90.

⁷⁶ Gintarė Kriauciūnaitė-Lazauskienė, “Religion as a Way of Branding in the Age of Consumerism,” *Contemporary Research on Organization Management and Administration* 6, no. 1 (2018): 90–101; Wahyu Eko Pujiyanto, Mochamad Rizal Yulianto, and Hidayatulloh, “Commodification of Religion: Between Religion and Manipulation (A Literature Review),” *Journal of Economic and Economic Policy* 1, no. 4 (December 2024): 1–23.

⁷⁷ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 138.

⁷⁸ Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–20.

⁷⁹ Jeffrey P. Straub, “Fundamentalism and the King James Version: How a Venerable English Translation Became a Litmus Test for Orthodoxy,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 16 (2011): 41–64; James Alfred Loader, “Reading and Controlling the Text,” *Old Testament Essays* 19, no. 2 (2006): 694–711.

⁸⁰ Straub, “Fundamentalism and the King James Version: How a Venerable English Translation Became a Litmus Test for Orthodoxy,” 47–60; Loader, “Reading and Controlling the Text,” 697–707.

⁸¹ Richard Clifford and Khaled Anatolios, “Christian Salvation: Biblical and Theological Perspectives,” *Theological Studies* 66, no. 3 (2005): 739–761.



secondary, even acceptable, cost.⁸² The focus was on extracting souls for heaven, leaving the terrestrial world, with its injustices and ecological degradation, as a temporary, disposable proving ground. This provided a potent theological alibi for both slavery and ecological destruction.

3. THE LOGIC OF SEPARATION AND ENCLOSURE: FRAGMENTING THE COMMONS

The extractive project requires the dismantling of systems of shared sustenance and collective life.⁸³ Historically, enclosures of the commons achieved this goal.⁸⁴ For example, the seizure and privatization of collectively managed forests, pastures, and waterways that sustained peasant communities exemplified this process.⁸⁵ The colonial-capitalist gaze universalized this logic, applying it not only to land but also to social and theological realms. Aside from these actions, the theological enclosures manifested as a series of fateful dualisms that shattered the biblical vision of an integrated creation.⁸⁶ Spirit was severed from matter, rendering the physical world spiritually null and open to abuse.⁸⁷

Grace was opposed to nature, suggesting God worked against or in spite of the created order, rather than through its healing and fulfillment. The individual soul was prioritized over the communal body, crafting a salvation that was a private, vertical transaction between sinner and God.⁸⁸ This “spiritual enclosure” mirrored and enabled the material enclosure of the individual soul.⁸⁹ If one’s true citizenship is in a disembodied heaven, then earthly communities, ecosystems, and political economies are of secondary concern.⁹⁰ The shared commons of creation, the interdependent web of life as a sacred trust, was theologically dismantled.⁹¹ It is privatizing faith into individual piety and parceling creation into disposable real estate. Another consequence is the atomized self and the disenchanted world.⁹² These developments produced the atomized self, a theological counterpart to *homo economicus*.⁹³ It is a self-interested agent whose primary relationship is to God and whose salvation is separate from the fate of its neighbor or its forest.⁹⁴ It also finalized the disenchantment of the world. With spirit evacuated from nature, the cosmos became a silent, clockwork mechanism. This was not a neutral scientific development;

⁸² Clifford and Anatólios, “Christian Salvation: Biblical and Theological Perspectives,” 760.

⁸³ Sebastião Salgado, “The Environmental Crisis Is a Capitalist Crisis,” *TriContinental*, dossier no. 92, October 14, 2025, <https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-environmental-crisis/>; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, introduced by Ernest Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books in association with *New Left Review*, 1976), 238–239; Fourth International, *The Capitalist Destruction of the Environment and the Ecosocialist Alternative: Resolutions of the 17th World Congress* (April 11, 2018), 1, <https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/pdf/the-capitalist-destruction-of-the-environment-and-the-a5452.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, introduced by Ernest Mandel, 873–942.

⁸⁵ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 15, 21–22, 152.

