God's Journey Home: Toward a Theology of Migration and Home from the Americas

by

Alberto A. La Rosa Rojas

Date: 20th June 2022

Approved:

Luke Bretherton, Supervisor

Edgardo Colón-Emeric

Norman Wirzba

Eugene F. Rogers

Peter J. Casarella

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the meaning and importance of migration and home for the Christian Life in the context of modernity and the colonial history of the Americas. In doing so, it offers a constructive theological proposal that addresses two interrelated questions. First, what does a truly flourishing human life look like in view of the realities of migration and home? That is to say, how are migration and home aspects of God’s created order that are deformed by human sinfulness yet still caught up in the eschatological renewal of all things? Second, can Christianity, despite its role in the colonization of the Americas, offer a vision of migration and home that leads to the flourishing of all creatures? This dissertation addresses these questions by locating the realities and experiences of migration and home within the Triune drama of God’s creative, reconciling, and redemptive work as enacted within the story of the Americas—its peoples, lands, and cultures, from the moment of colonization up to our current modern moment.

This study makes a methodological contribution to the fields of Reformed and Latinx theology by engaging in a mode of ressourcement from the margins. In dialogue with the works of Karl Barth, George Tinker, Willie Jennings, and
Latinx theologians, like Virgilio Elizondo and Ada María Isasi-Díaz, I demonstrate how Christianity’s eschatological vision of all creation joined together in Christ by the Spirit provides an alternative to a colonial and modern vision of home grounded in the commodification of the land, the destruction of native cultures, and the segregation of peoples into racial and national enclosures. Moreover, I argue that the Virgin’s appearance to Juan Diego at Tepeyac, Mexico in 1531 summons the Church to look for God’s redemptive homecoming at the margins of society where the political, economic, and socio-cultural negotiations that displaced peoples make in order to make a home in the world become the site of the Spirit’s reconciling and redeeming work in creation.

The final chapter provides a theological account of what sociologist Paolo Boccagni describes as the "migration-home nexus" by arguing that a flourishing human life takes place at the nexus of migration and home and the forms of political, economic, and cultural negotiations and mestizaje that this nexus produces. I argue that through these, the Spirit works to transform creation into the eternal home of God. I conclude by drawing on the notion of ‘transplantation’ to describe wise ways of migrating and homing in anticipation of the Triune God's redemptive homecoming.
For Anna, Simon, and Penelope
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Abbreviations

CD I/1  Church Dogmatics I/1
CD I/2  Church Dogmatics I/2
CD II/1  Church Dogmatics II/1
CD II/2  Church Dogmatics II/2
CD III/1  Church Dogmatics III/1
CD III/3  Church Dogmatics III/3
CD III/4  Church Dogmatics III/4
CD IV/1  Church Dogmatics IV/1
CD IV/2  Church Dogmatics IV/2
CD IV/3.1  Church Dogmatics IV/3.1
CD IV/3.2  Church Dogmatics IV/3.2
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Introduction

I.1 The Goodness and the Woundedness of Migration and Home

I was ten years old when my family and I left Perú. It was 2001.¹ Economic instability, coupled with a long series of political scandals, terrorism, and corruption, all played a role in our decision to emigrate. We settled in the suburbs of Chicago, in my uncle’s home. He had offered to sponsor my father’s application for US residency. Sadly, our family was unable to gain legal status because of a series of unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances.² As a result, I lived as an unauthorized immigrant in the United States for fourteen years.

Despite having spent most of my life in the United States, growing up as an unauthorized immigrant made it incredibly challenging to feel fully “at home.” I could not legally apply for a job, a driver’s license, or financial aid for

² The terrorist attacks on 9/11 led to a massive overhaul of US immigration policies, with the effect that immigrants, particularly from the Global South, were increasingly perceived as possible threats to US national security. In the years that followed, many laws that had previously opened up pathways toward legal status for immigrants were either eliminated, or the criteria were made much more narrow and specific, leaving out many.
college. I could not leave the country with my youth group or soccer team. I lived in constant fear of being deported and separated from my family. As I grew older, I came to understand and accept this permanent state of uncertainty and liminality. I recognized that a very thin thread connected me to the people and places that surrounded me. I always knew that thread could be severed at any time. Even after finally becoming a US citizen in 2015, I still feel a sense of ambiguity about where and what home is. Many Hispanics in the US refer to this ambiguity as being “ni de aqui, ni de alla” (neither from here nor there) or simply from no place. For me, to theologize about migration is at a visceral level to talk about the longing for home and the crisis of losing one’s home.

My journey toward achieving a sense of home in the United States is coterminous with my journey towards becoming a theologian. Because of my irregular status, I found nothing but closed doors when it was time to go to college. I spent an entire year after graduating high school looking for a way forward before a small Reformed Christian college in the south suburbs of Chicago opened its doors to me. It took a significant amount of financial wrangling and institutional willingness, but in the end, we were able to find a way to fund three years of a college education. Stories like mine bespeak the
constant negotiation of institutional politics and economic transactions that make up a migrant’s everyday life; we depend on these negotiations to survive and thrive.

Through these negotiations, new ways of being at home in the world would emerge for me and others. For instance, through the process of funding my college education, I was also invited to partake in a Reformed faith community where I heard the stories and cultures of the Dutch immigrants who had brought this denomination to the US. By the time I graduated, I was not only a little more at home in the United States, but I had also found a new home in the Reformed Faith tradition. In the fall of 2012, I began my journey to become a theologian at Western Theological Seminary, a Reformed seminary in one of the Dutch pockets of the US—Holland, Michigan. I was a Peruvian immigrant whose vocation as a theologian and whose sense of homecoming had been deeply shaped by an encounter with a Dutch immigrant church in the US. The redemptive possibilities that emerge at the intersection of faith, migration, and homecoming and the negotiations and interplay between these two realities deeply inform the reflections that follow.
In September of that same fall in 2012, another event would indelibly shape my journey toward homecoming in the United States—President Barack Obama signed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival Act. This executive order allowed me to be legally employed in the United States for the first time.

So it was that in the summer of 2013, I returned to my home in the suburbs of Chicago and began to work at a factory where most of my co-workers were Hispanic immigrants—many of them, like me, DACA recipients. To pass the hours on the hum-drum assembly line, we would share stories that often revolved around our lives back in our home countries and how different they were from life here in the United States. Many of the conversations I had in the factory that summer were inflected with profound piety, a powerful and abiding sense of God’s providence. If they had made it to the US, it was because Diosito y la Virgencita had protected them. If they had managed to remain without being deported or to come back again after deportation, it was because God had provided for them. Life was never taken for granted; being an immigrant meant to them receiving each day of work and each meal as a gift of grace which they did not deserve. This thankfulness expressed itself powerfully at lunch when we would all gather around tables, and each person would contribute part of their
meal to the others. Sharing food at lunch was not a practice I was familiar with from high school or college cafeterias. So, on my first day at work, I was reprimanded by one of the elder ladies when I started to eat my lunch before offering it to others. It was a true culinary experience each time. As a Peruvian, I had never had *pupusas* or *maiz tortillas*, and when I showed them my Peruvian *ceviche*, they all looked at me with uncertainty—a good reminder that “Latin America” is not singular, but a region with a vast diversity of cultures and peoples. Despite our differences, we had been drawn together in the US by a common desire for flourishing, our common experience of home loss, and the desire to celebrate our homes by sharing something of them with others.

Many of the older women and men with whom I spoke would describe their reason for coming to the United States as providing a better life for their families. Everyone seemed to be saving up every penny to send money back home to a *prima, abuelita, or hermano* they had left behind. The very thing they had sacrificed to provide for their families was life with their families. Not surprisingly, then, along with the remittances they sent to help sustain their families back home, they would also often send money to buy a “little house” where they hoped to retire. However, retirement would *only* happen once their
children had gone to “good American schools” and achieved prosperous careers. Though they lived with one foot firmly planted in their Latin American homes and one in their US American home, they never imagined a future where their children returned to Latin America. Why make all the sacrifices that they had—for some, the grueling journey across the border, for many more the daily memory of the food, weather, land, and people left behind, for all the constant reminder from the news media and from their white American neighbors that they did not belong—if their children would wind up back where they had started? This tension between immigrant parents’ desire to return home and their desire for their children to make a new home in the land of their sojourn is one that I have experienced deeply in my life as well.

My parents had wanted to inculcate in me as much of our Peruvian culture as possible, demanding that I not only speak but also write and read in Spanish, always celebrating national holidays in the house, and regularly telling stories about life back home around the dinner table. They would always remind my sister and me, “Nunca te olvides que eres Peruano”—”Never forget that you are Peruvian.” They would always finish stories urging my sister and me to keep a vow: “Cuando me muera, entierrenme en mi tierra,” or “When I die, bury me
in my homeland.” Never did they ask, if we were supposed to bury them in Perú but stay in the US, who would put flowers on their graves? This is the challenging demand placed on many who were raised by immigrant parents—how to be faithful and responsible to two nations, peoples, cultures, how to carry two homes with you throughout your life.

By the end of that summer, I felt for the first time what my parents had been trying to inculcate in me for all these years; I felt that I belonged among these immigrants from Latin America, and I felt that I belonged to them precisely because I was Peruvian. Being Peruvian was what I contributed to this community; it was what I had to offer by way of stories and food. How odd to find belonging in the US by embracing my Peruvian identity among a group of immigrants who, to many around us, did not belong because they spoke the wrong language or spoke it with the wrong accent, practiced the wrong religion, or simply because their skin looked the wrong way.

As I returned to seminary for my second year, I began to ask myself what Scripture and the theological tradition had to say about the conflict I felt between belonging in the US and belonging in Perú. I also began to feel the need for theological reflection, to contribute in concrete ways to the flourishing of the
people I had met in the factory. What does it mean to be a faithful migrant? What responsibilities do I have to the people here in this place where I now live, and what responsibilities do I have to the people back in my Peruvian home? Perhaps the question that nagged at me the most was whether our attachment to our homelands, peoples, and cultures mattered to God, or if these identity markers were only incidental or, worse, obstacles to the life of faith. After all, are Christians not called to embrace a vocation as pilgrims whose true citizenship lies not in any earthly place but in the heavenly city of God? I longed to return to Perú and to reflect in situ about how my faith intersected with my Peruvian identity. Yet, my return to Perú did not clarify this crisis of faith. It only deepened it.

In 2015, I finally achieved official status as a US resident, and one of the first things I did was to return to my homeland of Perú with my wife, Anna. Stepping out of the Jorge Chávez International Airport, I was immediately surprised by the powerful smell of the Pacific Ocean as it filled my nostrils. My senses quickly became overloaded, and my mind whirled as I struggled to absorb every detail of a place that had lived in my memory and my imagination for fourteen years. The next morning, I ran to the rooftop of my childhood home
to take in the view of my hometown of Callao. I felt like the glittering Pacific to my left and the Andean foothills on my right were extending a warm embrace to me—a prodigal son who had finally come home.

However, that feeling of home, its sacred mystery, was snatched from me as quickly as it had come. It happened first as I descended from the rooftop and encountered mi tíá (my aunt) Nelly. When I was a young boy in Perú, she had been like a second mother to me. But now, fourteen years later, she spoke to me with a subtle but distant reserve, almost as if she were speaking with a friendly stranger. I encountered the same feeling of tempered familiarity in so many of my interactions during my time in Perú. Although I had envisioned this trip as a triumphant homecoming, I felt more and more like a guest—native and yet a foreigner, recognized and yet unknown. The haunting question could not be ignored: If Perú was no longer my home, where was my home? The reflections that follow are also deeply shaped by this experience of loss and ambiguity about where or what home is; to me, it represents the woundedness of home, which many migrants experience every day.
I.2 The Problem: A Crisis of Homelessness

My own biography highlights a few of the ways in which many immigrants around the world are wrestling with questions of home and belonging. As an immigrant, theologizing about the meaning of home is not an abstract activity or a form of sentimentalism, but a pressing existential demand and an urgent political task. However, immigrants are not the only ones struggling to cultivate a sense of home in the world. Indeed, in recent years, throughout the world, immigrants are blamed for this growing global sense of homelessness.

In the twenty-first century, dominant cultures are increasingly being disrupted by the forces of globalization and mass migration. These global forces have led some citizens into relentless and fear-driven attempts to secure their “homes.” Those who see themselves as “natives,” “hosts,” or “citizens” are also increasingly struggling with questions of home and homelessness. Some of them ask questions such as these: Are immigrants a threat to the safety and order of our homeland? How can we preserve our cultural traditions and sense of home in an increasingly globalized world? Is the experience of a stable home only possible for those with money and power? In view of this increased sense of homelessness experienced by both migrants and citizens, a clash of desires
emerges. The migrant’s desire to make a home for themselves in their new land seems to conflict with the citizen’s desire to protect and preserve their own sense of home amid an ocean of change. This project is birthed out of the wound that forms at the nexus of the migrant’s desire for home and the desire of the settled to preserve their ‘at-homeness.’

Yet this wound between migrants and citizens is part of a wider and deeper crisis of homelessness. Global questions about immigration and pluralism, the ecological crisis, and the resurgence of vicious forms of populism and nationalism all point toward widespread questions regarding how humans envision, experience, and perform ways of being at home in this world. As signs of the times, these realities beckon the global church into deeper theological reflection about the meaning of home in light of the self-revelation of God. As an affirmation of this crisis of homelessness, Francis’ 2015 papal encyclical, *Laudato*

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3 Throughout this dissertation, I am deploying the terms “immigrant” and “citizen” or “native” as a heuristic device to signal the difference between those who live in their country of birth and feel a relatively strong sense of being at home there, and those who do not live in their country of birth and therefore whose experience in their place of residence is that of being foreigners. However, in legal usage, the terms are more fluid than that. For instance, immigrants can and do become naturalized citizens, as is the case with me.

Si’, addresses the contemporary ecological crisis through the lens of our “care for our common home.” This dissertation analyzes the immigration crisis present not only in the US and around the world through the lens of a global crisis of homelessness that afflicts not only humans but also the earth itself.\(^5\)

The modern crisis of homelessness afflicting all creatures of the earth today can also be understood as the most recent chapter in a story of displacement and homelessness that reaches back, in its modern form, to 1492.\(^6\) As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, the European migration and subsequent conquest of the “New World” entailed more than the militarized occupation of Amerindian lands, the genocide of Amerindian peoples, and the enslavement of African peoples.\(^7\) The arrival of Europeans also meant a type of epistemic conquest. This

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5 In describing the immigration crisis as a crisis of home, I am partly arguing that questions about the rule of law as it applies to immigration, the morality of border, and the criteria for asylum, all fundamentally point to a disagreement about how we are to be at home in the world and what it means to secure or sustain a sense of home through political, economic, and social means.

6 While the migration crisis cannot be resolved by simply going back to pre-Columbian conditions or undoing all of the institutional structures built since the period of conquest and colonization, neither can the current migration crisis in the US and across the Americas be properly understood or addressed without a long view of history that includes the conquest.

7 Ordinary terms and categories begin to break down as we engage this historical event. For instance, what we commonly know as the Americas (North, Central, and South) was described by Europeans in the 15th century as the New World, although it was not a new world to the native inhabitants who lived there for centuries prior to European arrival. Moreover, to even call these lands “America” is to participate in a history of colonial cartographical imposition as the name “America” is a derivate of European cartographer Amerigo Vespucci. For brevity though, I will be referring to pre-Columbian natives and their land as natives or Amerindian.
way of describing the conquest acknowledges the ways in which European colonial settlers not only commodified the land in the search for gold and resources, but also how the colonization of the Americas eradicated many pre-Columbian cultural and spiritual practices and institutions through which indigenous peoples from the Americas, and shortly thereafter those brought from Africa, related to and made home with the land and its creatures for centuries.

Part of the program of the conquest was to establish the colonizers’ epistemology as the only filter through which to imagine any and all ways of relating to the land. Such changes were reflected in the universal imposition of European languages to describe reality, the re-mapping of the land according to European technology and nomenclature, and the establishment of political, economic, and social orders which mirrored those found in Europe. Further, all

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8 Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano coins the term “coloniality” to describe the underlying logic of colonialism, modern rationality, whereby making the conquest of the Americas not only a physical one but also an epistemological one. This explains for Quijano why despite gaining independence from European colonial powers, the freed peoples continued to depend on European forms of governing, administering goods, etc. See Aníbal Quijano, “COLONIALITY AND MODERNITY/RATIONALITY,” Cultural Studies 21, no. 2–3 (March 2007): 168–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353.

these changes had Christian underpinnings, not only insofar as they were sanctioned by the church but in that they were also justified through theological argumentation.\textsuperscript{10} The mixing of indigenous and European cultures and religions was perceived as counterproductive to the establishment of a pure Christianity and therefore of a truly flourishing way of life.\textsuperscript{11} In sum, the colonizers’ desire for security, familiarity, and belonging in the newly conquered lands was directly linked to the insecurity, displacement, and exclusion of natives and their cultures and religions from the same land.

Therefore, at a physical level, at a political level, and even at an epistemological level, the threat of homelessness has haunted the Americas from the fifteenth century until today. This threat is not only for all those unauthorized or undesirable residents of sovereign states. It is also a problem that haunts those who live and thrive on land built upon the sustained

\textsuperscript{10} With respect to the conquest of the Andean peoples and lands, it was the Salamanca theologians who articulated the strongest theological arguments supporting the conquest, with Juan Gines de Sepulveda articulating the strongest argument in the Valladolid debates (1550–51).

\textsuperscript{11} *Mestizaje*, a Spanish term that denotes the mixing of races and cultures. *Mestizos* as it was used by the Spanish in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century and still today, is a racial or ethnic marker that identifies one as being of mixed European and indigenous descendancy. *Mestizos* were perceived as a threat by both the indigenous and the European colonial-settlers and their respective descendants. However, throughout North, Central, and South America the *mestizos* positioned themselves as the group in power, using this to oppress the indigenous peoples after the Europeans had left.
destruction of native peoples and their ways of being at home in the world.

Ironically, it is often those reduced to bare life, without status and recognition and so situated in permanent precarity, that live most intimately with the land, having to befriend the soil and its creatures in order to survive. In view of this, who can claim to be at home in the Americas after 1492? What could home possibly mean in light of this history?

1.3 Toward a Constructive Theology of Migration and Home

In view of this modern crisis of homelessness that has its roots in the colonization of the Americas, this present study offers a constructive theological proposal that addresses two interrelated questions. The first is, what does a truly flourishing human life look like in view of the realities of migration and home? To address this question requires understanding the inherent goods and chief aims of migration and home, as well as how they are shaped by the reality of human sin. It also requires understanding better the relationship between migration and home. Are the two are mutually exclusive or ultimately co-constitutive realities? The second question concerns whether Christianity, despite its role in the formation of the wound of homelessness in the Americas,
can nevertheless offer a vision of migration and home that leads to flourishing. If so, a second and parallel question follows: what kind of ethics and politics corresponds to such a vision? To address these two critical and interrelated questions, I will engage in a theological reflection that is biblical and dogmatic as well as contextualized to the lands, peoples, and cultures of the Americas. As such, this dissertation represents an effort to develop a theology of home and migration emerging from the woundedness of home at the heart of the Americas.

The first aim of this study is to develop a Biblical and theological account of home and migration. Yet, acknowledging that theological reflection is never abstract but contextualized, it pursues a theological and biblical understanding of home by analyzing the motif of home as it develops in theological works of Karl Barth, George Tinker, Willie Jennings, Virgilio Elizondo, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz. Each of these authors offers a way of thinking about the Christian faith in relation to questions of home, belonging, and displacement. Barth’s development of the motif of home throughout his theological corpus, is critical to this study not only because he is one of the most important modern interpreters of the Christian tradition, but also because his theology offered a critical response to modernity and its understandings of home, particularly as it was developing.
in the German context in the 19th and 20th centuries. The German intellectual
tradition and its impact on the Enlightenment, as well as on Germany’s imperial
march across Europe in the 20th century, is a defining feature of modernity, the
impact of which continues to be felt around the world even today in the
Americas. In particular, the German context to which Barth spoke opens up the
question of the church’s relationship to ethnic nationalism as a way of cultivating
a sense of home in the world.

The second aim of this study is to give a theological account of the
historical wound of home in the Americas. Tinker and Jennings offer us a
decolonial perspective that interrogates the colonial roots of modern Christianity
and its vision of the relationship between people and the land. They also offer
analyses of the modern crisis of homelessness from a Native American and Black
theological perspective, respectively. Their theological proposals each take a
different stance with regard to Barth’s theology and its capacity to address the
colonial wound in Christianity. Virgilio Elizondo, a Hispanic theologian, and
Ada María Isasi-Díaz, a Mujerista theologian, offer the foundations of a Latinx
theology of home that is attentive to the colonial wound in the Americas but also
attentive to the goodness of home amid cultural mestizaje and the trials of
contemporary migration. Together, Tinker, Jennings, Elizondo, and Isasi-Díaz offer us a comprehensive view of the Americas as a crisis of homelessness and of the redemptive possibilities that Christianity might offer.

The final aim of this study is to give a constructive theological and ethical account of a flourishing life with respect to the realities of migration and home. To do so, I first draw on the aforementioned authors to construct a Trinitarian account of the human desire for home and the reality of displacement that is both biblically and theologically grounded and attentive to the wound of home in colonial modernity as it developed in the Americas. Then I put this account in conversation with three contemporary anthropologies that emphasize the importance of rootedness: an agrarian anthropology represented by Kentucky farmer and poet Wendell Berry, an anthropology from the perspective of nomadic peoples as articulated by the British anthropologist Hugh Brody, and finally, an anthropology of creatureliness as expounded on by eco-theologian and philosopher Norman Wirzba. Through this dialogue, I provide a theological account of what sociologist Paolo Boccagni describes as the migration-home nexus as not only descriptive of human social life but as a normative claim concerning a truly flourishing human life. I then apply a pneumatological lens and a Mujerista
liberative perspective to this theological anthropology of the migration-home nexus to develop a concrete proposal for how the church can accompany migrants, particularly irregular migrants, in their struggle to flourish in the context of the Americas.

Through these three lines of argumentation, this study offers a unified constructive theology of home and migration that 1) is biblically and theologically grounded 2) critically analyses the wound of homelessness in the modern Americas, and 3) addresses this wound through a constructive moral and political theology of migration and home.

**1.4 A Critical Intervention: The Migration-Home Nexus**

My work pushes the study of the theology and ethics of migration to address the challenges migrants face beyond the border as they seek to cultivate a flourishing common life with their non-immigrant neighbors. In his response to Daniel Grody and Gioacchino Campese’s seminal theological work on migration, *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey*, Latinx theologian Miguel H. Díaz asks, “How might we construct a theology of migration meaningful to the displaced who among themselves did not experience perilous journeys (e.g. longstanding
Cuban exiles or Haitian refugees in South Florida or the Hmong in Minnesota)?” Díaz’s question exposes a difficulty found in all theological works addressing migration in the contemporary context, namely how to construct a theology of migration that minds the distinctiveness of migrants’ geographical, cultural, and situational differences. For example, many theologies of migration have focused on the journey across borders when an increasing number of immigrants in the US did not experience such journeys, arriving instead as refugees or simply overstaying a tourist visa. One way to address this challenge posed by Díaz is to begin with what is shared among migrants regardless of their status as an economic migrant or refugee, or legal and illegal—namely, they all experience the loss of home and the need to cultivate a sense of home in order to flourish.

Home remains an ever-present, yet undertheorized, concern in discussions of migration among Christian theologians and ethicists, even among Latinx scholars. For example, the Willey Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology contains an entry for “theologizing immigration” but no such entry for

“theologizing home.”¹³ Yet, a concern for how to be at home in the world in view of the economic, political, and cultural realities and challenges that characterize modern life is the very thing that joins migrants not only to each other but to their non-immigrant neighbors.

As such, while this dissertation aims to address the wounds experienced by many immigrants in contemporary society, it does so by focusing on the question of home—what its meaning and importance are and how to achieve a sense of home in ways that lead to the mutual flourishing of all creation. Thus, I intervene in theologies of migration by choosing to focus not on the first act of migration (leaving) nor on the second act (journeying), but rather on the third act, the political and economic negotiations that migrants undergo as they seek to cultivate a sense of home in the world.

¹³ Victor Carmona, “Theologizing Immigration,” in The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology, ed. Orlando O. Espín (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015), 365–85, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118718612.ch20. Carmona argues that US Hispanics have been exploring how migration is “an important aspect of US-Hispanic experience” since at least the 1980s. However, Carmona observes that generally speaking, only since the early 2000s have Latinx theologians, bible scholars, and Christian ethicists focused on migration as “as having meaning and significance as an experience in and of itself.” My own project aligns with Carmona’s in thinking about migration as relates the inner life of the Christian, although while his focus is on family, mine is on the longing and love for home.
In recent decades there also has been a steady rise in interest among theologians in reflecting on the meaning and experience of home, particularly given a growing sense that modernity has been characterized by a widespread sense of homelessness.\textsuperscript{14} For instance, New Testament scholar N.T. Wright has written popular and scholarly works addressing a nascent Gnosticism in many contemporary Christian theologies, which fails to see that salvation entails not an escape from creation but its redemption and transformation.\textsuperscript{15} For Wright, the created cosmos is our home, albeit one in need of healing and restoration. He thus urges believers to be more rooted in the world in faithful ways rather than disengaging from the world’s problems. Sharing a similar concern for the restoration of creation, theologians, and particularly eco-theologians, have increasingly noted the important role that being rooted in particular places has in

\textsuperscript{14} Walter Brueggemann’s \textit{The Land} is an Ur text for theologians of place as it is one of the first works in modern theology to expresses a concern for the centrality of place and land in the Hebrew Scriptures and its significance for the “modern crisis of homelessness.” Walter Brueggemann, \textit{The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith}, Overtures to Biblical Theology 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

the biblical narrative, and thus how necessary it is for Christians to respond to a diseased modern nomadism with a praxis of dwelling.\textsuperscript{16}

Two works in the last couple of decades stand out in their attempt to craft more systematically how the Scriptures and the theological tradition might give shape to the importance and goodness of home, even in this age of exile. The first is Steve Bouma-Prediger’s and Brian Walsh’s \textit{Beyond Homelessness}, which explores the problem of postmodern homelessness and offers a Reformed vision of God’s redemptive homecoming.\textsuperscript{17} The second is Natalia Marandiuc’s \textit{The Goodness of Home}, which offers an account of the formation of how God constructs the self through our loving attachments to places and peoples.\textsuperscript{18}

However, in the same way that home is often a tacit concern in theologies of migration, migration often remains at best a tacit reality in the background of these different theologies of home and place. At times, as in \textit{Beyond Homelessness}, migration is even presented as an obstacle to be overcome in achieving a more

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\textsuperscript{17} Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, \textit{Beyond Homelessness}.
\end{flushleft}
truly grounded and rooted existence that attends to the goodness of our creaturely homes. While some recognize migrants’ experience of the loss of home as a symptom of our modern problem of rootlessness, they fail to see that migration and the lives of migrants are not only sites of the woundedness of home, but also sites of redemptive possibility of home. Thus, this dissertation moves towards a theology of home by arguing that it is not to those who are most at home in the world, those whose lives appear to be rooted in the land, that we must look to in order to best understand healthy practices of homemaking. Rather, it is precisely by looking to the displaced, the rejected, and the exiled that we might find the Spirit equipping humanity for ways of homecoming that bear witness to the restoration of creation.

In sum, what this dissertation offers is a theological analysis of what, as I have already mentioned, sociologist Paolo Boccagni describes as the migration-home nexus.19 The experiences of home and of migration often fall into disciplinary discourses where they are kept separate, if not at odds with each other. However, through his study of Ecuadorian migrants’ practices, cognition,
and emotions about home, Boccagni discovered that transnational migration provides a unique and helpful lens for understanding both the fields of home studies and migration studies.20 Boccagni’s findings thus challenge the traditional binary between home/rootedness and migration/mobility that is reflected in theologies of migration and theologies of home.21 What I offer, particularly in the last chapter of the dissertation, is a more systematic and critical theological analysis of this nexus and the socio-political implications that follow from embracing a theological anthropology at the nexus of migration and home. This is not an ethnographic study of concrete practices and negotiations of home by migrants and displaced peoples of the Americas. What I have instead tried to do is to set forth a theological foundation that points in the direction of that kind of ethnographic work and which would frame such historical and ethnographic work as has already been done on the lives of migrants in their search for home within a trinitarian framework.

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20 “It is exactly the perceived absence or remoteness of home [experienced by migrants], however, what makes the migration experience unique in revealing the cognitions, emotions and practices associated with it, as a place and a set of biographic routines.” Ibid., 17.
21 Boccagni, 16.
Finally, this dissertation also seeks to contribute to debates about the modern Americas as a colonial project and as a theological problem. In particular, it engages with decolonial theory as it emerges from the Americas as the most stringent form of critique of the colonization of the Americas and of Christianity’s role in it. In response to this, recently, particularly among Latinx and Black theological works, there has been an effort to decolonize Christianity, that is, to delink it from its Eurocentric intellectual sources. Despite Gustavo Gutiérrez’s claim that liberation theology represents the church in Latin American drinking from its own wells rather than from the wells of European thought, both decolonial and indigenous thinkers have pointed out that liberation theology has often utilized European categories of Marxist critique to formulate its critique and its constructive proposal. The question thus remains, what is a truly decolonized Christianity from the soil and people of the Americas?

However, the quest for a truly decolonized Christianity is as problematic as the colonial quest for a truly pure Christianity. Christianity is, to use the language of Latinx theologians, a *mestizo* phenomenon. It is always already formed inside of the encounters between peoples, cultures, and lands, and as such, it is always already located inside of the asymmetries of power and structures of domination that are endemic to the history of nations. This social history of Christianity corresponds to the Christian claim that in Jesus Christ, God assumed sinful human flesh in the midst of history, and therefore that the salvation and redemption of the world takes place not by an act of destruction or extraction but rather of transfiguration and transformation as the world is made to participate in the life of God.

The modern peoples and lands of the Americas indeed inhabit theological constructs born out of colonialism and its many corruptions. Yet, we must not look for redemption by destruction or extraction, but rather by looking for the hope of redemption in the transformation of darkness to light and death to life. In particular, we must follow liberation theology’s understanding that the most wounded, the displaced, the marginalized, the rejected, are icons of the crucified Christ and thereby sites of the Spirit’s redemptive work. The peoples and the
lands of the Americas do inhabit a theological crisis, but they also inhabit the surplus of these wounds, the redemptive possibilities that appear there as their efforts for liberation are transformed by the Spirit into witnesses to the coming New Creation.

Analyzing the colonial wound at the heart of the Americas is a critical aspect of this work, and to provide such an analysis, I have engaged with theological voices from the margins, including those of Indigenous, Black, and Hispanic theologians as well as of Mujerista theologians. These voices often engage in a mode of theological reflection that is oriented toward the decolonization not only of the land, peoples, and cultures of the Americas but of the church and her theology as well. However, while such deconstructive efforts are critical for getting a sense of the wound of home in the Americas, I ultimately argue that decolonal theory needs to be complemented by constructive theological proposals that see redemptive possibilities of the Spirit’s work within the darkness of colonial brutality.
I.5 Methodology: Ressourcement From the Margins

As the opening story denotes, this study is deeply shaped by both Reformed theology and by my lived experience as a first-generation Latin American immigrant from Perú living in the United States. Thus, methodologically this study is what Latinx theologians refer to as ressourcement from the margins.²⁴ It transplants Barth’s Reformed theology of home into the soil of the Americas, while at the same time critically interrogating it from that place. In particular, I draw on the Reformed theology of Karl Barth, with its emphasis on the transcendence of God, the noetic effects on the fall, and a christocentric approach to revelation and soteriology, in order to craft a theology of home. However, I mobilize Barth’s theology in order to address a concrete wound in the world, in this case, the wound of home that lies at the heart of the Americas. In doing so, my dissertation also engages in ecumenical dialogue between the Reformed Protestant tradition and Latin American popular Catholicism.

²⁴ For an explanation of the Latinx notion of ressourcement from the margins, see Edgardo Antonio Colón-Emeric, Óscar Romero’s Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 18–20.
1.6 Chapter Summary

The first three chapters of this study give shape to a theological and biblical understanding of home and how it differs from the way in which modernity casts a vision of home and migration rooted in the colonial soil of the Americas. Chapter 4 draws the themes of the first three chapters into a single constructive trinitarian theology of home. Chapter 5 then addresses the ethical and political demands of flourishing human life at the nexus of migration and home.

Chapter 1 outlines a biblical and christocentric view of home in conversation with the Swiss Reformed pastor and theologian Karl Barth. This chapter represents the first attempt to analyze how the motif of home develops in Barth’s works, from the more apophatic “crisis theology” of the Romans Commentary, to his magnum opus on the Doctrine of Reconciliation in the fourth volume of Church Dogmatics. I demonstrate that Barth’s christocentric and trinitarian approach to home offers an important alternative to the ways in which contemporaries such as Heidegger, as well as predecessors such as Schleiermacher, addressed the crisis of homelessness endemic to modernity. However, Barth’s theological retrieval of home is insufficient in two ways. First, Barth is not concerned with telling us how to be at home concretely in the world.
But more importantly, while Barth is cognizant of the need for theology to respond to the crisis of home emerging from European modernity, he was not equally aware of the need for theology to reckon with the crisis of home that gave birth to European modernity itself, the colonization of the New World.

Thus, chapter 2 engages the colonization of the Americas as the soil out of which modern homelessness grew. In conversation with Native American theologian George Tinker, I diagnose the colonial wound of the Americas through the lens of the loss of native cultural traditions and their way of relating to the land. In addition, in conversation with Willie Jennings and Black Marxist thought, the chapter unpacks the deep malformations that arose from the imposition of a racial and capitalist order on the exploited lands and displaced peoples of the Americas. I thus show how Europeans, Native Amerindians, and Africans were being formed into a vicious way of being at home in the New World. In light of Christianity’s role in the colonization of the Americas, the chapter also evaluates whether Christianity might hold the possibility for healing the Americas’ crisis of home. To fully assess this possibility, I turn to the work of Latinx theologians.
In conversation with Hispanic theologian Virgilio Elizondo and *Mujerista* theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz, chapter 3 develops a *mestizo/a* theology of home that is attentive to both the woundedness of home that lies at the heart of the Americas and the redemptive possibilities that are active within this wound. This chapter tries to render explicit the redemptive vision of homecoming found only implicitly in Latinx theology, particularly in early theologies of *mestizaje*. While *mestizo/a* peoples themselves are by no means synonymous with God’s redemptive homecoming, I argue that Latinx and Mujerista theologians have uncovered a critical aspect of God’s work of activating homecoming in creation, showing us that the wound of homelessness is also the site of God’s redemptive homecoming in the world. In particular, I analyze the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a seminal story that connects Latin Americans across the Americas and even across faith traditions, through the lens of home. I argue that the story of Guadalupe offers us a window into how even in the darkness of colonial domination, the social, political, economic, and spiritual negotiations that displaced natives made in their struggle for home, and the forms of cultural *mestizaje* that these produced, can be seen as the very sites of the Spirit’s work in redeeming creation.
Chapter 4 outlines a Trinitarian theology of home. The chapter frames the human desire for home within the framework of God’s work as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. With a Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God, it argues that God is the source of the desire for home and the chief end of all journeys and homecomings. It also explores how, within a fallen creation, the longing to belong and all human efforts at homecoming are tainted by sin, such that our migrations and homecoming lead us away rather than toward a flourishing common life. I conclude by noting that the Spirit assumes our fallen attempts to establish home in the world and transforms them so that they participate in the eschatological homecoming of God in Christ.

Moving from trinitarian theology to theological anthropology, chapter 5 posits that how one conceives of the centrality of human rootedness in places is key to the meaning of home. However, there is no serious work to date engaging the intersection between the recovery of place in the Christian life and theologies of migration. This dissertation thus seeks to show how migration provides a unique window into our understandings of place. I do so by engaging with

\[\text{Place, like home, is once again a hermeneutical lens through which Latinx scholars do a lot of their scholarship, though much more remains to be written on the intersection of place, migration, and Latinidad. See Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., \textit{Reading from This}}\]
contemporary anthropologies that attempt to craft the human as either rooted in creation or as fundamentally mobile and show how these are inadequate representations of human life. The chapter ends with an account of how migrants engage in a variety of practices that are aimed at recovering home, practices which are part of the process which sociologist Paolo Boccagni calls ‘homing.’

My aim is not here to prescribe a particular set of actions or universal norms for migrants to follow in the search for home but rather to describe the theological realities within which decisions to migrate and the ensuing process of homing take place. That said, almost all scholarship on Christian ethical and theological responses to migration either explicitly focus on the practices of Christian hospitality or have been written from the perspective of the host (individual, nation, city, or church) about the need to make room for the stranger. This singular focus on Christian hospitality has the effect of making

Place (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Efrain Agosto, Latinxs, the Bible, and Migration (New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media, 2018). A good starting point for his kind of work would be Jacqueline Hidalgo’s Revelation in Aztlán and La Lucha for Home and Home as Lucha. Segovia and Tolbert, Reading from This Place; Agosto, Latinxs, the Bible, and Migration.

the host or the citizens the primary moral agent with respect to migration, thereby reducing the migrant to a passive recipient of the host’s compassion.\textsuperscript{27}

While the nature, conditions, and limits of the practice of hospitality are an essential aspect of the ethics of migration, this chapter tries to recover the agency of migrants through its account of the practice of transplantation as a mode of migrant homing. I conclude by offering a reflection on the contributions this

\textsuperscript{27}To be offered hospitality is not only to be welcomed but to be asked to participate and become a member of a home, even if for a set time. This is because home is not just four walls that protect us from the elements, home is the stability of a physical place and also a set of interweaving relationships which foster flourishing in that place. The migrant enters into this set of relationships and immediately impacts them, so that the flourishing of all now also is fully dependent on the flourishing of the migrant and her homing practices.
study makes in particular to the fields of moral and political theology, Latinx theology and Reformed theology.
Chapter 1
Karl Barth and the Son’s Journey of Homecoming

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Situating Barth in Modernity’s Crisis of Homelessness

Karl Barth (1886–1968) articulated a vision of humanity’s homecoming in the person of Jesus Christ at a time when many Europeans were wrestling with a profound philosophical, spiritual, political, and socio-cultural crisis of alienation and homesickness. By the time Barth arrived on the theological scene, the dread of existential homelessness had become a feature of living in the disenchanted universe crafted by the Enlightenment philosophers. While the question of humanity’s at-homeness in the world is one that reaches into antiquity, a theme in the founding myths of many ancient civilizations including the Hebrews (Abraham) and the Greeks (Odysseus), the crisis of humanity’s homelessness takes on a new meaning with the modern ‘turn to the subject.’\(^1\) René Descartes’

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\(^1\)The kind of homelessness experienced by modern peoples and described by philosophers and intellectuals of the post-enlightenment period is of another order and kind than that which is described by pre-modern philosophers and theologians. For the ancient Greeks and Hebrews, for instance, humanity’s homesickness was a product of a primal exile from a paradise. For the Platonic philosophers, humanity’s homesickness expresses the soul’s captivity in the material
philosophical assertion that the thinking subject is the foundation of all knowledge, including knowledge of God, may have been what sparked the modern “turn to the subject,” but it was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) who fulfilled this anthropocentric cartesian epistemological vision. Having been awakened from his “dogmatic slumber” by David Hume’s skepticisms concerning Cartesian metaphysics, Kant posited that knowledge of first principles or of the essence of things in the world, the *noumena*, lay behind an impenetrable epistemological veil. However, far from enlightening our knowledge of things in the world by providing a sure foundation for knowledge, Kant’s idealism instead casts the world into utter darkness by fundamentally separating the thinking subject not only from the world of objective reality but from other thinking subjects.

world and its constant longing to return home to the realm of perfect ideals. According to the first three chapters of Genesis, humanity’s homesickness is the result of God’s exiling of Adam and Eve from Eden. The Genesis story does not, however, share the same gnostic assumptions as the Platonic story of exile, for Adam and Eve were already full embodied beings before being exiled from their home in paradise. Nevertheless, it seems that both the ancient Greeks and Hebrews agreed that this world, or at least the world in the form in which it exists now, is not and cannot be humanity’s true and ultimate home. By contrast, in the modern period, homelessness is a feature of the disenchanted cosmos constructed by the rationalists and empiricists of the 16th and 17th centuries. See Brendan O’Donoghue, *A Poetics of Homecoming: Heidegger, Homelessness and the Homecoming Venture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub, 2011), chapter 1.
It was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) who finally showed that the modern turn to the subject leads ineluctably to the relativization of all knowledge and ultimately to nihilism. Nietzsche saw through the illusion of Kant’s transcendental universal categories, contending that our highest held ideals, be they cultural, religious, or moral, are neither transcendent nor universal, but simply manifestations of an individual’s will to power, the subjective imposition of rule and order which thinly veils human self-interest on a ultimately meaningless and valueless world. Nietzsche, in other words, saw the end game of the cartesian epistemological revolution, the loss of an ordered universe in which a sense of home, a sense of where humans come from and where they ought to be headed, is utterly shattered. Expressing the deep disillusionment that comes with being a free-rational-individual inhabiting a disenchanted cosmos, Nietzsche writes,

We children of the future, how could we be at home in this today? We feel disfavor for all ideals that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of transitions…. The ice that still supports people today has become very thin; the wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we ourselves that are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and other all too thin ‘realities.’

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Nietzsche’s declaration depicts humans as not meaningfully bound to the world or to concrete places and communities in the world, such that what’s most true about human existence is a deep and abiding homelessness. Modern homelessness is thus the condition of living in a universe where the loss of ultimate meaning or value renders the human an aimless sojourner.

This modern crisis of homelessness was not only philosophical in nature, and thus not only experienced by the elite intellectual class; it was also a widespread experience among working-class Europeans amid the industrial revolution. Many renowned social thinkers of the 19th century detected in modern industrial societies an inherent homelessness and a profound sense of alienation. Key among these was Karl Marx (1818–1833), who saw in modern industrial European societies not the construction of flourishing homes but rather the alienation of working-class people. For Marx, “the worker therefore [because of the industrial system’s alienation of labor] feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not

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3 Although at the same time, Nietzsche expresses a deep homesickness for Ancient Greece. This is an interesting feature of many of the continental philosophers in Europe and in particular in Germany, the sense that for humanity to find their way back home, we must find our way back to Athens. Barth, as we shall see, shows that the way back home is not through Athens and her glory, but rather by way of Jerusalem and indeed through Golgotha.
voluntary but imposed, forced labour.” In the same period, the famed British novelist Charles Dickens (1812–1870) explored the homesickness not only of factory workers and working-class peoples but especially of children in boarding schools and coalmines in the industrial slums of Victorian England. It is also around this same time that Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) had begun to perform psychoanalysis using what he called the “un-heimlich,” the unhomely or the uncanny, that is, stories and cultural symbols of the strange and unfamiliar which are meant to point us back home and to the familiar. Despite the optimism of Europeans philosophers like G.F.W. Hegel (1770–1831) concerning the spirit of modernity manifested in the liberation of the rational subject, the consolidation of nation-states, and the industrial revolution, by the end of 19th century, Europeans in the wealthiest modern nations had grown ever more alienated, ever more economically and existentially homeless, and profoundly homesick for a different and better world.

5 The juxtaposition of the warmth of home and the coldness of the capitalist house is central to Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, while many of his other novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* depict the plight of the homeless and homesick children in the cold industrial world of Victorian England.
This crisis of homelessness paved the way for one of the most significant intellectual counter-movements of the Modern period: Romanticism. As Frederick Beiser notes, the main goal of the Romantics was “to cure humanity of homesickness and to make people feel at home in the world again.” Faced with the Scylla of the metaphysical abstraction of rationalists and Charybdis of the spiritless materiality of the empiricists, the Romantics urged a recovery of the importance of feeling and intuition as the necessary path to homecoming. Indeed, rational and empirical reflection on the world entailed a moment of abstraction or of self-removal from our being-in-time and space. Romantics urged not self-removal but rather rootedness. Romantic philosophers like Herder and Schlegel thus urged people to be more present to the universe all around them and to their interconnectedness and interdependence with the natural world as well as with their people’s cultural traditions. Their desire was not to reflect on the world by rational abstraction or metaphysical speculation but to contemplate the world and its existence and thereby to be brought to awe about our earthly homes. For the German Reformed theologian Friedrich

Schleiermacher (1768–1834), this contemplation and immediacy to the cosmos lay at the heart of true religion.

For Schleiermacher, religions play a fundamental role in the homecoming envisioned for humanity. Indeed, Schleiermacher viewed human homesickness as nostalgia for an Edenic state.⁸ Eden represents a place where perfect God-consciousness can be enjoyed because its inhabitants experience God not fleetingly or in punctiliar ways as we moderns do, but rather never leave the moment of encounter and communion with the divine. Nostalgia for the Edenic state is the longing for the joy of being in the eternal present, of communing with God and with the rest of nature without anxiety or disruption. Thus, if cold rationalism had led to the feeling of homelessness in the world, then for Romantics like Schleiermacher, Europe needed to recover religion as a way of being at home in the world.

However, Schleiermacher did not desire the recovery of a cold, calculated, dogmatic religion, but rather the recovery of religion as form of contemplation of

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the eternal in time, and of the infinite in the finite world—of, in other words, mystical religion. For him, religious experiences are all grounded in that conscious and unreflective feeling of absolute dependence. To be at home in the world becomes about understanding that we depend upon our families, our communities, and on nature to do everything from walking, to talking, to thinking. This feeling of absolute dependence is what religions describe as the divine, as God. Forgetting this feeling which religion helps us to contemplate leads to our homelessness, while embracing it leads to God-consciousness and homecoming. Schleiermacher does not undo the modern turn to the subject; rather he sought to prove that the turn to the subject did not imply, as many believed, a turning away from religion or from belief in the transcendent and mystical. Instead, as we journey inwardly, exploring our lived experiences in the world, our innermost longings, there we will find God, there we will find home.

The attempt of the Romantic philosophers and theologians to find humanity’s way back home in the universe by recovering a sense of our concrete being-in-the-world had a profound influence on one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, the German existentialist Martin Heidegger
(1889–1976). According to Heidegger, the homelessness which Nietzsche detects in the nihilist moment is in fact not a symptom of the liberation of the rational subject from all subjective ideals, but rather is the symptom of western philosophy’s neglect of the importance of “Being,” or what Heidegger calls “Da-sein.” In his Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger observes that translating the Greek word ousia as substance, a very abstract term, is misleading. Rather, its etymological roots point to words like “‘homestead, at-homeness, a standing in and by itself, a self-enclosedness, an integral presentness or thereness.’”

Heidegger thus argues that Being, Da-sein, is not an abstract ontological category, neither a Platonic ideal or a Kantian universal transcendental category. Instead, Being is always a being-at-home-somewhere-in-the-world, it is the concrete lived

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9 Heidegger’s reflection on home are dispersed throughout all his major work as it is a critical leitmotif in his philosophical program. However, some key works where Heidegger explicitly works out the meaning of home, the experience of homelessness, and how to achieve a sense of homecoming are to be found in his “Letters on Humanism” in Martin Heidegger and David Farrell Krell, Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964), Rev. and expanded ed (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993). As well as in “Building Dwelling Thinking” and “Poetically Man Dwells” both found in Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 20. print (New York: Perennical Classics, 2009). Robert Mugerauer also provides an excellent systematic analysis of Heidegger’s reflections on home in his later writings, particularly his esoteric writing on the German poet Hölderlin. See Robert Mugerauer, Heidegger and Homecoming: The Leitmotif in the Later Writings, New Studies in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

10 O’Donoghue, A Poetics of Homecoming, 12.
To understand ‘being’ or existence it is thus not necessary to bracket our lived experiences of the world, our cultural ideals, or our human traditions, as all philosophers not just from Descartes but really from Plato had sought to do in order to get to the abstract and unconstrained “Truth.” Quite to the contrary, Heidegger argued that human cognition is always already conditioned by the concreteness of our lived experience: by language and cultural traditions, by our lived experience in the world. His existential methodology, which expanded in his Jewish mentor Husserl’s phenomenology, precipitated a profound shift in European philosophy. Instead of attempting to get at the “truths” of human existence by escaping from the world of particulars and concrete existence, Heidegger argued that getting at the Truth of human existing required reflecting on our concrete existence, and our everyday modes of dwelling in the world, at particular places and times and among a particular people.\textsuperscript{12}

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\textsuperscript{11} As Cecil L. Eubanks and David J. Gauthier note, “for Heidegger, the essentially modern attempt to maintain identity as a self-conscious individual is a symptom of ontological homelessness, for which the ‘remedy’ is an attempt to return to ‘the house of Being.’” See Cecil L. Eubanks and David J. Gauthier, “The Politics of the Homeless Spirit: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling and Hospitality,” History of Political Thought 32, no. 1 (2011): 125–46.
\textsuperscript{12} Thus, in his magnum opus published in 1927, Being and Time, Heidegger rejects modernity’s attempt to distill the rational knowing subject through his emancipation from all contingent cultural values.
\end{flushleft}
Heidegger also famously rejected the modern infatuation with technology, which he described as the manifestations of the modern subject’s will to master the universe by imposing his meaning on the world and transforming it to meet his self-interests. For Heidegger, the modern technological age is merely intensifying and speeding up humanity’s homelessness because it is a constant attempt to overcome the limits and conditions of our being-in-the-world, especially that great limiter that is death. Heidegger thus called for a rejection of what we now understand as globalization, as it was fueled by modern technological and cosmopolitan society which he saw as another form of nihilistic nomadism that rejects our embeddedness, our rootedness in concrete places and their cultures and tradition. Only by struggling to be at home in the world in this concrete and particular way will humanity combat the forces of technological civilization which breed what he describes as inauthenticity. That is to say, the forces of technological civilization in the wake of the 19th century created the illusion that one could peel back the layers of cultural, national, ethnic, and geographic particularity to get to one shared universal human nature.

13 Heidegger’s notion of Bodenständigkeit, enrootedness, is crucial for understanding his existentialist project of homecoming.
For Heidegger, then, to dwell poetically in the world was the ultimate form of homecoming, for the poet, unlike the analytic thinker, dwells on the human condition, on our being in the world, and on reality—not in such a way as to deconstruct reality to show its naturalistic or metaphysical origins, but rather by using language to communicate the mystery of our very existence, our being in the world. Moreover, Heidegger, who had grown up in a rural German town, sees the image of the true philosopher in the farmer whose daily work is to be attentive to the rootedness of life in the soil and to the realities of life and death in the seasons of the soil.

Heidegger’s existentialist philosophy and his vision of homecoming have a complicated reception history. For instance, Heidegger’s existential philosophy inspired the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who used his existentialist methodology as a tool to perform postcolonial criticism. On the other hand, Heidegger’s vision of humanity’s homecoming also has a troubling history of being utilized by ethnonationalist political regimes. With regard to the latter, this is not only true of interpreters of Heidegger’s philosophy, but it is true of Heidegger himself. In the early 1930s Heidegger found in the German

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Nationalist Socialist party a manifestation of his vision of homecoming and the possibility of an arrest of the march of modern cosmopolitanism and nihilism. The Nazis, it appeared to Heidegger, wanted the same things he wanted, namely, to achieve an authentic way of being in the world through being rooted in their homeland and in the cultural traditions and history of the Germanic people. Indeed, *Heimat* an *Heimkehr*, German words which mean home and homecoming, were key slogans of Nazi political and military campaigns. And while Heidegger eventually became disillusioned with the Nationalist Socialist party and indeed with all modern politics, which he saw as veiled attempts of the subject’s will to power, it is clear that Heidegger’s vision of homecoming, a vision of rootedness in one’s homeland and people, is always pregnant with the possibility of an ethnonationalist and violently exclusionary form of anti-democratic politics.\(^{15}\)

We would be mistaken to think that this story is only about modern western Europeans and their attempts to be at home in the world. In the 19th and

\[^{15}\text{One of the most ardent critics of Heidegger’s philosophical program and its rejection of subjectivity is the Jewish philosopher Immanuel Lévinas who sees precisely this danger in Heidegger’s ontology of dwelling. I will return to Heidegger and to Levinas’ critique of his ontology in Chapter 5 when I deal with the question of anthropology.}\]
20th centuries, many nations across the Atlantic basin and in Africa entertained similar processes of nation-building as western nations had in the 17th and 18th centuries, each experiencing different modalities of the modern turn to the subject, industrialization, and ethnonationalism. Moreover, many postcolonial critics today continue to mobilize Heidegger’s methodology of drawing on lived experience and the recovery of culture and tradition as a way to achieve liberative homecoming.16 These postcolonial and decolonial frameworks argue that when we are free to be who we are, whether that is Puerto Rican, Native American, or Black, then we will be free to be home in the land. Yet, this philosophical move always opens itself to exclusionary and violently anti-democratic logics, sometimes from the centers of power and at times also from the margins. We have seen over and over throughout history, not only in western Europe but also in the previously colonized world, how the effort to achieve homecoming through nationalism ultimately leads to the alienation,

marginalization, and even at times genocide of all those who are not deemed by the dominant culture as native but rather as foreign, alien, or other.¹⁷

The history of modern homelessness leaves us with a profound dilemma concerning the human condition and our longing for home. Are we fundamentally homeless in this world and called to make provisional ‘tents’ in the wilderness whilst embracing our fundamental mobility in the land experienced as a place of exile? Or are we fundamentally at home in the world and called to dig deeper roots in our homelands to precisely avoid the alienating and homeless spirit of modern and postmodern cosmopolitan relativism? Or perhaps, is there a third option that is neither an embrace of the modern rootlessness which leads to despair or the modern embrace of homecoming which seems to indefatigably collapse into ethnonationalist politics?

¹¹.² A Barthian Theology of Home

In the summer of 1946, only a year after the war ended, Karl Barth addressed an audience of theology students at Bonn, Germany with these words:

Let us be clear about what is usually meant by ‘God’ outside the Christian faith. When man speaks of God, of the divine nature, of

¹⁷ This was certainly true of Jews in Heidegger’s own context.
the divine essence, or of God simply, then he means the object of the universally present and active longing, the object of man’s homesickness and man’s hope for unity, a basis, a meaning to his existence, and the meaning of the world; he means thereby the existence and the nature of a Being who, whether in this or that connexion [sic] with the realities other than Himself, is to be regarded as the Supreme Being that determines and dominates all that exists.\(^{18}\)

Barth’s words speak to the widespread feelings of alienation and homelessness afflicting Europeans, and particular Germans, in the aftermath of two world wars and the Holocaust. This was a wound rendered all the more visible by the ruins of destroyed buildings, homes, and school halls that marked the landscape around Barth and his students, the scars left behind by the German Nationalist Socialist Party’s attempts at Heimkehr, homecoming.

Yet Barth’s words did more than speak to the wounds of homelessness and alienation of his students. His words were also redolent of two important movements in European theology and philosophy, two movements very much birthed and nourished on the very German soil upon which they stood. These movements had promised to overcome humanity’s state of homelessness and

alienation, and yet they had failed in the most critical way to deliver on this promise. When Barth states that those outside of the Christian faith speak of God as “the object of the universally present and active longing, the object of man’s homesickness and hope for unity,” he is making a direct reference to Schleiermacher’s liberal Protestant theological project and its understanding of God as the feeling of absolute dependence that leads us home. On the other hand, Barth’s inclusion of the language of God as the “meaning to his [man’s] existence and the meaning of the world” and “the nature of a Being who, whether in this or that connexion with the realities other than Himself, is to be regarded as the Supreme Being that determines and dominates all that exists” is an incontrovertible reference to the existentialist philosophy championed by Heidegger. 19 For Barth neither of these paths ultimately lead home.

Only a few lines later Barth states, “when we Christians speak of ‘God’ we may and must be clear that this word signifies a priori the fundamentally Other, the fundamental deliverance from that whole world of man’s seeking, conjecturing, illusion, imagining and speculating.” 20 Barth’s understanding of the

19 Arguably, this is also a direct reference to the work of the theologian Paul Tillich and his existential account of Christianity.
20 Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, 36.
Triune God revealed in Christ pronounces a crisis on these two movements, for they represent to Barth humanity’s “seeking, conjecturing, imagining and speculating” about God as the ground of human existence and as the home for which all humanity longs. For Barth, no amount of journeying, either outwardly into the world or inwardly into the recesses of the human mind and soul, will ultimately lead us to God our home. Yet the good news is that God has come home to us in our state of alienation, in the country of our exile from God, each other, and the cosmos. And God has done this in the person of Jesus Christ. What Christians confess, using the words of the Apostle’s Creed, that the Eternal Word indwells the womb of Mary at a particular place and time in human history, this is nothing less than the declaration that God has brought Godself home to us. Yet this same Christ who has been brought home to us is also the exiled one, who found no home during his earthly sojourn, from his birth outside an inn to his execution outside the city, rejected by the centers of political and religious power. It is to this radical pronouncement and its paradoxical nature, which slowly develops throughout Barth’s theological career, that the rest of this chapter devotes itself.
This chapter traces the motif of home as it develops throughout Barth’s theological corpus. In part one, I argue that Barth’s commentary on Romans performs an apophatic theology of home that sets in crisis all human attempts at homecoming, including the liberal Protestant and Heideggerian visions of homecoming. In part two, I describe Barth’s turn to the biblical narrative to understand humanity’s homesickness and where and how humanity can come home. Here, I focus on the third volume of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, on the doctrine of creation, in which Barth performs a rereading of the hexaemeron, the six days of creation, that retrieves the early Christian tradition’s view of home through the lens of *creatio ex nihilo* and Edenic exile, while also re-interpreting this tradition through a radical christological lens. In part three, I show how Barth’s treatment of home in the doctrine of creation develops into a mature christological dialectic in his magnus opus, the fourth volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, on the doctrine of reconciliation. There, Barth argues that it is through the concrete life of an exiled Palestinian Jew that homecoming is achieved for all humanity. As such, the answer to humanity’s homesickness is not to embrace our alienation, nor to place our trust in belonging to a homeland, nation, state, one’s people, or even the church. The answer to humanity’s homesickness is
always already Jesus Christ, God at home with us. I go on to show how, far from
entailing a radical denial of all forms of human identity, Barth reorders all
sources of identity and belonging around Christ where they are both judged
fallen and redeemed, such that to participate in humanity’s homecoming is also
to participate in the cross of exile.

1.2 The Revelation of Home

Barth personally understood the despair of homelessness. In his early
years, he had lived the nomadic life of the European intellectual, as he left his
beloved hometown in Basel, Switzerland, to travel across Europe and learn from
the great minds of his time. But Barth’s most significant experience of
homesickness came as a result of having lived through Europe’s two great wars.
During World War I, Barth experienced the homesickness as a solider drafted to
the Swiss army. During World War II, Barth’s refusal to sign an oath of
allegiance would incur his deportation from Germany, the place he had called
home for fifteen long years. Even more troubling than his own experiences of
home-loss and alienation, however, was Barth’s witnessing of one of the great tragedies of human history: the Holocaust. 21

Barth not only understood the trials of physical displacement, but he also understood the existential homesickness of leaving one’s intellectual tradition, especially when this tradition purported to claim the path for homecoming amidst so much exile and alienation. Barth’s career as an academic theologian began at the point of his departure from his theological home in German Protestant Liberalism, a tradition deeply indebted to the Romantic theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. This exile from his academic and ecclesial home is the primary subtext for Barth’s work in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, a text suffused with language of alienation, estrangement, and otherness.

Barth’s Epistle to the Romans is marked by a radical apophaticism through which Barth attempts to describe the transcendent God of Scripture against the immanent God of Barth’s liberal Protestant theological teachers. As such, Barth’s early “krisis” theology manifests his sense of alienation from the German

21 For an account of Barth’s biography and his experiences of home loss from early childhood to adult years, see Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). Barth did not personally or directly witness the terrors of the holocaust which some date to between 1941-1945, for Barth was deported from Germany in 1935.
theologians whose influence was felt strongly across the global Protestant church and whom Barth had once considered mentors and friends before they signed their support of the Kaiser’s war campaign in Europe. The *Epistle to the Romans* is a fundamentally iconoclastic text. It attempts to shatter the idol of a god who proved to be too weak to confront the powers and principalities of the age and who instead could be coopted to do the brutal work of empire-building. From beginning to end, the *Epistle to the Romans* expresses a sense of the absence or the hiddenness of God. For Barth, God’s transcendence implied a divine resistance to all human efforts to craft a god in human likeness.

Our journey toward understanding home with Barth does not begin with positive experiences of God as home, but rather with a sense of homelessness and alienation—indeed, with a vision of the abyss which sinful humanity inhabits. Throughout the *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth uses the image of home in order to express our fundamental alienation from God, thus joining together the crisis of God’s unknowability with the crisis of humanity’s homesickness. This section argues that Barth’s account of the noetic effects of the fall, particularly as articulated in his *Epistle to the Romans*, renders it impossible for humans to know concretely and truly the meaning of home either as a created good or as an
eschatological reality, thereby destabilizing both eschatological and creational frames as starting points for thinking about home.

1.2.1 The Unknowability of God our Home

For Barth, the unknowability of God represents an epistemological crisis affecting all human knowledge. The Gospel both reveals and is the solution to this problem: as the self-disclosure of God, it not only grants true knowledge of God, but also reveals the futility of human attempts to know God apart from God’s self-revelation. This is not only due to the infinite gap between Creator and creature but is also the result of the profound noetic effects of the Fall. Attempts to know God apart from revelation tend to render false images of God, projections of the human self that replace God with the human as supreme ruler and lord over the cosmos.22

Without knowledge of God, Barth notes that all reality loses its ultimate reference point, the Absolute against which each particular has meaning. Unable

22 This is why one of Barth’s favorite philosophers is the German Ludwig Feuerbach, who argued that God is a projection of the best version of humanity that we can imagine. Barth fundamentally agreed with Feuerbach that the only God which Protestant liberal theology could muster was a human being.
to know this ineffable and holy God, Barth describes humans as disoriented wanderers in the cosmos, unable to make sense of where we come from and where we are going.

Fugitive is the soul in this world, and soulless is the world when men do not find themselves within the sphere of the knowledge of the unknown God, when they avoid the true God in whom they and the world must lose themselves in order that both may find themselves again. This is the Cause of the Night in which we are wandering.\(^\text{23}\)

According to Barth, without God we are not only far from home but in a constant state of fugitivity. Our very attempts to find home entail running away from the One in whom alone we can find rest. Similarly, to this fugitive soul the world is itself soulless, mere matter, dirt without life, meaning, and purpose. Humanity’s condition in the world of sin is not merely like that of a people who have taken a wrong turn; rather, the human condition after the Fall is like being-adrift-at-sea in an endless and starless night, incapable of returning home and without knowledge of where a safe harbor might lie.\(^\text{24}\) Barth thus connects the Fall with


\(^{24}\) I’m reading Barth here through an Augustinian lens. In *Beata Vita*, Augustine describes the human condition as being adrift at sea and in the darkness of ignorance. Philosophy can help illumine one’s way to the shore it is ultimately only the Christian faith which makes one capable of getting to the shore and dwelling richly in the truth. See Augustine and Boniface Ramsey,
the same sense of existential homelessness that penetrates all human reality which Nietzsche describes. The painful reality of our sinful and foolish condition is that humankind has strayed so far from God, our “true home,” that we have made ourselves quite at home in the strange world of sin and exile, which we crafted for ourselves.25

1.2.2 The Dialectic of Home and Exile

The Epistle to the Romans is not only Barth’s first academic theological treatise, but the point of departure for the dialectical theology central to Barth’s dogmatic project.26 Barth inherits the dialectic at the heart of the Epistle to the Romans from Martin Luther, who identified it as the dialectic between Deus Absconditus and Deus Revelatus. Rearticulated by Barth, at the heart of the gospel is the revelation that “We know that God is he whom we do not know.”27 The

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25 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 49.
26 The dialectic of home that Barth develops in the Epistle to the Romans comes to full christological maturity in Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation. For this reading of Barth’s theological method as consistently dialectical throughout his career see Bruce L. McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936 (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1995).
27 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 78.
paradox of God’s revealed unknowability lies at the root of the dialectic of home which Barth begins to develop in the *Epistle to the Romans*. Barth observes that “when we rebel, we are in rebellion not against what is foreign to us but against that which is most intimately ours, not against what is removed from us but against that which lies at our hands. Our memory of God accompanies us always as problem and as warning. He is the hidden abyss; but He is also the hidden home at the beginning and end of all our journeyings.”

For Barth, God is the true home which we are always forgetting and running away from. God is foreign to us precisely in God’s infinite proximity to us. God is the hidden abyss which darkens our past and future precisely in that God is the ever-present memory of the home we come from and toward which we are always headed. Indeed, God is our “distant home,” the source of our being and the end of all our ways and works, even as God is that source and end which we cannot reach and from which we are actively alienating ourselves.

Many cultures have attached transcendent meaning to the relationship between a people and their homeland. Mythic narratives about a people’s origin provide more than a divine or transcendent claim on the land. They also provide

28 Ibid., 46.
a sense of purpose to a people: the preservation of the family, tribe, or nation, the protection and cultivation of home. The notion of the home (whether the locus is the family, tribe, a national territory, or even a religious tradition) takes the shape of an ultimate reality which give absolute shape to our lives.\textsuperscript{29} Heidegger understood this and so did the leaders of the Third Reich. That is why there was such a concerted effort by Nazis to retrieve and teach pagan mythology and Germanic folktales as integral to their project of \textit{Heimkehr}, the homecoming of the Aryan race in Germanic lands. However, in light of the connection that Barth establishes between knowledge of God and knowledge of home, the limitations which Barth applies to knowledge of the “true God” also become the limitations of the knowledge of the “true home.” As Barth avers, “wherever the qualitative distinction between men and the final Omega is overlooked or misunderstood, that fetishism is bound to appear in which God is experienced in…the half-spiritual, half-material creations, exhibitions, and representation of [God’s]...

\textsuperscript{29} There are both ancient and modern versions of these stories of origin. For instance, in the context of the Americas one can find narratives of origin of the aboriginal peoples of the land, such as the legend of Mama Ocllo and Manco Capac, the children of \textit{Inti}, the Sun God, emerging from Lake Titicaca to establish the Incan dynasty which would settle all across the Tahuantinsuyo; but one can also find modern stories such as that of Manifest Destiny, a popular cultural narrative of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century which justified and fueled the westward expansion of the US Government on the grounds of progress and civilization.
creative ability—Family, Nation, State, Church, Fatherland.” Our attempts to make a home for ourselves in the world are never innocent, nor are they to be reduced to humanity acting in ‘natural’ or ‘ordinary’ ways. When we make idols out of our homelands, then instead of being sources of life, rest, belonging, and memory, the cultivation and protection of our home becomes the occasion for death, unrest, exclusion, and trauma.

The unknowability of God implies a crisis for all our earthly ways of claiming and making homes, and to our tendency to misjudge and ascribe to these the ultimate significance which rightly can only belong to God, who alone is Alpha and Omega. As Barth notes, religious attempts to discern and worship God while pointing toward the seed of faith placed in us by God can, in the end, only be idolatrous, for they are aimed not at true God but a god who can be known and, therefore, a no-god. Humanity has been created to strive for and long for God as the one who is our very home, yet apart from God’s self-revelation, our best attempts to come home will never come to fruition. Barth does not depart from the Christian tradition in proclaiming that, indeed, God is

30 Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 51.
31 God alone appoints the nations and rules over them such that these can never become self-referential entities, but always find their ultimate significance in God.
our true and ultimate home. However, Barth also wards off any Christian triumphalism whereby Christians can claim that they alone know the meaning of home. The only God that Christians can know in this age is the unknown God, and therefore the only home that Christians can know in this age is the home that lies beyond time and this world as it is now.

However, the unknowability of God is also a form of grace, for the very absence of God produces in humans a desire and a need for God. This desire and need can be expressed as the angst of a sense of homelessness in the world, that sense of restlessness which Augustine speaks to in the Confessions which accompanies us all throughout life. For Augustine as for Barth, this restlessness, this perennial homelessness is a form of grace.32

Throughout history, nations and peoples seeking a sense of peace and rest have sought to make a home for themselves in the world precisely through the displacement of those considered threats or strangers. The scars of genocide and

32 In Göttingen Dogmatics Barth asks “who and what is the man to whom Christian preaching is and should be addressed” and his response is that Christian preaching is addressed to those who are “alone, away from God in a far country.” Barth goes on to say in view of this that it is to “pilgrim man” who is “not at home in the houses in and between which he comes and goes” that the Gospel is addressed. Karl Barth, The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 123; https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C5056243.
many trails of tears lie at the foundations of many civilizations. As a result, the displaced often desperately run away from their homes to arrive at a safer shore. This journey provides no guarantees that the rest they seek will materialize, and more often than not, a sense of home always remains on the horizon for those forced to flee from their native homes. Meanwhile, although the modern age is characterized by radical technological improvements that make our dwelling places safer, more restful, and significantly more entertaining, this past century has also been characterized by massive displacements of peoples and a pervasive sense of unease, unrest, and rootlessness even among the wealthier and more privileged in western societies. In their way, each of these “experiences of home” reveals that the longing for home is real and that what we have here and now is not quite the home we truly desire. It is from this place of suffering, from this open wound, that God’s work of transformation and our ultimate homecoming to God begins.

Faced with the insurmountable tensions between peoples and their competing claims to home, Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans* destabilizes all claims on home by rendering them all contingent on the effects of the Fall. The Barth of Romans seems to be saying that “home,” whatever it is, is not possible in this world at this time. No one knows or fully understands what it is to be at home here and now. Moreover, attempts to absolutize claims to home in the world are fundamentally idolatrous.

For Barth, it is the God revealed in Jesus Christ who must give the word “home” its proper context and meaning, thereby giving a reference point to our earthly experiences and attempts at being at home. However, we are separated from God and continually seeking for home in our self-willed exile. It is only in Christ, who reveals God to us, that we discover a sense of the meaning and purpose of home, and even then, Christians have no monopoly on the meaning of home, for knowledge of God and home is a gift which the Spirit gives to whom the Spirit wills. As such, any earthly institution seeking to establish a way of being home in the world must necessarily come under the judgment of the cross. This includes the institutions of the nation and the family, and especially so when modified by the adjective “Christian.”
There is a sense in which this apophaticism becomes a foundation for all of Barth’s theology. Barth’s evacuation of all content from the word “home” begins the work of dismantling the binary between migrants’ and citizens’ claims for home. On the other hand, this is only one aspect of the dialectic of home: the condition of homelessness and alienation within which humanity finds itself after the Fall and God’s judgment on all attempts to establish a home in this kind of world. This constitutes Barth’s initial response to the problem of homelessness endemic to Modernity. Barth’s account of God’s “Yes” to the creature in her creation, a Yes that is to be fulfilled and actualized in Jesus Christ, the Yes that is the promise of an eternal home with God, this constructive response to Modernity requires that we shift toward Barth’s more mature theology.

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34 For the more mature Barth, as we shall see, God is God’s own place and time, that which Scripture designates as eternity or infinity. Before the Fall, we somehow participated in that, and our human longing for home is somehow linked to this prelapsarian reality. However, now, that time and place remain to us only a fleeting sensation, like an ephemeral dream, the memory of which vanishes the second we open our eyes from slumber. Indeed, the desire to recover this lost memory, this knowledge of a primal time, which is also an eternal future, is what for Barth constitutes the doomed attempts of religion and the religious imagination. In the end, religion can only reveal to us our failed attempts to recover a sense of home in the world through the language of the sacred or mystical, even and especially the state religion, the religion of blood and soil.
1.2.3 God’s Self-Revelation as Homecoming Event

When Barth published the first edition of The Epistle to the Romans, he was ministering to a small Reformed congregation in Safenwil, a post that lasted about 10 years before he left for Germany to begin his academic career at the University of Göttingen in 1921. The journey away from his liberal theological home turned out to also be a joyful journey of homecoming for Barth as he turned to the strange world of Scripture, where he discovered a new intellectual and spiritual home. During his time at Göttingen, Barth established himself as a dogmatic theologian deeply steeped in the biblical narrative and developed his doctrine of revelation, grounding it in an event of encounter with God that took on, not coincidentally, the shape of a homecoming.

Only God can know God, and therefore only God can communicate knowledge of the divine to that which is not God. This theological dictum lies at the heart of Barth’s work, and it forms a bridge between the apophatic theology of the Romans commentary and Barth’s Christocentric theology in the Church Dogmatics. The basic but profound conclusion to Barth’s Commentary on

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35 The dictum is of course by no means original to Barth, rather it can be found as a foundational block of much theology going back to the early church. Yet, in Barth’s context among the post-
Romans is that the human creature, as both finite and fallen, has no intrinsic capacity to know the infinite and holy Creator. And yet: God speaks to the creature. For Barth, revelation is a miracle on the order of the virgin birth or the resurrection. Both of the latter are logically impossible; similarly, for Barth, revelation is the miracle by which the eternal and unknown God transforms finite and fallen human words so that they bear true witness to the infinite and holy God. And since revelation is miraculous, knowledge of God is something which can never be achieved or possessed by the creature, but only be received with gratitude as a divine gift. The condition for the possibility of knowing God is God’s unconditional reaching out and God’s free and loving self-giving to the creature. Knowledge of God thus always implies an encounter, an active communion and fellowship between Creator and creature in the unconditional and free act of grace by which God wills to encounter the creature in her

Kantian scholars of Europe, Barth’s retrieval of this theologoumenon was a source for much debate.

36 “We have no organ or capacity for God.” Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, ed. Thomas F Torrance, trans. G. W Bromiley (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), CD I/1, 168. Subsequently, Church Dogmatics will be cited as CD volume/part, page.

37 CD I/2, 172-203.
lowliness and, willing to be joined to her, elevates her for participation in the
divine life.

This explains why Barth also speaks, at times, of revelation as a homecoming event.\textsuperscript{38} To repeat, the event of revelation, for Barth, is not merely the transferring of data about God, but always an encounter, a communion, in which the creature comes into the presence of God, but only because God has first entered into the sphere of the creature. The incarnation as the paradigmatic event of revelation makes the connection between revelation and homecoming all the more concrete. The Word of God concretely assumes a home in the world, in a particular family and nation, such that God is revealed to humanity in and through an event of homecoming. Although Barth does not precisely phrase it this way, his doctrine of revelation suggests that in order to understand what or where home is, we must begin by looking at the incarnation, whereby God has assumed a home in the world for us and for our salvation. It is in looking at

\textsuperscript{38} The implication of this theological epistemology, which Barth develops later in his works, is that knowledge of God is always already salvific for it entails a gracious movement of God toward the creature, a self-giving of God to the creature, a union which is always healing and life-giving to the creature.
Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension that we not only see God truly, but we also see our home truly.

We can see this connection between revelation and home developing early in Barth’s theological career, particularly in the lectures on the Gospel of John which he delivered at the University at Münster between 1925 and 1926. In the prologue to the Gospel of John, the Word of God is described as the light of the world (revelation) whose luminosity gives life (salvation), and this Word is described as coming home in the cosmos by assuming flesh (homecoming). Thus, the prologue to John’s gospel is a fertile theological soil for Barth to weave together the themes of revelation, salvation, and homecoming. In what follows I will explore the two senses in which the revelation of the Word in the world through Jesus Christ reveals ‘home’ to us. The first is that in coming into the world, the Word reveals the created cosmos as the chosen home of God. The

40 For an account of the significance of John’s Gospel in Barth’s Church Dogmatics see Keith Eyeons, “Retreat and Restructuring: Karl Barth’s Strategic Use of John’s Gospel in the Church Dogmatics” (Downing College, 2009), https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1810/226814/Keith%20Eyeons%20-%20Barth%20and%20John.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
second is that in coming into the world, the Word reveals God as the condition for the possibility of humanity’s homecoming.

1.2.3.1 The Word Comes Home to Us

In 1925, while teaching in Münster, Barth delivered a set of lectures on the theological interpretation of the Prologue to John’s Gospel. He argued for a particular translation of a famous passage found in John 1:11 which in the Greek reads, “εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.” Barth’s full translation of this passage reads thus, “Er kam in sein Heimwesen, und seine Leute nahmen ihn nicht auf/He came to his own home [heim] and his own people did not receive him.”41 Barth notes that many commentators, such as Martin Luther himself, translate “τὰ ἴδια” as “his own,” rather than “his own home” in order to emphasize the relationship between the Word and the cosmos as one of possession. In other words, translating “ta idia” as simply “his own” denotes how the created cosmos belong to God.42 However, Barth opts for a more

41Heimwesen is the Swiss and the German word for home. Barth’s use of the specifically Swiss word for home rather than the German word is not arbitrary but denotes the importance of one’s home culture and language him. Barth, Witness to the Word, 11.
42Ibid., 67.
concrete translation of the passage by translating “τὰ ἴδια” not as “his own” but as “his own home [heimwesen].”

