

Academic Capitalism and Theological Education: A Critical Analysis of the Commodification of Ministerial Vocation in the Neoliberal Era

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Abstract: Christian theological education faces serious challenges as academic capitalism increasingly shapes higher education. Market logic emphasizing efficiency, competition, and profit shifts theological education from spiritual formation and vocational calling toward economic investment and expected returns. This article critically examines how the commodification of education affects theological institutions, particularly graduates' orientations toward ecclesial ministry. Using a critical interdisciplinary literature review, the study integrates sociology of education, practical theology, and postcolonial studies, engaging international scholarship alongside literature and policy sources from Indonesia and Asia. It argues that rising educational costs, market-oriented accreditation, and the declining role of churches as financial guarantors intensify tensions between ministerial vocation and post-study economic needs, risking the reduction of ministry to a materially rewarded profession. The article's novelty lies in connecting academic capitalism with Maldonado-Torres's concept of coloniality and interpreting educational and economic pressures through a Global South perspective. It concludes by proposing theological education reform that integrates spiritual formation, communal responsibility, and financial sustainability.

Keywords: academic capitalism; commodification of education; theological education; ministerial vocation; coloniality

Abstrak: Pendidikan teologi Kristen menghadapi tantangan serius seiring semakin kuatnya pengaruh kapitalisme akademik dalam pendidikan tinggi. Logika pasar yang menekankan efisiensi, kompetisi, dan keuntungan menggeser pendidikan teologi dari proses pembentukan spiritual dan panggilan vokasional menuju investasi ekonomi yang menuntut imbal hasil. Artikel ini secara kritis mengkaji bagaimana komodifikasi pendidikan memengaruhi institusi teologi, khususnya orientasi lulusan terhadap pelayanan gerejawi. Dengan menggunakan tinjauan literatur interdisipliner kritis, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan sosiologi pendidikan, teologi praktis, dan studi pascakolonial melalui dialog antara literatur internasional dan sumber literatur serta kebijakan dari Indonesia dan Asia. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa meningkatnya biaya pendidikan, akreditasi yang berorientasi pasar, dan melemahnya peran gereja sebagai penjamin pembiayaan memperkuat ketegangan antara panggilan pelayanan dan kebutuhan ekonomi pascastudi, yang berisiko mereduksi pelayanan menjadi profesi yang berorientasi pada imbalan material. Kebaruan artikel ini terletak pada pengaitan kapitalisme akademik dengan konsep coloniality Maldonado-Torres serta interpretasi terhadap tekanan pendidikan dan ekonomi melalui perspektif Global South. Artikel ini mengusulkan reformasi pendidikan teologi yang mengintegrasikan pembentukan spiritual, tanggung jawab komunal, dan keberlanjutan finansial.

Kata kunci: kapitalisme akademik; komodifikasi pendidikan; pendidikan teologi; panggilan pelayanan; kolonialitas

Introduction

Over recent decades, higher education has undergone a profound transformation in which universities increasingly operate according to market logic. Since the 1980s, neoliberal reforms have promoted efficiency, competition, and performance-based accountability, repositioning universities as organisations expected to generate economic value and financial sustainability. Slaughter and Leslie (2001) conceptualise this transformation as academic capitalism, describing the adoption of corporate practices in teaching, research, and knowledge production. Although initially developed in relation to research universities in the United States and Europe, academic capitalism has become a global phenomenon across diverse higher education systems (Jessop 2017; Kauppinen 2012).

The consequences extend beyond institutional governance. Market mechanisms increasingly shape academic priorities, lecturer-student relationships, research agendas, curricula, and definitions of institutional success. Evidence from Finland, Catalonia, Iran, Chile, and South Africa demonstrates how market-oriented reforms have reshaped funding, governance, and competition (Bori and Block 2024; Chetty 2026; Guzmán et al. 2022; Kauppinen and Kaidesoja 2014; Ramezani 2025). Indonesia has experienced similar pressures. The 2012 Higher Education Law accelerated institutional autonomy and aspirations for world-class status, while governance weaknesses continue to constrain institutional quality (Rosser 2023). Consequently, market logic may narrow academic autonomy, deepen institutional inequality, and marginalise fields that generate limited direct economic returns (Cantwell 2015; Fredricks-Lowman and Smith-Isabell 2020).

These developments raise an underexplored question: how does academic capitalism affect Christian theological education? Theological institutions have traditionally been oriented toward spiritual formation, character, vocation, and service to the church rather than labour-market preparation. Yet they increasingly face pressures related to funding, accreditation, operational sustainability, and student recruitment. Theological education therefore cannot stand outside these transformations.