⁸⁶ Maria Asensio, André Pinto, and Helena Lopes, “Precarity and Dualism in Higher Education: Diagnosing Their Consequences and Assessing Portuguese and Spanish Policies,” *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, September 2025, 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2025.2564911>; Wati Longchar, *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education An Indigenous Perspective* (Tainan, Taiwan: Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia, 2013), 17.

⁸⁷ Anthony Dupont, Bernard Bruning, and Kristiaan Venken, “The Relationship between Augustine’s Anthropological Duality and His Doctrine of the Two Cities,” *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060791>; Elizabeth Latham, “One Nature Under God, and Divisible: Augustine’s ‘Duality of Man’ Applied to the Creation Stories of Genesis,” *Aporia* 29, no. 2 (2019): 11–23; Funke Elizabeth Oyekan and Oluwafemi Babawale Oyeleke, “The Doctrine of Creation: A Theological Reflection,” *Scope: Journal of English Language Teaching* 14, no. 2 (June 2024): 1392–1406.

⁸⁸ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 138; Marti Kheel, “From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge, in *Earth Ethics: Environmental Ethics, Animal Rights, and Practical Applications*, ed. James P. Sterba (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995), 219.

⁸⁹ Steven M. Studebaker, “The Spirit in Creation: A Unified Theology of Grace and Creation Care,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 43, no. 4 (December 2008): 943–960; Dan Howarth, “Rubén Valdez Practice Creates ‘Concrete Spiritual Enclosure’ in Mexico,” *Dezeen*, May 24, 2025, <https://www.dezeen.com/2025/05/24/spiritual-enclosure-paradero-hotel-todos-santos-ruben-valdez-practice/>. See also Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁹⁰ Per Olsson, Michele-Lee Moore, Frances R. Westley, and Daniel D. P. McCarthy, “The Concept of the Anthropocene as a Game-Changer: A New Context for Social Innovation and Transformations to Sustainability,” *Ecology and Society* 22, no. 2 (2017): 31, 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-09310-220231>.

⁹¹ Hesron Sihombing, “Capitalism and the Ecological Crisis: The Spirituality of Voluntary Sacrifice,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 15, no. 3 (2021): 329–348, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15697320-01530003>; E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1991), 1–15.

⁹² George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2010), 1–24.

⁹³ Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption*, 32–33, 59.

⁹⁴ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 2, 7–8, 65, 72, 98, 111.



it was a theological victory for the colonial-capitalist gaze. An enchanted world, alive with spirit and presence, demands reverence, negotiation, and reciprocity. A disenchanted world of inert matter demands only calculation and exploitation.

4. THE TELEOLOGY OF PROGRESS AND CONQUEST: SANCTIFYING THE LINEAR MARCH

Every worldview needs a story about where history is going, which is a teleological account.⁹⁵ The colonial-capitalist gaze constructed a powerful, linear narrative of progress and conquest, portraying its expansion as the inevitable, divinely sanctioned unfolding of history itself.⁹⁶ This teleology recast violent invasion as a tragic yet necessary birthing process and depicted genocide and ecocide as components of the “march of civilization” and a “sacralizing conquest.”⁹⁷ The most explicit theological exports of this teleology were the Doctrine of Discovery and the ideology of Manifest Destiny.⁹⁸ Fifteenth-century papal bulls and royal charters asserted that non-Christian lands were *terra nullius* (“nobody’s land”).⁹⁹ On that basis, European powers could claim such lands through discovery, conquest, and possession.¹⁰⁰ This was not mere *realpolitik*; it was a theological jurisprudence that framed colonial theft as an act of evangelical and

civilizational duty. Manifest Destiny, its 19th-century American successor, preached that continental expansion was God’s providential plan for a chosen nation.¹⁰¹ These ideologies sacralized conquest, turning soldiers and settlers into agents of a divine will and rendering their victims, indigenous nations, and ecosystems into obstacles to be removed from the path of destiny. Another is the eschatology of arrival.¹⁰² The movement produced an eschatology of arrival, in which the Kingdom of God was conflated with the triumph of European Christendom and, later, with the global spread of capitalist modernity.¹⁰³