For Barth, the text conveys more than the abstract sense in which the cosmos and its inhabitants are the possession of God. Rather, the text conveys a relationship of intimacy and familiarity, an at-homeness that exist between the Word and the world. Barth states, “The point of comparison is the original and intimate relationship in which he who comes from afar stands to this place and its inhabitants. He belongs to it and to them by right. They ought to receive him willingly and joyfully as one who is at home with them. For they themselves belong originally to him. They ought to see that they stand in an original relationship to him.” The Word of God “comes from afar” not in the sense of having travelled the great distance that, for example, separates the Sun and the Earth; instead, Barth is referencing the infinitely greater and uncrossable distance

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44 Barth, Witness to the Word, 68.
which exists between the Creator and creation, the distance between two planes of reality that run parallel.45

However, despite being separated by such a great distance, the Word should be no stranger or unknown figure in the cosmos. For, indeed, nothing and no one could be more intimately familiar and known to the creation than the Creator who is the Sustainer and Lord.46 The advent of the Word of God in the cosmos is, or at least should always be, a homecoming event. The revelation of the Word in the flesh should have been great cause for celebration in the cosmos and most of all in Israel, the kind of celebration which should ensue when a most beloved one who seemed to be far away returns home.47 The Word who is the light of world has come into the world which was made to receive it, to host it, to be the Word’s home.

45 Barth is careful here to maintain the distinction between Creator and Creation. The Word is not at home in the world in the same way that the creature is at home in the world. “The world is naturally not the home of the Logos, as though he came from it, and men are not his compatriots, as though he were one of them.” Ibid.
46 “He [The Word] came where he could and should come. His coming could not mean anything new or strange.” Ibid., 69.
47 “The Word belongs to the cosmos in the same way — we must stress the element of comparison — as one who has resided abroad for a long time belongs to his homeland and is eo ipso at home there when he returns.” Ibid.
However, establishing the Word’s rightful at-homeness in the cosmos serves paradoxically to throw into stark relief the “absurdity” of humanity’s rejection of the Word. Thus, Barth writes, “Although the Logos came where he truly belonged, even if as one apart, according to [Jn 1:3] v. 3 and [Jn 1:10] v. 10, those who were there, his own people, did not receive him, as though his claim were not natural, legitimate, factual, and self-evident.”48 Here we are met again with the self-contradiction of sin, for although “the Word is no alien/stranger in the world [Das Wort ist der Welt nicht fremd],” yet the Word is not recognized among His compatriots, not esteemed by His people, and the Word’s homecoming, rather than becoming a celebration of life, instead becomes a cause for lament.49 This is the absurd reality which the gospels portray: Jesus, the eternal Word through whom all things are made, came into the world, and yet those who belonged to his house and who were called to maintain his home did not receive him. The consequence of forsaking the vocation to be at home with God in the world, is, as we saw already in Romans, that humanity has rendered itself homeless and alienated from the one through whom they are at home and

48 Ibid.
49 Barth, “Johannes 1,1-18 Theologischer Verlag Zürich,” 883.
for whom they have a home in the cosmos. The question then becomes: can humanity really render itself homeless and thus render the Word of God an alien and stranger in the cosmos, to the point of exiling the maker from the very world which the Word created as its home?⁵⁰

The answer, for Barth, is that despite humanity’s inability to recognize the Word in His homecoming, in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word takes on the responsibility for creating ‘receivers’ of the Word. God does not wait for humanity to welcome God or to affirm God’s right to be at home in the world; instead, Christ takes upon himself the responsibility for fulfilling humanity’s vocation to participate in the Word’s homecoming. In so doing, Christ restores humanity’s vocation and the identity of Israelites as relatives [die Verwandten] or compatriots [die Landsleute] of God, those who are called to share a common home with the Creator.⁵¹

The Word enters into the sphere of humanity’s exile from Eden, and rather than begrudging this sorrowful state, God assumes and experiences every

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⁵⁰ “Can the world sustain its defiance? Is the Word spoken or witnessed to in vain? Can the world shut out the Word?” Barth, *Witness to the Word*, 70.
⁵¹ “But ta idia probably has the more concrete sense of “home” or “homeland,” and in this case hoi idioi are relatives or compatriots.” Ibid., 67–68.
aspect of humanity’s suffering, including the experience of being forsaken by God. In so doing, God makes out of the arid hill of Golgotha, out of the wilderness where Israel wanders, a way for humanity to find a home. Consequently, God makes strangers for whom God’s presence represents a threat into compatriots, a people with whom God shares a common home. This is in fact the good news of the gospel, that in Christ humanity has come home to God because in Christ “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Throughout these passages from Barth’s Lectures on John, we see that home is revealed primordially as an action of God, as a gift of grace which God gives to the creature despite the creature’s self-willed alienation from God. That is to say, the Word of the Father condescends to dwelling in the world of sinful

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52 Revelation is a homecoming event in which God gives Godself to the creature, not only sharing a common space with her, but being revealed therein as the God whose home is with the creature. However, humanity fails to recognize the Word of God as such, failing to see God as properly and fittingly at home in the world. Humanity fails to “receive the Word” and therefore to share a common home with God. As such God, in the eyes of sinful humanity, takes on the form of a stranger, of an alien, of an undesirable foreigner who threatens the safety of home. In view of this betrayal of humanity, the Word makes His own ‘hearers.’ That is to say the Word makes out of an unhearing people a people who hears and welcomes his message and out of an unwelcoming people a people who are compatriots and at home with God. Thus, the Word, Jesus Christ, makes himself responsible for his own homecoming in the World and among humankind.

53 In times past, the Word had come home to the cosmos which the Word created for a home, but in Christ, the Word has made a home in the world in the modality of the creature, being born to a particular family and in a particular land, becoming the citizen of a particular nation, “pleased as man, with men to dwell” according to the famous words of the Christmas hymn, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.”
humanity and in so doing elevates the world to be the home of God. In the incarnation of the Word, we witness “the one unique divine power which comes home to us.”\footnote{CD I/1, 150.} God makes a home in the world, and in a way, this grants dignity to all human efforts to be at home in the world. Nevertheless, the Word’s homecoming in creation also destabilizes and sets in crisis all of the stories which we tell ourselves about home while we remain in our self-imposed exile from God.

1.2.3.2 In The Word, Home Has Come to Us

In 1924, during his first post as a professor at the University in Göttingen, Barth made his initial attempts at a dogmatic theology in what became the *Gottingen Dogmatics*. In his remarks about the nature of the incarnation of the Son and its soteriological implications, he suggested a new perspective on the nature of the Word’s homecoming. Not only does the Word make a home among sinful and homeless humanity in Christ, but indeed, in Christ “home has come to us.” Speaking of the nature and essence of the Son, Barth writes, “He is to be regarded as the one who, although he is distinct from it [the world] and remains
distinct, upholds and preserves and directs it inwardly...as the revelation par
excellence in which there is not only a summons and invitation home, but home
comes to us, the kingdom of heaven is near, ἐνίκην, as the gospel expresses it
with both urgency and restraint.”55 Barth is renowned for his joining of two
categories often kept separate, the person of Christ and his work in proclaiming
the Kingdom of God. What’s interesting here is the way in which home relates to
both Christ’s person and work. If Scripture testifies, on the one hand, that home
is primarily what the Word is assuming through the incarnation, then on the
other hand, it also testifies that what the Word’s homecoming in the world
means for humanity is nothing other than a homecoming to us.

For Barth, while Christ is in the world, home is not something *out there*,
beyond the horizon of this life in some utopian vision; rather, while Christ is in
the world, home happens to us. In other words, what is revealed in the
incarnation is home as an event and not merely as a condition, feeling, or human
behavior. To be more precise, home is an *eschatological* event, which in the
incarnation bursts forth into time, into human history, in the same way that
wherever Christ enters the Kingdom of God has drawn near. The gospels thus do

not give us an objective and transparent pattern of homemaking which we can simply recapitulate throughout the ages. Rather, the gospels bear witness to an event of homecoming, breaking open the possibility that out of exile, out of homelessness, out of death, God can give the gift of homecoming. In that God is our home, home remains to us a mystery, something which the Spirit can enable us to experience and participate in by joining us to Christ.\textsuperscript{56} The homecoming of God in the world is an event to which we must constantly bear witness and participate in but which we can never fully comprehend in this age.

Finally, the notion that in Christ humanity’s true home has come to dwell with us in our homelessness raises another interesting avenue for understanding the meaning of home, and that is that God is God’s own home. We can discern this from Barth’s attestation that God inhabits God’s own sphere of existence “which is proper to Him and to Him alone.” In that God is revealed in Jesus Christ as coming home to creation and as humanity’s true home, we can postulate that home is not something new to God, contingent on the existence of the creature, but rather the reality and experience of home which the creature

\textsuperscript{56} Even the texts which bear witness to the homecoming of God can become an idol if we think that in reading and interpreting them we have finally captured the essence of home and therefore essence of God.
receives as a gift from God must have as its ground and source in God’s own
divine at-homeness. However, at this point we run up against the limits of
mystery. What human words could ever be used to describe the way in which
God is perfectly at home apart from the creature from all eternity, as the
condition for the possibility of the creature’s homecoming in God? God’s own
divine at-homeness is something which we must postulate in light of God’s self-
revelation as the homecoming Word in creation and as the true home of the
creature, yet like other concepts which Barth discusses, such as God’s spatiality
and God’s temporality, we can only speculate about these without knowing
exactly what it is we are saying when say these words.57

The fact that home, according to Barth, is an event which is revealed most
fully and truly in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ
means that our experiences and preconceived notions of home are both granted
dignity and destabilized. Herein lies the paradox of Scripture: if we look to
Scripture to find concretely how it is that Christ reveals home or how it is that
Christ brings us home to God, we will be faced with a constant crisis in our ways

57 For more on Barth’s account of God’s own spatiality see Elizabeth Callender Jarrell, “A
Theology of Spatiality: The Divine Perfection of Omnipresence in the Theology of Karl Barth”
of conceiving home. In his birth, Jesus of Nazareth was delivered not among family and in a safe cozy home but rather outside in a manger, in another city. Then, before Christ is able to even enter into fellowship with the people of his hometown, he and his family are forced to flee to Egypt, such that his first steps, his first words, and his earliest memories were not of his native land of Israel, but among a foreign people. Finally, in his ministry, the very place where Christ first experiences rejection is his own hometown.

However, not only was Jesus constantly forced to negotiate home while constantly having to flee for his life or suffering rejection by his own people, but Christ himself questions many of our ordinary categories for home. For example, he tells his disciples that while foxes have holes and birds have nests, the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. Ultimately, our expectations of what homecoming looks like are irreparably crushed under the weight of the cross. For Christ is not only executed and rejected by his own people but he is executed outside of the city gates, not allowed the decency of dying in his own land and among his loved ones. In birth and in death then, Christ affords us no clear picture or self-evident vision of ‘rootedness,’ ‘belonging,’ or ‘rest.’
Like Schleiermacher and Heidegger, Barth agrees that the human condition is a constant struggle against alienation and the existential despair of homelessness it produces. However, neither the abstract universal God of Schleiermacher nor Heidegger’s romantic embrace of historical narrative about a people’s right to the land open up the way home for Barth. The crucifixion of Christ at the hands of the Roman state as a means to preserve the Pax Romana, and his rejection from his own people and homeland thus present a crisis to both Schleiermacher’s religious vision of homecoming and Heidegger’s call for ethnic rootedness. Because Christ is God come home to us, our attempts to be at home in the world must now be reordered in consideration of the event of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Christ marks the way home in his concrete particularity, but he points the way home not just for himself or for his people, but for all humanity.

In all of this, Barth is already paving the road for what will be one of the highest moments of his more mature dogmatic work in the doctrine of reconciliation. Already Barth is showing us the paradox of God’s homecoming in creation and the great exchange that is to take place as humanity arrives home to the Father at the same moment that the Son of God, the Word of the Father,
enters into a world in which He is a stranger among those who have alienated
themselves from God. The implications of this are far-reaching for what it means
for the Christian to both seek a home in the world and to be considered in the
world as a stranger. Yet before we dive deeper into this drama revealed in Christ,
first we must understand with more precision how it is, according to Barth, that
the Bible describes humanity as lost, homeless, and alienated from God, that
humanity which Christ comes to. To claim humanity as homeless and alienated
presupposes that humanity was either once at home, a matter which Barth
alludes to in the Romans commentary, or that humanity was already, from its
very coming into existence, without a home. To better understand this, I turn to
Barth’s treatment of home in his work on the doctrine of creation, the third
volume of his Church Dogmatics.

1.3 A Creaturely Home

Going as far back as the early church, one finds examples of Christian
theologians adopting aspects of both the Platonic and Biblical accounts of the
condition of exile and homesickness that afflicts humanity. St. Augustine (354–430 CE), who never fully shook off the Platonic notion of the soul’s journey from material existence to life in the spirit, famously writes in the Confessions that “our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee [God].” For Augustine, believing that our restlessness is a feature of our separation from God in this life had deep political implications that play out in his later admonition to Christians exiled during the sack of Rome to not be dismayed, for “[Christians] awaiting a heavenly fatherland with true faith, know that they are pilgrims even in their own homes.” In the same vein, the medieval scholastic theologian and mystic Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) observes that “the man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land.” Yet, neither Augustine nor Hugh of St. Victor were the first to articulate a vision of the Christian life as taking place in exile. Indeed, in the circa 2nd century CE

58 Origen’s account of the creation and the fall is heavily influenced by Neoplatonist thought even while retaining important elements of the Biblical account of creation and the fall.
Epistle to Diognetus, the anonymous writer describes Christians as those for whom “every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land.”

Thus, a steady stream of Christian thinkers from as early as the second century through to the middle ages addressed the human longing for home by attributing it to humanity’s alienation from God. We are all children of the Edenic exile and as such, humanity’s homesickness is for Eden. Moreover, what makes Eden ‘our home’ is that the residents of Eden experience the unmitigated presence of God fructifying and blessing all things. To flourish east of Eden, or to be “perfect” in this life, thus necessitates remembering that “the entire world is as a foreign land.” Christians have thus historically been exhorted to embrace no home in this age of exile, but instead, to do as the writer of Hebrews says: to sojourn on earth with the hopeful expectation for arrival in heavenly country of God, an event that does not take place in this age but in the next. Home, thus, has historically been a central motif of Christian eschatological expectations and reflections.

Barth’s treatment of the motif of home in the third volume of the Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation, retrieves this premodern eschatological

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understanding, thus rejecting any possible utopianism that would claim an absolute sense of home in this age. However, Barth’s work on the first six days of creation also offers a rereading of the patristic sources. Barth’s reconceptualization of creation as the external basis of the covenant allows him to read the first six days of Genesis in light of the incarnation. That is to say, for Barth, the first six days of creation bear witness to God’s overcoming of the human condition of alienation and homelessness in the event of the fall. For Barth, our exile from Eden never rises above the level of that which is always already negated by the cross, the impossible possibility of human estrangement from God. Therefore, creation is our home even in the aftermath of Edenic exile, because at its core creation always already bears witness to God’s eschatological overcoming of alienation and homelessness in Jesus Christ. The problem then is not ontological but epistemological: creation is our home, but we envision homecoming and homemaking in ways that render ourselves and others alien and homeless.
1.3.1 Why Humus is a Habitable Place for Humans

Day 1

*And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.”* Gen. 1:6

Day 2

*And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.”* Gen. 1:9

Day 3

*Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.”* Gen. 1:11

On the second day of creation, according to Genesis 1:6, God separates the heavens into the highest heaven and the lower heaven. The highest heaven, Barth notes, is the place in creation from which God rules, and thus it is the site of God’s heavenly throne. As such, the highest heaven represents a threat to the lower parts of creation, much as the sun represents a threat to any living creature who is not properly protected from it. For Barth, this explains God’s creation of the raquia, a dome that separates the higher and lower heavens and serves as a
protective barrier between the upper sphere of creation, from where God orders and commands all the invisible powers and principalities, and the lower sphere where physical creatures will soon dwell. For Barth, this dome’s designation as a protective barrier for the lower sphere of creation begins an observable pattern throughout the entire creation narrative. Although each part of creation has its own dignity before the Creator, each part of the created order also aims at establishing a habitable and safe space for humans and the other living creatures.

With all its manifold presuppositions, consequences, and reservations, this whole [the entirety of the creation narrative until day sixth] has aimed and moved towards man as the true occupant of the house founded and prepared by God, the central creature on the ground and in space and in the midst of all others, the one being capable of and participating in light.  

This house’s purpose is to protect its inhabitants from external threats and serve as a space for communion, delight, and life between God and humans. It is the place prepared by God for the sabbath.

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On the third day of creation, Barth observes how God continues the work of preparing the cosmos for human habitation through the creation of dry ground, a living space for humans and other land-dwelling creature. A connection is thus established between the dry ground, or the earth, and the human, as each is mutually determined and prepared for the other. Barth also asserts that the house which God prepares for living creatures before they even exist is not merely a roof and walls, but indeed that this house is, from the beginning, furnished with a table filled with life-giving food. The creation of the vegetative kingdom is another sign of God’s Yes to the cosmos as a good house for creatures and, by implication, a No to the possibility of a cosmos that is uninhabitable. Days four, five, and six of creation parallel the first three days as God creates the creatures who are to dwell in the sky, on the sea, and upon the earth, including the first humans. However, I will now jump to Genesis 2, in which more details are given to us about the integral relationship between humanity and the earth which God has made as a home for the human creature.

64 CD III/1, 152.
65 CD III/1, 140-143.
66 CD III/1, 235.
Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Gen. 2:7

In Genesis 2:7-8, we witness a more detailed account of the creation of human beings than that offered in Genesis 1, and the emphasis of this account, for Barth, has to do with the integral relationship between Adam and ‘Adamah,’ the human and the fertile soil. Barth observes in these Scriptures a rejection of any gnostic understanding of human existence. Quite to the contrary, he states,

The earth itself bears from the very outset a human character. It belongs a parte potiori to man. It is inhabited by the human race and appointed for it. It is the home where he lives and dies. It is the place of his joy and sorrow, of his might and omnipotence, of his sin and worship—but all this in the course of the history with a view to which God has created the whole cosmos, both upper and lower.

Humanity does not merely dwell on the earth in a superficial way as if the earth was a mere container for human life and only in that sense a home. As Barth’s

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67 That Adam is taken and formed from the dust of the Adamah testifies in the first instance that he belongs to it. Adamah is the earth as cultivated land, the field. Adam thus means man of the earth or field or soil, the husbandman. In Latin, too, Homo derives from Humus. CD III/1, 244.

68 CD III/1, 150.

69 In chapter 5, I discuss how Norman Wirzba, an eco-theologian and philosopher, has in recent years rejected doctrines of creation that view the earth as a “container” for life-forms, arguing instead for a deep integral relationship between humans and the soil at a biological and spiritual
interpretation of Genesis 2 demonstrates, humanity’s relationship to the earth is more akin to how a child is at home in her mother’s womb before birth, or how an organ is at home in the human body. In this way, as those joined in a divinely engineered integral relationship, is the earth to be conceived as the rightful home for humanity.

Moreover, the bond which binds the human creature to the earth is not only metaphysical, but also covenantal. As Barth sees it, the formation of Adam from the ‘Adamah,’ the soil, prefigures the covenant which God is going to make through Noah with all flesh. The continuity of these events suggests that humanity was not arbitrarily formed out of the earth, but with divine purposefulness. Adam is, from the beginning, to be the covenantal representative of the earth. Indeed, as we have already noted, for Barth, the earth itself has a “human character.” Thus, not only ought we say that humans are bound to the

level. Barth here seems to be thinking along similar lines. See Norman Wirzba, This Sacred Life: Humanity’s Place in a Wounded World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

70 Had the Genesis creation narrative only included Genesis 1, the possibility might remain of thinking about the human apart from the earth and uniquely basing human existence on the image of God. However, Genesis 2 binds human existence to the earth as an aspect of God’s will for the human creature.
earth as to their source, but indeed the earth is bound to the human creature as to its divinely appointed mediator. Again, Barth writes,

That man is directed absolutely to set his hope on God alone has its solid and undeniable counterpart in the fact that he is completely dependent on the cosmos surrounding him. And it is an incontestable and unshakeable sign of the real grace of God addressed to him that the cosmos is a home prepared to satisfy his own and his fellow-creatures’ needs, to nourish him and them, and in this way, when existence has been given to them, to assure their continuation as the presupposition of the activity assigned to them.\textsuperscript{71}

Humanity’s primal relationship to the earth is thus not one of an owner to property or that of lord to servant, but rather more akin to covenant partners or even kinsman-redeemer.\textsuperscript{72} When Adam and Eve speak, they speak not only for themselves but also for their entire household, for the soil and all the living creatures that live therein.\textsuperscript{73} Barth also notes how humanity’s earthiness results in an asymmetrical relationship of dependence. The earth existed before humans were on it, and as such, it has a dignity before God that is apart from humanity. The same is to be said of the vegetative and animal kingdoms as well as for the soil and the microbiome. As those created last, humanity is both the crown jewel

\textsuperscript{71} CD III/1, 207.  
\textsuperscript{72} CD III/1, 246.  
\textsuperscript{73} CD III/1, 143.
of creation and given a type of dominion over all things, and yet this dominion must never be understood apart from humanity’s profound dependence upon the rest of creation. Indeed, Barth notes that humanity is the neediest of all the living creatures God has made. Humanity is to be served by that which humanity depends upon the most; this is the paradox of the sovereignty of human beings in creation. “When man finally appears at the centre of all the older circle of creation, and when it is shown in fact that everything must serve him, it must not be overlooked that man is thus revealed to be the most necessitous of all creatures. Will his sovereignty over plants and beasts consist in anything but the fact that he has more to be grateful for than these other earthly creatures, not only for his own existence, but for that of the whole earthly sphere which is the indispensable presupposition of his own?”

Having established humanity’s character as belonging to and being at home on the earth, Barth deals with a tension that naturally emerges from the New Testament, namely, “is not being ‘earthly’ or ‘of the earth’ a negative reality according to the New Testament?” In short, for Barth, being earthly is only a problem because of the Fall. The “discrediting and threatening of the earth” in the

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74 CD III/1, 143.
New Testament is only a “provisional stage,” a temporary period which will be overcome.\textsuperscript{75} Indeed, Barth writes, “The earth does not cease to belong to the Lord because it has so ‘earthly’ a mien, and is in fact so ‘earthly,’ and therefore moves with heaven toward a great dissolution…. When the earth quakes in the hour of Jesus’ death ( [Mt 27 52]), its sin is sealed and revealed, but also removed; its destruction is determined, but also averted.”\textsuperscript{76} God does not allow the house which God has prepared for humanity to be destroyed under the sign of humanity’s “No” or rejection to the Word. Instead, by taking up a home in creation, the Word is going to fulfill the covenant which God makes with all of creation, the covenant expressed to Noah in terms of God’s determination to never destroy all flesh.\textsuperscript{77}

Consequently, what characterizes the eschaton, for Barth, is not the loss of the earth, nor the decomposition of the human creature into constitutive parts of earthly flesh and God-breathed spirit. Such an eschatological vision would mean the precise opposite of salvation. The threat is one of returning to mere material existence, to the lump of clay as yet unformed and without a divinely given

\textsuperscript{75} CD III/1, 151.
\textsuperscript{76} CD III/1, 151-2.
\textsuperscript{77} CD III/1, 152.
purpose and end. Again, the threat which Barth calls the threat of materiality is more like the threat of chaos, a reversal of the process of creation, in the case of the human, an undoing of the bond between spirit and matter. The lump of clay was good in God’s eyes before it was formed into a human being and indeed God even found it a fitting and proper material upon which to breathe and form into a human partner. “Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Instead, Barth affirms that God’s “yes” to humanity in the incarnation means the return of humanity to the earth as to their long-lost home, the inheriting again of the earth as the gift of God of the Father.

\[78\] “That this threat was known also to the saga is evident from [Gen 3 19] Gen. 319, where God says to man that in the sweat of his face he must eat his bread ‘till thou return unto the ground, for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’ It is for this reason, because he is so much a citizen of the earth, that according to [Ps 119 19] Ps. 11919 man is a ‘stranger,’ i.e., a pilgrim making a short journey across it. He depends on God and in Him alone has he hope—the hope that this pilgrimage will not be meaningless, that God has not created or formed him from the dust in vain, but that God wills and will effect this life.” CD III/1, 245.

\[79\] “It is still the case—confirmed and revealed by what takes place in the death of Jesus—that the meek are called blessed as those who are to inherit the earth, the real earth ([Mt 5 5] Mt. 55).” CD III/1, 151.
1.3.2 From Habitable Place to Home

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Gen. 2:8

From Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:7 we see how the earth as the lower sphere of creation is determined and prepared by God to be humanity’s home in a way that is not merely biologically but primordially true, in light of God’s determination of humankind as covenant partner and representative of the earth. However, the earth remains only a potential home for humans until God plants Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is Eden which Barth is likely referencing in the Romans commentary, when he refers to the long-lost home which humanity has forgotten but which we constantly long for. But what makes Eden home?

1) Home Is An Earthly Place

Where is Eden? According to Barth, Eden is not a superterrestrial place. It is neither in heaven nor in an alternative reality. Instead, it is a definite place on
the earth which God has made. However, Barth describes Eden as “semi-concrete,” meaning that its precise geographical location is unidentifiable and inaccessible. It is fitting that Eden be a real earthly place because only in this way could it be a home for Adam. But Barth also argues that only a real earthly place could continue to live in humanity’s collective memory. Its reality, though obscured, is what distinguishes Eden from both utopia and myth. Eden is not Elysium; it is not a projection of the human idealized experience of home in a fallen world. If it were like Elysium, then Eden would be susceptible to replicating the very same wounds and idolatry that marks our current condition in our earthly homes. Indeed, throughout history utopian visions of homecoming often have served to justify conquest, genocide, and mass displacement.

Instead, Eden belongs in the same category as what Barth calls saga—a real event that is not demonstrable using the tools of modern historiography. As

80 *CD* III/1, 252.
81 “It was a real place on earth, distant from and unique in relation to all other earthly places, yet belonging to the same plane.” *CD* III/1, 253. Eden’s semi-concreteness as a geographical location is an aspect of it being a part of what Barth deems “pre-historical history” or saga. These are both events, places and people which are historical in that they are revelation of God’s actions in the cosmos and yet they are events which predate modern historiography. As such Barth writes, “Where is there even a hint of a region called Eden? And where is the one original reiver? Where are the other two branches of the river whose identification is still a matter of conjecture?—not to mention the fact that Euphrates and the Tigris do not originate from the same source.” *CD* III/1, 252.
such, humanity’s homesickness, or the condition which Freud, Heidegger, and many others have described as humanity’s existential homelessness, is not merely rooted in our psyche, nor is it metaphor for a sense of rootlessness. Homelessness is a concrete event in human history; it is the exile of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden and the repercussions of that event that last to this day. Homelessness is a condition only because it is fundamentally, ontically true of every human since Adam and Eve that we are not in the immediate presence of God. Humans are not merely existentially those who are in exile; rather, after the fall exile is our only concrete reality, even when we are seemingly at home.

2) Home Is a Bounded Place

Eden is neither a general place on earth nor a symbol for earth in general. Eden is a unique place with a particular location whose significance is tied to the fact that God appointed it as the place where Adam and Eve were to be at home with God and delight in the presence of God. Picking up on the language from Genesis 2:8, Barth writes, “It was there that God originally put man and gave
him rest when He had formed him. It was there that he could and should live. What he was there is his reality as the creature of God.”

The particularity of Eden as the concrete home of Adam and Eve means that we cannot simply say that Eden is humanity’s home. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Eden produces a universal meaning of home.

Barth observes that Eden is a place whose boundaries set it apart from other places in creation. Its uniqueness is not only with reference to God’s particular will and plan in planting it, but it also has a visible uniqueness, which the narrative manifests when it speaks of the fence that guards its entrance. Boundaries and distinctions are part of God’s creative work and their purpose is, as Barth makes evident, to protect and nourish human life. However, Eden’s boundaries do not prevent it from being connected to the rest of creation. Indeed,

82 CD III/1, 253.
83 “Man finds himself in a place appointed for this purpose by God and fenced off from the other earthly places.” CD III/1, 253.
84 Barth notes that even in the case of the fences that block humanity from returning to Eden, it is there ultimately to protect Adam and Eve’s offspring from eternal death. Having eaten of the tree of knowledge and thus alienated themselves from the Word of God, Barth notes that if Adam and Eve were to also eat from the tree of life, their disobedience would take on the character of an eternal decision and therefore of eternal death. Thus, their exile from the garden and their prohibition from eating the tree of life is understood by Barth as an act of mercy by God who determines that humanity’s disobedience is to result in merely a temporary condition of decay and death, and not an eternal one. See CD III/1, 255-256.
Eden is a source of life and blessing for the rest of creation. As Barth notes, “it is by that portion of the whole terrestrial space created by God that the totality has meaning and is to be understood. It is there that salvation, blessing, joy and peace originate for the whole earth because there is the first seat of the divinely willed life of the earth and plant and man, and a fulfillment already of His purpose in creation.” Eden is not only the prototypical or primal home of humanity, but it is a kind of conduit through which God renders all places of earth as habitable and potential homes for the nations.

Eden, like the temple on Mount Zion, is a chosen place, a place set apart from all others. Moreover, like the land and people of Israel, the election of Eden is tied to the fact that it is to be a conduit of God’s free and gracious love for all of creation.

There all the rivers of the earth have their common origin in a single river. With their division they bring fertility to the whole earth because first as the one river they watered Paradise and made it fruitful. They are the beams of that one light which shines in that unknown and inaccessible but earthly place. There would be no rivers without that one river. There would be no plants if they did not have in the trees of Eden their prototype and pattern. There would be no earth if it were not for that Garden in its place. There

85 More than that, it would seem that for Barth, Eden is “the” first place, as it is certainly the first place that we are presented with in the account of creation.

86CD III/1, 253.
would not be ‘here’ if there were no ‘there’; no ‘without’ if there were no ‘within.’

Thus, Eden is not only a prototype and the referent to every earthly place, but it also serves as a source through which every earthly place is blessed and enabled to serve as a home. As Barth observes, although Eden remains inaccessible to humans after the Fall, every plant in creation which is able to serve as food is watered by the rivers whose source is in Eden. Therefore, the election of Eden and of Adam and Eve is teleologically ordered toward the blessing of the nations and of the entire earth. Every earthly home that is a blessing has its source in the original blessing which God gives to Adam and Even in Eden, and that original blessing, despite sin’s curse, continues to surge through creation, finding its way back to God. To be home and enjoy its benefits is to participate in this circuit of blessing.

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87 Ibid.
88 “If man no longer lives in the Garden of Eden, if it has become inaccessible to him, he nevertheless lives by the streams and rivers of the earth; wherever there are fruit-bearing trees; wherever his labor on the land is not for nothing but serves the support of life; by the banks which in their final and supreme origin are those of the unknown and yet known, of the lost and yet real Paradise.” CD III/1, 255.
89 “It is made clear by this river with its four branches that the one thing which God is and wills and does in His sanctuary contains and promises and releases the many things which He will be and do outside His sanctuary on His whole Earth as such.” CD III/1, 256.
3) Home Is Being in the Presence of God

What makes Eden a source of blessing and a home for Adam and Eve is precisely that its center is the place of God’s unmediated presence.⁹⁰ Eden is, first of all, God’s garden, a special place in which God delights because it reflects God’s glory back to God. Eden holds this special meaning out of all the places in creation, and yet it also grants this gift to all of creation. Eden is not somewhere out there, but the center of God’s glory in creation. As such, Eden is able to be a conduit for God’s life-giving blessings throughout creation because it is not only a home for creatures but it is also a sanctuary, a holy dwelling place of the living God.⁹¹ Eden prefigures the temple in Jerusalem and the entire history of Israel as a history of the encounter between God and a particular people at particular place through which God wills to share the divine life with all of creation.⁹²

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⁹⁰ “But all the distinctive features of this place are obviously focused on the fact that it has itself a center, a Holiest of Holies.” CD III/1, 256.
⁹¹ “It is made clear by this river with its four branches that the one thing which God is and wills and does in His sanctuary contains and promises and releases the many things which He will be and do outside His sanctuary on His whole earth as such.” Ibid.
⁹² “In the Garden the tree of life occupies the position and fulfils the function which the tabernacle will later occupy in the camp of Israel in the desert, and the temple in Jerusalem in the land which it is promised and given, and the holies of holies in the tabernacle and the temple.” CD III/1, 282.
In Eden, Adam and Eve do not have to look for God’s presence, as there is no semblance of distance or separation between God and humans: there “God Himself, and therefore the source of his [man’s] life, was no problem to him, but present and near without his so much as having to stretch out his hand.” The next time that this would happen in the history of the world would be the incarnation. However, the incarnation as God’s homecoming, though conditioned externally by Eden, is nevertheless an event which precedes Eden and is Eden’s raison d’etre. Because in Christ, God chooses to share a common home with human flesh, God makes Eden. For Barth, Christ is the tree of life that is at the center of the Garden, from which the very river of life flows to all the earth. Christ is therefore the condition for the possibility of Eden being Adam and Eve’s home. And if Eden is both where God plants Adam and Eve as well as the place that is to serve as God’s sanctuary, Eden thus points toward God’s eternal decision to give Godself over to the creature and to share the divine life with her.94

93 CD III/1, 257.
94 CD III/, .282.
4) Home Is a Gracious Gift of the Creator

But it does not follow, from God’s election of Eden as the home of Adam and Eve, that Eden somehow naturally or historically belongs to them. Eden becomes Adam’s home only when God chooses to share this garden of delights with the first human creature. It might be argued that the condition for the possibility of Eden being Adam’s home is precisely that it must first be a place in which God dwells without the need of any human presence.\(^{95}\) Thus, Barth’s interpretation of Genesis 2 shows that in the history of creation, as in the history of salvation, having a concrete place to call home is an unconditional and yet contingent gift of grace. Home is not something which the human creature can earn or over which the creature has a natural right on the basis of either a pre-existing history or material relation. Home is the gift of dwelling together with God in God’s chosen place.

Like the Israelites entering into the Promised Land and inheriting “vineyards and groves that they did not plant,” in Genesis 2, Adam is planted in

\(^{95}\) We must remember that God creates almost the entirety of all things that exist before creating humankind and therefore each thing has a meaning and dignity with respect to God that is apart from its dignity with respect to humans.
a garden for which he did not toil. Barth observes that when God forms Adam out of the ground, “he [Adam] has no home; nor does he seek or find one. It is prepared for him, and in a special third act of his creation he is brought home.”

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that without being given a home in a particular place in the world, according to Barth, Adam’s creation remains incomplete. His transplantation into the garden of Eden takes on the form of an event rather than a process or status conferred. Homecoming is always an event. However, homecoming is not just any event. Adam’s homecoming in the garden of Eden marks the fullness of his creation, the finalization of God’s will for Adam. It is not within Adam’s natural capacity to be at home, and yet without the divine gift of home, Adam is not fully the kind of creature that God intends him to be.

Moreover, like all events in revealed history the giving of the first home to the first human is an event which has God as the primary actor. It is God who prepares the cosmos as a habitable place for creatures, it is God who then forms Adam out of the soil and prepares for him a house on dry land, and it is God

\[96\] “It is not just a striking coincidence that man was no more created or at home in the home assigned to him than Israel originated as a people in the land which it was allotted.” *CD* III/1, 268.
\[97\] *CD* III/1, 251.
who then transplants Adam from a soil outside of Eden into Paradise. God is the gardener, and Adam’s original status is more that of a plant than that of a co-gardener. Home is a gift prepared by God, sustained by God, and given to humanity by God.\textsuperscript{88}

Though there is much more than can be said about home as revealed in the biblical narrative, we must now turn to the other aspect of the dialectic by which God not only grants humanity a home in the world, but in which God also rejects the possibility of alienation and with it the wound of homelessness. As with the rest of Barth’s account of creation, the creation of the cosmos and the event of Adam and Eve’s transplantation and homecoming in Eden involve both a Yes and a No, a promise of blessing which generates a duty or vocation and a warning of a curse that is to follow if the humans rejects God’s blessing. However, God nevertheless transforms the curse which is rightfully gained by the rebellious creature into an opening for divine redemption.

\textsuperscript{88} CD III/1, 251.
1.3.3 The Impossible Possibility of Alienation

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Gen.1:1

Barth detects the presence of a dialectical Yes and No already on the very first day of creation, in the text’s mention of a "formless and empty" earth, interpreting this as Scripture’s narration of the possibility of a world without the Word of God. However, this possibility is rendered impossible, as God’s Word immediately brings order to the cosmos. For Barth, Scripture accounting for a "formless and empty" earth serves the purpose of telling us precisely what God rejects: the possibility of a world without God’s Word, a world empty of meaning and order.

Another way of thinking about God’s divine No to a world without the Word is that God does not will a world in which the Word of God is alien or unknown. Thus, Barth writes, “Once and for all the Word of God went out

99 Barth describes this is as "The monstrous world that is only past and can never be because God has already declared no to it. Barth describes such a world as an "impossible possibility," only imaginable as that which God rejects and renders impossible. CD III/1, 97.
against the rejected and vanished reality of an alien and hostile creature.”\(^{100}\) In bringing the world into existence, God simultaneously negates the possibility of there ever being a world where the Word is not present and holding all things together. Thus, God wills a world which is fundamentally bound to God through the Word, a world which by its mere existence, gives praise to God in reflecting the glory of its Creator. While humanity may experience or even describe a world in which the Word of God is absent or alien, nevertheless, for Barth that would be to experience a lie and to enter into contradiction, for in short such a world would be nothingness—which God declares it cannot be.\(^{101}\) However, the presence of this “alien factor” in the creation narrative mirrors the reality of the world as we know it, a world that is rebellious against the will of God and which

\(^{100}\) CD III/1,101.

\(^{101}\) “It is only behind God’s back that the sphere of chaos can assume this distinctive and self-contradictory character of reality. This can, of course, happen. The creature can be so foolish. It can become guilty of the inconceivable rebellion of looking past the Word of God and the ground and measure of its own reality, and therefore of looking back and returning to its essential past, to this \textit{Hayethah} and therefore to this state of chaos; loving what God hated in His love as the Creator, and thus drawing upon itself the wrath instead of the love of God the Creator.” CD III/1, 108-9.
therefore rejects the very condition for the possibility of its existence, the world of sin.\textsuperscript{102}

While the creation of a welcoming and life-giving house for the creature describes the positive aspect of God's work of creation, Barth also constantly reminds us of the negative aspect of creation. In each day of creation, God rejects the possibility of death, chaos, and alienation. All of these are rendered as "nothingness," as the impossible possibility only visible as the shadows cast by the light of God's grace toward the creature in electing her for life with God.\textsuperscript{103} Barth detects here God's rejection of the possibility of a homeless human creature, a human creature that is bare-life, unprotected, and utterly vulnerable to the elemental forces of the cosmos. God's creative Word is a decisive No to this kind of reality, to this kind of world, and this kind of non-life. This Yes and No of

\textsuperscript{102} "there is opposition and resistance to God's world-dominion. There is in world-occurrence an element, indeed an entire sinister system of elements, which is not comprehended by God's providence...There is amongst the objects of God's providence an alien factor." \textit{CD III/3}, 289.

\textsuperscript{103} "It is in the mighty act of salvation in Jesus Christ as attested by the Holy Scripture that the question of the reality, nature and function of this alien factor is seriously raised and seriously answered." \textit{CD III/3}, 366. The impossible possibility of alienation from God and homelessness can only be apprehended in light of God's decisive overcoming of these in Christ. Alienation and homelessness have not substance in and of themselves but can only point to God's triumph over them.
the Creator will be equally apparent in Barth's account of Genesis 2 and the foreshadowing of a covenant.¹⁰⁴

Why put a second tree in the garden? It is not only the tree of life at the center of the garden which serves as a distinguishing marker of Eden, but also the other tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. While the tree of life is nothing less than the sacrament of God’s presence at the center of the garden, pointing to the Creator’s affirmation, accompaniment and provision for creation, the tree of knowledge instead points to that which God rejects, passes over, and excises from creation. It is the subject of the first utterance of a divine No in a form of a “Thou shalt Not.” Yet even this No is a form of grace. In this now lies the mystery of God’s dealing with sin, with the alien factor in creation, with nothingness; in the No of the Creator is always a hidden Yes to the Creator, so that Yes always precedes and follows the No. In this case, the No imminent in

¹⁰⁴ The Yes and No of Genesis chapter 1 prefigures the Yes of grace and the No implied in the law. It is the Yes of God which gives every tree in the Garden of Eden as delightful fruit to be eaten by Adam and Eve, and the No found in God’s command to not eat from the tree of knowledge. It is the Yes of the blessings promised to Israel if Israel is faithful to the Lord and the No implied in the curses which will befall Israel if Israel forsakes the Lord. Ultimately, the Yes and No of the Creator is the same Yes of God in Christ to humanity and to all of creation, and the No of God to humanity’s self-alienation and to the decay and death of the flesh.
the Tree of knowledge is a No to the possibility of a creature that chooses to disobey, to act against and without her Maker.

When Adam and Eve choose non-freedom and death rather than life through their rebellion and disobedience to God, they incur God’s No. That is to say, Adam and Eve act in the world that cannot exist, the world which God has already, in planting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, declared impossible. Barth makes an interesting point here: the alienation that is the result of sin, exile, and the wound of homelessness is paradoxically God’s response to human sin and self-alienation. It is God who exiles Adam and Eve from the home which God had prepared and assigned for them. It is God who enacts the curses. However, exile and death veil a grace from the creator. For if Adam and Eve were to eat from the tree of life, having already sinned and rebelled against their maker, their alienation from God would take on an eternal character: it would go, as it were, all the way down. The serpent’s words thus turn out to be right, in a way. Eating from the fruit of the tree of knowledge brings about alienation from God, which is ultimately worse than death. It is uncreation, a return to the chaos unto which God had already declared No. Death and exile is what God’s sovereign will determines for Adam and Eve; these are not the direct
side effects of eating the prohibited fruit. But insofar as they are due punishments for their sins, these turn out to be forms of grace. For out of the wounds of death and exile, God would bring eternal life and homecoming.

Therefore, Barth’s account of creation presents us with an important distinction between our delusion in attempting to be home in the world where we are estranged from God’s presence, and the ontic status of the world which is truly God’s house and made to be a common home for the Creator and creatures. Though history makes it difficult to see it in this light, the world is in fact, by God’s grace, humanity’s good home. For as Barth writes, “that His creative Word can be forgotten and despised by man in the world created by Him—with all the consequences which this must bring—cannot prevent Him from remaining bound to this world by His Word. That chaos can also become present and future cannot alter the fact that it is essentially the past, the possibility negated and rejected by God.”\[105\]

I have thus far argued that Barth’s theology of home has both an apophatic and a cataphatic character. On the one hand, Barth’s notion that home is revealed in Christ represents an epistemological crisis to attempts to view

\[105\] CD III/1, 110.
homecoming through the lens of culture or the human spirit. On the other hand, Barth’s Christocentric doctrine of creation suggests that humans are made for the goodness of home and as a part of God’s created home. This tension was not only intellectual abstraction. As I aim to show in this next section, for Barth it was a lived tension.

1.3.4 The Created Order, Nationhood, and Home

Barth’s deportation from Germany in 1935 resulted in an unexpected return journey to his hometown of Basel, Switzerland. Barth would spend the rest of his academic career teaching at the university of Basel, a testament to his love for his hometown given that he likely could have held a prestigious post anywhere in the world. Indeed, Barth’s first experience of leaving home came when he was about four years old, and his father moved the family from Basel to Bern. Growing up in Bern, Barth not only longed to return to Basel, but recounts a feeling of apathy and alienation toward the people of Bern, in particular when being mocked for his odd Basel accent.\footnote{Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 17.} Eberhard Busch describes how for
Barth trips to his grandmother’s house in Basel felt more like pilgrimages than summer vacations.\textsuperscript{107} Despite moving at age four, Barth would always claim his provenance from Basel, remembering with love the traditions and culture of his hometown. It is perhaps this great love for his native home that led Barth to nuance his heavy-handed rejection of nationalism with attention to cultural and national identity as sites of discipleship in the Christian life.\textsuperscript{108}

There is a lively tension within Barth’s writings regarding the proper appreciation and love for one’s homeland. On the one hand, I have argued that for Barth, as for many in the Christian tradition, the Christian cannot be too attached to her earthly home and to her people’s visions being at home in the world. Whatever the status conferred on the Christian by the regime under which she lives, whether citizen or alien, she must always remember that her real home and citizenship lies in the city of God. However, there also evidently remains a place in the Christian life for accepting and acting upon one’s earthly

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{108} Barth’s experience of alienation from his beloved Basel when he only moved to a neighboring city in the same nation demonstrates something unique about how Switzerland’s socio-cultural and political organization. Namely, Switzerland is organized into twenty-six Cantons or states which constitute a confederacy, each canton retaining a very independent civic and political culture. As we shall see, this way of organizing the nation as a in institution that maintains peace and order across ethno-cultural differences would have a deep impact in Barth’s politics.
citizenship. Despite his awareness of the dangers of nationalism Barth does not offer us a reading of nationhood that renders life an unending form of exile, as many of the detractors of nationalism do.\footnote{For example, Levinas’ philosophy also responds to the dangers of nationalism, but he does so in part by naturalizing a sense of exile and alienation within which an ethic of hospitality is pre-eminent. See Eubanks and Gauthier, “The Politics of the Homeless Spirit: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling and Hospitality.”} This is in part because, as I have already shown in Barth’s doctrine of creation, alienation is that which God rejects in the very act of Creation. Instead, the Creator desires to give to creation the gift of belonging, of being at home in creation. I now want to engage Barth’s theo-political reflections on nationhood and the Christian life as an outworking of his theology of home.

Barth situates his discussion of nationhood and nationalism in the fourth volume of his doctrine of creation. This location of this topic bespeaks how many of Barth’s contemporaries viewed nations as part of God’s work as creator. The 18th century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) argued that the \textit{völk} (a German word that loosely translates to people, nation, or ethnos) is more than the sum of its individual members; rather \textit{das Volk} is an organic whole, a united cohesive entity with a shared character and with concrete limits
and boundaries. For Herder, the common language, religion, culture, and geographical location of a people or nation are all aspects of this organic whole and together they manifest the ‘spirit of the nation,’ or what Herder called the nationalgeist or volksgeist. For Herder, the spirit of a people or nation was something given to a people by the Creator, thereby granting each nation an absolute ontological necessity.\textsuperscript{110} Threats to a nation’s spirit, threats in other words to the preservation and transmission of a people’s common language, territory, culture, and religion, are transgressions against the very laws of nature and against God’s will. It is not hard to see the profound influence of Herder on Heidegger’s understanding of culture and national identity. For both Herder and Heidegger, the preservation and transmission of a German culture, language, and tradition are central to the cultivation of a flourishing life. In other words, with being a nation comes the responsibility of preserving and championing one’s national identity.

Herder’s notion of the distinctive spirit of a nation/people/ethnos has had a complex history of reception in the 19th and 20th centuries. The most famous

case of Herder’s national ideology gone wrong is that of the oppressive ethno-
nationalist Nazi regime in Germany. The Nazis used Herder’s ideas of the spirit 
of a nation to justify the elimination of what they deemed were ‘alien threats’ to 
the German people. For Hitler and the Nazis, the primary threat to German 
Aryan national identity came from all those whom the dominant culture deemed 
as not part of the ‘national whole,’ chiefly, all German Jews and their “Jewish” 
culture. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, at times the processes of 
consolidation of nation-states across Europe took on a similar character as ethnic 
groups vied with each other over claims to the land and to the right to self-rule. 
Nevertheless, paradoxically, Herder’s notion of the nation is also visible in the 
idea that nations have a “right to exist” as a ground for humanitarian effort to 
counteract the threat of genocide and exile. For instance, the formation of the 
state of Israel was viewed as a necessary and moral act in that Jewish 
people/nation have a right to exist and that right was threatened by not having a 
state and territory of its own. Having lived through both world wars and the 
establishment of the state of Israel, Barth saw the fruits of nationalism, and while 
he strongly opposed nationalism and in particular the essentializing of national
identity prompted by Herder’s ideology, Barth nevertheless gives us a nuanced view of the important of national identity.

In her book *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Carys Moseley notes that Barth rejects any ontological, creational, eschatological, or pneumatological grounding of nationhood.\(^{111}\) For Barth, the absence of any account of mentions of nations in Genesis until after Noah and the flood is evidence that nations are not a part of God’s created order but rather postlapsarian human constructs.\(^{112}\) However, Barth does not deny that belonging to a nation or people has a role to play in the Christian life. Though human constructs, one’s nation or people conforms to a sphere of human activity within which the Christian can be receptive to God’s call to discipleship.\(^{113}\) Thus Barth writes,

> As the command of the holy God sees and meets a man and calls him to obedience, there is a sanctification of this man and therefore of his particular geographical determination, of his outlook, background and origin in accordance with home and country and people. This is not rejected. It is all taken up and included. There thus belongs to the essential character of his obedience not only his own language but his own connexion with this or that longitude

\(^{112}\) Ibid., 189–90.
\(^{113}\) \textit{CD} III/4, 292.
and latitude, landscape and climate, and his commitment to this or that form of life.\textsuperscript{114}

Barth reformulates national and ethnic identity so that they are not essential or absolute ontological categories but rather sites of redemptive encounter with God’s Word, Jesus Christ. Following Barth’s line of thinking, one could argue that creation is our home, and our nations/peoples are the contexts in which we are called to bear witness to God’s rejection of alienation and to the Creator’s gift of belonging. As evidence of this, Barth rejects the idea that there is a mutual exclusivity between our calling to belong to the Church as an inherently transnational community and our responsibilities to our national or ethnic groups. Thus, in his \textit{Letter to American Christians}, Barth remarks that “The Christian, therefore, can very well be, as a matter of principle, a loyal citizen of a National State \textit{and} a loyal member (for instance: you a good American and I a good Swiss) \textit{and} a loyal member of the universal Church.”\textsuperscript{115}

Nevertheless, the vocation to be a good member of one’s nation must always be understood in light of Barth’s warning that the Christian “must will to

\textsuperscript{114} CD III/4, 292.
speak his own language rightly. What is meant by rightly he will not, of course, learn from any abstract idea of blood and soil, from any *nomos* [Volksnomos] supposedly lurking in the minds of his people and his own mind, from any independent theology and ethics of place, home and motherland invented by sentimental or wicked fools.”\textsuperscript{116} We must learn from Christ and only from Christ how to live as reconciled and redeemed creatures, and at the same time this learning takes place in the context and within the sphere of the responsibilities that constitute our earthly homes—family, land, culture, people, etc.

Barth’s warning that we are not to develop a natural theology from our national identities entails not a rejection of our national identities but rather an embrace of the limitations of a people to any transcendent claims about its right to exist, and perhaps in particular its right to a particular land. In a radical rejection of the possibility of an ethno-nationalist state, Barth writes, “To-day, of course, there is no people—not even in Asia and Africa, let alone in Europe and America—which can boast that its present members derive from the same families or clans and therefore constitute a unity of blood and race.”\textsuperscript{117} For Barth

\textsuperscript{116} CD III/4, 329.
\textsuperscript{117} CD III/4, 294.
the historical contingency of nations renders impossible the ethno-nationalist project. As Mosley notes, for Barth this implies not the “removal” of national borders which would deny the particularity and historical concreteness of nation, but it does imply the “overcoming” of national barriers. Indeed, for Barth, our political vocation is not to preserve or establish the nation through the elimination of any and all foreign threats or through militarized borders, but rather what God ordains is that we work to preserve and establish a “just state.” This is never allied to a single people or ethnos, but rather it is always the facilitator and reconciler between nations and peoples and their contestations over land. The just state is the multinational state.

Indeed, for Barth being a “good Swiss” entailed in a fundamental way ensuring that Switzerland remained a just state and did not collapse into the ethno-nationalist delusion that the German people had fallen prey to under Nazi leadership. Throughout his career, Barth championed Switzerland as a “parable of the kingdom of God” in that the Swiss state did not govern in such a way as to guard the self-interest of some imagined Swiss völk, but rather governed in such way as to establish and protect the common rights and individual liberties of the

\[118\] CD III/4, 290.
various peoples that called Switzerland home.\textsuperscript{119} That is to say, the Swiss state made possible the common life, the peaceful unity, and even made space for the reconciliation of various peoples and lands, cultures and religions, amid their historical conflicts and asymmetries of power.\textsuperscript{120} For Barth it was evident that God does not ordain the consolidation of nation-states. However, God does ordain the existence of the just state, the state whose governance corresponds to God’s kingdom of reconciliation. Indeed, nationalism is the corruption of the just state. Nationalism is the idolatry produced by the allure of a state by the economic and political self-interest of a people, a temptation that denies the states’ ordination to preserve the peace between the nations. Thus, Barth writes, “a totally national state which serves only nationalist interest…would thereby ipso facto cease to be a state.”\textsuperscript{121}


In sum, according to Barth, the possibility of a world alienated from God is precisely that which God, in God’s unconditional faithfulness, continuously rejects and overcomes in God’s work as Creator. This is revealed throughout the history of Israel as well as in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Thus, we see again how, for Barth, the creation narrative prefigures Israel's history as the history of God's eternal Yes toward the creature and God’s No to the creature's self-alienation, a history that Jesus Christ ultimately fulfills. The history of civilizations and peoples fighting each other over claims to home exhibits the shadow of home, that reality which God has overcome and declared as nothingness. Humanity does not have to try to be at home; we are not aimless wanderers trying to discover home. Home is the Creator's gift of grace that always lies before us. We might discover this gift of grace in our nations, our families, and even in our cultural traditions, but we ought not confuse these and the homemaking projects they develop with the simple truth

122 CD III/1, 107.
123 “He [God] will naturally take seriously the alienation from His Word of which man has become guilty and by which He has compromised the whole divinely created cosmos.” CD III/1, 110.
124 CD III/1, 277.
revealed in Christ and Israel that to be a creature is to always already be at home
in God.

The dialectical Yes and No of God’s work as Creator accompanies Barth
in his work on the doctrine of reconciliation. There, the Creator’s Yes becomes
the Yes of the Son of God in coming home into the sphere of humanity’s self-
alienation from God in order to heal the wounds of exile. Ultimately, the dialectic
of homecoming and alienation is overcome in and through the person and work
of Christ. However, this is no Hegelian dialectic which imagines home and
alienation as co-existing in some kind of synthesis. The Barthian dialectic is
grounded in Christ’s assuming of the responsibility for humanity’s No to the
Creator such that the threat of alienation and homelessness is taken up into the
very life of God. In other words, in Christ, humanity’s homelessness is
simultaneously revealed and overcome in the homecoming God. Christ does not
assume a house-cosmos that is polished, beautiful, and perfect. Christ assumes a
house-cosmos that is decaying, crumbling, and succumbing to death. Christ
assumes a house whose inhabitants have become estranged and alienated from
the householder and therefore also from each other. It is fitting that the Word
who made this house and its inhabitants, and who prepared a table of fellowship
for them, should be the same Word who takes on the responsibility for its restoration.

1.4 Reconciliation and the Son’s Homecoming in the Land of Exile

As Barth shows throughout the Doctrine of Creation, the primary image of homemaking in the Bible describes God’s establishing and furnishing of particular place in the cosmos fit for the habitation of human beings, in relation to other creatures and in preparation for communion with God. As such, a sense of home is synonymous with a flourishing human life. However, while having a sense of home is a fundamental condition for human flourishing, the human desire for home can also become oriented toward evil ends. Such malformation became evident in the German Nationalist Socialist Party’s reliance upon home-rhetoric to justify displacing and killing Jews and occupying neighboring countries. For example, the most popular film in Germany during the 1940s, which received the rare title of “film of the nation,” was Heimkher or Homecoming. It became an important piece of Nazi propaganda to justify the German occupation of Poland. Indeed, the famous slogan “Heim ins Reich,” “Back Home to the Reich,” has resulted in the German word Heimat—the closest translation of
which is home or homeland—carrying a dangerous and even fearsome connotation among many Germans even to this day.\textsuperscript{125}

Barth himself experienced displacement and exile during the Reich. Between 1921 and 1935, Barth would spend his time living and working on German soil, with approximately five-year stints at the Universities of Göttingen, Münster, and Bonn. In 1935, four years before Hitler’s German forces invaded Poland, Barth refused to sign an oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler, which resulted in his family’s deportation from Germany. Barth’s theology and his views on home would forever be marked by his opposition to the German Nationalist Socialist party and in particular with the frightening ease with which he witnessed the German Evangelical Church find itself at home in the Reich. One wonders, when reading that “[Christ] is the first and supreme Guest and Stranger who found no room in the inn and still cannot find any,” if Barth, who wrote that line in 1967, was thinking too of the millions of Jews who during the Holocaust attempted to

\textsuperscript{125} During the Holocaust, millions of Jews were systematically and forcefully removed from their homes as part of a Nazi campaign to make villages, cities, and regions that were Judenfrei, “free of Jews.” For the Nazis, uprooting the millions of Jews who had lived on German soil for multiple generations was the condition for the possibility of the homecoming of the ‘true’ German people. Today, many nationalist and right-wing groups in Germany continue to rely on the slogan of “Heimat” to represent their political and social interests.
find refuge in various European nations and even in the United States, but often
did not find room in the inn.  

Barth’s experience of Nazi “home” rhetoric, however, did not prevent
“home” from being a recurrent motif throughout Barth’s writing. Indeed, so
important is the notion of home for Barth that it shows up as a key image in two
of the most famous sections of the Doctrine of Reconciliation: Der Weg Des Sohnes
Gottes in die Fremde, "The Way of the Son of God into the Alien/the Foreign/the
Far Country” in §59, and Die Heimkehr des Meschensohnes, "The Homecoming of
the Son of Man" in §64. I argue in this final section that Barth’s strategic use of
home in these two sections of the doctrine of reconciliation reveals a dialectic in
which home is always viewed through the optics of exile, belonging through
rejection, and citizenship through alienation.

As I have briefly mentioned, traditional Christian home-talk, or talk of
one’s "Patria" or "homeland," focuses on the biblical motif of the Heavenly City of
God or the New Jerusalem. For theologians ranging from St. Augustine to
Thomas Aquinas and even to John Calvin, a Christian grammar of home is

126 CD IV/2, 743.
fundamentally eschatological. For these authors, God alone grants that perfect and eternal rest, that sense of belonging and rootedness, and that experience of arrival and fulfillment we so often associate with home. In sum, the desire for home is ultimately a desire for the creature’s eschatological fellowship in the Triune God.

However, in Barth’s Dogmatics, christology rather than eschatology serves as the primary doctrinal location for home. While it might seem that Barth merely uses the grammar of home to describe God’s work of reconciliation, such an interpretation betrays a fundamental principle of Barth’s theological exegesis. For Barth, it is always the concrete life of Christ which gives content and meaning to the words and concepts of Scripture. Thus, while the notion that

127 Augustine’s famed notion of God as our ultimate and true rest alludes to images found in the Letter to the Hebrews, wherein the author tells us that the Hebrew Patriarchs’ desire for homecoming in the promised land pointed to our eschatological homecoming in God and our entry into eternal rest (Hebrews 4:9-11; 11:16). For Thomas Aquinas, all creaturely movement and activity is caught up in a mystical rhythm of procession and return to and from God. Barth resonates with this Thomistic notion when he observes that “God is the home at the beginning and end of all our journeys.” John Calvin describes the Christian life as a holy pilgrimage to the City of God and this as some have argued is rooted in his own experience as an exile from his hometown in Noyon, France. For pilgrimage in Calvin’s theology see Cornelis van der Kooi’s essay, “Life as Pilgrimage: The eschatology of John Calvin” in H. van den Belt, ed., Restoration Through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited, Studies in Reformed Theology, V. 23 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 185–98.

128 An example of this can be found in Barth’s 1925 Munster Lecture on the Gospel of John where Barth notes that it is Christ who defines and gives meaning to the “Logos” and not the Greek notion of Logos which defines and gives meaning to the person and work of Christ. See Mary
home is a mode of participation in the Triune God is ontologically true, Barth helps us see that Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension provide concrete meaning to our desire and struggle for home. In other words, home is revealed in Christ. I now turn to Barth’s constructive christology in paragraphs 59 and 64 of the Dogmatics to show how Barth thinks of home through the person of Christ and how this constructive christology reveals a dialectic of home.

### 1.4.1 Home as the Work of Reconciliation

In continuity with his earlier work, Barth’s exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation decenters the human by making the doctrine’s central question not “how are humans reconciled?” but rather, “who is the God that reconciles?”

Directly addressing the latter question, Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation unfolds

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129 There is a sense in which, for Barth, the true meaning of home is lost to humanity in the event of the fall and our alienation from God. In the *Romans Commentary*, Barth writes, “Our memory of God accompanies us always as problem and as warning. He is the hidden abyss; but He is also the hidden home at the beginning and end of all our journeyings.” Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 46.

130 Nevertheless, Barth answers both questions at once by arguing that Jesus Christ is both the saving God and the human restored and reconciled by God’s saving grace. Moreover, the reason for humanity’s salvation, the mode by which God saves, and the end toward which God saves, for Barth, all center around the person of Jesus Christ.
like an extended reflection on the meaning of Jesus’s given name of Emmanuel, “God With Us.” In noting that the entire doctrine of reconciliation is summed up in these three words, Barth is already showing what will become the key emphases of his interpretation.

First, “God With Us” is a statement about God’s actions in and for the world. It speaks of God’s eternal electing decision to not be God without creaturely flesh. However, Barth is forceful in arguing that “God With Us” should not be viewed as a natural state but rather as an event that takes place in Jesus Christ, in his being and its manifestation in his ministry and works in time. Second, “God With Us” is a statement that bridges the Old and New Testaments, thus grounding the doctrine of reconciliation in the concrete history of God’s covenant with Israel and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus Christ is revealed as the fulfillment of this covenantal promise as well as the presupposition of God’s covenant with Israel. Third, “God With Us” implies a “We With God.” As John Webster notes, ”Barth was as keen as any Christian existentialist to retain a vivid sense of the gospel as a human reality. However, he

\[131\] Because ‘God with Us’ is a visible event in the life of Christ, we can know that God with Us is an event also in the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
did so, not by supplementing theological talk of God with philosophical or experiential talk of humanity, but by drawing attention once again to the gospel which already includes us.”132 “We With God” is therefore not a second act from humans that somehow adds human agency to God’s gracious act in choosing to be “God With Us.” “We With God” is the affirmation of the reality of “God With Us,” it is “God With Us” viewed from below rather than from above. Again, a reality takes place not in us primarily but in Jesus Christ, and is appropriated to us only in that the Spirit joins us to Christ.

In sum, “God With Us” manifests God’s eternal decision to condescend to the creature by entering into the sphere of the creature’s reality, thereby elevating the creature to participation in the life of the Triune God. Reconciliation is the fulfillment in Christ of God’s will to enter into fellowship with the creature. Since the creature has rebelled against her Maker and chosen that which does not give her life, reconciliation also entails, secondarily, an undoing of sin and overcoming the creature's alienation from her Creator. In that it is the fulfillment

of God’s desire to dwell with humans, it can be and is the overcoming of humanity’s self-alienation from God. 133

Although Barth does not explicitly say this, from his exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation it is clear that a better way to describe reconciliation is as the fulfillment in Christ of God’s eternal election to dwell with creaturely flesh and to share a common home with human beings. Barth’s reliance on the covenant as the concrete ground of reconciliation, as well as his use of the motifs of exile and homecoming in CD IV/1 and IV/2, suggest that "God With Us" has the more concrete meaning of God "at home with us" and "we at home with God." It is not an abstract statement about the existential or metaphorical state of humanity, but an event revealed in the covenantal history between the electing God and elected Israel. Particularly, “God With Us” is a concrete promise made to Israel through Abraham, and the tabernacle and temple serve as the sign and the seal of this promise. When Israel prays at the temple in Jerusalem, when they make a pilgrimage to the holy city, indeed when they take up the words of the

133 The church’s primary vocation, indeed, the entire content of her proclamation, is to bear witness to this event in the history of Israel; for although the incarnation occurred in the middle of history, for Barth, the event of Jesus Christ, God With Us, is the presupposition, the core, and the telos of God’s work as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer.
psalmist in delighting and rejoicing in the house of God, Israel is rehearsing and performing the promise of God, proclaiming to the gentile world that ”God is at home with Us.”

A concrete example of this can be witnessed in prophetic words that rearticulate the covenant promises of God while still bearing the open wounds of the destruction of the temple and the exile of the people from the land. Ezekiel 37:27 is one of Barth’s preferred texts for describing the covenant as the context for the doctrine of reconciliation. Pointedly, when the prophet Ezekiel reiterates the covenantal promises, he does not look forward to a restored covenantal relationship by simply reminding Israel of God’s promise, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Much more concretely, for Ezekiel, the restoration of God’s relationship with Israel is unimaginable without the restoration of the temple as God’s concrete presence in the land and among the people. Thus, the words “I will be their God and they shall be my people” are preceded by the promise that “My dwelling place [lit. tabernacle] shall be with them” (Ez. 37:27). The exile represented not only the breaking of a relationship in the abstract but the physical alienation of Israel from God. For Ezekiel, while Israel cannot journey to the house of God or turn in prayer to Jerusalem to delight in the courts
of God, the covenant between God and Israel remains broken, and Israel's homecoming remains pending.

Therefore, the reconciliation of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel, the enactment of God’s presence in creation as it once was in Eden, is a homecoming event. In the definite sense, reconciliation must be interpreted as the fulfillment of God’s tangible presence in the land among God’s people, God at home with God’s people Israel. Those who are chosen to share a "common history" with God, no doubt, also share a "common home" with God. As such, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the only fitting and possible fulfillment of God’s covenantal promises with Israel. For in Christ, God fulfills God’s promise to be at home in Israel while at the same time, in Christ, God makes Godself responsible for fulfilling Israel’s side of the covenant — accepting the gift of God’s presence, the gift of a home in the land. In sum, in Christ, God is at home with us and we are at home with God.

Having described how Jesus Christ, as “God With Us,” is the ground, content, and form of the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth goes on to expound on how exactly “God With Us,” — or better, as I have argued, “God at home with us” — is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Barth does this by
analyzing the doctrine of reconciliation through three christological lenses that bind together the three aspects of Christ’s being with Christ’s three offices.\textsuperscript{134} In order to further demonstrate how Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation as summed up in “God With Us,” implies God’s eternal election to be “God at home with us,” I will analyze Barth’s use of the images of the “Far Country” and “Homecoming.” Barth describes reconciliation 1) from above as a movement of the Son of God toward humanity, 2) from below as a movement of humanity toward God, and 3) simultaneously as these two movements take place in Christ and as the church is called to bear witness to Christ.

1.4.2 The Far Country as the Way Home

For Barth, God is truly “with us” in that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God journeys into the Far Country, into the society of those alienated from God. Barth thus writes "that Jesus Christ is very God is shown in His way into the Far Country in which He the Lord became a servant."\textsuperscript{135} This \textit{forma servi} is how God

\textsuperscript{134} “If in this sense and with this understanding we return to the being of Jesus Christ as we have briefly defined it, we find at once that there are three “christological” aspects in the narrower sense— aspects of His active person or His personal work which as such broaden into three perspectives for an understanding of the whole event of the atonement.” \textit{CD IV/1}, 128.

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{CD IV/1}, 157.
chose to reveal Godself, and therefore no other God can be known except the God whose glory is revealed in God’s humiliation. Moreover, what becoming a servant meant concretely for Barth is to be explained using an image from the Prodigal Son’s parable, the journey into a Far Country. Therefore, the way of exile, which leads the Son of God to the site of humanity’s self-alienation from God and the wound of homelessness which it inflicts, becomes the way of humanity’s homecoming in God.

For Barth, God’s glory is revealed in the freedom in which the Son of God, out of a deep love for humanity, wills to enter into the strange world of sin that humanity inhabits east of Eden. Barth describes this world of sin by using an image from the parable of Prodigal Son, the image of the Far Country. In the Lukan parable, the Far Country is a place of alienation, humiliation, and death. However, the Far Country also turns out to be where the prodigal son remembers his father’s house and thereby elects to repent and return home. Thus, while characterized by the misery and despair of homelessness, the Far Country is also simultaneously the site of redemption and homecoming.

\[136\] CD IV/1, 213-14.
Barth defines the Far Country as “the evil society of this being which is not God and against God.” On the one hand, the Far Country is characterized by the lowliness of its creaturely inhabitants. The distance that separates the Far Country from God is in the first place the same distance which separates the Creator from the creature. However, Eden is not in the Far Country. Eden is indeed a country of beings that are not God but also a country in which God dwells in perfect love and friendship with created flesh. Instead, the Far Country is a place of animosity toward God, the sphere of human rebellion against the Maker.

Indeed, the Far Country, in one way, is all that belongs to the creaturely plane which lies east of Eden. Thus, it is a country that is characterized by the finitude of its inhabitants and their constant rebellion. God is always a threatening stranger in the Far Country, and God’s glory is always necessarily veiled therein such that the inhabitants of the land cannot and will not recognize

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137 CD IV/1, 158.
138 “The way of the Son of God into the Far Country, i.e., into the lowliness of creaturely being, of being as man, into unity and solidarity with sinful and therefore perishing humanity.” CD IV/1, 211.
their Maker. Inhabitants of the Far Country are not only those alienated from their Creator, but they are afflicted with an inbred animosity toward God. To be in the Far Country is to exist in a constant state of alienation from God and to increasingly pursue and embrace this alienation.

Although Barth shows us that the Far Country is not Eden, his exposition of the gospels does suggest that the land of Israel not only exists within the Far Country but also that in a way, it is through the prism of Israel that we are to understand the meaning of the Far Country. Therefore, the Son of God’s journey into the Far Country is always necessarily a journey of atonement. The incarnation of Christ is the concrete homecoming of the Son of God into the land of Israel such that God’s journey of condescension into the Far Country bears a particular entry point in the land of Canaan. Barth writes, “The particularity of the man Jesus in proceeding from the one elect people of Israel, as the confirmation of its election, means decisively that the reconciliation of sinful and lost man has, above all, the character of a divine condescension, that it takes

139 “Thus that when in the presence and action of Jesus Christ in the world created by Him and characterised in malam partem by the sin of man He chooses to go into the Far Country, to conceal His form of lordship.” CD IV/1, 191.
place as God goes into the Far Country.” That the land of Israel is in the Far Country suggests the Far Country’s paradoxical nature: not only is it a land which is characterized by the lawlessness and rebellion of its inhabitants, but it is also a place of redemption. As the site of the creature’s wound of homelessness, where the memory of being at home with God haunts the people’s memory, the land of Israel will be the first to witness the homecoming of God.

Unlike the prodigal son, the offspring of Adam and Eve are incapable of repenting and finding their way back to the Father. Therefore, it was fitting that the Son of God assume flesh and enter into the sphere of humanity alienated from God, to make humanity’s condition his own and take responsibility for our homecoming. In going into the Far Country and taking on humanity’s condition in exile and homelessness, Christ is doing what Adam and Eve failed to do in the Garden of Eden, namely, to obey the Father’s command to be fellow creatures. The paradox of Christ is that it is precisely in the Son of God’s obedient going into the sphere of creaturely alienation from God, that the way to redemption and homecoming is opened up for Israel and the rest of creation.141

140 CD IV/1, 167.
141 As Barth notes, “the way of the Son of God into the Far Country is the way of obedience. This is (in re) the first and inner moment of the mystery of the deity of Christ.” CD IV/1, 192.
In Christ, we know that God does not abandon Israel and, therefore, all of creation to the death and decay of life far from God, of life, alienated from the divine presence and therefore alienated from the source of life itself. Instead, in Christ, God enters into the exile which defines human reality after the Fall, thereby taking our wounds of homelessness into God’s sphere. For Barth, the cross always stands at the horizon of the Far Country. Adam and Eve’s alienation from God always pointed to this cruciform end. Alienation leads to death. The wounds of homelessness are not superficial; they are mortal wounds because all alienation is rooted in our fundamental alienation from God, who is the source of life. Thus, the cross is the fitting end of every kind of alienation and of all the wounds of exile and homelessness. The atonement is the event in which God goes out toward dying alienated flesh in order that dying alienated flesh might come into God. In this way, the atonement by which Christ reconciles us to God fulfills what God had determined from the beginning of creation, that

142 “It was to His being in death that He had gone as the end of His way into the Far Country, in fulfilment of His obedience in our place, in His self-offering as the Judge who is judged and as the Priest who is sacrificed.” CD IV/1, 252.
143 “That is why the Lord became a servant, why the Son of God went into the Far Country in obedience to the Father. That is why He took His way among us as the Judge judged and the Priest sacrificed. As the One who went this way, He will be the end of all time.” CD IV/1, 348.
no creature should exist that is alienated from God’s providential care and divine presence. The Creator’s command is fulfilled at last on the cross where alienation is itself rendered nothingness and excised from God’s good created order.

Moreover, it is no coincidence that the end of alienation is announced in the land of Israel. In some ways, the entire Old Testament is the story of God’s descent to accompany humanity in their exile through a particular family and nation. God’s journey to the Far Country does not begin with Jesus Christ; rather, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this journey, its proper end. For though God exiles Adam and Eve from Eden, yet God goes with them into exile, providing for them and accompanying them and their offspring on their journey through the wilderness where the possibility of a return to chaos seems perennially before them. God’s willingness to journey with the people of Israel in their longing and search for a home is a constant theme throughout the Old Testament, from Abraham’s calling to the Babylonian exile. Reconciliation is thus intricately tied

144 God’s way into the Far Country is announced already throughout the Old Testament. “From what we hear of the people of Israel and its kings, he shows by his action that he is a transgressor of the commandment imposed on him with his election, an enemy of the will of God directed and revealed to him. The God of the Old Testament rules amongst His enemies. He is already on the way into the Far Country to the extent that it is an unfaithful people to whom He gives and maintains His faithfulness.” CD IV/1, 170.
to exile. In that the children of God could not return from exile, God their home comes to them, thereby exiling the possibility of alienation from the created order.  

Nevertheless, something special happens in Jesus Christ that had not occurred yet in the Old Testament. Not only does God encounter humans under the state of exile, but indeed, God becomes exiled, alienated from Godself in becoming fallen human flesh. Even as the Son of God assumes the human reality of alienation from God and therefore of exile and homelessness, even in the Far Country, the Son of God remains perfectly at home with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. This must be the case if the integrity of the divine nature of Christ is to be kept in accordance with Chalcedonian instruction. Yet, what distinguishes the God of Israel as different from all other gods, according to Barth, is that Israel’s God chooses to reveal God’s glory by assuming the journey of humanity into the Far Country. In Barth’s christological interpretation of the

145 “But how much more the work of God on the right hand, in which He does not abandon man even in his fall into the abyss, in which He does not cast him out of His hand, in which He does not annul and extinguish his being as His creature and covenant-partner, in which He remains to him a home even in the Far Country into which he has wandered, in which even in death.” CD IV/1, 541.
146 Moreover, for Barth, God does this without ever ceasing to be God. CD IV/2, 20.
147 CD IV/1, 158.
parable, God is not only the Father waiting for the prodigal son to return, but indeed, God is also the prodigal son in his journey toward exile and homelessness.

However, if one is not careful, Barth’s account of the way of the Son of God into the far country can look like a divine embrace of alienation and exile. Were that to be the case, we can imagine Christians as those who, in imitation of their Lord, ought to embrace a life of alienation, choosing to live as exiles in the world. However, the way of the Son into the Far Country is not an embrace of alienation, of homelessness, or exile. It is God’s embrace of the creature at the site of her utmost exile, in her self-alienation and even hostility against her Maker. Thus, the incarnation of the Word as the way of the Son of God into the far country is paradoxically God’s movement toward fellowship with the creature, toward dwelling with and for her. The Son’s journey into exile and alienation reveals the human creature at home with God.

Although in every way, Christ’s life looks like a life of alienation culminating in the ultimate form of exile which is the cross, yet each moment of

148 “Once and for all the Word of God went out against the rejected and vanished reality of an alien and hostile creature. CD III/1, 101.
the life of Christ simultaneously reveals the extent to which God will go to dwell with the creature. Thus, Barth asserts that in Christ, “there is not only a summons and invitation home, but home comes to us, the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Because the creature in her rebellion could not return to her home in God, God does not wait for the creature to return, but rather God brings home to the creature in a movement of unconditional grace. As in the parable of the prodigal son, the far country is thus not only the place of sinful self-alienation and exilic wandering, but it is also the site of repentance and homecoming. Barth’s constructive christology in the doctrine of reconciliation thus shows us that to find home, we need not look beyond the far country to some utopian vision of paradise or nostalgic memory of bygone times. Rather we ought to look for home in the life of the One who has come to dwell with us here in the far country in the middle of history, Jesus Christ, Incarnate Word made flesh.

For Barth, to affirm Christ’s divinity is to confess that in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and Joseph, we have to do with the actions and being of Israel’s God, the Creator of the cosmos.

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and Lord of the covenant. However, according to Barth, the creedal affirmation of Christ’s divinity is not an invitation to appropriate to Christ a set of abstract metaphysical claims about divine nature. As such, Barth sets out to define divinity according to Christ—that is, according to the concrete events to which the Scriptures testify concerning Christ’s life, death, and resurrection/ascension.

Barth concludes that God is not to be found in a triumphant homecoming, or in the centers of power among those who live comfortably in the land while others suffer the wounds of homelessness. Instead, God reveals Godself in the forma servi, which is to say, in the form of the alien, the stranger who does not belong and is rejected by the masses. God is revealed in one who bears the wounds of homelessness and alienation, one whose history is marked by exile. God is none other than the God who is with humans and for humans. There is no hidden God, for Barth, behind the God who freely and eternally moves toward humanity in perfect love.

