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RESEARCH ARTICLE



A Pastoral Theology of Dwelling: Political Belonging in the Face of a Pandemic, Racism, and the Anthropocene Age

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ABSTRACT

The recent pandemic has accompanied a surge of protests against racial injustice in the United States and around the world, which together are occurring during a growing recognition that the world is in the midst of a sixth extinction event. These three events (and others) have in common the question of how we (human and other-than-human beings) shall live or dwell together on this one earth. In this article, I first sketch out the various existential features of dwelling. This sets the foundation for moving to a pastoral theological perspective on dwelling and its relation to the pandemic, racism/classism, and the Anthropocene Age.

KEYWORDS

Anthropocene; dwelling; pandemic; pastoral theology; politics; racism

For Levinas the home rises to the fullness of its dignity when it is used as an instrument of welcome.¹

The privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition.²

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.³

Around the same time as Pope Leo XIII's encyclical (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891) was published,⁴ the United States saw the rise of the Social Gospel Movement along with the Emmanuel Movement, both of which marked a deep concern for the psychological and material suffering of poor and working-class persons in society.⁵ These movements, in one sense, were the roots of what would later emerge in the United States as pastoral theology around the mid-twentieth century. Since then, Protestant and Catholic pastoral theologians have demonstrated a wide focus of social concerns, including the articulation of the foundations of pastoral care,⁶ as well as innumerable other issues of human need that are linked to political realities. A few examples will illustrate this: care of children,⁷ care of older women,⁸ care for the traumatized,⁹ care for ostracized or marginalized persons,¹⁰ and care for people who are grieving.¹¹ In the 1980s and 1990s, an additional focus of concern extended pastoral theological analyses to social and political issues. The works of Archie Smith,¹² Larry Graham,¹³ Bonnie Miller-McLemore,¹⁴ and others represented this needed expansion. Recently, pastoral theologians have tackled macro systems that are implicated in the suffering of individuals, communities, and societies

– systems that threaten our very habitat (e.g. classism, racism, neoliberal capitalism, post-colonialism). While relying on the frameworks of care and justice, these scholars used economic, political, and human science research to address systemic social, political, and economic failures.¹⁵ In a different vein, other pastoral theologians have tackled ethical and pastoral questions and issues associated with advances in neuroscience and human-technology interfaces.¹⁶ There are three points here. First, pastoral theology's focus on the care¹⁷ and well-being of persons (and communities/societies) has had and continues to be a key principle and framework for addressing political and economic suffering. Second, the range and depth of pastoral theological analyses have accompanied a diverse use of human science, philosophical, and theological interpretive frameworks, which reflects the intersectional strength of pastoral theological analyses. Third, and most crucial for this paper, these varied interests have a common thread and that is the ethical-political question of how shall we live or dwell together, not just for the sake of survival, but for human flourishing.

Today, the issue of dwelling is more important than at any other period of history. The reality of the pandemic has raised issues of dwelling and belonging. It is not simply that COVID-19 can literally unhouse people (death and eviction), but that it has exposed, to the general public, what people of color have long been pointing out for decades and that is the long-running economic, social, and political disparities of dwelling vis-à-vis people of color and the poor – the result of the intersection of racism, classism, and neoliberal capitalism. Coupled with the pandemic are the murders of African Americans by the police. This sadly is also not new, but it may be that many people of color are weary of and angry at the apparatuses¹⁸ of society that have functioned to foster what Orlando Patterson¹⁹ calls social death and what Giorgio Agamben calls bare life, wherein the police have 'the power to decide which life may be killed without commission of homicide [and] which life ceases to be politically relevant.'²⁰ The protests, which have echoed around the world, have touched on the precarity of dwelling for people of color, not simply with regard to death, but also their flourishing. In other words, food deserts, food insecurity, housing insecurity, dilapidated infrastructures, evictions, higher rates of imprisonment, lack of access to quality education, excessive policing, and a dearth of quality medical care are some of the realities that lead to political and economic disenfranchisement and, concomitantly, the undermining of persons' dwelling.²¹ If this is not dire and urgent enough, let me add that according to most climate scientists²² and other experts, we have moved from the Holocene to the Anthropocene Age.²³ The news is bleak – increasing temperatures, melting glaciers, rising and more acidic seas, catastrophic storms, desertification of vast tracts of land, decimated rain forests, frequent massive forest fires, extinctions of millions of species, failed and failing states, and mass migrations of peoples within and between borders.²⁴ Along with this dismal news is the likely possibility that classism and racism will be exacerbated as a result of fear, anxiety, and hostility within and between nations as resources diminish.²⁵ The Anthropocene Age also brings with it the knowledge that human beings are in the process of not only unhousing millions of other species, but very likely we are well into the process of unhousing ourselves. We may join our dinosaur friends, though this time we will be the cause of the extinction event.

While all of this can feel overwhelming, it invites us to consider the question of what it means to dwell with each other, as well as other species, on this one habitat in which we

are all dependent. In this article, I first sketch out the various existential features of dwelling, recognizing the limits of an article length-essay. This sets the foundation for moving to a pastoral theological perspective on dwelling and its relation to the pandemic, racism/classism, and the Anthropocene Age.