Alternative futures, cyclic conceptions of time, and visions of harmony with nature were branded as primitive, backward, and heretical. History was a single, upward arrow, and to stand in its way was to be against God.¹⁰⁴ This teleology provided an ultimate justification for the other three logics: objectification, extraction, and enclosure were all necessary tools in the grand, progressive work of redeeming (i.e., dominating) time and space.¹⁰⁵ In summary, the colonial-capitalist perspective constitutes a coherent and self-reinforcing theological framework. It begins by objectifying the world, then extracts value from it, having first enclosed and privatized what was held in common, all while marching toward a divinely ordained destiny of conquest. This is not a peripheral heresy but a deep, formative stream in modern Western theology. To educate for planetary liberation, therefore, requires more than adding new topics to a syllabus; it demands

⁹⁵ Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 1–5; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover, 1956), 30–33.

⁹⁶ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Matthew Rowley, “The Epistemology of Sacralized Violence in the Exodus and Conquest,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 1 (March 2014): 63–83; Brett Bowden, “In the Name of Civilization: War, Conquest, and Colonialism,” *Pléiade* 23 (January–June 2019): 73–100.

⁹⁸ Shane Mountjoy, *Manifest Destiny: Westward Expansion* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), 9–20.

⁹⁹ Sookyoon Huh, “Title to Territory in the Post-Colonial Era: Original Title and *Terra Nullius* in the ICJ Judgments on Cases Concerning Ligitan/Sipadan (2002) and Pedra Branca (2008),” *European Journal of International Law* 26, no. 3 (2015): 709–25, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chv036>

¹⁰⁰ Huh, “Title to Territory in the Post-Colonial Era: Original Title and *Terra Nullius* in the ICJ Judgments on Cases Concerning Ligitan/Sipadan (2002) and Pedra Branca (2008),” *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Mountjoy, *Manifest Destiny: Westward Expansion*, 10, 13–14.

¹⁰² Barbara R. Rossing and Johan Buitendag, “Life in Its Fullness: Ecology, Eschatology and Ecodomy in a Time of Climate Change,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020): a6245, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.6245>; Richard Osei Akoto, “The Impact of Climate Change on Biblical Interpretation and Theology,” *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)* 6, no. 8 (2025): 1371–1388, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2025687>;

¹⁰³ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 8, 67–68.

¹⁰⁴ Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, 46, 47.

¹⁰⁵ Allen, *The End of Progress*, 47, 86–87.



a radical interrogation and dismantling of this gaze at its epistemic and theological roots. It requires us to see that the crisis is not just in our policies but in our very perception. A theology of domination has profoundly shaped this perception and continues to do so.

SYMPTOMS IN THE THEOLOGICAL ACADEMY: A CURRICULUM OF DISCONNECTION

The colonial-capitalist gaze is not a ghost haunting the halls of theological institutions; it is the often-unseen blueprint that shapes their very foundations.¹⁰⁶ Its logics are not merely historical curiosities but active, structuring forces that manifest in the modern theological academy as a pervasive curriculum of disconnection.¹⁰⁷ This disconnection is not an accident of neglect but a systematic outcome of an education designed within and for a paradigm of domination. It reveals itself in four primary, interlocking symptoms: the construction of the canon, the paradigms of theological discourse, the pedagogical methods, and the institutional structures themselves.¹⁰⁸ Each symptom reinforces a vision of theology as a detached, proprietary enterprise, severing it from the living, breathing, suffering web of creation it ostensibly seeks to understand and serve.

The most visible symptom is the persistent centrality of the European male theological canon as the universal, normative core of theological knowledge. While lip service may be paid to diversity, the foundational curriculum, the required sequence in church history,

systematic theology, and even biblical studies, often remains a journey from Augustine to Aquinas, through Luther and Calvin, to Barth and Tillich.¹⁰⁹ This journey is presented not as one trajectory among many, but as *the* trajectory of Christian thought. Many vital theologies emerge from contexts of oppression, resistance, and embodied existence, for example, liberation theology, Black theology, womanist theology, *mujerista* theology, indigenous spiritualities, and eco-feminist thought.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, these are frequently sidelined to elective or “special interest” courses. It is safely contained in slots marked “Contextual Theologies” or “Theology and Culture.”¹¹¹ This curricular apartheid performs a powerful epistemological violence.¹¹² It reinforces the colonial-capitalist fiction that true knowledge is abstract, timeless, and disembodied, qualities associated with the rational European male subject. Knowledge born of particularity, struggle, and relationship to land is contingent, emotional, and non-essential. It perpetuates the gaze by teaching students that to be a “serious theologian” is to master the language and concerns of the European academy. While the vital insights of the marginalized become decorative additions to a pre-existing, settled structure, they remain unintegrated and often overlooked. This canon does not merely exclude certain voices; it actively produces a theological imagination that is geographically narrow, racially blinded, and ecologically obtuse, incapable of grappling with a pluralistic, wounded planet.