In sum, God is truly at home with us in Jesus Christ in that, in Christ, the Son of God journeyed into the Far Country, which is the sphere of humanity’s alienation from God’s presence. In so doing, the Son assumes the wounds of exile.

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150 CD IV/1, 129.
and homelessness and makes himself responsible for our homecoming. Viewing
the atonement of Christ from above, we can see that God does not abandon
humanity to our self-alienation and our steady movement toward chaos. Instead,
the Son of God enters into exile with us, making our homecoming his
responsibility and taking our place in assuming the wounds of homelessness.

Therefore, God is not to be found in the form of triumphant homecoming but
rather in the form of a son who journeys into exile and homelessness. Having
analyzed the doctrine of reconciliation from the perspective of God’s movement
toward humanity in Jesus Christ, I now turn to the same doctrine, but as Barth
understands it from the perspective of humanity’s movement toward God in
Jesus Christ.

1.4.3 The Homecoming of the Royal Son of Man

For Barth, God is truly “with us” in Jesus Christ, in that in Christ, the Son
of Man, was elevated to the right hand of the Father to participate in the eternal
fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The reconciliation of humanity to
God is thus, in a very concrete sense, a homecoming event that takes place in the
person of Christ. In the previous section, we observed this homecoming event
from above, from the perspective of the Son of God’s journey into the site of the creature’s exile from God. Now I analyze the same event from below, from the perspective of the Son of Man, who ascends to the right hand of the Father and therefore to where the Son of Man truly belongs, to his home.

The exaltation, the rising to glory, of humankind is revealed in the homecoming of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, into fellowship with the Father. Exaltation is a homeward movement. For Barth, exaltation is “the movement of man from below to above, from the earth which is his own sphere, created god by God and darkened by himself, to heaven which is the most proper sphere of God, from man in his creaturely and fleshly essence...to peace with God His Creator, Judge and Lord.” Insofar as Jesus reveals the true essence and nature of humanity, we are shown that the goal of human life, the fullness in maturity, and the self-actualization of humanity is shown to be fellowship with God. However, what does this fellowship with God look like? It is not a static being but a being in motion. It is not a state but a journey. To Barth, it looks like the homecoming of the prodigal son.

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151 CD IV/2, 29.
Once again, Barth finds in the parable of the prodigal son the form of the atonement as a downward journey of condescension and an upward journey of exaltation. Interpreting the parable through a christological lens, Barth observes that “Jesus is the power of the son’s recollection of his father and home, and his father’s fatherliness and readiness to forgive.” 152 Although having assumed flesh that is estranged from God and suffering the marks of homelessness, Christ does what no other daughter or son of Adam and Eve could: he remembers his home at the right hand of the Father. In so doing, Jesus not only shows the way back to the Father but Jesus is the way back to the Father, his life concretely revealing in every moment what the journey home to the Father looks like. 153 Thus, Barth begins discussing the atonement as homecoming not with a discussion of the resurrection and ascension but with an extended reflection about the incarnation, for “It is in the incarnation of the eternal Word and Son of God that we have to do with the exaltation of our human essence in which the existence of this very

152 CD IV/2, 24.
153 “Yet again—and this cannot be denied—the way of Jesus Christ is primarily and properly the way to that home of man which is not lost but remains, not closed but open; the way to his fellowship with God… the way to the end of which He Himself has already come, so that this home of theirs is already visible and palpable to the men who still tread it.” CD IV/2, 24.
man takes place.” For although the resurrection and ascension reveal in a unique and distilled way the rising of human flesh to glory, insofar as every moment of the life of Jesus is a moment in which humanity is in perfect fellowship with God, every moment of the life of Jesus is a window into our homecoming with God.

In the life of Jesus, we learn not only that homecoming is an essential event in the "becoming" of the human being, but we also learn that to be home is to be in fellowship with God. Home is not a state of being; home is an event that takes place in Christ, through whom humanity enters into fellowship with God. Therefore, even as Israel and the whole of creation struggles and suffers with the wounds of homelessness rooted in our self-alienation from God, in Christ, humanity’s homecoming has already occurred. Because Jesus Christ, from all eternity, rules creation as the Royal Man who is seated at the right hand of the Father, we know that humanity is at home with God. Indeed, in Christ, Jewish flesh even now delights in the courts of the Father's house.

Therefore, home is to be found in Jesus Christ, as the Spirit joins us to his resurrected flesh. Jesus is the way back to the Father and thereby our way back

\[134 \text{CD IV/2, 30.}\]
home. Moreover, because home happens in Christ, home is an eternal event in the triune God’s life:

Because His [the Son’s] free mercy wills that He should, He can break through the bounds of the divine being and descend into the depths, into the Far Country, the world, and there become and be a completely different being—man; and that as man He can open the frontier, not to make man a second God, but as man, by Himself becoming and being man, to set him within this frontier, to bring him to His own home, to place him in and with Himself at the side of the Father. This is the work of the eternal Son, determined in God’s eternal decree and taking place in time, as the meaning and basis and power of the reconciliation of the world with God.¹⁵⁵

This is why Jesus’s homecoming, and within it our own homecoming, is described by Barth as a return journey. This is why Jesus can “remember” the Father’s house. For in Jesus, not just in the future or at the moment of ascension, but from all eternity, humanity is at home with God the Father. In the eternal Son, God has determined from all eternity to not be God without being at home with us, although this eternal decree takes place and is fulfilled in time. A possible contradiction might be at hand here. In his doctrine of creation, Barth told us that the fertile soil is humanity’s home. How then can God and the world both be our home? The answer is that for Barth, God’s election from all eternity

¹⁵⁵ CD IV/2, 44.
to not be God without being at home with the Jewish flesh of Christ is the presupposition, the very logic behind, underneath, and within the creation of the cosmos. The creation of the cosmos as a common home for humanity and God is an event always already contained in the election of God to be home with human flesh.

For Barth, homecoming concerns the healing of the creature's self-alienation from her Maker. The incarnation of the eternal word as Jewish flesh is an atoning event, for, in the incarnation, God goes out to humanity in alienation and exile in order that alienated and homeless human flesh might come back to God. As Barth writes, “The spoil of the divine mercy, the result of the act of atonement, is exalted man: new in the power of the divine exaltation; no longer far from God but near to Him, a man who even as such and precisely as such is a man as we are; the first-born of a new humanity; the second Adam who is still our elder brother and in whose exaltation our own has already taken place. His history is the Word of God addressed to us and to the whole world.”

The going out of God, the Son of God’s journey into the Far Country, has as its telos the coming of humanity into fellowship with God. The homecoming of humanity

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156 CD IV/2, 103.
has as its presupposition and condition the Son of God’s journey into the Far Country of exile. As Barth therefore notes, “He is the One who did not and does not will to be the One He is—the eternal Son—without also being the Son of Man; to be exalted without being lowly; to be at home without also being in the Far Country.”¹⁵⁷ Christ is the homecoming one as the exiled one, and precisely in that he is both humanity is enabled to be reconciled to God.

Barth affirms the Chalcedonian definition of Christ as true human by grounding it in the Scriptural account of Christ as revealing humanity in its movement toward God. For Barth, the exaltation of the Son of Man, who is now seated at the right hand of the Father, is precisely what reveals Christ as truly human. For the true essence of humanity is not as those who are alien to God, but as those who have been called by God to dwell with God in creation, thus becoming co-heirs in Christ of the earth as an eternal home. Therefore, even while we may experience our lives in a postlapsarian creation as a constant exile, as a constant being of homelessness, in Christ this is revealed as a false reality.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ CD IV/2, 47.
¹⁵⁸ CD IV/2, 483.
In the same way that Christ’s descent into exile and alienation reveals humanity’s prideful attempts at homecoming, which only alienate us further from God and each other, so the royal homecoming of Christ into the Father’s house reveals humanity’s slothful refusal to be joined to Christ in being at home with the Father. Homelessness in creation, whatever form it might take, is a fundamental contradiction, an inexplicable reality, an evil that amounts to nothingness, which God in Christ has declared from all eternity as false. Therefore claims to home in the world which render others homeless cannot but be examples of what Barth calls “the perverse love of chaos in which we let ourselves fall where we ought to stand and lift up ourselves…the perversion of our relationship to God and our fellows and ourselves and our temporality.”

Alienation is sin, the very sin which God has in Christ overcome in order to achieve our homecoming and reconciliation, not only with God but with each other and with all of creation. In the last section, which covers the third aspect of Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation, found in CD IV/3, I will briefly give an account

159 CD IV/2, 486.
of how the church is called to bear witness to Jesus Christ—“the stranger who is at home among us.”\footnote{160}

1.4.4 The Christological Dialectic of Alienation and Home

For Barth, the journey of the Son of God into the Far Country of alienation and exile and the homecoming of the Son of Man take place simultaneously in the person of Jesus Christ. As such, every moment of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection contains within it the upward movement of humanity into homecoming and the downward movement of God into exile. Moreover, for Barth, in that these two movements constitute the hypostatic union, they do not occur independently of each other but rather they mutually interpret each other:

It was God who went into the Far Country, and it is man who returns home. Both took place in the one Jesus Christ. It is not, therefore, a matter of two different and successive actions, but of a single action in which each of the two elements is related to the other and can be known and understood only in this relationship: the going out of God only as it aims at the coming in of man; the coming in of man only as the reach and outworking of the going out of God; and the whole in its original and proper form only as the being and history of the one Jesus Christ.\footnote{161}

\footnote{160} CD IV/3.1, 85.  
\footnote{161} CD IV/3.1, 20.
Consequently, the dialectic that lies at the heart of the gospel—the dialectic of Christ as the God-Man—is at the same time the dialectic of home and alienation, of homecoming and exile. For the fulfillment of humanity’s final homecoming with God is revealed in and through Christ’s journey into exile and alienation. Conversely, in Christ’s journey into humanity’s exile and alienation from God, from each other, and from all of creation, we witness God making a home with sinful and finite flesh and therefore our homecoming in God. In Christ, homecoming is to be seen through the optics of alienation and exile even as the wounds of alienation and exile become the very sites wherein God assumes a home with us.

Moreover, according to Barth, Christ encounters us in history in a way that destabilizes the very categories of stranger and neighbor, of alien and kin, and of near and distant neighbor. “The life of Jesus Christ,” he claims,

Even as the life of God and the life of His grace, is the life of...this stranger whom we cannot overlook or remove as such because as such He is at home among us and like us and with us, belonging as we do to our human situation and history. It is because it is the life of this alien who is so utterly at home among us and so fully belongs to us, of this near Neighbour even in all His otherness, that this life is called light, revelation and Word.\(^{162}\)

\(^{162}\) CD IV/3.1, 83.
If we put the accent on his divinity, then Christ is the Word of God at home among us, the Creator who made this cosmic house and made us to be God’s co-inhabitants in creation. To be a creature is therefore revealed as being the Word’s “fellow, associate, and neighbor.” Because the Word transcends time and space, the Word can assume flesh and become just like one of us, “belonging as we do to our human situation and history.” However, if we put the accent on his humanity, then Christ is the Lord of all creation whose throne is above every power and principality and therefore who “lives and will live this eternal life.” He is as such the “stranger and alien” whose humanity is the humanity of God. Again, Christ is the “near neighbor” who has met us in the Far Country. Because in his humanity he comes to us as a stranger, he was not accepted in his own home, and he was exiled to the cross. Because in his divinity he “so fully belongs to us,” in Him exile and alienation are undone and therefore through him, all humanity is made to be at home in the presence of God. And all of this occurs simultaneously without separation, confusion, or alteration in this one person who is always a stranger and yet who is also at home among us in his encounter with us.

163 CD IV/3.1, 83.
For Barth, God’s reconciling work reveals sin and its consequences, but it does so only by showing us that and how God has saved us from them. It is, therefore, grace all the way down. In terms of the question of home, Barth notes that in the encounter with Christ, “we become aware of the abyss above which we unsuspectingly moved. But at the same time, again in the human life of this human person, we now become aware of the fact that we are prevented and delivered from plunging into this abyss.”  

Christ reveals our homelessness as those who seek in sin to make a home in the abyss. The experience of homelessness, that void in the soul when we know we are far from home, is in the end not entirely subjective, for to be human after the Fall is to live in the Far Country and, therefore, on the precipice to the abyss. Nonetheless, in Christ, we become aware of this abyss only as that which God has rejected and from which God saved us.

164 CD IV/3.1, 85.
165 Our reconciliation to God and the homecoming which it gives way to “can sound alien only to the alien element in man, to man in his self-alienation. But for all that it is so unexpected, for all that it does not arise from within man but comes from without, from a great height and distance, it reaches and strikes the real man as a call from the Father’s house, from the home to which he belongs and which belongs to him, as a summons from his native place, as the gift of his freedom and the ascription of his right and claim to be there and not elsewhere, to be a resident in his own land and not a stranger abroad.” CD IV/3.1, 271.
However, if our homecoming has already been accomplished in Christ, if in him, humanity is at home with God, and the wounds of homelessness are being healed, why do we still experience the pernicious wounds of exile and homelessness in the world today? Barth’s response to this delay in our final homecoming is that “it is [God’s] good will, because it has as its aim the granting to and procuring for the creation reconciled to God in Him both time and space, not merely to see, but actively to share in the harvest which follows from the sowing of reconciliation.” That is to say, God wills for the creation and humanity, in particular, to not merely be the objects of God’s reconciling work, but to be participants in it, to be a witness of it, and therefore in witnessing to Christ to be activated and enabled for freedom. The reconciling Word of God is both the beginning Word setting the world into motion and the concluding Word, which brings all things to their proper end. However, it is also a Word that enables our words, which elevates our words to participate in God’s Word.

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166 The very same questions vexed Barth: “Why did He will for Himself first, and therewith for the creation reconciled in Him, to set this distance still be to overcome between the one day and the other? Why did He Himself will to be still a Pilgrim and Warrior, thus entailing that the world, the church, and ourselves should not be at peace at home but unsettled in an alien land, and therefore directed to look for and hasten unto “the coming of the day of God.” CD IV/3.1, 331.

167 CD IV/3.1, 331.
Thus, while it is true that for Christians, home remains an object of eschatological hope, this does not mean that Christ sends us on a journey through time and space toward our homecoming. Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension are not the precondition for our homecoming. Christ is not merely the means to our heavenly homecoming with God. God has already accomplished our homecoming in Christ. Therefore, a Christian grammar of home does not have to wrestle with a binary between embracing one’s earthly home or embracing our heavenly home with God, and it certainly cannot suffer the gnostic vision of salvation as an escape from creation into a disembodied heavenly home. A Christian grammar of home rather must reckon with the dialectic revealed in Christ, in which our homecoming is only made visible through the optics of a journey into exile.

An account of humanity’s eschatological homecoming in God must therefore be grounded in Christ’s concrete and fleshly existence. Our eschatological homecoming must therefore be grounded in the Word’s assumption of Israel’s history. It must be grounded in Christ’s life among a people under Roman occupation; it must be grounded in the holy family’s journey to find refuge in Egypt; it must be grounded in Christ’s interaction with
diasporic Jews returning home for the holidays and even those on their way to Emmaus. A Christian grammar of home takes its cue from Christ’s deep embeddedness in and love for the culture, wisdom, and history of the nation of Israel and also by his rejection from the same, even by those from his hometown.

1.5 Going Beyond Barth

For Barth, the church’s task is to be a witness to the world of Christ’s life, to find ways in which, in a plurality of contexts both temporal and spatial, the church can correspond her life to the life and being of Israel’s messiah. Thus, the revelation of humanity’s homecoming in Christ summons the church as the People of God to bear witness to a certain kind of life, a life of pilgrimage. Barth thus states in CD IV/3.2,

He Himself, God’s grace to the world in person, is the first and supreme Guest and Stranger who found no room in the inn and still cannot find any. How could the community be His community if it were present in any other way, if it had holes like the foxes or nests like the birds, if it had somewhere to lay its head (Mt. 8:20)? It must share with Him His weakness, which also consists in the fact that He has no such abiding place. Naturally it means weakness for it too, and indeed it means total weakness in face of the other elements in world-occurrence and the whole world of humanity around, that it has no such place, that it is nowhere at home on the earth, that it can only lodge and camp here and there as the pilgrim.
people of God, that at best it can only be permitted to stay but not granted any rights of settled citizenship.  

If the church is to witness to Christ, then it must follow Christ into the place of exile. The church must find herself dwelling in the site of the creature that is alienation and reeling from the wound of homelessness. Indeed, the church must herself take on the form of homelessness, the form of the alien, and the rejected stranger. Nevertheless, as is the case with Christ, the church is no vagabond or wanderer, for it knows that in Christ, the way to the Far Country is also the way home to God. The church is, therefore, a pilgrim in her journey into the Far Country of alienation.

Moreover, taking the form of a stranger in the world, the church becomes a prophetic sign against humanity, which has succumbed to the sin of sloth in its homeward journey and therefore chosen to settle in the abyss, away from God’s presence and alienated from her fellow creatures.

For is it really the case that the surrounding peoples in their dwellings, supported by constants of world-occurrence, are quite as much at home and secure and sheltered as might appear? The man who no longer lives at peace with God, his neighbour and himself, because he does not recognise or grasp the peace proffered to him, is one who does not have, but merely seeks and does not find, a true place of shelter and permanent home. Since the days of Cain,  

168 CD IV/3.2, 743.
he has been "a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth" ([Gen 4:12]
Gen. 412). Thus in the marginal existence of the Christian community, homelessness is surely brought to light and representatively revealed as the true situation of Cainite humanity.\textsuperscript{169}

Yet, in her homeless form, in her solidarity with flesh that is alienated and homeless, the church is called to proclaim the good news of humanity’s homecoming in God. Precisely in the site of homelessness and exile, the church does not proclaim despair but hope. She does not tell the poor and those on the margins to embrace their homelessness at the hands of “Cainite humanity.” To the contrary, the church affirms the calling of all humanity to be at home with God, and if so then also co-inheritors with Christ of the New Earth.\textsuperscript{170}

It must be the case that as the church becomes a witness to the crucified and risen Christ, the exiled and homecoming Lord, that she must look for the homecoming God in the places where humanity suffers most from the wounds of

\textsuperscript{169} CD IV/3.2, 745.
\textsuperscript{170} Barth notes that the church “does this by uncomplaining acceptance of its alien status and therefore of the total weakness of its visible existence. And in so doing, in virtue of its invisible nature, it may still act in such a way that even in its alien status it may typically hear and attest the Word of God, participate in the peace granted to Cainite humanity, and to that extent be the first of all peoples here and now to be genuinely at home and secure in world-occurrence because in the house of the Father, which by its existence it may attest as the true home which is waiting for other peoples too. Hence the strength secretly dwelling in it is to be understood as the strength of the dawning truth of the general human situation under the judgment and the grace of God.” CD IV/3.2, 745.
alienation and exile. The way home for the church is always through the cross and, therefore, always in the company of the crucified peoples. However, in witnessing to the one who was exiled and alienated, the church does not confess that we are without a home on the earth. The church proclaims the promises of God that the earth and all of its inhabitants belong to God and that the Father has given all nations to his Son, Jesus Christ, whose home is with the poor of the earth.

Barth’s interpretation of the vocation for the people of God to live as pilgrims in the world likely addresses his concerns with the way German Evangelical Church had grown so comfortably at home in the Reich. What might this vocation mean for us in a different context, today in the Americas? One way to interpret the church’s vocation in light of the dialectic of home revealed in Christ is to see it as a vocation of embodied and political participation with, for, and on behalf of those on the margins in their struggle to find a home in the world.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, for Barth, salvation is not an escape from creation, but God’s embrace of the creature even in her alienation and hostility to God. Moreover, Christ himself did not embrace alienation and
homelessness as a way of life, but Christ does join in solidarity with the homeless and alienated creature. I thus propose interpreting the church’s command to be a pilgrim as a call for the church in the Americas to make a preferential option for the displaced. That is, the church as the body of Christ is not called to embrace homelessness, but rather to embrace the homeless, the wanderer, and the exile as Christ did. The church in the Americas is called to enter into solidarity with those on the margins and make their condition and struggle for home the church’s own. The church’s vocation to be a pilgrim in the world is then to be fulfilled in her embodied and political participation with, for, and on behalf of those on the margins in their struggle to find a home in the world.

What does a preferential option for the displaced mean concretely in light of the global rise of nationalist groups, which is seemingly a response to the increasing number of displaced people worldwide? While the church has a vocation to make a preferential option for the displaced, it must be careful not to collapse concern for national identity and patriotism with domiratory and oppressive nationalistic movements. Throughout Latin American history, there have been nationalist movements that emerge not from the centers of power but the margins. For example, in Bolivia, agrarian movements that decry
neoliberalism’s excesses often identify as nationalist movements. Similarly, the Puerto Rican Nationalist party continues to fight for independence from the United States, citing an ongoing history of colonial abuses. The problem is not, as such, the love of one’s homeland, people, culture, but rather, as Latinx theologian Jacqueline Hidalgo observes, a history in which “dominant populations continually struggle to build home on the backs of others.”

Faced with this violent history, one in which the church has too often been complicit, the church will need to learn to listen and look for God’s redemptive homecoming, not in centers of power, but instead at the margins of society, where the displaced and the homeless mobilize everyday practices of faith and piety to cultivate a sense of home in the world.

Barth rejected a particular historical understanding of the nation, one that emerged among German Romantic philosophers in response to the enlightenment and its particular crisis of homelessness. This was an absolutizing vision of cultural nationalism wherein, though circumstances change all around them, the spirit of a people remains the same throughout history, its territorial

boundaries stable. Belonging to one’s people in this absolutizing vision is not dependent on God’s ongoing providential activity but is rather a fixed reality. This kind of nation, sure of its boundaries and core, views the land and bodies, the state, and religion as tools that it must use in its own self-preservation and extension. The nation/people become their own sense of meaning or purpose, which is then manifest in the world, rather than being a people that is always becoming and discerning its meaning and purpose in and through its external relationships with God, with other peoples, and with the rest of creation. As such, despite being a response to the enlightenment, this Romantic and romanticizing vision of home is in that sense an extension of the Enlightenment’s turn to the subject.

This sense of nationhood emerging from the 18th and 19th centuries is indeed inherently idolatrous and Barth was correct to reject it and moreover to re-center a Trinitarian and Christological account of identity that posits the inherent contingency of national identity and its responsibilities to both near neighbors (kin) and far neighbors (other peoples)—and perhaps here we could go beyond Barth and include also other-than-human neighbors. Barth teaches us, importantly, that the nation, far from being messianic, is a human reality that
exists in the fallen world, and which thereby needs to be reconciled and redeemed by God.

However, I have two important critiques to make of Barth’s understanding of the nation. First, while it is important to preserve a distinction between the nation and the state, in the modern world one cannot make any absolute separation between the two. The state’s politics are in many ways inseparable from cultural and thus transcendent questions of identity and purpose. The state is not a sphere of abstraction from all national identities and self-interest groups, such that it is able to function with the objectivity of a neutral third. There is slippage here in Barth’s own dogmatic objectivity, for his belief that Switzerland is a parable of the kingdom cannot simply be reduced to an analytic judgment about Switzerland as a counter-witness to the ethno-nationalist politics of the Third Reich. Barth’s theology and his politics were always already deeply influenced by his cultural enmeshment with not only with Switzerland but with Germany. This is neither good nor bad. However, the

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specter we must counter here is the notion that Barthian theology is fundamentally allergic to culture. What Barth needs, instead, is a richer account of the Spirit work of reconciling and redeeming cultures. To this I will turn in chapters four and five.\footnote{173}

Second, Barth’s account of humanity’s at-homeness in creation through Jesus Christ opens up the possibility for thinking “otherwise” about human identity in relation to the land.\footnote{174} That there are ways of being at home someplace in creation, among a particular people and their traditions, that do not collapse into ethno-nationalism is a fact, albeit one perhaps forgotten by most modern Europeans. However, before Herder entered the scene, there were cultures and peoples throughout the world, and particularly in the pre-Columbian Americas, that viewed the relationship between people and the land in different ways than those we have inherited from the European Enlightenment. While indigenous ways of relating to the land are not exempt from the realities of sin and exile that mark human existence, they offer important and interesting alternatives that may

\footnote{173 Jessica DeCou’s essay \textit{Barth and Cutlure} argues this very point. See Paul Dafydd Jones and Paul T. Nimmo, eds., \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth}, First edition, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2019), 609–21.}

\footnote{174 Thinking ‘otherwise’ is a phrase used by decolonial scholars to denote the need to recover non-western ways of being and knowing in the world.}
or may not be more relevant parables of the kingdom than what was available to Barth.

If we reject with Barth a non-porous, fixed, and absolutizing understanding of national identity, would it nevertheless be possible to conceive that our identities, as they are forged in connection to our places of belonging, have more than just instrumental roles in the order of salvation? Is it possible to imagine that God might be redeeming culture and peoples as part of the redemption of creation, so that our cultural identity is preserved in some way in the eschaton? Put christologically, is Christ’s Jewishness simply instrumental, or does Christ remain Jewish in the resurrection? If Christ’s Jewishness—his language, his cultural identity, his membership in a people—continues in the resurrection, then might not we say something similar happens to gentile peoples as well? Therefore, can we imagine an eschatological church whose members are not pilgrims who have now been stripped of their culturally diverse garbs, but pilgrims whose garbs have been transfigured—but not destroyed—in the resurrection? Such a vision is hard to imagine, considering the way that European modern visions of nationhood gripped not only the western nations but their colonies throughout the world. In chapter two, I will put Barth
in dialogue with African American theologian Willie Jennings and with Native American theologian George Tinker. Both Tinker and Jennings offer visions of how the way in which we relate to the land has been shaped not only by modernity, but indeed by the European colonization of the Americas.

Barth, Jennings, and Tinker show us that we must look to places other than the modern legacy to cultivate a truly flourishing way of being at home in the world. Jennings and Barth, in particular, agree that we must look to Christ, whose own identity as a member of the nation of Israel is both crucial and troubled. For Christ’s Jewishness is always already questioned in light of his upbringing first in the land of Egypt, and secondly in a border town where Jewish culture mixed with gentile cultures in ways that troubled the centers of religious and cultural power. Christ’s life thus beckons us to break open our understanding of national identity in light of the realities of mestizaje brought about by human life lived at the intersection of migrations and homecomings. It is to this theme of mestizaje at the intersection of migration and home that I will turn in chapter three.
Chapter 2
The Homecoming Word and the Americas’ Crisis of Home

“El Evangelio llegó a nuestras tierras en medio de un dramático y desigual encuentro de pueblos y culturas. Las ‘semillas del Verbo’ presentes en las culturas autóctonas facilitaron a nuestros hermanos indígenas descubrir en el Evangelio respuestas vitales a sus aspiraciones más hondas: ‘Cristo era el Salvador que anhelaban silenciosamente.’”

--Aparecida, Conclusiones, 4

2.1 Introduction

In chapter 1, I discussed how for many Europeans, modernity has been characterized by a struggle with a profound crisis of homesickness. At the heart of this crisis lies the dilemma of having to choose between embracing a cultural nihilism that engenders a nomadic cosmopolitanism or becoming rooted in one’s homeland, people, and culture and thereby opening oneself to the dangers of ethno-nationalism. I argued that Barth offers us a way out of this dichotomy through his account of the human creature at home in creation as revealed in the exiled and homecoming Jesus Christ.

1 “The Gospel reached our lands as part of a dramatic and unequal encounter of peoples and cultures. The ‘seeds of the Word’ present in the native cultures, made it easier for our indigenous brothers to discover in the Gospel life-giving responses to their deepest aspirations: ‘Christ is the Savior for whom they were silently longing.’” Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe, Documento Conclusivo: V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe: Aparecida, 13-31 de mayo de 2007 (Lima, 2007), 34.
I began with an account of European modernity’s crisis of home because its origins and influence are not limited to Europe. Indeed, the processes of economic, political, social, and intellectual modernization and industrialization that Europeans underwent in the 18th and 19th centuries are unimaginable apart from the amassing of great wealth and prime materials by western nations during their period of colonial expansion across the world, and particularly in the Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries. Thus, the displacement and homelessness suffered by many other peoples as a result of European colonialism, from the late 15th century through to the 20th century, is directly linked to European modernity’s crisis of home.

No matter how helpful Barth is at navigating this crisis, he does not address the complex and vicious realities of colonialism and their relationship both to Christianity and to his own response to the modern liberal theological project. Therefore, if Barth’s Reformed christological and trinitarian theology of home is to make a contribution towards healing and reconciliation in the Americas it first needs to be re-analyzed in view of European colonial history, the theology that developed inside of this history, and its impact on the ongoing homelessness of many in the Americas today.
In order to give a theological analysis of the history of the colonization of the Americas as evoking a crisis of home, this chapter engages in conversation with two theologians from the Americas George Tinker and Willie James Jennings. Tinker is a Native American and Lutheran theologian whose work interrogates the colonial frameworks that shaped and informed the encounter between Christian missionaries and Native Americans. Jennings is an African American theologian in the Baptist tradition whose work unearths the connection between colonial Christianity and racial formation. Together Jennings and Tinker, help us to see how the political, economic, and socio-cultural dynamics of the colonial encounter between Old World and New World produced a new way of imagining the relationship between God, peoples, lands, and cultures. Tinker and Jennings are critical to this study not only because of the marginalized American communities to which they hold their theologies accountable, or for the way in which their theologies directly engage questions of belonging to the land, and thus implicitly of home, but also because their theological proposals give us a clearer perspective of both the challenges and the promises of a *ressourcement* of Barthian Reformed theology for the marginalized lands, peoples, and cultures of the Americas.
Thus, in the second part of the chapter, I turn toward the theological solutions to this crisis of home at the foundations of the Americas that Jennings and Tinker offer. For Tinker a true decolonization of both land and Christianity needs to take place if Christians are to participate in the healing of the colonial wound. Tinker’s theological projects problematizes Barth’s christocentric approach to home. Indeed, according to Tinker, christocentrism is the very problem we need to overcome in order to heal the colonial wound. On the other hand, Jennings offers us possibilities for using Barth’s christocentric method to address this colonial wound of homelessness. I will argue that while both Jennings and Tinker are necessary for understanding the wound of homelessness in the Americas, ultimately a Christian vision of reconciliation and homecoming for the Americas requires not going around the scandal of particularity (that salvation comes through Christ alone) but, in accordance with Jennings, it requires a christology that is more attentive to the mystery of God’s joining of gentile and Jews at Pentecost.

In the conclusion of the chapter, I look to build on Jennings and Tinker by arguing that addressing the colonial wound of home in the Americas requires resisting both the urge to get behind the colonial encounter in order to recover a
previous ‘purer’ way of being at home in the world, or around the colonial encounter by establishing an entirely new beginning that enacts a utopian vision of homemaking, whether Christian or secular. Anticipating my work in chapter 3, I argue that the church should instead learn from Latin American liberation theologians to look for God’s redemptive homecoming within fallen history and particularly as it emerges from the margins of society and in the borderlands. These sites which bear witness to the brutal encounter between migrants and natives, colonizers and colonized, indeed, between peoples in their struggle to be at home in the world, are also the very places where, by the power of the Spirit the redemptive homecoming of the crucified and risen Christ breaks forth into our time and place, and among our peoples.

2.2 The Homecoming of the Word and Colonization

According to the Spanish church historian Josep-Ignasi Saranyana, the story of Christianity’s transplantation to the Americas begins neither with clergy nor with religious missionaries, but with the arrival of the Genoese admiral
Christopher Columbus.² Although other seafarers from the European and Asian continents had preceded Columbus in arriving on the shores of the so-called "New World," October 12, 1492, marks not only the beginning of the mass migration of colonizing Europeans to the New World, it also marks the first time that the gospel was proclaimed in the Americas.³ As such, it is Columbus and his men who represent the initial presence of the church in the Americas, nearly a year before missionaries would arrive to learn the local languages and teach the natives the basic tenets of the Christian faith. It is perhaps for this reason that Saranyana includes the events of October 12, 1492, as the first moment of "the founding evangelism" of the Americas. The foundations that were being laid down were those of the church in the Americas, and these foundations provide a context for the kind of Christianity that would grow in the fertile soils of the New World.

³ On August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus set sail from the port city of Palos de la Frontera, Spain on an explorative mission to find a westward sea-route to India and China. On October 12, 1492, after more than two months at sea, Columbus and his crew of 90 sailors aboard the famed caravels, La Niña, La Pinta, and La Santa María, would at last reach the shores of Guanahani, an island in the Caribbean.
Saranyana turns to Bartolomé de las Casas, who claimed access to Columbus’s travel diaries, to recount the order of events that took place on that fateful October day in 1492. Las Casas describes how having disembarked on the island of Guanahani, Columbus’s first instructions were for the armada’s legal notary, Rodrigo de Escobedo, and for the Captain Rodrigo Sanchez de Segovia, to serve as witnesses to the events taking place on that day, namely that "he [Columbus], before anyone else, was taking, and he did take, possession of [Guanahani] Island for his lords, the King and the Queen, having made the required declarations." Before encountering the natives of the land, Columbus’s first act in the New World was political: declaring the island the possession of the Spanish Crown. The proclamation of the name of Jesus, which Columbus would utter for the first time in these lands, and with it the foundation of the institutional Catholic church in the Americas, would henceforth always already occur within the context of a claim on the land of the Americas. This was a claim that simultaneously dispossessed the natives of the land in which they had been at home for centuries by declaring it the property of the Spanish crown. The

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4 Saranyana, Breve Historia de la Teología en América Latina, 4. This papal bull would re-open debates the pope’s authority not only over spiritual and eternal matters but also over temporal earthly matters.
evangelism of the native peoples of the New World and the founding of the church in the Americas would henceforth be conditioned by this act of dispossession and property acquisition.

The next significant event which set the tone for the encounter between the New and the Old Worlds was Pope Alexander VI's papal bull, *Inter Caetera*. On May 1493, four months before Columbus's second voyage to the Indies, Alexander issued this document that granted to the king and queen of Castilla and Leon a donation in perpetuity of "all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered...with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances." This document, on the authority of the pope as *Dominus Orbis*, provided the Spanish king and queen with the ecclesial and juridical right to claim private possession of the New World territories. The papal bull also gave a theological justification to the dispossession to the conquest, namely, “to bring the people of said mainlands and isles to the Christian religion.” The Spanish would cite this theo-

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5 “Inter Caetera,” *Papal Encyclicals* (blog), May 4, 1493, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/alex06/alex06inter.htm.
6 Ibid.
7 As the earthly representative to Christ, the pope claimed the status which Psalm 2 accords to the Messiah as heir and lord of all creation of every nation.
juridical declaration nearly four centuries later, hoping to declare the independence efforts of the burgeoning Latin American nations both heretical and illegal.\textsuperscript{8}

\textit{Inter Caetera} was the seed that would become \textit{el Patronato}. The Spanish patronage system conferred authority to the Spanish crown to appoint clergy and priests in the New World and to make decisions about the spiritual welfare of the native peoples. The logic behind both \textit{Inter Caetera} and the patronage system was that giving the Spanish crown and its affiliates authority over not only temporal but also spiritual matters in the New World would facilitate the evangelization of the natives of the Americas. However, these concessions ended up ceding power to the conquistadores to commit many abuses against the natives. The patronage system would become the early target of opposition by religious missionaries in the land, most famously Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolome de Las Casas.\textsuperscript{9} The most pressing question posed by the thinking of

\textsuperscript{8} Saranyana, \textit{Breve Historia de la Teología en América Latina}, 7.

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Inter Caetera} also laid the theological foundation for the church's “right to migrate,” or \textit{ius peregrinandi}. The belief of many in the early church, which identified the Christian life with pilgrimage, underwent a significant transformation in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century when it became the idea that the church had a divine right to migrate to the New World. The human phenomenon of migration, seen as a \textit{felix culpa} in the time of St. Augustine, would be baptized and naturalized in the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Interestingly, the notion of a migrant church that naturalizes migration as divine will is now voiced by the colonized or the previously colonized peoples. It is no longer
Inter Caetera and the institution of el patronato is to what extent evangelization and colonization are not only concurrent events taking place at this moment of encounter, but also mutually determinative and coterminous realities at the very foundation of the modern Americas?

The moral validity of the Spanish conquest of the Americas would be the object of much debate for years to come. However, the evangelistic rationale given as justification for the conquest of the Americas would seldom be questioned, not even by those like Las Casas who derided the brutality of the colonizers.\(^\text{10}\) Las Casas believed he was able to hold together the tension and complexity of violent conquest and the goodness that was the gifts of Christian faith and of European civilization. Over time, colonization came to be seen by Christians as a kind of felix culpa, a historical mishap that nevertheless had

the dominant forces and power in the world who are undertaking mass migrations and who in bringing their faith with them become the seed of an evangelistic church, but rather the figure of the migrant has now changed to the weak and vulnerable who must flee their lands to find safe harbors abroad and who as they do so bring their faith them and become a new force of evangelization.

\(^\text{10}\) Tinker describes Las Casas as enacting a “gentler” form of conquest through which European norms, values, and culture were imposed on the Natives through means other than the use of deadly force. For example, it is Las Casas who suggest implementing the reducciones which, in an attempt to convert natives, removed them from their communities and reestablished them in new Christian communities where they were treated kindly while being indoctrinated to Euro-Christianity. See George E. Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2008), 6.
become the vehicle for the evangelization and modernization of the Americas. For centuries to come, the conquest and evangelization of the Americas would be taught in schools and preached from pulpits across the Americas through the lens of a modern story of progress. The myth that the Americas, lands already inhabited by a diversity of peoples and cultures were ‘discovered’ by Columbus continues to be perpetuated even to this day. Indeed, from the US and Canada to Peru and Chile, Columbus Day is not held as a day of lament marking the conquest of the lands and the genocide of native populations but rather as a national holiday to be celebrated.¹¹

However, since the mid-20th century, this dominant account of the conquest and evangelization of the Americas has been contested.¹² For Luis Rivera Pagán, a prominent Latin American church historian, seeing the conquest of the Americas through the lens of a modern story of progress betrays a profoundly Eurocentric perspective about the implantation of Christianity in the

¹¹ Although in recent decades many have opted to celebrate “Indigenous Day” as a way to protest this history.
Americas. Drawing on Marxist critical theory, he argues that this dominant way of telling the history of the conquest is inattentive to critical questions, namely, how the church and her missionaries were being shaped by and participating in the developing new world capitalist system.

In *A Violent Evangelism*, Rivera Pagán argues that there were deeply problematic ulterior motives fueling *Inter Caetera* and *el Patronato*. Columbus’s tales of new and exotic lands full of strange peoples and rich in gold and other precious metals soon spread across Europe, instigating various new expeditions. Rivera Pagán suggests that these expeditions sponsored by other European rulers posed a political and economic threat to the interests of the Spanish Crown and the Bishop of Rome, who found in the Spanish kings his strongest allies. As such, he argues that the primary intended audience of *Inter Caetera* was not the natives, but rather the various other princes of Europe who were not loyal to the Bishop of Rome. For Rivera Pagán this is the reason why Columbus and his crew would plant a tall wooden cross whenever they made landfall in the New

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14 Ibid., 8.
World. The cross, like the reading of the Requerimiento, were meaningless acts to the natives, who understood neither the language, nor the customs and legal traditions of their strange visitors. But to other Europeans, the conquering cross signified that the land was the legitimate possession of the Spanish Crown and the Catholic church, a visible sign and seal warning other marauding seafarers to stay away. In other words, evangelism in the New World did not make use of the conquest to accomplish its own ends; rather the conquest of the New World was both political and religious, such that the evangelism of the natives itself became a tool of conquest.

Moreover, Rivera Pagán argues that the discovery of the new lands played into apocalyptic currents in Europe. Now at last the church could fulfill her mission of spreading the word of God to all the nations of the earth; now at last, an “eschatological oikoumene” was on the horizon. The establishment of this

15 The Requerimiento was a legal proceeding which offered indigenous peoples the choices of submission to the church and the Spanish Crown, or death.
16 Rivera Pagán, A Violent Evangelism, 8.
17 This phrasing is from Virgilio Elizondo who remarks that for many Europeans in 15th and 16th centuries, the discovery of the Indies entailed “the foundation of an eschatological oikouméne.” The Greek word oikoumene refers to the “whole inhabited earth,” or what you might find in a world map. The conquest of the Americas truly entailed a new understanding of the whole, of the very order and limits of the earthly oikoumene. With the encounter between Europeans and New World peoples, the shape of the cosmos for both conquerors and conquered dramatically changed. The possibility for expanding the household of God, the divine oikoumene, or of
eschatological oikoumene, at least in South and Central America, would be fueled by what Rivera Pagán describes as a providentialism rooted in Spanish racial-nationalism.¹⁸ The roots of this racial-nationalism however, went all the way back to the old continent. In 1492, in what is today known as the Reconquista, Spain declared the triumph of Christianity over Muslims and Jews, exiling these groups after more than seven centuries of residence in the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁹ Rivera Pagan argues that the blood purity laws of the new Spanish period drew Christian identity (opposed to Jewish and Moorish) into Spanish national identity, such that a claim to belong to Spain became synonymous with Catholic piety. As that national orthodoxy crossed the Atlantic to the New World it would be accompanied by messianic providentialism by which the Spanish imposition of Catholic orthodoxy and Spanish national culture on natives was synonymous with the will of God.²⁰


¹⁸ Columbus himself makes this link in his diaries. See Rivera Pagán, A Violent Evangelism, 49.
³⁹ This seven-century period known as la Convivencia—cohabitation or common living—came to an end the same year that Spain made its way to the new world.
²⁰ Rivera Pagán, A Violent Evangelism, 55–62.
A similar sentiment of nationalist providentialism was found among the British Puritans who arrived on the shores of North America in the 17th and 18th centuries. These early colonial settlers also saw their journey to the New World as a holy pilgrimage imbued with a divine call to establish a new City Upon a Hill. Unlike the Spanish, the British, French, and Dutch came with the clear intent of settling into the land and starting a new life in the New World. While religious liberty and a sense of national providentialism may have been important motivators for the early colonial settlers of North America, it was ultimately the promise of land and cash crops like cotton, tobacco, rice, and indigo that drove the mass migration of northern Europeans from the British Isles and the Netherlands to the colonies. In the 18th and 19th centuries it was not northern but southern and eastern Europeans who would migrate en masse to the new republic, the United States. Again, the spirit of nationalist providentialism would undergird the southward and westward expansion of the United States under the banner of Manifest Destiny, the belief espoused both by the

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21 In John Winthrop’s famous speech “A Model of Christian Charity,” delivered in 1630, he describes the New World as a “city upon a hill,” drawing on the imagery of the sermon on the mount to inspire the Puritan settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony with him to view their migration from a divine perspective as their vocation was to make a commonwealth that was to be a light to the nations.
government and by a large segment of the public that the United States had a
divine vocation to spread from shore to shore, bringing civilization and modern
advancements to all the land. 22 There is little historical question that the
processes of evangelism, nationalism, capitalism, and racial formation drew
enormous energy from each other and that this coalescing of powerful historical
forces in the Americas lies at the core of understanding colonial modernity. What
I want to explore in further detail is how this history also gives shape to a crisis
of home in the Americas.

When we examine this moment in history, we see two powerful events
taking place simultaneously and drawing enormous energy from each other. In a
very concrete way, through the work of European missionaries and colonizers,
Christianity was digging roots in the soil and among the peoples of the
Americas. Churches were sprouting all across the lands of the Americas and
around these churches peoples, cultures and lands were being reshaped and re-

22 Manifest Destiny describes a popular belief in American exceptionalism which is said to have
undergirded much of the US territorial expansion in the 19th century. The belief has its roots in a
theological supersessionist logic which believes that the United States is the manifestation of the
biblical “New Israel,” the eschatological city of God. Tinker observes that many churches in the
south (for instance, the Moravian and the Methodist denominations) supported, both explicitly or
by remaining quiet, President Andrew Jackson’s plan of “the removal [of Indians] as a means of
opening up Indian lands to White settlers” in what later became known as the “Trail of Tears.”
Tinker, American Indian Liberation, 12–13.
imagined. What is critical here is that it was not only people who were being
converted, but indeed the land itself was undergoing a kind of conversion, it was
becoming Christian land. At the same time, these same lands, peoples, and
cultures were being made to serve the interests of their European colonial lords
and their growing empires. It is as if the homecoming of the Word of God in the
Americas and the homecoming of European colonial settlers in the New World
were taking place together and the site where these two homecomings merged
would be the new church being built in the Americas. Thus, at stake in the
colonization of the Americas was the very form that Christianity would take.

The questions that I want to raise from this account of colonization and
Christianity is what theological vision of humanity at home in the cosmos would
this colonial Christianity perform and bear witness to? A crisis of home was
about to envelop the New World, and in making themselves the protagonists of
America’s evangelization, these missionaries also made themselves the
harbingers of this crisis. To understand the Americas as a crisis of home, I begin
now by engaging the work of one of the most influential Native American
theologians of the 20th century, George Tinker. Speaking from a Native
perspective, Tinker, adds to the accounts of the conquest given by Marxists, the
European church, and Latin American Liberation theologians, an account of the destruction of native ways of being and knowing in the world, and in particular of the deep bonds between people and land. For Tinker, the exploitation of peoples and lands worked in tandem with the destruction of native cultures in the creation of the modern colonial world.

2.3 Native Americans, Evangelism, and Cultural Genocide

According to the Native American liberation theologian George Tinker, one aspect that has been absent for decades from liberationist critiques of colonialism in the Americas is an understanding of the role of culture. In his essay “The Full Circle of Liberation: An American Indian Theology of Place,” Tinker critiques Gustavo Gutiérrez and other liberation theologians, observing that “powerful naming of the alienation of marginalized poor and oppressed peoples as the impetus for a liberation theology falls short of doing justice to the particularities of indigenous people’s suffering of non-personhood.” Tinker goes on to argue that the reason for this failure is that,

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23 Tinker is a dual citizen of the United States and of the Osage Nation, a Native American tribe of the Great Plains in the Midwestern US.
Gutiérrez, like other Latin American theologians, identifies the preferential option for the poor with socialists and even implied Marxist solutions that analyze the poor in terms of social class structure. This overlooks the crucial point that indigenous peoples experience their very personhood in terms of their relationship to the land…. Native American peoples resist categorization in terms of class structure. Instead, we insist on being recognized as ‘peoples,’ even nations with a claim to national sovereignty based on ancient title to our land. Classification as ‘working class’ or ‘the poor’ continues the erosion of our cultural integrity and national agenda.24

Tinker claims that the modern story of progress and civilization and the liberationist project both present a Eurocentric way of understanding the history of the Americas. It’s not that Tinker entirely rejects the liberationist project as it emerges from Latin America. However, while the liberationist project goes a long way in dismantling the myth of modern progress, it does not, for Tinker, fully get us out of the waters of modern assumptions about God, humanity, and the cosmos. For Tinker, the liberationist project remains locked into a Marxist, and thereby Eurocentric, view of history as a struggle of the classes. This is not only deeply individualistic, but also reduces human identity to one’s social/economic class. Moreover, in this understanding of the materiality of history, the land and

the cosmos remain a “resource” to be fought over. Similarly, understanding racial consciousness and the role of white superiority in the genocide of Native Americans is critical for Tinker, but again it does not tell the full story of the conquest. For Tinker, missing from all these critical accounts is a substantial analysis of how native identity and agency are deeply bound to the way in which native cultures interpret and relate to the land and its creatures, ways that are not tied to notions of possession of property but of belonging.

Consequently, for Tinker healing the colonial wound will entail more than returning the means of production to the working class and dismantling systems of racial and gender oppression, though these are also important for Native American communities. Healing the colonial wound for natives more fundamentally entails a recovery of native ways of being at home in the world through the deconversion of the land from private property. To achieve the long-awaited homecoming of native peoples the Euro-American colonial powers will first need to return to native tribes their ancestral sacred lands. Only in this way will natives recover their identity and agency in the world. To understand this way of envisioning the colonial wound and its healing, we first need to understand what for Tinker is the deepest wound resulting from the conquest.
In *Missionary Conquest*, Tinker narrates the history of Christian mission among the North American Indians from an American Indian perspective. Tinker's aim is not to give a historical reading of the moment of conquest like Saranyana or Rivera-Pagán offer. Rather, Tinker aims to show, through a series of portraits of some of the most significant missionaries in North America, how despite their best intentions to prevent natives from falling to the sword of the colonizers, these missionaries still inflicted irreparable damage. This “unintended damage,” according to Tinker, was and is caused not by sword or famine but by the destruction of native cultures, their ways of being, and knowing in the world. Though native communities continue to exist today throughout the Americas and some even retain a level of sovereignty even as they exist within modern nation-states and their borders, the disintegration of their cultures through displacement and cultural assimilation has meant a slow exile and death. Thus, for Tinker, though the active genocide of Native Americans by the colonizers may have ended, another form of genocide has continued to take place slowly but steadily from the moment of conquest until

today, the death of native peoples through what Tinker calls "cultural

genocide."\(^{26}\)

Tinker locates the roots of this vicious cooperation between missionaries
and colonizers in a critical missiological mistake, namely, that "the kerygmatic
content of the missionary's Christian faith became confused with the
accouterments of the missionary's cultural experience and behavior."\(^{27}\) While
Tinker recognizes that conversion in the Christian sense entails a transformation
of every aspect of the convert's life, the trouble with the evangelization of the
natives was that this total transformation was not only toward a life of
discipleship to Jesus Christ but a conversion to European economic, social, and
political norms, values, and practices. The adoption of Euro-American culture as
a prerequisite for conversion to Christianity eclipsed native cultural traditions,
establishing a relationship of colonial dependence to Europe that was not only
economic and political but also socio-cultural.\(^{28}\)

\(^{26}\) Tinker defines cultural genocide as "the effective destruction of a people by systematically
(intentionally or unintentionally in order to achieve goals) destroying, eroding, or undermining
the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life" (Ibid.,

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 5.
Tinker avers that fueling and justifying this grave missiological mistake was a deep-seated belief in the myth of white Euro-American Christian cultural and racial superiority.\textsuperscript{29} This myth of white superiority has not only been internalized by Euro-American Christian individuals and institutions, but as Tinker argues, "Indian people have internalized this illusion just as deeply as white Americans have."\textsuperscript{30} The myth of white superiority served to justify the displacement and cultural and physical destruction of native communities at three critical junctures in the modern history of North America. First, white superiority is reflected in the doctrine of discovery, which allowed the colonizers to claim Amerindian lands for European Christian princes.\textsuperscript{31} Second, it can be seen in the discourse of "civilizing the savage Indians" utilized by colonizers and missionaries to justify the displacement of native tribes and their slow

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 93–94.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{31} While the origin of the doctrine of discovery lies in Pope Alexander IV’s bull \textit{Inter Caetera}, the doctrine receives its formal name from the United States federal government, which cites it as the rationale for all US-owned property in the landmark Supreme Court case \textit{Johnson v M’Intosh} (1823). The ruling maintains that the federal government has inherited from the British Crown the property titles to all lands that were "discovered" by European explorers. Thus, \textit{Johnson v M’Intosh}, while creating a common law of aboriginal title to the land, also explicitly affirms the doctrine of discovery and establishes it as the foundation for the lawful titles of all US federally owned lands. The doctrine of discovery, it is worth noting, is not a legal fiction of a distant colonial past; its most recent use was the Supreme Court Case \textit{Oneida v New York} in 2008. See Steven T. Newcomb, \textit{Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery} (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Pub, 2008).
assimilation into Euro-American Christianity and Enlightenment culture between the 15 and the 18th centuries. Third, we find it in the 19th-century doctrine of Manifest Destiny, which fueled the expansion of the United States territorial limits westward toward California and southward toward Mexico, laying the foundation for the final exile of the American Indian into reservations and the economic ascent of emerging world power.

Tinker argues that the imposition of European social, economic, political, and religious structures on the American Indians precipitated the loss of the deep structures which sustained Native American life in the land. He lists four of these structures in particular: attention to spatiality, attachment to particular lands, the priority of the community over the individual, and the interrelatedness of humans and the rest of creation.

These four cultural identifiers are so interconnected that any damage to one cultural aspect extends the damaging effect to the other three. For instance, the primacy of spatial metaphor among the indigenous peoples of the Americas is intimately linked to their deep rootedness in the land. This intimate interconnection between an Indian community and the spatiality of its territory explains why the history of our conquest and removal from our lands was

32 Tinker draws on four concrete examples of missionaries whose good intentions nevertheless led to the cultural erosion of natives: John Eliot, Junípero Serra, Pierre-Jean DeSmet, and Henry Benjamin Whipple.
33 Tinker, American Indian Liberation, 7.
so culturally and genocidally destructive to our tribes. Yet, the removal of Indian peoples from their lands, the destruction of ‘joint tenure’ as a cultural mode of territorial residence, and the teaching of private (individual) ownership of land became principal missionary strategies in the Christianization and civilization of Indian peoples.34

For Tinker, the doctrine of discovery did more than help settle legal disputes over ownership of land; it reified and codified into law the supposed superiority of Christians over heathens and white Europeans over American Indians. Moreover, the doctrine of discovery did more than transfer ownership of territories from native tribes to the federal government; it also enacted a transformation of the soil or how the land's inhabitants would relate to the soils. As Tinker notes, "the earth itself, the Indian lands, was converted in one legal Christian religious civil law into private property. It quit being our ‘grandmother’ in the land of Europeans, and it became a resource to be split up and owned."35

As Native American theologian Richard Twiss notes, "The loss of land, beyond the dirt, relates to 'losing sacred space and place' and its influence in

34 Ibid., 9.
shaping personhood, being and identity. Land provides a sense of being from and belonging to a place. Many First Nations peoples have lost their land completely. Their self-identities, which are tied up with place (their land), have diminished along with the loss of land.”36 The notion of reclaiming lands for Native Americans means something entirely different from capitalist land-grabbing, and although it would be naive to hope that the US government would cede its most precious resource, reclaiming the land remains the only hope for a full of healing the colonial wound and healing the loss of identity which afflicts many Native American communities to this day.

The loss of these deep structures also means that the home Euro-Americans have tried to build in the Americas through colonization and evangelization is one whose foundations are made of sand. The dual processes of colonization and evangelization entailed a rejection of the gifts that native cultures might have shared with Euro-American Christians.37 The result of this cultural genocide is not only the exile of Native Americans but a slow but increasingly visible ecocide. The land was treated as a commodity to be exploited

from the very beginning, such that the very logic which permitted the theft of land and its exploitation is now slowly rendering the land uninhabitable. What is most troublesome is that the practical knowledge necessary for sustainable habitation was destroyed and continues to be destroyed through the ongoing marginalization of indigenous people, and now by processes of cultural appropriation and cultural erosion exacerbated by globalization.

Tinker's reflections on the historic missions to the Native Americans are fueled by what he describes as a "litany of woes" afflicting Indigenous communities in North America today. Despite living within the territorial bounds of one of the most affluent and powerful nations in the world, Native Americans outpace all other minority groups in the US in unemployment rates, teen suicide rates, and premature deaths. These statistics reveal that the ongoing aftermath of this slow destruction of native cultures and the displacement of native peoples from the land has meant an ongoing exile for many Native American communities as the structures that had permitted them to be at home in the world for centuries continue to be destroyed. The loss of

38 See Ibid., 57–83.
land led not only to economic subjugation but to the loss of culture. Because culture is tied to political, economic, and spiritual realities, it is almost impossible to simply ‘retain’ one’s culture while functioning in an alien political, economic, and spiritual framework. Given this ongoing exile and homelessness of many native communities, Tinker offers an important corrective to the liberationist critique of the evangelization of the Americas—it is not just a class problem, it is also a culture problem.

2.4 Colonialism as a Crisis of Race and Place

In The Christian Imagination, Willie Jennings offers a theological analysis of the arrival of Christianity in the Americas that shares many affinities with Tinker’s diagnosis of the colonial wound. However, while in Tinker’s account of colonial Christianity, race is subservient to the tragedy of “cultural genocide” produced by missionaries and colonizers, for Jennings applying a racial optic to the story of colonial Christianity reveals another deep tragedy taking place in the

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colonization of the Americas, one to which Tinker is less attentive. This tragedy is the cultivation of a “diseased social imagination” that imagines the human as fundamentally displaced and segregated into ethnic, cultural, and national enclaves. Jennings helps us to see how colonial modernity invites us into a new way of being at home in the cosmos, a reality ruled by the idolatrous logics of race and its manifestation in the dual forms of cultural imperialisms and cultural nationalism. What has been lost in colonial modernity, according to Jennings, is the very logic of a biblical view of creation as the joining together of lands, peoples, and cultures in and around Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this loss of a deep logic of joining at the heart of creation that continues to exacerbate the existential and material forms of homelessness experienced by many in the Americas today.\footnote{Tinker doesn’t perform a critical analysis of racial superiority; instead, his analysis revolves around what he calls Euro-American cultural superiority, only noting the connection between being white and being culturally Euro-American. For instance, in the introduction to Missionary Conquest, he only briefly notes that “differentiation by race seems to have gathered impetus at the time of the Renaissance under Aristotelian pressure for ever-greater classification and taxonomy. After surviving and the successfully repelling the Muslim invasion, the European mind-set, with an air of finality, became entrenched in the basic presupposition of the inherent superiority of its own culture and its own religion, combining both in its notion of civilization.” Tinker, Missionary Conquest, 8.}
2.4.1 A Diseased Social Imagination

In the opening to *The Christian Imagination*, Jennings recalls an incident when a white couple came to his childhood home and began to evangelize to him and his mother. The profound dissonance this produced in him, even as a child, arose from the fact that Jennings’s mother was a devout woman and well known throughout the community as a “pillar of faith.” Yet, despite calling the same neighborhood and faith their home, there was a fundamental disconnect between the white evangelizers and this African American woman that stood before them, a disconnect that made manifest the profound lack of communion that existed between the ethnic communities to which they belonged. “Why did they not know us?” Jennings asks.

They should have known us very well. I am not asking why they weren't familiar with us, and I am certainly not asking about the logistics of their missional operations. The foreignness and formality of the speech in our backyard signaled a wider and deeper order of not knowing, of not sensing, of not imagining. In the small space of a backyard, I witnessed a Christianity familiar to most of us, enclosed in racial and cultural difference, inconsequentially related to its geography, often imaginatively detached from its surrounding of both people and spaces, but one yet bound to compelling gestures of connection, belonging, and invitation.43

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In this personal account we see the symptoms of what Jennings calls Christianity’s “diseased social imagination.” Jennings sets out to explain why, despite Christianity’s deep power to “redefine the social, to claim, to embrace, to join, to desire,” what has instead too often characterized the social performance of Christianity in the modern west is an absence of intimacy forged in and around a segregated social imaginary that produces seemingly impenetrable racial, cultural, and national enclaves. Jennings’s aim is not to give an empirical or critical account of the history of colonialism as it leads to our current modern moment of fragmentation. Rather, he offers a theological analysis of the social performances of Christians attempting to be faithful in the milieu of the powerful demonic forces swirling in the colonial moment. Through a type of theological narrative exegesis, Jennings shows how these demonic forces were indeed reshaping and deforming Christian doctrines and praxis with a particular locus of intense deformation being the doctrine of creation.

44 Ibid., 6.
46 In consecutive chapters, Jennings performs a theological analysis of the social performances of Gomes Eanes Zurara, a 15th century Portuguese royal chronicler; Jose de Acosta, a 16th century Spanish Jesuit missionary to Peru; John William Colenso, a 19th century British bishop of the Anglican church in Natal, South Africa; and Olaudah Equiano, an 18th century emancipated Nigerian slave in North America. He relies heavily on primary sources, including the autobiographical and other texts written by these four figures.

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2.4.2 Colonialism’s Displacing Vision

To understand the roots of our contemporary racially segregated social imagination, Jennings argues that we first need to understand how in the modern west we have lost a sense of place or a sense of how the earth (the land, landscape, animals, and plants) serves as a primary signifier of creaturely identity. The loss here is that the land was reimagined not as a site of identity-formation and as common place of belonging, but as commodified good whose only value was its potential for producing wealth for the owner.\(^47\) Thus, For Jennings the deepest tragedy at the heart of the colonization of the Americas is the loss of the earth precipitated by a colonialist “displacing” vision. It is within this displacing vision that race emerges as an ordering principle for relating bodies to the land and indeed to God. Inside of this colonial displacing vision, race becomes a new pseudo-doctrine of creation, indeed, a diseased doctrine of creation.

According to Jennings, from the colonial moment onward people saw themselves as possessors of the earth rather than possessed by the earth.\^{48} European colonizers, Jennings writes, saw the lands of the New World as “a system of potentialities, a mass of undeveloped, underdeveloped, unused, underutilized, misunderstood, not fully understood potentialities.”\^{49} Theologically speaking, in this colonial schema it is not the Creator that gives meaning and order to creation, a meaning and order which we are to discern through intimate dwelling with creatures. Rather, creation is a blank slate that needs us, or in this case the colonizers, to give it meaning and purpose.

As such, the colonizers of the Americas laid claims on the earth (this or that patch of land was claimed as the private property of such and such person) while becoming increasingly blind to any claims that the earth and its creatures might make on them. In so doing, they performed a new way of relating human bodies to land, a performance that suggests that humans are not interdependent with the land and its creatures but rather fundamentally separated from and independent with respect to the rest of creation. Jennings states that this

\^{49} Ibid., 43.
idolatrous subjugation of the world to the will of the colonizers enacted a fundamental shift and reversal of the way that many ancient peoples, and certainly the indigenous peoples of the Americas, related to the land. To better understand this shift Jennings points us to the examples of native peoples prior to the arrival of the colonizers.

Jennings argues that many native peoples inhabited “ways of life that are patterned not after but actually with space, with land, trees, water, animals.”50 The land and its creatures were to these native peoples more than merely objects waiting to be ascribed value as resources, but rather the land and its creatures were for natives the source of their identity as a people, an extension of their own existence, and even a source for moral imagination.51 Jennings does not deny of course that prior to the arrival of Europeans, there were empires that also sought to extract and exploit lands and bodies to serve the interest of overlords. Nor does he deny that native religions were powerful allies to these pre-Columbian

50 Ibid., 52.
51 Jennings offers two examples of this understanding of the land, the Ju/wasi people of Saharan Africa and the Apache people of North America. In each case the meaning of the land as signifier of identity, as extension of human existence, and as source of moral formation is rendered visible in the introduction of a different understanding of land, as private property, by colonizers. See Ibid., 40–64.
empires. However, he argues that the occurrence of such events was narrated by native peoples as a transgression against the natural order of reality.52

Thus, for Jennings colonialism not only enacted a physical dislocation of many peoples from their lands (the Europeans leaving home, African bodies transplanted to the Americas through the slave trade, and Natives removed from their lands either into encomiendas, or into the wilderness) but more fundamentally it imagined a world in which bodies were ontologically displaced from the land. That is, colonialism enacted a displacing anthropological vision of “freedom from the ground, the dirt, landscapes, and animals, from life collaborative with the rhythms of God’s other creatures.”53

Jennings goes on to note that as missionaries arrived from Europe to the New World, their teaching and implanting of the Christian faith would be influenced by this colonial vision of displacement. Jennings describes what should have been the trajectory of Christianity in the New World, noting that “to enter a new land was to enter a newness that requires careful listening to the

52 See Jennings’ account of effects of displacement on the Apache tribe in North America. Ibid., 55–59. Jennings also notes the way in which many native peoples in the Andes of Peru were originally receptive of the European colonizers and collaborated with them to overthrow the Incan empire. Ibid., 72–77.
53 Jennings, 290.
rhythms of creation played by the indigenous peoples so that the sounds of Christian witness might be joined in harmony (with its proper dissonances) with those rhythms.”\textsuperscript{54} Instead, according to Jennings, those who arrived in the New World acted to “separate theology from the earth for the sake of theology’s coherence.”\textsuperscript{55} However, the ways of the natives, their relationship to the land, were instead viewed as heretical, and in order to combat that heresy, Christian theological orthodoxy, which was always already modeled after European cultural biases, would replace indigenous ways of being and knowing.\textsuperscript{56} Echoing Tinker’s claims about Christian mission, Jennings argues that Christian theology became a vehicle of the cultural imperialism of the colonizing nations such that to become a Christian, natives had also to take on the cultural practices of their colonizers.\textsuperscript{57}

The performance of missionaries like the 16\textsuperscript{th} century Jesuit Jose de Acosta displays for Jennings how the displacing logic of colonial capitalism would be

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{56} Here Jennings is rehearsing a decolonial argument that the conquest was epistemological as well as political and economic. I engage decoloniality in more depth at a later point in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{57} This is the main work of Jennings’ chapter on the Jesuit Missionary, Jose de Acosta. See Jennings, \textit{The Christian Imagination}, 65–118.
lodged inside of the architecture of the Christian faith, continually distorting it and deforming it so that Christianity itself would become a “discourse of displacement” that alienated native peoples from institutions and practices that maintained them close to the land. While cultural imperialism would eventually be challenged during the enlightenment and in modernity as previously colonized nations sought liberation, the trajectory of Christianity within this displacing anthropological vision would not be reversed. Both Christians and non-Christians in the Americas and in all other parts of the world impacted by European colonialism will continue to live in the world re-created through the colonization of the Americas.

Thus far, we have a basic agreement between Jennings and Tinker. Jennings, like Tinker, argues that the loss of the land as a marker of identity is one of the profound tragedies of the colonization of the Americas, and that this lies at the center of the genocide of native peoples. Yet, as mentioned earlier, for Jennings applying a racial optic to the story of colonial Christianity reveals another deep tragedy taking place in the colonization of the Americas: the cultivation of a diseased social condition, at the center of which is the loss of the
possibility for joining and intimacy between peoples and lands. To understand this, we now need to turn to Jennings’s account of race.

2.4.3 Race as an Idolatrous Doctrine of Creation

For Jennings, understanding the loss of the earth as a signifier of identity and as a conduit of creaturely belonging is critical for understanding the development of the modern western view of race. That is because, according to Jennings, from the colonial moment onward race came to replace place as the marker of creaturely identity and as the primary means of constructing community belonging, even and perhaps especially in the Christian community. In the vacuum created by the loss of land as signifier of identity, a new way of imagining human identity began to take foothold in the world emerging from colonialism; identity would henceforth be confined to the body, and in particular to one’s skin pigmentation. Jennings notes that through the conferral of racial identity on the dislocated and displaced bodies of Africans and Amerindians, the colonizers introduced a new organizing principle, a new telos, and a new way of being in the lands of the Americas—racial being.
The implementation of a racial scale of existence that ascribes to certain bodies blackness and thus ugliness and animality and to other bodies whiteness and thus beauty and intellectual superiority was, as Jennings notes, not an invention of the 16th century.58 What was new, however, about the colonial moment was the imposition of this racial scale amid the massive displacement of bodies from the land occasioned by the discovery and colonization of the New World. Jennings suggests that while “there is no mystery to race,” in order to heal we have to “reckon with its substitution for place and place-centered identity.”59

At this point, Jennings draws on Barth’s Reformed account of divine freedom found in CD II/1 to show how the global imposition of a racial scale of existence was not only a deeply oppressive act but also a theologically charged one as it put European colonizers in the role that God alone can fulfill—that of conferring on each thing its specific nature.60 For Barth, God is who God is apart from all else, and indeed all that exists is what it is in relation to God. That is to say, the freedom of God or the transcendence of God is the very source of the

58 Ibid., 23.
59 Ibid., 289.
60 Ibid., 60.
ordering of all things in creation. Jennings observes that the performance of the white colonizers in the New World entailed a vicious mirroring act as they "became as those conditioning to those conditioned, European to native." The conference of racial being thus enacts a new order of creation that is a deformation of God’s intended order because it places white male European bodies as the source of authority and meaning in the colonial world. Racial being is a new way of imagining how humans, plants, and animals, as well as the land, fit together with each other and with God around the will and desire of the colonizer. What Jennings goes to great lengths to show is that racial becoming is not the suspension of networks of interdependence, mutual conditioning, or civilized order; rather, it is the construction of ways of being that are interdependent, mutually conditioned, and organized around capital.

### 2.4.4 Racial-Capitalism

Up to this point, Jennings account of race in the *Christian Imagination* has shown how racial consciousness develops amid the displacement of bodies in the New World, such that it is impossible to tell the story of race without also telling

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61 Ibid.
the story of the loss of place. However, Jennings only makes passing references in the *Christian Imagination* to how the displacement of bodies was itself a feature of a developing capitalists political economy. Jennings account of how the racial consciousness developed in the colonization of the Americas needs to be supplemented and expanded by a more nuanced account of this history that attends to the different political economies both in the Americas and in Europe before and at this crucial moment in history. My critique of Jennings here is not meant to deny or even downplay the deep impact of racial consciousness in the modern west, and its influence on how people would find a home in the Americas. Rather, my purpose is to show that racial consciousness cannot be understood fully apart from the material conditions in which it is produced and which upon its creation it helps to sustain.\(^{62}\)

\(^{62}\) It is not Jennings account of ‘whiteness’ is false or wrong, but rather that it can and has been ‘overextended’ such that the story of race, and particularly the racial relationship between white and black bodies enshrine din the image of the plantation, becomes the controlling narrative over all peoples of the Americas. It means that native peoples, Asian-Americans and Hispanics, for example, will have to narrate their experiences of exclusion, oppression, and marginalization as if the whole of the Americas was a plantation and within the black-white binary that the plantation did in fact create. The Plantation and its arrangement of white and black bodies does play a crucial role in the history of the Americas, the story of the Americas cannot be told without it. But there are other stories too that didn’t, at least directly, involve the plantation. To pay attention to these stories, we have to be more attentive to political economies beyond the plantation. See Jonathan Tran, “(Post)Critical Political Theology and the Uses and Misuses of Whiteness Discourse,” *Political Theology : The Journal of Christian Socialism* 22, no. 7 (2021): 573–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2021.1912449.
To help us to see how race is always entangled within a political economy, I want now to briefly turn to Black Marxist thought as advanced by the political scientist Cedric Robinson. What Robinson has shown us is that the formation of racial practices of othering in the New World were not sui generis but rather that they were conditioned by the emerging capitalist political economy in the New World. Indeed, the developing racial consciousness and a capitalist world market were not new events in history. As the exile of Jews and Muslims from Spain exemplifies, what Europeans did in the Americas, and parts of Africa and Asia, they had already begun to do in their own homelands. However, Europeans had been limited in their capacity to appropriate lands and produce great wealth in their own homes because European lands were already saturated with competing landowners. Upon “discovering” the New World, these same European lords saw a seemingly unfathomable opportunity. As I began to show in the first section of this chapter, the discovery of the New World was simultaneously the discovery of new peoples to be evangelized and the discovery of capital in the form of vast stretches of “un-developed” or

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“underdeveloped” lands and cheap/slave labor in the form of native and African bodies.

Thus, what the discovery and subsequent conquest of the Americas really entailed was the intensification and universalization of a capitalist commodification of lands that had already started in Europe. Feudal lords from Spain, Portugal, England, France, and Netherlands would come to possess not only a small village, region or even a country, but entire continents. The earth in its entirety slowly became either someone’s private property or the potential for private property. What began as provincial prejudices between peoples thus intensified in the colonial moment as it became a means of rationalizing the brutality of the slave trade and of the appropriation of native lands in the New World. Columbus’s discovery took provincial currents of nationalism, racial othering, and capitalism to another level. The conquest of the Americas multiplied enslavement and the extractivism of the land by feudal lords at a massive scale, and turned ideologies that permitted these into global systems. As a result, capitalism reinforced racial consciousness and race reinforced the veracity and productivity of the capitalist global market. Establishing the racial

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and cultural superiority of the European colonizers became a way of rationalizing the exploitation of black and brown bodies and the dispossessions of natives from their land.

What Jennings helps us to see in this entanglement of demonic forces which we may describe as ‘racial capitalism’ is the way in which it evoked not only a material crisis of displaced bodies but an anthropology that viewed bodies as essentially displaced and, in their displacement, racialized. As colonial greed increasingly demanded the removal of natives from profitable lands and the transplantation of African slaves and natives to work these lands, human bodies began to be conceptualized as naturally floating free from the earth and fully mobile on the land. We can now see how the capitalist commodification of lands into private property and the imposition of a racial scale of existence together reinforce a view of the human as fundamentally disconnected from the land and reconnected around racial being. If the doctrine of creation is about a way of seeing and acting in the world created by God, a way of participating rightly in the created cosmos as embodied creatures who depend on other creatures, then racial capitalism amounts to a distorted, indeed an idolatrous, way of imagining our participation in the cosmos.
Although Jennings account of race is insufficiently attentive to questions of political economy, Jennings does gesture in the direction of racial capitalism when he notes that "people today continue to live in a dual trajectory of constantly shifting geographic spaces made more mutable by the dictates of capitalistic logic and racial identities that are free-floating and changeable yet constantly stabilized through the reciprocity of racial being." It is this new capitalist logic and its confluence with racial identity which, to use Jennings words, drew parasitically on Christian theology, finding arguments in Scripture and the tradition to justify the appropriation of bodies and lands. In doing so the colonial capitalist order also produced a deformed Christianity. In sum, racial becoming in the New World reinforced the idea that capitalism holds all things together and in the market all things live, move, and have their being. This is the world out of which modernity was born.

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65 Ibid., 63.
2.4.5 Modern Belonging: Between Cultural Imperialism and Cultural Nationalism

The age of western colonialism gave way to the Age of Revolution beginning in the 18th century with the French and American Revolutions and leading to the Spring of Nations in 1848. The Enlightenment’s ideals of individual liberty and constitutional government became prime motivators of not only revolutions in Europe, but also of wars of independence across the Americas, as previously colonized peoples shook off the yoke of European imperial rule. The 19th and 20th centuries became a time of national consolidation as peoples sought to establish themselves on the world scene as independent sovereign entities, not only in the Americas but also in Europe, with the notable cases here of Spain and Germany. According to Jennings evangelism, which had played an instrumental role in reinforcing European cultural imperialism during the age of colonialism, would now also play a key role in the processes of nation-building. Indeed, the translation of the Bible into the vernacular language of
different nations and ethnicities also served to reinforce the idea of a consolidated national or ethnic group.\textsuperscript{66}

Jennings argues that the historical process of translating the gospel from one culture to another, while helping to prevent the outright destruction of native cultures, has nevertheless led to the formation of various cultural nationalisms. These nationalisms thus represent a modality of the displacing vision of the colonial order, for they manifest the attempt to cultivate a sense of belonging that prioritizes ethnic wholeness of a dominant group over the complexities of the diversity of shared lives on, with, and through the land. How did this critical aspect of Christianity, translation, give birth to cultural nationalism? For Jennings, the problem is the attempt to translate cultures, ideas, and theological concepts without any actual or real physical communion of peoples. A real joining of peoples through shared lives would require that in the process of translation, both the missionaries and the people receiving the gospels would be transformed through their new shared life—their boundaries shifted, their identities intertwined, their ways of being and knowing in the world

\textsuperscript{66} Jennings demonstrates how this process of language consolidation through biblical literacy was taking place in Europe through the works of the famous British hymn-writer Isaac Watts. See Ibid., 209–20.
mutually re-interpreted. This, however, has not often been the case in the history of Christian missions from the colonial moment onward. Christianity has taken on many different cultural garbs, but the cultures of both missionaries and the evangelized have resisted being changed themselves. We have seen how in the moment of European imperialism this reality of joining was denied by the imposition of European cultural forms and destruction of ‘heretical’ native traditions. In modernity there would not be a destruction of indigenous cultures, but rather a complete fragmentation of the world into various cultural nationalisms.

To show us the tragedy of translation developing in the global south, Jennings turns our attention to John William Colenso, the 19th-century Anglican bishop of Natal, South Africa. While Bishop Colenso’s effort at indigenizing Christianity among the Zulu through the translation of the Bible was successful in opposing the cultural imperialism of the colonial settler church in South Africa, Jennings argues that ultimately the encounter between the Zulu and the gospel wrought no profound changes on the way either the Zulu, Colenso, or the white settler church imagined God or the world around them. By translating the bible into the vernacular Bishop Colenso may have opened the doors for the
Zulu to engage in self-definition through their contextual reading of Scripture, but he himself foreclosed on any opportunity to be transformed, rebuked, or affirmed by a Zulu reading of Scripture. As such, Bishop Colenso, for Jennings, represents the proto-modern as an act of translation and border crossing that always avoids and is against true joining. In the end, the product of this process of translation, which evades a real joining or cultural engagement, is what Jennings calls "a tortured Christian cultural nationalism among non-white peoples."67

According to Jennings, the theological mistake undergirding the practice of translating the gospel without a joining of peoples is akin to the heresy of adoptionism. According to adoptionism, the Word of God merely adopts, and does not assume, a human body in Jesus Christ. What is denied is the hypostatic union, the sense that Jesus Christ is the actual presence of the eternal Word among finite and fallen flesh. For Jennings, the incarnation bespeaks God’s election to not just save humanity but to save humanity through assuming a people and their way of being and knowing in the world. In Christ, God assumes the contours of finite and fallen Jewish flesh, redeeming it from the inside. The

67 Ibid., 147–48.
incarnation thus enacts God’s desire to be joined with the creation, to not be God without the creature, indeed, to allow finite fallen flesh to somehow mysteriously participate in the divine life itself. Evangelism, the homecoming of the Word of God among the peoples of the gentile world, thus requires nothing less than this sharing of life and all the necessary complexities and changes that this entails. To share the gospel is to join a people, to eat with them, to learn from them, to walk with them. This is what Christ did, but this is precisely what missionaries rejected thus performing the very logic of cultural nationalism and its fragmentation of the world.