Studies already indicate the presence of market-oriented dynamics within theological education. Resane (2017), for example, identifies the commercialisation of education and ministry within Neo-Pentecostal Charismatic contexts, where economic prosperity, organisational expansion, and public image may compete with theological depth and spiritual integrity. Institutional data reveal significant changes. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) reports that enrolment at member institutions declined from 77,043 in 2019 to 76,318 in 2023, while Master of Divinity enrolment fell from 30,803 to 26,143. In 2023, Master of Arts enrolment (28,034) surpassed MDiv enrolment, a shift projected by Tanner (2017) and reflected in ATS data (ATS 2024; Meinzer 2023, n.d.). Rising costs, accreditation demands, and reduced church financial support further encourage managerial strategies. In Indonesia, Karnawati (2024) identifies persistent governance, financial, human-resource, and infrastructure problems among Christian religious higher education institutions, while Ditjen Bimas Kristen (2025) acknowledges the limited number of institutions and programmes receiving an “Excellent” accreditation and continuing budget constraints.

The implications also extend to graduates. Theology students enter ministry with a vocational understanding of service as a response to God's call, yet they simultaneously confront economic requirements related to income, family provision, and educational cost recovery. Data USA (2024) reports that among approximately 333,619 theology graduates in the US labour force, only about 26 per cent work as clergy, while others work in education, management, administration, and other occupations. Average annual income is also lower among clergy (US\$54,868) than among theology graduates across occupations (US\$68,677) (Data USA 2024). Educational debt intensifies this tension: an ATS survey found average debt of US\$33,537 among seminary graduates with educational loans (Association of Theological Schools 2021), while McWhorter (2023) estimates that the debt-to-income ratio may exceed 1:1 at graduation. Comparable systematic data for Indonesia on graduate destinations, pastoral income, and student debt are not publicly available. The North American evidence therefore functions as a heuristic lens rather than a direct representation of Indonesia.

Economic pressure may subsequently affect ministerial sustainability. Miner, Dowson and Sterland (2010) identify economic pressure as one factor associated with clergy burnout, while Randall (2004) links financial burden and ministerial pressure to some pastors' decisions to leave active ministry. Emslie (2026) further argues that prolonged economic pressure can shift pastoral identity from spiritual calling toward a pragmatic professional orientation. Thus, graduate outcomes cannot be understood solely as matters of individual commitment but also as products of structural change in higher education.

Previous scholarship has addressed these dimensions separately. Research on academic capitalism rarely examines theological education, while studies of clergy well-being seldom trace economic pressures back to higher education structures. Resane (2017), for instance, focuses specifically on Neo-Pentecostal Charismatic contexts in Africa. This article extends the discussion across ecclesial and geographical contexts, particularly Asia and Indonesia, by connecting academic capitalism with Maldonado-Torres's concept of coloniality and interpreting ATS and Data USA evidence through a Global South perspective. Accordingly, the article aims to (1) analyse how academic capitalism penetrates theological education institutionally, (2) examine how it shapes the vocational orientation of theology graduates, and (3) formulate a theological and ecclesiological response that reconnects theological education with the church's mission. It contributes by situating economic pressures on theological education within a broader historical, decolonial, and ecclesial framework.

Method

This study employs a critical interdisciplinary literature review to examine academic capitalism in theological education. Unlike a descriptive review, a critical review analyses, compares, and synthesises existing scholarship to develop a coherent argument (Grant and Booth 2009; Snyder 2019). The identification of recurring patterns draws on thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), adapted to textual rather than interview data.

The literature was retrieved primarily from Scopus through four thematic clusters: (1) academic capitalism and marketisation of higher education; (2) commercialisation of theological education; (3) ministerial vocation, professionalisation, and clergy burnout; and (4)

the historical relationship between church, education, mission, and postcolonial societies. Supplementary searches were conducted through Garuda and Google Scholar to capture Indonesian and Asian scholarship, using Indonesian keywords related to theological education, Christian religious higher education, educational commercialisation, and ministerial vocation. Official publications from the Directorate General of Christian Community Guidance were also included. Priority was given to peer-reviewed Scopus-indexed and SINTA-indexed publications, reputable academic publishers, and literature published between 2015 and 2026, while foundational works were retained.