Existential Features of Dwelling

To sketch out the existential features of human dwelling, it is best to start at the beginning. Our first dwelling place is the womb, where needs are met before we can be aware of them. Infant-parent researchers have known for some time that, before birth, infants are organizing experience, later seen in their showing preferences for their parents' voices and even particular stories that were read to them before they were born.²⁶ This tells us that, prior to birth, embodied-relational experiences of dwelling are organized pre-representationally. This first abode lasts a short time before we are thrown into a world that is 'one great blooming buzzing confusion.'²⁷ In this new home, there is a delay between experiences of need and when it is met, because parents are not capable of anticipating all needs and, even if they were, this would present psychosocial problems later. In this new place of dwelling, cooperation is not simply bodily, but psychosocial, wherein children assert their needs and desires and, if all goes well-enough, parental attunements address these needs. Assertion of needs and desires suggests a nascent ego and consciousness, which are necessary for this early form of embodied-relational dwelling. In one sense, we could depict this new arrangement of dwelling as speaking and acting together²⁸ or, to use Hannah Arendt's term,²⁹ 'space of appearances,' wherein children 'appear' in their singularity or suchness as a result of parents recognizing and appropriately responding to their assertions. The experience of embodied-relational singularity can be further depicted as pre-representational experiences of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence.³⁰ Of course, for these experiences of dwelling to emerge, there must be pre-representational experiences of trust³¹ and this trust is dependent on good-enough parental care that involves not only recognizing and suitably responding to infants' assertions, but also repairs of relational failures.³²

These early embodied-relational, pre-representational experiences of dwelling/belonging are the foundation for the next complicated developments vis-à-vis dwelling. The next change in dwelling occurs as children develop the capacities for language and symbolization, using the language and symbols of their particular family and culture to organize experience. Donald Winnicott coined the term 'transitional objects' to refer to children's use of objects, in this case cultural objects and language, in their transition to engaging with the larger social world.³³ These objects represent, in part, the ministrations and interactions experienced in relation to the parents, but which now are under children's omnipotent control. Moreover, the transitional object provides children the space to learn to use language and symbols in relation to an imaginary Other. A playful illustration of this is the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*. Calvin is a little boy who plays with his stuffed tiger, Hobbes. Together 'they' co-create and inhabit a world together. Hobbes and Calvin embark on all kinds of adventures, they argue and make up, and they comfort each other when hurt or distressed – speaking and acting together (in Calvin's imagination). The parents are present, but in the background. To Calvin, Hobbes is alive, and not just alive but a person who recognizes and treats Calvin as a

person – suchness/singularity. In Calvin's imagination, there is, then, a sense of mutual self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect that is derived from speaking and acting together, which includes shared repairs of conflict. While imaginary, they together create a pre-political space of appearances wherein they dwell together in their shared singularities. Calvin's and Hobbes' relationship represents more sophisticated experiences of care and repair. Moreover, Hobbes is not a mere blanket. He is instead a cultural object, signifying Calvin's entry into and use of cultural symbol systems and practices to dwell with others in public-political spaces.

So far what has been presented are three related features of existential dwelling. The first is the pre-representational embodied dwelling before birth. The second is the pre-representational embodied-relational experiences of dwelling that emerge from parent-child speaking and acting together (proto-conversations) and that are contingent on good-enough parental (care) attunement and repair. In this space of speaking and acting together, children develop pre-representational trust to appear and these experiences of suchness or singularity are depicted as pre-representational, embodied-relational experiences of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence. The third feature of existential dwelling emerges as children gain capacities for language and symbolization. This space of appearances is speaking and acting together and, consequently, experiences of singularity are organized through symbolization and narrative. Put differently, transitional objects represent a space of social-material dwelling/belonging, wherein children speak and act together with the beloved object (proto-person), which means their experiences of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence become organized and linked to the symbols, narratives, and practices of their culture.

There is one other transition of dwelling that is important to address, but before doing so a few words are necessary regarding the relation between this pre-political space of dwelling and public-political dwelling. Pre-political space does not suggest that political and economic realities do not shape these spaces – positively or negatively – and the accompanying experiences of embodied-relational dwelling. As Winnicott noted, for parents to hold and handle their children, they need to be held and handled by the larger community and society.³⁴ That is, parents need to be supported psychologically and physically (possessing the material resources to provide care for themselves and their children). The evidence for this is plain when we consider that the pandemic has resulted in the loss of millions of jobs, disproportionately impacting people of color and the poor.³⁵ The loss of work and benefits (if they were lucky enough to have them) creates uncertainty, anxiety, and fear for parents trying to care for their children.

The pandemic is new, but not systemic racism/classism, which reveals longstanding failures of the larger society to provide the psychosocial and material resources for many parents to care for their children.³⁶ Does this impact children's experiences of dwelling? Despite good-enough parental care, the insidiousness of racism's violent illusions of inferiority and superiority and its impact on social-political recognition and, concomitantly, the distribution of resources, shape parents' care for their children, which influences their experiences of dwelling. A brief example will illustrate this. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his memoir to his teenaged son, repeatedly writes about the fears of African Americans and of his own terror of disembodiment as a child and as an adult – racism and the undermining of embodied-social dwelling.³⁷ This fear shaped his father's love for him long before Coates was aware of racism, echoing James Baldwin's

comment that ‘Long before the Negro child perceives this difference [white superiority], and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it.’³⁸ Coates writes, ‘My father was so very afraid. I felt it in the sting of his black leather belt, which he applied with more anxiety than anger.’³⁹ His father’s physical discipline took place against the background of pervasive violence – rooted in the socio-political machinery of racism – was aimed at protecting his son. ‘Everyone,’ Coates writes, ‘has lost a child, somehow to the streets, to jail, to drugs, to guns.’⁴⁰ Recalling his Dad’s voice, ‘Either I can beat him, or the police,’ Coates struggles with whether or not that saved him. ‘All I know,’ he writes, ‘is the violence rose from the fear like smoke from a fire, and I cannot say whether that violence, even administered in fear and love, sounded the alarm or choked us at the exit.’⁴¹ As Coates tells us, ‘It was a loving house even as it was besieged by its country, but it *was* hard.’⁴² What made this experience of dwelling hard was the political, economic, social culture of racism. Racism shaped his parents’ love for him (speaking and acting together), which in turn impacted his relational-embodied experiences of dwelling. Coates’ memoir, which finds parallels in the autobiographies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, as well as the works of Zora Neale Huston and James Baldwin, reveals the intersection between pre-political spaces of dwelling and political spaces infected by racism/classism.