Therefore, according to Jennings, the rejection of European imperialism through the consolidation of independent sovereign nations in Europe and the Americas in the 18th and 19th centuries, and Africa in the 20th century, would yield an opposite but equally flawed social imagination, namely, the formation of cultural nationalisms and the fragmentation of the world into national, racial, and ethnic enclaves. Thus, while the emancipation of previously colonized peoples and their consolidation into sovereign nations may have undone the legacy of European imperial rule, it did not, according to Jennings, undo the displacing vision of colonialism, but indeed served to entrench it only further.
While the formation of national consciousness has at times been a seemingly necessary step in surviving the genocidal force of colonization, national consciousness and its deep logic of disjoining ultimately cannot be a source of life for the world.

What the history of many modern nation-states shows us is a ‘slow’ democratization of the right of individuals to claim private property, to possess their own land and indeed their own bodies, and thus to have agency in history.68 The displaced colonized subjects did not leave behind the colonial world, but rather gained a seat at the colonizer’s table. As such, the desire to be free, and with it the fervor to belong to one’s people and land in modernity, does not entail a return to our shared life of intimacy with the land and its creatures but rather only manifests the pernicious afterlife of racial capitalism. The result is that emancipation from systems of oppression did not lead to a new healing way of belonging, but only to individuals and communities having more agency in the capitalist world market. Moreover, although modern forms of nationalism

68 Independence and revolution did not entail the automatic democratization of the right to own property, but from the United States to many other nations in the Americas and beyond, indigenous peoples and black peoples were slow to gain this right and, in some cases, remain to this day without it.
were at times cultivated inside of Christian emancipatory projects, nationalism ultimately betrays the deep wisdom of the incarnation and Pentecost, in which the divine joining with humanity urges forth a joining of Jews and gentiles in pilgrimage to God. Nationalism shows itself to be a false messiah.

Jennings shows that not only were racial and ethnic identities naturalized and essentialized, but they were also baptized. The Christian church which the event of Pentecost summoned to be a united community of members gathered from various nations has instead become emblematic of the deep fragmentation of the world around racial, ethnic, and cultural enclaves. This is not only true in extraordinary cases like the segregated churches of South Africa in the mid-20th century or the US south in the 18th and 19th centuries, but it is especially true of the ecclesial academy which continues to produce Christian leaders formed theologically inside of racial, national, and cultural enclaves.

Even when Christian theological discourse attempts to liberate itself from the hegemony of Eurocentrism, then, it falls prey to a form of cultural nationalism. Black, Hispanic, Asian, and African theologies often reflect not our shared life in Christ or even our common life of struggle in the Americas but rather our national, ethnic, and cultural fragmentation. And this has at times
been viewed as a positive and even necessary fragmentation.\textsuperscript{69} To be sure, neither Jennings nor I are arguing against the importance of theologies emerging from the particularity of lived experiences and contexts. However, the formation of cultural boundaries that prevent any kind of productive cross-pollination is a critical aspect of the crisis of home in the Americas and I believe Jennings is right to show the influence of colonialism’s displacing vision in the development of these theologies.\textsuperscript{70} In the modern west, to be at home in the world and to be at home in one’s theological tradition is a constant fight to claim one’s right to exist and to sit at the table which everyone else thinks is being colonized by another group.

Jennings’s critique of nationalism also resonates deeply with Barth’s critique of nationalism. Barth had argued that an idolatrous logic of supersessionism that denied the concreteness of Jesus’s Jewishness was at work in 20\textsuperscript{th} century theologies that supported nationalist regimes. Indeed, Barth and

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\textsuperscript{69} James Cone famously argues that “theology cannot be separated from the community it represents. It assumes that truth has been given to the community at the moment of its birth. Its task is to analyze the implications of that truth, in order to make sure that the community remains committed to that which defines its existence.” James H. Cone, \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, 40th anniversary ed (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 9.
\textsuperscript{70} Others like Brian Bantum have also made similar cases. See Brian Bantum, \textit{Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity}, 2016.
\end{flushleft}
Jennings show that in modernity the white male, European has become a new organizing principle in creation in a way that deeply opposes the rule of God by displacing Christ as the true organizing logic of creation. Thus, the theologies that support and undergird modern projects in ethnic nationalism have a common root in the colonization of the Americas. Moreover, Jennings is able to give further specificity to Barth’s claim that nationalism is sinful by adding that the deepest wound left behind by colonial Christianity is the making of a doctrine of creation “that imagines Christian identity floating above land, landscape, animals, a place, and space, leaving such realities to the machinations of capitalistic calculations and the commodity chains of private property.”71

Jennings shows us that to reject modern ethnic nationalism is not enough and that we must dig deeper to a place Barth didn't go, to the problem of colonial Christianity and its production of bodies displaced from the land.72 Not only must we decolonize Christianity in order to fight Eurocentric cultural imperialism, as Tinker calls for, but we must also reach deeper than that to

71 Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 293.
recover a trajectory of dwelling in creation that enacts the rejoining of peoples through their shared belonging to the land, lest we go out of the frying pan of cultural imperialism into the fire of cultural ethnic and tribal nationalisms.

2.4.6 Home in the Americas Today: a Crisis of Place, Joining, and Belonging

The tension at the heart of the church’s homecoming in the Americas is the incommensurability between the church’s message of salvation, grounded in the Word’s homecoming in creation, and the exile of Native American and African peoples which Euro-Christian colonialism produced. Saranyana refers to this unique and complicated period in the history of the church in the Americas as the “founding evangelism.” However, as my recap of Tinker and Jennings makes clear, what the missionaries helped to lay down was not only the foundations of the church but also the foundations of a deep theological crisis of home. The Biblical story presents us with the possibility that humanity’s wandering east of Eden might be by God’s grace transfigured into a pilgrimage of hope toward union with God in Christ. However, through the demonic forces of racial capitalism in the colonization of the Americas this transformation was inverted, such that the gospel instead signaled an unholy wandering in exile for
Native American and African peoples. Consequently, the gospel of the Word’s homecoming in creation has paradoxically become a harbinger of exile, of homelessness, and indeed of creation slowly fragmenting into chaos.

Tinker demonstrates that the theft of native lands and the cultural genocide of Native Americans at the hands of missionaries and colonizers constitutes a critical fissure at the very foundations of the Americas. As Tinker notes, conversion to Christianity entailed not only a change in Native religious beliefs but also the erasure of the deep social, political, and economic structures that sustained Native American life in the land. The “cultural genocide” of Native Americans devolved into a physical and spiritual exile from which their descendants have not ever fully returned. Jennings shows us that the Americas are the site of the production of a deformed and deforming doctrine of creation that displaces bodies from the land rooted in the commodifying and fragmenting creation taking place in the colonization of the Americas.

To live in the Americas today is thus not only to inherit the wound of many brutal historical displacements, but indeed to indwell a social formation that continues to extract bodies from the land in order to turn both bodies and land into commodifiable goods. The ultimate loss incurred by the colonial
process of racial capitalism and its maturation into modern nationalisms is that our desire to be at home (our desire for a sense of place, for intimacy, and for belonging) is now the very desire that further entrenches the cultural, national and racial enclaves that fragment the world. We have not only lost our intimacy with the land, as Tinker argues, but we have also lost the capacity for intimacy with those who are different from us. This crisis is perfectly visible in a church that reflects and even intensifies the world’s cultural, national, and racial divisions.

How then do we cultivate a way of being at home in the world that does not fall prey to cultural imperialism and yet that also avoids ways of being at home in the world that entrench our differences into uncrossable national, racial, and cultural divisions? Some will argue that in order to debunk all the false essentialized identities created by dominant cultures in modernity, now more than ever we need to be border-crossers; our new vocation is to be not homemakers but migrants who transgress the political, ecclesial, socio-cultural, and economic boundaries that divide us. Yet in chapter 1, I argued that things are not so simple. We cannot hope to faithfully, lovingly, and hopefully address our contemporary crisis of home by proposing that we embrace a life of
migrancy in the world such that we become less attached to places and people. Not only is such a response blind to the plight of many displaced peoples who feel and experience the loss of home as deep suffering and as a great obstacle to their flourishing, but it also is a response blind to the profound problematic of modern nomadism. We cannot forget that the nomadism emerging from the enlightenment and championed by the nihilists is that which precisely gave birth to our modern crisis of homesickness and the resulting reactionary politics of ethnic nationalism that we saw in the 20th century and still see today.

In the previous chapter, in dialogue with Barth I argued that the desire for home is implanted in us by God and that our home is not in some transcendent realm but to be found in the particularities of finite creaturely life. Moreover, I argued that it is in Christ’s life that we must look for the way to our true home. Yet, if the homecoming of Christ to the Americas on the ships of colonizers wreaked such havoc, can Christ truly be the answer to the Americas’ crisis of home?
2.5 A Decolonial Option

One way to respond to the Americas’ crisis of home is to follow the path of decoloniality. Decolonial theory offers an alternative to the dominant Marxist critique of colonialism. It is also a critical theory that, unlike Marxism, emerges from the soil of the Americas. Indeed, Tinker’s and Jennings’s diagnoses of the colonial wound of the Americas share many affinities with decolonial critique. To understand the decolonial critique, I will first briefly show how it diverged from the Marxist critical theory at its origins.

In the 1920s, a century after the birth of most nations in Latin America, a dispute continued to be waged over the soul of the continent. Was Latin America to follow the path of capitalism and give birth to modern industrialized nations that rivaled their old colonizers in power and wealth, or would it reject the world of western capitalism, which had subjugated its lands and peoples for centuries while European nations amassed great wealth?73 One of the most prominent voices in this debate was José Carlos Mariátegui, a political philosopher and journalist who founded the socialist party in Peru. Beyond the obvious

opposition that Mariátegui faced from the Peruvian oligarchy, he also faced opposition from his allies on the left, particularly from a nationalist and antiimperialist political movement led by Victor Raúl Haya de La Torre. Mariátegui’s nationalist critics argued that embracing Marxism would only lead Peru down a Eurocentric path; after all, they argued, both Marxism and capitalism represented European answers to European problems. Mariátegui worked throughout his life to develop an authentic form of Latin American socialism that recognized that saving the nation’s soul entailed not only the rejection of western capitalism but also honoring the cultures and forms of rationality of the conquered, still-marginalized indigenous peoples of Peru. Mariátegui’s struggle points to the development of two distinct schools of critical thought that continue to co-exist in Latin America today: Latin American Marxist critique and decolonial critique.

74 Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, founder of APRA, the American Popular Revolutionary Party, was one of the most important voices of anti-imperialism in Latin America in the early 20th century.
75 See Quijano’s preface to Mariátegui’s Textos Básicos in which Mariátegui responds to ethno-nationalists like Haya de la Torre. José Carlos Mariátegui and Aníbal E. Quijano Obregón, Textos Básicos, 1. ed., reimpr, Tierra Firme (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995).
76 Gutiérrez’s A Theology of Liberation emerges from and is a response to this geopolitical crisis in Peru between the oligarchy, Mariáteguian socialism and Hayalan nationalist anti-imperialism. North American retrievals of Latin American liberation theology and particularly of Gutiérrez’s work have often ignored the “emplacement” of liberation theology and how for instance, Gutiérrez proposals grow out of the concrete political and economic debates in Peru during the
In the 1960s, the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano began to articulate a “theory of dependence” built on Mariátegui’s attempts to develop a form of critical thought that was genuinely Latin American. Quijano found in Mariátegui’s work a rejection of the brutal economic structures of capitalism and a rejection of Europe as a source for socio-cultural and political frameworks. Quijano would call the collective power exerted by the meshwork of European socio-cultural, economic, and political frameworks imposed by the colonizers on the Americas the “coloniality of power.” He argued that while South and Central American nations had gained limited political independence from Europe in the 1800s, they continued to be epistemically dependent on Europe as they adopted European economic, political, social, and cultural governing structures to solve their problems. Quijano proposed that unless Latin Americans look to their own sources—namely indigenous ways of being and knowing—to address their issues, the continent would remain a colonial site of extraction for the European powers. Many see in Quijano’s theory of dependence a critique that did not


77 For Quijano’s’ theory of dependence see Quijano, “COLONIALITY AND MODERNITY/RATIONALITY.”
simply wish to overcome colonial structures of political and economic domination, but to delink or disconnect entirely from the underlying epistemic principles of European colonialism to think and sense the world “otherwise.” 78

In sum, the “decolonial” mode of critical reflection sees the conquest of the Americas not primarily as the imposition of European political and economic oppressive systems but fundamentally as an epistemological conquest—that is to say, the destruction of native ways of being and knowing in the world and the imposition of Eurocentric epistemologies and praxis over native peoples. Liberation for decolonial scholars thus means not only liberation from modes of capitalist extractivism but a radical detachment from all Eurocentric ways of being and knowing that would lead to the resurgence of native cultures and peoples. Walter Mignolo, one of the leading contemporary voices in decolonial theory, has also argued that Christianity has been a critical site of European epistemic domination. Mignolo argues that the Christian church was not only politically complicit in the conquest and genocide of native peoples and the mass displacement of African peoples through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade; rather,

78 This language of otherwise is not Quijano’s but comes from Walter Mignolo, who is one of the prominent figures of decoloniality today and whose work is deeply indebted to Quijano.
the Christianity that arrived in the Americas was an expression of the rationality
or the very logic undergirding colonial modernity.\textsuperscript{79} Liberation from the
domination of Eurocentric coloniality thus would require delinking from
Christian modern western thought itself.

Tinker’s invective against Gustavo Gutiérrez in light of his failure to
incorporate the loss of culture into his liberationist project does not equally apply
to Latin American decolonial theory.\textsuperscript{80} The decolonial critique of the colonization
of the Americas thus aligns more with Tinker and Jennings’s explanation of the
colonial wound than the Marxist critique of liberationists. Tinker would agree
with decolonial scholars that the Christianity implanted by missionaries in the
New World was a mode of European religious consciousness that was imposed
hegemonically at the expense of destroying the diversity of native spiritualities
present in the land.

\textsuperscript{79} See Mignolo, \textit{The Darker Side of Western Modernity}.
\textsuperscript{80} While Gutiérrez does make brief mention Quijano’s theory of dependence, he relies more
heavily on Mariátegui’s Marxist critique, thus setting the path for future liberation theologians’
reliance on Marx.
Jennings is also much indebted to decolonial theory in his description of the colonial wound of the Americas.\textsuperscript{81} However, he has less use for the kind of vision of the healing of this wound that decoloniality presents. For Mignolo and many others who subscribe to the decolonial option, healing the colonial wound entails working toward the re-emergence of indigenous cultures eradicated by colonialism and, as such, toward the making of a “pluriverse”—a world that embraces a plurality of ways of being and knowing. While this itself is not a problem, what is not as clear within decolonial thought is whether a “joining” of peoples and cultures is of any necessity in this pluriverse.\textsuperscript{82} The notion that cultures and peoples are meant to desire each other and engage in cultural mixing is a normative Christian claim that decolonial theorists are unwilling to make. Yet, for Jennings, this “joining” of peoples is an essential aspect of overcoming the colonial wound, which not only destroyed native cultures but also displaced bodies from the land and fragmented the world into cultural, national, and racial enclaves.

\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, Jennings specifically invokes Mignolo in his critique of Western cultural imperialism. See Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 86–87.

Within their critiques of the colonization of the Americas, both Tinker and Jennings reserve the possibility of a Christianity that does not co-opt capitalism and that does not perpetuate the myth of Euro-American cultural and racial superiority which justified the taking of the lands and destruction of peoples and cultures.\(^8^3\) However, for Tinker and Jennings healing the colonial wound requires allowing a truly indigenous Christianity to take root, which is to say, they gesture toward a decolonization of Christianity itself. For Tinker, this must begin by presenting a Christian faith not from the exclusivity of claims about Jesus and atonement, but rather with the universality of Christian claims about the Creator God. For Jennings, on the other hand, the Christian scandal of particularity is precisely what needs to be recovered in order to undo the worst damage of colonialism. Moreover, for Tinker, returning stolen lands to native tribes is a necessary step on the way to recovering the native cultures lost to the conquest. By contrast, for Jennings, it is not in recovery of the past but in looking to a new

\(^8^3\) In recent years there has been an attempt to ‘decolonize’ Christianity that has been carried forth largely by Latino/a theologians in North America and, in some cases, also by Latin American liberation theologians. See Decol\(\text{O}\)nal Christiani\(\text{e}\)ties: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives, 2019; Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012). Barreto and Sirvent, Decol\(\text{O}\)nal Christiani\(\text{e}\)ties.
beginning in the future that the colonial wound will be healed. On the first point, I take Jennings’s side and argue that the particularity of Christ is a necessary means of healing the colonial wound; however, concerning the latter point, I argue that the church ought to look neither to the past nor to the future to heal the colonial wound, but rather the church must look to the Spirit’s redemptive work in the present and at the margins of society. I now will analyze these claims in further detail.

2.6 Dismantling the House Colonialism Built

By way of bringing this chapter to a close, this final section recaps three critical aspects of the colonial wound at the foundations of the Americas and how Tinker and Jennings suggest each be addressed. These critical aspects are the displacement of natives from their ancestral lands and the transformation of these lands into private property, the ongoing destruction of Native and African cultures which this precipitated, and the cultivation of a segregated mentality that, rather than drawing a shared sense of belonging from belonging to a shared land, divides peoples into racial, ethnic, and national forms of belonging. These are the foundations of the house colonialism built in the Americas.
2.6.1 The Foundations of the House: The Loss of the Land

At the foundations of the crisis of home in the Americas is a crisis of the loss of the land. According to Ray Aldred, “land was and still is the center of controversy and dispute between the Western colonial and current Nation-states (along with their churches), and Indigenous people.” ⁸⁴ In North America, indigenous peoples have been forced to choose between the Scylla of ceding their ancestral lands and assimilating to Euro-American society and the Charybdis of death or forced resettlement in unknown and often barren places. These sites of forced resettlement following exile, now called reservations, today represent the sovereign territory of many Indian nations across the US and Canada. However, as Tinker notes, reservations have historically been afflicted by various forms of unhealthy economic, social and political dependence on the US and Canadian governments. More than that, as the constant news cycle of protests against the building of pipelines on native lands demonstrates, the sovereignty of these nations is too often threatened by capitalist industrial encroachment. ⁸⁵ Yet, the

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problem of land has not only been one endemic to North America, nor simply to the indigenous.

In South and Central America, much of the land taken by European colonizers at the moment of conquest was not returned to the natives after the wars of independence, but rather was passed down to the criollos and mestizos who continued to subjugate native peoples long after. Thus, redistribution of lands has remained a critical problem throughout Latin America, often being identified as one of the principal roots of the pervasive poverty that afflicts the continent and which eventually always leads to political turmoil and violent uprisings. Moreover, the problem of land is of course not limited to the experience of indigenous peoples. Afro-descendants and other ethnic minorities

86 In the colonial tabula rasa, criollos were the children of Europeans born in the Americas and mestizos were the ‘mixed’ children of Europeans and natives. For an account of how black and native farming lands in the Americas were reappropriated as mestizo and ladino lands in the consolidations of many nations in Latin America, see Sharlene Mollett, “The Power to Plunder: Rethinking Land Grabbing in Latin America: The Power to Plunder,” Antipode 48, no. 2 (March 2016): 412–32, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12190.
throughout the Americas have also historically been ghettoized and marginalized, being granted little to no access to fertile lands.88

To be clear, the “land crisis” that afflicts many in the Americas is not reducible to the question of “who possesses it?” To reduce it to those terms is to be captive to the logic of private property, which for Jennings and Tinker is the essence of the problem. As Tinker and Jennings both note, the commodification and privatization of land in the modern capitalist world system does not just declare who is the owner of the land but institutes a fundamentally new way of relating to the land, no longer as sacred but as commodity.89 This transformation of the kind and quality of our relationship to the land has produced a way of being at home in the earth that is fundamentally ignorant of the careful harmony and balance of life on the earth, and as such that is self-destructive in that it renders the earth less habitable. As both Jennings and Tinker note, the commodification of the land that allows for practices of resource extraction that pollute the environment and destroy the landscape also lies at the roots of the

current ecological crisis throughout the world, and particularly in the Americas. Often those who first feel the impact of the ecological catastrophe are precisely those who live on the margins of society.\textsuperscript{90}

To this day no process of reparation exists for the theft of Native American lands.\textsuperscript{91} The existence of reservations in which some Native American tribes preserve a limited amount of sovereignty points less to the state’s historical reparation for the theft of lands by colonizers, and more to a history of broken treaties and promises by the state that for centuries continued to push natives from their ancestral lands to these marginal territories to meet the demands of industrial capitalism. This is one reason why Jennings acknowledges that it is possible to imagine a post-racial world that still functions within the logics of colonial displacement and thereby through the logic of private property.\textsuperscript{92} The ongoing crisis of land in the Americas raises the question of whether there can be a true healing of the colonial wound in the Americas without a fundamental change to the way states and individuals relate to the land as mere commodity,

\textsuperscript{91} See Tinker’s Lecture on the Doctrine of Discovery (available through a video recording online. Tinker, \textit{Reflections on the Doctrine of Discovery by Tink Tinker}.
\textsuperscript{92} Jennings, \textit{The Christian Imagination}, 290.
indeed as private property. For Tinker and for many Native American liberation theologians, the question of decolonization, and with it the desire for Native American integral liberation, hinges on the question of Native American reclaiming sovereignty over their ancestral lands and thereby reestablishing a right relationship with the land. According to this argument no full healing will come to native communities, nor can true reconciliation with the descendants of colonizers take place, without a restoration of the sovereignty of American Indians over their ancestral lands.

An important distinction is worth making here between the critique Jennings makes of modern nationalism and the importance of Native American sovereignty expressed by Tinker. For Tinker, the concept of Native American national sovereignty is not based on native claims to possession of lands, but rather on native claims to a deep abiding connection with and belonging to the land and its creatures, paired with a sense that native peoples are custodians of these sacred lands. Following Jennings’ s line of critique, we must distinguish a nation as constituted by the possession of land or territory, and a nation or people constituted by their shared belonging to a land. The national identity of indigenous peoples, linked as it is to an understanding of the sacredness of the
land and the covenantal and not merely transactional relationship between the people and the land, thus transgresses modern notions of nationhood produced in colonial modernity. That is not to say that indigenous national identity is exempt from being coopted by a racial-capitalist framing or that indigenous claims to the land are incontrovertible and always already innocent. However, a critique of indigenous forms of nationalism must come from a different critical stance than that offered by modern critical theories, namely, it must come from within indigenous peoples themselves or at least from frames of reference that view the land as more than mere private property.

Nevertheless, Tinker remains hopeful that Christians can play a critical role in the undoing this intractable problem of the commodification of lands in the Americas. Faced with the impossibility of the state dismissing its own citizens’ claims on private property in favor of Native American activism, Tinker and many other native activists believe that churches and other non-state institutions can begin the process of “decolonizing the land.” This can be done first by acknowledging the history of the aboriginal inhabitants of the land upon which buildings and churches belonging to such institutions were built. This we might call an epistemological act of decolonization that acknowledges other
relations between people and land beyond property ownership. Another way of decolonizing the land is to begin to recover a way of life with the land and its creatures that nurtures intimacy and cultivates responsibility beyond the logic of private property. One way to do this decolonial work is through recovering native wisdom about the land, a wisdom that is often founded on harmony with all living and non-living creatures, or what Randy Woodley calls “shalom.” I will engage in more detail with the recovery of native wisdom in the next section as well as in chapter 5. However, I note here that the recovery of native wisdom about the land can easily collapse into a project of colonial extractivism if it ignores the historic relationship of native peoples with particular lands in the Americas. The historic theft of native thus stands as a profound obstacle to making peace with the land.

As such, a third and more concrete way of decolonizing the land is to actually “return” the lands. For Tinker there are concrete ways that the church and Christians can be involved in this aspect of decolonizing the land. The primary way, one which Tinker has been known to encourage, is that the land upon which closed-down churches or other institutional facilities sit should be returned to the native tribes who claim aboriginal stewardship over the land (or
at the very least to sell the lands at an equitable price only to these native tribes). Beyond these two important solutions, churches can also use their political power to advocate against the incursion into native lands of private capitalist interests. An example of this would be joining with native peoples in rejecting the building of oil pipelines that transgress native territorial claims.

Tinker, however, provides no clear suggestion for what it means for historically marginalized non-native communities to participate in decolonizing the land. And Jennings offers only very general advice, exhorting us to “[attend to] the spatial dynamics at play in the formation of social existence…to imagine reconfigurations of living spaces that might promote more just societies.” For Jennings this means that everyday people should be more thoughtful about where and why they buy property by educating themselves on the history of the lands that they are buying or renting (both the social and biological history). Jennings also avers that those involved in “the formation of space and those concerned with identity formation—urban planners, ecologists, scientists, real

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estate, brokers, developers [be joined] in conversation with theologians, ethicists, literary and postcolonial theorists, sociologists, anthropologists and historians.”

Interestingly, Jennings does not touch the question of returning lands to natives. Perhaps the implicit reason for this lacuna in Jennings’s work has to do with the fact that it is not clear what “returning the land” would mean for historically marginalized non-native communities in the Americas. Again, I will engage with this matter in more detail below, but for now, suffice it to say that for Jennings a return to the way America looked before the Europeans arrived, and therefore before the slave ships arrived with African peoples, is not the ultimate solution to the Americas’ crisis of home.

2.6.2 The Foolishness of the Builders: The Loss of Native Wisdom

Tinker argues convincingly that the theft and commodification of native lands was the condition for the possibility of the destruction of native cultures throughout the Americas. This “cultural genocide” means that the deep wisdom of native ways of dwelling in the land and of the necessary skills for flourishing with the creatures of the land have either been ignored or forgotten altogether.

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95 Ibid., 293.
Indeed, the imposition of European political, economic, and cultural structures that were already always displaced and displacing rendered such learning impossible as Europeans made the erasure of Native the pre-condition for dwelling in the land. Moreover, Christianity played a critical role in the erasure of these native cultures, often demonizing all aspects of native culture to root out idolatry. In destroying the deep structures of Native American culture which connected bodies to land, plants, animals, and landscape, the missionaries and colonizers also lost their own capacity to connect with the land and ecological communities present in the stolen lands, and thus to discern the virtues, skills, and habits necessary to flourish not only in but with creation in the Americas.

Rejecting the gifts of Native American wisdom has meant that the Euro-American builders of America have built the kind of house they desired but not the one they needed. It is a house made with fortified walls to protect against the retributive invasion of natives and other newcomers to the land, but which also disrupted the deep structures of connection throughout the land. Moreover, the “rules of the house,” how one is to inhabit the land, structure and restructure the land, and relate to others in the land, from the beginning were made to disproportionately benefit Euro-American or white peoples at the expense of
others. And these rules, as already mentioned, were always already established without the real wisdom necessary to flourish with the land and its creatures. The unsustainability of the house built by colonialism is becoming more and more apparent amid the ecological crisis. The effects of this situation, however, are not just somatic but also moral and spiritual.

The deep spiritual and moral failure rooted in the lack of wisdom of the builders of the house of the Americas has left Americans afflicted with a profound sense of placelessness and rootlessness which produces, ironically, both the global citizen who consumes and extracts cultures, as well the insecurity behind nationalism and xenophobia. Once again, ignorance about natives and the perpetuation of the enlightenment myth of advanced European civilization is not a problem endemic to the North but is also deeply rooted in South and Central America, where knowledge of native cultures is often reduced to “national patrimony.” National patrimony means native cultures are relegated to museums or monetized as tourist attractions rather than being seen as living knowledge in real communities that are still struggling to flourish because of the aftermath of colonialism. Moreover, recent attempts to “recover” native cultures have too often boiled down to cultural appropriations that make use of native
wisdom to further non-native goals and desires, and these are often influenced by a view of human flourishing dictated by capitalism. Tinker thus warns against confusing the New Age movement and its appropriation of native cultures with a true reclaiming of the deep wisdom of Native American cultures. The deep structures of cultural formation can only be learned through prolonged encounters, not just through abstract knowledge of another people’s culture but through participating and joining them in solidarity.

In view of the foolishness of the colonizers’ project of homemaking in the Americas, Jennings and Tinker both propose the need to learn to perceive the world again through indigenous wisdom. Such work is akin to what decolonial scholars call epistemological decolonization. As I briefly noted earlier, epistemological decolonization entails two distinct but interrelated processes: de-linking and re-emergence. De-linking is the process of becoming unbound from or standing outside of western forms of discourse, rationality, and praxis. Its counterpart is re-emergence, which is the process of recovering non-western epistemologies through the recoveries of native languages, religious practices, norms, values, traditions, etc. Tinker suggests that for Native Americans who have adopted Christianity, decolonizing might entail leaving the church or
developing native expressions of Christianity that do not look like the traditional expressions of the west.

More specifically, in Missionary Conquest, Tinker argues that a truly indigenous Christianity needs to begin not with the atoning work of Christ, which he notes has been the tragic starting place for most historic attempts to evangelize Native American communities. Indeed, Tinker even rejects the idea that Latin American and black liberationist interpretations of Jesus that show Jesus to be on the side of the poor and those on the margins can be a possible starting place. Tinker writes, “for American Indians, on the contrary, the radical interpretation of Jesus would be an unproductive and even counterproductive starting point for a liberation theology because the first proclamation of Jesus among any Indian community came as the beginning of a colonial conquest that included the total displacing of centuries-old religious traditions and the replacing of those tradition with a one-size-fits-all euro-western Jesus. And even...[correcting] Jesus’ ethnicity historically to some shade of Mediterranean brown helps little to obviate our historical experience of the way the missionary preaching about Jesus was used to destroy our cultures and legitimate the theft
Indeed, Tinker identifies Christomonism, the reduction of Judeo-Christian narrative to a fall/redemption framework and therefore to Jesus Christ’s atoning work, as the reason for the loss of the doctrine of creation and as one of the primary heresies found among Christians today.\footnote{Tinker, \textit{American Indian Liberation}, 129.}

Tinker instead argues that Christians ought to recover the doctrine of creation as a more fitting starting place if their theologies are to be able to engage with other religious traditions, including indigenous ones. Indeed, Tinker argues, the great ecumenical creeds of the Christian tradition begin not with Jesus but with the Creator God who brought all things and therefore all living and non-living creatures and peoples and their cultures into existence. To begin with this creator is to grant dignity to all forms of life and to ways of life that exist beyond the exclusive claims of Christian faith. Tinker concludes that in the end, “the ideal world to which Jesus points in the gospels is precisely the realization of that proper relationship between the Creator and the created.”\footnote{Ibid., 44–47.} To begin with the Creator of all and therefore with the dignity and interconnectivity of all creatures

\footnote{Ibid., 52.}
is to begin with goodness, and therefore not to operate with the colonialist desire to root out the evil from every people and culture.

I began in chapter 1 by discerning with Karl Barth a theology of home that begins with Jesus Christ. However, Barth is also among the theologians most often criticized for committing the mistake of christomonism and indeed also criticized for undermining a Christian doctrine of creation through his denial of any form of natural theology! Thus, if Tinker is correct in his claims, a proper theology of home from the colonial wounds of the Americas cannot, as I have begun to do in the previous chapter, begin with Jesus Christ.

While I agree with Tinker’s claim that a truly indigenous Christianity is necessary, I believe Tinker misidentifies the heart of the problem by locating it in christology. First, some of the earliest journals of missionaries to the Americas show that these missionaries began not by teaching the natives about Christ, for they believed the natives to be too malformed by pagan beliefs to receive and understanding that gift, but rather through doctrines of creation. These early

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99 In 1493, a hermit friar of the order of St. Jerome named Ramón Pané joined the second Columbian voyage to the Americas and became the first missionary to the Americas. Pané’s writings about his evangelistic efforts give us insight into the earliest theological production in the Americas. Saranyana remarks that Pané quickly learned the language of the local Taíno people of the modern-day Dominican Republic, and he took to the task of presenting the gospel
missionaries believed that if the natives could first be engaged on the grounds of their own religion, even see Christian principles in their own religions, then the missionaries could separate the heresy and paganism from the good kernels of indigenous belief and start to teach them a rule of life that accorded with the natural law of Scripture. Thus, a turn to a theology of creation will not necessarily lead down the path of decolonial Christianity that Tinker envisions.

Nevertheless, it is true that at least in the past century, Protestant efforts at evangelism not only in the US but throughout Latin America have heavily accentuated human sin and Christ’s atoning work, often creating a false dichotomy between salvation as atonement from sin and salvation as the

in the natives’ language and learning about their culture and religious beliefs. Indeed, Pané’s work Relación Acerca de las Fabulas de los Indios is one of a few extant ethnographic works describing the religious universe of the Taíno people. Saranyana highlights three key aspects of Pané’s evangelistic labors: an initial emphasis on the doctrine of creation, strong training in Christian morality beginning with the decalogue, and finally, the recitation of Christian prayers. For many years to come, missionaries to the New World would follow versions of Pané’s evangelistic plan, each relying on the language of a common Creator to open up wider paths for communicating Christian notions about God to the natives. Yet this emphasis on the doctrine of creation would also engender a systemic conversion of native ways of being and knowing with and through the created world—its plants, animals, and the soil. To become a Christian meant leaving the old native cosmologies behind and making a new home in a Christian world—a world which would bear the distinct marks of European culture. Saranyana, Breve Historia de la Teología en América Latina, 12.

100 Another historic example of evangelization through a doctrine of creation can be found Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Loa to Divine Narcissus. Juana Inés de la Cruz and Pamela Kirk Rappaport, Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz: Selected Writings, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2005).
restoration of a just and good created order. Yet, if we direct Tinker’s critique at this mode of theological formation and evangelization, we might note that the heart of the problem is not that contemporary evangelism begins with Jesus Christ, but rather a profound cultural blindness that ignores the way in which Christian faith is always already contextual. In many cases, the Christ being presented has lost his first-century Jewishness and taken on the cultural and national identity of the evangelizer. Such a Christ is indeed not only displaced but produces Christians who are displaced and displacing. Tinker all too quickly minimizes the efforts of liberation theologians to contextualize Jesus, in part because he sees that the trajectory of these efforts has not always led to a decolonized Christianity. This nationalist christology, however, is precisely what Barth rejected in his own time and context and it is a kind of Christology, as Jennings has argued, that emerges from the colonial distortion of the doctrine of creation. The problem then is christological, but if Jennings is right, and I believe he is, it has to do with a christology that rejects the full meaning of the Incarnation and of Pentecost.
2.6.3 A House Divided

In Tinker’s liberating vision for Native Americans a conciliatory joining of Euro-American and Native peoples and cultures is possible, but it is not clear whether it is ultimately necessary. Tinker is driven by a concern for the impoverishment of the Native American community and the need to heal the community. His concern is right and good, and indeed, healing Native American communities should be a precondition for any work of reconciliation. Yet, as Jennings observes, one of the tragic outcomes of colonization that becomes visible through an analysis of modern racial existence is the deep alienation between peoples that runs right through the church herself.\(^\text{101}\) While Jennings and Tinker are both wary of moving too quickly toward a reconciliation (or conciliation) of peoples and cultures before true healing and repentance takes place, nevertheless Jennings makes clear that the joining of peoples is not only

\(^{101}\) At the heart of Jennings’s account of the formation of a racial world in the foundations of the Americas is his account of how space was reimagined by European Christian within a colonial framework and therefore mangled by “the economic and political calculations of nation-states and corporations.” What was lost in this reimagining of space was the relationship between peoples and places, a relationship in which the land was no mere commodity able to be mathematically dissected and sold but in which the land was a facilitator for the formation of identity. Jennings’s final chapter asks the question, “if space and race go together in the making of modern peoples, then what would be involved in the spatial and racial unmaking of modern peoples, that is, the remaking that should be the constitution of Christian people?” Jennings, _The Christian Imagination_, 250.
the telos of a flourishing creation but indeed that the failure to accomplish this joining lies at the heart of the crisis of colonial modernity.

According to Jennings, despite Christianity’s entanglement with colonialism, Christianity can still offer an alternative vision of space, people, and place that counters the segregation of space and bodies in the modern West. The vision he offers is rooted neither in an uncritical recovery of pre-colonial native cultures, nor does it embrace an anti-essentialist fantasy that disintegrates all concrete claims of belonging between peoples and lands. Jennings’s vision instead is distinctively Christological and rooted in the covenantal history between Israel and the Creator. He argues for a renewed doctrine of creation that avoids the fundamental theological error of adoptionism, the attempt to implant the gospel in different cultures without a concrete joining bodies and lives. This renewed doctrine of creation, while being grounded in God’s unconditional election Israel, points toward Pentecost and the Spirit’s work of joining of Jew and Gentile in Christ as the telos of its trajectory. For Jennings, the church has an important role to play in this work of healing, for the church inhabits a story of deep joining, the joining of Gentiles and Jews in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this trajectory of joining at the heart of the economy of
salvation that colonial Christianity rejected. Recovering this story is basic to the struggle to overcome modern homelessness and its impact not only on Native Americans and other ethnic minorities, but on all who call creation home. However, attempts at overcoming the wounds inflicted by colonial Christianity, such as the attempts that seek to liberate oppressed peoples, which do not also offer an account of the Creator’s will to join peoples to each other and to the land, will ultimately only reinscribe colonial modernity’s deep fragmenting and isolating wound.

2.7 Christianity as a Story of Joining

For Jennings, healing the colonial wound in Christianity begins with Christians in the modern west remembering their Gentile identity.\textsuperscript{102} This remembrance becomes a new hermeneutic through which to read Israel’s scriptures, as if Gentiles from every tribe, tongue, and nation in the world are ‘second readers’ of an intimate conversation between Israel’s God and Israel. For Jennings, it is the Canaanite woman, who interrupts the conversation between

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 250–88.
Jesus and his disciples and then speaks Israel’s Scriptures in her desperate attempt to get Jesus to heal her child, that best represents the subject position of Gentile Christians in scripture’s drama of salvation. To be a Gentile Christian is to be one who is drawn into Israel’s story out of need for healing and to have been surprisingly granted the grace to be at the table set for the Jewish children of God.\textsuperscript{103}

Jennings’s reading of the Canaanite woman as the icon that points to Gentile Christian subjectivity provides a powerful alternative to the way in which the missionaries at the colonial moment imagined themselves before the native peoples of the land. One of the reasons, Tinker argues, that Indigenous peoples have not readily accepted the proposal of Latin American liberation theology to read the God of Israel as a liberation God and thus to assume the story of oppressed Israel as their own story, is that the God of the Bible is an ambiguous character who is at times on the side of the conqueror and at other times on the side of conqueror. Robert Warrior makes this case in essay where he argues that Native Americans occupy the literary place of Canaanites—those who Israel was called to displace and eradicate from the land in order to bring

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 262–63.
about their own homecoming—in the Christian imaginary. This God, the same God who had led the Israelites out of oppression in Egypt, was not a God that indigenous peoples could ever accept.

However, Jennings posits that all Gentile Christians inhabit the reality not of Israel but of the Canaanite woman, those without any real claim, divine or not, to the land but moved by need and desire for liberation from the forces of evil in the world. The story of Israel opens up to the Canaanite woman and both of their worlds are changed. Jennings sees layers of complexity in the biblical narrative that go beyond the fall-redemption category without rejecting those. For Jennings the story begins with divine desire, and it is fundamentally the story not of humans or even Israel, but of God. Through Israel this story opens up to all of creation. There is for a Jennings a new beginning and a joining taking place in the Biblical narrative that thwarts and destabilizes the constant vying for power of the world’s peoples. And this is the very logic of creation-joining-something that Tinker’s language of interconnectedness of creation doesn’t quite get us to.

If the Canaanite woman serves as a kind of hermeneutical device for how Christian Gentiles are joined to Israel’s scripture and their story, then the image
of the crowds serves as a hermeneutic for how Christian Gentiles and Jews joined together social relations around Christ. According to Jennings, “there is a communion taking place in the gathering of listeners to Jesus…. Those who under normal circumstances would never be together must be together to find Jesus of Nazareth, to hear him and gain from him their desires. Jesus, in forming a new Israel in the midst of Israel, positioned himself as the new source of desire,” for his Jewish followers but also for some Gentiles.\(^{104}\)

This drawing of Gentiles toward the God of Israel, manifest both in the Canaanite woman and in the crowds that followed Jesus, becomes for Jennings an icon of the history of all peoples drawn from every nation to make a pilgrimage to Israel to hear about Israel’s God revealed in Jesus Christ, and then

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 264. Jennings’ theology of desire is Christocentric. In line with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, all desires are rightly ordered which have God as their chief end. This includes the desire for intimacy, for belonging, and for communion- indeed the desire for God. One of Jennings’ refrains throughout his exegesis of Israel’s election is that the story is one in which God constantly stands between Israel and the land. God is not standing “in the way” in the sense of preventing Israel from fulfilling their desire, indeed, their need for land. Rather God is constantly reorienting this desire, purifying it, redeeming it. God is making sure that arrival, rest, belonging, rootedness all the gifts that we envision as emerging from having a homeland, are gifts that eventually point to God. As the Westminster catechism, notes, this is the chief end of all creatures, to glorify God and enjoy God forever. But this is not turn dualistic, creation is God’s gift of love and it is through our receiving of this gift with thankfulness to the Creator that we are satisfied as creatures. At the same time this desire toward God turns outward to creation.
return back to their nations transformed.\textsuperscript{105} Gentiles become like the magi who bring gifts to the messiah of Israel and return “home” by another route, changed now by their encounter with the Son of God. Jennings observes how this drawing of Gentiles toward Israel is the secret will of God, which was before the foundations of the world, but which is revealed in the fullness of time through Jesus Christ, according to the writer of Ephesians.\textsuperscript{106}

This joining event through which Gentiles are made partakers of Israel’s story of salvation with Israel’s Creator God is not to be conceived as individual salvation, but rather as the restoration of all creation, human and other than human. As Gentiles return from their pilgrimage to Israel, not only have they been reconciled to God and established new bonds of intimacy with Jews, but indeed they begin to imagine their sense of peoplehood and their ways of relating to their homelands differently, now in light of Jesus Christ. “Israel’s God ruptures the way peoples imagine their collective existence, reorganizing what they know about God and how they should understand themselves in their land

\textsuperscript{105} “As we enter the story of Israel we are being drawn into their land, their hoped-for place and their life in that space. Yet what constitutes that space is centrally neither land nor literacy, but God. Israel’s story opens to all people not simply the very nature of humanity, but the drama of peoples in the presence of the living God.” Ibid., 252–53.

\textsuperscript{106} Ephesians 1:9-10
and in the world.”  

There is an affirmation of the histories of peoples and their attachment to particular lands, but it’s not a mere affirmation of national territorial claims. While Israel’s story reveals the creature in her longing for home, the same history also destabilizes our notions of home and belonging, bringing judgment on all our attempts to settle apart from Jesus Christ.

Having established the basic contours of how Jennings reads the Scriptures as enacting a story of joining, I want first to briefly outline some christological and pneumatological implications of Jennings’s telling of the Christian story, before engaging how the trajectory of this story of Jew-Gentile joining has been thwarted.

### 2.7.1 Jesus: the Site of Joining

According to Jennings, Jesus Christ reveals “the intensity and depth of the Holy One’s journey with Israel and God’s great love for the elect people.” This is a dialectic relationship, with Jesus defined by Israel’s story, and at the same time, Israel’s story re-ordered around Jesus. As mentioned early, for Jennings

\[^{107}\text{Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 253.}\]
\[^{108}\text{Ibid., 259.}\]

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Gentiles take up the subject position of the Canaanite woman—drawn to Israel by a critical need, just as Israel was once drawn to Egypt by need, but rather than becoming slaves like Israel did with Egypt, freed from their bondage in and through their journey to Israel to meet the Christ. Does that mean that Israel’s story becomes the story of every Gentile nation? No! But it does mean that the stories of the Gentile nations are now re-ordered around the story of Israel, which is to say the story of Jesus. Jennings tries to thread the needle between the particular and the universal, rejecting the idea that the Jesus movement was “simply a reform movement in Judaism,” a provincializing move, and on the other hand, rejecting the missiological mistake of translation without joining which strips Jesus of his Jewishness to reclothe him in the cultural garb of Gentile peoples.109

True to his Barthian roots, Jennings sees Jesus as evoking a crisis not only upon Israel but also upon the Gentiles who overhear Israel’s story. Jennings states: “just as Israel’s election ruptures Gentile space (and time)—breaking open knowledge and reorienting truth—so does Jesus’ election bring to Israel a

109 Ibid., 265.
rupture.”

Jesus brings about a moment of deep and serious reflection and conversion for both Israel and the Gentiles. But, critically, “this rupture...is not the destruction or eradication of Israel’s knowledge.... This rupture breaks open their story and reveals a deeper layer for how Israel should understand birth, family, and lineage.”

The key move for Jennings is to make Jesus the one who is the mediator for the many. It is in Jesus that particularity and universality come together. It is in Jesus that Israel, European peoples, and the native peoples of the Americas have their particularity affirmed and their dignity protected, and yet at the same time are set into crisis even as they are drawn to each other across boundaries of national, ethnic, cultural, and racial identity. In sum, in Jesus, there is “an advent of a new form of communion with the possibility of a new kind of cultural intimacy between peoples that might yield a new cultural politic.”

Jennings’s vision is ultimately one of joining. The colonialist logic, which in modernity operates inside Christianity itself, also carries with it a hope for joining; however, it is a counterfeit hope for joining that functions through the logics of racial capitalism. This colonial logic, like the New Testament’s vision of

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110 Ibid., 264–65.
111 Ibid., 260.
112 Ibid., 265.
joining, has strong universalist elements. It also imagines all peoples within an aesthetic of race, but this aesthetic produces death and alienation through segregationist thinking. The fruits of God’s vision of joining instead produce communion that breaks down boundaries, beginning with the transgression of the socio-cultural boundaries that kept Jews and gentiles separated. To witness the actualization of this joining and the new cultural politic it produces, Jennings points toward the work of the Spirit among the apostles after the ascension of Jesus.

2.7.2 The Spirit Who Weaves People Together in Christ

What was being prefigured in the crowd that formed around Jesus comes to full actualization in Pentecost with the work of the Holy Spirit. According to Jennings, in Pentecost,

The disciples performed a gesture of communion, a calling to all peoples that the Spirit of God would have them join together, and together they would worship the God Jesus reveals. Just as Jesus, driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, enacted the reality of the many in facing the tempter for us, so on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit descended on the disciples and drove them into the languages of the world to enact the joining desired by the Father of
Jesus for all people...this is in effect the Creator reclaiming the world through communion.\(^{113}\)

The Spirit, in drawing the peoples of the world toward Jesus and through Jesus to the Father, also draws the peoples of the world toward each other in communion.\(^{114}\) This signals “the coming of the one new reality of kinship.”\(^{115}\)

Scriptures call this new kinship emerging from the drawing in of the nations to Christ “the New Israel.” This is not the destruction or the replacement of Israel or of the many Gentile nations, but rather it is the formation of a new polity in the space that constitutes the resurrected body of Jesus, that is to say in New Creation. The primary difference between this new polity and the old polities is that peoples are reordered against all kinds of ethnocentrism whereby each nation has itself as the center of its existence and relates to all others in that manner. Instead, now each nation, Jewish and Gentile, has Christ as its center of existence. There is a fundamental deconstruction of identity that takes place as Gentiles are brought into the reality inaugurated in the body of the crucified and

\(^{113}\) Ibid., 267.

\(^{114}\) “This election enabled desire to be formed between Jew and Gentile, a desire that drew them together in longing for him [Jesus] and in turn invited them to desire one another.” Jennings, 267. So drawn together in desire for Jesus, Jew and Gentile become neighbor (that’s my language) but neighbors in the way of the Samaritan story where there is an ethic of love and care, a responsibility.

risen one: “If Jesus constitutes a new space for Jew and Gentile existence, then in that new space, a common life must ensue that allows for the formation of a new identity. Space here is both a relational practice and that which is created by a relation between Israel and Gentiles.”

Far from extracting individuals out of the networks of kinship within which they are constituted in the world, this new space which is Jesus’s body is the space of constant negotiation and struggle, as these old networks of kinship are transformed and re-situated in light of a recentering in Jesus Christ. This is where Jennings most departs from Tinker’s vision for liberation and reconciliation. There can be no binary between Jesus and creation, as Tinker sometimes appears to suggest. Christ is the center of creation, that which gives each particular creature and nation its dignity and particularity. In turn, creation always points back to Christ from its particularity as the center, which connects all things and draws all things together.

Jennings notes that as the Spirit draws all peoples toward Christ, some elements of people’s self-narration are changed, and others are taken out entirely, while some that were at the margins will take up a more prominent role

116 Ibid., 272.
in the formation of peoples. “What we know of our collective selves, of our
peoples, and of our ways of life is not eradicated in the presence of Israel’s God,
but that knowledge is up for review. Indeed, some of the stories, practices, and
fragmented memories that lay hidden in the shadows of our peoples must now
be moved to the center of life. Other truths of our people, time-honored,
irrefutably powerful, aiming toward eternality are irretrievably weakened in the
presence of Israel’s God.”\(^\text{117}\) Jennings’s vision of the work of the Spirit making all
things new is powerful, deeply biblically rooted, and it offers both continuity
with creation as we now know it—with our entanglement in places, with our
loyalties to peoples and to lands—even as there is also discontinuity and
newness. We must constantly ask ourselves: how do we participate in the Spirit’s
work of joining our lands and peoples to Christ, and what are we being asked to
leave behind and to retrieve? Moreover, this process of critical retrieval takes
place in the context of communion. The image of the crowd of people bumping
into each other, fractioning bodies together, and the forms of deep joining that
that entails is irremovable. There can be no surface-level joining, and it must be a
deep joining of peoples through real presence and prolonged learning.

\(^\text{117}\) Ibid., 258.
No culture or people is left behind or obliterated, but through deep encounter that goes beyond language translation to bodies in friction in the crowd, there is an enfolding of identities, a constant overlap, even perhaps a fusion.118 The Spirit’s work of bringing peoples into Christ’s body “enfold[s] the old cultural logics and practices inside the new ones of others, and they enfold the cultural logics and practices of others inside their own. This mutual enfolding promises cultural continuity measured only by the desire of belonging.”119 Jennings believes this trajectory of Christianity offers a vision that deeply counters that offered by the nation-state. It does so because Jennings believes the space in which joining takes place is a formative one in which people are invited to rethink their being in the world around a mutual desire.120

Jennings’s interpretation of Gentile Christian faith is biblically grounded, but as he himself argues, Christians from early on imagined themselves not as second readers of Israel’s story and therefore as those who by God’s grace have

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118 It is interesting and we shall look at this later, that Jennings does not use the language of mestizaje. But that is precisely what mestizaje is about.


120 Why create a binary between aesthetics and ethics- what does that even mean? Let’s look to Roberto Goyzueta for help here. But also the question is does this vision “touch the ground?” as Jennings would put it? There is so much imagining? What about real peoples and real church and real Christians? And is the agonistic vision of nations a result of the fall, are nations the result of the fall or are they a part of the created order?
been brought near to God vis-à-vis Israel. Rather, Gentile Christians quickly began to imagine themselves in the place of Israel, as those who have superseded Israel as inheritors of divine blessing and as the new elect people of God. This supersessionist blight has had a profoundly deforming effect on the way that Gentile Christians relate to their Jewish neighbors, and history has shown over and over how a supersessionist vision is deeply tied to acts of genocide. However, Jennings goes back to the root of Scripture’s account of the inclusion of Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel and identifies a different trajectory, one which reveals a deep loss.

In Acts 10, Jennings sees the root of the church and the trajectory that the church was to follow until Christ’s return but ultimately has rejected. The chapter begins with Peter’s dream vision, in which God commands the apostle to eat unclean animals only to then lead Peter to the house of a God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius. There Peter preaches the gospel to those present and the Spirit descends on all, proving to Peter and thereafter to the Jewish followers of Jesus that the good news of the resurrection and of the coming kingdom of God was now extending from Israel to the Gentile world. Jennings sees in this Biblical event a new beginning not only for Gentiles but also for Jews. Gentiles would
henceforth be invited to re-read their people’s stories and to re-orient themselves and the world around Israel’s story of creation and of the Creator. At the same time, Israel now would be called to re-read their own scriptures in light of the mystery of Gentile people’s being included in God’s drama of salvation for creation. The Spirit, in other words, calls Jew and Gentile to a new shared world of meaning and action that flows out of the mystery of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension and which is be fueled by the Spirit’s improvisational work in creation.

Beginning with the miracle of languages at Pentecost and affirmed in Peter’s encounter with Cornelius, the mystery of Gentile inclusion enacts a new kind and quality of relationship between Jew and Gentile. A new kind of intimacy will be forged between Jews and Gentiles of every nation as they are each drawn to each other, to perceive each other in new ways, and to perceive God and the world in new ways through the power of their encounter. For Jennings, the journey here is as important as the destination. The journey toward new creation entailed people’s learning each other’s languages, and with this learning each other’s ways with and in the world, cultivating together a way of being and dwelling in the world. This new openness to the other would be
developed around shared meals, which is why Paul’s rebuke of Peter for not eating with Gentiles is so critical. It was in the sharing of everyday life, in the sharing of cooking, eating, and play, in the sharing of births and funerals, that the Spirit’s work of weaving Jew and Gentile and all of creation together toward the new Creation would take place. It was to be a deeply sensual work. It was to be a work of desire ordered toward joining.

However, according to Jennings, this is not the path that Christianity followed. Instead, already in Peter’s reluctance to eat with Gentiles a few verses later we see the church’s own reluctance, from her own first leader, to follow this path set before her, instead opting to return to the old ways of separation, distinctions of clean and unclean, and distrust. Jew and Gentile would not find themselves in a shared world of meaning and action, they would not inhabit creation as their shared home, but instead, they would dwell in the world in deep contention. Nevertheless, the possibility of true joining, of a shared intimacy with the land and with each other remains the telos of the church and the active work of the Spirit over against the demonic forces of every age that seek to lead the church astray.
To bear witness to this work of the spirit, Jennings argues that we must move beyond the logics of “multiple legacies of the colonialist moment,” the space that exists only “inside commodified existence.” Therefore, if we are to conceive of a truly enriching communion and joining of peoples as that attested by Scripture, we must begin by returning to the land and recognizing our shared bonds to it. To do so, Jennings invites us to consider that the history of the land—who/what was here before we were here, when were they here, what happened to them?—should not be left to historians, anthropologists, geologists, and archeologists. These are deeply theological matters. Theologians must learn to theologize about the land and about places. Those best equipped to help in this theological task are perhaps those who have lived closest to the land and the soil, those who also have been most marginalized and forced into an agrarian life to make ends meet. This return to the land becomes the inauguration of a new joining of bodies to each other, a new way of imagining agricultural practices, city planning, and indeed communal worship.

122 Ibid.
123 “This joining also involves entering into the live sof people to build actual life together, lives enfolded and kinship networks established through the worship of and service to the God of Israel in Jesus Christ.” Ibid., 287.
Although Jennings resorts to the language of imagination, he affirms that this reality of joining has already taken place in Jesus Christ. He notes that “if the space of joining and of communion is not first a possibility but a reality unrealized inside the identities and potential relationships between different peoples who have been convinced of the power of Jesus’ life, then this space may become a profoundly visible place on surprising spaces that give sight of a different world.”\textsuperscript{124} To realize what is already most true about ourselves in Christ, Jennings says that “we who live in the new space of joining may need to transgress the boundaries of real estate, by buying where we should not and living where we must not, by living together where we supposedly cannot and being identified with those whom we should not.\textellipsis We must enter the struggle of land acquisition, space and place design, targeted housing development, buying, and selling which constantly reestablishes and strengthens segregationist mentalities and racial identifies.”\textsuperscript{125} Jennings thus concludes his theology of joining by noting that “we are in need of a vision of the journey of faith imagined

\textsuperscript{124} Jennings, 286.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 287.
as the joining of peoples now separated by violence, poverty, or race. Where, however, is this space of joining or communion?"¹²⁶

Jennings argues for a radical disruption of the trajectories of Israel and gentile history forged as a common history in Christ and through the Spirit’s work. However, Jennings largely skips over a long and at times troubling, though also beautiful history of Jewish and Gentile cultural and ethnic mixing, as described in Scripture. Jewish biblical history is always already intertwined with Gentile history in complex and problematic ways. For instance, Joseph’s children, who go on to constitute two of the twelve tribes of Israel, are not only born of an Egyptian mother, but they are raised largely in Egypt. I say this is a troubling history because indeed, there were forms of joining that took place that led Israel astray by inclining Israel toward worshipping other gods and following the way of the nations as opposed the way of life dictated in Torah.

However, there are also other examples in which Scripture exalts cross-cultural and cross-ethnic, joining such as the case of the story of Ruth and Naomi. Jesus himself, as Virgilio Elizondo famously argues, experienced a kind of cultural “mestizaje,” having been raised partly in Egypt as well as in the border

¹²⁶ Ibid., 286.
region, Galilee of the Gentiles. We must also reject romanticizing Jesus’s cultural encounters given that indeed the presence of Romans in Israel during Jesus’s time also enacted a form of cultural joining that influenced Jewish traditions, language, and history, but as a violent and oppressive kind of cultural encounter. Nevertheless, Jennings’s account of the work of the Spirit joining Jews and Gentiles might suggest that Jews and Gentiles were, previous to the Spirit’s work of doing something utterly new, entirely culturally bounded and separate groups. However, this is not entirely the case.

In the story of Acts, the first people that Peter reaches out to are not a group of complete foreigners. Rather, the description of them as God-fearing Gentiles suggests they had been already deeply influenced by Judaism and therefore primed, as it were, to the Spirit’s work of joining. The Spirit’s work of joining Jews and Gentiles may be a new event in history—but it is an event that engages and addresses already existing complex, troubling, but also beautiful histories of peoples joining together. As such, the new creation the Spirit is making is not a creation ex nihilo but ex vetere, not a new creation out of nothing, but a new creation out of the old, out of an existing set of relationships. What the Spirit is doing in a way is transfiguring and transforming these relationships into
a new kind and quality. The migrations of peoples into and out of Israel, even that migration of Roman imperial soldiers into the land of Israel, were not set aside, ignored, or rejected, but re-made as vehicles for the work of the Spirit of creating a new family in Christ out of these peoples. The Spirit’s works of joining in creation is directed at the site of the wound, at the very places of most fragmentation.

If, on the one hand, Jennings and Tinker help us to trace back the roots of the crisis of nationalism that Barth engages critically in his own context, on the other hand, Barth shows us the impossible possibility of the undoing of the diverse particularity of creation and at the same time the fragmentation of all things into chaos was already present in the very work of Creation as that which the Creator overcomes. The Creator’s work of both creating a diversity of things, each given the integrity of its own particularity, and then of joining all these particulars in and through the Word, casts a shadow that seems to take on life when Adam and Eve disobey God and are thus exiled from Eden. As their exiled descendants, we experience that diversity and cultural difference, in the moment of encounter, not as fruitful joining and communion but as the threat of domination and destruction. And the land, instead of being a source of our
common life, instead became the object of dispute, separation, and violence. This impossible possibility became reality in the event of humanity’s turning away from God and the exile from Eden. Because the work of creation is a work of distinction and of joining with greater and greater intensity, the curses that follow the disobedience of humankind entail a reversal in which creation falls into meaninglessness without its proper limitations, and at the same time into fragmentation.

Jesus, however, undoes this impossible possibility, this idolatrous way of being at home in chaos, by taking the curse of exile upon himself. He himself who is the communion of all peoples and who holds all things together is cast out, cut-off, alienated. Yet, the resurrection is the affirmation that the Creator rejects and overcomes this impossible possibility. In the end, he who holds all things together cannot be cut off. He who is Israel for Israel’s sake cannot be rejected by his own people. Jesus inaugurates the necessary joining of people’s in history because in him all peoples are always already joined. Since this inauguration will not be consummated until he returns, it must be constantly reacted and practiced in church and by the church, through practices of
communion. Otherwise we all, in the church and beyond the church walls, too easily slip out of it.

2.8 Witnessing the Spirit’s Work in the Americas

If Jennings detects in the performance of Christianity in the modern West a fundamentally diseased social imagination which erases the importance of place and reduces identity to racial optics, what performance(s) of Christianity would constitute a healing and redemptive social imagination? Are there examples in the world or in the history of such communities? If so, what kind of \textit{habitus} or practices best cultivate the kind of community that Jennings is urging us toward? If it’s an ecclesial community—what constitutes its liturgy, its language, and its pious practice? If it is a community \textit{extra-muros-ecclesiae}, what polities, virtues, and language does it use? If Jennings cannot point us to such a community, then what is being proposed enters the problem of Utopianism. That is to say, Jennings’ “imagined” community of healing is simultaneously an abstract and idealistic place for which to aim for and a No-Place, a place without any concrete material existence which is always a conjecture of the human mind and thereby bound to its excesses.
For Jennings, it will not do to dwell in a house divided. If the Americas are to be a common home for many peoples, then a vision of deep joining needs to take place, one which takes place seriously and thus offers a transformation of the Christian imagination. Jennings believes that there has never been a true joining of peoples in the Americas. His reflections on the story of Equiano, a freed black slave in the Americas who longs to return to Africa, reveals that for Jennings even the attempts of the displaced and marginalized to resist the colonial-racial order can and do often end up performing a false intimacy. For Jennings, Equiano may have escaped his slave-master, but he did not escape the house colonialism built. For Tinker, there was, once upon a time before the colonizers arrived, a true harmony of all things to which we must return. One proposes we look backward in time to recover something lost, the other proposes that we look forward to God’s redemptive work in some imagined future. But what about the Spirit’s work in the present?

I contend that as in his lack of attention to the on-the-ground political economies in his description of the origins the racial imagination, Jennings outlook to the healing of the racial wound also demonstrates a lack of attention to the on the ground realities of collaboration and negotiation between peoples.
and cultures in the great milieu of the Americas. In a way we are asked here to read Jennings against himself. For Jennings is clear that the trajectory of the incarnation for Jennings ought to move us closer to bodies and closer to the soil, bringing our attention to the economies and ecologies which sustain our lives. It is there, Jennings maintains, that the Spirit does its crucial work. So why not look there too for redemption? Why not expect to find in the economic and ecological negotiations of life east of Eden, New Creation breaking forth by the power of the Spirit, joining peoples, cultures, and lands?

While a new social imagination is critical to the work Jennings is calling us to, we need to consider who or what will be the sources for this re-imagining. We do need poets, but not poets who harken back to a lost history, nor poets who create an idealized future; rather, we need poets of the now, people who can discern the beautiful in the broken. We need, in other words, what Hispanic theologian Roberto Goizueta has described as a theological aesthetics of liberation.127 The Americas, as they are now, require a deep transformation and

127 Goizueta writes, “A Christian theology of beauty, or theological aesthetics, can only be grounded in the particularity of the crucified and risen Christ and in our practical response to him, in our solidarity with him as we encounter him today among the crucified victims of our societies.” Goizueta, Roberto S. Goizueta, Christ Our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2009), 122.
not merely the deconstruction of institutions. Jennings and Tinker give us glimpses of this transformation, of this new cultural politic. There is deep brokenness and pain muddled in their stories, but there are also the workings of the Spirit in the mundane, in the everyday struggle. The crucified lands, peoples, and cultures of the Americas point us to the crucified one and as such they also point us to the one who is risen.

The questions of joining cultures and peoples and the question of home have always been the center of Latinx theological reflection in the US. Yet neither Tinker nor Jennings engage in any robust way the voices of Latinx scholars or, for that matter, engage deeply in the theme of mestizaje which is so central to that discourse. Nevertheless, the question of culture, which is so critical to Tinker, and the question of joining, which is critical to Jennings, are both longstanding questions for Latinx theologians. Mestizos and mestizas, as I will discuss, are those who bear in their bodies and in their culture the joining of African, European,

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128 Interestingly both Jennings and Tinker make mention in their writings of a “mixed” heritage or a biological and cultural hybridity that they carry with them. Jennings for instance makes brief mention of his mother’s métis heritage and her roots among the Cherokee peoples (Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 2. Meanwhile, Tinker mentions explicitly that his mother’s euro-western and amer-european descendancy while his father belongs to the Osage tribe Tinker, American Indian Liberation, 4.. Neither identifies very deeply with this hybridity in their families and the possibilities this might bring forth.
and Indigenous peoples and cultures. And the story of mestizaje is what Justo Gonzales calls a non-innocent history. Indeed, mestizos have long participated in colonization and have often been complicit in the marginalization of native and black communities in north, south, and Central America. It is the story of joining in the Americas that bears witness to histories of violence but also to beautiful new possibilities, fusions, and hybridizations of cultures and peoples. Mestizaje is not a panacea for colonization, but it does reflect that daily struggle to negotiate cultural differences and that mutual enfolding of cultures and peoples that Jennings argues is the core of the new cultural politic that Jesus and the Spirit inaugurate.

Jennings voices the lament of many African Americans in not being able to commune with their white brothers and sisters, a lament that echoes those of Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Baldwin. Tinker gives prophetic voice to the clamor of many Native Americans alienated from their lands and from their old ways of life and how this loss of land has led to the social and physical death of many Native American communities. As those who have struggled to be at home

129 Justo L. González, Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 75.
amid the colonizers and who have also been exiled from the colonized, Latinx theology has always tried to navigate these two realities of alienation from land and of alienation from peoples from the optics of new creation emerging from the margins. What we see among Latinx communities is not an ideal community of perfect belonging, but rather a people constantly negotiating the desire for intimacy and belonging, the desire for home, in the midst of life’s most difficult circumstances. The Spirit makes their struggle God’s own struggle. The way to enact the vision that Jennings cast, therefore, cannot be done simply by reforming our thinking and putting on a new hermeneutical lens to read Scripture. More fundamentally, we must participate in the work of community formation, in the struggle for a home of those on the margins.

Thus, in the next chapter I will develop a vision of redemptive homecoming in creation that develops at the site of enmeshment of native, European, and African peoples and cultures, or what Latinx theologians call *mestizaje*. I will argue that we need to learn to see the Spirit’s work of joining creation in the world and also to be aware that joining work of the Spirit takes place at the sites of most wounding in creation, where our exile from Eden is most felt. There isn’t any one moment of fragmentation and exile in history of
creation and the church, even something as important as the colonial moment.

We only see all of history rightly when we view it through the lens of Christ’s life—both his exile from the cross and his homecoming in the resurrection. What has been the mystery of all the ages, what is ontologically true because it is eschatologically true, is that God is at home with us. That means that this fractured, fragmented, broken world in which we live is an impossible possibility always already overcome in Christ in newness, healed, and whole, rejoined, and the Spirit’s ongoing work from creation to new creation of weaving all things together in Christ. This is not to baptize our histories of migrating and homecoming, our way of life in our ancestral home or in diasporic communities, but rather to see our home and migration both under the judgment of God and the mercy of God, to see them through the lens of the cross and the resurrection.
Chapter 3  
Toward a Latinx Theology of Home

“We are a people living in two worlds; away from our traditional home, creating and establishing a new home…we are thus a bicultural people at home in neither world—the permanent ‘others.’”

--Fernando Segovia, Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that since the colonization of the Americas in 1492, to dwell in the lands of the Americas is to inhabit a crisis of home. At the heart of this crisis lies the conquest of Native American lands and their commodification into private property, the destruction of native cultures and of non-capitalist ways of knowing and relating to the land, and finally the establishment of racial and nationalist forms of belonging that continue to reinforce a fundamental disunion between the peoples and cultures that call these lands home. The combination of these constitutes not only a material and existential crisis of homelessness for many of the current inhabitants of the Americas, but they also bespeak a theological crisis in the form of a failure of the

Christian imagination to imagine non-commodifying ways of cultivating a common home with the land and fellow creatures. This failure is one I have experienced as an immigrant in the Americas. Not surprisingly then, in modernity the church has often had to make a choice between the false binary of rootlessness on the one hand and vicious forms of ethnic and cultural nationalism on the other.

Willie Jennings’s and Tink Tinker’s theological proposals urge the church to address this wound of home that developed in the colonization of the Americas and extended into modernity. While Tinker argues for the decolonization of Christianity and of the Americas through a recovery of native ways of being and knowing, Jennings argues for reaching back to the church of Acts to recover a way of being at home in the world that could have been but never was. Thus, Jennings offers us a new beginning grounded in a theological trajectory set forth in scripture, and Tinker the recovery of bygone times where Natives were more truly and fully at home in creation.

In this chapter, I wish to explore an alternative path to healing the wound of home in the Americas, one which posits that the conquest of the Americas was indeed a deep moment of wounding and at the same time, that it was also a
moment pregnant with the hope of redemption and renewal. My aim in this chapter is not to deny or downplay in any way the depth of the loss suffered in the colonial encounter that shaped the Americas, as that would be to tell an untrue story. Nor, however, is my aim simply to describe the conquest of the Americas through the lens of a narrative of declension such that the only possible route for healing the wound is to somehow turn the clock back to before the moment of colonial encounter. This chapter instead argues that redemptive possibilities emerged out of the wound of colonization, a hope of home in the midst of exile. But this hope, emerging from within the darkness of exile, must be viewed and understood from the struggle of those on the margins and not from the centers of power. This way of viewing the history of the conquest of the Americas is one which emerges deep from within the lived experience of a group that Jennings and Tinker do not really engage, namely, Latinx peoples. This chapter, by contrast, addresses the crisis of home at the foundations of the Americas from the unique perspective of Latinx theology.

At the heart of Hispanic/Latinx theology lies a profound longing for home felt by people who, as Fernando Segovia describes, are always situated between
home and exile and therefore always rooted in a liberative struggle for home.² “Home” is an almost ubiquitous thematic in Latinx theological works but has yet to be the subject of systematic theological study. This chapter thus attempts to clarify and render explicit the notion of home which is so often left implicit in Latinx theological reflection. My first task is to articulate a Latinx theology of home as it emerges from the experience and reality of mestizaje.

Latinx theology has developed historically as a cohesive field in great part through the reflections of Latinx theologians on their shared experience of cultural mestizaje. Virgilio Elizondo, a Mexican-American Roman Catholic priest, was among the first Hispanic theologians to mobilize mestizaje as a theological concept, and his work remains influential as the foundation of many Latinx theologies today. As a native-born U.S. citizen and the son of two Mexican parents who had migrated to and settled in San Antonio, Texas, Elizondo approaches the history and culture of Mexican-Americans as an emic-insider, as one whose investment in the flourishing of the Mexican-American people is not

merely intellectual or humanistic but also existential. Elizondo’s reflections on
the history, cultures, values, and hopes of this unique group of people in the
world opens into an analysis of a broader reality that lies at the heart of the
Americas and indeed of the whole world—the reality of cultural *mestizaje*.

Despite how well known *mestizaje* has become among theologians, it is
often overlooked that Elizondo’s articulation of this concept is situated within an
existential and spiritual pilgrimage from the goodness of his childhood home in
San Antonio, Texas, through the desert of an existential crisis of social alienation
and exile, and finally to a transfigured understanding of home in his embrace of
a *mestizo/a* Christian identity. Critical to this journey of homecoming are
Elizondo’s companions, who include not only the Mexican-American people of
his parish in San Antonio but also the Galilean Jesus and his *mestiza* mother, the
Virgin of Guadalupe. The Latinx theology of home I propose in this chapter
affirms the fundamental goodness of our earthly homes while also being aware
of their deep woundedness. In this way, Elizondo gives us a textured and
concrete account of what, in chapter 1, I surfaced as Barth’s way of theologizing
home through the dialectic of the cross and the resurrection.
In the first part of this chapter, I argue that Elizondo’s reflections on mestizaje depict the hope of homecoming for the Mexican-American people as revealed and emerging from the site of alienation and exile—from marginal lands, peoples, and their cultures. Moreover, Elizondo shows how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as the Virgin of Guadalupe’s apparition before Juan Diego in Tepeyac in 1531, are events that reveal God’s desire to dwell with creation, embracing a particular creature in a time of need, in the midst of exile. Elizondo’s theology of mestizaje presents us with a vision of home for the Americas which, while rooted in the Mexican-American experience, nevertheless opens up to the longings and hopes for homecoming of the diverse peoples of the Americas, summoning every ethnocultural group to accompany each other on a journey from exile to the liberative homecoming of all peoples in God’s renewed and restored creation.

In the second part of this chapter, I analyze the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe through the lens of the Latinx theology of home developed in the first part of the chapter. I argue that the narrative of La Virgen de Guadalupe reveals a similar dialectic. The Virgin’s appearance to Juan Diego at Tepeyac in 1531 summons the North American church to look for God’s redemptive homecoming...
not primarily in centers of power, but at the margins of society, where the displaced and the homeless mobilize everyday religious and cultural practices to cultivate a sense of home in the world.

To conclude the chapter, I engage Mujerista theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz, whose works are also deeply informed by her desire to return to her native homeland of La Habana, Cuba. Isasi-Díaz’s voice is critical to the formulation of any Latinx theology of home for two main reasons. First, this is because Isasi-Díaz’s migrant story is a critical complement to the story of other Latinx/Hispanic scholars like Elizondo who were born in the US. At the heart of Latinx theology is the dual lived realities of those Hispanics who are born in the US and yet who experience life as strangers, and those who migrate to the US from other Latin American countries and who experience a double alienation not only from the dominant ‘white’ culture but also from Hispanics who do claim the US as their native home. Second, Isasi-Díaz brings to our analysis of home not only a racial optic but also a gendered critical analysis. Through Isasi-Díaz’s reflections, we see that home is embodied and performed in the everyday struggles of Latina women. Home thus becomes a critical site of what Isasi-Díaz calls la lucha—Latinas’ ongoing struggle for liberation-fullness of life for their
families and their communities. Mujerista theologians like Isasi-Díaz help the church to see that home cannot be reduced to a general feeling of belonging, a static cultural practice or belief, or rosy memory of a beloved place; rather, life itself is a constant struggle for home, a struggle that God assumes in Christ, and which the Spirit fulfills in history. I argue, thus, that a Latinx theology of home necessarily entails a liberative praxis of home, a matter which will be developed in depth in the final chapter.

Part 1

3.2 Mestizaje: Between Home and Exile

In this first section, I explore an aspect of Virgilio Elizondo’s theology of mestizaje that has largely remained unretrieved by Latino/a scholars: namely that Elizondo’s discovery and embrace of a mestizo/a Christian faith emerges in the course of his own existential journey between home and exile. It is fitting that mestizaje be the starting point for a Latinx theology of home because it poses both the beautiful possibilities and the grave dangers involved in the joining of peoples and their cultures in a shared land which they call home.
Introducing Mestizaje

Virgilio Elizondo defines *mestizaje*—a Spanish word derived from the Latin *mixticius*, which means “mixing”—as “the process through which two totally different peoples mix biologically and culturally so that a new people begin to emerge.”³ Though not all contemporary ethnic groups identify as *mestizos/as* or *mulattos/as*, all contemporary ethnicities are indeed the historical products of ongoing biological and intercultural exchanges.⁴ However, *mestizaje* and *mulatez* came to mean something very specific in the context of post-1492 Americas. Starting in the fifteenth century, Iberian colonizers in the Americas began to use the term *mestiza* as a racial category used to classify the “mixed” children of Iberian and Amerindian parents, and the term *mulatto* to refer to the mixed children of Iberian and African parents. Belonging to one of these groups of “mixed-blood” would place someone in an elaborate social caste system where they occupied a place below the ‘pure’ Spanish and above the ‘pure’ Amerindian and African peoples.⁵ No longer a general term for describing the historical

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⁴ Ibid., 17.
⁵ The usage of *Mestizaje* dates back further than 1492 to at least the thirteenth century when it was used by the Spanish to describe the mixture of African and Semitic peoples. The word, however, would take on a new and global meaning in the aftermath of the colonization of the
intermixtures of peoples, mestizaje and mulatez became a tool of the colonizers in justifying the conquest of lands and the subjugation of peoples, eventually finding a place in the pseudoscience of race developing in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As such, mestizaje is no innocent word, but rather a term that has historically been charged with very concrete political, economic, and social implications.

Although from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, the term mestizo/a was used derogatively by both indigenous peoples and Europeans, the term would be redeployed theologically in the twentieth century by Virgilio Elizondo and other Hispanic theologians. These theologians, who had been marginalized by the academy, the church, and by Anglo-American society, resisted assimilating to the dominant Anglo culture and sought instead to embrace their diverse cultural heritage as a source of beauty and creativity rather than as a mark of exclusion and otherness.⁶

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Elizondo’s retrieval of *mestizaje* not only sought to establish this cultural phenomenon as a unifying characteristic among US Hispanics but also as a fundamental starting point for theological reflection from a Latinx perspective. As María Pilar Aquino notes, “the reality of *mestizaje*...implies a conscious option for intellectual, cultural, and theological *mestizaje*. Incorporated as a fundamental principle of the intelligence of the faith [of Latinos/as] and as methodological axis, this option constitutes the basis on which to articulate an intercultural vision of Christian identity.” Through the efforts of Virgilio Elizondo, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, María Pilar Aquino, Arturo Bañuelos, and other prominent first-generation Latinx theologians, Latinx theology was born as a *mestizo/a* theology in which interculturality becomes a privileged space for theological reflection, a hermeneutical lens through which to read Scripture and the tradition, and a prophetic vision for the future of a church/academy too often tempted by a segregationist mentality.