Analysis proceeded through three stages: thematic mapping, critical-comparative analysis across disciplines and geographical contexts, and argumentative synthesis connecting academic capitalism with theological education, graduate vocational dilemmas, and the church's mission. The study does not generate primary empirical data and therefore does not claim to represent the Indonesian context directly. Rather, international evidence is interpreted alongside available Indonesian sources to construct an initial analytical framework for subsequent empirical research.

Results and Discussion

Academic Capitalism and the Structural Transformation of Higher Education

Academic capitalism refers not merely to the presence of commercial tendencies within higher education but to a broader systemic transformation in which universities increasingly integrate market-oriented practices into research, teaching, institutional governance, and resource allocation. Slaughter and Leslie (2001) developed the concept from their observations of universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, where institutions had become increasingly dependent on competitive funding, industry partnerships, and the commercialisation of research. In this environment, universities are encouraged to generate external revenue, compete for students and funding, and demonstrate measurable institutional performance. Knowledge consequently shifts from being understood primarily as a public good with intrinsic intellectual and social value toward a resource expected to produce identifiable economic returns.

This transformation does not occur uniformly. Academic capitalism takes different forms according to the political, economic, and cultural structures of particular countries. Jessop (2017) emphasises that marketisation should therefore be understood as a differentiated process rather than as a single global model. In Northern Europe, for example, performance-based funding mechanisms increasingly influence institutional priorities and academic behaviour, encouraging universities and academics to respond to measurable indicators of productivity and performance (Kauppinen and Kaidesoja 2014; Poutanen 2023). In Catalonia, public universities have increasingly constructed themselves discursively as entrepreneurial institutions whose knowledge production should demonstrate market relevance and economic utility (Bori and Block 2024). These examples illustrate how market logic can become embedded not only in financial arrangements but also in institutional identities and definitions of academic success.

In the Global South, however, academic capitalism frequently intersects with existing state structures and produces hybrid forms of marketisation. In Iran, neoliberal practices coexist

with strong state control, creating tensions between academic autonomy, market-oriented reform, and political compliance (Ramezani 2025). In Chile, the distinction between public and private higher education shapes how academics engage with society within a highly marketised system (Guzmán et al. 2022). These variations demonstrate that academic capitalism should not be reduced to the simple replacement of public education by private interests. Rather, it involves the reorganisation of institutional priorities through competitive mechanisms, performance measurement, financial pressures, and changing expectations concerning the social and economic value of knowledge.

Indonesia represents another distinctive configuration. The rapid expansion of higher education has occurred alongside national ambitions to strengthen institutional quality and develop world-class universities. Yet Rosser (2023) identifies institutional governance failures as an important factor contributing to the uneven quality of Indonesian universities. For Christian higher education, these pressures are further complicated by dual institutional oversight from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (Ditjen Bimas Kristen 2025). Academic capitalism in this context therefore operates less through direct industry partnerships than through accreditation requirements, competition for students, institutional performance indicators, and the dependence of many private institutions on tuition income. Consequently, market pressures can become embedded in administrative and regulatory practices even when institutions are not directly engaged in commercial research.

Across these contexts, several structural consequences become visible. *First*, academic autonomy is constrained. As institutional funding and reputation become increasingly dependent on competitive mechanisms and quantitative indicators, academic priorities can shift toward activities that are measurable, fundable, and institutionally advantageous. Wieczorek and Muench (2022) describe how market thinking reduces knowledge to units that can be measured, compared, and potentially sold. The issue is therefore not simply that universities seek financial resources, but that financial and performance criteria can increasingly influence what counts as valuable knowledge and which academic activities receive institutional recognition.

Second, academic inequality intensifies. Academic capitalism does not distribute its pressures equally across academic workers. Douin et al. (2026) document the emergence of a two-tier academic system in which non-tenure-track faculty may carry substantial teaching responsibilities without comparable career security, while tenured faculty are increasingly encouraged to concentrate on research activities capable of generating institutional income or prestige. Market-oriented restructuring can thus create differentiated academic roles and unequal distributions of workload, security, and opportunity.

Third, disciplines whose contributions are difficult to translate into economic indicators become particularly vulnerable to marginalisation. The humanities, arts, and religious sciences often produce forms of knowledge whose social significance cannot easily be expressed through immediate financial returns or conventional productivity metrics. Fredricks-Lowman and Smith-Isabell (2020) therefore highlight the vulnerability of such fields within increasingly market-oriented higher education. Their marginalisation raises a broader question about

whether the value of higher education can be adequately defined through economic productivity alone.

