



WHAT IS... COLONIALISM



DEFINITION:

COLONIALISM IS a systematic process of exercising military, political, and religious control and domination over the land, resources, and native populations. Colonizers may or may not share ethnicity, religious belief, language, and other ways of thinking of the group of individuals that aim to control the area.



BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

FROM THE CHRISTIAN'S UNDERSTANDING, COLONIALISM WAS SEEN IN TWO WAYS:

1. White Spaniards, backed by Christian teaching, believed colonization was the way to expand the gospel message beyond their borders. Spanish colonizers used this as an excuse to invade and colonize Abya Yala.
2. Colonialism allowed for the expansion of power worldwide, and, again, "pagans" who had not yet heard about the Christian message can see the faith in action as expressed through power. Vestiges of white colonialism remain today.

For many people, the call to following Christianity conflicts with the historical legacy of how the gospel message arrived in their nations, and by the fact that colonialism is antithetical to Jesus' teachings on liberation and freedom. Through colonialism, Europeans weaponized the Christian message in order to take land and resources from indigenous people in other lands and take land and resources and impose their rules.

¹ Notably, the term Abya Yala comes from the Guna language. It means "land in full maturity and land of vital blood." The Guna people inhabit the meeting points of the north and south geographically (now Panama and Colombia), and the use of their language symbolizes the connectivity of the lands. In the 1970s, many native activists, farmers, historians, politicians, and theologians as a unified name instead of North America (primarily English speakers) and Latin America (mostly Spanish and Portuguese speakers) perpetuated colonial divisions.



EXAMPLE(S):

EXAMPLES OF COLONIALISM INCLUDE:

To understand how colonialism has been implemented historically, we can examine the process of the Spaniards/ European invasion of Abya Yala, which created a new political and religious system over the native people and the territory.¹ This colonization led to genocide, tremendous pain, family separations, generations of trauma, and forced assimilation to the new culture, languages, and imposed rules.

Colonialism can be seen as a blunt force to push whole areas, peoples, and land into submission. It is the foundation upon which the current North American continent was established.

As a practice, we see that colonialism can often be interrelated with procedures of oppression and the expansion of territories.

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REFLECTION:

QUESTION #1

Is colonialism as a political and religious practice still in use, or has it ended? Give examples.



QUESTION #2

Was white colonization a commandment from God to white Christians?



QUESTION #3

Is it possible to build healing and forgiveness with the native people of Abya Yala after the atrocities inflicted as a result of colonialism?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

EMPIRE OF COTTON BY SVEN BECKERT
(FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS, EDITION 2014)

ABYA YALA THEOLOGY (BY YENNY DELGADO AND CLAUDIO RAMIREZ)
<https://publicatheology.org/2022/04/06/abya-yala-theology/>

SOCIAL REALITY AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS. THEOLOGY, ETHICS, AND THE WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BY GERD THEISSEN (MINNEAPOLIS, 1992)

CONQUEST BY ANDREA SMITH
(DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2005)

BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS BY FRANTZ FANON (PLUTO PRESS, LONDON, 1986)