This said, I want to briefly discuss the transition from the pre-political to political spaces. Many children transition from their homes to public-political spaces without much notice. A reason for this is that some children discover positive social recognitions that are produced and maintained by varied social, political, and economic apparatuses, which are entwined with political spaces of speaking and acting together. The public-political world of speaking and acting together is relatively safe, which means there is sufficient civic care and trust for children to assert themselves (civic agency) in public-political spaces, which accompany public-political experiences self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence. If all goes well enough, children and, later, adults have a sense of being at home, of dwelling in this social-political world.

Of course, not all public-political dwelling goes well, as evident in Coates’, King’s, and Malcolm X’s biographies. There is often a moment when African American persons (and others who are marginalized and oppressed) painfully realize that they are not only not welcome in public-political spaces,⁴³ but worse, these spaces are imbued with apparatuses of humiliation.⁴⁴ Martin Luther King Jr. had an early painful experience when he was 5 or 6 years old. A white friend, with whom he often played, told King that he was no longer allowed to play with Martin because Martin was black.⁴⁵ King recalls being initially confused and hurt, and later enraged by the way he and other African Americans were targets of public, political, and economic humiliation by Euro-Americans. Malcolm X also recalls a deeply painful moment when his 8th grade teacher asked him what he wanted to do when he grew up. Malcolm imagined being a lawyer, which represented a positive social-political self-representation. His teacher replied,

Malcolm, one of life’s first needs is for us to be realistic. Don’t misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you’ve got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that’s no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be. You’re good with your hands—making things. Everyone admires your carpentry shop work. Why don’t you plan on carpentry?⁴⁶

Both King and Malcolm X experienced painful awakenings in their transition from home to the wider public-political world. I think they were painful primarily because they had received good-enough care at home (and, for King, church), wherein speaking and acting together led to embodied-relational self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence. When they moved to dwell in the wider world, they encountered public apparatuses of systemic humiliation, which revealed a lack of civic care and civic trust vis-à-vis African Americans. In other words, they were denied the discovery and appropriation of positive, public/political self-representations, which means the political space of speaking and acting together was attenuated. An attenuated space of appearances meant that African Americans were included-excluded Others – permitted to dwell on the fringes of the political-public realm. As James Baldwin writes,

Negroes in this country—and Negroes do not, strictly or legally speaking exist in any other—are really taught to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. This world is white and they are black. White people hold power, which means they are superior to blacks ... and the world has innumerable ways of making this difference known and felt and feared.⁴⁷

In the face of what Orlando Patterson calls social death or Giorgio Agamben calls bare life, dwelling in the political world is challenging in indecent societies that construct apparatuses of economic, political, and social humiliation.⁴⁸ This said, faced with these obstacles, marginalized and oppressed persons, more often than not, develop dwellings of resistance and transgression vis-à-vis the forces of racism/classism (though this is more challenging in a pandemic). For King, his family and church supported spaces of speaking and acting together that maintained mutual-personal recognition that founds shared self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence – resisting the forces of racism/classism. Later, King and many others would resist and transgress the structures of racism in non-violent protests. Malcolm X found support within his family, until his mother was unable to care for her children (as a result of numerous pressures linked to racism, classism, and sexism). As a teenager in Boston, Malcolm X found a sense of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence in his relations with the so-called subculture of Boston. He would later experience dwelling in the Nation of Islam, where he and other African Americans politically and economically resisted and transgressed the apparatuses of racism. Fast forward to the present pandemic, we find resistance and transgression against the same racist-producing apparatuses in the Black Lives Matter movement and other groups that demand the right to dwell: to be recognized and treated as persons and not systemically humiliated by the police and other social, political, and juridical institutions;⁴⁹ to have access to good schools; to have access to affordable and healthy food; to have an infrastructure that makes possible ease of movement; to have access to quality healthcare; to have access to equitable loans, etc.

Resistances and transgressions reveal an existential truth regarding dwelling. The apparatuses of oppression cannot completely deny or deter the excess inherent in being human. Giorgio Agamben writes:

Beyond the apparatuses and the forms of subjectivity that they produce there is an excess of living being that can never be subsumed under them. While the excess does not in itself constitute a political subject, it testifies to the fact that the apparatuses are never all there is.⁵⁰

There is always an excess that is not entirely captive to the grammar of the apparatuses of racism/classism, even if they continue to have their vicious effects. Frederick Douglass is an excellent example of this excess, or what Agamben calls an ungovernable self.⁵¹ Slavery and northern racism aimed to produce humiliated subjects for the sake of serving the needs of white supremacists. Douglass, for numerous reasons, demonstrated an excess of subjectivity that could not be captured by the political apparatuses of racism and he did not, for the most part, operate out of the grammar of these apparatuses. It is this excess, which makes its appearance in the presence of care and trust, that is the seed of the transgression and resistance toward disciplinary regimes that undermine political dwelling.

It is clear that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted persons of color, revealing the systemic realities of racism/classism. It is not only that racism negatively impacts embodied-relational dwelling and political-social dwelling (speaking and acting together in the public-political realm), it can literally unhouse people. This can be seen not simply in the long history of legalized and extra-judicial murder and rape of African Americans,⁵² but also in physical unhousing associated with poor housing, evictions, food deserts, making people more susceptible to physical complications and even death from COVID-19 (and other diseases). Let me frame this also in terms of the Anthropocene Age. As mentioned above, the sixth extinction event will accompany declining resources, large movements of climate refugees, greater challenges finding habitable spaces, etc. It does not take a seer to prognosticate that this will exacerbate dwelling for vulnerable peoples and by this I mean marginalized and oppressed persons.⁵³ We have already seen this in the prevalence of environmental racism/classism,⁵⁴ as well as the wedding of capitalist and political classes in the environmental exploitation that has negatively impacted the dwelling of millions of people.⁵⁵