Having given this brief introduction to the origins of the theological discourse on *mestizaje* among Latinx theologians, I now want to focus on an

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aspect of Elizondo’s work on mestizaje often overlooked by scholars who both retrieve and critique his work. While most theological deployments focus on its usefulness as a hermeneutic of interculturality or on its problematic use as a racial or ethnic category, Elizondo’s exploration of mestizaje is set within a wider narrative about a shared longing for home. Elizondo’s theological autobiography, offered in the opening sections of his now-classic work The Future is Mestizo, narrates a homecoming journey that marks Elizondo’s life as a member of the Mexican-American people of the US Southwest. His own life thus resonates with the critical question I asked in the previous chapter: What might it mean for a people to claim to a home in the Americas in light of the history of stolen and commodified lands, of cultural death, and of racial segregation? Ultimately, mestizaje offers a different way of reading this history, but first, I want to analyze Elizondo’s account of mestizaje through the lens of his journey from exile to home.

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3.2.2 Elizondo’s Journey Home

In *The Future is Mestizo*, Elizondo describes a pilgrimage from the goodness of his childhood home, toward an existential crisis of alienation and exile as he experienced racial and nationalist forms of exclusion, and finally on to a transfigured understanding of home as he learned to embrace a *mestizo/a* identity. Elizondo’s theology of *mestizaje* emerges in the course of this existential journey, which takes place largely in the context of his hometown in San Antonio, Texas, in the US Southwest. The recognition of a “Mexican-American” people as a *mestizo/a* cultural identity is not the starting point but the *conclusion* to his theological autobiography.

Elizondo’s story begins with the goodness of his early childhood home, about which he says, “there was no questions whatsoever about my identity or belonging. We grew up at home wherever we went—playgrounds, school, church. The whole atmosphere was Mexican and there were no doubts in our minds about the pride of being Mexican.” Although Elizondo’s parents arrived in San Antonio as Mexican immigrants before Elizondo was born, they quickly

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10 Ibid., 12.
found themselves at home in San Antonio. As Elizondo reflects on the
uniqueness of San Antonio, he often returns to this aspect of the city where
“socially and culturally speaking much of San Antonio is still in Mexico—or, as
some people say, that part of Mexico presently occupied by the United States.”

The local Hispanic parish where all the Mexican fiestas were celebrated,
his father’s corner shop which provided the townspeople with all the Mexican
products they needed, and the nun-run day school where all the teachers and
students spoke in Spanish each helped to form in Elizondo a powerful sense of
home and belonging that was deeply tied to “being” Mexican. Reflecting on this
time, he writes, “we belonged to this land called the United States, and this land
belonged to us. In those early days, I never experienced being Mexican as not
belonging. This was my home. I was born here, and I belonged here.” As a
child, Elizondo would only experience the positive aspects of this ambiguous
and liminal reality of San Antonio: the benefits of US citizenship—namely land
ownership—with the benefits of Mexican cultural identity.

11 “Whether our families have been here all the time, or whether we have simply come from the
other side of the river (a popular way of saying we have come from the other side of the border),
there is a deep sense of being at home—en nuestra tierra [our land]” Ibid., 4.
12 Ibid., 2.
13 Ibid., 12.
Elizondo recounts how his first serious experience of alienation and displacement came when he began to attend a Catholic grade school operated by German nuns.¹⁴ Elizondo recollects that these nuns prohibited the children from speaking Spanish, the food in the cafeteria was strange and unfamiliar, and the main fiestas and worship practices of his hometown, like the veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, were either frowned upon as superstitious or simply ignored. The very things which had served to establish a sense of home in his early childhood began to be deeply disrupted and replaced by a people that not only were different but also who seemed to resent his own cultural identity. Consequently, Elizondo began to feel like the journey to school was a journey to another country altogether, as if being at school was being away from home.

Elizondo describes this great ambiguity and sense of alienation as the labor pains of mestizaje.¹⁵ While the earliest memories of childhood represent for Elizondo the gifts and the beauty of mestizaje in the womb of nurturing community, these transitional years into the broader climate of North American life represent the

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¹⁴ Ibid., 15.
¹⁵ Ibid., 50.
“feeling of being a foreigner in the very country in which I had been born and raised.”

It was not only his experience at an Anglo-American school which prompted these feeling of alienation for Elizondo. Indeed, Elizondo also recounts feeling a deep alienation whenever they visited his relatives in Mexico. “Even though they loved us and we loved to visit them,” he writes, “in many ways they would let us know that we were pochos—Mexicans from the U.S.A.” The result was that he “lived on the border between two nationalities...an insider-outsider to both.” This is the great paradox that so deeply characterizes the experience of many Latinx or Hispanics living in the United States, whether they are first- or second-generation immigrants. It is a profound sense of being “ni de aquí, ni de alla,” neither from here nor from there, which really amounts to a profound sense of non-being. Sometimes this experience is described from a positive angle as having a fluidity of identity which allows one to “move in and out of two

16 Ibid., 16.
17 Ibid., 20.
18 Ibid., 21.
worlds,” yet for those who live with this reality, there is no escaping the dread of existential homelessness, a sense of not fully belonging to any place or people.¹⁹

Elizondo was not alone in feeling like a foreigner in his own country and his ancestral lands. Indeed, he describes how upon returning to the States after World War II, many Hispanics (as well as African Americans and Asian Americans) felt disenfranchised by their own country. This situation incited the Chicano and agrarian reform movements of the 1960s and 70s.²⁰ These movements were not only a fight for better wages, social equity, and better representation in the government, but an attempt to have the United States recognize the Hispanic culture of the Southwest as both unique and different from the Anglo-American culture, and as fully belonging in the social fabric that is the U.S. They were, in other words, bold proclamations of Mexican-Americans’ right to a flourishing home in the land. This urge to be recognized as belonging to the land was not merely a socio-cultural revolution but also a political, economic, and spiritual one.²¹

²¹ The motif of mestizaje and home describe more than existential subjective experiences. In the case of the Mexican-American people, experiencing a sense of home vis-à-vis belonging to the
These reform movements, in turn, provoked an inward turn in Elizondo and in the Hispanic peoples of the U.S. Southwest, a desire to go down to the roots precisely in order to be able to enunciate a renewed sense of identity, a reason for why they belonged in the land and their culture had every right to be treated with dignity. This reform took place not only in the public square but also in the church. It was this collective process of soul-searching that gave way to a better understanding of the people’s identity as Mexican-American. Elizondo writes,

As a people, we had been born as a result of the U.S. invasion and subsequent conquest of the great northern regions of Mexico from California to Texas. And before that, our Mexican ancestors had been born out of the invasion and conquest of pre-Columbian Mexico…. Through each conquest, the native soil with its culture and inhabitants had been deeply penetrated but not destroyed…. Like the womb of a woman receiving the seed of a man to produce new life, so in Mexico and subsequently in the Southwest of today’s U.S. a new child had been conceived and born.22

land and being identified by others as a discrete people with bicultural roots was a matter of political, economic, as well as social reform. Politics is in the end is about establishing the kinds and the quality of relationships that are necessary for a flourishing common life. Home and culture are therefore not pre-political or apolitical but the very matter of politics. See Luke Bretherton, “Political Theology, Radical Democracy, and Virtue Ethics; or Alasdair MacIntyre and the Paradoxes of a Revolutionary Consciousness,” Political Theology 22, no. 7 (October 3, 2021): 627–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2020.1867406.

Elizondo’s life is therefore marked by a journey from a stable, but unconscious, being-at-home in a place where his identity as “Mexican” was unquestioned to a transitional stage of non-being where he felt alienated from both the U.S. and Mexico. Amid this journey, home itself becomes a paradox. Elizondo will write, on the one hand, “Even though the U.S. was our home, it was in Mexico that we felt more and more at home,” only a page later to note, “I loved visiting Mexico, but I always knew that I would never live there. The United States was my home, it was my country, it was my nationality.” The state of non-being—neither Mexican nor American—is unsustainable, painful, and paralyzing. Life becomes an ongoing journey of exile and of not knowing where or what home might be. The need to claim and to name a new identity—the formation of a new consciousness—becomes the most urgent need for homecoming.

The way forward through this riddle of hybrid identities finally started to dawn on Elizondo during his time in seminary as he learned to reject the

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23 Ibid., 20–21.
24 Naming becomes a critical part of asserting identity, agency, and being. Hence, Elizondo writes, “the search for a name would dominate the quest of artists, intellectuals, social scientists, and poets for decades to come. And as of today we have not yet succeeded in finding the proper family name for this new human group on the planet earth.” Ibid., 27.
neither/nor of “a regular U.S. American” or “puro Mexicano” and to embrace the newness of Mexican-American *mestizaje*.\(^{25}\) Although he had begun to embrace Mexican-American identity as unique, distinct, and worthy, the fullness of this embrace of a *mestizo/a* identity would come about when he began to reflect on the meaning of *mestizaje* during a trip to Mexico City. Elizondo recounts having an epiphany when looking at the Monument to “La Raza” in the *Plaza de Tres Culturas* in Mexico City: “As I consciously rewalked the historical pilgrimage, no longer through the categories of conquest but through the categories of birth, I saw the identity of the new being in a new light.” For Elizondo, the brutal conquest of Mexico by Iberians was the end of history and the death of peoples and their cultures, while at the same time being the birth of a new people. The conquest of the Americas cannot be fully understood without seeing the profound paradox of a people being born out of the ashes of the death of another people. Moreover, these newborn people’s sense of home is thus deeply tied to the exile of their indigenous ancestors.

This realization about the *mestizo/a* peoples of the Americas helped Elizondo to look at Mexican-Americans through a new lens. The people of the

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 26.
U.S. Southwest and of San Antonio were not a people without a home, in perennial exile both from their cultural home in Mexico and from their national home in the U.S. Rather they were a people-in-becoming, a people emerging with a new sense of home in the land, but a new sense of home that required remembering and digesting the history of exile and pain of their Native ancestors as well as somehow learning to embrace the identity they share with their oppressors. Their new sense of home in the world would have to assume the histories of two places, two peoples, and two cultures—Mexico and the United States, histories of death and of new life.

Out of the uncertainty of racial/ethnic/national forms of exclusion, Elizondo experienced a new homecoming, but his sense of home was now transfigured. It became neither a return to his childhood home where he experienced an ultimately false sense of security about his Mexican cultural identity, nor an embrace of exile that rejects any and all claims of belonging to a particular people and to the land. The embrace of mestizaje is an embrace not of a solution but of a tension: a living on the border between ethnocultural identities, their ways of telling history, and indeed on the border between two different ways of being at home in the world. Some Latinx scholars refer to this as an
embrace of life on the hyphen, of life in-between. To live in-between is to recognize that life is more the fluidity and tension of “becoming” rather than the static essentializing forces of pure racial, ethnic, or national “being.” In this journey toward a mestizo/a consciousness, home itself becomes an ongoing negotiation, such that without denying the centrality and concreteness of home, one has to recognize that what home “is” or “means” is constantly changing, in both positive and negative ways, at the borders of our ethnic, cultural, and territorial locations. That is to say, the quality and the kinds of relationships we have to the land, to each other, and to our ancestors, which constitutes our sense of home in the world, are in a constant state of becoming. In a sense, Elizondo’s journey toward embracing mestizaje points to an anthropology in which humans are always arriving home and thus never fully in exile nor stably at home. To be mestizo/a is to live between exile and home.

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26 See Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994). The concept of in/betweenness is widespread in Latinx literature, although it is most famously developed using the Nahuatl word Nepantla by Gloria Anzaldúa as both a way of describing cultural and a gender consciousness that transcends binaries. See her essay titled, “(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe spaces,” in the preface to Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation, 2002, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780203952962.
3.3 A Mestizo/a Theology of Home

Having demonstrated how Elizondo’s embrace of mestizaje emerges from his experience of a journey of homecoming, I now engage Elizondo’s mestizo Christology as the source for developing a mestizo/a theology of home. In this section, I will first give a brief account of Elizondo’s mestizo Christology and how it can help us to develop a mestizo theology of home. Then I will engage some of his critics who argue that, paradoxically, Elizondo’s retrieval of mestizaje undercuts the very message of social inclusion and intercultural dialogue that he purports to spread. To address these critics, I will argue for a Barthian interpretation of Elizondo’s mestizo Christology by showing how Elizondo’s three theological principles—the Galilean Principle, the Jerusalem Principle, and the Resurrection principle—align with Barth’s notion of the ‘Yes’ of God’s election to be “God for Us” which precedes and proceeds from God’s ‘No’ toward human sinfulness. In view of this Barthian rendering of Elizondo’s mestizo Christology, I outline a Reformed-Mestizo/a theology of home that views our earthly homes from the margins and through the lens of incarnation, cross, and resurrection.

I argue that a mestizo theology of home begins with the affirmation that our earthly homes are granted dignity and shown to be a good gift of God by the
logic of the Incarnation, in which the Son of God assumes a home in Galilee of the gentiles. However, when also viewed through the optics of the cross, our earthly homes are revealed as sites of wounded creation wherein our ongoing struggles to be at home are set in the context of historical exiles and exclusions by dominant peoples and cultures. Finally, when viewed through the resurrection, our wounded but good earthly homes are revealed as united to the crucified and risen Christ by the Spirit, such that they become icons that point toward God’s eschatological homecoming in creation.

3.3.1 Elizondo’s Mestizo Christology

In *Galilean Journey*, Elizondo describes the sojourn of the Mexican American from cultural birth to cultural exile and finally toward homecoming in the embrace of their *mestizo* identity as one which they do not undertake alone, for they have a faithful companion in Jesus of Galilee. Inspired by the cruciform faith of the people of his parish in the face of social discrimination suffered both in the public square as in the church, Elizondo turned to Scriptures for an answer. Elizondo is not performing a “post-colonial” reading but rather, he is answering on the call of Vatican II to embrace the concrete faith of the world’s
people in all their sociocultural particularity. Cultural location, rather than being an obstacle to overcome to get to the truth, becomes the medium of the Creator’s self-giving to the creature. It is also a pastoral reading.\(^27\) His reading of the gospel is deeply pastoral, as his driving question became how the Jesus of the gospels can proclaim the good news of liberation to the Mexican-American people. The “cultural-spiritual poverty” faced by this community “is the worst type of oppression,” Elizondo writes, but “mestizaje is the worst type of human rejection because it brings with it a double alienation and margination. The mestizo is not allowed to feel at home anywhere.”\(^28\) Aided by his encounter with Latin American liberation theology, Elizondo embraces not only economic and socio-political location as a critical hermeneutical starting point for reading of the gospels, but also cultural location. This hermeneutic of cultural homelessness

\(^27\) “This undertaking is not, as such, a work of biblical exegesis or of dogmatic or moral theology, but of pastoral theology: the pastor, as the teacher and animator of God’s revealed truth, seeks to channel the word of God, its meaning and power, to a specific faith community today.” Virgilio P. Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, Rev. and expanded ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2000), 48.

\(^28\) Ibid., 99. See Bantum, *Redeeming Mulatto*. Bantum undertakes a parallel project to Elizondo’s although from the perspective of Mulatez as he reads the Christ of the gospels through the lens of the “tragic mulatto,” one whose body is a problem to both the dominant and oppressed groups. For Bantum, as for Elizondo, the embodied experience of hybridity foments a desire for joining the two parent cultures or peoples separated by historic violence and by systemic subjugation/marginalization. This desire points to the deepest pain brought about by modernity: namely the fragmenting of creation that prohibits a true communion between peoples, the land, and God.
becomes a fundamental contribution of Latinx/Hispanic theologies to Latin American liberation theology. In doing so, Latinx theology also begins to address the gap in liberation theologies identified by Native American theologians, the failure to analyze cultural identity as central for the liberative project.\textsuperscript{29} In this culturally sensitive reading of the gospels, \textit{mestizaje} becomes the hermeneutical key that connects the biblical world of faith to the everyday life and struggles of the Mexican American people of San Antonio, Texas.

Reading the gospels through the lens of \textit{mestizaje} allows Elizondo to notice an often-ignored Christological cue in the gospels, namely the theological significance of Jesus’s Galilean identity—a \textit{mestizo} identity.

The overwhelming originality of Christianity is the basic belief of our faith that not only did the Son of God become a human being, but he became Jesus of Nazareth. Like every other man and woman, he was culturally situated and conditioned by the time and space in which he lived.... And we cannot really know Jesus of Nazareth unless we know him in the context of the historical and cultural situation of his people. Jesus was not simply a Jew, he was a Galilean Jew.\textsuperscript{30}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Segovia, “Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand: Mixture and Otherness in Hispanic American Theology,” 28–43.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Elizondo, \textit{Galilean Journey}, 49. Like Barth, Elizondo sees historical-critical exegesis of the gospel as critical to the task of theology but in a way that puts historical critical exegesis in its proper place as prolegomena, as the work that must be done in order to get to the content of the Word of God- the good news it proclaims to us today.
\end{itemize}

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For Elizondo, the Son of God assumes not only Jewish flesh, but in assuming a home in Galilee, a borderland region between Israel and the gentile nations, the Son assumes the struggle for home of the mestizo Galilean people. Elizondo highlights the significance of Galilee not only as a place on the margins of society whose inhabitants were economically destitute but also as a borderland, far from the centers of cultural power both among the gentiles and among the Jews.\footnote{Ibid., 54.}

Elizondo goes on to draw a connection between the journey Jesus undertakes from Galilee to Jerusalem and the historical journey of Mexican-American people from colonization and cultural exile to a kind of homecoming in the Americas through the embrace of their mestizo cultural identity. For Elizondo, Jesus’s Galilean identity as one that was marginal to the Jews of Jerusalem is critical for understanding the atoning work of Christ and its soteriological significance. He first observes that “In Jerusalem, the Jews felt at home within the ordered universe of their worldview and beliefs.”\footnote{Ibid., 67.} Jerusalem, with its sacred center being the temple, stood for the culmination and fulfillment
of the long struggle of Jewish people for a home in the world. After this people went through nomadic existence, captivity, wandering, and exile, Jerusalem contained within its walls the living memory of their liberative homecoming as a people.33 Yet, Elizondo also observes that Jerusalem had become the site of a wound: “Jerusalem can be seen as a symbol [in the gospels] of the structural absolutism that sacralizes divisions, rejection of others, and even hatred and murder—all in the name of God.”34 Jesus’s Galilean identity as rejected borderland dweller proclaiming a Kingdom of God that welcomes all exposes the violence of the absolutism and exclusivism of Jews in Jerusalem.

Describing Jesus’s rejection by the authorities in Jerusalem, Elizondo writes, “the drama of Jerusalem is not only redemptive in itself, but it is also symbolic of the drama of every human group that attempts to survive by its own power, by absolutizing its culture and its religion—in the conviction that its life, as seen by itself is the way for everyone.”35 Jesus’s Galilean identity means that he becomes a crisis to “human categories of importance and belonging.”36 Instead,

33 “[Jerusalem] was the center of Jewish identity and belonging; it was the designated place of God’s abiding presence.” Ibid., 68.
34 Ibid., 70.
35 Ibid., 76.
36 Ibid., 65.
Elizondo claims that in Christ we see that “the basis of the new belonging and acceptability is the recognition and acceptance of the common fatherhood of God.”\(^37\) This is not a rejection of particularity or difference, nor is Elizondo indiscriminately targeting all people’s sense of belonging. Rather it is a rejection of “particularism,” or the politics of identity that sees one’s culture and people as normative and absolute. Elizondo instead argues that the only absolute norm which simultaneously joins all peoples while affirming their differences is the Kingdom of God, proclaimed by Christ and woven together by the Spirit.\(^38\)

This new universal fellowship, the symbol of which is the Kingdom of God, relativizes all human structures—i.e., ethnocultural, racial, national, and gender forms of identity and domains—but it does not destroy them.\(^39\) Indeed, Elizondo argues that structures are a gift of the Spirit and that precisely the problem is when these structures obscure the fact that they are not self-made or eternal but rather the creation of the Spirit and thereby accountable to the Spirit.

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\(^37\) Ibid., 63.
\(^38\) “Each person and each group has its share of richness to offer to the others, and each its own share of poverty to be alleviated by the others. It is in this freely accepted relationship of interdependence and mutual cooperation that the kingdom of the children of God emerges from within the kingdoms of this world.” Ibid., 64.
\(^39\) “Jesus does not proclaim a structureless society, but he does question the deification of any and every human structuring.” Ibid., 66.
of life and freedom. In sum, no human tradition, culture, or people is god, but rather every culture, tradition, and people find their dignity in God.

At the same time, for Elizondo the resurrection reveals how God assumes this drama not to condemn Jerusalem and its inhabitants, or humanity at large in our sinful ways. Rather, God assumes this human drama in order to redirect it toward God’s redemptive end, a new existence that ends the cycle of death and exile to which the search for a sense of belonging continually leads human societies. The Way, which the Spirit instills in the hearts of Jesus’s followers, liberates humanity from the perennial struggle to establish a sense of home in the world through violent rejection, exclusion, and absolutizing. Home is now to be sought instead in joining other peoples, particularly those on the margins, in table fellowship, and in thanksgiving to God, who is the source of all peoples and their cultures.

Having reread the gospels from the cultural perspective of the Mexican-American people and their mestizo identity, Elizondo turns to rereading the history and reality of the Mexican American people in light of the gospels. The

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 89.
concreteness of Jesus's life and his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and to the announcement of new creation in the resurrection yields for Elizondo three theological principles through which life today can be interpreted: the Galilean principle, the Jerusalem principle, and the resurrection principle.\(^42\)

The Galilean principle is the notion that God elects what the world rejects. Elizondo rejects any dichotomy between Jesus' person and his work, noting that “he [Jesus] did not come just to do certain things for them [Israelites]: he came to become one of them, so as to enable them to find new life in him and thus be able to do things for themselves.”\(^43\) The incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus of Nazareth is therefore not just instrumental to salvation, but itself is the saving gift of the Creator's self-giving to the creature. God is none other than the one who elects to embrace the creature in her need, in her exile, and in her rejection. In many ways, this is a reiteration of what the Latin American liberation theologians, as well as James Cone in the North American context, had already begun to announce—that God is revealed in Jesus Christ as One who makes a preferential option for the poor. What Elizondo adds is the sense in which “the

\(^{42}\) “Today Jesus continues his struggle for new life in our struggles, and it is in him and through him that we discover the ultimate purpose and goal of our struggles.” Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 92.
poor” can also mean those who are made by poor by their ethnocultural identity. As those who are “culturally poor,” the mestizo Mexican-American peoples participate in the rejection and, therefore, also the election of the Galilean Christ.

Moreover, this election is not a passive one, but an election unto a struggle for liberation and human flourishing.\(^4\) The election of those on the margins is not an opiate for the masses, but rather a catalyst that activates them to see and hear God’s judgment over anything which negates their God-given goodness and dignity. The struggle of the Mexican-American people against their dual oppression in their longing for a flourishing home participates, then, in Jesus’s own struggle in his journey toward Jerusalem and his final struggle against the forces of evil on the cross. This participation transfigures oppressed peoples into peoples of the crucified one, or in the words of Ignacio Ellacuría, “el pueblo crucificado,” the crucified peoples of history.\(^5\)

The language of the crucifixion is critical here because, for liberation theologians, the cross is inherently tied to the resurrection, each mutually informing and refracting off the other. As Elizondo notes, “The cross without the

\(^4\) Ibid., 103.
resurrection would be without value and only a curse, but the resurrection without the way of the cross would be a pure utopic dream or illusion.”

This brings us to the third and final principle, which is the principle of the resurrection: “out of suffering and death, God will bring health and life.” In correspondence to the resurrected Jesus today, the struggles and hopes of people of the world today who are marked by their mestizo/a heritage for marginalization can become icons that point beyond themselves to God’s redemptive work in the world and the transformation of all things into New Creation.

Like every other aspect of Jesus’s life, Jesus’s Galilean identity has soteriological significance. Thus, Elizondo’s contextual reading of the gospels through the lens of mestizaje sheds light on how Jesus’s rejection and crucifixion point to the rejection and discrimination of mestizo/a cultures and peoples while his resurrection grants dignity and even a divine vocation to the marginal existence of mestizos/as.

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46 Elizondo, Galilean Journey, 81.
47 Ibid., 115.
3.3.2 Critiques of Elizondo’s Theology of Mestizaje

In recent years the use of *mestizaje* as a locus theologicus has come under scrutiny by several Latinx scholars. The most salient critique has come from Nestor Medina, who argues that “paying little attention to the historical and socio-cultural developments taking place in Latin America, U.S. Latina/o theologians adopted a romantic and idealized understanding of *mestizaje*.”

Medina critiques Elizondo’s *mestizo* theology on two primary fronts. First, Medina criticizes how the discourse of *mestizaje* as a monolithic category for Latino/a identity seems to gloss over how Latino/a culture is itself filled with many “intermixtures-*mestizajes*” and is not a monolith of Iberian-Amerindian popular Catholicism. In the attempt to unite marginalized Latinos/as in the U.S., this “Hispanic cultural identity” ended up glossing over the profound cultural differences among Latinos/as while inadvertently fomenting nationalist and ethnocentric sentiments.

Medina is not the only scholar to observe the dangers of positing *mestizos/as* a “cosmic race,” a concept used by the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos to describe the people of Mexican mestizo people as the perfect

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synthesis of human cultures and ethnos and therefore as an epitome of human evolution. Latinx theologians have increasingly noted that those who identify as *mestizo/as* are not immune to participating in the modern struggle for establishing one’s racial, ethnic, or cultural identity as normative.\(^4^9\) Medina, however, argues that none of these scholars go far enough in their critiques of *mestizaje* because they have not paid attention to how, in the Latin American context, “the discourse of *Mestizaje* represents ethnocultural absolutism” that silences and oppresses indigenous and African peoples.\(^5^0\)

For Medina, it is not just that *mestizaje* has been whitewashed in such a way that those who use it gloss too quickly over the historical product of the violent rape of Native and African women as well as the rape of their culture by the unconsented introduction of European values and norms. Medina thus

\(^4^9\) The first attempt to resolve this essentializing of Latino/a identity came from scholars like Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Roberto Goizueta, and Orland Espín who sought to acknowledge that Latino/a culture is as much influenced by African cultures as it is by Iberian and Amerindian people. These scholars thereby moved toward using the term *mestizaje-mulatex* to account for this reality. Building, on their work, Ruben Rosario Rodriguez argues that *mestizola* as a theological metaphor is not to be understood literally in a way that essentializes a homogenized Hispanic identity but rather calls for “reconstructing *mestizaje* as a set of relationship rather than a static identity moving beyond the narrow ethnocentrisms and striving for a genuine mutuality between cultures.” Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latinola Perspective* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 109.

\(^5^0\) Medina, *Mestizaje*, 90.
argues that *mestizaje* in Latin America, and in a more discrete way in North America, is still invoked today in ways that render African and Indigenous cultures invisible and voiceless.⁵¹ In North America, where Anglo culture remains dominant, *mestizos/as* remain a marginalized ethnic group. However, Medina argues that an embrace of *mestizo/a* ethnocultural identity in Latin America was a critical aspect of the nation-building processes where there was not a democratic distribution of power among the ex-colonial subjects, but rather *mestizos/as* established themselves as the ruling class and carried on with the subjugation of Native and African cultures. As evidence of this, over the last century, Latin Americans have witnessed much bloodshed from repeated indigenous reform and nationalist movements where indigenous communities blame the governments for their destitute living conditions. In sum, *mestizaje* in Latin America has and continues to function as a tool for assimilating and pacifying indigenous and African peoples, so they continue in their state of subjugation in a manner analogous to how Manifest Destiny and the myth of American Progress functioned as an imperial project in North America.⁵² Based

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⁵¹ Ibid., 91–93.
⁵² Perhaps more poignantly, Medina draws on the work of Zapata Olivella and de la Cadena to shows how in Latin American nations where native populations continue to be
on these critiques, it would seem that an embrace of mestizaje as a theological hermeneutic for discerning God’s work in the creation is fundamentally incompatible with a decolonial project for the Americas. However, I will argue in the next section that a theological hermeneutics of mestizaje and a decolonial concern are both necessary in the work of healing the wound of homelessness in the Americas.

### 3.3.3 Responding to Critiques of Mestizaje

While I recognize that decolonial theory is a critical direction in which a Latinx theology of home can go, and moreover that many of the concerns raised by Latinx decolonial scholars are true and important, yet decolonial Latinx theology is not the particular route that I’m taking, for the reasons I will here outline. Instead, what I am proposing is a Reformed Latinx theology of home that attempts a *ressourcement from the margins* of Barth’s dialectic of cross and resurrection as it informs a Latinx theology of home.

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disproportionately affected by economic depravity and social margination, many African and native communities have sought to define themselves as *mestizo* precisely in order to “de-Indianize” themselves and gain greater social acceptance Ibid., 93–98.
Medina is right to show the inner tensions of *mestizaje* and the way in which this intercultural and biological mixture historically took place amid profound asymmetries of power that even today, particularly in Latin America but also among Latinx people of the U.S., are not immune from participation in the machinations of racial capitalism and the colonial matrix of power. To avoid this critical lens in the appropriation of *mestizaje* is to craft it as a utopian concept, as the savior of humankind, and thereby to trap it within a teleological narrative of historical progress, albeit one from the underside of history.\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, this mobilization of *mestizaje* as a discourse in a narrative of human progress from the underside of history tends to also reify and universalize an image of the human as “universally mixed person” that substitutes the *mestizo* race in the place of the white race as the bearer of messianic salvation for all humanity. Indeed, many Native cultures refused the self-identification of *mestizo* precisely because it meant a kind of whitening or Europeanization and the erosion of their concrete

\textsuperscript{53} The universal mixed person- the mestizo here understood abstractly- comes to replace Christ as the image of humanity in a way that is oddly reminiscent of a Hegelian account of the spirit of history running through the white male German. Medina’s claims that this concept advanced by José Vasconcelos was influential in the development of mestizaje as a Latino/a theological metaphor. At most we can say that that story was very much in the water when Virgilio Elizondo and others began the theological discourse on mestizaje, although Elizondo rejected having read Vasconcelos. See Ibid., 60–81.
local identity. Simply put, *mestizaje* cannot be separated from the history of colonial violence, as to do so would be to succumb to the temptation of a modern narrative of progress that neglects the power of racial capitalism to transform all ethnic identities into tools of domination.

However, if embracing cultural *mestizaje* proves to be a fundamentally oppressive way to imagine and construct a more hopeful, faithful, and loving way of being at home in the world, then what alternative do Latinx theologians have to construct a common flourishing home with others across difference, disagreement, histories of violence, and asymmetries of power?

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54 Guaman Poma de Ayala is a famous example of this. Guaman Poma was a 17th century Andean chronicler whose famous work “The First New Chronicle and Good Government” makes a plea to King Philip III of Spain for a socio-political reform in the colonial Peru. Rolena Adorno, one of the premiere scholars of Guamán Poma, notes that an exacting critique of mestizaje underlies much of Poma’s work. Indeed, Poma labels *criollos, mestizos* and *mulatos* as ‘ruffians,’ ‘thieves,’ ‘liars’ and ‘drunks.’ He also makes a plea to the Castilian crown to order the effective disintegration of the Iberian and Andean peoples and thus to render unlawful the mestizaje of African, Indian, and Iberian peoples and cultures. This he says is a fundamental remedy to halt the destruction of the Andean people and their ways in the world. Yet Poma’s work perform exactly the opposite of what his words urge. That is to say, Poma’s work draws liberally from Andean and Iberian Christian traditions, beliefs, and practices and mixes them in remarkable ways to make his case. This is visible particularly in the way in which he reads Andean beliefs about the origins of all things into the Christian narrative. See Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala and David L. Frye, *The First New Chronicle and Good Government, Abridged* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 2006), 198–201. Rolena Adorno, “Contenidos y Contradicciones: La Obra de Felipe Guamán Poma y Las Aseveraciones Acerca de Blas Valera,” *Yale University Lehman College, CUNY 2000*, 2000, https://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletas/v01n02/Adorno.htm.
Medina ends his critical review of *mestizaje* by endorsing a decolonial approach to Latinx theology. A decolonial agenda, according to Medina, would make cross-cultural and interreligious conversations with historically muted indigenous and African voices the main concern of Latinx theologians.\(^{55}\) Medina argues that “the reclamation of the traditions and wisdom from diverse groups that make up the Latino/a population exemplify and illuminate Pentecost.”\(^{56}\) Thus Medina posits the move toward decoloniality as a way of living into the pneumatological pluralism expressed in the story of Pentecost. This implies in turn that “revelation is not a finished product or a complete process; it cannot be contained in one particular sacred document or by one cultural tradition. The process of divine disclosure continues, and now in richer ways, as we learn to draw from the wisdom and knowledge of other ethnic, cultural, and religious traditions.”\(^{57}\) Against a theology of *mestizaje*, Medina posits a decolonial

\(^{55}\) Medina, *Mestizaje*, 133.  
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 141.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid. In some ways, Medina is not saying anything different here from what Vatican II calls Catholics to do in the wake of modernity and what Pope Francis has begun to do with the synod of Amazonia.
pneumatology that sees the Spirit as revealing God not through any one culture, race, or ethnicity, but rather through their shared wisdom.

While I agree with the substantive claims that Medina makes about Latinx theology moving in the direction of decoloniality and therefore toward a dialogue with the wisdom of indigenous and African traditions, I find decolonial theory insufficient for the task of constructing a common flourishing home in the Americas. In the previous chapter, I noted decoloniality’s rejection of all normative and universal claims as an impediment to the work of constructing a common home. I thus note that while Tinker and Jennings make use of or resonate with aspects of decolonial theory, ultimately their commitment to Christianity and/or to Native spiritualities means they must transcend the corrective decoloniality provides to discern the path forward for the Americas. In sum, decoloniality gets us to see the deep wounds of the colonial matrix of power and thereby the need for a broader conversation, but it does not give us a set of criteria or a method for navigating and negotiating the tensions, the disagreements, and the substantive claims made by all the different parties in their desire to be at home in creation. Decoloniality offers no way of discerning good from evil, right from wrong, beautiful from destructive, and indeed the
idea that one can and must make such choices goes directly against its ethos. One can see this inability to make ethical judgements implicit in Medina’s analysis of indigenous cultures.

While Medina’s central aim to get Latinx theologians to cultivate a more equitable dialogue with cultural difference is right and good, Medina shies away from judging it as right or wrong, or more or less fitting the substantive claims made by indigenous liberationist thinkers such as Tinker, claims like “to whom do the lands of the Americas really belong?” While it is true that decolonial theory aims to level the epistemological playing field, ultimately what is needed is to restore the agency of indigenous cultures so that indigenous peoples can act on the political and economic stage with their epistemic claims. However, this agency is always already premised on some claim to true, good, beautiful life and therefore to a concrete telos. While it is important to show how attempts to be at home in the world in the last five centuries have participate within a vicious colonial logic that always renders the weak and the ‘other’ homeless, we also need new criteria and a new path toward homecoming that address our shared need in the Americas across cultural and ethnic differences, to cultivate flourishing homes. What is needed is not only the decolonization of our homes
and of our ways of being at home in the world but also a spiritual praxis of homemaking.

In the previous chapter, I noted that indigenous cultures articulate an actual and concrete spiritual and material relationship between peoples and lands. Indeed, for Tinker and Jennings the colonization and destruction of Native cultures is a symptom of a ruptured relation with the land. Yet, the land receives little if any attention in Medina’s account of *mestizaje*. By contrast, in Elizondo’s work, though often implicitly, lands is central to the question of *mestizo* culture. Interreligious and intercultural discourse does not take place at the mere theoretical or intellectual level, as sometimes seems to occur in Medina’s argument; it takes place in the context of covenants between peoples and lands, it takes place in the context of reform movements for land redistribution both in Latin America and in the U.S., it takes place in the context of peoples contesting claims for home in Aztlan, in San Antonio, in Cuzco and Lima. How we think about and relate to lands, as Tinker and Jennings demonstrate, deeply impacts how we order and narrate all of life, from the economic to the social and political. Decolonial theory shows us the need for a broader conversation about how people relate to land, but decoloniality itself does not posit an account of place or

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land and its centrality to identity formation. It simply cannot do that. For to give any account of the kind and different quality of claims that lands make on people and vice-versa is to make a normative statement about human life and decolonial theory refuses to make such statements.

Latin American *mestizo* history is not exempt from the crime of subjugating indigenous cultures, but it is also equally marked by indigenous rebellions not just for their cultural dignity but for the redistribution of land. Spirituality cannot in the end be separated from connectedness to the land and the desire for home. In this sense, I find the work of Jeanette Rodriguez-Holguin in *Teología de la Tierra* promising and compelling. Rodriguez-Holguin argues that “Latino/a spirituality is an example of a spirituality especially conscious of a relationship with the land. This relationship with the land, however, cannot be separated from one’s relationship with family, community, and even the cosmos.”\(^{58}\) Rodriguez notes that the centrality of land/place in Latino/a spirituality is an inheritance of the knowledge of Latino/as indigenous ancestors. This ancestral wisdom which persists in Latino/a spirituality speaks of “our emergence from birthing lands that still nourish us, and which remain the reason

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\(^{58}\) Rodríguez-Holguín, “La Tierra: Home, Identity, and Destiny,” 192.
for our existence. We are inseparable from the land from which we were created.\textsuperscript{59} This observation of birthing lands is echoed in much of Latino/a theology and in particular in the Mujerista theology of Ada María Isasi-Díaz who often describes Cuba as “\textit{la tierra que me vio nacer},” the land that witnessed my birth.

While Latinx culture is not the only culture to conceive of a fundamental and transcendent spiritual relationship between people and land, such a relationship does contrast deeply with modern sociological and economic myths which reduce peoples’ relationship to land to mere historical contingencies and social constructs or to the logic of property. This will be the task and challenge of decolonial work, to take seriously the concrete claims of indigenous peoples and their religions as not merely ideas in the marketplace that should get their own dignity but as concrete claims about the world and humanity’s place and role in it.

Moreover, because in his critique of \textit{mestizaje} Medina shies away from supporting or rejecting the substantive claims of indigenous and African peoples to the lands of the Americas, he also fails to make a proper critique of indigenous

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 193–94.
cultures and the presence of brutal empires before Europeans arrived. Before the Iberian colonizers arrived, the Incan and Aztec empires were wreaking havoc across South and Central America. Where then do we draw a deep vision of the healing and joining of peoples if both Western and non-Western sources are also tarred by the violence of imperial expansion and their fracturing of creation and peoples’ relationships to the land? There is no innocent history either among Europeans or non-European peoples; this means that it is not enough to simply invite all cultures to co-exist, we must also work toward ways of ordering a common life between cultures and peoples and their ways of being at home in the world that are aimed toward their mutual flourishing, even amidst histories of conquest and marginalization. It is not clear whether decolonial theory, at this point, has developed the conceptual tools necessary to engage in or facilitate such a conversation.

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61 Ibid.
62 The cultivation of such a common life requires a political vision that is not over-determined by capitalism, but which is attentive to the different visions of the good, including different claims on land upon which they are based, as well as to the challenges of negotiation these visions amid histories of violence and domination and ongoing asymmetries of power between peoples. See Luke Bretherton, Christ and the Common Life: Political Theology and the Case for Democracy (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019).
The second concern that I want to raise about embracing a decolonial option is that if *mestizaje* can fit within a western narrative of progress whereby one’s race or ethnicity or culture is posited as the telos of humanity, decolonial thinkers like Medina can also make *mestizaje* fit into an anti-western declension narrative whereby all attempts by cultures to be at home in the world are haunted by the specter of western imperialism and colonial modernity. The only solution then is a flaccid co-existence, whereby every ethnocultural group is given the space to re-emerge from colonial extinction and to delink from western epistemological paradigms. How does such a vision not end up with the same segregated existence that Jennings warns against? While delinking from western epistemologies and rearticulating non-western frames of thinking are crucial first steps toward the liberation and flourishing of indigenous peoples, decolonial theory provides no concrete vision of a coming together of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, precisely because such a vision is always already a truth-claim that must be made from within a tradition.

*Mestizaje*, as it occurred in the Americas, must be examined from the critical frame of colonialism in which it played a role in the enrichment of the European colonizers and the subjugation of Native and Black peoples, but it also
cannot be reduced to this critical frame. True, *mestizaje* does not represent an ontologically privileged location, as does no group, people, or culture in history. All ethnocultural identities exist within a fallen created order and therefore are susceptible to the *libido dominandi*. However, the post-colonial analysis of *mestizaje* does not exhaust the meaning and reality of this phenomenon.

The insights of liberation theology that while marginalized groups do not hold an ontological privilege, they do hold a privileged epistemological position as unique sites of God’s redemptive-liberative work in the world, are critical here.63 A more charitable reading of Elizondo’s work and that of other Latinx and Mujerista theologians in their retrieval of *mestizaje* would note that at the heart of their efforts is a conscious attempt to prioritize the voices of those on the margins of society—indigenous, African, and *mestizo*—as a fundamental condition for addressing the challenges of constructing a common life in the modern world. What Elizondo and others who have come after him, including Mujerista theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz, are at pains to describe is how in the context of the atrocity, brutality, and sacrilege of colonial exploitation of Native peoples

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and lands, in the grotesqueness of this colonial *mestizaje*, something beautiful, good, and true emerges: a joining of people’s cultures.

“Joining” is what Jennings wants us to aim toward as the only mode of resistance to modernity’s fragmentation of life. Such a joining would not only be people respecting or tolerating their differences but, as Jennings describes it, people desiring one another in the way that in Christ, we see the Father’s desire to be intimately joined to human flesh.\(^\text{64}\) This joining, while not glossing over difference, also implies real change and transformation. And this vision of joining is precisely the vision of *mestizaje* that Elizondo presents.\(^\text{65}\)

A question that we must ask now is whether the term hybridity, suggested by some Latinx scholars as a better option than mestizaje, is a better description of the Spirit driven work of joining toward which Jennings is gesturing.\(^\text{66}\) Medina rightly shows us that mestizaje is a term with a non-innocent history of use and signification. Nevertheless, mestizaje is also a term which is


\(^\text{65}\) That said, Elizondo’s account of *mestizaje* needs further development if it is to accord to Jennings’s vision of joining. In the next chapter, I will take up this challenge of developing a theology of home that is attuned to how cultural *mestizaje* is a site of the Spirit’s work of redemptive joining of peoples, their cultures, and their lands.

much more attuned to the embodiment and emplacement of the peoples and cultures of the Americas than it’s much more abstract alternative of hybridity. While the discourse on hybridity rightly rejects absolutizing visions of human identity, it can often also insinuate that human identity is fundamentally fluid and mobile rather than emplaced and rooted.

Mestizaje does make a claim about human identity but not by choosing between mobility/fluidity and rootedness/emplacement; rather mestizaje suggests that human identity is rooted in particular and bounded places, communities, and their cultures while also recognizing that these communities are neither fully bounded in space nor temporally static. The very phenomenon of mestizaje suggests that communities are forged from the constant encounters of peoples through migrations and homecomings and the ecological, economic, political, and cultural negotiations and enmeshments that derive from these encounters. A critical retrieval of mestizaje sees these negotiations and encounters not through a rosy veneer but as sites of struggle and even
woundedness through which nevertheless the Spirit brings forth redemptive possibilities out of the joining peoples, land and cultures. 67

As such, Elizondo’s vision of mestizaje is not ultimately about escaping our current condition of globalization, but rather of seeing how, amid the crisis of modernity and globalization, the Spirit is doing redemptive work of joining at frayed edges and wounded borderlands between peoples and cultures. The task of the church is to bear witness to this redemptive work of the Spirit, a work which Elizondo notes moves from the margins toward the centers of society. For Latinos/as in the U.S. and for Latin Americans, this means that we must learn to listen to the voices of those who live at the margins of society: to Native and Black communities. Of course, the picture is even more complicated than this as other waves of migrations from Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia need to be accounted for.

Medina’s decolonial critique of mestizaje is necessary because it shows us the depth of the loss of the conquest and the nature of the wound that is the Americas. The wound of home in the Americas affects all cultures and

67 This understanding of mestizaje is much more in line with how Rosario Rodriguez suggests the church retrieve mestizaje in the second part of Racism and God Talk. See Ibid., 153–250.
ethnicities. However, I have argued that decoloniality on its own is insufficient to name the possibilities of redemption because it rejects any sense that the good, the true, and the beautiful can be discerned by any culture or people. Tinker and Jennings, whose work is sympathetic to and even reliant on decoloniality, do give us a more concrete path toward homecoming in the Americas, yet they do so by either attempting to get behind the colonial wound or by looking to home in a world to come that is not yet. I have argued this too is insufficient. Instead, Latin American liberation theology teaches us that we must look for salvation in history; we can actually attend to the redemptive work in history as part of a soteriological vision. Latinx theologians following this insight detected redemptive possibilities not just before the colonial moment or in some decolonized future, but in the very midst of the colonial historical wound, and in particular at sites of cultural mestizaje.

The question now before us is how Christians can detect and appreciate newness and goodness and beauty when it is always in the context of fallen and sinful creation. I would argue that to the decolonial critical analysis of mestizaje needs to be added a theological analysis of the dialectic of sin and grace, cross and resurrection. While Jennings, Tinker, and Medina have helped us to deepen
our understanding of the wound of home in the Americas and thus also given us a better understanding of what exactly Barth was facing in his critiques of modern nationalism, I now want to come full circle by letting Barth be a helpful guide in developing a mestizo/a theology of home that is attuned to the dialectic of cross and resurrection and therefore to the simultaneous woundedness and goodness of home.

### 3.4 Toward a Barthian Reformed-Mestizo/a Christology

The three principles of Elizondo’s mestizo theology, as it happens, parallel Barth’s own account of the grace and judgment of God revealed in Christ. According to Barth, God’s election of Israel bears witness to God’s unconditional and eternal Yes to the creature in exile and need. This election of the creature in need is precisely what the Galilean principle purports. However, this election also carries within it the No of God’s judgment toward that which negates the goodness and beauty of the creature imbued in her by the Creator. In the election of the suffering creature, human sinfulness is revealed as that which opposes the gracious election of God. This is recapitulated in the Jerusalem principle, an election that reveals God’s abhorrence at the sinfulness of humanity.
Nevertheless, God’s judgment of No, of a rejection of human sinfulness which destroys the creature, is not the final word but only points to God’s grace which embraces the creature even and especially in her rejection and thereby overcomes the negation of the creature’s goodness. This is, indeed, what Elizondo describes in and through the resurrection principle, God’s final victory of love over the powers of sin and evil in the world. Barth, of course, does not apply this hermeneutic of cross and resurrection to creatures in their cultural reality. To apply this hermeneutic of cross and resurrection and of God’s judgment and grace over culture is Elizondo’s contribution, and it emerges from his concrete lived experience as a U.S. Hispanic.

I argue for a Barthian reading of Elizondo’s theology of mestizaje that centers on the logic of the incarnation (the Galilean principle), crucifixion (the Jerusalem principle), and resurrection (resurrection principle) as applied to the experience of mestizaje. In correspondence to Jesus’s life, today, the struggles and hopes of peoples of the world who are marked as impure, weak, or foolish by their mestizo heritage can become icons that can point beyond themselves to God’s redemptive work in the world and the transformation of all things into New Creation. Icons, however, are ultimately finite creaturely things that the
Spirit can enable to witness to the divine life, not because of their inherent value or goodness but by grace alone.\textsuperscript{68}

Elizondo only applies the Galilean-Jerusalem-resurrection principles to his theological reflections on human cultures. However, as I have argued thus far, Elizondo’s preoccupation with questions of inculturation, biculturality, and the experience of \textit{mestizaje} emerge from and are framed within the Mexican-American existential longing for home or for a socio-cultural and political sense of belonging in the Americas, and in particular in the United States. Moreover, in reflecting on \textit{mestizaje}, Elizondo engages in the critical relationships between peoples, places/lands, and cultures. \textit{Mestizo/a} peoples are peoples of the borderlands, not only culturally but physically and spiritually. Indeed, borderland cultures reflect a people’s way of responding to the political, economic, social, and spiritual challenges of being rooted in a borderland.\textsuperscript{69}

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\textsuperscript{68} This may not be the only reading of Elizondo’s work, but it is the one I am applying.

\textsuperscript{69} Anzaldúa’s \textit{Borderlands/La Frontera} is not only written about, but it is also written in the form of life as it takes place at the US/Mexico border. Thus, Anzaldúa notes that, “the switching of ‘codes’ in this book from English to Castilian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language—the language of the Borderlands. There at the juncture of cultures, languages, cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born.” Not just languages, but bodies, traditions, foods, burial practices, eating habits, songs and dances mix at these junctures. Gloria Anzaldúa, \textit{Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza}, 4th ed (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 20.
Borderland peoples, cultures, and places thus play a critical role in how Latinx peoples think about and practice home. As such, in the same way that Elizondo analyzes Jesus’s cultural identity as *mestizo* by looking at his life, death, and resurrection, I will now do the same analysis but focusing instead on what Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection tell us about the human longing for home.

### 3.4.1 The Galilean Principle: God Elects a Galilean Barrio

Like every other aspect of his life, from birth to resurrection and ascension, Jesus’s assumption of a Galilean *barrio/hometown* is of saving significance. As such, Christ’s homelife—his dwelling in intimacy with his family, with his *barrio*, and even within his national home—are for us and for our salvation. And what you see in the life of Jesus is a deep love for Galilee, for the land and for its people, expressed in every word and every deed recorded in the gospel. The gospels do not downplay, set aside, or minimize the importance of Jesus’s hometown, thinking that his message might be better received if he could

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70 In many Latinamerican countries and among Latinx peoples in the U.S., a *barrio* denotes one’s hometown and people, one’s unique place in the world of belonging. The word barrio also carries with it the connotation of a humble place of origin (e.g. the hood), a place of which one might say, “it’s not much, but it’s home.”
pass as someone from a powerful or prominent village or city. Each time Jesus’s authority is questioned by those with power, each time the crowd murmurs in disbelief, “isn’t he from Nazareth” and “is he not Joseph’s son,” it is not primarily to raise doubt about his divine status—this would be an unfortunate anachronistic reading—but rather about his human status, his authority among the people of Israel, and the viability of a political and religious leader emerging from an unimportant and perhaps even sinful region and people. Yet Christ embraces his Galilean identity, so much so that his ministry is almost entirely devoted to this place and its people. Jesus’s ministry begins by preaching to all the local synagogues, and he calls most if not all of his disciples from among the local folks; one might say he chooses from among his *homies*.

More fundamentally, Jesus reveals the mysteries of the kingdom of God by using the common language of his people forged in the daily lived experiences of his hometown—Galilean fishermen, farmers, homemakers, etc. Jesus drinks from the wells of knowledge and wisdom of his family and local culture, and through these, he also learns his identity as a Jew. From dwelling

71 Indeed, his love and commitment to his family, his barrio, and to the nation/people of Israel are evident throughout the gospels, displayed in his ministry which is never a general humanist concern but always located within web of familial, communal, and national relationships.
deeply with his people and in his land, Jesus learns the language, which he then uses to communicate to the Jews and Gentiles the grace and profound goodness that is dwelling with his Father in the Spirit. Christ’s love for Galilee is love from within; it is the love of a \textit{paisano}, of a native; it is not merely the love of a passerby filled with pity; it is intimacy. It is this love which we can trace all the way to the cross, and it is out of this profound love for the people of Galilee that Christ is revealed as divine. In Christ, God’s love for all of creation is concentrated and powerfully displayed in Christ’s love for the Galileans. But as Elizondo points out, Galilee is not just any home; it is a fraught place, a borderland.

In Christ, God desires, assumes, and sanctifies a home that is not only at the margins of the Roman empire but indeed also at the margins of Jewish society at the turn of the first century. This much is clear from the telling of the gospels, and if one reads Virgilio Elizondo’s \textit{A Galilean Journey}, the depth and the consequences of God’s love for Galilee—for Jesus’s hometown, a hometown that many others rejected—quickly become clear. As Elizondo so diligently points out, to be a resident of Galilee means on the one hand to suffer socio-cultural rejection by the cultural elite of Israel, represented by Jerusalem as the center of
dominant Jewish culture, and on the other hand to suffer (along with the rest of Israel) oppression by an occupying alien power, the Roman Empire. Thus, God assumes a home in the world where the people struggle with betrayal by their near neighbors and political and violent oppression by their distant neighbors in Rome. And in the midst of this troubled home in the world, Christ affirms the goodness of home.

To put it in Spanglish, God is a God who elects to love the barrios, the hometowns, that humans reject. Elizondo’s Galilean principle should apply not only to the people of Galilee but also to the land of Galilee. God loves Nazareth of Galilee because God loves rejected places. You can’t love the Galilean identity of Jesus without loving Galilee. And what is Galilean identity apart from the buildings, the social structures, the landmarks, the entanglements between place and people?

3.4.2 The Jerusalem Principle: God Assumes Israel’s Struggle for Home

Yet Galilee is also not to be romanticized. In some ways, Elizondo mistakenly creates a binary between Galilee and Jerusalem. While it is true that Jerusalem was a center of cultural power and Galilee in some ways represented
the margins of society, yet the optics of cross and resurrection run through every aspect of life in every place, people, and culture. Jesus suffers rejection not only at the hands of the socio-religious elite in Jerusalem, but he also suffers rejection in his own hometown and indeed even in his own family. The very same people whom God embraced as his own paisanos, as his own hometown family, these people who suffered rejection by their other compatriots in the centers of power—these same people also rejected Jesus. So powerful is this episode of hometown rejection that it is recorded in every one of the synoptic gospels.72

Before Jesus ever taught anything in Jerusalem, his words inflicted such a crisis in his hometown people that they were ready to throw him off a cliff. One need not leave one’s home to experience violence and the threat of death. Our homes are good, and they are also sites of woundedness. In assuming a hometown in the world, Jesus not only assumes the goodness of home but also the deep woundedness that many associate with home.

In Galilee, Jesus’s confrontation had been with those like him, his kinsfolk, those who knew rejection as he knew it. In Jerusalem, Jesus was to encounter the teachers of Israel, those who embodied the history, the memory of this nation,

72 See Mark 6:1-6; Matthew 13:54-58; Luke 4:28-30,
and even the king of Israel whose body was a sign and seal representing the very body of the people of Israel through the ages and across space, reaching even those in diaspora. To be rejected by these is not only to be found outside of the circle of love and care of one’s closest friends, but indeed to be rejected by those who represent the nation is to be also found in the space of political precarity wherein social exile leads inevitably to death. To be rejected by one’s national authorities, by the people and the powers that be, is to be facing the possibility of being excised out of history itself and out of the living memory of a people. It is to be counted as among those unworthy to be blessed by this place and its people. It is to be set outside of the covenantal protection of a polity, to become accursed. It is one thing to have been indicted in a local trial as not belonging; it is quite another for the highest human court and authority in the land to see you as not belonging, as worthy of being executed outside of your city and by a foreign power. If early in life Jesus had experienced rejection by his own country when forced to flee with his family to Egypt and make his home among a foreign people, this experience of alienation and exile is only exacerbated in his life in his journey toward Jerusalem and toward the cross.
It is fitting that God’s eschatological homecoming in creation should begin from the margins of society and that the residents of the margins should be the bearers of the message to those in the centers of power of God’s homecoming. God assumes a home at the margins of history and of empire. And not only that, but God assumes a broken home. And from this broken and marginal home, salvation and redemption goes out to every people and place, every nation and barrio in the cosmos. From Golgotha, a forsaken place that represents the power of the empire and nationalist fervor turned in on itself, become deadly, new creation breaks forth. A Latinx theology of home has to posit that to embrace our homes in the world requires joining those on the margins in their struggle for home.

3.4.3 The Resurrection Principle: Golgotha and our Eschatological Homecoming

Despite showing our sinful self-serving attempts to be at home in the world often through the brutal violence of exclusion, a violence that spills over onto the rest of creation, the cross points not to God’s rejection of earthly homes but rather to God’s embrace of our finite and fallen homes. Yet this embrace also has a profound effect on our earthly homes; it means they must be transformed.
in the light of grace. As Christ’s resurrected flesh points to God’s embrace and transformative redemption of fallen human flesh, so does the resurrection of Christ point to God’s embrace and transformative redemption of our fallen earthly homes. We must look to the resurrection not only of the body but of our homes.\textsuperscript{73} To use more common language, we must look to how the Spirit, in and through Christ, is weaving the fragments of creation broken by sin into New Creation. New Creation is not to be reduced here to a new Eden, a new garden that bears no resemblance to our current towns, cities, and earthly homes. Rather New Creation, as is often spoken of in Scripture, is also the New Jerusalem, the redeemed and renewed City of God.\textsuperscript{74}

Ultimately, what Jesus brings into his hometown in Galilee and into the heart of his country in Jerusalem is not condemnation but a prophetic word of salvation and of hope. He did not hide away, seeking the preservation of his own life, but instead gave himself fully to the people of that city. Indeed, he brought

\textsuperscript{73} Reformed theologian Keith Starkenburg makes the case that the most fitting form of Christian grammar to describe the transformation of all things as they participate in the life of God is to talk in terms of the resurrection, Thus to speak of how our homes need to be transformed in anticipation of God’s eschatological homecoming is to talk about the resurrection of creation. See Keith Starkenburg, “What Is Good for Christ Is Good for the Cosmos: Affirming the Resurrection of Creation,” \textit{Pro Ecclesia (Northfield, Minn.)} 30, no. 1 (2021): 71–97, https://doi.org/10.1177/1063851220967333.

the greatest gift the city could receive, the very presence of the Father, the Word that gives life and light. The gospels juxtapose Christ’s love for the people and nation of Israel with that of the chief priest Caiaphas. Both Caiaphas and Jesus seek the welfare of the city and of the nation, yet the manner in which their love for the people, land, and nation of Israel is performed are profoundly opposed.

Here the words of Caiaphas, the high priest, reverberate across the centuries:

So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council and said, ‘What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.’ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.’ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. (John 11: 47-53)

What Caiaphas represents is the nation that no longer receives the gift of life and being from God, but that takes life in order to preserve its own being and reality. But John in this verse shows us how Jesus turns this logic entirely upside-down—for indeed Jesus would die for the nation of Israel, but rather than have his life be taken, Jesus gives it willingly. And this is the most remarkable bit which John tells us: in blessing the nation of Israel with his life which was willingly given at the cross, no more or no less than it was given every day with
every word, healing, and act of love, Jesus was also blessing the dispersed children of God from every nation. This is the power of blessing. It is not the inward turn that sacrifices others for the sake of self-preservation but an outward turn that sees one’s love as a source of blessing to others. No doubt, Caiaphas thought he was loving his nation, believed that he was doing what was best for the people; indeed, that was his divinely assigned job as high priest. We ought not to condemn Caiaphas for loving Israel, this people and this nation. What he gets wrong is the manner according to which that love works, not in turning in on itself at the expense of others or taking from others what is needed to survive, but in the willful self-giving of love.

Christ, instead, shows us the goodness of home, the joy that comes from abiding and dwelling with one’s family, hometown, and fellow citizens. Christ also shows us how love of one’s home-land/people/country is sinful, namely when it ceases to produce fruit, when it becomes curved on itself rather than a blessing toward others. Nevertheless, Christ’s spirit also shows us the restoration of this love and its turn outward.

As Elizondo points out, one of the first commands of the resurrected Jesus is to tell his disciples to return home to Nazareth. The disciples return home now
profoundly changed from their journey to the cross. They bear the marks of the wounds of this journey which had led them to the trauma of ultimate rejection at the foot of the cross. Yet, having witnessed the resurrected Christ, they leave Jerusalem and return to Nazareth, a changed people whose sense of home has now been transfigured by the resurrection.

What does the resurrection principle look like in action for Elizondo? It looks like the transformation of a city that begins with its sacred center and goes out to all the land. Elizondo writes, “Out of the resources of the past we have to transform the future into something new. So, upon my arrival at San Fernando, I immediately invited in the local artists, musicians, educators, professionals, community leaders, merchants, and ministers of other denominations to help me explore the possibilities of a downtown sacred center, which—although very Catholic and very Mexican—would be open and welcoming of everyone!” Elizondo notes, “If San Fernando Cathedral, which he calls “the soul of the city of San Antonio.”

had been the home of the marginalized and excluded Mexican-Americans of San Antonio—those who were not welcome anywhere else, even in other Catholic churches—now we would transform it into a center of welcome and hospitality for everyone…. Here we are all equally at home.”77 As in the miraculous turning around of the cross into the resurrection, so San Fernando Cathedral at the heart of the city of San Antonio, a city of exiles, will become a city of refuge and welcome, not just to the marginalized but to all peoples. The city itself, as not just the sum of its buildings and people but as an organic whole, becomes an icon, a witness to the eschatological fiesta in the New Jerusalem.

Elizondo’s emphasis on the resurrection concerns the fact that in the resurrected Christ, there is a newness that does not destroy but does fundamentally transform all of life, including each aspect of the web of relationships that bind us to each other, to the land—the very ecology which we call home. A Latinx theology of home, therefore, looks at earthly homes as sites of goodness, as sites of woundedness, and as icons that bear witness to the resurrected Christ and his communion of saints. In this view, borderlands have a unique role to play as places that speak to both the woundedness of our

77 Elizondo, Galilean Journey, 128.
creaturely homes and to the beautiful possibilities of new joining, of communion between enemies and distant neighbors, a union the fullness of which is impossible apart from the Spirit who weaves together creation in Christ. As God’s homecoming in Christ occurred in the borderland of Galilee, so God’s redemptive ‘second’ homecoming takes place in unique ways at the margins of society, where life and death are united so that the resurrected Christ becomes more visible, more palpable.

Part 2

3.5 The Virgin of Guadalupe: Icon of Divine Homecoming in the Americas

Thus far, I have argued that more is at stake in mestizaje than questions of cultural and ethnic identity; as Elizondo’s theological autobiography shows, embracing mestizaje entailed embracing a new way of being at home in the world, a new way of belonging and embracing a people’s relationship with the land: a mestiza theology of home. Mestizaje is neither the telos of history nor is it synonymous with the redemptive activity of God in history; it too belongs in the history of fallen humanity in need of redemption. Nevertheless, mestizaje remains a critical way to tell the story of the lands, peoples, and cultures in the Americas.
and as such, it must continue to be put in conversation with African and Native American accounts of the colonial foundations of the Americas.

The question this section seeks to address is: what does mestizaje contribute to the story of Americas’ founding crisis of home? If Native American and Black theological interpretations of Americas’ crisis of home, as we saw in the last chapter, have laid heavy emphasis on how the early founding evangelization of the Americas ended up paradoxically crucifying peoples, crucifying cultures, and crucifying the lands of the Americas, what is often lacking is an account of God redeeming peoples, cultures, and lands—not outside of or apart from sinful human history of the Americas but from within it.

In view of that, I argue that the gift that theological mestizaje provides to these other theological narrations of the founding of the Americas is the gift of “little stories” like the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Nican Mopohua.78 Alejandro García-Rivera has noted that to do theology from a Latinx or Latin American perspective is to pay close attention to these “little stories,” which together form

78 Nican Mopohua is the title conferred late to the Nahuatl tract which records the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego in 1531 at Tepeyac, Mexico. Nican Mopohua are simply the first words of the text and they mean “here is retold” which is the Nahuatl equivalent of the English, ‘Once upon a time.’
the mosaic of Latinx/Latin American popular religion. From a theological perspective these little stories constitute the sensus fidelium—the living faith of the peoples God in the Americas. These little stories and the symbols which are found therein, according to García-Rivera, point to the “Big Story, the story of God’s redemptive work in creation,” and as such these “little stories” are a fitting locus for theological reflection. More to the point, little stories that emerged from the early colonial period in the Americas testify to the deep joining of peoples, lands, and their cultural traditions and spiritualities. Therefore, to look for a theology of home in the Americas one must attend to these “little stories.”

I will argue that the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a little story set in the context of the colonial wound which points to “Big Story” of the good news that through Christ and the Spirit our fragmented creaturely homes are being redeemed and transfigured by the Creator into God’s New Creation. This, I believe, is the true gift that Elizondo’s theology of mestizaje can bring to the

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81 For an account of how listening to little stories can form the basis for a Latinx ecclesiology see Natalia M. Imperatori-Lee, Cuéntame: Narrative in the Ecclesial Present (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018).
conversation, but it must be a gift that enters fully into the dialectic of cross and resurrection. If not viewed through this lens, then the story of Guadalupe enters the same problematic romanticization of *mestizaje* which haunts early Latinx theologies.

### 3.5.1 The Home of Guadalupe

The apparitions of Guadalupe and the historical origins of the text have been a source of much debate for centuries, not only among historians but also within the church.\(^\text{82}\) However, the importance of the narrative for Catholics and non-Catholics, not only in Mexico but throughout all of Latin America, was affirmed when Pope John Paul II dubbed her officially the evangelizer of the Americas.\(^\text{83}\) Our Lady of Guadalupe is venerated by many Latin Americans and Latinos/as not only in Mexico and the U.S. but across the Americas and indeed has become a staple not only of Latin American popular religion but of popular

\(^{82}\)Some Catholic priests during the 16\(^{th}\) century saw the cult to Guadalupe as a syncretistic worship and therefore sought to eliminate it as vestige of pagan native religion.

\(^{83}\)Protestants need to engage with Guadalupe in charitable ways and as not only a cultural artifact but as an ecumenical icon of faith in Latin Americas. Some of this work has already begun and the first fruits are the wonderful edited volume by Maxwell Johnson titled *American Magnificat*. Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *American Magnificat: Protestants on Mary of Guadalupe* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2010).
culture as well. Given the wide recognition of Guadalupe, the setting of the narrative, and her central role in the faith and culture of many U.S. Latinos/as and Latin Americans, Guadalupe is a fitting story through which to reflect on the meaning of home in the Americas.

The story of the Virgin of Guadalupe takes place ten years after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire. It tells how Mary the mother of Jesus appeared several times to Juan Diego, a humble native convert to Christianity, at Mount Tepeyac, on the northern fringes of modern-day Mexico City. In the story, the Virgin, who is dressed in the local garb and who speaks Nahuatl, appears to Juan Diego in order to bequeath him a mission: to go and tell the bishop, Juan Zumarraga, to build her “a home right here, that he may erect my temple on the plain.” Guadalupe explains the purpose of this home: “In it I will show and give to all people all my love, my compassion, my help, and my protection, because I am your merciful mother and the mother of all the nations

84 Mount Tepeyac was also a sacred site where the local natives worshiped the Nahuatl goddess Tonatzin.
85 I will be relying on Elizondo’s translation of the text in Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*, 8.
that live on this earth who would love me....”

Although at first the bishop and those who lived in his palace did not believe Juan Diego’s message, after many signs and miracles, including the healing of Juan Diego’s uncle Juan Bernardino and the miraculous imprinting of the Virgin’s image on Juan Diego’s tilma, mantle, the bishop finally believed the message and built a hermitage for the Virgin at Tepeyac.

In *Guadalupe: Mother of New Creation*, Elizondo interprets the Guadalupe event as a story that offers an alternative account of the homecoming of Christianity to the Americas, an account told through the lens of mestiz/ía Christian faith rather than through the triumphalist faith of the conquerors. Indeed, for Elizondo, the Nican Mopohua is a “sacred narrative as remembered by the victim-survivors of the conquest who were equally the firstborn of the new creation.”

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86 Ibid. The word for the structure which the Virgin is asking Juan Diego to have the church build for her changes a bit throughout the text. At times the best translation is “hermitage” which Elizondo associates with “a home for the homeless” then it is translated other times as simply home and as temple. What connects each of these is the sense of dwelling place. Ibid., 8fn.8,9.
87 Elizondo begins by describing his experience of pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a participation in a collective rhythmic movement, “entering together into the common womb of the Americas.” Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*, x.
88 Ibid., xviii.
As a narrative about the encounter that gave birth to Americas, the *Nican Mopohua* also depicts how the drama of the Americas participates in the biblical drama of creation, and recreation, of Israel’s homecoming and exile, and of God’s way into dwelling with people through Christ and in the Spirit. Indeed, as Elizondo states, “Guadalupe is not just a Mexican happening—it is a major event in God’s saving plan for humanity.”[^89] In particular, for Elizondo, Our Lady of Guadalupe is not only the mother of a new people—the *mestizo/a* peoples of Mexico and the Americas—but indeed, she is the mother of New Creation, asking her children to provide this new creation a home.

### 3.5.2 Guadalupe Through the Lens of Mestizo/a Faith

What is critical about the aesthetics of the story of Guadalupe as an American icon of New Creation is that it is neither a triumphalist nor innocent account of the violent conquest and evangelization of the Americas. As such, in

[^89]: Ibid., xi. The Guadalupe event is at the very least a central even in the story of the gospel’s cultivation in the Americas and therefore of the participation of the Amerindian lands in history of salvation. This is true not only because, as Elizondo calls her, Guadalupe is the “Great evangelizer of the Americas” but also according to the “sensus fidelium” the “the memory of the faith” not only in Mexico but throughout Latin America. Ibid., xii. Guadalupe constitutes an ineluctable aspect of popular religion in the Latin American context.
his interpretation of the Guadalupe narrative, Elizondo identifies the seeds of New Creation even while gazing into the blood-drenched soils of the conquered Americas and examining the very heart of the Christian colonial wound. Through the story of Guadalupe, Elizondo revises the history of the founding of the Americas as not only a history of trauma, exile, and death but also as one of healing, redemptive homecoming, and of new life.

For Elizondo, the source for both the critical and redemptive aspects of his account of the founding evangelism of the Americas is the living faith of the people of his parish in San Antonio, those who are the children of the brutal encounter between Iberian Christians, Indigenous peoples, and African peoples. Unlike Jennings and Tinker, whose accounts of Christianity’s homecoming to the Americas aim primarily at revealing the synergy of colonialism and evangelism in the production of a colonial Christianity whose performance is inherently antagonistic to Native and Black peoples in the Americas, Elizondo’s account of Christianity’s homecoming to the Americas recognizes these tensions as also the sites of redemptive possibility. Without ceasing to be critical of the violence, not only physical but also spiritual and cultural, perpetrated by the early Christian missionaries against native inhabitants, Elizondo remains attentive to how the
seeds of Christianity grew and produced fruits of redemption through the
children of the encounter, even if these fruits grew in the thorny soils of
colonization. However, it will not be a redemption that emerges from the center
of religious power but rather from the people and places least expected, from a
Native who still held on to his pagan faith and at the sacred pagan site far from
the centers of Christian power and education. Thus, while Jennings and Tinker
remain vigilant for some future moment of redemption and reparation that
overcomes the historically distorted and colonizing Christianity that was
implanted in this continent, for Elizondo, the history of the Americas is one that
is simultaneously fallen and being redeemed by God.

3.5.3 Responding to Critiques of Elizondo’s Reception of Guadalupe

According to Medina, Elizondo reads Guadalupe through the optics of a
Christian mestizo lens and thus fails to see how Guadalupe and Juan Diego are
not mestizo but indigenous, and how the narrative is not an affirmation of the
beauty of Christian inculturation of the gospel but rather an indigenous act of
resistance to Christian evangelism. He draws from Gloria Anzaldúa’s
interpretation of Guadalupe, who “does not view mestizaje as a trump card by
which everything is made right by mixing.”⁹⁰ Rather, “she claims that mestizaje is a way of life, a conceptual orientation for interpreting life and constructing identities. It is a way of leaning into the tension rather than to ameliorate them or overcoming them by mixture.”⁹¹

I disagree with Medina that there is a significant conceptual distance between Anzaldúa’s and Elizondo’s interpretation of Guadalupe, as much as there is a difference in emphasis. Both, for instance, consider Guadalupe a feminist native symbol against Christian colonial patriarchy. Both see Guadalupe as “an alternative to the dominant discourse of homogenous, hermetically sealed identities,” although Medina seems to only allocate this to Anzaldúa. Indeed, for both Anzaldúa and Elizondo, Guadalupe is a symbol of “newness.” Elizondo, however, comes at Guadalupe from the sense of the Christian faith of the people, thus seeing in her first the beauty and resilience of people’s piety, and within that the need to critique. Anzaldúa comes at Guadalupe first as a symbol of resistance, and from within that resistance, as a symbol of newness. Thus, Guadalupe performs a much more stringent critique of the church and its

⁹⁰ Medina, Mestizaje, 123.
⁹¹ Ibid.
patriarchy for Anzaldúa, who “rejects the binaries of women/men, saint/whore, spirit/body,” than for Elizondo who does not go so far, perhaps because of his Catholic faith and his own priesthood. While ultimately both Anzaldúa and Elizondo read Guadalupe through a *mestiza/o* hermeneutic, Medina wants to read the text as a text of resistance precisely to *mestizaje*: “I propose that the indigenous elements one finds in Guadalupe are not merely expression of the evangelization of the indigenous, by which the divine ‘reconciled’ the Spanish and the indigenous, but rather are concrete expressions of the indigenous peoples’ resilience and resistance to being erased from history.”

As mother of New Creation, however, I argue that Guadalupe is not erasing either Iberian or Native history but rather transforming both. The evils of history are not ignored in her story, nor are they simply judged, but rather they are transformed through hermeneutics of *mestizaje* so that they become a source of healing newness rather than a festering colonial wound. This doesn’t mean that Guadalupe cannot be co-opted into nationalist agendas, and indeed, Elizondo at times falls prey to language that would suggest or incite such agendas. I don’t want to posit Guadalupe as a solution to the Americas’ crisis of

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92 Ibid., 128.
home without first admitting how Guadalupe is also part of the problem. We do not need a simplistic picture of Guadalupe. The event of Guadalupe and its witnesses and its redaction and passing down in communities are all situated within the very same dynamics of Christian colonial practices and racial capitalism and the fragmentation of creation it entails.

That is what makes the tradition of Guadalupe so relevant for us today—it is not set in utopia; it does not paint away the various dilemmas of home and of evangelization we’ve been exploring. Is it a Native story, or is it a Europeanized version of a Native story that has been colonized? Is it a Christian story to appease the Natives, or is it a story of Native resistance to Christianity? She is called the Virgen Morena/the dark-skinned Virgin, but does Africanicity really appear in the story, and has she really been a symbol of hope for African or mulatto people? Has the story not been coopted as part of Mexican nationalism and thereby been mobilized against Natives and even against women? So, once again, is Guadalupe a story of colonial resistance? Yes! Is it also a story of internalized colonialism? Likely, Yes. Life is messy that way. Home, which is at the heart of the story, is messy that way. But when we read Guadalupe through the lens of the incarnation, of the cross, of the resurrection that leads to New
Creation, she can offer us a vision of repentance, of hope, faith, and love, and of reconciliation, set within the context of a people building a home in territory both native and alienating.

3.6 Guadalupe as a Story of Home and Exile

The story of Guadalupe is not only a story about the origins of the Americas; it is also fundamentally a story about God’s homecoming among the marginalized and the outcast, a homecoming that heals the wounds of homelessness. The Guadalupe event reveals that the Americas were re-conceived by the Holy Mother of God when she met Juan Diego, a child of exile and displacement, and asked him to build her a home that was to serve as a resting place for the displaced and the weary. Guadalupe does the opposite of what the missionaries had done. They took the Indians out of their homes, reconfigured their land, changed their language, and rendered them aliens in their own land. Instead, the Virgin Mother meets Juan Diego in the heart of Nahuatl land and even at one of their sacred sites—thus embracing their culture, their sacred places, their ways, and language—and there gave birth to the Word of God, putting it on the lips of young Juan Diego. In this way, the Guadalupe event
points to another event, the event of the Incarnation, whereby the Son of God, the child of Mary, also embraced a people suffering from the wound of homelessness and exile and made his home among them, taking up their language, their culture, and their ways in order to speak the good news of God.

3.6.1 The Time of Revelation: Alienation and Chaos

The Guadalupe event focuses our attention on one particular moment in the gospel of the incarnate of the Son of God, a moment of utmost alienation and exile. According to the text of the *Nican Mopohua*, the Guadalupe event takes place on “Saturday, when it was still night.”93 There is a fittingness to the setting of this story on Saturday. As Elizondo reminds us, “the conquest of Mexico had started on Good Friday 1519,” and in 1531, when our story takes place, the Natives had finally surrendered to the Spanish.94 The story of Guadalupe thus takes place during “the dark night of the collective soul of the Indian nations.”95 From a Christian perspective, then, the story of Guadalupe has as its Biblical and liturgical backdrop Holy Saturday, those hours when the Son of Mary descended

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94 Ibid., 28.
95 Elizondo, 30.
into the farthest country, hell. God’s embrace for alienated and homeless humanity went as far and deep as the Son of God’s journey to the land of endless night, where creatures are most alienated from their Creator and therefore farthest from home. The Gospels don’t tell us exactly where Mary was during those moments. Yet the Guadalupe events tell us that on Holy Saturday, when it was still night, Mary too descended into the place of suffering and alienation, bound by a mother’s love for her child. Have not liberation theologians declared from the beginning that to do theology in the Americas is to do theology between the cross and the resurrection and therefore in the silence of Holy Saturday? Indeed, liberation theology has as its very premise the harrowing of hell, the refusal of God to abandon God’s children to their exile and alienation, and to the decay of death. The good news which Holy Saturday announces and which liberation theologians bear witness to is God’s electing decision in Christ, to enter into the sphere of our alienation and exile in order to liberate us onto life and communion with God.