These structural transformations also influence how students understand the meaning and purpose of education. When universities increasingly function as service providers and students as consumers, education can be interpreted as an economic transaction in which tuition represents an investment and employment represents the expected return. Academic programmes are consequently evaluated according to their perceived contribution to employability, income, and career advancement. This orientation does not necessarily eliminate educational or intellectual purposes, but it can gradually subordinate them to economic calculation.

The implications become particularly significant for theological education. Unlike programmes whose primary objective is preparation for participation in conventional labour markets, theological education traditionally seeks to form persons for vocation, ministry, character, spiritual maturity, and service to the faith community. Its value therefore cannot be fully captured by employment outcomes or financial returns. When theological institutions adopt the same market-oriented criteria that increasingly shape general higher education, a fundamental tension emerges between education as economic investment and education as spiritual and vocational formation. Academic capitalism thus becomes more than an institutional or financial issue for theological education: it raises a question about the very purpose of education and the kind of person that theological institutions seek to form.

The Penetration of Market Logic into Theological Education

Theological education has traditionally occupied a distinctive position in higher education because its purpose extends beyond academic competence and professional preparation to the formation of character, faith, vocation, and ministry. Miller (2012) notes that from the patristic era to the Reformation, theological education served as a space for character formation, deepening faith, and preparing ministers of integrity for the church. This tradition rested on the assumption that theological education belongs to the calling of the faith community rather than functioning as a commodity. That assumption, however, is increasingly challenged by the marketisation of higher education.

The commercialisation of theological education reflects broader structural changes in higher education. Reduced state subsidies, intensified accreditation requirements, and institutional competition place particular pressure on small theological institutions with limited resources. Resane (2017) documents this dynamic among Neo-Pentecostal Charismatic churches in Africa, where theological education increasingly adopts commercial practices, including high tuition fees, aggressive programme marketing, and the use of popular but academically shallow literature. In this context, ministerial success may also become associated with material prosperity and public visibility rather than theological depth or ministry quality.

These dynamics extend beyond a single ecclesial tradition. Von Sinner (2022) observes that reconfessionalisation can weaken ecumenical cooperation as theological institutions strengthen denominational identities partly as strategies for recruitment and institutional positioning. Similarly, Akatukunda (2023) shows that urban theological institutions face

simultaneous pressures to address complex pastoral challenges and manage high operating costs, potentially shifting institutional attention from missional and formative priorities toward financial sustainability.

The Indonesian context presents both parallels and distinctive features. The expansion of urban Pentecostal-Charismatic megachurches has generated particular symbols of ministerial and institutional success. Simanjuntak (2023), however, shows that megachurch growth should not simply be equated with commercialisation, since it may also contribute positively to congregants' spiritual growth. Nevertheless, when institutional size, visibility, and material resources become dominant indicators of success, theological institutions may become increasingly exposed to market-oriented expectations. Accreditation requirements add another pressure, as smaller theological colleges must devote substantial resources to administrative compliance despite limited budgets (Ditjen Bimas Kristen 2025; Karnawati 2024). At the same time, formative commitments remain evident. Sanjaya et al. (2025), for example, describe how a theological college in Batam contextualises Christian religious education to cultivate students' civic and Christian character, demonstrating that formation remains an important institutional resource.

Marketisation also transforms the relationship between students and theological institutions. Traditionally, students entered theological education in response to vocation, while the church supported their formation financially and spiritually. Mashabela (2017) shows that this communal model is increasingly replaced by a transactional relationship in which students finance their own education and expect the degree to function as capital for securing economically viable ministry. Theological education consequently risks being understood as individual investment rather than communal formation, with ministry itself interpreted through expectations of economic return.

Professionalisation, however, should not be rejected in itself. Higher academic standards, relevant curricula, and stronger research capacity are necessary for credible theological education. The critical issue is whether professionalisation serves formative quality or primarily institutional competition. Golemon (2021) reminds us that clergy formation has historically involved preparing ministers as culture-builders and agents of social transformation. The central challenge, therefore, is to integrate legitimate professional and institutional demands while preserving the formative, vocational, and ecclesial purpose of theological education.

The Dilemma of Theology Graduates: Between Vocation and Economic Calculation

The impact of academic capitalism on theological education extends beyond institutional structures to graduates who must navigate the tension between ministerial vocation and economic reality. This tension is not merely an individual psychological problem but reflects a structural shift from communal formation toward personal investment. When students bear the full cost of theological education without adequate support from churches or faith communities, graduation can introduce an economic calculation that was not traditionally central to ministerial vocation: how to recover the financial costs and sacrifices of theological study.