There is yet one more key factor in this discussion about human dwelling. Giorgio Agamben notes⁵⁶ that Western political philosophy and theology have supported the idea of human sovereignty over nature (the earth and all other species), which means human superiority vis-à-vis the earth and other species and, concomitantly, the privileging of human dwelling. The belief in and practices of human sovereignty legitimate the exploitation, domination, and ruthless pursuit of control over nature. According to Agamben, nature and other species are included-excluded Others – politically irrelevant and existing for the expressed purpose of serving the needs of human dwelling (more accurately, those in positions where they can benefit from the exploitation of nature and other species). What we fail and have failed to grasp is that the earth is the very foundation of the possibility of human dwelling. Moreover, the earth is a living system of incredible diversity of species upon which human life depends. The Anthropocene Age reveals just how dependent we are on the earth and the plurality of other species. The very possibility of our political dwelling, then, depends on the viability of a habitable earth – political dwelling is ecological. Given this, Agamben proposes ‘dwelling in the zone where humanity and animality are not separable and hence no difference between them is possible to mark.’⁵⁷ In other words, ‘Agamben focuses on the possibilities of being-with on the basis of nothing but being-together, a being together of [human being] and animal.’⁵⁸ Other scholars, activists, and politicians have argued for the inclusion of nature in the political, recognizing that human dwelling depends on including nature and other species in the dwelling spaces of speaking and acting together.⁵⁹

In summary, existential dwelling ideally begins with good-enough parents who recognize and treat children as persons such that children develop sufficient trust to risk asserting themselves, developing relational-embodied experiences of suchness or singularity in this pre-political space of speaking and acting together. In time, children extend their experiences of dwelling, of speaking and acting together, to the larger world, discovering, if all goes well enough, a public-political sense of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence. The apparatuses of racism/classism undermine dwelling, which the current pandemic and the realities of climate change expose again and again. Despite the prevalence of racism/classism, there is an excess of dwelling, of being, that is not captive to these apparatuses and that gives rise to persons' and groups' resistance and transgression. Finally, existential/political dwelling depends on a habitable earth and the dwelling of other-than-human species.

A Pastoral Theological Approach to Dwelling

Before proposing a pastoral theology of dwelling, it is necessary to acknowledge and briefly discuss Judeo-Christian scriptures that contain theologies that are deeply problematic with regard to dwelling, whether this refers simply to human dwelling or dwelling vis-à-vis other species and the earth. These theologies are particularly unsuited to the issue of dwelling in the Anthropocene Age. Once this has been discussed, I can proceed to depict a pastoral theology that avoids these pitfalls.

There are theologies of subordination and subjugation embedded in scriptural stories.⁶⁰ A few examples will serve to illustrate my points. In Genesis, we are told that God gave human beings dominion over nature (Gen. 1:28), which, if we are learning anything about the Anthropocene Age, is a destructive illusion. The idea of dominion over nature implies relations of subordination and subjugation, an illusion of human superiority, and the privileging human dwelling vis-à-vis nature. Yes, there are scriptural references to caring for the earth, such as the jubilee laws (Deut. 31:9–13; Lev. 25:1–7, 8–17), but that is merely practical wisdom in that people are dependent on the earth for food. More to the point, these laws do not contradict the belief that God gave human beings dominion over the earth and other-than-human beings. This belief and its concomitant apparatuses of subordination/subjugation gave rise to all kinds of exploitation of human beings, other species, and nature throughout history. European Christians, for instance, colonized America, relying on a theology of dominion/subjugation to legitimize and justify removing (unhousing) native peoples from the land. John Winthrop, for example,

created the excuse to take Indian land by declaring the area legally a 'vacuum.' The Indians, he said, had not 'subdued the land and therefore had only a 'natural' right to it, not a 'civil right.' A natural right did not have legal standing.⁶¹

The scriptural referent here is the command by God for human beings to *subdue* the earth (Gen 1:28). While not necessarily directly supported by theological apparatuses, current examples of the belief in human dominion include the environmental devastation of Mountain Top Removal (MTR), mass production of animals on corporate farms, loss of marsh lands to development, loss of forests and jungles to farming and logging, and scientists who seek to geoe engineer the earth. Of course, it is not simply the earth and other species that suffer. For instance, Christopher Hedges and Joe

Sacco identify five sacrifice zones in the U.S.⁶² These zones portray the realities of environmental racism and classism, undermining the dwelling or well-being of people of color and poor people. The dwelling of these people and millions of others are negatively touched by the prevalent belief in human dominion over nature and other-than-human beings. The tragic result of philosophies and theologies of subjugation will be our own unhousement. As Jonathan Schell notes, 'If we conquer nature, we will find ourselves among the defeated.'⁶³

Relations of subordination and subjugation vis-à-vis nature mean that nature is to serve the needs and desires of human beings and, usually, a particular group of human beings (classism). But this theology also refers to relations between human beings, wherein one group's dwelling is privileged over another group. Consider, for example, the Exodus story. The Israelites lived in Egypt and, during Joseph's lifetime, retained the favor of the Pharaoh, though they were obviously subordinate to the Pharaoh's rule. They were, in other words, able to dwell in relative comfort (though remaining included-excluded Others) because they were dependent on the Pharaoh's good graces. After the Pharaoh died, a new king was less inclined to favor the Israelites and more inclined to oppress and exploit them (Ex. 1:8–15), revealing their political irrelevancy (lack of political agency and self-esteem, etc.). Their ability to dwell in Egypt worsened (bare life) and eventually Moses and Aaron were chosen by God to confront the Pharaoh (Ex. 6 & 7). Like most tyrants bent on subjugating a people, the Pharaoh was impervious to the demands for freedom, since he could easily exploit the Israelites without apparent costs or consequences. The Pharaoh's intransigence led to a response from an all-powerful God. We read that God sent plagues, poisoned water, destroyed crops and livestock, killed firstborn males, etc. all of which, for obvious reasons, negatively impacted the living conditions of the Egyptian people. Eventually, the Pharaoh was brought under the yoke of God's crushing power and agreed to let Moses and his people go. Soon after, the Pharaoh changed his mind, only to have his armies destroyed. The Pharaoh subjugated the Israelites, only to be eventually violently subjugated by God. Of course, it was not simply the Pharaoh who suffered from the destruction and the deaths of family members. Yet, we read 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Gen 18:25), even if it involves unhousing innocent people.