“[The] Paschal reality - its dark side murder, and its light side martyrdom, the cross of death, and the resurrection of life - is the authentic Sitz im Leben [setting in life] - as well as the Sitz im Tode [setting in death], let us add, although this customarily ignored in other theologies - of liberation theology.” Ellacuría and Sobrino, Mysterium Liberationis, ix.
However, the story of Guadalupe is not only written through the lens of the Christian biblical drama; in fact, the story offers Christian imagery transplanted into a Nahuatl cosmovision.97 Seeing the setting of the story through the lens of the Nahuatl cosmovision allows Elizondo to see another aspect of this “cosmic night.” The setting of the story “on Saturday when it was still night” can also then refer to what Elizondo describes as “the absolute apocalyptic end of not only their [the natives’] collective life but their entire history.”98 The story of Guadalupe thus takes place during the period of mourning that follows not only the death of loved ones or the loss of one’s home but, indeed, the death of an entire nation and its people. Nevertheless, Elizondo observes that “when it was still night” also refers to the “cosmic rhythm of ongoing creations…. The Nahuatl cosmovision was structured around successive creations—each one preceded by massive disasters. We are now in a key moment in the cosmic movement of the universe when a massive cataclysm will be

97 For Elizondo, the contrast is not between Christian and Nahuatl spirituality but rather between the European cosmovision and the Nahuatl cosmovision and how the gospel was cultivated in both to produce different fruit. “The language [of the Nican Mopohua] embodies the entire Nahuatl cosmovision, which was totally different from that of the European.” Elizondo, Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation, 3. The fruit of the gospel in the European cosmovision, at least at the moment of conquest, was death and homelessness. The fruit of the gospel in the Nahuatl cosmovision was to be something much different- life from death.

98 Ibid.
followed by a new creation.”

Out of the chaos and abyss of the dark night of conquest, the Nahuatl cosmovision offered the possibility of new life. Out of the Tenebrae of death, a new light shines upon a people. Most importantly, this new light of life will not be one brought by missionaries or the priests who had arrived on the ships of conquerors, but rather this new light of life would arrive through a lowly Indian boy named Juan Diego.

That the narrative of the Virgin of Guadalupe takes place on “Saturday while it was still evening” points to the encounter between La Virgin de Guadalupe and Juan Diego as the real birthing of today’s Americas—not the encounter between conquistadores and the natives, which did not bring about life but death and a cross to the indigenous peoples. Her presence at Tepeyac with Juan Diego confirms that the cross of yesteryear’s conquest perennially marks all life in the Americas, and yet, the presence of the Holy Mother in the dark night of conquest also points to the hope of a reconciled humanity, of a redeemed land, and of a return home for the Nahuatl people. To reflect on the

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99 Ibid., 33.
100 It is ironic that the conquerors would give to the natives the very “Christian language” of death and crucifixion which would later be used by the natives to describe what the conquerors did to the native peoples.
reality and history of the Americas through the lens of the Guadalupe event means to enter into the space between cross and resurrection and, therefore, between exile and homecoming. One cannot do theology in Latin America without cross and resurrection as twin poles, for to choose one over the other would be to skew our reality as a people “living in the land of the shadow of death” where “a light has dawned.” Therefore, to reflect on the meaning of home from Latin America is to always bear in mind the wound of homelessness and exile of the peoples while at the same time looking forward to their final homecoming.

3.6.2 The Place of Revelation: Tepeyac as Home of the Exiled

Juan Diego, the narrator tells us, experiences the summons by the Virgin to the top of Mount Tepeyac in a place, language, and in a manner that is familiar to him. Again, the Guadalupe event points toward the subversion of the ways in which Christian missionaries and the conquistadores used education and centers of power to make themselves at home in the land while rendering the

101 Matthew 4:16.
102 Upon coming before the presence of the Blessed Virgin, Juan Diego observes that he might be “in the land of his ancestors.” Elizondo, Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation, 6.
natives as strangers in their own land. As Elizondo notes, “At Tlatelolco, the new center of religious power and learning, the natives were not at home; in fact, it was the place where ‘native home’ was driven out of them in the name of God and civilization.” Conversely, not only did the Virgin of Guadalupe speak to Juan Diego in his native language, but she also appeared to him in Mount Tepeyac, in a place that was at the margins of the colonial centers of power and education. She did not appear to Juan Diego in a church or in the new capital city of Tlatelolco; rather, she appeared to him a place that was familiar and even sacred to his people and a place which the colonial powers had neglected and considered insignificant. This was a place where, according to Elizondo, Juan Diego was “truly at home,” a place where “he can be himself; here he does not have to be ashamed of who he is, of how he dresses, or how he speaks or looks, of the beloved and revered ways of his ancestors.” Again, Elizondo writes, “In a foreign land, just a favorite song in one’s own language immediately brings forth deep sensations of connectedness and belonging. Tepeyac had not been

103 Ibid., 40.
104 “Tepeyac had been left alone because the conquerors saw it as having no economic importance. Yet for the Native peoples, it was one of the most sacred sites of the Americas.” Ibid., 43.
105 Ibid., 42.
taken away from the Indian people. Here Juan Diego is not bombarded with foreign words and strange demands—he is truly at home in the land that had always belonged to his people.”

Elizondo observes how the setting of the revelation and the place that is to be Guadalupe’s home in the Americas is of great significance precisely because of its insignificance to the colonial church. Elizondo notes that despite the missionaries’ best efforts to “create spaces where the Indians could feel at home among their own,” evangelization efforts had quite the opposite effect, of alienation and displacement. As such, the event of revelation takes place far from the centers of empire and from the centers of colonial re-education.

Indeed, the Aztec centers of power, which had once been temples where sacrifices were offered to the Native gods, now were imperial Christian centers of power where the conquistadores’ religion reigned. As such, the priest’s house and the cathedral in Tlatelolco represented the very self-estrangement and self-alienation of the natives, their homelessness in their own land. To enter these great institutions of learning and holy cities built upon pagan sites of worship

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106 Ibid., 43.
107 Ibid., 39.
was for the natives to stare down the abyss of their own dark night, to become wanderers and exiles rather than holy pilgrims. It is sometimes better to run away and seek home in the wilderness than to look for a home in the place of shame and degradation.

In contrast to the places of colonial power and colonial re-education, Tepeyac was, in the words of Elizondo, “still a place where the natives could be alone and at home in familiar surroundings.”¹⁰⁸ It is here at Tepeyac where natives are at ease and at home and not in the palace of the bishop or the catechetical school that the Virgin wishes to be at home. It is here in Tepeyac where Juan Diego “is truly at home; here [where] he can be himself, here [where] he does not have to be ashamed of who he is or how he dresses or how he speaks or looks.”¹⁰⁹

Tepeyac was already a native pilgrimage site before it became the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and indeed, it was a site of the feminine sacred, as it was the temple of the goddess Tonantzin. It was the place of indigenous spirituality of life and fecundity in the cosmovision of the Nahuatl, a place where

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 42.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
heaven and earth consummated, where the divine could be encountered.

However, what the church rejected and believed to be foolish, even demonic, God chose as the place of revelation and of new creation.\textsuperscript{110} God chooses Tepeyac as a home to be birthed again by his Holy Mother, such that Tepeyac of the Americas bears witness as an American icon to the manger in Bethlehem, a place far from Rome and even from Jerusalem. In the story of Guadalupe, native religion is not an obstacle to be overcome, but rather it becomes the means through which God redeems, loves, and reconciles, where God wills God’s glory to be revealed.\textsuperscript{111}

The conquered natives of the Americas were prevented from finding a home in the church even while the church displaced them from their own homes. However, God came home to Juan Diego in his wandering through the presence of the Holy Mother and through her gives Juan Diego a mission to the church for her conversion. For Elizondo, “[Tepeyac] is the Americas’ version of the mountain from which the resurrected Lord commissioned the apostles to go forth and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:16), for it is here that Juan Diego

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{110} This is the Galilean principle being applied to a place rather than a people. \\
\textsuperscript{111} Like Jerusalem and the Jebusites.
\end{flushright}
is commissioned to go and request a common home for ‘all the inhabitants of these lands.’ It is indeed God’s sacred mountain of the Americas.”

The notions of home and of where God is at home in the world are upturned for Juan Diego, for the bishop, and likely too for the listeners. All are asked to move from where they are. Juan Diego is asked to travel not once but twice to the bishop’s home; the bishop is a lot more resistant to the call to get up and leave his house, but eventually, he is converted and indeed makes a pilgrimage to Tepeyac. That is to say, the colonial church, as represented by the bishop, is forced to leave the comfort of home in the colonized lands and to be no longer host to all peoples but fellow pilgrims. Our Lady of Guadalupe desires a home not among the lofty places or in the beautiful palaces of the bishop or the church but in the wilderness, among her abandoned children. She also, however, allows her image to go to the bishop’s house. The story, moreover, is not merely a recollection of the past, but as a kind of divine revelation it also explains and clarifies the present. It explains why people all over the Americas keep leaving their homes to make a pilgrimage to Guadalupe. It also explains why the Virgin

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112 Ibid., 47-48.
goes with so many migrants and asylum seekers across the wilderness still, journeying across dangerous borders.¹¹³

### 3.6.3 Juan Diego: Witness to New Creation

As witness to Christ in his exile, in a startling paradox, it is Juan Diego and not the missionaries who represents the seed of the church in the post-1492 Americas. As Elizondo reminds us, Juan Diego is the first witness to the breaking in of new creation being birthed from the Virgin of Guadalupe. Like Christ, Juan Diego is rejected, blamed, and suspected of being a blasphemer. Throughout the narrative, he bears and even embraces the form of the servant. But Juan Diego is also a priest and a witness of the resurrection, a forerunner of the New Creation. The image of New Humanity is born in Juan Diego as a gift from Mary. Juan Diego comes home to Tepeyac in his exile, and in his exile in the wilderness is most at home.

The colonial church, in her advent in the Americas, performed the very self-contradiction of humanity in a state of sin by seeking by force and violence

to secure a home in the ‘New World.’ Rather than seeking to be a home of the wanderer, the church had instead proved to be a catalyst of homelessness and exile. It tried to look inwardly for the meaning of home but found its own image as white and European reflected back at it, rather than looking outwardly to God and looking for where the Spirit was preparing a fitting place for Christ’s presence.\textsuperscript{114} In the words of Elizondo, “While inviting everyone into the common household, the church sharpened the division within its household and sanctioned the radically unequal distribution of the goods of that household.”

The church’s conversion begins with confessing her graven images of home in the world and finding herself again in that ambiguity and longing for home of the poor and the displaced.\textsuperscript{115}

It has long been a tenet of liberation theology that the poor and the rejected, who are often also displaced and exiled from their homes, present a crisis to the church. The church did not understand how the indigenous nations made a home in the cosmos, and so it blindly destroyed their houses, their communities, and their manner of being at home in the land. All the while, the

\textsuperscript{114} Elizondo, \textit{Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation}, 58.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 59.
church was creating new idolatrous ways of being in the land. In view of this, the Guadalupe event as a conversion event was the judgment on the church’s settling in the land through the destruction of indigenous homes. At the same time, Guadalupe presents a word of grace. Our Lady of Guadalupe desires a home in the New World within which to give birth to the Word, to bring faith in the incarnate Christ and Savior. And she calls the church to leave her centers of power, her established hills, shrines, and houses which have become idolatrous to her, and to come be at home with God among the rejected, those forced to the desert wilderness at Tepeyac.

When becoming a disciple of Jesus means being forced to leave behind one’s home, one’s people, and one’s culture, as the situation was for the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the effect is not dying to sin but physical death and alienation. The cross is not an embrace of alienation and exile; it is rather God’s solidarity with the alienated and the exiled. It depicts the erroneous desire to preserve one’s home by rendering others homeless. Alienation leads to homelessness, which is a form of social death that can very quickly lead to physical death. Evangelism then is not an embrace of alienation and homelessness in the world, although these may be the very concrete
consequences of solidarity with the alienated and homeless of the world. The way of evangelization is the way of the incarnation, which is also a journey to the far country. It is God’s deep embrace, by which God in Christ dwells with those who suffer most from restlessness, from not being home, from being constantly forgotten and left out of the household. It is a joining in solidarity with those who creatively and actively each day pursue a home in the world. Nor is it a simplistic embrace of their home, for every home is in need of redemption as well. God does not destroy our homes but rather reconciles, sanctifies, heals, and redeems our homes by assuming them as his own home. This is the way of the Incarnation. The Word of God is to be given birth in every land and cultivated in every soil. Our Lady of Guadalupe is a herald of this good news.

In sum, the narrative of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Nican Mopohua, offers Christians a different vision of home that not only corresponds with the Christological account of home revealed in the gospels but also resists the European colonial settler's mode of homemaking. The Virgin of Guadalupe sets the foundations for a Latinx theology of home by identifying the sitz in leben of such a theology as the colonial wound of alienation, exploitation and homelessness in the Americas. Yet the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe also
shows God’s unexpected homecoming in the Americas, not through the centers of colonial power, be they religious or political, but at the margins of society among the exiled and displaced. It is there at the site of exile and homelessness that once again, the Holy Mother of God makes a home and gives birth to the Word. Once again, as in nearly 1500 years prior in the land of Palestine, the good news of God with us is first uttered to the world through those whom the world considers unwise and untrustworthy. The Guadalupe event marks the true origins of the Americas as a land and a people who have been drawn into the biblical drama of God’s homecoming in Jesus Christ in exiled and conquered Israel. Today, Guadalupe continues to summon the church to bear witness to the Spirit’s work of actualizing God’s redemptive homecoming in all creation precisely by entering into solidarity with the homeless, the displaced, and those on the margins.
3.6.4 Guadalupe: Icon of Pilgrimage Towards our Eschatological Homes

For Elizondo, Guadalupe, the mother of mestizos, becomes a sacred icon of the resurrection of a people.116 Guadalupe is not merely an image to be found in a shrine; she is a fiesta, a wholly embodied experience and icon that draws peoples into the movement of life from death.117 Her story invites us into the valley of death upon which the pre-Columbian Nahuatl peoples trod during the conquest. Through this valley shines a light atop the mountain, the hope of new life which resides in her womb points to the rebirth of a people. However, this rebirth is neither a creatio ex nihilo (a completely new start discontinuous from the past) nor a simple return to the past, for there is newness, transformation, and yet also continuity. It is that which makes Guadalupe the mother of new creation. Guadalupe gives birth to nothing else but the very hope of the gospel, the Word of God, which she bears in her womb and shares with the peoples of the Americas.

116 “[Guadalupe] is a sacred icon whose power is far beyond our abilities of comprehension but whose life-giving power and liberating influence are at the very core of our untiring struggles for survival and new life.” Elizondo, The Future Is Mestizo, 59.
117 “The annual celebration of the Guadalupe-event is not just a devotion or a large church gathering. It is the collective affirmation and cultic celebration of life in spite of the multiple threats of death.” Ibid., 58.
In Elizondo’s account there is a deep parallelism, an almost entire identification, between the Mexican people, the mestizo race, and Jesus, which can be deeply problematic. Mestizola peoples are witnesses, icons, to the New Creation that is God’s people, the joining of all peoples in a healing reconciliation that happens in Christ—the one whom the Virgin Mother has come to the Americas to proclaim. This new people, or new nation, as Elizondo at times notes, is a new creation, a synthesis, a reconciliation of oppressor and oppressed. At times, Elizondo seems to leave behind the language of icon and starts to reach toward a realized eschatology. It is as if the Mexican people are the new creation breaking forth into the here and now, and Mary is the bearer of this new creation. The result is that Guadalupe reifies and baptizes Mexican national identity and mestizo racial identity.

However, Juan Diego is not the One who is inside the womb of Guadalupe; he is the witness to this mother and to the child in her womb. Barth

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118 “In her children divisions of race and nationality will be overcome, the downtrodden will be uplifted, the marginated will be welcome home, the cries of the silenced will be heard, and the dying will come to new life.” Elizondo, The Future Is Mestizo, 65.

119 “We gather to welcome new creation, the birth of our race, the mestizo people of the Americas. Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the queen, empress, and mother of the Americas, expresses the deepest nationality of our people.” Ibid., 57.
can here become a helpful interpretive aid; the church today is called not to take up the messianic responsibility of homecoming for humanity, but rather to bear witness to the homecoming of God among humans in the sites of woundedness. Moreover, again like Juan Diego, the church is not called to be a passive but an active witness, one who faithfully participates in divine work, without full understanding. And so, despite his christological qualities, Juan Diego ultimately represents the church who always witnesses to Christ.

Moreover, Tepeyac, while one of the first holy places in the Americas, is not the only holy place that points to the New Creation being revealed in the Americas. The shrine of the Lady of Guadalupe, like many other holy places throughout the Americas, was formed through the mestizaje of native and Christian cultures and spiritualties and serves as an icon of the resurrection of creation. Those who make a pilgrimage there are summoned to the vocation of bearing witness to the resurrection of their own homelands and peoples. Read in this larger context Guadalupe is an icon, not of Mexican national identity per se,

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120 In Peru, for instance, the devotion to El Señor de Los Milagros, a mural painting of a dark Jesus painted by an Angolan slave in 1651 tells of another “little story” which draws on African, Iberian, and Amerindian elements and symbols and in which the church is converted by the unexpected witness of mestizo-mulatto faith.
but of all the other holy places across the Americas, which tend to be characterized by *mestizaje*, and often neglected by the church under the charge of syncretism. In that they are holy places not only for the Christian converts but also for the natives, they become sites of pilgrimage where many peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations gather to worship the Creator. They bespeak our vocation—to bear witness to the resurrection of our homelands and peoples.\textsuperscript{121}

It is this reality which many postcolonial and decolonial theologians miss because they analyze cultures, lands, and peoples, not through the faith of the people, a faith forged in the dialectic of being crucified peoples looking to the resurrection of creation, but through the lens of power differentials and institutional forms. What Latinx theological readings of history through the lens of *mestizaje*, as for instance we see in the story of Guadalupe, demonstrate is that a true theology of liberation requires one to have the ability to see beauty during the ugliness, life in the midst of death, redemption from the very sites of woundedness and from the margins. For Latinx theologians, the virtue necessary

\textsuperscript{121} To this I will take up in more detail in the final chapter where I ask how migrants and citizens are called to participate in and bear witness to the Spirit’s work of resurrecting places— that is of making them ready for the eschatological return and homecoming of the Son of God in a restored creation, no longer bound to decay.
to learn to see this beauty is that of accompaniment, through which a commitment is forged to pilgrimage to the margins and to enter into solidarity with the poor, the displaced, and the homeless.122

Mestizo/a cities and peoples are thus icons that point beyond themselves to the work of God in order to help us rethink and relook at the very places where we are. What elucidates this work is the Spirit who, with the Word of God, takes up a home in creation. Galilee was the first place, but then Jerusalem and indeed all of Israel underwent resurrection in Christ. As the Word and the Spirit went out to the world, God changed and transformed cities, architecture, holy places, stories of saints and holy places, pilgrims’ maps were formed. Resurrection went out slowly from Jerusalem to all lands of the world until it arrived in the Americas in 1492. None of this of course meant that violence and death came to a sudden end, any more than we can say that because Christians live resurrected lives, death no longer occurs. Just as we say that humans when inhabited by the Spirit of Christ are already in the already-not-yet of resurrection, so we must be

122 Roberto Goizueta is the Latinx theologian who perhaps has best developed a theology of accompaniment. What is needed now is also an ethics of accompaniment. See Roberto S. Goizueta, Caminemos Con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1995).
able to speak of the land and of places. This leads to the critical nature of the
story of Guadalupe. Here for the first time, and in 1532, we see the Spirit
renewing creation, not just humans, but the land too.

3.6.5 Joining and a Mestizo/a Spirituality of Homemaking

The consequences of the commodification of lands and the implantation of
Euro-centric cultures over the native and African peoples of the Americas
rendered fraught the possibility of true joining of peoples in the land through
which cultures can be refined through an encounter with one another. Instead,
the Americas have been defined by cultural forms of segregation whereby
national, ethnic, cultural, and racial identities become sources of division rather
than sources of redemptive coming together in the land. In this context, love of
home as the love of one’s land and one’s people and their culture become
susceptible to vicious forms of ethnocentrism and nationalism. A sense of a
shared common home becomes impossible then, and the flourishing of one
people at home in the land becomes dependent on the physical, cultural,
economic, and political exile of another.
Mestizo/a peoples are not immune to what Jennings describes as modern segregated existence, yet the history of mestizaje bears witness to a praxis of conviviality or of sharing a common home through the fusion of foods, architecture, music, arts, families, and even spirituality that inherently resists a segregated mentality. These fusions are almost always given birth to at the margins of society where cultures meet to produce newness.123 However, when mestizo cultures assume the socio-cultural position of the dominant culture, they quickly forget their mixed origins and take up the subject position of purity. That is why in the section that follows, I want to introduce the concept of a liberative praxis of dwelling together in the land or a liberative praxis of home. This is an idea that Elizondo gestures toward, but which is only fully embraced by Mujerista theologians like Ada María Isasi-Díaz. The question that remains to be asked is, what might it look like to concretely bear witness to the resurrection of

123 In Latin America for instance, some of the culinary delicacies of many countries which have become emblematic as national dishes began as fusions of culture at the margins of society. To speak of those I’m most familiar with, those emerging from Peru: ceviche which emerges from Japanese migrants fusing their culinary techniques with coastal native fish dishes. Another example is the cult to El Señor de los Milagros, one of the biggest in Latin America, which began in the outskirts of Lima when an Angolan slave painted a figure of Jesus on a wall near a church that bore marks of the local Native deity, el Señor de Pachacamac, and which soon became the main form of Catholic popular piety among the criollos of Lima. For more on El Señor de los Milagro See María Rostworowski de Diez Canseco, Pachacamac y El Señor de Los Milagros: Una Trayectoria Milenaria, 1. ed, Serie Historia Andina 19 (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1992).
home? I believe that those best equipped to show us this praxis are the Mujerista scholars.

3.7 Conclusion: Toward a Mujerista Liberative Praxis of Home

What does a liberative praxis of home look like when performed from the margins? What does a preferential option for the displaced look like when it takes human beings' fundamental nature as emplaced seriously? For Isasi-Díaz, Mujerista theology is liberative praxis. That is to say, Mujerista theology holds the everyday experience of Latina women, lo cotidiano, as the source of theology and their liberation: fullness of life as the criteria to which all theology (and not just Mujerista theology) is accountable. Her theology, then, is one deeply grounded in listening to the faith, spirituality, and wisdom of the poor and those on the margins as those through whom God is revealed in a unique and preferential way. To Latin American liberation theology’s preferential option for the poor, she adds an intersectional analysis that sees liberation as not only overcoming forms of economic oppression but also ethnic/racial, cultural, and gendered forms oppression. Isasi-Díaz’s Mujerista theology is a rich garden with many fruits ripe for reflection. However, for the purpose of this chapter, I wish
only to draw on one in a particular aspect of her theology: her experience of
home and how it informs her vision of liberation and the kin-dom of God.

In the first part of this chapter, I analyzed Elizondo’s theology of mestizaje
and showed how it reveals a journey from home to alienation back to a
transfigured sense of home. Elizondo, however, never migrated. His was an
existential and spiritual journey, which is no less a real struggle, but there was
never a concrete act of “leaving” and “resettling.” While Elizondo’s work is
deeply informed by Mexican-American social and ecclesial reforms during the
1960s and 70s, during that same time period, Ada María Isasi-Díaz arrived on the
shores of the U.S., as one of the first generation of migrants exiled from Cuba and
seeking to find a new home. While Elizondo was able to return to San Antonio
from seminary every summer and re-experience the goodness of home, slowly
imbibing the identity of his Mexican-American people, Isasi-Díaz was away from
her homeland for twenty-six years and her return would not be a homecoming in
the way Elizondo experienced. Rather, Isasi-Díaz remarks, “There [in Cuba] I felt
the same as I feel in the United States: a foreigner. I am caught between two worlds, neither of which is fully mine, both of which are partially mine.”

In her essay “La Habana: The City That Inhabits Me,” Isasi-Díaz gives us insight into what home means from the site of displacement and alienation. However, it is not the loss of a sense of place that drives Isasi-Díaz to reflect on place. On the contrary, Isasi-Díaz’s reflection is driven by her deep attachment to her home place in La Habana, which continues to shape her everyday faith and praxes in her new place of habitation in New York City. As the title suggests, Isasi-Díaz begins with the concept not of humans indwelling in places, but instead of places indwelling in humans. Contrary to the normative accounts in which theologians of place describe displacement in negative terms, Isasi-Díaz argues that “Displaced refers to what we have brought with us and hold on to, letting this richness evolve and be transformed as needed.” For Isasi-Díaz, the Mujerista vision for a more just future, which she calls “Proyecto histórico,” is...

125 Natalia Marandiuc speaks about the capacity of places to make the human when she writes, “the goodness of home consists in its power to create and sustain human subjectivity.” Marandiuc, The Goodness of Home, 1.
necessarily grounded in concrete places, thus rejecting the false dichotomy between a Marxist materialism or an arid Western idealism.\textsuperscript{127}

Isasi-Díaz describes displaced Hispanic/Latinx peoples’ search for a home in the U.S. not as an attempt to build an imagined city upon a hill or to rebuild a mythologized glorious past, but rather as a vision grounded in concrete places. “Hispanas/Latinas’ \textit{Proyecto histórico} has a geographic base,” she writes. “We were displaced from somewhere concrete and our ‘original’ selves—our first selves as well as our creative selves—continue to be displaced not only from where we came but also from where we have arrived or have always been.”\textsuperscript{128}

Home or Place for Isasi-Díaz is neither an abstraction nor is it an absolute historical or existential claim. Home is an ongoing negotiation, a fluid process of dwelling in new places while bringing one’s places of origin along the way.

The themes and motifs of home and alienation and of \textit{mestizaje} are also present and vital to Isasi-Díaz’s theology and to her vision for the liberation of Latina women. To Elizondo’s pastoral theology Isasi-Díaz adds an activist spirit and an intersectional analysis that views liberation/fullness of life as a concrete

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 127.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 128.
address to the matrix of oppression suffered by many Latina women. She thus builds on Elizondo’s work in critical ways, most importantly by moving beyond Elizondo’s transcendent vision of new creation to a textured analysis of how God’s redemption work begins concretely in the everyday struggles, en la lucha, of those on the margins, and particularly of Latina women. Isasi-Díaz shows us how the redemption and resurrection of our homes is not a static reality which one either has or does not have, but rather that home-making is a constant struggle deeply tied to the liberation of those on the margins.¹²⁹

Through the prism of her home-place, La Habana, Isasi-Díaz offers an account of how displacement, caused by a colonial history of oppression, can be transfigured into a redemptive practice of placemaking or “multi-placement.” Isasi Díaz writes, “It is a turning of our ‘displace-ness’ into a multi-space/place that includes from where we come from and where we are—both of which are in themselves many places that harbor spaces. We are working to create a multi-sites Proyecto-histórico here where we live, in the U.S.A. We are also helping to create a multi-sites proyecto histórico in our communities of origin.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Isasi-Díaz, La Lucha Continues, 128.

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Hispanics/Latinx peoples, and in particular Hispanas/Latinas, as multi-site persons, can offer four gifts for the cultivation of a world that is a common flourishing home to all creatures. First, multi-site persons bring the gift of globality, which Isasi-Díaz defines not as diversity-crushing cosmopolitanism, but rather as a sense of the interconnectedness of all created places and creatures. Second, multi-site persons bring “the gift of multiple conceptions of life and fullness of life-liberation,” that is to say, multi-site persons bring their cultural heritage, adding new possibilities to the local cultures they inhabit. Third, multi-site persons bring with them the gift of a dangerous memory. For Isasi-Díaz this concretely means “making known to and reminding the USA that this country has done harm to Cuba.” Finally, multi-site persons bring with them the recognition of “the danger of closure inherent in all utopian projects.” As those who have experienced exclusion, multi-site persons bear the scars of utopian projects that too often repeat the mistake excluding and alienating those who ‘don’t belong.’

The work of Isasi-Díaz offers just one example of how those on the margins of society engage in liberative praxes of placemaking. Most importantly,

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131 Ibid., 128–30.
a Latinx theology of home informed by the Mujerista struggle for liberation will always need to be attentive and accountable to the crucified peoples, cultures, and lands of the world. A Latinx theology of home as liberative praxis will point to liberation-fullness of life not only culturally but also economically, politically, and socially. What Mujerista theologians point us to, then, is the need for a liberative praxis of home.

In particular, in the U.S. context, many communities have suffered and continue to suffer from an ongoing history of displacement, marginalization, and exclusion. However, these communities represent more than just the wounds of displacement; they also bear witness to the healing of these wounds through creative modes of resistance. Latinx peoples do this by living in the interstices of two places, living in-between or, as Fernando Segovia says, by “standing in two places.” Similarly, Native American, African-American, and Asian-American communities will offer distinctive approaches to the task of placemaking rooted in their peoples’ concrete histories of displacement. By attending to these communities and the lived experience and creative modes of resistance and transplantation of their members, the church follows the Spirit in learning what it means to fulfill the human vocation of placemaking.
The everyday struggle for home of Latinx peoples, and particularly of migrant Latina women, our most marginalized group, constitutes a liberative praxis of home as active forms of resistance from the margins against the exile precipitated by racial-capitalism, cultural genocide, and segregation. That is to say, those on the margins, in their struggle for home, become the sites of the resurrection of our homes in Christ through the Spirit. The church’s task is not to imagine some utopian/heavenly future home, but to listen to the exiled, the diasporic, the fugitive, exploited and the displaced in their daily struggle for home, and to look for the resurrection of our homelands and peoples from the margins. It is to this liberative praxis of homing that I turn in the final chapters.
Chapter 4
A Trinitarian Theology of Home from the Wound of the Americas

4.1 Introduction

Throughout each of the last three chapters, the meaning and importance of home has slowly begun to take shape. I have explored the meaning of home not only from a Biblical and dogmatic perspective, but also in light of the deep wound of homelessness suffered by many of the inhabitants of the Americas. In the previous chapter, I argued that even whilst inhabiting creation in its current form under the curses of sin and exile, nevertheless, we can discern the Spirit’s work of redeeming our earthly homes, if we know where and how to look. This chapter draws on the main themes developed so far to outline a Trinitarian theology of home that is attentive to the colonial wound at the heart of the modern Americas.\footnote{In their excellent book \textit{Beyond Homelessness}, Brian Walsh and Steven-Bouma Prediger argue that “the triune character of God is an important dimension of a biblically conceived theology of home.” See Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, \textit{Beyond Homelessness}, 280.} To do so, I reframe the human desire for home within the Triune drama of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. I reject a false dichotomy between the daily desire or love for one’s earthly home and the ultimate desire to be at home with God to which Scripture and the tradition
summons, arguing instead that that our experiences and stories about home, through which our desire for home is made manifest, need to be transfigured by the Spirit such that they bear witness to the Triune drama of homecoming. In addition, I note that this work of the Spirit takes place with special affinity at the margins and borderlands of society—sites of cultural mestizaje.

I want to highlight three methodological moves that undergird the trinitarian theology of home I wish to develop. First, I follow Barth in setting God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ as the primary source of theological reflection and in allowing the human experience of home and migration to be illuminated and clarified by being re-situated within the Triune drama.² Thus, I organize these first sections according to God’s work as Creator and source of our stories of home and migration, as Reconciler of our desire for home, and as Redeemer of our attempts at cultivating a sense of home in the world. Secondly, I am also resisting, any strict separation between theology and ethics. Therefore, I will also be analyzing how the self-revelation of the Triune God is a crisis to our

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² This dissertation aims to do methodologically with the desire for home what Sarah Coakley does with sexuality and gender by assuming that “the questions of right contemplation of God, right speech about God, and right ordering of desire all hang together.” Sarah Coakley, God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay “on the Trinity” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2.
attempts to be at home in the world. Finally, I am following the path set forth by
Mary McClintock Fulkerson, who avers that “theology begins at the site of a
wound.” Therefore, what follows is a theological investigation of the human
longing for home that takes seriously the wound of home experienced by many
in the Americas today as the necessary context in which to develop a liberative
praxis and spirituality of home that is transformative, healing, and restorative.
To do theology in this way is to always struggle to remain on the road from cross
to new creation.

4.2 God the Creator of Desire for Home

We do not find ourselves in stories of journeying and homecoming in
which God has an important role to play; rather, all of creation finds itself inside
of the Creator’s story, a story in which, to use the words of Karl Barth, the Father
sends the Son on a journey into the far country, a journey which is paradoxically
also the Son’s journey of homecoming to the Father. This triune drama of
journeying and homecoming is revealed to us in and through Jesus Christ who is

University Press, 2010), 13.
the incarnate Son at home in the far country. Moreover, creation is made an active participant and witness of this story by the grace of the Holy Spirit who, being sent from the Father and the Son to dwell within creation, thereby gathers and joins all things to the Son in his journey to the cross and to homecoming with the Father.\(^4\) God’s work as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer is made manifest in the cosmos in God’s movement toward us vis-à-vis the indwelling Word and Spirit. The focus that I want to bring to this theological account of home is not, firstly, on creation itself, but rather on the Creator’s desire for home as revealed through this Triune drama.

In that the Creator sends the Spirit to dwell in human hearts and sends the eternal Word to assume a dwelling place in the cosmos, the Creator’s desire to make out of creation a divine home, an eternal dwelling place, has been made known (Ps. 132:14, John 14:23, Rev. 21:3). The Creator’s desire to be at home with creation does not suggest a lack in God, as if God was homeless prior to creating, reconciling, and redeeming the cosmos. In her reflections on divine desire, Sarah Coakley observes that God’s desire “connotes that plenitude of longing of love

\(^4\) According to Ephesians 1:10, the Spirit, in the fullness of time gathers all things, things in heaven and things on earth into Christ, the eternal Word made flesh.
that God has for God’s own creation and for its full and ecstatic participation in
the divine, trinitarian, life.” The Creator brings the cosmos into existence out of
an eternal desire for creatures to participate in the perfect at-homeness, the
mutual indwelling, of the Godhead. This divine desire for creaturely
participation in the Triune life is the true source of the desire of every creature to
move toward rest and fulfillment. All things, as Thomas Aquinas observes in the
Summa, process from God and return to God in a way that participates in the
eternal processions of the Spirit and the Son from the Father.6

By reflecting on home in light of this Trinitarian frame, we can begin to
see the true goodness of home. Far from rejecting our creaturely material homes
as merely transitory tents on our way to our true heavenly home, chapter 1
showed that a Trinitarian theology of home renders our earthly homes as proper

5 Coakley, God, Sexuality and the Self, 10.
6 Moreover, God’s movement toward creation in the Trinitarian missions is not in contradiction
with the eternal and perfect mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s desire is
that creation would participate in the eternal mutual indwelling of the Godhead, an indwelling
which is simultaneously also revealed as the eternal procession of the Son and the Spirit from the
Father, that mysterious exitus and reeditus which is revealed in Christ and through the Spirit as the
Triune life of God. The theological principle assumed here is that the immanent Trinity and the
economic trinity are one and the same. The Godhead’s perfect at-homeness in se which takes the
form of the eternal mutual indwelling of the Son and the Spirit with the Father, is not at all in
tension with God’s activity ad extra, which is to say the missions of the Son and the Spirit toward
creation in the incarnation and indwelling Spirit of Pentecost.

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objects of desire, so long as they are seen in their proper place as finite and penultimate. When we understand the Triune God and not human will or desire as the true source, subject, and chief end of all human journeying and longing for home, then we can begin to desire our earthly homes rightly, as gifts to sustain and enrich our creaturely life with God. Moreover, we ought not despair in our failed attempts at homecoming or in the woundedness that comes from leaving home, for the Triune God is also the primary agent through whom our finite and fallen attempts to journey toward home are transformed into a journey into eternal rest.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit, who gathers and unites all of creation in the Son, the Triune story of journeying and homecoming revealed in the Incarnation becomes creation’s story as well. Not only does everything that exists live and move and have its being in the Son but more precisely, by the indwelling grace of the Spirit, everything that lives and moves exists as such because it participates in the Son’s journey into the far country and His homecoming into the Father (Acts 17:28). I propose this Triune framing as the best possible starting point for a theology of home, and it is a crucial starting point, for it grounds everything we have to say concerning the journeys from
and to home that mark our lives. Without this Trinitarian grounding, as Barth notes, our journeying and striving for home becomes an aimless wandering in the night.

4.2.1 An Apophatic Theology of Home

This triune drama of journeying and homecoming in which all creation participates is also a crisis for all our stories about journeying and homecoming. For Barth, this became clear as he engaged a German context in which the state’s stories about the exile of the ‘true’ German people and its summons to all ‘ethnic Germans’ to fight for their homecoming in the land was revealed not only to be idolatrous but deadly. The eviction of all ‘alien peoples’ and their cultures from German land, the tragedy that was the Holocaust, stands as a perennial warning to all peoples and cultures about the dangers pregnant in the stories we tell about our homelands. As I argued in chapter 1, Barth’s theological response to the Nazis’ way of envisioning homecoming was to offer an alternative account of home, one that re-situated the human longing for home within the covenantal drama of Israel and Israel’s God and its fulfillment in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.
The contrast between the vision of homecoming orchestrated by the Nazis in their imperial genocidal march and the vision Barth witnesses to as emerging from Christ’s life and his journey to the cross is jarring. While the former envisages homecoming through the image of the German völkish, the ethno-nationalist movement which declares that ‘German soils’ belongs alone to ‘German blood,’ the latter envisages homecoming through the image of an alienated and rejected Palestinian Jew, through whose exile from the land and his people, God achieves the homecoming of all peoples and lands.

Barth’s observation that home is intrinsically linked to a transcendent, wholly other God presents a crisis not only for German supporters of the Third Reich and their self-understanding of their exile and homecoming, but indeed for all human stories of migration and attempts at homecoming. It suggests that humans do not know what home is or ought to look like and that perhaps our unwillingness to leave home and/or our urges to migrate toward what we imagine will feel, look, and smell like home, may in actuality be idols leading us toward exile. Yet this crisis also points to another possibility, namely that what we reject as alien, strange, and foreign may be pointing us on the way to God our home.
Although Barth’s critique applies to all human attempts to be at home in the world, his words were aimed at the European Protestant churches that endorsed the brutal homecoming projects of empires. To this church, even and especially as it continues to exist today, Barth poses an important question: Would you recognize God’s home if you were in it? Would you see yourself in the faces of its inhabitants, would you find the taste of its food and the aroma of its food halls pleasing, indeed, would you find delight in the art and beauty decorating its many rooms? Or would you find yourself a stranger and guest who has failed to dress appropriately for the festivities of the season and thereby be left speechless when the host asks, “how did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?”7

What then does a faithful, hopeful, and loving way of being at home in the world look like? The answer, Barth would tell us, is that we must look to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ as the manifestation of the goodness and beauty of home and as setting forth the way to creation’s homecoming.

7 Matthew 22:12
4.2.2 Jesus Christ as the Form of Migration and Homecoming

Following Barth’s line of thinking, we must begin with the concreteness of the life of Christ if we are to discern the goodness of our journeys and homecomings. Jesus Christ is the mystery of the Triune God’s journeying and homecoming made flesh and dwelling with us. However, Barth warns us that we ought not to map the journey of the Son into the far country and His homecoming to the Father onto Christ’s life in a literal-chronological or analogical way. Christ’s conception and birth are not an analogy for the Son’s journey into the far country, and neither is Christ’s rising from the dead and ascension to the Father an analogy to the Son of Man’s homecoming journey. This way of relating the life of Christ to the eternal Triune life wrongfully attempts to contain an eternal mystery, an event in the life of God, within finite temporal and spatial categories.

The life of Christ does, of course, disclose the Godhead but not, according to Barth, by way of an analogy of being, but by an analogy of faith. That is to say, every moment of the life of Christ, mystically, by the grace of the Spirit, reveals the Triune God. Therefore, each instance of Christ’s life, when illuminated by the Spirit, becomes a performance in history of the journey of the Son into the far country and the Son’s homecoming to the Father simultaneously. The via dolorosa,
which leads to Golgotha, reveals the Son’s journey into the far country just as much as it does the journey of the Son’s homecoming to the Father. The glorious rising from the dead of the Son and his ascension to heaven reveals as much the homecoming to the Father as it does the Son’s journey to the far country.

For Barth, there is a fundamental Christological dialectic at the heart of how God is revealed in the world, and this applies also to how home is revealed in Christ. In Christ’s rejection and exile from his land and people—rendered most visible in his crucifixion—it is possible to see humanity homecoming to the Father; meanwhile, in Christ’s going ahead of us to prepare a room for us in his Father’s house—proclaimed in John 14 as the purpose of the resurrection and ascension—it is possible to see humanity’s ongoing habitation in the far country under the curse of exile and alienation from the Creator. Therefore, God’s reconciling work on behalf of creation is displayed in the form a diptych, wherein the image of Christ’s journey to the cross points to the image of Christ’s journey to the Father’s house. Looking to these images magnifies and intensifies our longing for home by making us more aware of exile until Christ comes again. There is thus an inherent rejection in the way God reconciles all things in Christ to any triumphalist vision of homecoming. The way to a healing and loving
relationship with God, the land, our peoples, and their cultures is the way of the cross.

### 4.2.3 Witnessing to the Triune Story of Journeying and Homecoming

For Barth, the Church and Israel are the elect community of God, charged with being witnesses in the world to the life of Christ.\(^8\) Thus, Israel’s history is the history of hearing and receiving God’s promises, within which is also the promise of a homecoming in a land flowing with milk and honey. In his doctrine of election, however, Barth describes Israel as the sphere of the people of God who are summoned to hear but not to believe the promises of God.\(^9\) In saying this Barth is drawing on the New Testament’s account of Jesus as a stumbling block to unbelieving Israel. Thus, we might say that Christ poses a crisis to Israel’s desire for home, to the desire to return from exile. On the other hand, Barth claims that the Church is the sphere of the people of God, who are summoned to be not only hearers of the promises of God but also to believe the Word and its fulfillment.\(^{10}\) In this typology, Israel represents the world in its

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\(^8\) *CD* II/2, 195.
\(^9\) *CD* II/2, 234.
\(^{10}\) *CD* II/2, 238.
passing form, a world in which we are not called to be at home but to be pilgrims, while the church represents those who believe the good news that in Jesus Christ we have been made at home with God. At this point, I think we need to offer an important corrective to Barth’s doctrine of Israel and the Church. For the promises of God are both heard and fulfilled by the one people of God made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and indeed, Christ is a crisis not only to Israel but also to the Church in her desire to be at home in the world.

Nevertheless, to say that Jesus Christ is a crisis to our stories of home is not to suggest that our stories of home and God’s story of homecoming compete for the truth. On the contrary, the Triune story of journeying and homecoming is utterly unlike ours, in that this story precedes creation as creation’s formal, efficient, and final cause. That is to say, the Son’s journey into the far country and the Son’s homecoming to the Father is what brings creation into existence, what gives creation its very shape, function, and meaning, and its ultimate purpose. To riff on Kathryn Tanner, the revelation of God’s homecoming journey in Jesus Christ is not a type of story among others, but rather it is a story that exists on another plane altogether—that of God’s eternal being, which is to say in God’s
own space, which is infinite space, and God’s own time, which is eternal time.\textsuperscript{11} As with created temporality and spatiality which participate and flow out from the eternal life of the Triune God, so too our journeys home participate in God’s own journeying and homecoming. This is simply another way of saying what the Christian tradition has always confessed, namely, that the Triune God is both the source of all our journeying and striving for home, that the Triune God is the chief end to all our homecomings, and finally that it is in the Triune God that all our homecomings find their ultimate meaning and purpose.

It follows from this that the human vocation (and thus the church’s task in the world) as pertains to homecoming is twofold.\textsuperscript{12} First, the Church is called to reflect on human journeying and homecomings in light of the Triune God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ—to allow the life of Christ to illuminate, clarify, and most importantly to transform the human desire for home. And second, the church is to rightly order human desire for home such that it gives glory to God.

\textsuperscript{11} Again, from a Barth’s perspective God is not without space or without time, for that would equate to creation having or obtaining something which is lacking in God. Whence then finite space and time as we experience in creation? The answer for Barth is that the realities of space and time are derivative of God’s own eternal space and time. See Elizabeth Callender Jarrell, “A Theology of Spatiality: The Divine Perfection of Omnipresence in the Theology of Karl Barth.”

\textsuperscript{12} Israel too has a vocation with respect to this story of homecoming, but I will focus here on the sphere of the Church given my own limitations with respect to Israel as a gentile Christian.
and so that it opens up to delighting in the life of the Triune God. Indeed, the Church receives her vocation into the ministry of reconciliation by taking on the mind of Christ and with it the form of his life and ministry. That is to say, the Church is called to be mystically joined to Christ on his journey to the cross and as such to share also in Christ’s homecoming to the Father. The church, in its words and its performance in the world, thus bears witness to the mystery of the exiled creatures’ homecoming with the Creator.

In the first chapter, I turned to Barth to situate the human desire for home within the biblical and theological framework that I have thus far outlined. I have done this not only because I am operating within a Christian confessional framework but also because ‘secular’ frameworks, whether the Nietzschean nihilism that embraces rootlessness or the Romantic subjectivism that tends toward ethno-nationalist visions of home, do not lead down the path of human flourishing but rather have historically led to despair and destruction. However, as I note in chapter 2, the task of seeing how Barth’s christocentric theology of home plays out concretely in the sphere of the church and the everyday lives of

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13 As the famous words of the Westminster Confession Q&A 1 denote, to delight and glorify God is creation’s chief end.
believers in the context of the modern Americas is also troubled, given the
complicity of the church with the conquest and colonization of the Americas. We
must therefore do what Barth did not do: we must seek to understand how
Christ presents a crisis to the modern western church that emerged from the
colonization of the Americas.

Moreover, while this theological account of the desire for home is
necessary to avoid the pitfalls of rootlessness and ethnonationalism, in the end
this biblical and theological understanding of the desire for home is speculative
and needs grounding. It does not fully attend to the realities of how humans
actually make a home in the world; nor does it attend to the challenges of
journeying, whether voluntarily or by force, and the woundedness that comes
with losing home. Thus, to reflect concretely on what a trinitarian theology of
home look like in the context of the Americas, I turned to work of Willie Jennings
and George Tinker, two theologians who give apt descriptions of the wound of
home in the Americas and of the church’s role in inflicting this wound. Indeed, in
conversation with Tinker, Jennings, I argue in chapter 2 that the Americas as a
modern project represents a theological crisis of home.
4.3 God the Reconciler of Our Journeys and Homecomings

Few events in modern history compete with the early modern conquest and colonization of the Americas in their capacity to be both world-shaping and world-shattering events. Today, all who claim a home in the Americas partake in a larger drama indelibly marked by two critical aspects of the colonial encounter between the Old World and the New World. The first is the colonial displacement and genocide of native peoples, and the second and interrelated event is the forced transplantation of African peoples to the Americas through the transatlantic slave trade. To live in the Americas today is to experience not only the material aftermath of these two destructive historical events, but also to inhabit the vicious theological and ideological frameworks and orientations that emerged in many ways to justify and rationalize these events as necessary for the birth of modernity.

Thus, in chapter 2, I argued that the very notion of the ‘Americas,’ a name given to the lands of the New World by its European colonizers, represents not only a political, social, and cultural crisis but also a theological crisis. For rather than assuming the form of the crucified and exiled Christ, the European church that migrated to the Americas became complicit with the colonial powers in fueling and justifying these two historical atrocities. Consequently, the colonial
project of homemaking took place simultaneously and in an almost inseparable manner with Christianity’s homecoming in the Americas. What, then, could the reconciliation of humanity in the form of a proclamation of the healing eschatological homecoming of the Triune God mean in the context of the Americas today? What could proclaiming the name of Jesus, the exiled and crucified one for the sake of our homecoming, mean in light of the historical wound of colonial encounter not mitigated by the church, a wound which, as Gloria Anzaldúa notes, continues to hemorrhage today?  

Although Jesus Christ bequeaths to the people of God the ministry of reconciliation, he is also the one who stands as an ever-present crisis to how the elect community of God imagines, narrates, and performs migration and homecoming. In the gospels’ account, we see how Jesus enacts a crisis not only to the Roman Empire but also to the elect people of God, Israel. The crucifixion as the image of homecoming is a crisis not only to Pontius Pilate, and therefore to the stories the Roman Empire told about being at home in the world through military might and an authoritarian political order; but the crucified Christ is also a crisis to the high priest Caiaphas and the violence of the religious state in

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14 Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 25.
its willingness to sacrifice one human life for the good of the laos, people, to avoid the whole ethnus, nation, perishing (John 11:50). In the same manner, Christ continues to be a crisis to the elect community of God in its form as the Church, as the gathering of gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel by the Spirit’s joining power.\footnote{Barth was a trailblazer in his own time in articulating an understanding of the church and Israel as constituting the one elect community of God, avoiding as such the Marcionite supersessionist heresies which have had a tragically long life in the church. However, along with others like Kendal Soulen, I would like to add a corrective to Barth’s assigning to Israel the role of humanity under state of disobedience and the church as humanity in the role of obedient servants. This is simply far from historically true and shows the nasty persistence of supersessionist thinking. Both the church and Israel bear witness to the world of humanity’s disobedience to God and of God’s gracious love which sustains, reconciles, and redeems humanity even in that state of alienation and disobedience from God. See R. Kendall Soulen, \textit{The God of Israel and Christian Theology} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 1–18.}

In chapter 2, I turned to Willie Jennings and George Tinker to give a more textured account of how Christ represents a crisis to the colonial church in the Americas.\footnote{It helps to consider the crucial role that desire played in the colonial encounter between the Old and New Worlds at the turn of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. I want to focus here on the intersecting desires for migration and home, the desire, in other words, of the European colonizers to leave their homes, whether provoked by the urge to seek freedom and safety or by the prospects of a promised land of milk and honey, and how these desires became mingled with the desires of missionaries and of the church to migrate to the New World in order to proclaim the Word of God in a foreign land and to plant there the church and thereby convert and sanctify the lands and peoples until they were baptized and reborn as Christian lands and peoples.}

Tinker shows that the tragic genocide of native peoples and the theft of their lands, which resulted in an exile of Native American peoples that is
ongoing today, cannot be reduced to a moral flaw in ‘some’ members of the church who unfortunately succumbed to the greediness of colonial acquisition of land. According to Tinker, even those missionaries who defended native peoples still inadvertently contributed to the genocide of Native Americans, for even these benevolent missionaries confused European cultural values, which they believed to be inherently superior to native cultures, with the gospel. The colonial settlers not only conquered and exploited the lands and peoples they encountered in the New World, but they also expressed a sense of righteous justification in doing so, believing that they were, in and through their colonial projects, converting the ‘uncivilized’ natives to a better way of being and knowing in the world, one that was both Christian and European.

What Tinker describes is what decolonial scholars call the ‘epistemic conquest’ of the Americas. According to decolonial theory the most trenchant and vicious aspect of the conquest of the Americas was not political domination or economic exploitation, despicable as these may be, but rather the epistemic conquest that took place alongside these and which marked a turning point in human history. As the missionaries sowed the seed of the gospel in the soil of

17 See Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity.
the Americas, they simultaneously infused European cultures into the land, thereby systematically converting Amerindian lands and peoples into European lands and peoples. For natives, conversion to Christianity was not only turning away from their gods to the Christian God, it was losing their relationship to their ancestral lands and forsaking the cultural practices, values, and beliefs that made these ancestral lands their home. Conversion to Christianity precipitated an existential and material homelessness for the conquered natives.

In rejecting and subsequently destroying the natives’ wisdom, their cultured ways of being at home in the land, the church, and her missionaries operated not by God’s wisdom, the wisdom of the cross, but rather according to worldly knowledge, which is always oriented to the glorification of man and not of God. In remaining silent before the suffering of the natives, the theft of their lands, and the destruction of their cultures, the church sought to migrate to the Americas and make a home on the land not by setting its foundation on the crucified and risen Christ, but rather by setting it upon the crucifixion of native peoples and their lands.

However, the displacement of native peoples throughout the Americas and the destruction of their ways of being and knowing in the world was only
the first act of the colonial homecoming in the Americas. The second act, which occurred almost simultaneously, was the forced transplantation and enslavement of African peoples through the transatlantic slave trade. To understand better the experiences of slaves and the imposition of a racial social order that rendered white Europeans as those deserving of home and all others as only precariously at home in the world, I turned to Willie Jennings’s account of colonial modernity. Jennings echoes Tinker’s analysis of the commodification of native lands and destruction of native cultures by examining how through these events a Christian displacing and segregating social vision was slowly taking shape.

The root causes of this deformed Christian social vision are both the commodification of lands that reduces the land to private property and the imposition of a racial scale of being which operated within the commodification of lands and the displacement of bodies. Thus, for Jennings, the trials of Native Americans and those of African transplants to the Americas are fundamentally intertwined, as they both bespeak a basic set of presumptions, a way of being and knowing in the world that grew in the soil of a colonial praxis of displacement. This was a way of conceiving or reconceiving what it means to be human, not in view of a web of relationships that tie people to particular
places—to the soil, the landscape, the animals and plants—but instead around the logics of capitalism and racial segregation. Thus, colonialism gave birth to a new way of seeing and performing intimacy, belonging, and place; it became a new way of being at home in the world that grew parasitically within the church.

The wound of homelessness suffered by African and native peoples at the hands of colonizers and missionaries in the Americas sheds light on an important and often ignored aspect of Jesus Christ’s reconciling work—namely, that the crucifixion enacted an attempt by the political and religious powers to eliminate the way of life which Christ embodied and performed, his way of being at home in the world. Put on trial before Pilate and Herod and subsequently convicted and put to death was the very wisdom of God, the logic of the Incarnation, which is God’s self-giving communion and fellowship with creation, a way of life oriented toward healing and toward the rejection of ways of making and of being at home in the world that inherently brings about the death of others. Therefore, the good news of Christ’s resurrection applies to more than just the giving of new life to dead flesh. It also means the hope of a return home, the hope of the sanctity of marked and wounded land healing and being restored, and with all
this hope of ways of relating to the land and the cultures that propagate from this reality being transformed and redeemed in newness in the risen Christ.

In the upheaval of colonialism, the Native and African peoples of the Americas became a witness against the church of her betrayal of Jesus.\(^{18}\) Thus, the native cries over the loss of sacred lands and of African slaves over their alienation from their peoples and lands and subsequent enslavement, this ongoing lament of the colonized and enslaved peoples of the Americas becomes a kind of liturgy of lament that joins in the crucifixion of Jesus, and which testifies against the church’s sin. So too the struggle of these peoples in their godforsaken exile joins the Spirit’s tired groans for the new creation to be born. Moreover, it is not only crucified peoples but also the crucified land itself, wounded by generations of colonial extractivism, which bears witness against the church and her complicity with the project of colonial homemaking.

Nevertheless, if crucified peoples and lands are indeed conformed into Christ by

\[^{18}\text{Bartolome de Las Casas speaks to this crisis when he describes seeing the crucified Christ in the beaten bodies of the native peoples. Las Casas thus shows us how the story of the exile of native Americans in the wake of the church’s colonial homemaking in the world gets caught up in the story of Christ. For an account of how Las Casas sees Christ in the Natives see Gustavo Gutiérrez, }\text{Dios o El Oro En Las Indias: Siglo XVI (Lima, Perú: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas cep, 1989), 168–72.}\]
the Spirit through their sharing in the wounds of the cross, then there is also a sharing in the resurrection.

With the help of Jennings and Tinker, we can now also re-apply Barth’s notion that Christ represents a crisis in the Nazi vision of homecoming to the homecoming of the colonial church in the Americas. Wherein Heimkehr was representative for Barth of the deep modern longing for home expressed as nationalist and ethnocentric visions of belonging, Jennings and Tinker show that the Nazi Heimkehr is the maturation of a socio-cultural and theological distortion developing in the colonial period. This distortion, while concocted to justify the colonial theft and brutal extraction of lands and bodies, then began to take on a life of its own through a process of racial formation. And all of this occurred not just outside the institutional church but inside of the church, and not as an alternative to a Christian way of life but rather taking its cues from fundamental Christian doctrinal insights about creation, about God, and about humanity, albeit distorting these for the political and economic benefit of the colonizers.

To the Nazis, the hundreds of years of German Jews dwelling in the land and the undeniable ways in which Jewishness had shaped “German culture” could not ultimately trump the claim of “ethnic Germans” (that is, “Aryans”) to
the land. Indeed, claims based on historic dwelling in the land competed with claims based on ethnic and racial being. To be German and thereby belong to the sovereign German nation and its sovereign territory was not a matter of being deeply rooted in the land but a matter of racial-ethnic belonging. But it is not just Germany that is to be faulted with this ethnocentric nationalism, for the history of the Americas, and in particular of the United States, also bears witness to the exclusion of African and Native peoples from rightful claims to the land, and all the implicit and explicit ways in which belonging in the United States is synonymous with being white. Jennings and Tinker show that colonial modernity is the product of a long process that began with disassociation, with displacing bodies from the land, thus robbing the land of its role as the source of identity, reducing it to private property, and marking peoples according to skin color and other ethnic markers for the roles of master and property owner, slave, and everything in between.

However, the woundedness of home apparent in colonial modernity is by no means new. Life east of Eden is always predicated upon humanity’s condition of exile, on a profound alienation that only grows with time, and in the human desire to be at home in ways that lead only to more death and exile. The colonial
homemaking project is thus another iteration, a particularly vicious one perhaps, of our condition of alienation as those who inhabit a fallen creation. Yet, it is also true that “in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself.” That is to say, in Christ, the wounds of this alienation and of the various forms of exile it produces are being healed and transformed.

Jennings and Tinker are reluctant to use the language of reconciliation; perhaps this is because of its long use by Christians to enact a kind of cheap grace. Yet precisely what alienation is, is the destruction of the relational bond that ties people, places, and God together. This bond brings life, and its rupturing is a cause for death, perhaps more quickly for some than for others, but eventually for all. Reconciliation is thus not just the restoration of those who went to Sheol because of their alienation from God, but the restoration of the life-giving bond of relations between bodies and the land. This remaking of the bonds of peace is not a form of cheap grace but is a costly process; it is nothing less than the way of the cross.

20 Perhaps what Jennings and others have rightly criticized with respect to the discourse on reconciliation is that it has been minority peoples who have too often been made to carry the burden of the cross, the burden of the costs of reconciliation and discipleship. It would seem that those who have been rendered most vulnerable and most felt the death-dealing power of this
crucified and risen Christ for the crucified lands and peoples of the Americas?

How do we dismantle the house that colonial-modernity built in the Americas?

More importantly, can a Trinitarian theology of home, let alone any Christian theology, really help to address the wound of home in the Americas when it is a wound that Christianity helped to inflict?

4.3.1 Reconciliation as Joining

In chapters 2 and 3, I referred to decolonial theory as vital to understanding the nature and shape of the crisis of home at the foundations of the Americas. Decolonial theory points us to how the colonizers drew on theological frameworks to justify their exploits with the land, the peoples, and their cultures. The colonizers performed a particularly distorted vision of God, humanity, and the world, the fruits of which were exile, alienation, and ultimately death for many native and African peoples. Christianity is constitutive of the wound of home in the Americas. However, the decolonial frames have an inherently anti-normative bias that limits, from a Christian perspective, the work alienation are also those called to bear the cost of discipleship, in a disproportionate manner to those who have born less of the material burden.
of the Spirit. Jennings and Tinker, by contrast, are not anti-normative, but rather their work envisions the healing, restoration, and renewal of the peoples and lands of the Americas. More than that, this renewal and restoration is not only mindful of the wound provoked by colonial Christianity, but it also draws on a Christian vision of the goodness of creation, goodness imbued by a benevolent Creator.

Tinker and Jennings show that to justify the theft of lands, the displacement of natives, and the enslavement of African peoples, a new way of being and knowing in the world was slowly developing inside the Christian imagination of the colonizers. This new way of being and knowing in the world, this new culture, views belonging and the cultivation of home not primarily as a deep relationship with the land but rather around the concepts of racial and ethnic identity that extract bodies from their deep-rooted relationship in the land and with the other creatures of the land. Both Tinker and Jennings argue, then, that to decolonize the Americas, economic reparations and social welfare programs are not enough, a fundamental social transformation is needed, a new way of being and knowing in the world that engages in the process of epistemological delinking from the Euro-American colonial imagination.
One question that emerges from Tinker’s decolonizing proposal is whether Jesus Christ is the problem or the solution to native liberation and homecoming. For Tinker, the answer is that Jesus cannot be a starting place for a truly native liberation theology. Instead, the church in the Americas needs to assume a different starting place, one which he believes is more amenable to a form of Christianity that is not authoritarian, a form of Christian faith that opens itself up to the possibility of divine revelation and of truth beyond its institutional and traditioned walls. This is a form of Christianity that recognizes the universality of the Creator of all peoples, nations, and their ways of being and knowing in the world. For Tinker, it is not so much Christ who presents a crisis to colonial Christianity and thus to its means of achieving homecoming in the Americas, but rather the notion of the Creator God. He argues that Christians ought to recover a trinitarian theology as a more robust starting place for engaging with other peoples and cultures, claiming that starting with the Creator is not only a better way to make inroads into cultural encounters but also

21 Indeed, Tinker specifically identifies Barth as one of the main culprits of this in modernity, given that Barth’s radically orthodox theology begins with affirming the specificity and uniqueness of Christianity in Christ. See his essay, “Creation, Justice, and Peace: Indians, Christianity, and Trinitarian theologies” in Tinker, American Indian Liberation, 36.
the path toward healing the earth from the extractivism that has been decimating nature since the colonial moment.

Tinker helps us recognize the need to dismantle false notions of white and Christian superiority and recover the wisdom of native peoples in the Americas and around the world. However, for all its positive benefits, the liberationist and decolonizing agenda which Tinker sets forth does little to address fragmentation and indeed could even aggravate it despite Tinker’s best intentions. The problem lies in how Tinker seems to understand native cultures within a modernist frame as holistic, static, non-porous realities.22 Against the constant usurpation of European cultures, which violated the integrity of native cultures, native thinkers have at times, reasonably so, taken a conservationist stance that is in practice segregationist. Of course, this is not recent, but one can see this strategic move toward survival as early as Guaman Poma in South America.

22 Writing against modern western understanding of culture, Kathryn Tanner notes that “the distinctiveness of cultural identity is therefore not a product of isolation; it is not a matter of a culture’s being simply self-generated, pure and unmixed; it is not a matter of ‘us’ vs. ‘them.’ Cultural identity becomes, instead, a hybrid, relational affair, something that lives between as much as within cultures.” Tanner Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 57.
Nevertheless, cultures are porous and fluid, changing over time through internal conflicts and tensions and in response to external events and encounters with other cultures. Therefore, whatever covenant existed between native tribes and the land before the fifteenth century, indeed, whatever constituted a “native tribe” culturally or ethnically, before and during the colonial period, is now profoundly changed, and it was already always changing even before the colonizers arrived. There is no doubt that native communities in reservations in the United States, for instance, or in marginal provinces across central and south America, maintain a common core that distinguishes them from a popular culture which often sadly marks them for continued marginalization and exile. Yet, one also needs to reckon with the reality of cultural mestizaje. Are not many present-day urban peoples and cultures the descendants of a mixture of natives, European colonizers, and African peoples? Are these peoples and cultures not also members of the covenant with the land? Which sets of cultural/religious practices mark one as genuinely belonging to this or that native tribe? Are native practices not today influenced by western and Christian values, even as many forms of Christianity and western culture today are also deeply influenced by native cultures? In other words, it is not clear that Tinker’s solution to the
colonial wound of homelessness entirely gets us out of the problem of nationalist, cultural, and racial forms of fragmentation that Jennings sees as the maturing of the colonial wound in modernity. For a culture to re-emerge from extinction or delink from western European epistemologies would be to deny that while some cultures may have been truly destroyed, many others remained, survived, and changed over time with their people in ways that European peoples and their cultures nevertheless indelibly mark.

Jennings posits a different vision of healing, reconciliation, and liberation than the one that Tinker offers. On the one hand, Jennings agrees with Tinker that Christians need to overcome the colonial formation, the formative power of capitalism and racial segregation, as a way of being at home in the world that disassociates bodies from places to commodify bodies and land. However, the deepest logic at the heart of Jennings’ constructive theological move, a logic that is not equally clear in Tinker’s theological liberative program, is the logic of a deep joining of peoples, lands, and cultures in Christ and through the Spirit. Moreover, for Jennings, the scandal of particularity represented in Israel’s unconditional election and the fulfillment of this election in the life of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus Christ, is not a problem to be overcome, as it is in Tinker’s
theological proposal, but rather it is the very principle on which Christian forms of inclusion stand.

There are many peoples and cultures, but one God who is Creator, maker, and sustainer of them all, and it is the God who elects, loves, and redeems Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ. For Jennings, as gentiles listen to the story of Israel and Israel’s God, a crisis ensues as “the story of every people rupture, cracks open.” But this rupture, this crisis, is not destructive but transformative. Israel’s God does not obscure other peoples and their stories of home but rather illumines their stories, showing that beneath it all, “they are bound to this God” and therefore to each other. Salvation, for Jennings, necessitates an act of joining of peoples, of their stories, and through these stories of their lands as well. As in Isaiah’s vision, all nations must journey in pilgrimage to the Holy Land so that Torah/God’s Word/Jesus Christ may go out to the nations. Indeed, in an encounter with the Living Word of God, our stories about home should not remain unchanged. Jennings’ soteriological vision here departs from a decolonial plan; it is not enough that cultures, languages, and peoples delink from the hegemony of western colonial modernity. These cultures, languages,
and peoples must undergo a transformation in the light of grace, but not destruction.\footnote{I will argue in the next section that this work of joining is primarily the work of the Spirit to which the church be constantly attuned to.}

Paradoxically, for Jennings, the revelation of such a vision of deep joining and the possibility of a Christian faith grounded in this is precisely found in Jesus Christ himself. The incarnate Word, who assumed a home on the earth at the margins of empire and the religious centers of power and who taught about God and God’s kingdom from the wisdom and traditions of his people repudiated by those with “higher knowledge,” poses the greatest crisis to the colonial practice of homemaking. It is Jesus Christ whose ministry, when passed on to his apostles through their anointment by the Spirit at Pentecost, became the source of a deep form of joining across seemingly insurmountable ethnocultural, political, and religious differences. In and through Christ, an eschatological homecoming is finally forged in the coming together of peoples and nations into one body. This, of course, is not in contradistinction to Tinker’s vision of a Creator who loves all peoples, though it may have been for Barth, who inspires
Jennings’ Christological imagination—for it is this Creator who is present and active in the incarnate person of the Son.

If Tinker is right that the Creator God represents a crisis to the church’s complicity in colonial homemaking and the cultural and ecological devastation it has produced, then Jesus Christ, in whom this Creator God is revealed, ought also to be a crisis to the colonial homemaking of the church. This accords with Jennings’s constructive project of decolonization, a project in which Barth’s Christocentric trinitarian theology is felt strongly and where Barth can certainly be made an ally rather than the enemy. For Jennings, Christ marks a path for Christians to open themselves up to the stories of home and migration of those who stand outside of the institutionalized church, and this is not just for the sake of temporal peace and tolerance but as part of the Spirit’s work of joining peoples in Christ, the very process through which the Triune God gives Godself to dwell with peoples and in lands in restorative and transformative ways. But how do we learn to see the joining of peoples and cultures in the world and in history as part of the Spirit’s work and to nourish it, especially when this deep joining of

24 As evidence of this see Willie Jennings’s constructive retrieval of Barth’s theology in his essay, “Barth and the Racial Imaginary” in Jones and Nimmo, The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth, 499–516.
peoples often takes the form of cultural imperialism and the forced exile and exclusion of peoples and cultures?

4.4 God the Redeemer of our Homes

Jennings and Tinker help us enter fully into the drama that is the crucified lands, peoples, and cultures of the Americas. To call these peoples, lands, and cultures “crucified” is to suggest that they were sacrificed by the empire and by the religious authorities in the centers of power for the sake of what they believed to be the common good, for the sake of their understanding of ‘the people.’ As such, these exploited lands and peoples and their cultures participate in the mystery of Christ’s sacrificial death. Jennings and Tinker provide us with a necessary optics for addressing the wound of home at the foundations of the Americas. But I argue that their constructive proposals for addressing this wound do not pay enough attention to the redemptive possibilities that emerged from the very death and destruction of colonization.

In other words, what is not readily found in the accounts of Jennings and Tinker is how these crucified lands, peoples, and cultures of the Americas participate in the coming new creation, how they bear witness not only to the
cross but also to the resurrection. For Tinker, home lies in a seemingly irretrievable past; for Jennings, home lies in a seemingly inaccessible future. However, the hope of the resurrection is not about a return to the past or reducible to an opening up to the future. If Latin American liberation theologians have taught us anything it is that the Spirit is at work in history bringing forth life and newness in the very midst of this present darkness.

Liberation theologians and Karl Barth share one incredibly important insight about the nature of God’s salvific work: it does not occur outside or beyond history, but in time and within fallen creation, and that is because salvation takes place in and through Jesus of Nazareth. In that God has dwelt among us east of Eden, we have been made to be at home with God. As such, humanity’s homecoming is an event that does not occur outside of creation in some otherworldly place or time, but rather it is an event in history. If the history of this first-century Palestinian Jew is true history, if it is (as Barth would say) the

> 25 For Barth, salvation is synonymous with Jesus Christ the incarnate Word in history. More than that, all of history is itself the unfolding of the meaning of Jesus Christ such that God’s salvific work stands before, within, and as the chief end of history. Gutiérrez argues similarly when he notes, “there are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, ‘juxtaposed’ or ‘closely linked.’ Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibility assumed by Christ, the Lord of history. His redemptive work embraces all the dimensions of existence and brings them to their fulness. The history of salvation is the very heart of human history.” Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, 86.
history of God and therefore a history that stands before creation as the history out of which creation flows, then all creaturely events, orders, and histories point to Jesus in his way into the far country and his homecoming to the Father. In other words, because the history of salvation as revealed in Christ is the history of creation itself, we can know that the redemptive quality of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is not only good news for a group of poor Galileans sojourning in the land of Israel, but it is good news for all peoples, places, and cultures in history. All places, peoples, and cultures that have existed have been created for God’s redemption of the cosmos. Yet, as those who live in the age between the cross and the resurrection, we are those for whom history has not been fully assumed and transformed in Christ. Nevertheless, in this apocalyptic age, new creation breaks into the present, such that the kingdom of God is now and not yet.

This time between resurrection and second-coming is thus defined by the advent of the Holy Spirit, sent from the Father into creation to restore and renew all things by joining creation to the homecoming Son. If God is reconciling all of creation to Godself through joining all things in creation (peoples, lands, landscapes, plants, and animals) to Jesus Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who
actualizes this reality in creation and in history.26 We live in the cosmic moment in which the Spirit is gathering up all things of this age and transforming them into the next age. And this Spirit is even now gathering up creation, time and space, peoples and lands, cultures, and stories, and joining them to the crucified Christ that they may arise also in newness with Christ at the end of the age. This age of the Spirit is thus not characterized by the rendering of all things ephemeral through the rejection of material forms of existence toward a spiritualism, but rather it is the work of rendering the material truly material by seeing how by the Spirit’s grace all things participate in the Triune life of God. It is then the church’s task to attend to the working of the Spirit in the concrete institutional and material realities of this life as it is being transfigured into new creation.27

The church is called to bear witness to this work of the Spirit of gathering all things and joining them to Christ. It is the Spirit and not the church who is

26 In fact, I think the neglect of pneumatology in modernity has contributed to christologies that fail to enact joining for joining is the very work of the Spirit. A spiritless Christ might champion difference but not the union of all things in their difference.

27 For an extended account of how the church discerns the Spirit in the institutional forms that constitute our common life as creatures, see Luke Bretherton’s account of “pneumatological political theology.” Bretherton, Christ and the Common Life, 128–34.
responsible for actualizing and rendering concrete the reconciliation of all things achieved by God in Jesus Christ. And this Spirit always goes ahead of the church, working beyond the church’s walls to activate, heal, and restore creation to its fullness. That said, while we must not confuse the sphere of the Spirit’s work with that of the church, the church also confesses that the Spirit works in recognizable or identifiable ways. How does the church learn to discern the Spirit’s work in the world and thereby follow the Spirit’s lead?

Rightly afraid of the spirits of his age, Barth famously neglected to develop a more thoroughgoing doctrine of the Spirit and of the Spirit’s work in the world. However, Barth did affirm what the reformed tradition has historically confessed about the Spirit, namely, that the Spirit promises to be present in word and sacrament. That is to say, the Spirit’s agency in the world is in the first place as witness to the Word of God in its incarnate, biblical, and kerygmatic forms. The Spirit not only illumines the Word, but the Spirit is also the agent in the world that joins to the Word sacramentally, making possible communion with the life of God given in Christ. As Jennings notes, the church

29 CD I/1, 88.
must constantly stand at the door of Israel to hear the Word and receive the Word, and we do so not only when we listen to and study Scripture but when we join in fellowship around the waters of baptism and the Lord’s Table. There’s a way then in which the sacraments offer us a foretaste and a participation in the journeying and homecoming of God in creation. Indeed, the Christian liturgy enacts a vision of bodies, land, and cultures all being joined into the Triune drama of homecoming, giving us a foretaste of our eschatological homecoming.

Having practiced table fellowship, the immigrant and the citizen have their understanding of and desire for home challenged and reordered toward our eschatological home with God. At the Lord’s Table, we hear, see, and taste the good news that God is our one true home. Our earthly patterns of homemaking are not set aside by the Supper, but they are transfigured and redirected toward God and his gracious will. Having experienced the hospitality of Christ at the communion table, believers can now see their earthly homes in a new light. Earthly “homes,” be they nations, neighborhoods, or actual houses, become witnesses to our eternal home in God. This eucharistic reframing of “home” means that we no longer treat our earthly homes as ends in and of themselves. Instead, they become aids for us in anticipating the coming city, the
new Jerusalem, where all of God’s creatures share in perfect fellowship with each other and with God.\(^{30}\)

However, another way the Spirit characteristically acts in the world, a way that has received a lot of attention in the twentieth-century churches of the Americas that helped to clarify this mystery, is by means of and through the struggle of the poor for justice.\(^{31}\) If the church is to bear witness to how all of creation, including all histories and cultures, is being assumed, reconciled, and redeemed by being united to Christ by the Spirit, then the church must keep turning to the Word, to the Sacraments, and indeed to the poor as the characteristic sites of the Spirit’s redemptive work in the world. I want now to explore how in the exploited lands, and among the displaced peoples, and cultures of the Americas we can discern the Spirit at work in joining all things to Christ in anticipation of God’s great homecoming at the end of time.

\(^{30}\) See La Rosa Rojas, “A Migrant at the Lord’s Table: A Reformed Theology of Home,” 253–64.

\(^{31}\) In a sermon given in the Bogota in 1968, Pope Paul VI referred to the poor “the sacrament of Christ” as those in and through whom Christ’s presence is mysteriously found in the world. Pope Paul VI, “Peregrinación Apostólica a Bogotá: Santa Misa Para Los Campesinos Colombianos,” August 23, 1968, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/homilies/1968/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19680823.html.
4.4.1 Cultural Mestizaje as the Site of the Spirit’s Redemptive Work

The notion of new creation bursting forth into history in and through the exploited lands and peoples of the Americas is a critical theme not only in Latin American liberation theology but also in the theology of Virgilio Elizondo, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, and many of the other founding mothers and fathers of Latinx theology. However, liberation theology’s emphasis on the crucified Christ among the poor finds expression in the faith of Latinx peoples not only in the form of solidarity with the poor and marginalized, but also in a constant urge toward fiesta. For Latinx theologians, God’s people celebrate life despite the death and destruction visible all around, precisely because they affirm that the God of Jesus Christ brings life and newness out of death. Lament in Latinx theology gestures toward God’s work of renewing and restoring creation. What Latinx theology also adds to the work of Latin American liberation theology is the recognition that this renewal and restoration happens in unique ways at the borderlands of peoples and cultures, at the sites of cultural mestizaje.

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In chapter 3, I argued that Jennings’s vision of the joining of peoples, lands and cultures in and through Christ is precisely what Latinx theologians have been pointing to in their theology of *mestizaje*. There is a historical concern among many Latinx theologians with the importance of culture, not only as the context in which theological discourse is developed, but as an aspect of the created order which God embraces, reconciles and redeems in Christ and through the Spirit.\(^{33}\) Therefore, the destruction of native cultures in the conquest of the Americas, given its relation to the cause of the gospel, is one of the crises which animates Latinx theological reflection, and recovering forms of cultural expression and voices subjugated by the colonial powers is one of its primary aims.\(^{34}\) However, Latinx theologians’ interest in culture goes beyond criticizing the destruction of native cultures. Latinx theologians also see redemptive possibilities worth celebrating in the birth of new cultures that emerged from the dark abyss of conquest. For Elizondo and many others, the cultural *mestizaje* that took place alongside of and at times even as a result of the colonization of the


\(^{34}\) See Isasi-Díaz and Mendieta, *Decolonizing Epistemologies; Decolonial Christianities*. 441
Americas manifests, beyond the tragic losses by native and African peoples, also a deep joining of peoples and their cultures that bears witness to God’s new creation.\textsuperscript{35} The cross and new creation, colonization and cultural \textit{mestizaje}, lament and celebration—these dialectical pairings constitute the lively tensions that make Latinx theology what it is today.