Research on clergy well-being demonstrates that economic conditions can influence the sustainability of ministry. Randall (2004) found that burnout was a strong predictor of clergy leaving parish ministry in the Anglican context, with economic pressure among the factors aggravating this condition. Miner, Dowson and Sterland (2010) further showed that ministers' orientations toward ministry are associated with burnout and job satisfaction. Those motivated primarily by intrinsic commitments tend to demonstrate greater resilience, whereas stronger extrinsic or instrumental orientations are associated with greater vulnerability to exhaustion and dissatisfaction.

These findings become particularly significant when considered alongside the marketisation of theological education. When education is experienced as an investment expected to generate a return, students may gradually develop an instrumental orientation toward ministry. Such formation operates cumulatively through everyday calculations of tuition costs, career prospects, denominational opportunities, and ministerial compensation. Consequently, the economic logic acquired during theological education may continue to shape expectations after graduation rather than disappearing when students enter ministry.

Beatty, Biwa and Millender (2024) capture this complexity through their finding that clerical professionalism can become an identity that cannot simply be removed like ordinary occupational clothing. Ministry permeates the minister's identity and daily existence. Emslie (2026) similarly describes the ministry context as an ontological force that can be both formative and corrosive, shaping not only how pastors minister but also how they understand themselves. When this environment is dominated by economic calculation, the spiritual identity intended to ground ministry may consequently be weakened.

The dilemma is particularly acute in the Global South, where ministerial support structures are often limited and pastoral compensation may be low or irregular. Theology graduates carrying educational debt or substantial study costs may therefore pursue bivocational ministry, seek positions in better-resourced churches, or, in more problematic cases, treat ecclesial ministry primarily as a source of income. The latter risks transforming pastoral relationships from vocation and service into economic transactions. The South Korean case illustrates the broader structural danger. Han (2026) shows how hereditary succession in Korean megachurches has been shaped by money, honour, and power, while an oversupply of theology graduates has intensified competition within a contracting ecclesial labour market. In Indonesia, Simbolon and Widjaja (2025) emphasize Christian leadership as a theological calling to imitate Christ the Good Shepherd, while Marisi, Sutanto and Lahagu (2020) use Isaiah 40:11 to address Christian leadership in the postmodern context. These contributions affirm the vocational and pastoral dimensions of leadership but leave relatively underexplored the economic structures through which ministerial orientations are formed.

The problem, therefore, cannot be reduced to individual morality. Blaming graduates for economic calculation without examining the system that produces such pressures overlooks its structural dimension. Kane (2006) demonstrates the importance of ethical frameworks for regulating pastoral conduct, particularly relational and sexual boundaries, but such frameworks primarily govern individual behaviour rather than the economic structures shaping ministerial expectations. Consequently, ethical formation must be accompanied by structural reflection. As

long as theological education places disproportionate financial responsibility on students, churches remain distanced from their responsibility for theological formation, and ministerial success is closely associated with economic outcomes, the tension between vocation and economic calculation is likely to be reproduced across successive generations of theology graduates.

Historical Roots and Theological Reflection: Returning Education to the Mission of the Church

Understanding the commodification of theological education requires both structural and historical analysis. The phenomenon did not emerge solely from within the church but reflects a longer trajectory in which educational responsibility shifted from the church to the state and subsequently toward market mechanisms. Recognising this history is essential because responses that address only contemporary symptoms may overlook the structural roots of the problem.

Historically, the church was among the earliest and most widespread providers of education, particularly in regions later identified as the Global South. Jensz (2012) documents how nineteenth-century Christian missionary institutions became major providers of education for Indigenous peoples across territories of the British Empire. Education was understood not as an independent commercial activity but as part of evangelisation, community formation, and social service. Kallaway (2009) similarly shows how the International Missionary Council shaped educational policy in colonial Africa by integrating education with health and social welfare as dimensions of a broader mission.

This history, however, should not be romanticised. Ghosh and Abdi (2025) demonstrate that missionary education could also function as an instrument of cultural assimilation and colonial ideology, particularly through residential schools for Indigenous peoples in Canada. Albrecht (2026) likewise shows that religious schools in Sri Lanka simultaneously created opportunities for women while reinforcing colonial narratives concerning gender and nationalism. These tensions indicate that reclaiming the church's educational mission requires critical retrieval rather than simple restoration: the formative and communal dimensions of Christian education should be recovered without reproducing its colonial legacies.