Once liberated from Egyptian oppression, the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert before arriving at the borders of a land of milk and honey (3:17). The CliffsNotes version of this story is that God commanded the Israelites, who were apparently learning the arts of war and forging an army while in the desert, to conquer the peoples of this land and expropriate their land. The mimetic irony and tragedy here is that a people, who were once subjugated and oppressed by the Egyptians, later subjugate and oppress others without any apparent angst, misgiving or remorse. Why would they if they are commanded by God to subjugate violently foreigners or enemies? Put differently, in Egypt the quality of the Israelites' ability to dwell was severely diminished because they were subjugated by the Pharaoh. The subjugation of the Israelites was to privilege the dwelling of the ruling classes in Egypt. A similar relation existed once the Israelites moved into the promised land, at least for those who survived the slaughter. The land and non-Israelite peoples were subordinate, politically irrelevant, and their existence was to benefit the dwelling of the Israelites.

The idea of the promised land and the desire for liberation have appeared throughout Christian history. Puritans, fleeing religious oppression in England, understandably turned to scripture to make sense of their experience, to prepare for the journey to a new land, and to justify their dispossession of native peoples from their lands, as well as killing native peoples, as mentioned above. Christian exceptionalism, which is imbued with a theology of subordination/subjugation and the illusion of superiority of one's people, was also used to justify colonizing and enslaving other peoples.⁶⁴ For instance, in the nineteenth century, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote,

Ere long colonies from these prosperous and Christian communities would go forth to shine as lights of the world, in all the now darkened nations. Thus, the Christian family and Christian neighborhood would become the grand ministry as they were designed to be, in training our whole race for heaven.⁶⁵

In the less genteel political realm, Senator Beveridge of Indiana, for example, believed that the U.S. had a moral 'duty to bring Christianity and civilization to "savage and senile peoples."'”⁶⁶ Savage and senile peoples, by definition, were excluded from the space of appearances (speaking and acting together) that was reserved for American imperialists. Put another way, subjugated people in 'need' of training and guidance of the imperial nation were denied the positive political and social recognition (self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence) necessary to dwell politically. Whether couched in genteel piety or aggressive racism, both depended on a theology of subjugation/subordination that undergirded the legitimation of ruthless practices of subordination and subjugation, which has, through subsequent generations, negatively impacted the material and political dwelling of millions of people.

It is important to recognize, if only briefly, that many liberation theologians⁶⁷ use these Exodus stories of liberation and movement to the promised land without relying on the subordination or destruction of their opponents. While this is commendable, the stories of Exodus nevertheless contain theologies of subordination/subjugation, which are aimed at other human beings and nature itself.

Theologies that support, overtly or covertly, the dominion of human beings over nature have existed for millennia, privileging human beings over other species and, in innumerable instances, one group of human beings over others. These theologies (and philosophies) require apparatuses or disciplinary regimes for privileged people to 'realize' their superiority and the benefits of living well, at the expense of the subjugated (other human beings, species, the earth). While the current pandemic reveals the long-standing racial and classist disparities in the quality of dwelling – disparities linked to theologies and philosophies of dominion and their apparatuses – the Anthropocene Age illuminates the ultimate folly of the human belief in our dominion (illusion of superiority) over other species and the earth itself. The tragic reality of philosophies and theologies of subjugation will be our own unhousement.

If we are to offer a pastoral theology of dwelling, then, we first need to be cognizant of the theologies of subjugation embedded in scripture and that become entwined with liturgies, hymns, preaching, etc., that shape our perceptions, behaviors, and practices. Indeed, I contend that pastoral theologies must reject any notion of relations of subordination and subjugation, precisely because these relations represent distortions of care and trust. That said, from here I sketch out a pastoral theology of dwelling.

It seems proper to begin with the incarnation and God dwelling among us. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, wrote that Jesus,

though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied (*kenosis*) himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (2:6–8 NRSV)

For my purposes, there are three key points here. First, Paul depicted God's care in the decision to open Godself to the vulnerable realities of being human, of human dwelling, which, given the realities of living under the heel of the Roman Empire, included torture and death on the cross. The 'flesh' of the *Logos*, Mathew Eaton writes, then, refers not only to this instance of frailty and vulnerability, but also 'to the frail vulnerability of materiality itself,'⁶⁸ which, in my view, includes the vulnerability of other species. This self-emptying is not the invulnerable sovereign God, the unmoved mover, but a God who chooses to be open to being wounded, to dwell with and be moved by a suffering humanity, in general, and a subjugated people, in particular. Second, there is no hint here of subjugation or subordination with regard to Jesus' relation to God. This means the genesis of incarnated compassion emerges from equality. To put this differently, the appearance of God in the flesh is derived from Being that is without relations of subordination/subjugation and no illusions of superiority. Relations of subjugation/subordination and illusions of superiority and inferiority are simply and solely human constructions, though we often project these onto God. Third and relatedly, I understand self-emptying as necessary for human beings to recognize God's indeterminate and infinite love/care in the embodied dwelling of Jesus speaking and acting with other human beings. The revelation of the incarnation is God's care for all human beings and, more broadly, for creation itself.