However, in order to discern the Spirit’s redemptive work of joining peoples and cultures around Christ in the conquest of the Americas, these Latinx theologians bid us to look not at the colonial settlers’ efforts at homemaking in the New World, but rather to the displaced, to those on the margins who were forced to leave home (physically or existentially) and therefore forced to negotiate home in a new place and among a new people while under the constraints of colonial exploitation. The social and political negotiations these marginalized peoples had to make in their struggle to be at home in the colonial world constituted, among other things, a process of cultural \textit{mestizaje} between each other and with their colonial oppressors. It is at the site of this work of cultural \textit{mestizaje} that the Spirit’s work of joining all things to Christ becomes

\textsuperscript{35} Isasi-Díaz is an important example of someone who refused to choose between either being in solidarity with marginalized indigenous and native voices or delighting in the new cultures and peoples that emerged from the colonial encounter through \textit{mestizaje}.
most clearly visible. I argued in chapter 3 that the *Nican Mopohua*, the Nahuatl story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, offers a window into this work of the Spirit at the margins and borderlands of cultures, lands, and peoples.\textsuperscript{36}

In the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, we see how at the darkest hour in the history of the Mexican lands and at the very site of cultural destruction and marginalization, new creation and the promise of God’s homecoming in the Americas breaks forth into history, and the herald of this news is a poor and humble native convert named Juan Diego. In this story, the Virgin Mary, pregnant with the Word, appears in the New World heralding the birth of the Savior in these new lands and the possibility of a home for the homeless. The first hearers of the good news of this new creation breaking forth into history are not, however, the members of the church, those whose minds, whose ways, and whose instruments ought to have been most attuned to the things of God. Rather, the first receivers and heralds of these good news are those quite literally those on the margins of society.

\textsuperscript{36} Although I focus on Guadalupe as a story of home and migration, stories are not just found through oral traditions or written texts, but they are also found in the form of songs, foods, dances, and ritual practices—in other words, culture. Culture in Latinx theology speaks to the convergence of spirit and matter. Land is cultured because it is never merely property but always beloved soil. People and nation are terms that always already imply culture.
The Virgin’s appearance does not take place in the centers of Aztec imperial power, or in the new centers of colonial power, or in some transcendent spiritual realm, or even in the church. Rather, the Virgin appears to Juan Diego in Tepeyac, a place which the colonizers and the church had marked as barren and valueless. In this neglected land, a light of hope shines in the darkness of conquest. The first heralds of the good news of new creation in the story were the native flowers and bird songs that announced to Juan Diego that a divine event was about to take place. We are told from the beginning, then, that the new creation unfolding in the Americas is not just a matter of human salvation and liberation, but that plants and animals have an important role and place in this salvific event. The human herald of the new creation, meanwhile, occupies perhaps the lowest profile in the colonial social hierarchy as a native agrarian worker and convert to Christianity. Finally, perhaps the most important and remembered herald is Our Lady of Guadalupe herself, whose motherly presence stands in stark contrast with the male conquistadores and priests. More than that, her image, which is to be ultimate sign of God’s favor on the land and the peoples of the land, is miraculously imprinted by some native roses bundled in Juan Diego’s bosom on a tilma, a rough piece of cloth hewn from agave fibers.
New creation thus breaks forth from the margins of colonial Americas and through very concrete and humble everyday plants, animals, and the cultural symbols of the conquered native Nahuatl people. These plants, animals, clothes, and Juan Diego himself are all transfigured, not destroyed, but illumined by the light of grace, to bear witness to this new thing God is doing in the land. The story of Guadalupe, when read through the lens of cross and resurrection and when understood as a site of the Spirit’s redempive work, bids us think about social practices and rituals—the foods and the plants, the songs and dances—as more than just human cultural artifacts, but as sites and indeed mediums of God’s redemptive grace in the world, indeed as sacramental.

Moreover, part of what this new creation breaking forth means is a resistance to the death sentence that the colonizers had placed on the natives, on their lands, and on their cultures. In this story the good news of Christ’s birth is told through the sacred symbols of the Nahuatl people, which take on new life as they are resurrected from the death of conquest through being joined to the story of Christ’s birth. The narrative of Guadalupe is an icon to the Spirit’s work of renewing all creation, to joining things to God at a site of *mestizaje*. To truly understand the story, one needs to enter not only into the sensory and spiritual
world of the Nahuatl and of the stories they told each other about their place in
the cosmos, but one also needs to enter fully into the story of Jewish messiah
born of a poor young woman in the land of Palestine. Guadalupe invites us to
inhabit two worlds converging and embodies the wisdom necessary to negotiate
the differences in meaning and action.

The *Nican Mopohua* invites us to inhabit not just two peoples and their
stories, but indeed, the story invites us also into the stories of the migrant church
which arrived in the Americas aboard conquering ships. The European
missionaries and colonizers also have a role to play in this new work that God is
doing. Yet, to participate in this new work of God, the colonial power structure is
upended. The Guadalupe story ends with the priest, a representative of the
Spanish missionaries and of the conquerors, leaving his home and the church to
visit Tepeyac, a native religious site, and there to worship God and so participate
in God’s work of new creation. To attend to the Spirit’s joining work in creation
is to be summoned, like the priest in the story, to the borderlands, to the sites of
cultural encounter, to the places far from the centers of power. In Guadalupe,
colonizer and colonized are brought together, the world of each transformed, not
destroyed, around the event of homecoming that takes place at the margins in
Tepeyac. The story thus enacts precisely the vision of joining that Jennings sets forth.

We must not, however, mistake the process and work of cultural *mestizaje*, the encounter of peoples and their cultures that gives way to the hard work of social and political negotiations on the ground (through the mixing of foods, dance, songs, ritual practice, etc.), with the notion of a mestizo ethnicity or racial identity. It is not that new creation or resurrected humanity is in any way synonymous with belonging to the mestizo people—if such a thing actually even exists. This would be to fall prey to that vicious idolatrous belief, taught by Vasconcelos, that humanity is perfected through racial *mestizaje*. Rather, Guadalupe offers a window to the work of *mestizaje*, of cultural encounter and negotiation, and to the set of social and political negotiations taking place amid this encounter as sites of the Spirit’s work of weaving together fragments of creation. And all of this is taking place at the very site of the colonial wound.

The Word of God, Jesus Christ, came into the world precisely among those who had lost their homes and whose inheritance has been taken away, and the veracity of the story of Guadalupe lies in its correspondence to this biblical event. The preferential option for the poor is revealed here to be a preferential
option for those who struggle for home daily amid the forces of displacement and marginalization. When the poor resist the colonial-settler myths about how humanity can be at home in the world in and through their presence and struggle, they become a constant threat and a destabilizing force to idolatries of home. In their very life, the displaced resist the idea that the empire can provide us with a way of being safely and comfortably at home in the world, but in so doing they become a constant threat to be eliminated, a constant challenge to our corrupt ways of being at home in the world.

4.4.2 The Spirit and a Liberative Praxis of Homemaking

A Latinx theology of home thus rests on the belief that, since God gives Godself to us in Christ and through the Spirit while we are still in the far country, we can experience home even in a fallen and wounded creation. But we must look for the way home by accompanying the crucified peoples of the world in their struggle for home. In Christ, God assumes not only fallen flesh but also a fallen earthly home, and in doing so, redeems it and sanctifies it in Godself.37

37 This follows the logic stated by Gregory of Nazianzus that the unassumed is the unhealed. Gregory Nazianzus, To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius, 101, accessed May 16, 2020, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3103a.htm.
Therefore, the church in the Americas has a special vocation to listen to the
struggles and negotiations of the marginalized peoples of the Americas as the
condition of the possibility for bearing witness to the Spirit’s work of
transfiguring these lands in the eschatological home of God.

Often this work will entail listening and engaging with ‘little stories’ like
that of Guadalupe which, to use the words of Alejandro García-Rivera,
“performs the semiotics” of the culture of the people from the margins. Stories
like Guadalupe narrate the history—both the goodness and the woundedness—
of the land and its life-giving connection to the people. As such, these stories
have a catechetical function. They become a way of cultivating cultural identity
among people, a sense of home rooted in stories about the land and God’s
activity in the land. This is an identity forged in the margins but that slowly
migrates to the center of society. Moreover, these narratives from the margins are
often stories of mestizaje, of deep forms of joining and unexpected partnerships or
collaboration between marginalized peoples, and even between the oppressors
and the victims. And in many cases, as is the case with the narrative of
Guadalupe, they transcend tribal, ethnic, and even national divides.\footnote{Many Protestant theologians have recently argued that the Virgin of Guadalupe is a narrative that is so sown into the fabric of Latin American and Latinx peoples that even if one is Protestant and has doctrinal reservations about the view of Mary represented, one cannot avoid engaging with the narrative, and not only in a critical way, but in a way that looks to how through this narrative God is at work in the Americas. See Johnson, \textit{American Magnificat}.} In other words, while these stories can and have been used to divide and to create cultures of superiority, they also seem to have within them the capacity to enact the joining of peoples, which Jennings sees as fundamental to God’s redemptive work in the world.

Discerning the Spirit at work at the sites of cultural \textit{mestizaje} at the margins, and through the stories of home of those inhabit these liminal spaces, constitutes one primary task of a liberative praxis of homemaking for the Americas. But this means we now have another critical task ahead of us, namely, “how do we resist the aspects of our stories of home that lead to death and not to life?” How, in other words, do we detect the liberative work of the Spirit in and through our stories of home?

Every oppressive regime, empire, and colonial power tells a story about the superior right of its people and culture to be in the land. This was true of the Hellenic stories of the Roman empire in the first century at the time of Christ; it
was true also of the Aztec and Incan empires in their conquest of the various native tribes in the surrounding regions; and it is most certainly true today of the national myths about the origins, independence, and sovereignty of many sovereign nation-states. These stories justify the brutal violence which peoples, cultures, and even lands have to suffer to make room for a prosperous nation and people.

Nevertheless, history also records other stories, stories of resistance and survival of those from the underside of history. A common element of these stories from the margins of history is that encounters with the divine often emerge from the most unexpected places: not at the centers of religious or political power but in the margins, in unclean places, at the borderlands of societies where cultures and peoples join and clash with each other. It is remarkable how these narratives, which tell of divine encounters at these marginal sites of joining, are also stories that are, at least at first, strongly rejected.

and resisted by the powerful. This was true, I have already argued, of the story of Guadalupe, a story long seen as heterodox by the church authorities.\(^{40}\)

It is no surprise that in the story, the colonial church is at first reluctant about the possibility that the Spirit would work beyond its walls in places and among peoples who are considered not to be the true bearers of Christianity in its purest form. Colonial homemaking resists the wisdom that emerges from those who call the borderlands and marginal places of the world home. To be at home where culture, identity, and belonging are in a state of constant negotiation, and where the wounds of domination and exclusion are felt deeply, is to be constantly aware of how homemaking and migration are not mutually opposed realities, but rather constitute the very nexus of human flourishing life. As Jennings says, this movement toward the other, to dwelling and negotiation

\(^{40}\) Having grown up as a Roman Catholic in Lima, Peru, I grew up with stories about popular devotions including devotions to El Señor del Mar, El Señor de los Milagros, to la Virgen del Carmen. Like the Virgin of Guadalupe, these devotions have a mixed or syncretistic heritage drawing not only elements of Andean spirituality but also the African spirituality of slaves as in the case of El Señor de los Milagros. In almost every story, the devotion begins with humble people at the margins of society who are witnesses to great miracles from the calming of tsunami waters to structures remaining after destructive earthquakes. There is always a holy place involved where the miracle takes place which becomes a site of pilgrimage. In each case also, the church hierarchy is initially opposed to the devotion and there is a marked racial/ethnic/class character to this ecclesial resistance. Yet, in each case the popular devotion of el pueblo, of the faithful people, triumphs over hierarchical resistance.
with those who are not like us, and to allowing these strangers to inform and
shape our lives, is at the very heart of the Christian faith, and it is precisely what
the colonial church rejects.

I do not want to argue that these stories do not become weapons in the
hands of the powerful, even tools used by the dominant culture to exclude and
reject. This has been true even of Scripture. But these stories have also always
had the power to become vehicles of liberation in the hands of the poor, the
displaced, and those on the margins. For instance, the story of the Virgin of
Guadalupe has become a nationalist symbol in Mexico, a symbol
instrumentalized by the state to claim loyalty from its citizens. Yet migrants
fleeing Mexico because the state has either failed to provide for them or because
of the corruption of the state working in league with drug cartels often carry
stamps, statues, and prayers in their hearts to the Virgin of Guadalupe. They
consider the virgin their holy mother, guiding them on their journey and helping
them stay rooted and flourish in their new lands. Guadalupe becomes a crucial
help in their leaving home, their journey, and their process of being transplanted
to a new land, just as the virgin met Juan Diego in his journey from home. It
allowed him to encounter powerful people through his humility and faith.
Devotees to Guadalupe throughout the US, in their devotion to Guadalupe, perform a kind of holy protest against the nationalist claim on the virgin by the Mexican state and the assimilationist projects of the US government.\textsuperscript{41}

The church, Catholic and Protestant needs to learn to read and interpret narratives like Guadalupe through a pneumatological lens that is attentive to how the Holy Spirit joins peoples and cultures through narratives from the margins. It is no surprise that these narratives then produce collective memory of holy places and peoples, because to talk of sanctified places and peoples, or of that which has been consecrated or anointed, is in Christian discourse to reflect on a work of the Holy Spirit. Throughout Scripture, the Spirit consecrates, blesses, anoints, and most importantly, weaves and heals that which is fragmented and wounded. Eugene Rogers proposes that “the Spirit is a Person [hypostasis] with an affinity for material things. The Spirit characteristically befriends the body.”\textsuperscript{42} But what then does the Spirit do when resting on flesh,


\textsuperscript{42} Rogers notes that the Spirit is not alone in befriending flesh for the Father and the Son also love materiality, thus maintaining the principle that God’s work ad extra are unison. Yet, resting on
when befriending matter? Rogers goes on to note, “From creation to the promise to Abraham to the salvation in Christ, the Spirit characteristically gathers diversity for blessing.” 43 As the Spirit rests on matter, which is to say as the Spirit indwells and makes holy habitation in creation, the Spirit both creates particularity and gathers community, and the Spirit does so by drawing all things to the body of the Son wherein, in relationship to the Son, all things have their distinct existence (their particularity) and their unity (their communal or joined existence).

The Spirit, in other words, is the Author and Creator, with the Father and the Son, of the web of existence that nurtures and constitutes creation. And the Spirit does this work over time and not all at once, such that we might find a punctiliar character to the Spirit’s work in uniting all things to Christ. Just as we can detect, for instance, the Spirit’s work of befriending us and thus growing us closer to God in Christ at particular moments in our lives and at particular places, so too, we should be able to detect the Spirit’s work in creation similarly

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matter and thereby sanctifying it is something which the tradition has appropriated to the Spirit on the basis of the biblical narrative. For in Scripture the Spirit rests on Jesus body in Mary’s womb, in the tomb, as well as on the sacramental elements of bread, wine, and water. Rogers, After the Spirit, 60.

43 Ibid., 64.
at particular moments and times, in crucial events, drawing creation to itself.

Narratives like the *Nican Mopohua* bear witness to this work, to those places, and to those people involved—all consecrated by the Spirit as holy. Holy places, holy people, and holy things in their particularity point to the Spirit’s universal redemptive work.

Because, as Rogers argues, the Spirit works on matter, on the concrete stuff of creation, joining all things to Christ and thereby to each other, I would propose that the Spirit’s work is also rendered visible in the form and content of these stories of joining, stories like Guadalupe. If we read these stories through a pneumatological lens, then we will also see how these stories participate in the eternal, what García-Rivera calls the Big Story. Paying attention to the Spirit’s work amidst us through these narratives is also an important way of remembering ourselves back into the people and the land. These narratives of joining do precisely the kind of work that Jennings calls for of helping us connect to the land, our ancestors, others, and Israel’s God. Guadalupe, for instance, connects many modern-day Mexicans to the Nahuatl. Rather than criticizing how the story connects modern-day peoples to ancient communities as a form of

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44 García-Rivera, *St. Martin de Porres*. 456
cultural appropriation, I think Elizondo was right in opening up the story, showing the church how it connects us both to the land and the culture of the Nahuatl and to God’s story with Israel, and then showing how it operates today as a narrative of joining. This way of seeing the world through Guadalupe can be the kind of thing that opens the way for reconciliation to the indigenous and the possibility of a return to the land. It is the possibility of the resurrection of a people thought to be extinct and of cultures and languages thought dead. We need to teach and hear these stories more and more because through them, we become more attuned to the Spirit’s liberative work in creation.

An ecclesiology emerging from the colonial wound of the Americas ought to be founded on stories of joining or mestizaje, such as Guadalupe. These stories already are a part of the fabric of the faith of the people of the Americas, often in ways that transcend Protestant and Catholic lines and in ways that cross the official and popular. God is present to people through these stories, and these stories keep us connected to peoples, cultures, and lands whether we are fully aware or not. Latinx scholar Natalia Imperatori-Lee argues for an ecclesiology that acknowledges the redemptive power of the little stories that constitute our everyday lives. She argues that these little stories have too often been ignored as
sources for the church’s dogmatic statements, yet they continue to deeply inform people’s shared worlds of meaning and action. Notably, Imperatori-Lee works within a Roman Catholic framework and addresses her book to the Roman Catholic church. Yet a similar conversation ought to take place in Protestant circles, and indeed, given the importance of narrative theology in twentieth-century North America, it is surprising that Protestant theologians have not sought to reflect more deeply on how the biblical narrative illumines and connects to the stories of the land of the Americas.

How then do we pray and live in the Spirit in such a way that our love for our earthly homes grows, at the same time that it is being pruned and reoriented toward God? Our stories of home and migration, often interlaced as they are with the sacred, with divine encounter, with a witness to God’s providential grace, are the sites of the Spirit’s redemptive work in the world. As we learn to see the Spirit’s work within these stories as they reflect our life together, we begin to cultivate a sense of home in the world, and we begin to see how our migration can lead to life, not death. The stories cultivate in us a love of home that joins us to others. I don’t believe the answer is either to love our homes less

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45 Imperatori-Lee, *Cuéntame*. 458
or to have a blind love of home, but rather to love our homes in a way that participates in God’s love and desire for creation, love and desire that assigns value to particular places and peoples and their intertwined histories—in other words, a love for culture. That is to say, our love of home needs to be redeemed and transformed by the Spirit as it undergoes both a process of intensification and mortification.

Finally, it’s important to know the nature of the colonial wound and the impact of the colonial event on the land, on peoples’ cultures, and on our stories. This is not only because of the need to pursue the work of reconciliation and reparation that addresses the injustice but also, we need to know these stories to know where and through whom God is doing work. One of the critical points of this dissertation is that, following Fulkerson’s phrasing, God works at the site of the wound. So we need to understand and go to the wound to better perceive

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46 Once again, I owe a debt here to Sarah Coakley’s rendition of Romans 8, where she argues that “to step intentionally into the realm of divine, trinitarian desire, and to seek some form of participation in it through a profound engagement with the Spirit, is both to risk having one’s human desires intensified in some qualitatively distinct manner, and also to confront a searching and necessary purgation of those same human desires in order to be brought into conformity with the divine will.” Coakley, God, Sexuality and the Self, 13.
what God is doing, how God is transforming lands and peoples, joining them together in Christ and transforming them into a dwelling place for God.

As Barth would say, the church enlivened by the Spirit is called to follow Christ on his journey to Golgotha, not in a radical embrace of exile, but rather in faith that in the wounded places of the world and among the exiled and displaced peoples who dwell there, the Spirit is at work preparing a home for the Triune God. And this is so eschatologically precisely in the sense that from the very beginning, the Creator rejects the possibility of a creation in which alienation reigns and sets forth homecoming as the purpose and end of all things, past, present, and future. In Christ, the eschatological promise made to Israel and reiterated in the Apocalypse—“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them” (Rev. 21:3)—is fulfilled within time, for all time, and as such stands before all times as the perfect eternal electing will of the Triune God.

4.5 Conclusion

As an immigrant living in the United States, I was never told the stories of the original inhabitants of the land. Indeed, if those on the political right told
stories about the great efforts and victory of the founding fathers, the story of manifest destiny that denies the atrocities committed by these national founders and their predecessors against the natives, then those on the political left often tell a story of the United States as a nation of immigrants that equally renders invisible the stories and lives of the aboriginal inhabitants of the lands who were not ‘immigrants’ but who were at home in these lands before the nation came into existence. Caught between cultural imperialism on the one hand and rootlessness on the other, immigrants like myself are left with the choice either between a right- or left-wing version of the story of the “American Dream” as the means to cultivate a sense of home in the land.

For immigrants to the U.S. to cultivate a sense of home in a new land and among a new people, learning the stories of the marginalized peoples in the land, in particular of natives and of African Americans, is crucial. The alternative, and what continues to happen is that each generation that arrives settles into communities with those like them racially and ethnically and remain in those insular migrant communities until their children in the second or third generation suffer the crisis of choosing between their parents’ cultural heritage, which prevents them from being fully at home in the land, and embracing the
American culture they breathe and swim in through their schools, their churches, their social lives. Moreover, rather than joining in solidarity with the other marginalized groups in the U.S., often immigrants are exploited as cheap laborers in a way that makes them enter into competition with the other marginalized peoples of the land for economic advancement. As immigrants begin to climb the social ladder with a goal or dream to own their own piece of land either in the U.S. or in their country of origin, they are also cultivating the very spirit of colonial commodification that undergirds their status as exploited. That ownership is what marks success in the immigrant journey in many ways encapsulates the colonial crisis of the “American Dream.”

Immigrants who are successful in attaining economic and political status in the U.S. often remain plagued by a sense of being foreigners, never fully able to be at home in their own homelands or in the land of their sojourn. Beyond the xenophobia and ethno-nationalist sentiments that provoke this crisis in many immigrants, what contributes to this feeling of alienation is the mistaken notion that the acquisition of property or the acquisition of a certain political status is synonymous with the cultivation of a sense of home. However, cultivating a sense of home requires the cultivation of a different kind and quality of
relationship with the land than either capital or citizenship status can afford. It requires learning how to befriend the land, and thus a deep process of being welcomed into the land by its inhabitants and being taught their wisdom with and through the land.

Barth, Tinker, and Jennings have helped me to see how my longing and desire for home as an immigrant has been both caused, misshapen, and left unfulfilled by colonial modernity. For migrants like myself to struggle for home in the Americas, it will not suffice to find a sense of belonging in the pre-existing racial and ethnic silos which the academy and the church offer. Through the work of Latinx theologians, I have argued that cultivating a home in the Americas will require the building of a coalition that draws on the stories and lived experiences of people across the racial and cultural lines which divide society. Without this work of joining, our ways of being at home in the world, inspired by capitalism, racism, and nationalism, bear witness not to God’s homecoming in Christ but to our deep alienation from God and from the rest of creation.

Yet I also believe that an immigrant’s perspective can contribute something else to this account of the colonial wound in the Americas and its
healing. Migrants from the global south usually suffer a double form of alienation as they are both those displaced and pushed to the margins of society upon their arrival and alienated from their native lands and peoples. Migrants can thus play a critical role as those living in-between home and exile, in helping us to see beyond the choices of nomadic rootlessness and rooted nationalist ethnocentrisms, and between cultural imperialism and cultural nationalism. Belonging, intimacy, and a covenant with the land are never just about home. Lest they collapse into ethnonationalism, they must be imagined and narrated inside of the interplay between migration and home. Embodied life always take place at this intersection and this critical nexus, and it is this very nexus that is also the site of the Spirit’s redemptive work. New beginnings emerge from migrations past and present and the need to cultivate a sense of home between migrants and natives.

The desire for home, one of the most powerful desires that moves human action individually and collectively, is not a desire to be rejected nor to be accepted without limitation, but it is a desire that is to be rightly ordered, cultivated, and disciplined if we are to attain to a flourishing life. We are not called to love our homes less, but to learn to love our homes rightly, in ways that
are faithful, hopeful, and loving and in ways that are thus attentive to the woundedness and viciousness that can characterize the desire for home. It seems to me that immigrants have much to learn and much to teach us in this regard, for the desire for home and the experience of the loss of home are two of the most powerful forces shaping an immigrant’s life.

To cultivate wise ways of being at home in the world, a matter which is crucial to the flourishing of immigrants and existing inhabitants, I first needed to understand what kind of story we find ourselves in so as to discern where the desire for home comes from and towards what is it oriented. I have tried to do that in this chapter by arguing that the desire for home is best situated and understood within the Triune drama of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. This is a drama that speaks not only to the goodness of home but also to its woundedness. It is also a drama that Christians are trained to participate in through the liturgy and through their reading of the biblical narrative, and it is a drama that takes Christians to the margins of society and the sites of the Spirit’s work amid the experience and reality of cultural mestizaje. Thus, in the next and final chapter, I turn to the kind of theological anthropology that this Triune
drama of journeying and homecoming produces, a vision of human life at the nexus of migration and home.
Chapter 5
Theological Anthropology and the Migration-Home Nexus

5.1 Introduction

Ecological catastrophes, political instability, and extractive economic practices are only some of the powerful forces in the twenty-first century that have driven more people to migrate than at any other time in history. Yet this mass migration of peoples which characterizes our contemporary moment has also produced a resurgence of vicious nationalist regimes that urge citizens to protect their homes from the supposed threat of political, economic, and social instability that migration brings. A tension thus runs—not only through the Americas but indeed in many parts of the world—between migrants’ need to cultivate a sense of home in a foreign land and a nativist desire to protect one’s home from immigrants.

These ‘signs of the times’ summon the church to reflect critically on the roles that migration and home play in the pursuit of a flourishing human life. Yet, to gain a better understanding of the goods which migration and home offer as well as the ways in which they can become sources of wounding, it is important to first determine what kind of narrative about the nature and ends of
human experiences of home and migration we find ourselves in. Do we find ourselves in a modern narrative about human progress, at the heart of which is an inherent migratory urge, a drive to cross ever new frontiers, venturing out into the world and indeed even into space in the search for new homes and new forms of life? Or are we perhaps operating in an antimodernist narrative which sees in the frontier spirit the modern Euro-American colonial fantasy that justified the systemic displacement of native peoples from the sixteenth century onward and which today continues to operate with a vicious disregard for the vital and fragile relationship between humans and their ecosystems?

I have argued that we find ourselves neither in a modern story of progress nor in an antimodern declension story, but rather in the story of the Triune God who journeys to us in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ, and who therefore assumes and heals our condition of alienation and homelessness in a fallen and violent world. This is a story made possible by the grace of the Spirit who, in binding creation to Christ, enables all things to participate in the Son’s journey of homecoming to the Father. Neither the vanity of idolatrous human attempts to claim a home in the world nor the despair of being forced to leave home and endure exile and alienation have the last word, for in this Triune drama, the
eternal Word of God declares that alienation, exile, and death are overcome in God’s new creation. It is thus a story in which a finite cosmos under the curse of sin is neither destroyed nor abandoned by the Creator. Instead, through sharing in the Son’s journey of homecoming to the Father, the cosmos is transformed into the eternal dwelling place of the Triune God.

This chapter asks, if indeed all of creation finds itself inside of this Triune drama of journeying and homecoming, what then is our place and role as human creatures within this drama, and how might knowing our place and role in the story inform our vocation with regard to migrating and cultivating a sense of home in the world? Are humans fundamentally rooted placemaking creatures whose ultimate flourishing depends on communities remaining faithful to a life-giving covenant with a particular land or place in the cosmos, and then cultivating and tilling that soil until the soil begins to cultivate the love of God in their souls, in a multi-generational liturgy of thanksgiving to the Creator? Or are humans migratory creatures whose ultimate flourishing depends on leaving their parents’ house to be joined to other peoples, cultures, and tongues from distant lands so as to, with the help of the Spirit, work at the cultivation of new forms of life, discovering and nurturing new ways of praising God through ever-
new hybrid cultural, spiritual, and linguistic expressions? To put it in terms of a locus classicus of theology, what I explore in this chapter is a theological anthropology at the nexus of migration and home, an anthropology that takes as its starting point that humans are made in the image of a journeying and homecoming God.

In what follows, I will engage three contemporary anthropologies which take homemaking/placemaking as a central aspect of a flourishing human life. In conversation with these accounts, I will argue that a flourishing human life is irreducible to either the experience and reality of migration or to the desire to be at home in a particular land, culture, or people. I argue instead that a truly flourishing human life entails an ongoing negotiation between migrations and homecomings and the forms of practical wisdom that attend to that interplay. I thus look to bring a theological lens to what sociologist Paolo Boccagni, in his work on Ecuadorian immigrants in the UK describes as the “migration-home nexus.”¹ Like sociology, theological and Christian ethical accounts of migration lack a systematic and critical analysis of how the loss and ongoing struggle for

home of migrants and migrant communities is also a source of redemptive possibility. This chapter’s constructive move views the migration-home nexus as constitutive of human life in God’s good created order and as a unique site of the Spirit’s redemptive work in the world. I also argue that it is at the margins of society and in the borderlands between peoples, where peoples and cultures exist in a constant negotiation of migrations and homecomings, and amid histories of cultural, economic, social forms of oppression, that the Spirit’s work of transforming and redeeming this wounded creation into the eternal home of the Triune God is rendered most visible. This divine homecoming is enacted in history by the incarnate Son and the indwelling Spirit and is paradoxically rendered most visible not where people are most at home in the world, but rather at the sites in creation where the wounds of alienation, exile, and death are felt most strongly. I conclude the chapter by gesturing in three possible directions for this trinitarian theology of migration and home.

5.2 An Agrarian Anthropology of Rootedness

I begin with the view of the human creature as expressed by a group of writers, philosophers, and environmental activists from the mid-twentieth
century who identify themselves as ‘agrarians.’ I want to start with agrarianism because at the heart of the cultural crisis that agrarian writers address is what they describe as a profound sense of homelessness and rootlessness that afflicts many in North America today. I have further narrowed my focus to perhaps the most important agrarian thinker in North America over the last century, the Kentucky poet and farmer Wendell Berry. I have done this not only because of Berry’s pre-eminence in the field and in the wider literary world of North America, but because of his willingness to think about racial segregation and the erasure of indigenous cultures and theft of indigenous lands. Berry doesn’t go so far as to question the moral validity of his own claims to the Kentucky soil which

2 Agrarianism is a variegated philosophy which posits that human flourishing and virtue is fundamentally intertwined with the praxis of maintaining the health and wellbeing of the land. While agrarianism’s intellectual roots reach back to ancient times, in the modern west, agrarianism gained traction in the 18th century in Europe and particularly in England and was thus transported to the New World by way of British settlers. Agrarianism, however, has never been restricted to European cultures. For example, there are Maoist and Zapatista versions of agrarianism which focus on resistance to capitalist neoliberal extractive practices that damage the land and denigrate the livelihood of rural workers.


4 For instance, Berry makes this poignant observation about the white community in North America with whom he identifies: “one of the peculiarities of the white race’s presence in America is how little intention has been applied to it. As a people, wherever we have been, we have never really intended to be.” Wendell Berry, “The Unsettling of America,” in The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), 35.
he inherited from his Irish immigrant family, but he does attack the internal logic that drove those who colonized the lands and then used slave labor to extract resources from the soil. This is the very same extractive logic, Berry claims, that is present today in agribusinesses who continue to treat the soil as a site for resource extraction for the maximizing of capital gains. For Berry, the soil represents something much more sacred than capitalist extractivism suggests.

These particular acres of soil are his home, and for him, that makes the land an extension of his own being and identity. Berry’s agrarian philosophy thus represents an attempt from someone who has benefitted from the colonization of the Americas and the enslavement of African peoples to address the wound of homelessness inherited from the colonizers and slave traders. His critique comes

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6 Berry describes his relation to the family farm in Kentucky thus: “And since I did most of my growing up here, and have had most of my most meaningful experiences here, the place and the history, for me, have been inseparable, and there is a sense in which my own life is inseparable from the history and the place.” Wendell Berry, “A Native Hill,” in The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), 4.
not from an abstract ideological position, but from an awareness of the wounds history has left on the soil and on the soul of the peoples of the Americas.  

In order to draw out Berry’s agrarian anthropology, I will focus on one of his most well-known works, *The Unsettling of America*, and particularly on the essay “The Body, and the Earth.” I chose this essay not only because it articulates the nature and extent of the wound of homelessness suffered in the Americas but because it also proposes an interesting anthropological vision for the healing of this wound that has at its heart a story of exile and homecoming.

### 5.2.1 Agrarian Anthropology as an Odyssean Journey of Homecoming and Exile

In “The Body and the Earth,” Berry describes health, or we might say human flourishing, as the maintenance of a harmonious whole or as awareness and respect for the integrity and unity of the many distinct but inseparable relations that constitute human life. Berry describes these ‘unities’ as the unity of

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7 Berry’s writing focuses on the North American context, and perhaps more specifically on southern rural parts of the United States, but I believe this bespeaks an agrarian commitment to working from the particularity of one’s place in the world. Any theological account of the Americas and its wounds must begin with the concrete particular and not with the universal.

the body and soul, the unity of bodies in relation to other bodies, and finally as
the unity of bodies in relation to the land: the soil and all of its inhabitants. A
healthy, flourishing human life depends on maintaining and nurturing these
relationships. In view of that, Berry diagnoses the disease which he claims is
endemic to urban-industrial modernity as the severing of these life-giving bonds
and the fragmentation of the cosmic ‘whole.’ According to Berry, modern
industrial societies isolate the body from the soul, thus generating two
competing visions of life: a materialist vision where desire is unfettered from any
sense of transcendent order or purpose, and, on the other hand, an anti-
materialist and escapist spirituality which at best ignores the importance of
embodied experience and at worst punishes and restrains all forms of material
desire.

For Berry, the only way to begin to heal from this cultural crisis is to
recover a sense of the interconnectedness of the whole of creation and thereby to
remember humanity’s place in this ordered whole. Importantly, for Berry
humanity does not occupy a place at the center nor at the top of this cosmic
whole, but rather as a humble co-dependent creature among other creatures,
amid natural/divine forces much greater than ourselves. This re-awakening to
our place in the world is something which, before the urban-industrial-modern age, people used to encounter by way of a pilgrimage to the wilderness. In the wild, where the human body is most vulnerable to the elemental forces of nature, and beneath the unsearchable canopy of the universe, persons recover a sense of their minuscule, fragile, and contingent existence, such that they return home transformed. The wilderness, however, is precisely what the modern scientific mind has attempted to erase, first by measuring and comprehending it rather than contemplating its mystery and then by idealizing it as something only possible from the secure vantage of interstate highways and safe urban lookouts. The pilgrimage to the wilderness, or even an awareness that the wilderness exists surrounding us at all times, as both a source of life and a

9 Berry argues that “until modern times, we focused a great deal of the best of our thought upon such rituals of return to the human condition. Seeking enlightenment or the Promised Land or the way home, a man would go or be forced to go into the wilderness, measure himself against the Creation, recognize finally his true place within it, and thus be saved from pride and from despair. Seeing himself as a tiny member of a world he cannot comprehend or master or in any same token, since he shares in, depends upon, and is graced by all of which he is a part, neither can he become fiend.” Berry, The Body and the Earth, 95.

10 The problem with modernity is that the wilderness has become romanticized, as “we forgot that wilderness still circumscribed civilization and persisted in domesticity. We forgot, indeed, that the civilized and the domestic continued to depend upon wilderness—that is upon natural forces within the climate and within the silt that have never in any meaningful sense been controlled or conquered.” Ibid., 96.
limitation to our dreams of grandeur, is increasingly difficult for those who live in modern societies.

Yet, Berry observes, the wilderness remains, even if we don’t recognize it as such. Life continues to be fragile, easily overcome by the great forces of nature, and we are still dependent on the wilderness—the untamed land—as a source of life, even if we fail to recognize it. Agrarian life is not about overcoming nature or conquering the wild, but rather about learning to live with the reality of the wild forces that lie beyond human control and to accept and to learn from them. According to Berry, we ignore this reality only to our detriment. Therefore, he argues, we need not just to better our fragmented and isolated lives, but we need a different way of life altogether. What would a life cognizant of the wilderness look like? How do we, in this urban-industrial modern age, find our way home again?

Berry argues that we need to look farther back in time than the stories we have told ourselves about human progress and ingenuity. He ultimately finds a vision for our way back home in an ancient story of homecoming, a story that begins with life in exile and in the wilderness, a story that points the way back to wholeness and home. I want to focus now on Berry’s anthropological vision as it
emerges from his agrarian reading of *The Odyssey*. For Berry, Homer’s epic gives an insightful account of the inter-connectivity of life and of the concentric circles that constitute our place in the cosmos—from our at-homeness in the world at large to our at-homeness in our ancestral lands, all the way to our at-homeness in our familial households. Moreover, it also depicts the fundamental human choice between home and the limits of mortality, on the one hand, and the dream of immortality and exile, on the other.

To recap: Odysseus, the protagonist of the story, is on his way home from his glorious warmongering in Troy when he wanders off the path and ends up held for ransom by the goddess and seductress Kalypso. Eventually, Zeus, the leader of the Greek pantheon, orders Kalypso to release Odysseus from her remote island, leaving the hero with a tragic choice. On the one hand, Kalypso has offered him the inestimable pleasures of immortal life if he would only stay in exile on the island; on the other hand, choosing to return to his homeland and to his wife, Penelope, also means for Odysseus to choose a much less idyllic and pleasurable existence and the surety of death. In this classic tale, Odysseus shows fidelity to his wife and to his homeland, overcoming his desire for immortality and boundless pleasure.
Berry writes, “Odysseus’s far-wandering through the wilderness of the sea is not merely the return of a husband; it is a journey home. And a great deal of the power as well as the moral complexity of The Odyssey rises out of the richness of its sense of home.” Home is not only an existential choice for Odysseus, it is not merely an object of desire, but more fundamentally, home is a moral choice, the choice between finitude and infinitude, between the kind of fulfillment that might come from fidelity to his land and to his wife or infidelity to both for the sake of shallower pleasures.

Berry goes on to explain that Odysseus’s journey home “reveals a structure that is at once geographical and moral.” Berry asks us to imagine concentric circles, where the circle farthest from the center represents Odysseus’s starting place at Kalypso’s cave and the wilderness, the space of wild desire, of forces and realities beyond human control, “the forces of nature and of the gods.” This furthest circle is also the space of war, the battlefield where humans must struggle for survival by either killing or being killed. The innermost circle, by contrast, is the marriage bed where Penelope awaits Odysseus. This is the

11 Ibid., 120.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
sphere of the domestic, of human order, and of rest. For Berry, the Odysseus of the Iliad had experienced the wilderness, and rather than idealizing it, Odysseus chooses domestic order; he chooses to return home. The Odyssey thus tracks the battle-worn, desirous wanderer on his way from the outermost circle of life to the innermost, from exile in the wilderness where “man is alien” back home to human order. There’s a critical point here that Berry makes, which I want to highlight because I will return to it later: for Berry, Odysseus’s journey is one “from the periphery toward that center.”

Odysseus’s final stretch of travel home, as he lands on the shores of his island of Ithaka, is, as Berry notes, “marked by a series of recognitions, tests of identity and devotion.” The struggle for home is not only in the distant shores of strange lands, but it is even one fought in one’s own homeland. At this point in the tale, the reader wonders if Odysseus will be recognized and welcomed as one who belongs to this land after many years of wandering. The presence of the suitors who, in Odysseus’s absence, are courting his wife Penelope reveals the possible threat of a disordered and alienating household, of Odysseus not being

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.

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able to come home. However, Odysseus triumphs over each test of identity, and each, as Berry notes, “becomes at the same time a restoration of order.” In the final scenes of the story, as Odysseus triumphs in the final trial over his wife’s suitors, thus reclaiming his place on the throne, he murders all of the suitors as a way of asserting his homecoming. Berry notes that while the punishment “seems excessive,” nevertheless, “granting the acceptability of what violence means to a warrior such as Odysseus, this outcome seems to me appropriate to the moral terms of the poem. It is made clear that the punishment is not merely the caprice of human passion: Odysseus enacts the will of the gods, he is the agent of divine judgment. The suitors’ sin is their utter contempt for the domestic order that the poem affirms.” Although Berry finds a ‘literary’ way to justify this scene of abject horror, I will argue in later in this chapter that Odysseus’ actions here can be juxtaposed to those of Christ in his journey of homecoming to the cross.

Odysseus’s decisions and his journey in the story manifest for Berry a twofold fidelity that represents what is lacking in the modern industrial urban age: fidelity to the household in the form of marital fidelity and fidelity to the

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16 Ibid., 121.
17 Ibid.
land. “The Odyssey begins in the world of the Iliad, a world that, like our own, is war-obsessed, preoccupied with ‘manly’ deeds of exploitation, anger, aggression, pillage, and the disorder, uprootedness, and vagabondage that are their result. At the end of the poem, Odysseus moves away from the values of that world toward the values of domesticity and peace. He restored order to his household by awesome violence, it is true. But that finished and the house purified, he re-enters his marriage, the bedchamber, and the marriage bed rooted in the earth. From there he goes to the fields.”¹⁸ For Berry, the gambit that Odysseus faces in the Odyssey is the fundamental gambit that we face today in the modern west. So too, the modern human faces the decision to strive after immortality, to overcome the limitations of creaturely life and death, but in so doing to choose perennial exile. On the other hand, we can choose to build a home. And that choice entails finding our place in the ordered life of the domestic sphere where our wellbeing hinges on our fidelity to the relational bonds to each other and with the land. In sum, for Berry, the Odyssean narrative depicts the human as faced with the choice between a life of exile where human desire is endless and free from the limitations of embodied existence, and on the other hand, the

¹⁸ Ibid., 123.
possibility of choosing life within the limits of creaturely finitude in a cosmos ordered not by humans but by the transcendent creator, wherein life is a constant art of learning how to be at home with and in the great web of life that is the cosmos, this “great economy.”

Having returned to his home and to his wife, Odysseus goes into the fields where he meets his father, King Laertes. Berry notes that this encounter with his dad, who “in a time of disorder...has returned to the care of the earth, the foundation of life and hope,” introduces us to a final ritual atonement, a ritual of reconciliation which signifies the completion of Odysseus’s homecoming. Berry writes, “Like those people of the Biblical prophecy who will ‘beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks’ and ‘not learn war anymore,’ Odysseus will not know rest until he has carried the instrument of his sea wanderings [his oar] inland and planted it like a tree, until he has seen the symbol of his warrior life as a farming tool.”

19 For Berry, the ‘Great Economy’ is a stand in for the New Testament concept of the Kingdom of God, which is to say the cosmos in the symphonic order which the Creator gives to each creature in relation to the other and to the Creator. It is the largest possible organizing structure which holds all creaturely life. See Wendell Berry, “Two Economies,” in The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), 219–35.

20 Berry, The Body and the Earth, 123.
Odysseus turns to care of the earth in his final act before death, showing that war and violence, wandering and exile, must give way to the “values of domesticity and farming.” For Berry, we too in the modern west need to atone to the land for our violent past, and we must do so by recovering, like Odysseus, our original vocation as ministers to the soil through an agrarian way of life.

Berry’s interpretation of the Odyssean journey of homecoming depicts how, in the agrarian worldview, the cosmos is constituted by a great web of intertwined forms of life, each interdependent on the other. Berry calls this web of life different things, but three key names for it are ‘the whole,’ ‘the great economy’ and ‘Creation.’ What each of these words signifies is that humans are just one small constitutive element of the great web of existence and therefore not the center of the universe, the goal of the universe, or the highest form of life in the universe. Humans do have a responsibility with respect to the whole, a responsibility which is both unique to us and not any more or less indispensable than the responsibilities of every other living being. Our distinct contribution to creation is that we are to be priests, called to celebrate and sanctify these webs of life by giving thanks to the Creator; we are not only then to enjoy and delight in

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21 Ibid., 123-24.
these webs of life but also to nurture and sustain them, because it is on the
welfare of all of life that human life and being depend on for flourishing. For
over three decades agrarian writers like Wendell Berry have argued that the
disintegration of this web of life, beginning with the disintegration of the integral
relationship between humans and the land, lies at the core of many of our
contemporary cultural crises. They call for a fundamental conversion to a
different way of life, a cultural renewal that heals and restores a way of life that
acknowledges, respects, and attends to the interconnectivity of the body and the
soul, the city and the farm, indeed the soul and soil. This is opposed to our
technocratic and state-centered solutions to our many public crises, from
immigration to the nuclear arms race, from the disintegration of the family to the
disintegration of ecosystems, that according to Berry and his ilk are bound to
only contribute to our homelessness. Unless we recover the wisdom of agrarian
culture, “our efforts toward homecoming have ended in failure.”22

Is what is needed, then, a reverse migration to farmland and a return to
agricultural forms of life? Indeed, reclaiming an agrarian way of knowing and

being in the world is fundamental to addressing our modern homelessness, but a physical return to the farm is not what Berry advocates. One of the characteristics of this collective conversion to and reconciliation with the land is that the city and the farm are no longer seen in competition, the city extracting the goods necessary to survive from the farm whilst leaving it without the necessary means to thrive. Rather, the farm and the city are united as sharers in a common place, whose flourishing is mutually dependent. The town and country are interconnected parts of a cosmic order which also includes biological systems, and the flourishing of one always depends on the flourishing of the others. What is needed are cities and city-dwellers who are wise and knowledgeable about human interdependence with the land and who are therefore attuned to how their everyday actions, such as eating or producing waste, affect the soil, the creatures of the soil, and communities far beyond their own.

5.2.2 Agrarianism and the Biblical Narrative

To what extent does this agrarian anthropology, this Odyssean fidelity to homeland and to the household, correspond with the Biblical idea of a flourishing human life? According to Ellen Davis, the agrarian vision of human
life rooted in and entangled with the soil resonates with the vision of creaturely flourishing, or of shalom, which is found throughout the Old Testament. In *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, Davis observes that although biblical scholarship since at least the fifteenth century has disproportionately focused on Israel’s possession and sovereignty over the Promised Land, this obfuscates what is a perhaps a more central concern of Scripture concerning the promised land: not its possession but its care.²³ Davis argues that possession and care are inseparable realities in the biblical imaginary, as Israel’s capacity to remain in the Promised Land is premised on their capacity to care for the land and the creatures that live on the land. Here we already find a resonant structure between agrarianism and the Scripture: a sense of home in the land must be founded on care for the land.

Davis goes on to observe that when the Hebrew Scriptures are read from an agrarian perspective we begin to form a picture of a cosmic order within which God, the King who reigns from the city, the agricultural worker whose life is in the fields, and the fertile soil and animals, are all entangled in a web that

binds the well-being of each to God as well as to each other. Thus an image of wholeness and mutual interdependence that resembles the agrarian view of human flourishing, shalom, begins to emerge in the Bible. This image of interrelatedness and wholeness is manifested in God’s creative activity (Gen. 1 & 2) where each day of Creation shows a divine intentionality that assigns to each thing a place and function in relation to others, but it is also similarly articulated in the Torah Law (Lev. and Deut.) under the terms of God’s covenant with Israel. The covenant is a constant reminder of the limits and responsibilities of creaturely life in the land in gratitude to God the creator.

Thus, the Hebrew Scriptures present Israel as entangled with the soil, with the plants and animals, and with God, such that the people’s faithfulness before God is co-dependent on their care for the land, animals, and for each other. Sensitivity and care toward other human and non-human creatures in the land of Israel is a condition of covenant faithfulness. Faithfulness, agriculture, politics, and economy are inseparable entanglements under the terms of the covenant. Davis points to the prophetic literature of Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah, where a flourishing land and prosperous nation are tangible evidence of God’s covenant blessings, while conversely, lack of attentiveness to the soil’s health not only
affects humans and animals but also, as the prophets remind us, is considered a transgression of the covenant and an offense before God that ushers in political as well as ecological catastrophe. As in the stories of Noah and Elijah, floods and droughts which render the land infertile are tangible evidence of covenant curses.

Finally, Davis notes that the biblical writers don’t imagine a utopian agrarian society where the great cities like Babylon, which are the objects of scorn throughout scripture, are finally done away with. Rather the biblical image of Zion, the city of God, is an icon that ushers us forth into an eschatological reality where cities are conduits of God’s blessing, starting with Jerusalem and the Israelite nation. Cities, however, can only be blessings when they obey the terms of God’s covenant, that is, when there is a sense of wholeness and interdependence between the city and the fertile soil upon which it depends, between the farmers and the king, between those inside the walls and those outside of the city whose citizens they seek to serve. Again, there’s a distinct resonance here with the way that agrarianism portrays the evils of extraction as culminating in exile, and on the other hand, the summons to receive the gifts of
the land in good measure, preserving the gentle harmony of all things, as the
way to homecoming.

5.3 An Anthropology from the Wound of the Nomad

Before I give my own assessment of an agrarian anthropology of home, I
first want to engage an important counter-narrative to agrarianism, a narrative
that posits that the agrarian world is not the solution to a society addicted to
mobility but rather the very origin of the problem of homelessness in the world.
The view I want to engage here is that of the British anthropologist Hugh Brody,
whose research on the Inuit people of Rankin Inlet, Canada, articulates life from
the perspective of contemporary hunter-gatherer peoples. Brody’s ethnographic
work, The Other Side of Eden, not only offers a window into the so-called
“nomadic” way of life of the hunter-gather Inuktitut people, but indeed through
telling their stories, Brody also tells the story of humanity from a very different
perspective to both Berry’s agrarian account and to that which is taught in the
modern urban contexts. It is a perspective that challenges various long-held
assumptions in the modern west about what it means to be at home in the world and who truly is a ‘nomad.’

5.3.1 Home in the Wilderness

It was while participating in a hunting trip with other Inuit peoples in the arctic tundra that Brody for the first time experienced the way of the Inuktitut-speaking people and the bonds that tie them and their livelihood to the land. He describes the scene by contrasting how he had been taught to ‘see’ in the western elite world in which he had grown up and how these Arctic dwellers saw the world. Brody writes, “in one sense, this whole landscape was ‘empty,’ a ‘wilderness.’ But all of it had been given a set of complete human shapes—names and purposes and meanings—by Inuktitut. Inugu and Willie knew this land. They could navigate, select routes that took them over hundreds of square miles of sea ice…. They gave the names of every river and told me the names of many inland lakes. Again and again Inugu took me to places where we could see far into the distance, and there he would point and name and take delight.”

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25 Ibid., 33.
the colonial settlers saw when they first entered these Arctic lands is very likely what Brody’s first intuition was when staring out across the tundra—the pervasive sense of nothingness, an impenetrable and life-threatening wilderness. That is perhaps why they left those lands alone and why the Inuit peoples have managed to survive and retain much of their culture to this day—although, as Brody notes, by this point in the twenty-first century, no indigenous culture remains fully untouched by colonialism.

Through learning the language of these Arctic dwellers, Inuktitut, Brody was also learning to see the world differently. What he learned through the signification of the Arctic world by these hunters was that the wilderness is not a nothingness, but a place of familiarity; not a threat to be overcome but a known and welcome friend in whom to take delight. Brody observes that “to move around with safety, to hunt with success, to make the land’s resources available and nourishing, the hunter works with a mass of details and the names of many, many places...to know this particular territory is to prosper; neither the land nor the knowledge of the land can be replaced. A territory is made perfect by knowledge. Inugu was revealing his profound conviction that this was his only...
imaginable home.” We must be very careful to clarify what Brody means by knowledge in this passage because the knowledge that his Inuit companions displayed was not the knowledge of the conqueror, knowledge as a form of imposition of order on a place which has now been reshaped and reformed to one’s imagination and liking. Rather, the Inuktitut displayed the knowledge of intimacy, of careful study and recognition, a knowledge of delight and love that recognizes the wilderness as their “only imaginable home.” Their way of being at home in the world, like their language, is dictated by the patterned structures, the sounds, feels, smells, appearance, and motions of the wilderness and its creatures, and not the other way around. For the Inuktitut, thus, there is not a constant struggle to make a home in the world, as much as there is constant learning of how it is that the world, even in its most extreme and perhaps uncontrollable character, is always already a home in which we humans have a place.

Brody thus contends that, contrary to the exoticizing stories told by many western historians and anthropologists about hunter-gatherer tribes around the world, the actual lives of the so-called nomadic peoples of the world are far from

26 Ibid., 34.
loosely tied to the land. They are not aimless wanderers. On the contrary, hunter-gatherers’ lives are dictated by the rhythms of the land—the climate, the forms of life that live, die, and decompose in the land, the winds, the waters, and in the case of the Inuktitut, the hundreds of different kinds of snow that blanket the tundra. Life-giving intimate bonds connect the hunter-gatherers and the land.

Ironically, for the Inuit and many other hunter-gatherer peoples around the world, experiences of uprootedness and displacement do not come from seasonal migrations but rather from the sedentary life in “settlements” imposed by western governments. Rather than producing prosperity among the natives these settlements, made up mostly of low-income housing, western-style schools, markets, and other amenities, introduced the possibility of unemployment and economic precarity. The settlements were built far from the wilderness where many of the people had for generations relied on hunting as a source of constant labor and of sustenance for their household and community. Upon moving to settlements, the natives could no longer hunt for food in the tundra and instead

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27 Ibid., 25.
had begun to look for limited and very low-paying jobs in order to provide for
themselves and their families.28

At first glance, there are some striking similarities between Berry’s
agrarian account of a flourishing human life and the way of life of the Inuit as
Brody describes it. For instance, both focus on the importance of intimacy with
the land, of learning to appreciate and live within its limits. Both also see the
wilderness as a powerful force, not one to be overcome but rather an important
limit and context for a flourishing human life. It is not until Brody sets up a
contrast between the Inuit way of life and the Judeo-Christian story of creation
found in Genesis that a direct critique of agrarianism begins to take shape.
Brody’s disconcerting claim is that there is an alternate and competing story of
humanity, one that emerges from the true underside of history, from a
perspective which most modern historians have sought to marginalize by
relegating it to a foregone past.29 Brody’s claim is that indeed “it is agricultural

29 “Hunter-gatherers live at what have become the margins of the ‘developed’ world.
Development means profitable farming and towns that exist thanks to the farms that feed them.
Where farming is judged not to be possible or profitable, hunter-gatherers can sometimes
continue to use and occupy their lands.” Ibid., 6.
societies that tend to be on the move,” whereas it is “hunting peoples [who] are far more firmly settled.”

Brody agrees with Davis’s claims that an agrarian anthropology resonates with the Old Testament’s vision of human flourishing amidst exile. However, according to Brody, when seen through the lens of the hunter-gatherer way of life, the creation narrative of the Judeo-Christian tradition and its various historical interpretations—which have shaped western cosmologies and history—is fundamentally not a story of homecoming but of exile. The Bible and the Judeo-Christian tradition, and by extension agrarianism, are thus the contemporary living traditions that best embody a nomadic form of human life, a form of life which European Christians paradoxically and tragically projected upon the hunter-gatherer peoples whom they encountered and colonized.

### 5.3.2 The Story of Creation as an Agrarian Myth of Exile

According to Brody, the creation story in the book of Genesis is not a universal story about human existence, but rather “Genesis is the creation story in which aggressive, restless agriculture is explained, is rendered an inevitability.

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30 Ibid., 7.
Its first eleven chapters are the poem of the colonizers and the farmers. Not the story of hunter-gatherers.”

This story of exile begins not in Genesis 3, however, but with the creation of the first farmer.

In the first chapter of Genesis, the first human is described as a herder, created alongside cattle and told to tend to the cattle. Moreover, the first command God gives to these herding humans to spread over the earth and subdue it. For Brody, this command suggests that “the prospect of restless conquerors” is already there from the beginning. On the other hand, in the second chapter of Genesis, the first human, Adam, has no herds, as his diet appears to consist only of the kinds of vegetables one finds in a garden, which is precisely where God has planted him. Thus, in Genesis 2, there is no command to spread and subdue the earth, which means for Brody that this second human—the farmer—is not destined for restless conquest, in contrast to his herding counterpart from Genesis 1. However, the possibility for restlessness is also present to this first farmer, and the problem really begins with marriage.

31 Ibid., 96.
32 Ibid., 71.
33 Ibid.
In a way similar to Berry’s agrarian anthropology, Brody argues that in the creation story of Genesis, marriage, the household, and one’s homeland are inextricably integrated realities. However, for Brody, domesticity represents the prospect of exile, not of homecoming: “As Genesis points out at the close of its second chapter, this unity of man and woman—the one being made from the bone of the other—means that the couple will be united, and this will cause them to leave the homes of their parents. They will go forth to make their own way in the world. The power of love is the first origin of exile.”34 According to Brody, then, before Genesis 3 has even taken place, divine fiat has already imposed the seemingly painful reality of restlessness upon humans as a necessity and as destiny. What begins as the possibility of restlessness in Genesis 1 and 2 becomes a reality in Genesis 3 with the exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

For Brody, from Genesis 3 onward, the possibilities of exile and conquest established in Genesis 1 and 2 begin to not only unfold but to intensify. This comes to the fore in Brody’s analysis of the Cain and Abel pericope. The brothers mirror the two humanities portrayed in Genesis 1 and 2. Cain is a farmer and his

34 Ibid., 72.
brother Abel a herdsman. According to Genesis 4, Cain, the farmer, kills his herder brother. The result is a curse upon a curse, the curse of restless wandering east of Eden. Cain, the wandering farmer, goes on to make his home in the land of Nod, a land whose very name denotes wandering, where he establishes a city named after his firstborn, Enoch.\textsuperscript{35} Brody thus writes, “we begin to see [in Genesis 4] the human being as settled \textit{and} unsettled—a person displaced from his home, roaming the harsh earth looking for land to till, for somewhere to live. He can settle in a restless way, building, inventing, shaping, and then, as need be, roam farther afield—repeating the pattern that is the farmer’s destiny….”\textsuperscript{36}

Two things stand out from Brody’s exegesis of the figure of Cain as representative of farmers. First, in Cain, Brody sees an inherent connection between the farmer and the curse of exile, which only intensifies as the story unfolds. Second, the city and the farm are an extension of one another, and they represent together not settled life but rather wandering humanity living in exile from Eden. Cain, in a way analogous to Romulus and Remus, is thus not only the progenitor of farming but also of the human urge to settle, to make a city, to

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 74.
make a home through violent conquest. Wandering, exile, and death go hand in hand in these first chapters of Genesis. Moreover, as Brody notes, “Cain’s lineage triumphs. He does find new lands, and his descendants become the city dwellers and the most numerous, creative, and successful people. The one who is forced to roam, in exile, into unknown lands prospers.”\textsuperscript{37} About Abel, the herder, we hear no more. His story is marginalized as the rest of Genesis follows the story of tillers of the soil, tillers like Noah, whose story is characterized by the loss of home. Life east of Eden is henceforth defined by the inevitability of exile and wandering and by Cain’s longing for home.

As we move from Cain and Abel toward an account of the peoples and nations of the world, Brody observes that Genesis sets up a patrilineal history where peoples are defined not by the lands they inhabit, as much as by their ancestry. “For people who are settlers,” he writes, “cursed to leave home and yet working all their lives to make homes, ancestry is that which defines. Not land, not an Eden, not a community, but a family line, a lineage.”\textsuperscript{38} Here we have a kind of melding together of the two humanities presented in Genesis 1 and 2. As

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 74.
farmers continue to struggle to get recalcitrant soil to produce, they continue to bear children who have less and less space for sustenance. Those who are not firstborn must accordingly leave their family’s lands in search of new land to possess. Genesis thus gives us a glimpse of a system of inheritance and land possession that is common to farmers, not herders. This is a history not only of farmers but of nations.

This “social system of the farmer” is defined by the curses upon the earth and upon women at childbirth. The commands of God given to Adam and Eve and to their offspring as blessings, the command to multiply exponentially, do not in fact go unheard or unanswered, but rather they become curses that also grow exponentially. If Adam and Eve were to multiply and to bless the earth by helping it to multiply both plants (farmers) and animals (herders), what we see in Genesis 5-10 is a multiplication instead of the curse upon all of creation. The result of this multiplication of the curses is that

39 Ibid.
40 “The curse of the pain of childbirth is given its full poignancy by the divine insistence that humans have as many children as possible. The curse of barren earth is made dreadful by God’s emphasis on agriculture. Cain is curse, but it is his story that prevails he, the farmer and murderer, establishes a lineage that can take glory from its creative achievements. Noah, the farmer and vintner, is the survivor, but his sons are pitted against one another—two the master, one the slave.” Ibid., 76.
By the end of the ninth chapter of Genesis, humans are exiles bound to move over the earth, struggling to survive on harsh land, aided by dominance over all other creatures. In their hearts, from first creation, humanity rebels against God’s laws, ready to kill one another, brother against brother, harboring evil. They are farmers, gardeners, city dwellers, metalworkers, music makers, wine drinkers. But they are cursed in these things: they have no sure home and are forever conquerors, making gardens and tending domestic animals in places that are harsh and foreign. Their society is one of restlessness, of male supremacy, of a quest for dominance in which each family knows little trust and seeks always to father as many children as possible.\textsuperscript{41}

In their exile from Eden, the desire of humanity to make a home in creation brings death and exile rather than life. The stronger the desire to overcome the condition of exile, the more death, dispersion, and exile take hold. The conclusion to the creation story for Brody is thus the tower of Babel: “the final decisive curse is that peoples are henceforth unable to understand one another. They must desist from building the city of Babel, with its tower of human unity. Instead, they are condemned to be farmers and gardeners on a harsh land, to roam and disperse, move, and conquer, speaking a babble of languages.”\textsuperscript{42}

Slowly but surely, Brody has been reconstructing and analyzing what he calls “the Genesis creation poem” as a story not of humanity in general but of

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 76–77.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 78.
farmers in particular, and as a story that has influenced western civilization throughout more than two millennia. Brody argues that agricultural societies all live some version of the narrative of Genesis whereby they are forced to roam the earth to find a secure source of food and shelter in an often unforgiving world. Moreover, once such a place is found, a process of settling it and transforming it to meet an ever-increasing need for food and security takes place until overpopulation and/or famine causes the process to start over again. \(^{43}\) Gone is the agrarian division between the urban-industrial modern age and the premodern world of fidelity to one’s homeland and household. The latter becomes nothing but the expression of the longing to overcome exile by whatever means necessary.

This is a story not only of farmers but also of urban cultures from ancient times to modernity, for urban cultures depend, as Brody notes, on the farms for their success. Thus, he writes, “Townspeople and country people live and make their decisions within the same cultural and economic tradition: they move, they settle, they create a home, and they find—or their children or their children’s

\(^{43}\) “This mixture of agriculture and warfare is the system within which farms and towns and nation-states and colonial expansion have an inner and shared coherence.” Ibid., 85.
children find—that they must move on. Exile is the deep condition. The longing to be settled, the defensive holding of our ground, the continuing endemic nomadism—I suspect that we share them all.”

Modernity has thus been comprised not by the loss of an agrarian way of life but by its success and ultimate outcome. However, Brody notes an internal incoherence to the agrarian way of life: it is built on the desire to settle, but its efforts to satisfy this desire led to ever more wandering. According to Brody, agrarian life is a series of homecomings in the midst of exile, and home is thus always built on the site of a wound. Exile, and not home, define life. Moreover, in Brody’s view of the agricultural world migration becomes almost synonymous with colonization, doomed to be the result and the source of pain. Mobility gives rise to colonialism, and in turn, agriculture causes mobility. Thus, Brody’s diagnosis of our current cultural crisis is not that we have forgotten our agrarian

44 Ibid.
45 “this success is built on opposites. On the one hand, a passion to settle, on the other, a fierce restlessness; a need to find and have and hold an Eden, alongside a preparedness to go out and roam the world; an attachment to all that is meant by home, and an overriding commitment to a socioeconomic system, to some form of profit rather than to a place. The agricultural system is a form of settlement that depends upon, and gives rise to, the most pervasive form of nomadism. The urge to settle and a readiness to move on are not antagonists in the sociology of our ear; they are, rather, the two characteristics that combine to give the era its geographical and cultural character.” Ibid., 84.
46 Ibid., 96–97.
past (*pace* Berry) but rather that we are more than ever living up to its inner logic. The forces of urban-industrial modernity and of neoliberal globalization may be defeating the small family farm and subsistence farming communities around the world, but these forces are in that sense a kind of self-defeat, the necessary self-destructiveness of an agrarian way of life.

5.3.3 The Hunter-Gatherer Way

Brody wants his readers to recognize that it is possible to imagine a world in which exile is not the universal human condition. This is precisely what he discovered during his time among the Inuit. He writes, “Genesis is not a universal truth about the human condition. Inuit children do not grow up with the curses of exile.” The drive to root oneself in the land inherited from our parents and to protect it from any possible outside threat as well as the drive to migrate across the earth in search of new frontiers constitutes two sides of the same story and that story is one told by agrarian societies. We need a different story, one that only the so called ‘nomadic’ peoples can tell us. What might life

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47 Ibid., 96.
48 Ibid., 86.
look like if exile were not the foundational human condition? What might the story look like if Abel, and not Cain, had survived to become its protagonist?

According to Brody, the opposite account of reality, offered by hunter-gatherers, is to view the human condition as not defined by exile but by home.

Hunter-gatherers constitute a profound challenge to the underlying message that emerges from the stories of Genesis. They do not make any intensive efforts to reshape the environment. They rely, instead, on knowing how to find, use, and sustain that which is already there. Hunter-gatherers do not conform to the imprecations of Genesis. They do not hope to have large numbers of children; they will not go forth and multiply. Everything about the hunter-gatherer system is founded on the conviction that home is already Eden, and exile must be avoided.49

But home here is not a process, not something which we must constantly be manipulating, changing, and constructing, but is that which already exists in perfect harmony and to which we must simply grow attuned. Home cannot then be the farm. It definitely cannot be the city. Home is the wilderness. There is no pilgrimage there because there is no ‘here’ that is outside of where we live. All motion is within the wilderness space that constitutes home, within one’s land, and within one’s people. Brody is right: if there is a constant ebb and flow that moves to the rhythms of the land, there is also a static character to this life.

49 Ibid.
Brody’s account of hunter-gatherers offers an important deconstruction of a Darwinian and Hegelian view of history that locates western civilizations at the telos of humanity. It is a fitting rejection of the simplistic story that rudimentary hunting-gathering peoples became civilized by entering into agrarian settlements and finally into cities and conquering nations. As others (like Jennings and Tinker) have argued, this view of history has colonial roots, and it was a critical argument in rationalizing the reappropriation of not only Amerindian lands but also African and Asian lands, and the imposition of European cultures which supplanted supposedly “nomadic,” “uncivilized,” native cultures. Brody turns the tables and argues for the European colonizers as uncivilized and nomadic. Moreover, there is great merit in the important links that Brody draws between agriculture and human mobility. Undeniably, it has been the search for arable land that has moved civilizations, empires, and nations to expand and migrate, displacing and wreaking havoc on the peoples of the land which they reappropriate. That this mobility in search of fertile soil is also linked to colonialism is also historically demonstrable.

However, Brody’s argument that the social logic of any agrarian system inevitably produces migration and that every migration, in turn, is a form of
colonialism is questionable. Is nomadism truly endemic to agriculture?

Moreover, are there no other factors at play in the desire and the capacity to migrate and conquer other lands, factors like class or national-ethnic identity? Brody himself says that his argument “pays no attention to class or event or nation.” Are all farming peoples of history simply enacting different versions of the Genesis narrative? Brody’s meta-narrative flags important problems and flaws with a simplistic embrace of agrarianism, but it also makes questionable universalizing moves which are equally problematic. It helps to see that Brody’s way of reading the Genesis creation narratives is informed by his own upbringing and that this shapes his treatment of the hunter-gatherers, who are the foil of the Genesis agrarian myth.

This reader also wonders whether Brody’s reflections on his own upbringing give us a hermeneutical lens through which he re-reads a westernized version of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Brody’s mother, a Jewish woman, living in Germany at the start of the Third Reich, managed to escape the Holocaust only by seeking asylum in Great Britain. There, Brody himself grew up in between two worlds—the world of post-Holocaust Judaism and the world

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50 Ibid., 85.
of one of the greatest colonial powers known to history. Reminiscing about his experience attending Hebrew school as a child, Brody recalls, “we were not far from the events of the Second World War: as well as Hebrew and Talmud, we were learning how to take our places in the community of puzzled immigrants. Many of our parents had had to re-create themselves as English, as professionals, as human beings with a right to life.”\(^{51}\) Brody goes on to remark that “the teachers of these lessons [in Hebrew school] would have said they were making sure we learned the stories and rituals of the Jewish people. In fact, we were schooled in a mixture of elementary Talmudic scholarship and the rudiments of Zionism.”\(^{52}\) In many ways, Brody engages the Inuit through the lens of his experience as a member in a community of “puzzled immigrants” and as a way of responding to the “rudiments of Zionism” he experienced growing up as a Jew and also as Anglican in England. It was in a world of exile, exclusion, and the pain of rejection that the ethos of twentieth-century Zionism took root as the passionate desire to preserve one’s culture and to eventually return and reclaim one’s homeland. Those who strive most to ‘settle down’ and to claim a home in

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 66.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.
the world are, in Brody’s eyes, those who experience the world under a constant threat of exile.

Brody seems to read the entire biblical narrative through a Zionist lens. Scripture becomes a source text for explaining exile and for providing the hope of homecoming. It is not only Jews in the post-World War II diaspora who have seen in this ancient text the reflection of their own woundedness and hope. Many other migrants and diaspora peoples have also found consolation, comfort, and hope in these texts. Yet, Brody makes a peculiar move in his exegesis of Genesis by reading chapters 1 and 2 in light of Genesis chapter 3 and the exile from Eden, rather than the other way around. This is how Brody can read exile into the Edenic paradise itself as a pregnant possibility within the union of marriage. Thus, the story of the fall and of human exile becomes the overarching framework, the first and last word within which there might be moments of grace, but which sets the ultimate source and ends of the story of humankind.

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53 Peoples of African descendence in the rural Southern US, for instance, relied on exilic texts to interpret their experiences both during the years of slavery and during the great northward migration. Modern day Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other Latinx immigrants in the US have also shown sympathies with this text.
However, Genesis does not begin with the woundedness of creation, although that is an important part of the story. It begins rather with the goodness of creation. This goodness of the created order has a priority over exile. Indeed, a good creation in which humanity is at home is the condition for the possibility of perceiving exile as wound. If exile goes all the way down, then is it really evil, or is it simply a natural part of life? In Genesis, exile is always a shadow of the goodness of the created order, a possibility, but not in the sense of a potentiality but rather in the sense of the negation of the truth. Or to put it in Augustinian terms, the very conception of exile in Genesis has no substance or content of its own, such that a life of exile is something to be embraced; rather exile is best understood as the absence of a life-giving relationship with God and our neighbor (both human and nonhuman).

The command to spread over the earth became, in the aftermath of the fall and the cursing of creation, the history of conquest and of colonialism, whereas the command to join to another in love and to make a new home together becomes the history of contested relationships between sexes and indeed between peoples, a contestation that leads to exile (for Cain, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, etc.). Brody is right about this, but it is also possible to read Genesis 3 in
light of Genesis 1 and 2. It is perfectly possible that the restless conqueror or colonizer is practicing a deformed migration that, rightly understood, should be the gift of journeying out in order to journey further into creation, that is, in order to gain more intimacy with the rest of the creatures, from the plants to the animals to the rocks. Is it possible to imagine migration that leads to rest and not restlessness, a migration that is not a form of exile?

Similarly, does it necessarily follow that in joining to another that is different, a stranger in whom lives another people, land, and culture, there lies the experience of exile and alienation from the parent peoples, lands, and cultures, rather than the intimacy of love between neighbors and co-inhabitants? Or could the experience of alienation from one’s homeland in the joining to another’s, be a distortion of the original command to join with another and to make a new home that brings the gifts of parents (cultures, peoples, nations) together to make something new from the old? Which, then has a priority in defining the human condition: the woundedness of exile or the goodness of home and the desire for this goodness that underlies many journeys and migrations? Is the story of the Triune God of Scripture, of this God’s sojourn with Israel into exile and toward homecoming in the land of the Canaanites, a story
about the woundedness of creation, a story about exile that asks to embrace exile, to naturalize the human longing for home it produces, to assume that we are always already in someone else’s land? Or is it a story about the goodness of home, wherever it may be found, and the gift that is sharing life with each other, with the plants and animals, and with the land?

To answer these questions, we must attend to something else that Brody neglects in his narration of Genesis, or rather someone else: Seth. Seth, the third child of Adam and Eve, is neither Abel nor Cain. This child undoes the vicious binary between herder and agricultural worker. Brody argues that in the biblical narrative, we do not see the lineage of Abel, the herder, but that of Cain, and yet that is not altogether accurate, for what we truly see is the lineage of Seth. Indeed, the generations after Cain all perish in the flood. The story of Seth is, in many ways, the story of Eve, the consolation of a mother who has lost one son to his murderous brother and the other to exile. Seth is the hope of new creation and new life in the midst of darkness and gloom. Seth is a foretaste of the fulfillment of the promise to Eve that redemption would come from her offspring, that homecoming is coming from the land of exile, that the curse of painful childbirth will bring forth a savior, that goodness will emerge from the
site of the wound. Brody ultimately simply reverses the binary between farmers and herders, arguing that herders are the true victims of exile at the hands of farmers and that the true vision of flourishing human life can be found in herders, not farmers. Yet Seth complicates this interpretation of the biblical narrative, preventing a simple classification of the world into farmers and herders, murderers and victims, the settled and the unsettled. Seth enters a story of woundedness and of hope from within that woundedness to provide rest and a restored house.

I now want to turn to an account of creaturely life that draws from agrarianism to develop a vision of the goodness of human life entangled with soil, and yet which in accordance with Brody, also attends to the sinfulness of human beings and the wounds which not only farmers and city-dwellers, but even hunter-gatherers, have left on the land. Norman Wirzba, with whom I walk in the next section, narrates human life as both creaturely and sacred, both finite and yet open to the transcended God, both sinful and yet beloved of the Creator.
5.4 An Anthropology of Creatureliness

In the introductory essay to the *Art of Commonplace*, a collection of essays that outline the agrarian vision of Wendell Berry, Norman Wirzba observes, “Novalis, the German romantic poet, and philosopher, once remarked that all proper philosophizing is driven instinctually by the longing to be at home in the world, by the desire to bring to peace the restlessness that pervades much of human life.”54 A few lines later, Wirzba remarks, “our efforts toward homecoming have ended in failure.”55 Wirzba, a Canadian philosopher and eco-theologian, places his fingers on the wound that I’ve been wrestling with throughout this dissertation, “the longing to be at home in the world.”56 But whence this homelessness, and how do we find our way home?

Wirzba’s *This Sacred Life* provides his fullest and most mature answer to this question.57 For Wirzba, to arrive at home, we need to recover and continue to develop our understanding of what it means to exist as creatures who belong in a created order that is the physical manifestation of the Creator’s love. I will argue

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
that Wirzba’s unpacking of the meaning of “creatureliness,” as the core of an anthropology that is oriented toward the flourishing of all creatures and not just humans, draws on Berry’s agrarian anthropology in key ways while also responding to the central concerns pointed out by Brody’s nomadic anthropology. Along the way, Wirzba provides insights into who or what is the human creature and how recovering a sense of creatureliness leads to homecoming.

5.4.1 God’s Creaturely Home

Like Berry, Wirzba’s account of the sanctity of life takes off with a vision of wholeness and connectivity.58 However, Wirzba draws on the Genesis account of creation to develop a view of humans as not only interconnected with the soil but indeed as “soil-birthed and soil-bound creatures.”59 Attentive to the creation of Adam from the Adamah in Genesis 1, Wirzba notes that humans are not simply

58 Wirzba writes, “People are rooted, finite, needy, and dependent beings, drawing their inspiration, sustenance, and fulfillment from the divine, animating power that moves through the soil and into the whole creation. To disown this grounded life, to refuse to give one’s attention and care to it, or to yearn to escape from the limits and possibilities of soil, is to invite manifold forms of misery. It is, perhaps, even to precipitate a kind of death.” Ibid., 68.

59 Ibid., 66.
dependent on the soil for nourishment, but indeed that at an ontological level, humans are soil. Given Wirzba’s soil-centric anthropology, one must be careful in describing humans as being at home on the earth. Such a way of describing home suggests that the soil or landscape is a house we inhabit and which we must manipulate and reconstruct in order that it might become our distinctive ‘home’ place. This way of thinking lends itself to thinking of places as containers that humans indwell but ultimately remain separate from. Contrary to this vision, Wirzba draws on the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold: ‘People do not simply move on or across this world but instead move within fields of interrelated and symbiotic life that join places, processes, and creatures in an indissoluble web.’ We inhabit places the way that a single thread inhabits and indwells a meshwork or fabric, not in the way that an object might fit inside of an empty container.

