



# WHAT IS... DECOLONIZATION



## DEFINITION:

**DECOLONIZATION IS** a critical process where a person, community, and nation aim to dismantle the power, control, and laws imposed and assimilated during external rule and authority, commonly referred to as colonization.

Decolonization is not the same as independence because reclaiming administrative control is typically the first step toward full autonomy. In many cases, the descendants of the initial colonizers sought greater sovereignty and waged wars against independence, typically in the late 18th and early 19th century in Abya Yala.<sup>1</sup> However, colonization also affected the practice and language, religion, spirituality, and history of native people, who, even after independence, often held little power, prestige, or opportunity in the newly formed nation.



## BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

**FROM THE CHRISTIANS' UNDERSTANDING, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO RECOGNIZE DECOLONIZATION AS LIBERATION AND DECOLONIZED WAYS OF LIVING.**

1. An initial realization is that decolonization is a way to repair a painful act of oppression against the native population of the colonized land.
2. When uncoupled from Christianity's message, decolonization can bridge the gaps of trust and lead to healing and peace, as God is the one that created the diversity of the planet.

<sup>1</sup> 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 symbolically represents the connectivity of the lands. In the 1970s, many native activists, farmers, historians, politicians, and theologians used Abya Yala as a unified name instead of North America (primarily English speakers) and Latin America (mostly Spanish and Portuguese speakers) which perpetuated colonial divisions.



## EXAMPLE(S):

**EXAMPLES OF DECOLONIZATION INCLUDE:**

The ability of native people and their descendants to write their own history and practice self-determination and self-identification with their own words is the process of decolonization. Therefore, decolonization is an intentional practice to recover the native population's traditions and rituals of seeing life, empowering them to control their own narrative and sources of knowledge instead of the colonial-imposed ways of living.

Decolonization, then, is the process through which descendants of the native people who live in the territory once colonized by others, through which the people reclaim their language, histories, rituals, values, social structures, self-worth, and control from those who colonized them. Decolonization is a process of healing that engages individuals, groups, communities, cultures, and nations.

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## REFLECTION:

### QUESTION #1

Is decolonization a practice we can consider in our thoughts and practices in our faith community?



### QUESTION #2

Is it possible to recognize the native population to maintain their ancestral spiritual memory after centuries of colonization?



### QUESTION #3

How can we achieve healing during the decolonial process?



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

NOT A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS. SETTLER COLONIALISM, WHITE SUPREMACY, AND A HISTORY OF ERASURE AND EXCLUSION BY ROXANNE DUNBAR-ORTIZ (BEACON PRESS 2021)

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)

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED BY PAULO FREIRE (THE SEABURY PRESS. NEW YORK, 1974)