What is interesting and worth noting is that this kenotic moment or event included taking on the form of a slave. If God is to dwell among human beings, why take the form of a slave? Why not the identity of a Jew, Roman, Greek, etc.? Why not a citizen? Slaves are constructed by sovereign classes,⁶⁹ who make policies, establish practices, and found apparatuses that legitimize the subjugation and exploitation of a group of persons for the benefit of the sovereign classes. In terms of dwelling, slaves are universally and fundamentally excluded-included Others, dwelling in the polis, but excluded from political dwelling – denied a place of speaking and acting together in any polis – politically irrelevant. Slaves' existences are marked by relations of subordination/inferiority, at best, and subjugation, at worse. They are denied social and political recognition that leads to self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, which are necessary for political relevancy and agency. This does not mean that slaves are not 'cared' for or about. They are to the extent that they serve the needs and desires of their masters' dwelling. To be a slave is to be seen and treated as inferior, not recognized as a person – the most precarious and vulnerable form of dwelling.

So, what does 'taking on the form of a slave' mean? To understand this, I turn to Agamben's work, especially the concept of inoperativity. For Agamben, inoperative means deactivating or neutralizing the apparatuses of power that subjugate, that form and determine subjectivities and identities, making possible the realization of other possibilities or potentialities.⁷⁰ Inoperativity does not mean these apparatuses (e.g. racist or

classist) do not have very real negative effects. It simply means that the person(s) is not operating out of the rubrics of these apparatuses. Furthermore, Agamben's notion of inoperativity is not passive, as some critics argue.⁷¹ For Agamben, inoperativity does not 'affirm inertia, inactivity or apraxia ... but a form of praxis that is devoid of any telos or task, does not realize any essence and does not correspond to any nature.'⁷² In terms of God taking on the form of a slave, inoperativity means that, despite the apparatuses that determine dwelling vis-à-vis a slave, Jesus retained his suchness or singularity (e.g. agency, self-worth, confidence, and respect), because his singularity was grounded in God and not dependent on state apparatuses of sovereignty that are founded on and produce relations of subordination/subjugation. Jesus, in other words, was in the form of a slave, but not defined or determined by the predicates of domination extant in Roman or Jewish sovereign classes. Jesus established the dwelling of God in the midst of systems of subjugation and, in so doing, transgressed or made inoperative forms of dwelling dependent in sovereign classes' belief in their superiority and their apparatuses of subjugation.

We can get caught up in the literalness of the term 'slave.' In my view, it refers to any form of life that is subjugated and treated as inferior – included-excluded Others. So, today it includes forms of life constructed around the illusions of racial inferiority or inferiority associated with class, which undermine dwelling. As mentioned above, this likely will worsen as resources diminish due to climate change. The incarnation of God's infinite and indeterminate care reveals a form of dwelling that, while effected by apparatuses of subjugation, is not determined by them. This seed of singularity, of suchness is the source of dwelling that is transgressive and resistive toward those forms of dwelling reliant on relations of dominion.

The precarity of dwelling vis-à-vis class and race, in the Anthropocene Age, intersects with another form of included-excluded Others, namely refugees, who are and will continue to be more numerous as the effects of climate change worsen. Consider Agamben's perspective on politics and the refugee:

It is even possible that, if we want to be equal to the absolutely new tasks ahead, we will have to abandon decidedly, without reservation, the fundamental concepts through which we have so far represented the subjects of the political (Man, the Citizen and its rights, but also the sovereign people, the worker, and so forth) and build our political philosophy anew starting from the one and only figure of the refugee.⁷³

He adds,

The refugee must be considered for what he is: nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state ... and thereby makes possible to clear the way for a long overdue renewal of categories in the service of a politics which bare life is no longer separated and excepted.⁷⁴

In the Anthropocene Age, the category of refugee, like category of slave, removes their suchness and heightens their vulnerability and precarity.⁷⁵ The existential and pastoral task is to welcome refugees in the polis, not as refugees or any associated representation, but in their suchness.⁷⁶ Levinas echoes this when remarking that 'he or she who emigrates is wholly human: the migration of man does not destroy, does not demolish the meaning of Being.'⁷⁷ The refugee (or any Othered individual) is first and foremost a person and as a person (suchness), the refugee existentially and ontologically demands

welcome and care as a resident of the one earth. If we are to reimagine the incarnation in light of the Anthropocene, it would be that God also takes on the form of the refugee to dwell among us.

It is easy to get caught up in the underlying anthropocentrism of scripture. Whether Jesus takes on a form of slave, refugee, or any Othered category, it is all about being human and our dwelling together. Most Western theologizing and philosophizing are anthropocentric. Indeed, Agamben points out that Western political philosophy (and theology) has tended, because of its anthropocentric proclivity, to exclude other-than-human beings and the earth from political thinking, though obviously countless species and the earth as a living system are included in the polis. Put differently, other species are considered to be politically irrelevant and, as subordinate, their value is framed in terms of privileging human dwelling. The Anthropocene Age reveals that anthropocentrism is an extremely destructive illusion because it (1) privileges human life at the expense of other species and (2) legitimizes the extractive exploitation of the earth that destroys habitats and contributes to global warming. Without a viable earth, there will be no dwelling for human beings and millions of other species. To return to the idea of Jesus taking on a form of a slave, we can include any creatures and the earth itself as Othered entities. Jesus as the revelation of God's infinite and indeterminate care extends to all creatures and creation itself. In Jesus taking on the form of a slave, perhaps we could say that it was to get human beings to see and experience suchness in relations of care and, in so doing, surrender all their relations of subjugation and privilege vis-à-vis other species and the earth itself. Maybe it was St. Francis who later recognized this.

A pastoral theology of dwelling, then, affirms the non-sovereign, non-privileging care/love of a Cosmic Christ. God, in emptying Godself to take on human form, is also embodying Godself among creation and its denizens. Put another way, the Cosmic Christ makes inoperative human sovereignty as such and its privileging of human dwelling through relations of subjugation and subordination. Positively stated, the indeterminate, infinite care of God affirms the suchness of all creatures and the earth itself as a living system, which means making inoperative disciplinary regimes of exclusion and their attending illusions of superiority and inferiority that legitimate apparatuses of exploitation and violence toward other human beings, other species, and the earth itself. Existentially and theologically, to dwell in the world is to dwell with diverse individuals and the diversity of other-than-human creatures in their suchness.