¹⁰⁶ Yonah Hisbon Matemba, “Neocolonialism, Anti-Coloniality and Religious Education: New Lessons from Africa South of the Sahara (ASoS),” *Religious Education* 119, no. 3 (2024): 210–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2024.2352977>.

¹⁰⁷ Leni Franken, “Religion Education and ‘weak’ Religious Education: Common Concerns,” *Religionspädagogische Beiträge: Journal for Religion in Education* 46, no. 1 (2023): 65–77, <https://doi.org/10.20377/rpb-269>.

¹⁰⁸ Franken, “Religion Education and ‘weak’ Religious Education: Common Concerns,” 68–72.

¹⁰⁹ Liam Gearon, Arniika Kuusisto, Yonah Matemba, Saija Benjamin, Petro Du Preez, Pia Koirikivi, and Shan Simmonds, “Decolonising the Religious Education Curriculum,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 1 (2021): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2020.1819734>.

¹¹⁰ C. K. Raju, “Logic,” in *Encyclopedia of Non-Western Science, Technology and Medicine*, ed. Helaine Selin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 2564–2570, <http://ckraju.net/papers/Nonwestern-logic.pdf>.

¹¹¹ Philip Joseph D. Sarmiento, “Re-contextualization of Christian Dogmas on God, Christ and Grace: Implications to Catholic Religious Education,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 5, no. 4 (November 2017): 120–25.

¹¹² Claudia Brunner, “Un/Doing Epistemic Violence while Trying to Change the World,” *Journal Title* 39, no. 1/2 (2023): 5–29, <https://doi.org/10.20446/JEP-2414-3197-39-1-5>.



This curated canon sustains and is sustained by a dominant paradigm of theological discourse that implicitly sacralizes hierarchies of power. Within systematic theology, a particular model of God's sovereignty is often privileged: an omnipotent, all-controlling monarch whose will is absolute and inscrutable. This divine image mirrors and legitimizes earthly hierarchies of dominance, providing a transcendental warrant for unquestioned authority. Similarly, atonement theories centered on penal substitution, where a wrathful God demands violent satisfaction for sin, can normalize a logic of sacred violence, debt, and transactional justice that echoes the very economic and punitive systems that devastate communities. The ethical framework flowing from this paradigm remains stubbornly anthropocentric, concerned primarily with the salvation and moral conduct of individual human souls.¹¹³ The more-than-human creation is, at best, the stage for this drama or a reservoir of metaphors for human spiritual states; at worst, it is irrelevant. When ecological concern appears, it's often as a sub-discipline or optional "Theology of Ecology" course, not as the core context vital for doctrines from creation to eschatology articulated.¹¹⁴ This paradigm of domination thus trains students to think in terms of vertical power relations (God-over-human, human-over-nature) rather than reciprocal relationality and to see salvation as an escape from materiality rather than its healing. The method of knowledge transmission itself, the pedagogy of extraction, perfectly mirrors the extractive logic of the gaze. The classic graduate seminar model, hailed as the pinnacle of rigorous thought, often prizes the mining of texts for intellectual capital. Students are taught to critically dissect arguments, identify flaws,

and defend positions in debate, with success measured by the acuity of their critiques and the volume of their contributions. Knowledge is treated as a commodity to be extracted from the textual "resource," processed through individual intellect, and displayed for credentialing.¹¹⁵ This model sidelines holistic ways of knowing, such as contemplative silence, somatic awareness, artistic expression, and the wisdom gained from working with soil, community, or ritual. It prioritizes producing the expert, the theological professional skilled in managing religious ideas and institutions, over forming wise elders, healers, or community cultivators.¹¹⁶ This pedagogy creates a disconnect between the intellect and body, the classroom and the street, and theological abstraction and cries of the earth. It produces theologians who can deconstruct 4th-century texts but may struggle in local water rights councils or leading community lament for a clear-cut forest.¹¹⁷