The transfer of educational responsibility to the state accelerated through decolonisation and nation-building in the mid-twentieth century. Postcolonial governments increasingly incorporated education into national development projects, reducing the church's institutional role. Boender (2025), for example, documents how the African Independent Pentecostal Church in Kenya struggled to rebuild educational institutions following the Mau Mau uprising. A subsequent shift occurred through liberalisation and privatisation from the 1980s onward, allowing religious organisations to re-enter education, but within market frameworks that subjected them to common regulations and competition for students and resources (Dilger and Schulz 2013).

This trajectory raises a theological question concerning the relationship between education and the church's mission. Maldonado-Torres (2007) conceptualises coloniality as the persistence of colonial structures in knowledge, social relations, and institutional practices after

formal colonialism has ended. From this perspective, academic capitalism may function as a contemporary form of coloniality by defining how knowledge is produced, distributed, and evaluated. For Asian and Indonesian theological institutions, this operates through both inherited missionary legacies and contemporary accreditation, ranking, and performance systems shaped substantially by North Atlantic models of the university. Critical engagement is therefore necessary to prevent theological education from reproducing external structures of value that may conflict with its ecclesial and formative purposes.

The response, however, cannot remain merely critical. Lichon and Haug (2026) propose collaborative formation in which churches and universities share responsibility for education through partnerships that strengthen their respective missions. Mattei (2018) similarly highlights efforts to reconcile market-oriented strategies with universities' civic and societal missions, while Carbine (2010) emphasises experiential and relational learning as alternatives to transactional educational models. In Indonesia, Sanjaya et al. (2025) emphasise the church's responsibility for faith formation from early childhood and the complementary roles of church and family. This suggests a broader educational continuum: a church that assumes responsibility for forming children's faith should also remain concerned with forming those who will eventually serve them as ministers and educators.

For theological education, this requires reintegrating three dimensions separated by market logic. *First*, spiritual formation must remain central to the curriculum rather than functioning as an additional component. *Second*, communal responsibility requires churches to participate in sustaining students financially and accompanying them pastorally. *Third*, financial sustainability should be grounded not primarily in market competition but in ecclesial solidarity and responsible stewardship. In Indonesia, these principles could be expressed through synod-based scholarships linked to ministry placement, inter-synodal resource sharing among smaller theological colleges, and church commitments to adequate pastoral remuneration, particularly in under-resourced areas. Such measures would reconnect theological education with its formative and ecclesial vocation while responding responsibly to contemporary institutional demands.

Conclusion

This article has shown that academic capitalism, initially developed in general higher education through competitive funding, industry partnerships, and the commercialisation of knowledge, has increasingly penetrated theological education through rising individual educational costs, performance-based accreditation, institutional competition, and the transformation of students from members of a formative community into individual educational investors. These conditions create a tension between ministerial vocation and the need to recover educational investment, with potential consequences for burnout, spiritual identity, and the integrity of pastoral ministry, while reflecting a longer historical shift in educational responsibility from the church to the state and subsequently to market mechanisms. The article contributes by connecting academic capitalism with Maldonado-Torres's concept of coloniality, interpreting marketisation as not only an economic but also an epistemic and decolonial issue; using empirical data from ATS and Data USA heuristically rather than as

universal representations of the Global South; and incorporating Indonesian and Asian perspectives, including accreditation pressures and the Korean experience of pastoral succession, into a debate largely shaped by Western contexts. The findings indicate that responding to this challenge requires structural and ecclesiological rather than merely individual or moral responses, particularly through restoring spiritual formation as the core of theological education, reclaiming the church's communal responsibility for sustaining theological formation, and developing financial models based on ecclesial solidarity rather than market competition. As a literature-based study, this article does not provide primary Indonesian data; further research should therefore empirically examine these issues through tracer studies of theology graduates, comparative analysis of tuition costs, student debt and pastoral remuneration, studies of church-funded scholarship models, and qualitative research on how students and graduates negotiate vocation and economic necessity.

AI Use Declaration

In the preparation of this article, the author used Claude Opus 5 as an assisting tool to consider and explore ideas across different sections of the manuscript. Perplexity was used as a supporting tool for locating and considering relevant data and information. ChatGPT was used to assist with English-language paraphrasing and refinement. Grammarly and QuillBot were used as language-support tools for grammar checking, language editing, paraphrasing, and improving readability. All ideas, arguments, analyses, interpretations, source selection, and conclusions presented in this article remain the responsibility of the author. The author has reviewed and verified the content generated or assisted by these tools and assumes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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