This means accepting our pastoral (ontological) responsibility toward Othered persons and groups, other-than-human beings, and the earth itself with the aim of dwelling together (shared survival and flourishing). This cannot be done without recognizing and making inoperative the (theological, philosophical) apparatuses that support and maintain relations of subjugation that undermine the dwelling of other human beings and other-than-human beings. Inoperativity makes possible something new, which are forms of dwelling wherein human beings speak and act together toward common aims of survival and flourishing and where these aims include the well-being of other-than-human species and the earth itself. Let me be clear here that ecological responsibility (or care for the earth), from a pastoral theological point of view, eschews any idea of stewardship,⁷⁸ which is theologically bound to human privilege, superiority, and sovereignty. As Mick Smith notes, 'In becoming political, nature is not eroded, but it too is recognized

in its plurality and its natality. Acting into nature must, like acting into the political sphere, involve responsibility for others, concern about effects, and making choices.⁷⁹ Dwelling, then, involves the political and this is inextricably joined to the earth and other-than-human species. In brief, theologically, the revelation of the incarnation concerns God's dwelling not simply with human beings but with creation, and this has particular meaning for human beings in terms of our responsibility to dwell in and with creation. Of course, we know that human beings can eschew revelation and our responsibility to care, while continuing to privilege the dwelling of one group over other groups, as well as privileging human beings over nature, but we will find that the end result is tragic for ourselves, other species, and the earth itself.

Conclusion

It is easy to get caught up in the tragedies of a particular event. When the pandemic hit, we all focused on the virus, treatment, and its impact on the economy. Weeks into the pandemic, data revealed that people of color were (and are) experiencing higher rates of severe illness and death – the ultimate unhousement. While no surprise to some people, many white people were awakened to the systemic inequities of the healthcare system, as well as the systemic racism of the larger political system that undermined and undermines the dwelling of many African Americans. Add to this the ongoing killings of African Americans by police and the corresponding rise of protests around the country and the world – protests highlighting racism/classism in other nations. Furthermore, news reports soaring temperatures, massive and numerous forest fires, and frequent catastrophic storms, which point to the ongoing realities of climate change. While all of these events are distinct, I have suggested that they intersect on the question of what it means to dwell together on this one earth. A pastoral theological perspective offers a way to reimagine political dwelling, one that involves caring for each other, other species, and the earth as a living system upon which the survival and flourishing of all life (as we know it) depends. Whether we will learn to dwell with each other and other-than-human species on the one habitat in which we are all dependent is a question to be answered.

Notes

1. Gauthier, *Martin Heidegger, Emanuel Levinas, and the Politics of Dwelling*, 11.
2. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 152.
3. Weil, *The Need for Roots*, 43.
4. http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html.
5. Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*.
6. See Clebsch and Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*. Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care*. Gerkin, *An Introduction to Pastoral Care*. Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context*. Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility*.
7. Flesberg, *The Switching Hour*. Lester, *Pastoral Care with Children in Crisis*.
8. Scheib, *Pastoral Care*.
9. Poling, *Render unto God*. van Deusen Hunsinger, *Bearing the Unbearable*.
10. Marshall, *Counseling Lesbian Partners*. Sanders, *A Brief Guide to Ministry with LGBTQIA Youth*.

11. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*. White, *Saying Good-bye*.
12. Smith, *The Relational Self*.
13. Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds*.
14. Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*.
15. Helsel, *Pastoral Power Beyond Psychology's Imagination*. Johnson, *Race, Religion, and Resilience in the Neoliberal Age*. LaMothe, *Care of Souls, Care of Polis*. LaMothe, *Pastoral Reflections on Global Citizenship*. Ramsay, "Compassionate Resistance." Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*.
16. Bingham, *Pastoral and Spiritual Care in a Digital Age*. Hamman, *Growing Down*. Hogue, *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past*.
17. A brief definition of care and its relation to the political may be helpful to readers. Care is everything we do to help individuals, families, communities, and societies to (1) meet vital biological, psychosocial, and existential or spiritual needs of individuals, families, and communities, (2) develop or maintain basic capabilities with the aim of human flourishing, (3) facilitate participation in the polis, and (4) maintain a habitable environment for all. I add to this definition that care and pastoral care are political concepts that necessarily involve shared critical and constructive reflection on how the structures (and their accompanying narratives and practices) of the state, governing authorities, and non-state organizations (e.g., businesses, labor unions, religious and secular communities, etc.) and actors meet or fail to meet the four features of this definition of care. LaMothe, *Pastoral Reflections on Global Citizenship*, 8.
18. For Giorgi Agamben, the term "apparatus" refers to "a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient—in a way that purports to be useful—the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings." Referencing Foucault, Agamben writes that "in a disciplinary society, apparatuses aim to create—through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge—docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their 'freedom' as subjects." Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, 13, 19.
19. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.
20. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 142.
21. See Desmond, *Evicted*. Soss et al., *Disciplining the Poor*. Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*.
22. Scientist Paul Crutzen is credited with coining this term, which means that human beings have initiated an extinction event. Northcott, "On Going Gently into the Anthropocene," 20.
23. There have been five major extinction events in earth's history. The sixth has been caused by human beings, which has revealed that human agency is a force of nature. This term is not without controversy. Jason Moore argues that we should call this the Capitalocene Age because he argues capitalism is the cause of global climate change. Klein, *This Changes Everything*. Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*. Moore, Jason. "Name the System! Anthropocene & the Capitalocene Alternative."
24. Climate Science Special Report, <https://science2017.globalchange.gov/>. See also Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, 1–9. See also, Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos*. Sassen, *Expulsions*.
25. Davenport, "Pentagon Signals Security Risks of Climate Change."
26. DeCasper and Fifer, "Of Human Bonding." DeCasper and Spence, "Prenatal Maternal Speech Influences Newborns' Perception of Speech Sounds." Beebe and Lachmann, "Representation and Internalization in Infancy." Beebe and Lachmann, *Infant Research and Adult Treatment*.
27. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 488.
28. Of course, infants are not speaking but infant-parent researchers use a term "proto-conversations" to refer to parents who are speaking to their infants as if infants understand them. Similarly, while infants have not yet developed the capacity for language, they seek to communicate. See Bonovitz and Harlem, *Developmental Perspectives in Child Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*. Trevarthen. *Playing into Reality*.