Finally, these intellectual and pedagogical disconnections are cemented by the logic of institutionalism that houses theological education.¹¹⁸ In a tragic irony, many seminaries and divinity schools have internalized the very capitalist logics their curricula might occasionally critique. Governance structures increasingly mirror corporate boards, prioritizing financial solvency, market growth, and brand management over prophetic vocation. The relentless search for funds ties these institutions to global markets

¹¹³ Franken, "Religion Education and 'weak' Religious Education: Common Concerns," 73-74, 75.

¹¹⁴ Celia Deane-Drummond and Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser, eds., *Theology and Ecology across the Disciplines: On Care for Our Common Home* (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 1-24.

¹¹⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, intro. Donaldo Macedo (New York: Continuum, 2005), 71-86, 172-173.

¹¹⁶ Mara P. Squicciarini and Nico Voigtländer, "Knowledge Elites and Modernization: Evidence from Revolutionary France" (working paper, UCLA Anderson School of Management, October 2016), 1-31, https://www-apache.anderson.ucla.edu/faculty_pages/nico.v/Research/Elites_and_Modernization.pdf; Brian Martin, "Elites and Suppression," in *Intellectual Suppression: Australian Case Histories, Analysis and Responses*, ed. Brian Martin, C. M. Ann Baker, Clyde Manwell, and Cedric Pugh (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986), 185-199, <https://documents.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/pubs/86is/elites.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ González, *The History of Theological Education*, 111-115.

¹¹⁸ Hope S. Antone, "The Challenges of Globalization to Religious Education: Some Experiences and Reflections from Asia," accessed January 21, 2026, https://old.religiouseducation.net/member/01_papers/antone.pdf; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 147.



and often leaves them silent in the face of corporate predation, out of fear of alienating stakeholders and donors. Academic programs are created and promoted based on demand and “relevance” to careers.¹¹⁹ This leads to many niche degrees focused on professional skills rather than holistic planetary education citizenship. Faculty are pressured to produce quantifiable research outputs for academic journals, further entrenching the extractive, proprietary model of knowledge.¹²⁰ This institutional capture ensures that even the most radical critiques emerging within classrooms are structurally contained. The institution’s survival depends on the very system it might question, creating a form of systemic cognitive dissonance in which transformative ideas are welcomed as intellectual content but sterilized in institutional practice. The theological academy thus risks becoming a museum of religious thought, administering a curated past, rather than a seedbed for disruptive spiritual wisdom capable of confronting the collapsing systems of the present.¹²¹

These symptoms reveal a theological education in a state of profound alienation. It is alienated from the plurality of human experience, the integrity of the created world, the wisdom of the body and place, and its potential as an agent of liberation. The colonial-capitalist gaze, functioning through these academic frameworks, does not generate prophets and healers suitable for a wounded era. Instead, it produces managers and curators of a

declining paradigm. To educate for the Earth Commons, therefore, requires a revolutionary engagement.¹²² It is not just what is taught, but *how, by whom, and within what structures* the teaching is contained. The diagnosis is clear: the illness of disconnection is chronic and institutional. The healing will require nothing less than a radical re-imagination of theological education’s very soul.

The planetary polycrisis finds its roots in the epistemic and spiritual orientation of the colonial-capitalist gaze. This orientation, woven into Western theology, reduces creation to inert matter and souls to privatized consumers.¹²³ As we have traced, this gaze now structures theological education itself, producing a curriculum of disconnection that perpetuates the very logics of subject-object dichotomy, extractive logic, and enclosure, which fuel ecological and social collapse. Therefore, the task is not mere reform but a radical refounding of theological formation. Our guiding star must be the vision of the Earth-Commons: a sacred, interdependent community where life, air, water, soil, fungi, plants, animals, humans, ancestors, and the divine exist in mutual reliance. This theological claim—that to be is to be-in-common—grounds the project of planetary liberation. To embody this vision, theological education must be rebuilt upon four integral pillars. First, an ethos of radical interdependence must heal the subject-object fracture. This vision draws on indigenous cosmovisions, process theology, and ecological science to teach a relational reality in which God is the animating Spirit. Within the web of life, sin is the rupture of sacred relationships, and salvation is the healing (*salus, shalom*) of the entire community of creation. Second, this ethos must translate into a praxis of reciprocity

¹¹⁹ Elif Izberk-Bilgin and Russell W. Belk, “Religion in Neoliberal Times: The Global Spread of Marketization, Implications for Religion, and Future Research Directions,” *Marketing Theory* 25, no. 1 (2024): 57–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931241261000>; Carl Raschke, *Neoliberalism and Political Theology: From Kant to Identity Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 96–115.

¹²⁰ Anibeth Desierto and Carmela de Maio, “The Impact of Neoliberalism on Academics and Students in Higher Education: A Call to Adopt Alternative Philosophies,” *Journal of Academic Language & Learning* 14, no. 2 (2020): 148–59; Henry A. Giroux, “Neoliberalism’s War Against Higher Education and the Role of Public Intellectuals / La Guerra del Neoliberalismo contra la Educación Superior y el Rol de los Intelectuales Públicos,” *Limite: Revista Interdisciplinaria de Filosofía y Psicología* 10, no. 34 (2015): 5–16.

¹²¹ Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*, (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2014), 29.

¹²² Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 75, 77.

¹²³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, intro. Anthony Giddens (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 3–38.



and regeneration, replacing extractive logic with learning as an exchange that listens to the land and engages regenerative practices as spiritual discipline, guided by principles like *Ayni* and *Ubuntu*.¹²⁴ Third, it demands a commitment to de-enclosure and re-membling, actively dismantling separating walls by decolonizing the curriculum, decompartmentalizing knowledge, and recovering communal rituals that celebrate and grieve with the more-than-human world. Fourth, it requires a teleology of collective flourishing and eschatological hope.¹²⁵ This approach is intended to replace the narrative of conquest with the disruptive hope of a “New Jerusalem” descending upon a renewed Earth, energizing work for justice now.

This theoretical foundation manifests in a liberated pedagogical praxis that transforms where and how we learn. The classroom becomes an ecotone, a fertile zone for cross-pollination among scientific, artistic, indigenous, and mystical knowledges. Education must be place-based and embodied, unmoored from the generic through pilgrimages to wounded and thriving lands, learning bioregional history, and engaging the body as a primary site of knowledge. Crucially, formation must occur through theological apprenticeship in communities of struggle, where students, as “organic intellectuals” of the Earth-Commons, are accountable to movements for land defense and mutual aid. Finally, assessment must be by life, measured by the vitality of collaborative projects—such as developing food commons or liberation liturgies—rather than by grades alone. In this way, theological education is transformed

from a curator of a dying paradigm into a seedbed for the Earth-Commons. Aligning formation with the logic of the commons plants the seeds for a liberated creation, summoning theological institutions to their decolonial vocation: to form healers, prophets, and cultivators equipped for the profound work of mending the world. The future of theology and our planet relies on this brave rethinking, which demands we overcome the “colonial-capitalist gaze” that severs creation from salvation. This rethinking finds support in the theology of American ecofeminist Sallie McFague. She upholds the indivisible bond between creation and salvation, understanding salvation as the purpose of creation and creation as the context for salvation.¹²⁶ Thus, to heal our fractured world, theology must recover this interconnectedness, understanding salvation as the healing and fulfillment of the very creation we are called to protect.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Aïda C. Terblanché-Greeff, “Ubuntu and Environmental Ethics: The West Can Learn from Africa When Faced with Climate Change,” in *African Environmental Ethics*, ed. M. Chemhuru, The International Library of Environmental, Agricultural and Food Ethics 29 (Cham: Springer, 2020), 93–109, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18807-8_7.

¹²⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 15, 23, 33.

¹²⁶ Sallie McFague, “The Scope of the Body: The Cosmic Christ,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996), 287.

¹²⁷ McFague, “The Scope of the Body: The Cosmic Christ,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, 288.



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