29. Arendt uses this term to refer to political spaces. I am using it to refer to a pre-political space of early childhood, though I want to link pre-political spaces of dwelling with later political spaces. Arendt, *The Human Condition*.
30. Philosopher Axel Honneth argues that social-political recognition contributes to persons' experiences of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, which accompany and are necessary for engaging in the political sphere. I am using these in the context of early parent-infant relations because I want to suggest a link between this space of appearances and the space of appearances in the public-political realm. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*.
31. Erikson's first task of development is for parents and children to navigate trust and mistrust. Erikson, Erik. *Childhood and Society*.
32. Safron and Muran, "The Resolution of Ruptures in the Therapeutic Alliance."
33. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*.
34. Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 123–7.
35. Garcia and Vanek Smith, "Unemployment and the Racial Divide."
36. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth address the relation between political misrecognition and failures in distribution of resources in society. Fraser and Honneth. *Redistribution or Recognition?*
37. Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 104.
38. Baldwin, *Notes from a Native Son*, 26.
39. Coates, 15.
40. Ibid., 16.
41. Ibid., 16–17.
42. Ibid., 126.
43. Sawyer's excellent book on the political philosophy of Malcolm X discusses the intersection of geographical-public space and white racist institutions that operate to remove or marginalize African American citizens. Sawyer, *Black-Minded*.
44. Philosopher Avishai Margalit argues that a decent society does not humiliate citizens. The U.S. with its long history of racism (includes Native Americans and persons of color) is an indecent society. Margalit, *The Decent Society*. I would also wish to emphasize that classism intersects with racism, even though classism impacts white persons as well. Both lead to struggles with children transitioning from dwelling at home to dwelling in the public-political world. See Bradford, "Warren Buffett." Garland, "When Class Becomes More Important to a Child's Education Than Race." hooks, *Where We Stand*. Karlin, "Banishing the Poor, Unemployed and Working Class from the Mainstream Media Implies They Are Worthless." Lubrano, *Limbo*. Mercer, Joyce. "Economics, Class, and Classism."
45. King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, 7.
46. Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 38.
47. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 25–6.
48. See Margalit, *The Decent Society*.
49. Taylor, *The Executed God*.
50. Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 24.
51. Agamben, *Potentialities*.
52. See Anderson, *White Rage*. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*.
53. Kathryn Yusoff's interesting book addresses the intersection of geology and racism vis-à-vis the Anthropocene Age. Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*.
54. See Zimring, *Clean and White*. Taylor, *Toxic Communities*.
55. Hedges and Sacco. *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*.
56. Agamben, *The Open*.
57. Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 172.
58. Ibid. 173.
59. There are scholars and activists who advocate for nature being represented in politics. See Meijer, *When Animals Speak*. Meijer, *Animal Languages*. Rousseau, "In New Zealand, Lands and Rivers Can Be People Too (Legally Speaking)."

60. LaMothe, "Discerning a Theological Orientation for Pastoral Psychologies of Care."
61. Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 13–14.
62. Hedges and Sacco, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*.
63. Schell, "The Human Shadow," 19.
64. See Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 15–76.
65. Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, 32.
66. Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*, 43.
67. Cone, *A Theology of Black liberation*. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*. Moltmann, *The Gospel of Liberation*. Radford-Reuther, *Sexism and God Talk*. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*.
68. Eaton, "Beyond Human Exceptionalism," 204.
69. Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*.
70. Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*, 32–7.
71. *Ibid.*, 134.
72. *Ibid.*, 33.
73. Agamben, *Means Without Ends*, 15.
74. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 134. Agamben uses the term "bare life" to refer to the exclusion of *zoe* (to be alive) from *bios* (political/cultural life), which in reality means that human beings can be treated and managed as objects. The extreme of this is the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. For Agamben, modern politics reflects this state of affairs, which has been debated by other scholars. See Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics*. I would add here that Agamben's notion of bare life is building on Hannah Arendt's research on totalitarianism. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.
75. John Lechte and Saul Newman depict "the barbaric treatment of stateless people" throughout the world, illustrating numerous examples of their deaths, incarceration, and surveillance. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, 12–14.
76. Personal recognition or recognition of stateless people in their suchness necessarily means acknowledging their fundamental human rights. Hannah Arendt, who fled Germany, knew firsthand the plight of refugees. She wrote, "Their (refugees) plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them." Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 295–6.
77. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 11.
78. The notion of stewardship, as Christoph Baumgartner recognizes, is an ambiguous term in ecological literature, especially when linked to theology. Baumgartner attempts to recover the concept arguing that "A Christian understanding of stewardship can be defined as the God-given mandate of humanity to preserve the Earth for the future. The obligations of humanity in view of creation are direct obligations to God, who is understood as creator and owner of the Earth." While I appreciate the attempt, what remains in place is the sovereignty of God (and owner) and anthropocentrism. A pastoral theology of dwelling advocates a non-sovereign (non-owning) God and a non-sovereign humanity that is one species among millions dwelling on the earth. Baumgartner, "Transformations of Stewardship in the Anthropocene," 63.
79. Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty: Ethics, Biopolitics, and Saving the Natural World*, 158.

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