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60 Ibid.
61 Wirzba warns against “the danger in believing one’s place to be on the earth rather than rooted and entwined within it.” Ibid., 106.
62 Ibid., xx.
63 For Wirzba’s definition of meshwork as he draws on the work of Tim Ingold, see Ibid., 110–11.
To help the reader reimagine a way of inhabiting or dwelling on the earth that is oriented toward the guiding image of meshwork rather than of container, Wirzba turns to the voices and stories of indigenous peoples.

Among indigenous people and hunter-gatherer societies, for instance, the idea of wilderness as a place separate from people is foreign and makes little sense, because forests, meadows, mountains, jungles, streams, and tundra are the places of home, and thus places where people belong. The land is not a place people visit from time to time; it is, rather, where life and personal identity are worked out.... To be apart from the land is to be bereft of meaning and sense. 64

Wirzba’s words resonate with Tinker’s analysis of an inherent interconnectivity between colonialism’s erasure of native cultures and the ecological crisis. Moreover, like Tinker, Wirzba recognizes that addressing the wound of colonialism in the Americas entails more than technological solutions or public policy, it also requires conversion to native wisdom. Yet, like Jennings, Wirzba stops short of addressing the most concrete question emerging from Native American voices: if places are a meshwork upon which our identities and livelihoods depend, and indeed if places are more than just sites of cosmic coincidence but are truly holy sites of encounter and communion with the

64 Ibid., 107.
Creator, then does not reconciliation and redemption for the theft of the
Amerindian lands entail returning sacred lands back to native peoples? I will
return to this question later in this chapter by arguing that one way to start
returning the land is through learning to inhabit native stories about the land
through which we (re)member ourselves back into a covenant that exists
between natives, the land, and the Creator.

The description of places as unique knots in the meshwork of creation and
of human life as a strand among others that make up the knot has the virtue of
also decentering the human as the subject and primary agent of change and
motion in the universe. Humans are not the main actors in the cosmos, and
creation is not merely a stage upon which a theandric drama takes place.
Nevertheless, humans do have a distinct role to play within the meshwork of
creation. Our role is to nourish, protect, and delight in fecundity, for in doing so,
we sanctify the soil and give thanks to the Creator for the gift of life. Wirzba
draws our attention to the institution of the Sabbath on the seventh day of
creation (Gen 2:1-3) as that which grounds the human vocation to sanctify the
gifts of the soil and bless God for the gift of life that comes from the soil.
The seventh day of creation gives us a clue as to who it is that inhabits, indwells, and hosts this creational home. It is the Creator who, on the seventh day, rested, dwelt, and took delight in this house. The Genesis narrative thus presents neither a soil-centric story nor an anthropocentric story, but rather a theocentric drama. The main actor and subject of the creation narrative is the Creator, and humans—who are, and are dependent on, soil—are invited to commune, to participate, and to delight with their Creator in the beauty of creation. It is the Creator’s Word that brings all things into existence, and it is the Creator’s Spirit that delights, indwells, and rests upon creation, vivifying and sanctifying all that has been made, filling the created meshwork with goodness upon goodness. Creation is communion, and humans are not the hosts but co-participants with the rest of creation in God’s homecoming and table fellowship with all things that exist.

We are not, then, the hosts of our creaturely homes, much less the masters of the house, nor even its primary residents. If creation is a house, a dwelling place, then we are constitutive elements of this house: women and men, slave and free, Gentile and Jew, citizens and migrants, human, plant, animal, and soil all are part of the brick and mortar that go into the form and structure of this
house. At the same time, humans are also responsible for protecting, nourishing, and delighting in the life-giving and life-producing rooms of creation, the mansions which the Creator prepares for divine homecoming. Though we may experience our lives as a constant work of homemaking, this lived experience is always already framed within our ontological status as those who with the rest of creation are the dwelling place of God. Our sacred vocation is less so to make a home than it is to be God’s home. Belonging and having a sense place in creation is therefore oriented toward our participation in the Triune God’s redemptive homemaking. This means that creaturely activity, including both migrating and homecoming, are elements of our common vocation as creatures to prepare for God’s indwelling presence. Before the end of this chapter, I will return to this notion that our migrations and our homecomings are both ordered toward a single telos, and that is to receive the gift of God’s indwelling presence in creation. Yet, before turning to that we first need to analyze how humanity’s

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65 “The human being is not only placed in the garden by God. The Adam is also instructed ‘to till it and watch it’ (Genesis 2:15), suggesting that gardening work, besides contributing to human nourishment and aesthetic pleasure, is essential for understanding oneself and the world.” Ibid., 66.
holy vocation to join with creation in anticipating God’s homecoming is one which in this age takes place amidst the curse of the fall and our exile from Eden.

5.4.2 The Curse of Living Uprooted

Like Berry and Brody, Wirzba agrees that the disease that afflicts modern industrial societies stems from the attempt to live lives uprooted and disconnected from the soil—or to put in his terms, to live unaware of the meshwork from which we draw life. To live that way is to destroy the very means through which the Creator gives us life. That said, Berry pinpoints the modern urban-industrial age as the turning point in history when this affliction really began to take root, as people migrated from farms, and life with the land became life in the urban industrial complex. Brody sets the clock farther back, arguing that already in premodern times, the movement from hunter-gatherer cultures to agrarian cultures is what actually marked the beginning of the age of uprootedness; rather than being the alternative to extractivism, the agrarian turn, according to Brody, enables the construction of extractive societies and empires.66

66 Brody’s thesis in this regard echoes that of James C. Scott, who argues that the move from hunting-gathering to settled states and agricultural societies marked the beginning of systems of oppression including slavery and the patriarchal family structure. See James C. Scott, Against the
However, Wirzba goes beyond both Berry and Brody and puts the clock all the way back to the very beginning of human existence as the origins of the curse of uprootedness, rejecting the possibility of a time of innocence. In agreement with Brody, Wirzba notes that “the shift from hunting and gathering modes of life to agriculture…[introduced] new social and political forms that relied heavily on systems of coercion and bondage” and that “the development of agriculture also depended on growing practices that systematically denuded and wasted the land by putting it into bondage.” Yet Wirzba also notes that hunters and gatherers, dating back as early as 400,000 years ago, “used fire to burn away old growth and make way for new grasses and shrubs, many of them bearing edible seeds, fruits, and nuts (thereby inviting birds and game for meat consumption).” Wirzba, Berry, and Brody’s conceptions of human history all show us the wounds left behind by human habitation of the earth.

However, Wirzba argues that humanity is not locked into a competition between herders and farmer, as in Brody’s narration. Competition and strife are

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67 Wirzba, This Sacred Life, 16.
68 Ibid., 14–15.
not the defining feature of the created meshwork; the cosmos is first and foremost the Triune God’s work of love. Humans are meant to delight in a creation that is infused with the divine presence. In advocating for seeing the human through the lens of her “creaturely condition,” Wirzba demonstrates that not exile but rootedness and enmeshment are the defining features of human creaturely life. Indeed, Wirzba shows us that what Brody sees and desires in the hunter-gatherer way of life is ultimately also what Berry sees and desires in agrarianism, that is to say, “to want to be indigenous to a place, working to understand where one is, and through this understanding come to an appreciation of a place’s limits and possibilities, and one’s own dependencies and responsibilities, for it is only on the bases of intimacy that people can develop the detailed knowledge they need to live where they are without destroying it.”

However, this indigenizing urge, this longing for home and rootedness, is haunted by a history of violence and death, not only between humans but also against the earth itself. It is not a way of life of a people or a culture that is the source of the destructiveness of creation. Rather, as Wirzba rightly argues, the

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69 Ibid., 70.
reason that humans have been destroying the earth and each other for as long as they have inhabited the earth is that the source of this destructiveness is the very desire and urge for home. Wirzba thus rejects the possibility of dividing up good and evil societies or an elect and reprobate group of human beings. The way toward healing the wounds of creation lies neither in an idealization of agrarian nor hunter-gatherer traditions, for no human lifeway has been innocent of damaging creation, and all traditions sooner or later have fallen to the transhumanist fiction of overcoming the limits and realities of creaturely life. Whether urban or agrarian or hunter-gatherer, modern or premodern, humans have from time immemorial been destroying and disrupting the very created meshwork upon which they rely for life itself.

Though Wirzba doesn’t name it as such, his reading of the history of humanity constitutes a type of doctrine of original sin wherein humans have been afflicted with the disease of trying to overcome their own limitations and creaturely existence from the very beginning. Societies seek to make home in ways that are destructive to other creatures—human and non-human. That said, Wirzba is careful to note that not all humans and not all societies have had an equal impact in wounding each other and the earth. Indeed, he observes that our
current technological age marks an important turning point in history as humans, for the first time in history, have the capacity to provoke a mass-scale extinction event. This capacity characterizes what scientists have called the Anthropocene. However, Wirzba aptly notes that the “Anthropocene has been a latent possibility within the Holocene for a long time.” Life in the Holocene, life east of Eden, is one in which we are caught between the curse of living uprooted and the sinful desire to settle. What kind of politics, what way of life, then, is needed to flourish within these conditions?

**5.4.3 An Ontology of Dwelling Or An Ethics of Hospitality?**

As I discussed in the first chapter, the German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger’s lifelong philosophical project was an attempt to recover the rooted nature of human existence and overcome the homelessness of modern technological world. According to Heidegger, the modern isolation of the individual subject from his enmeshment in the world has the effect of estranging individuals from their concrete lives that renders the modern nomadic homeless spirit. We see here an echo of an agrarian concern with western individualism

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70 Ibid., 17.
and the fragmentation of the ‘whole’ into individual parts. Not only did Heidegger anticipate the problems outlined by both Berry and Brody, but his proposed solutions also bear a striking similarity to theirs. In what follows let me offer a brief recap of Heidegger’s ontology of dwelling which I describe in more detail in the first chapter.

Heidegger’s response to the modern crisis of homelessness was to urge the German völk to recognize and embrace their rootedness in nature and in their cultural communities—their concrete being in the world mediated through life in this place, and among these people and their shared linguistic and cultural practices. Only in embracing an ontology of dwelling and rootedness (Bodenständigkeit) can the modern nomad achieve the longed-for homecoming. Indeed, Heidegger was an advocate of a return to an agrarian life that was close to the soil, of seeing the limitations of living in a particular place as gifts to be cherished, not as obstacles to be overcome. Heidegger even proposed that one of the most critical ways to lead a flourishing life is to be constantly aware of our death, of our limitations, and thus of our fragility, a point of Wirzba’s language of creatureliness is reminiscent.
Early in his career, Heidegger believed that his ontology of dwelling could be realized through the nationalist agenda of the Nazi regime and their politics of homecoming (heimat). Heidegger’s turn toward Nazi ethnonationalist politics as a means of accomplishing the homecoming of the German peoples shows us that the indigenizing impulse, the desire for place and for home, even when conceived in ecologically and culturally sensitive terms, does not in and of itself have the resources to oppose imperial and nationalist violence and domination.

Late in his career, Heidegger favored a retreat from national politics altogether, which he perceived as a veiled attempt to ascribe subjectivist individualism to the collective. Thus, in the postwar period, Heidegger began to advocate a return to a simple agrarian life of dwelling in the soil, away from the sphere of public life. Yet this retreat away from the polis also fails to give us an account of how the urge to be at home in the world and to dwell close to the soil necessarily entails a form of resistance to the violence of the state. An ontology of dwelling and a politics of homecoming, at least in this Heideggerian tradition, seems at worst a friend to chauvinistic nationalism, and at best indifferent to the responsibility we might have to the stranger and the other in our midst.
Aware of this danger, the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, one of the most stringent critics of Heidegger, posits that what is needed is not an ontology of dwelling and a concomitant politics of homecoming but rather an ethics of hospitality grounded in the subjectivity of the migrant. For Levinas, Heidegger’s ontology of dwelling “subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relationship with Being in general, [and thus] remains under obedience to the anonymous and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny.”71 Levinas highlights that it is not at all clear in Heidegger’s vision of homecoming what the ethical demands are in the presence of the stranger or the Other, here in this place, and among this people. An ontology of dwelling, in other words, subordinates any ethical responsibility to the stranger in our midst to the essentializing claims of ethnic, cultural, and soil-bound identity. Not only “can” this invite tyranny and violent forms of cultural domination, but in fact it did, and did so in a very brutal fashion against German Jews.

In response to what he saw as the failure of an ontology of dwelling to respond to modern homelessness, Levinas posits that what is needed is not an

ontology of rootedness, or any ontology at all, but rather an ethics of hospitality (hospitalité). In a Levinasian ethics of hospitality, “the self maintains a proper relationship to place when it welcomes the Other into the home (la maison).”72

Ontology, for Levinas, is a tool in the hands of a violent political state and so he subordinates all claims to belonging and to Being to the ethical demands of that are owed to the “Other.” Hospitality to the migrant and the stranger is the mark of a flourishing life and our rootedness, our totalizing claims on the land, are exactly that which we must constantly seek to overcome as we reach out with love for the stranger.

Levinas’s rejection of a totalizing anthropology of rootedness implies that a flourishing human life is not primarily visible in the agrarian dweller who lives intimately with the soil but rather in the figure of the migrant—one who, because she knows what it is to be a stranger, therefore feels an ethical responsibility to welcome the stranger, the landless, and the homeless as a prerequisite for the construction of a flourishing home. Thus, Levinas writes, “to me, being a migrant is not being a nomad. Nothing is more enrooted than the nomad. But he or she

who emigrates is fully human: the migration of man does not destroy, does not demolish the meaning of being.”

Levinas thus anticipates Brody’s argument that nomadic tribes teach us more about rootedness than the western ‘settled’ society. Yet, for Levinas rootedness is the problem to overcome in developing a true ethic of hospitality that welcomes the other.

The model that perhaps best stands as representative of this Levinasian anthropology of the migrant is the biblical figure of Abraham, a sojourner who always lives with the divine and transcendent promise of homecoming and who embraces an ethic of hospitality through which he welcomes God. For Levinas, Jews live in this tension, called out from their homes to strive toward a promised land and always called to remember that they are strangers, migrants, even at home. Thus, Levinas writes, “To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham’s departure, who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land, and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the point of departure.”

For Levinas, the only way to live into this

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ambiguity and dialectic is to embrace a life of hospitality, a way of life that seeks to be at home precisely in welcoming the stranger and embracing ourselves as strangers in foreign lands.

However, Levinas’s anthropological vision here is not one cultural but of geographical rootlessness. Levinas worked from the Jewish monotheistic tradition in order to respond to the modern. Yet, what he finds in the Jewish tradition is neither a myth of agrarian exile (a la Brody), nor an embrace of geographic rootedness (a la Heidegger) but rather the notion of a “chosen home.” The migrant is not, in Levinasian terms, beholden to nativist claims on home. Nor, however, does she embrace a nomadic lifestyle. Rather, the migrant chooses to be at home here and among this people and thus enters into ethical negotiations with those there in the cultivation of home. Home is not a noun but an artform, a constant way of negotiating the I-Thou relationships that constitute life within an ethic of hospitality. Levinas thus writes, “to shelter the other in one’s own land or home, to tolerate the presence of the landless and homeless on

the ‘ancestral soil,’ so jealously, so meanly loved—is that the criterion of humanity? Unquestionably so.”

The politics that emerge from an ethics of hospitality is one in which the state welcomes and protects plurality rather than attempting to preserve a ‘homogenous’ ethnic and cultural tradition. Indeed, all traditions are ordered toward the preservation of human dignity. Just as an individual can be at home in many ways, and indeed in more than one location, so for Levinas the state can be at home without being beholden to a strong idea of territoriality, without a claim on place. That is because place is not first and foremost a site of belonging but a site for welcoming the stranger.

While I agree with Levinas’s critique of an ontology of dwelling, in rejecting any ontological account of humans as bound to places in preference of an ethics of hospitality Levinas operates with a profoundly anthropocentric view of the cosmos. Thus, in the Levinasian ethics of hospitality, plants, animals, the land, and the landscape remain inert and passive objects in the theandric drama of Scripture. As such, while Levinas addresses the modern problem of

ethnonationalist claims on home through his discourse on alterity, it is not as clear whether Levinas is even aware of the problem that is the exploitation and domination of the soil and of other-than-human creatures. Moreover, for foreignness presupposes a consciousness of one’s home and of those who don’t belong naturally in it. Thus, one might argue that a strong sense of one’s rootedness in place and one’s responsibility to place is a condition for the possibility an ethics of hospitality.77

Contrary to such a view, Wirzba’s anthropology of creatureliness and the wisdom of many indigenous traditions suggests a much more holistic view of the human as always already biologically and spiritually interlaced with the soil and thus emplaced. Wirzba accompanies Tinker and Jennings in noting that colonialism disenchants the universe in such a way that we lose the sense in which places are not just stages for human activity, but sacred sites, and the soil more than just geographic location or resource but rather a marker of identity

77 Luke Bretherton’s analysis of Derrida’s conception of hospitality reveals an intrinsic paradox at the heart of any ethics of hospitality, namely that “to be hospitable we must come from somewhere—we must have a home/circle of friends—yet such a circle depends on acts of exclusions.” Bretherton ultimately argues that for Christians living in anticipation of the eschaton, “hospitality is always required, as the other is always, at some level, the stranger.” Bretherton, Christ and the Common Life, 278.
and an agent in the world. Viewing the soil as an active participant and political
agent and thus of human life as co-determined and co-dependent with the non-
human world has the effect of destabilizing Levinas’s notion of hospitality. It is
not only people who must offer hospitality to the stranger, but the soil itself, and
the creatures who call the soil home have to offer hospitality to the stranger in
order for a common flourishing of all things to take place. Ray Aldred, an
indigenous theologian and member of the Cree Native American tribe, argues
that the hospitality of indigenous peoples is an extension of the hospitality of the
land and of the soil. The colonizers needed not only the hospitality of the
indigenous, but also the hospitality of the soil. This mode of thinking is present
neither in Heidegger’s ontology of dwelling, which rejects any sense of
transcendence, nor in Levinas’ ethics of hospitality, which renders the soil little
more than a passive bystander to human action.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I argued that the human longing
for home in a world estranged from God is one which cannot be resolved by a
simplistic embrace of the human experience of migration (whether that is in the
embrace of exile, diaspora, border-crossing, fugitivity, or even sacred pilgrimage)

nor by simplistic embrace of the world as home and human life as oriented
toward rootedness in the land and a desire to maintain the stability of our people
and culture against the streams of change. Much of what we take to be proper
love of home and wise homemaking is threatened by the possibility of becoming
idolatrous; yet attempts to romanticize or even idealize the experience of exile,
diaspora, and homelessness or unsettledness are equally susceptible to the
charge of idolatry.

Indeed, this is the more nuanced account of home that we find in
Scripture. Indeed, the Biblical drama unfolds in Genesis neither as story of
migrancy or nomadism nor of settler colonialism, but rather as the story of a
people living and struggling between the desire to settle, sometimes in sinful
ways, and the realities of journey and exile. The God of Israel does not condemn
the desire to settle nor the need to journey, but rather accompanies Adam and
Eve, Abraham and Sarah, and Israel as they navigate and negotiate these
dynamics amid the oppressive ways of other tribes, nations and empires all
around them and the elect community’s tendency to want to mimic and succumb
to these.
Given the ambiguity about both migration and home depicted in the biblical drama and visible throughout human history, neither an ontology of dwelling with its concomitant politics of homecoming, nor an ethic of hospitality with its implicit view of the human as migrant, are sufficient in and of themselves to guide us toward flourishing. Rather what is needed is a theological anthropology that takes seriously both the human need for home and the goodness and woundedness of rootedness, and the need to migrate and the goodness and woundedness of the journey.

In what follows I will argue that the realities and experiences of migration and home are both aspects of God’s created order, such that to live into what Wirzba calls our creaturely vocation is to embrace life at the nexus of migration and home. Indeed, the ways in which we migrate or make home such that we violate the soil, its creatures, and our human neighbors are parasitic on the goodness of life lived at the nexus of migration and home. Thus, I argue that the most fitting way to view human life in light of the Triune drama of journeying and homecoming revealed in Israel and Jesus Christ is through the lens of the migration-home nexus. To address the crisis of home at the foundations of the Americas, we must begin with a recognition of the forms of political, social,
economic, cultural, and spiritual negotiation that emerge from the margins and
the borderlands of societies where the migration-home nexus is rendered most
clearly visible. It by looking to these wounded sites of *mestizaje* and joining, these
places where home is an ongoing dance of conflict and conciliation between
migrant and native, that we must attempt to discern the Spirit at work healing
the wounds of false ways of migration and homecoming and joining peoples,
land, and cultures together in Christ.

### 5.5 Toward a Theological Anthropology at the Migration-home Nexus

The experiences and realities of home and migration often fall into
disciplinary discourses where they are kept separate, if not at odds with each
other. This is the case not only in the social sciences but, also in theology and
philosophy. However, for the migrant, the realities of home and migration are
inextricably bound, each mutually informing the other. This intrinsic relationship
between migration and home is what sociologist Paolo Boccagni discovered
through his research on Ecuadorian migrations. For Boccagni, the meaning,
importance, and achievement of home is not obscured by migration, but rather
the fundamental structures of home that seem to be shared across all humans are
rendered more legible in the migrants’ search for home. Boccagni thus coins the term migration-home nexus precisely to describe how transnational migrants’ practices, cognitions, and emotions about home provide a unique and helpful lens for understanding the fields of home studies and migration studies.79

The reason that home is revealed in a unique way in the lives of migrants is that migrants are called to question and negotiate what most sedentary people take for granted concerning the meaning, importance, and the means of achieving a sense of home. Moreover, many migrants perform this self-reflection while balancing a variety of factors, including navigating and resisting economic and social forms of oppression that lead to spiritual and cultural instability, adapting to various new physical and cultural settings, and learning from their successes and failures in achieving a sense of home. This constant work of self-reflection and negotiation that takes place in the migrant’s search for home is what Boccagni describes as “homing.” The term homing incorporates the migrant’s changing emotional and relational experiences (feeling-at-home) and

79 Boccagni notes that “some peripheral concern with all of these issues [pertaining to the search for home] can be traced across much research on transnational migration, as well as in ethnographies of immigrant communities, networks, and families. However, home tends to lie there as a tacit background, exactly as it does in people’s everyday life. The point is that there is much to gain from bringing it to the fore.” Boccagni, Migration and the Search for Home, xxv.
social practices (home-making) to discern the kind and quality of relationship that not just migrants but all people have to their homes.\footnote{As Boccagni notes, “migrants’ ways of homing, driven as they are by the need to question what is usually taken for granted, are revealing of the material and relational bases of the home experience at large.” Ibid., 105.}

The making of the noun ‘home’ into its predicate form also suggests that for the migrant home is a process that requires forms of practical reasoning that begins with a vision of the good home (usually emerging from the migrant’s rootedness in their culture and/or faith) and which also are attentive to what is necessary to implement a vision of home among this people and their culture and in this particular land and its history. Again, this process is often taken for granted by those who enjoy a sedentary lifestyle, but they constitute the daily struggle of many migrants.

We must not, however, confuse the process of homing with an embrace of rootlessness. On the contrary, migrants often show a unique and intense attachment to concrete places and to the material foundations of belonging. Though this sentiment is found most pervasively in migrants belonging to a poor working class or those who were forced to leave their homelands in order to survive, it is even found in those whose status in the world allows for a more
pleasant journey. Thus, Boccagni notes that the concept of homing “overcome[s] the stalemate between the traditional ‘assumption of home as a fixed and stable entity’… and the recent emphasis on the fluidity of home, on the prevalence of ‘routes’ over ‘roots’ in shaping its experience, or even it de-territorialization.”\(^\text{81}\)

The unique power of the home-migration nexus and of the notion of the migrant’s homing is its challenge to the binary often held between home/rootedness and migration/mobility. “Homing” is thus a term which incorporates the reality and need for home with the reality and need for migrating, seeing both as co-constitutive of a single process of seeking human flourishing.

The forced choice between an ethics of hospitality and an ontology of dwelling is, in view of the migration-home nexus and in light of migrants’ everyday practice of homing, rendered out of bounds. The migrant does not leave home behind, but brings home with her wherever she goes, and in the process rethinks and renegotiates both her memories and understanding of her native home and the possibility of being at home anew with those whom she encounters in a new place. Home is thereby shown to always already be a

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 108.
political and ethical act in which ethnic, cultural, and social differences are constantly renegotiated at the site of encounter between peoples, cultures, and lands in life of the migrant. I now want to take this social insight one step further by arguing that Christians have biblical and theological reasons for thinking critically about the home-migration nexus as a part of the created order.

**5.5.1 Theologizing the Migration-Home Nexus**

In Berry’s account, migration is at best a happenstance of life, but ultimately, human life is ordered toward the domestic sphere, toward home. A brief pilgrimage to the wilderness may be necessary from time to time, but pilgrimages always end back at home. Migration, however, is something altogether different, for it implies the making of a new home somewhere, requiring a fundamental uprootedness. In Brody’s account of human history migration, in the sense in which I just described it, is a direct result of the agrarian nomadic and colonial way of life. Thus, for Brody, the history of human migration is marked by loss and woundedness, a woundedness that is coming to a critical point in this current age of the Anthropocene. Indeed, a life of endless
exile and escape is unsustainable; it is an attack on human flourishing. Far from embracing such a way of life, Wirzba describes its unfolding thus:

In the past, as places were degraded and wasted, people either moved on to somewhere else, or suffered and died. Empty or open land, unexplored frontiers, virgin territory, untapped reservoirs of natural resources—these are how vast regions have been identified so they could be pressed into service and remade to satisfy human ambitions. Along the way there has been a considerable amount of resistance from indigenous and peasant peoples committed to their places, communities, and ways of life. In most instances, however, their resistance has had little lasting effect, which is why populations of people the world over, whether willingly or not, now find themselves in an Anthropocene epoch. The forms of power that have wounded the world and wreaked destruction in the past, along with the conceptions of human freedom that these expressions of power presuppose, now threaten the earth processes and life systems of the whole planet (which is why scientists like Stephen Hawking argued that we must make plans to colonize other planets). If there is something genuinely new about this time, it is, perhaps, the realization that there are few, if any, open, untapped places left on Earth to move into where these forms of power can be continued much longer.82

This is a way of framing the human history of migration as a give and take between colonialism and the fugitivity of those victimized by the advance of empire and colonization. It presents the story of humanity as a story of declension and apocalypse in which our only hope is to keep running away, even

82 Wirzba, This Sacred Life, 38.
if this means running away to space, the final frontier. The human is a migrant, but in a tragic sense: a wanderer and a fugitive, forced to make a new city through the technologies of warfare and conquest. This way of framing history resonates with Brody’s account of human history as the lineage of Cain, the first murderer and the first fugitive, who also becomes the first city founder. In the context of a fallen world, a world cursed by human sinfulness, migration takes the form of exile and fugitivity, both of which are forms of uprootedness that while necessary for survival are ultimately unsustainable and fall far short of a vision of life in abundance. An aspect of such a narrative does run through Scripture, and it is a reality that clearly results from the exile of humans from the garden of Eden in Genesis 3.

But what if we don’t begin with the curse of Genesis 3? What if we begin instead with the goodness of creation; would migration still be under the curse of exile? Wirzba’s anthropology offers a more nuanced account of creaturely movement and rootedness, one which rejects the “transhumanist fantasy” that flourishing happens by overcoming the limitations of our rootedness in places, while still positing that creaturely movement is a creational good necessary for human flourishing. If we apply Wirzba’s account to the migration-home nexus,
then it is possible to see how migration, if understood within the framework of a creaturely meshwork, is not only possible but indeed is in some instances necessary for human flourishing. Building on Wirzba’s work, I would argue that migration is not the result of the fall, but rather that migration and home are realities that always intersect and illumine each other in the meshwork of creation.83

On the one hand, Wirzba does critique, along the lines of agrarian and hunter-gatherer views of the world, a pedagogy of mobility that ignores the importance of rootedness. This would include theologies of migration which without reservation advocate for border-crossing. Wirzba’s concern is not with the maintenance of borders per se. Indeed, he makes clear that the concept of a meshwork of creation resists the idea of clearly bounded, demarcated, and enclosed spaces, thus destabilizing the logic that fuels the construction and militarization of many of today’s national borders.84 Wirzba’s concern is rather with the lack of awareness that leaving one’s home to engage in border-crossing

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83 I wouldn’t be alone in making such a claim for this is precisely what sociological research at the nexus of migration and home has revealed in recent decades. See Boccagni, Migration and the Search for Home.
84 Wirzba, This Sacred Life, 110.
is an activity that requires deep wisdom, care, and life-or-death precision. That some people are forced to leave home because home has itself become a space of death does not make any less critical the process of migration and transplantation; it does not lessen but worsens the blow of being uprooted. As for those of us trying to mitigate the damage, not fully appreciating creaturely rootedness prevents us from fully dressing the wounds of those who have been forced to leave home. At the same time, not all human mobility is automatically the result of or driven by settler colonialism, nor is all mobility inherently transgressive, invasive, and damaging.85

Within a framework of creaturely rootedness, movement is a basic and critical aspect of life as well. The creaturely meshwork is not static but in motion, with lines constantly intersecting and joining to create new forms of life. Thus Wirzba writes, “the work of dwelling is not simply to occupy a preformed and finished structure but to appreciate home-making and building as processes that weave us more deeply into specific places with all their diverse creatures.”86 In

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85 All forms of colonialism do demonstrate a lack of the wisdom found in real intimacy with the land and its creature and thus envision the human as fundamentally mobile, and that is to their own undoing.
86 Wirzba, This Sacred Life, 118.
sum, to be rooted and to be in motion are mutually constitutive activities, such that journeying and home and movement and rest are not binary but dyadic, elemental forces of a created order grounded in the eternal dwelling and processing of the Godhead. Therefore, home and migration need not be contradictions in the meshwork of creation. And we know this is true because often, a strong sense of home deepens the meaning of the journey and makes possible a journey, while a journey can strengthen our understanding of the meaning of home.

However, an emphasis on journey apart from a sense of our rootedness in places falls prey to aimless wandering, no sense of beginning or end, and therefore to restlessness, which is the opposite of delight. On the other hand, an emphasis on home without memory of the journey can become entrenched nativism, tribalism, or nationalism, which render a place—an ecological community—an ontological right rather than a gift to be received from the Creator and from the lives of other creatures. Indeed, the forgetting of a thing’s movement in terms of macro-history is what happens in nationalism, tribalism, where people make ultimate claims to the land, rather than accepting the
contingency that is the gift of land and our lives in it, the result of migrations of all kinds.

What this means in terms of the human vocation to live within our creaturely limits is what Wirzba describes as being a wayfarer. “When people wayfare,” he writes, “it is much more likely that they will sense their world not as a collection of points/locations/destinations on a map but as a field of intersecting paths that, in their coming together, form a meshwork. They will sense how their living arises out of and is made possible by the places they move within.”\textsuperscript{87} The wayfarer negotiates between the importance of intimate knowledge of places and the road, and it is this negotiation that makes possible safe travel. Creaturely life that is aware of its own limits and accepts them as gifts is thus life that takes place as an interplay of migration and home.

Indeed, for Wirzba, it is in the interplay of dwelling and migrating that the best thinking and creaturely forms of production—\textit{e.g.}, creativity—take place. It is at the intersection of migration and home that the work of creation is ongoing, that blessing continues to flow, and that newness of life continues to be given as communion from the Creator. Wirzba comments that “The very nature of a path

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
is to invite movement. And the work of dwelling is not simply to occupy a
preformed and finished structure but to appreciate home-making and building
as processes that weave us into specific places with all their diverse creatures. To
be human is to be engaged in activities of life making that nurture the
physiological, aesthetic, and spiritual needs of one’s living body.”88 The product
of movement and rest or of migration and homecoming is the formation of the
life-giving meshwork itself. Again, this is so not because of some inherent
capacity within creation, but precisely because creation finds itself within a
triune story of journeying and homecoming out of which, from which, through
which, and for which all of life exists and has its being.

Wise homing, being wise about growing roots and cultivating belonging,
depends on remembering our journeying as a people, on rehearsing our
migrations and what they taught us. This, in turn, becomes a moral impetus for
hospitality. Wise migrating, being wise about how to leave, how to journey, and
how to arrive, depends on remembering the goodness of home, how God has
provided for us through the land in the past and will protect us and guide us
home once again. Wise migrating and wise homing go together. In a way that

88 Ibid.
resonates with Barth’s criticism of nationalism, now we see why nationalism, which forgets our migratory past and rehearses the false idea that "we’ve been here our whole lives and this land has always been ours," is a kind of idolatry. That said, the embrace of exile is equally problematic because it ignores the inherent goodness of home. Redemption doesn’t come from embracing exile or fugitivity but rather, as the wisdom of the LORD pronounces through the words of the prophet Jeremiah, redemption and the hope of homecoming emerges in the midst of exile. The people of Israel are called to root themselves in the land of their exile by planting trees and building homes.

None of this would sound particularly strange to a migrant. In my own experience, I have found that to love the United States more, the land of my sojourn, I have had to recover and relearn my love for the land of Peru. Exile, endless wandering, and settler colonialism and empire are distortions of the goods of migration and home, present in a fallen creation, which make it extremely difficult to wisely migrate and wisely practice home. But they are hurtful precisely in that they incur the loss of home and of our vulnerability as migrant creatures.
The recognition that life takes place at the nexus of migration and home entails a rejection of any nativist essentializing claims on the land. Neither the colonial-settler’s claim to own the land nor the aboriginal claim on the land as those who were there first get to overdetermine what it means to be home ‘here,’ as both claims lead to fragmentation and are in denial of the histories of movement and migration that always constitute our homes. The mistake to be avoided is that of protecting one’s contingent iteration of homemaking and closing the land off from further fructification and enrichment from the arrival of new peoples. Neither, however, can we simply baptize migration as a good and ignore the need for home. To do so would not only be to romanticize the migrant’s experience and ignore the migrant’s desire for home, but it is also to neglect our responsibilities to our creaturely neighbors with whom we share a common home, both human and non-human.

A theological anthropology at the migration-home nexus bids us recognize the contingency of any rootedness while recognizing simultaneously its necessity; at the same time the migration-home nexus bids us recognize the contingency of our migrations—they need not have happened—while recognizing that migration is often needed and even a good thing, even if serious
losses are incurred. The creational good of the migration-home nexus is constitutive of human life, even if we now experience both home and migration in a fallen state. Most importantly, the Spirit’s redemptive work is caught up both in helping the homeless and displaced to make a home in the world and in activating people to leave home and journey towards promise of renewal. The Spirit works in the nexus of the historical migrations and homecomings of peoples and individuals, resisting false ways of migrating and of homecoming and transfiguring our finite attempts at homecoming and migrating into icons of God’s eschatological homecoming.

The migration-home nexus and the notion of homing also renders problematic the unique focus of Christian ethical and theological discourse on migration to the practice of hospitality, and the right of nations to protect their borders. Whether the focus is on Christian hospitality or on national  

89 Daniel Groody’s seminal essay “Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees” is one of the first to explore migration as a locus theologicus. Ultimately, what Groody sets out to accomplish in this study is to help us think of “theology and migration as a call to cross borders and overcome barriers.” In a way, Brody’s essay articulates what the agenda has been for the field of theological studies on migration over the last two decades. Another foundational book in the field, A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey, edited by Daniel Groody and Gioacchino Campese, offers a series of essays that for one of the first times in history examined modern migration from a Biblical, theological, ministerial, and ethical perspective, but once again the focus of each essay is on care for the immigrant without offering a serious exploration of how migrants themselves offer more than wounded lives but also redemptive possibilities for the
sovereignty, the effect is that the host or the citizen, those whose status at home in the land is well-established, remain the primary moral agents, thereby reducing the migrant to a passive recipient of the host’s compassion or

world and the church. More recently, Gemma Tulud Cruz explores the “challenges” that migrants’ religious experiences make on the church and on theology but once again the book focuses on how theology and the church need to change in order to improve the quality of life for migrants and not on how migrants as those who are already members of the church themselves constitute a new theological vision from their own resources and agency in the world. If we move from theology to more explicit Christian ethical focus, we find Kristin Heyer’s, *Kinship Across Borders: A Christian Ethnic of Migration*. As the title denotes, Heyer’s main focus throughout the book is on the moral crisis that the US-Mexico border presents for the church and on the resources that the Christian tradition offers for negotiating the right of nations to protect their borders and the Christian summons to show hospitality to the stranger. Miguel De La Torre offers a more liberative perspective on migration as he undertakes a personal journey to the border to reflect on migration “in place” as he accompanied other migrants and humanitarian agencies along the trek across the US-Mexico Border. Valiant as the effort might be, it once again reinscribes the idea that the “problem of migration’ can be reduced to the border crossing and the nexus of topics that emerge from that wound in contemporary society. Perhaps the most recent book on this topic, Peter C. Phan’s edited volume, *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration*, (this wonderful book is the result of Peter C. Phan’s many other edited volumes on the general topic of migration and Christianity) offers an interdisciplinary and intercultural analysis of the impact of migration on Christianity and yet it once again fails to move beyond the focus on hospitality, national borders, and migrant’s rights, albeit finally connecting migration to the ecological crisis. These works are all critical to any serious theological and ethical study of migration. Yet, a trend that has begun to develop in the field is that each new book begins by rightly noting ‘not enough has yet been written on the nexus of Christianity and migration’ and yet each book gravitates toward the same categories and perspective which I have just mentioned. Moreover, another common feature across these texts (excepting De la Torre) is that are primarily shaped and informed by Roman Catholic Social Ethics. What this brief survey of some key books in the field demonstrates is how migrants are always already presumed by the authors as wounded victims and never as moral agents whose daily negotiations and cultivation of home in the world is a source of redemptive possibility. See, Groody, “Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees,” 2. Groody and Campese, *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey*. Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience*, Content and Context in Theological Ethics (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Heyer, *Kinship across Borders*. De La Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis*. Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration: Implications for World Christianity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020). 553
rejection. While discerning the nature, conditions, and limits of the practice of hospitality is an essential aspect of ethics of migration, without its corollary of “homing,” it becomes a myopic reduction of the reality of migration. Meanwhile, without the sense of the migrant’s homing as integral to the process of nation-building, the discussion of national sovereignty and of a nation’s right to defend its borders relies on a false story that naturalizes and totalizes forms of cultural and ethnic belonging and their territorializing claims.

How then do we embrace migration and home and the mestizaje which contributes to the construction of the life-giving meshwork? In the previous chapter I argued that our journeys and homecomings have as their telos the Triune God’s homecoming in creation. Yet to live into this reality is to enter a way of practical reasoning that requires us to think like a migrant in search for home, to be wise about homing. As I began to show in chapter 3 and developed further in the previous chapter, we see the redemptive work of the Spirit not in the people who are most at home in the world—the settler colonial and those who inherited the riches of settler-colonialism—but in those whose lives are a constant negotiation of home and migration, those who are in a constant struggle for home at the margins and at the borderlands of societies.
5.5.2 Creaturely Homing and the Church’s Journey to the Margins

Brody, Berry, and Wirzba offer theologies of the creature at home in creation that wrestle with the homelessness and rootlessness that afflict not only humans but, in view of the ecological crisis, all other creatures as well. Of all three, I have argued that Wirzba is best able to offer a view of the human creature that attends to the breadth and depth of the wound beyond any facile binaries or romanticism while still also offering a vision for the healing of the world. Wirzba’s vision is grounded not in overcoming our limitations but rather in embracing our place in creation as creatures who are both rooted and mobile within a life-giving meshwork of creatures. As such, Wirzba does not craft a competition between farmers and hunter-gatherers, between matter and spirit, or between the soil and the city, for all depend on each other for wellbeing and flourishing. Rather being ordered toward competition for scarce goods, the relationships that constitute life are ordered toward love of the Creator and love for fellow creatures.

Wirzba, Brody, and Berry also share a common concern for how the colonization of the Americas marked a critical period in history that has left a particularly indelible wound on the world. These authors recognize that the situation of uprootedness and homelessness, from the colonial period onward,
has dramatically accelerated, intensified, festered. Moreover, I have argued, in
conversation with Tinker and Jennings, that the modern Americas represents a
theological crisis of home. Indeed, the modern Americas represent the attempt to
imagine the best human life possible detached from the soil and from the native
wisdom of the soil and from the rest of the creation. This is the ultimate
expression of the creation of the autonomous individual, the exact contrast of the
creature rooted in the meshwork which Wirzba offers. Jennings, Tinker, and
Wirzba all point to a necessary conversion to the soil as the condition for the
possibility of any successful attempt to respond not only to the ecological crisis
but also to the sins of classism, racism, and sexism. To all of this, I say Yes and
Amen! And at the same time, I would argue that even these wonderful projects
that seek to recover our creatureliness, that seek human flourishing at the nexus
of wise migrating and homing, need to enter more fully into the wisdom of the
cross, the wisdom that the margins and the wounded places of creation are also
the preferred sites of God’s redemptive action, the places where the Spirit’s work
of healing the nations through uniting them to Christ begins and takes root.

I want for a moment to return to Berry’s agrarian anthropology and to his
account of the Odyssean journey of homecoming to display what I mean by
embracing the logic or wisdom of the cross. Berry’s agrarian account of the need
to recover wholeness exudes wisdom, but his agrarian anthropology would be
made more valuable by the wisdom of the cross. I don’t mean by this that Berry
is on the side of empire, but I do think what becomes clear from his exegesis of
the Odyssey is the way in which Berry has not fully entered the logic of the
Christian story of cross and resurrection. Odysseus’s journey is one to the center
of his own world, where he is king. His homecoming is simultaneously his
return to the throne, to his glory as ruler of the island of Ithaka, and to his place
also as lord of his household. And despite Berry’s attempt to excuse the violence
that Odysseus enacts at his homecoming, one wonders if this doesn’t eventually
sink to a utilitarian tactic that contradicts the very logic of agrarianism. The ends
don’t justify the means; death and disregard for other forms of life cannot
eventually lead to a positive calculus for anyone.

Furthermore, there is a way in which the Odyssean journey home as the
paradigmatic western story of homecoming is always already interpreted
through a patriarchal lens: it is a “man’s” journey home. In Berry’s interpretation
of the epic, Odysseus is the agent of the story and Penelope falls into the
background as an object of Odysseus’s desire for home. The relegation of women
to the sphere of the domestic and thus the passive and of men as inhabiting the public and as agents and its roots in the industrial modern age is well documented by feminist critiques. Berry misses here an opportunity to do precisely the kind of work of healing the fragmentation of gender and sex that marks modernity, and instead reiterates the patriarchal mistake. Yet, in the Biblical drama, it is both Adam and Eve who are exiled from Eden and redemption does not come through Adam’s struggle to return for home, but rather through the seed of Eve birthed through pain and toil. Women thus play a crucial role in the healing homecoming of God in new creation. Indeed, in the New Testament women are heralds of new creation as those who are first to visit the tomb of the risen Lord, and as such they are heralds too of God’s eschatological homecoming. I will return to this theme at the end of this chapter as I discuss the work of Ada María Isasi Díaz.

How can theologies of place which offer such a profound and true account of the wound of colonialism and industrial capitalism, an account that resonates with Native and Black theological accounts of the wound of the Americas,

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protect themselves from this Odyssean anthropology which reinserts the human as the savior of creation and as the mediator of blessing and maker of places? The answer lies in Christology, and in the kind of Christology from the margins which I have been developing in conversation with Latin American and Latinx theologians. It is not the human who holds creation together or mediates blessing or makes places, but one particular human, Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus’s life follows a different trajectory from that of Odysseus. Rather than a movement from the margins toward the domestic sphere, from the glory of battle to the glory of the homecoming king, Jesus’s life moves in the opposite direction, from glory to humility, from the seat of the universe to the margins of society. This movement is reiterated throughout Jesus’s cruciform life.

According to the wisdom of the cross, the woundedness of creation is also the site of the Creator’s redeeming grace. As such, the crucified peoples, lands, and cultures of colonial modernity are not only the sites of hurt and suffering which affect us all and which point to the crisis of home that humanity has wrought upon itself; they are also, through the grace of the Spirit, the sites of new life, of resurrection, of the redemptive homecoming of God. This theologia crucis summons the church to look for the creaturely creativity that Wirzba urges

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as the possibility of redemption emerges in a unique way from the margins, from the sites of deepest woundedness.

Rather than following the path set forth by Odysseus, I argued in chapter 3 that in the story of Guadalupe, the church is summoned to Tepeyac, to the margins of society where she is to accompany Juan Diego in bearing witness to God’s homecoming as new creation breaks forth. Guadalupe points us to the political, economic, cultural, and spiritual negotiations that natives made as they were displaced from their lands by the arrival of the colonial church. In the *mestizaje* of the encounter between native cultures and the European cultures that arrived, amid the asymmetries of power between the colonial church and their own institutions, reckoning with the ways in which their ancestral lands were being renamed and remapped, the displaced natives were developing new ways of being at home in the world. Their ‘homing,’ while at times rejected by their own peoples and by the church, was nevertheless chosen by God as a means to bear witness to God’s redemptive homecoming in the land. To learn about this new thing that God was doing in the land, the first bishop of the new church in Mexico had to leave not only the centers of colonial power but even the magnificent church structure where he had settled in the land to travel to the
margins, to the borderlands at Tepeyac. There God was joining bodies and stories, human and non-human creation, lands and cultures, forging a new way of being and knowing in the world. As the church journeys to the margins, she is forced to confess her crimes, her captivity to false ways of being in the world that bespeak the glory of man and not of the cross. She must learn again to listen to the wisdom of natives if she is to follow the wisdom of the cross and to be joined to the new thing the Spirit is doing in the world.

Borderlands are not utopias, but they are good. They are not abstract constructs, they are not “spaces,” they are concrete places characterized by both mobility and rootedness. A “border” is an abstraction, but according to Anzaldúa, “a borderland is a vague and underdetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.” 91 Indeed, particular peoples and cultures inhabit the borderlands although they are those who are often perceived as strangers, indeed as homeless. 92 Far from being uprooted, borderland dwellers have often a longer view of history and a clearer view of the story of the land than many of those who have settled status in the world. Thus, it is no surprise

91 Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 25.
92 Anzaldúa calls the residents of the borderland, ‘los atravesados,’ “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead.” Ibid.
that many of the Chicano dwellers of the borderlands between the US and Mexico see the land neither as belonging to the Mexican state nor to US government but primordially to the Aztec people. To them, it is Aztlan and as such their home.\textsuperscript{93} Borderland culture is not culture that lacks a sense of place, it is culture whose sense of place is marked by woundedness and a constant negotiation between migration and home. It is a sense of place that is aware of plurality. To be at home in borderlands is not to embrace migrancy nor to reject it, nor is it to embrace rootedness nor reject the importance of place-bound identity, but rather to live in the interstices of both in a constant negotiation.

Moreover, borderlands are not reducible to the borders between nation-states.\textsuperscript{94} As an immigrant I have found myself to be more aware of the borders that mark my everyday life in ways that my non-immigrant neighbors often overlook. When an immigrant child graduates from the local elementary school

\textsuperscript{93} The title of this entire section I have been quoting where Anzaldúa reflects on living on the borderland is “The Homeland, Aztlan.” This is further prove that the borderlands might be underdetermined by the state but they are still in a very concrete and particular way home to the inhabitants. Ibid., 23–36. See also Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, Revelation in Aztlan: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 29–74.

\textsuperscript{94} “In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.” Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 19.
in her migrant neighborhood, where she was surrounded by people who speak her language and trade in her world of cultural symbols and enters into the city high school which is either largely populated by another culture not hers or by a plurality of other cultures, the high school becomes a borderland in which she must negotiate home every day. Those who are most settled in the world are often aware of their daily transit across borders and of the negotiations that take place at these borders. Those most settled in the world by way of their political, economic, or social status are also those most often resistant to the forging of new identities through the negotiations between peoples’ cultures and lands that happens at these borders. Migrants experience life in view of many borderlands and the negotiation for home that constitutes these.

This why the discourse on hospitality, while central to a just relationship to the land, ultimately falls short, as it still presumes the landowner, the farmer, and the host as the primary moral agent. Moreover, while it assumes migration is a part of life, it is always treated as an obstacle to be overcome or as a transitional phase endemic to a fallen creation, rather than as a creational gift with the redemptive power of its own, such that migrants are not just people we pity but those through whom redemption comes. Our vocation as creatures is to be
joined, along with the rest of creation, to Jesus Christ by the Spirit, and we do so not by setting and protecting our domestic sphere in order but rather by going to the margins and looking for Christ’s homecoming there. There at the margins, the Spirit is weaving together the fragments of creation—body and soul, farm, and city, etc.—through wounded peoples, places, and cultures.

Moreover, this struggle for home amid structures of oppression and exclusion does not follow an identity politics—peoples of color can succeed in achieving colonial-settler status, and as I mentioned in the last chapter, this is the hope presented by the American Dream to many migrants who arrive on the shores of the US. Moreover, discerning the Spirit’s work will mean paying attention to concrete places and their history, noting the concrete forms of cultural mestizaje that have taken place through the histories of homemaking and realities of migration that intersect to constitute a place, its people, and the culture there. Discerning the Sprit’s work at the migration-home nexus, amidst forms of cultural mestizaje and creaturely joining, requires creative ways of

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95 The Native American ownership of gambling institutions is an interesting case study of how the struggle for home doesn’t follow a politics of identity. Native American owned casinos which produce a great amount of wealth in part through being exempt from property taxes, depicts how it is possible for Native Americans to participate in an extractive capitalist economy in ways that sustain rather than resists the marginalization of native Americas.
navigating these differences between populations and places and the contingencies that exist on both sides. It also requires paying attention to the soil itself and its history.

**5.6 Wise Homing**

What I have done thus far is to argue for the importance of an anthropology that embraces the home-migration nexus and an ecclesiology that discerns the Spirit’s work of redeeming our false ways of homing by turning to the margins and the borderlands of society as sites of redemptive possibility. In this final section I want to draw out three critical implications of this theological anthropology and ecclesiology of the migration-home nexus. First, such an anthropology of the migration-home nexus urges a reassessment of theologies and ethics of migration around the notions of home. Second, theologies of place and the spiritualities of place they produce need to be more attentive to migrations not as obstacles to be overcome but as created goods, and of the borderlands and margins of societies not as merely wounds but as sites of God’s redemptive homecoming. Third, I suggest that we need new ways of describing the phenomenon of migration and its role in the divine economy of salvation and
liberation, ways that go beyond the logics of assimilation and decolonization as the two current prevalent alternatives. Drawing on the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz, I suggest that “transplantation” is a helpful way of describing a liberative praxis of homing that points to God’s eschatological homecoming and the resurrection not only of humans but all of creation. What follows is by no means a comprehensive account, but rather a brief outline of paths to follow that emerge from my extended reflection on theology, migration, and the human longing for home.

5.6.1 Toward a Theological Ethics of the Migration-Home Nexus

Crises such as the humanitarian crisis of unaccompanied minors at the border between the United States and Mexico in 2014, or the exodus of peoples seeking asylum from political persecution or climate catastrophe, summon society to make critical judgments with limited knowledge and resources to preserve vulnerable lives. These immediate responses of care have given way to a reassessment of our institutional policies and our socio-cultural paradigms in light of their effectiveness or ineffectiveness in protecting life and promoting
flourishing. One of the socio-political arrangements which has gone through a radical moral and political reassessment in recent decades in North America is the US-Mexico border and the extent to which it should be legally and physically open or restricted. Another concern of ethicists focused on concerning immigration in recent decades has been the political status of asylum-seekers, as the number of asylum seekers worldwide has increased through the confluence of climate catastrophes, political instability, and globalization. The attention given to the US-Mexico border and to refugees/asylum seekers by ethicists and theologians, especially in the last few decades, is well warranted, as these are often life or death issues.

However, the reality of mass global migration in the last decades also beckons us to ask more significant questions about how the realities of migration and displacement inform, condition, and limit our visions of human flourishing. Such questions cannot be solved or addressed by focusing solely on immigration and border policies. As someone who has experienced the trials of being an undocumented immigrant in the United States, I have found that the questions

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which haunt me are precisely those often left unprobed by ethicists and scholars of immigration who pour all their efforts into solving the crisis at the US national border and leave unaddressed the many crises that persist beyond this boundary, namely the crisis of how to heal the loss of home and how to cultivate a common home among a strange people and in a strange land. In fact, a hyper-focus on border policy has at times obfuscated some more theologically oriented questions about what a flourishing human life looks like at the intersection of the realities of migration and home. Moreover, national borders are not the only borders that affect the life and flourishing of immigrants; county, state, and school district borders, for example, all represent daily and real threats and possibilities to many immigrants’ capacity to root themselves and flourish in a new land.

In line with Levinas, recent scholarship has at times placed too heavy an emphasis on human mobility as giving us the true character of a flourishing human life such that fugitivity, being in exile, and diasporic living become models that we ought to aspire to. However, in the attempt to defy the logics of xenophobic nationalism and cultural homogeneity, such visions make displacement integral to a flourishing way of life rather than merely one aspect
of it that requires careful practical reasoning to navigate and negotiate. While I agree that displaced peoples have much to contribute to our understanding of the world and of a flourishing human life, we must be careful here not to make homelessness the marks of a flourishing life or, for that matter of the church. Homelessness is not normative for human life, any more than alienation and death are inherent marks of the church. Indeed, as I argued in chapter 1, the condition of exile that is often found in diasporic experience is that which is always already overcome in Christ. If Jesus Christ is a crisis to our visions of homecoming in which our homes are established through the violent exclusion and destruction of the ‘other,’ Christ equally presents a crisis to our visions of journeying that embrace the brutality of life ripped away from the life-giving bonds of communion, even communion with those who are now are enemies.

To avoid the mistake of normalizing homelessness that often results from migration, it is helpful to follow Wirzba in thinking about what plants can teach us about the rootedness and enmeshment that makes flourishing possible. According to Wirzba, plants show us that “life is not just networked; it is network...human life depends upon being rooted in a place and being responsive to the potential that is there. Rootedness does not restrict life but is its
precondition. Rootedness makes possible the relationships that build fertility, fecundity, and diversity.”97 There are two ways of thinking about human life as ‘rooted.’ The first is to use rootedness to depict human life as fixed in a single location and therefore immobile. This is not the manner in which I believe Wirzba is helping us to think about human life, for to do so would be to ignore the distinctiveness of plant life from animal and human life. Yet humans and animals are ‘rooted’ in the sense that their livelihood is maintained through a communion with the soil and with all the forms of life that subsists in and through the soil. When human creaturely life is understood in this way, then migration is not simply a change in one’s cultural or geographic “location.” Our home places and the webs that constitute them—the household, the family, one’s community, and one’s homeland—are not merely containers where our lives take place. The home places we leave when we migrate are the meshwork within which our lives have meaning and purpose, they are the condition for the possibility of our wellbeing and flourishing, and indeed they are the media through which the Creator communes with us and blesses us with the newness of life each day.

97 Wirzba, This Sacred Life, 86–87.
Seeing human beings as enmeshed, rooted creatures whose lives and identities depend on the bonds of communion with other human and nonhuman creatures helps us to narrate the losses experienced by many immigrants in a way that often theologies and ethics of immigration fail to fully capture. When we begin to think of migration within the framework of a meshwork of creation and the rootedness of human life, the saying that we leave a part of ourselves behind when we migrate ceases to be purely an expression of nostalgia and takes on biological and spiritual substance. The movement entailed a dissection of a web of life, not the transfer of life from one place to another, which means that some part of our soul and our very ecological make-up does remain. By the same token, in the same way that plants, when uprooted and transplanted into new bring the old soil into the new soil in order to survive, so we humans bring a part of our home-places with us when we migrate. The encounter is not just between an individual and a new land and people, but is an interlacing of two places and their respective histories and cultures, both in the anthropological and ecological sense of the word.\(^8\) Migration, as the act of uprooting oneself from a life-giving

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\(^8\) I am going to touch on this again later in the next section of this chapter when I reflect on transplantation as a metaphor for wise homing.
meshwork, is a life-threatening event whether or not one has a perilous journey across a desert or an ocean. And the impact of migration is not only on the migrant and those immediately around them but on all who constitute the meshwork of the sending and receiving places. For that matter, migrations have a multigenerational and multi locational impact, for they reshape the very meshwork into which multiple generations are birthed.

The discourses of inculturation and assimilation, in that these remain primarily anthropocentric categories and insofar as they function within a purely immanent frame of existence, are thus limited in their capacity to describe the process of being uprooted from one’s homeland and transplanted into another. Social scientists have preferred the language of inculturation over that of assimilation because inculturation suggests that the migrant does not switch his or her cultural heritage and identity in assuming another culture, but rather becomes steeped in another culture until he or she is able to identify with both cultures. In sum, assimilation entails the loss of one culture to gain another,

99 I don’t mean to draw a false equivalence that undermines the trauma of border-crossing for some people. What I do mean to say is that the border-crossing is not the end or the beginning of the trauma and that for those who arrive, the trauma of being uprooted, of losing their home meshwork and being re-inserted into another is as critical for flourishing life as the actual journey.
whereas inculturation makes possible the bicultural subject. However, neither term fully attends to the multidimensional realities of migration that we just spoke of. In migrating, the body, the soul, and the soil change, and not just for the migrant but for the receiving and sending communities. The language of inculturation fails to capture these multiple dimensions. Migration is more like a surgical dissection that cuts through the bond between the body and the soil and thereby also severs the body and the soul. When we reduce migration to border-crossing or cultural navigation, we fail to consider the multivalent impact of migration on the body, the soul, and the soil, and thereby we prevent ourselves from properly tending the wound left behind this surgical procedure, a wound that continues to hemorrhage through the rest of the migrant’s life.

Attention to the rootedness of creaturely life helps us to better understand the systemic, multi-generational, and global wounds left behind by colonialism, indigenous removal from land, and segregation in the context of the Americas. Wirzba renders more explicit the implicit anthropology that is found in Jennings’s and Tinker’s accounts of colonization. Only in a world that is a meshwork of creaturely forms of life and where humans are rooted can we explain why centuries after the systemic displacement of indigenous peoples
from their lands in the Americas, the wound of colonialism continues to afflict the bodies, the soul, and the soil not only of the descendants of the colonized but also the descendants of the colonizers. It also explains why solutions that do not tend to the meshwork do not work, why throwing more money at the problem or creating government agencies is not enough. Only a recovery of the covenantal bonds between natives and lands promises to heal the wound for all who have inherited this trauma. Moreover, insofar as Jennings shows that race is a disease that begins with displacing bodies from the land and replacing land with skin pigmentation as the primary signifier of identity, race too cannot be fully addressed without a recovery of the importance of place and land as the site of identity formation. So too with the ongoing immigration crisis and the responses of either xenophobic nationalism and modern nomadism, both of which represent the failure to appreciate the relationships of co-becoming and co-dependence within which human creaturely life flourishes. Technocratic solutions like building higher walls or getting rid of all walls, while attractive, and perhaps necessary at times, ultimately remain inattentive to matters of the soul—not just the individual soul, but the collective soul of a people and indeed of an ecological community.
Until we recover the importance of home, our attempts to attend to the wounds at the heart of the Americas are profoundly limited. And although it is important that we begin by listening to indigenous wisdom, for indigenous peoples are both much more aware of the meshwork of creation and (along with enslaved Africans) experience(d) the wounds of colonialism most intensely, yet we must also remember that the wound was already there before Europeans arrived, caused, among other things, by the displacement forced upon peoples by warring pre-Colombian civilizations. As a human family, we have not learned the wisdom that is required for migrating wisely, nor have we exhausted the wisdom of being at home in creation. Indeed, today in many ways we are farther away from understanding our rootedness in the meshwork of creation than we were before the fifteenth century. The looming climate catastrophe, the rise in vicious nationalist movements, and the mass migration of peoples urge us to attain the wisdom of wise-migrating and wise-homing all the more.

5.6.2 Toward a Spirituality of Place: Re-Mapping Creation’s Sacred and Storied Places

In his account of creaturely rootedness, Wirzba makes the interesting claim that displacement is actually a conduit of thinking as the meshwork
produces new ‘living’ histories and patterns (aka cultures). The concept of meshwork helps us to see that places are not only composed of living creatures but places themselves have the kind of quality of a living thing. A place is more than just the sum of its inhabitants. It is a living meshwork of creaturely life. Places are not containers but knots of creaturely life, human life, other than human life, the soil, the soul, and their history together. If the Creator communes with placed creatures, then the Creator communes in a way with places, too. Thus, places are formed and deformed, born and also suffer many different kinds of death, and all of this happens in relation to God. Indigenous peoples have always had this understanding of places, an understanding which, as Wirzba reminds us, often is described as “animistic,” although he makes the case that the presence of the logos in all places gives Christians strong grounds to

100 “Displacement is key to knowing because it signifies a breach of the boundaries that keep us locked within ourselves. Understood this way, the task of attention is to abide with an ever moving, ever-entangling world that is not ever in stasis... Cognition should not be separated from locomotion because what we know of a living world is a feature of things moving within it. Thinking is, therefore, a form of fidelity not just to things but also to things in their development as they engage with other things. To forget a thing’s movement is to lose the thing. The swirling eddy disappears the moment one tries to lift it out of the river’s currents.” Wirzba, This Sacred Life, 113–14.

think with indigenous wisdom. It stands to reason, then, that we should also be able to write hagiographies of places, just as we do with people. These hagiographies would be histories that tell of how the Triune God has encountered creation at particular sites, revealed Godself, and blessed people through these places. It also should attest to the woundedness of places, for God’s loving action works on and in a wounded world, and as such, it is restorative as well as creative. Knowing the activity of God in certain places and being able to worship God in response to this activity would constitute a vital spirituality of place.

Paying attention to popular cultural narratives, in that they give us a window into the meshwork of creation and into the negotiations of home and migration that take place therein, is thus a crucial way of cultivating a wise practice of homing. It is tragic that most immigrants, when they arrive in the US, are not told stories that go any earlier than the seventeenth century, and this

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103 See Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, 115.

104 This is not altogether different from medieval spirituality around making pilgrimages to sacred places. John Inge has done interesting work in retrieving this tradition. Where I go beyond Inge is in thinking that we need to pay attention to indigenous spiritualities of place and not just Christian ones. Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*.
failure to develop a common memory that goes beyond the colonial period is related to the marginalization of native cultures and peoples as well as to untruths about the meshwork of creation here. For example, as someone who has taken the United States Citizenship test, I can attest that while one of the questions on the exam recognizes that native peoples existed in the land before the establishment of the British colonies, no exam question asks the applicant to identify a particular tribe or any aspect of native history. That is because the history that matters is that which begins with the inception of the nation and not the history of the land itself. Yet, I would argue, and I think Wirzba, Jennings, and Tinker would too, that knowing the history of the land is fundamental for the thriving of the nation. If, as Wirzba claims, “the measure of well-educated persons is not how many facts they can repeat but whether or not they can tell how their lives, and the lives of others, emerge out of their entanglements with others, depend upon them, and so must also include a measure of responsibility for them,” then we need to tell better and more ancient stories about this place and all places.105

105 Wirzba, This Sacred Life, 114.
We need to teach sacred geography, the hagiography of the land, and that involves teaching about migrations and homecomings, and the *mestizaje* of body, soil, and soul they produced. This is the only way to undo the bad storytelling and bad cartographical practices that emerge from the colonial period.° Walter Mignolo argues that one of the primary accomplishments of colonialism was the way in which the lands could remain colonized for long periods of time after independence because the imposition of the culture of the colonizers and the destruction of the cultures of the colonized meant that new cartography reshaped the land for generations, turning places into copies of the old world. Thus, writing the sacred histories of places that remember the goodness and the woundedness of creaturely places is redemptive work because it points not only to the different proprietors or inhabitants of places but to the deaths of places, their goodness, and even to their resurrection. Writing sacred geographies by listening to the stories of the land, particularly those told from the margins, is

°“Mapmaking in the imperial age did two seemingly contradictory things. On the one hand, it brought near places that were previously unknown and far away. But on the other hand, it presented places as abstract and reduced, having rendered a dynamic, three-dimensional place (four dimensional, if one adds time to the mix) into a static, two-dimensional plane where no one actually lives…. Whereas indigenous people usually named a place in ways that reflected its particular history and features, European descended explorers often named places to reflect the power of persons engaged in conquest.” Ibid., 100.
thus not only cultural work, not only work of reconciliation and justice, but it is also critical Christian theological work. It is how we witness to the resurrection. Over against the religious abuses of history, Wirzba nevertheless argues that witnessing to the sacred—the sanctity of life and of places—is a critical response to the Anthropocene.¹⁰⁷ I would argue that what we are witnessing to is the Triune God’s homecoming, the grand story in which our little stories are founded.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, vicious forms of nationalism, tribalism, and sectarianism arise from not remembering rightly the sanctity of places for those who came before us. Sacred cartography can help us to engage in holy pilgrimages that utilize our sacred geographies to remember rightly. Some liberation theologians, like Mitri Raheb, have already argued that the land itself tells a story about its inhabitants if we are able to have a long view of history that remembers who was here before us and who has been here all along.¹⁰⁸

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¹⁰⁷ "Genuine knowing is thus a form of witnessing that testifies to the ways in which one’s life is implicated in and made possible by the lives of others. And thinking is a form of thanking that aims to keep the currents and creatures flowing into one’s life constantly in mind, and so repositions the thinker in the world so that he or she might be a more hospitable presence." Ibid., 116.

Remembering the people through the stories of the land helps us to resist the attempts to forget or to remember wrongly by those with power. We need a pilgrim’s map of the Americas that would invite people to visit sites like the shrine of Guadalupe in Tepeyac.

How do we teach sacred geography and learn about the sites where God encounters people in creation through narratives of joining? The stories peoples tell about their lands and how they came to settle in these lands often resemble Wirzba’s meshwork. Jennings’s vision of the joining of peoples and cultures requires a vision of creaturely life in which cultures and peoples coexist as porous and entangled entities. Such a vision transcends the modern vision of cultures and peoples as inhabiting rigid enclosures that segregate all things into their allotted places. The meshwork of creation offers a vision of human life that is humble in its awareness of our dependence on human and the non-human and that is therefore oriented toward thanksgiving to the Creator and reciprocity with our creaturely neighbors, rather than one predicated on domination and mastery. Moreover, for Wirzba, the healing work required to overcome the wounds of human destructive practices in creation is happening in the everydayness of life—in eating, cooking, gardening, and even walking from one
place to the next. Healing happens when we are attentive to creation in the way we cook, in the way we dress, in the work that we do with the soil. As Jennings also writes, what matters is intimacy and curating a sense of belonging through focused attentiveness to our surroundings and what God is doing there. I would only add that the margins have a special role to play in how we think about these everyday creaturely activities.

Nevertheless, a spirituality of place does not boil down to stories; a spirituality of place must be attentive to all the forms of embodiment that attend to being present and dwelling in a place. A spirituality of place takes off from an intimate knowledge of what plants, fruits, vegetables grow somewhere and what it takes for them to grow there. A spirituality of place is about intimate knowledge of what other living creatures relate to us within particular places. It is knowing from where our cuisine comes and from where our dances and songs emerged. It is knowing why people are buried where they are. This is what it means to know the stories of the land, stories which tell of the goodness and the woundedness and how these wounds continue to impact not just humans but other than human communities. Discerning the work of the Spirit in redeeming and transfiguring places in creation invites us to read the histories and narratives
of places through a pneumatological lens. Listening to people’s stories is one of the main works we can undertake to participate in the Spirit’s work of joining. *Mestizaje* is about the joining of people’s stories about the land. Because settlers didn’t learn the stories of the natives of the Americas, they were able to justify seeing the land as an object rather than as kin. This has serious political implications.

Migrants have a critical duty to play as the bearers of places, cultures, and peoples and their stories. To learn the stories of one’s people and land is critical for the migrant to be able to flourish in a new land, but also the flourishing of future generations. Transplantation means knowing where you come from in order to discern how to adapt to new soil. Immigrants are the sites where stories meet. Stories of the homes left behind encounter and mingle with the stories of new lands and new peoples, and out of this encounter, newer stories begin to form. This is the way of *mestizaje* and reflecting on this reality through the lens of the Spirit’s work in the world requires one to do theology in Spanglish. This mixing is what I have tried to describe as the work of the Spirit who joins and

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109 Edgardo Colon-Emeric’s reflections on the name of El Salvador.
110 That is to do theology in the modality of hybrid discourse, bringing together disparate stories, languages, and cultures to talk about God and God’s work in creation.
gathers all things in creation. It doesn’t mean everyone has to be a migrant, but it
does mean, even if you have been living somewhere for generations, that you
need to know who lives there besides you and your kin; how your own family
got there generations ago; and what got transplanted from the old land and why.
You still need to be wise about migration.

As I reflect on the importance of cultivating a spirituality of place as
central to the flourishing of both migrants and citizens in the Americas, I am
aware that many will read this as an attempt, yet again, to theologize the land.
Indeed, theologizing the land is dangerous work at this time in history, and yet it
is also important work that we have ahead of us. Many will note that one way to
describe the colonial project in the Americas is as the performance of a vicious
theology of the land, a theological performance that turned native lands into
European and Christian lands as a first step toward turning the land into private
property. The response, however, cannot be to un-theologize the land. Nor can
the response be to delink the church from the land and its history. This is not the
answer for the reasons that desacralizing the land by drawing a strict separation
between the sacred and divine and the earthly, soil-centered, secular leads not to
a wholesome view of the soil but rather leaves the soil vulnerable to
commodification by the state or other powers. We therefore have to cultivate theologies of the land that orient us toward new creation, toward the joining and not fragmentation of all things in Christ and through the Spirit. I would argue that this is not only the demand of a Christian theologian but indeed a summons that emerges from the margins of society.

Throughout the Americas, ordinary people whose spiritualities and cultures are influenced by both the church and by indigenous traditions practice rich spiritualities of the land. The devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe on many home altars of the poor in Mexico and throughout the Americas, and the millions who pilgrimage to her holy shrine in Tepeyac, bear witness to a constant sanctifying of the land and spirituality of place that transcends and transgresses the colonial desacralization of the land. But Guadalupe is not alone in this. We could point to myriad other devotions to sacred shrines and places that are erected, most notably not at the centers of powers but often in the margins, among the poor and the displaced, and even in immigrant communities. One salient example of this is the shrine to Our Lady of Charity in Miami, Florida, a sacred site of devotion built up by Cuban exiles whose devotion as it relates to questions of identity, place, and the sacred is described well by Thomas Tweed
in his work in Our Lady of the Exile. Through holy pilgrimages, holy processions, home altars, dances, and songs, the everyday devotion of these ordinary people binds them not only to God and to the sacred but also to the land and to concrete places. The sacred meaning that these shrines create goes beyond a view of the land as commodified good or as European property continues.

Seeing these devotions as merely religious superstitions, or only analyzing them through a sterile academic lens, would be to take for granted modernity’s disenchancing vision of the world, and thereby to perform a more mature version of the colonial gaze. I have argued that what we need instead is a hermeneutics of the Spirit that allows us to see how, through everyday devotions in the form of pilgrimages, processions, songs, meals, home altars, the Spirit is at work binding all things to Christ and all things to each other including peoples and land, and all of this at the sites of most woundedness, at sites of exile. The question is, can Christians participate in this work of non-colonial theologizing of the land? Can theologizing of the land become a tool for decolonization? Yes. It must be. New

Creation demands it. The margins demand it. But there’s no easy way forward. There’s no path traced out before us. However, I believe that the first step will have to be to think differently about how we migrate and how we seek to cultivate a home in the world.

5.6.3 Toward a Liberative Praxis of Homing: Transplantation

For many women, the home and the domestic sphere point to a serious, at times even fatal wound, and to the way in which women have been marginalized precisely by being kept away from the public sphere and enclosed to the private sphere of the home. The enclosing of women to the domestic sphere of passivity and thus away from the public sphere of agency was and is an experience shared across ethnic, racial, cultural boundaries, and social classes. Moreover, the home has also in many cases been a site of male violence against women. As such, Jaqueline Hidalgo observes that women are not only in a struggle for home with the rest of humanity, but that home itself in a way that is particular to women is the very site of the struggle. If home is the site of oppression, how then can home be a site of redemption and liberation for

women? Critical reflection on the meaning, importance, and achievement of a sense of home in the world must thus not only be textured by the experiences of migrants and those who live in the margins and borderlands of societies, but it almost necessarily must be concretely oriented toward the liberation of women and their communities. What then does a liberative praxis of homing look like that leads to the flourishing of women and their communities?

The answer to this question deserves an entire dissertation of its own, and within the limits of this project I can only gesture toward a starting point. In chapter 3, I argued that one of the critical issues addressed by Latina theological voices is precisely that of home, and that the work of Mujerista theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz is especially promising for rendering a liberative praxis of home. As I have argued in this chapter, home and migration are not mutually exclusive terms but rather mutually informing and illuminating aspects of human life, such that a better way of describing the work of cultivating home is

to use the word ‘homing.’ I accordingly now want to briefly outline the practice of transplantation as described by Isasi-Díaz in her essay “A Hispanic Garden in a Foreign Land” as offering us one important way to engage in a liberative praxis of homing.\textsuperscript{114}

In this beautiful essay, Isasi-Díaz reflects on her return to Cuba for the first time since her exile. She visits her mother’s garden, now in her grandmother’s house in La Habana. Walking through the garden, Isasi-Díaz observes,

As a foreigner in an alien land, I have not inherited a garden from my mother but rather a bunch of cuttings. Beautiful but rootless flowering plants—that is my inheritance. Rooting and replanting them requires extra work on the part of the gardener; it requires much believing in myself to make my life flourish away from the tropical sun of Cuba. Some of the flowers I have inherited from my mother help me to deal with this situation; others at times can hinder me.\textsuperscript{115}

An immigrant, Isasi-Díaz recognizes that migration requires the wisdom of a gardener. Unlike others who inherit gardens from their parents and are called to nourish the soil and preserve it, she inherited instead the rootless cuttings. The flowers are, of course, metaphorical, representing her cultural inheritance and the artifacts and practices that once rooted her and her family in their native

\textsuperscript{114} Isasi-Díaz, Mujerista Theology, 13.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 14.
Cuban soil. Now she is tasked with the hard labor of planting a garden, indeed of planting herself in a new garden. She must now tend to her own nourishment with the task of transplanting her uprooted body and her spirit in the strange new soil of the United States.

As any gardener knows, the task of transplantation requires careful attention to detail if the transplants are to flourish together with the native plants of the garden. Cognizant of this danger, Isasi-Díaz notes that “rooting and replanting [the flowers] requires much believing in myself to make my life flourish away from the tropical sun of Cuba.”116 In particular, she knows what every wise gardener and every wise migrant knows, that transplantation entails knowing both about the transplants and their native soil and the soil and plants in the new garden and navigating the needs of both.

First, a gardener needs to know which plants to transplant into the new garden. Thus, Isasi-Díaz notes that, “some of the flowers I have inherited from my mother help me to deal with this situation, others at time can hinder me.”117 Migrants can’t take every aspect of their native homes with them to the lands of

116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
their sojourn, but they also cannot arrive empty handed. Knowing what aspects of home to bring and which to leave behind is one critical aspect of the work of transplantation. The wisdom of the gardener depends both on being able to receive the gifts of a previous culture and to know how to retain them as well as knowing what gifts to transform, change, or to even reject. Isasi-Díaz, for instance, treasures the faith, the love of family, and the vocation to struggle which her mother handed down to her, while also criticizing her mother for her acceptances of sexism in the family or in the church.

But that’s not all. Effective transplantation also requires knowing well the receptivity and health of the soil into which the new flowers are being transplanted, and for that matter who else tends to that garden. Thus, Isasi-Díaz notes that “belonging to the culture of one of the ‘minority groups’ has meant that the plants in my garden have been seen as weeds or exotica; they are either plucked up or treated as a rarity.”\textsuperscript{118} Knowing where and how to replant one’s cultural heritage is just as critical a task as knowing which bits of home to bring with on the journey. The work of migration, like the work of gardening, requires

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 15.
the wisdom of knowing what, when, how, why to plant, and perhaps even to develop a new culture, a new soil.

For Isasi-Díaz the liberative struggle of Latina women is one which requires paying attention to the precise nature of Latinas’ homelands. Thus, she writes that,

Our Latina specificity, for example, includes the fact that the majority of us find ways to relate in a concrete way to our countries or communities of origin. We send money on a monthly basis; we often return to visit. Those of us who were born outside the U.S.A. work to be allowed to vote in government elections in the countries from which we come.... Liberation for us, therefore, has to do with more than better participation in the benefits that accrue to us because we live in the U.S.A.... It means we have to struggle to bring about radical sociopolitical change so we will not continue to live at the expense of our sisters and brothers in our countries or communities of origin.\(^\text{119}\)

Attending to the specificity of Latina women’s experience as multisite persons suggests that Mujerista liberation is more than just the search for equality, it is the search for a flourishing home that among Latina women means the negotiation of where they’ve come from—their national homes—and where they currently dwell. Out of this negotiation of homes comes flourishing. Their

leaving their homelands and their attempts to settle in the US are not only the source of their wound and struggle, but also the site of redemptive possibility and an important source of encouragement for the struggle not only for their own wellbeing but for that of their communities.

Thus, Isasi-Díaz concludes her essay with these words, which bespeak how Latinx and Mujerista theology see in the work of transplantation redemptive possibilities, and not just the wounds of the loss of home:

I plow ahead, aware that I must not idealize what I have inherited from my mother—especially because we have been transplanted and, in that process, have lost some of our roots and have not always correctly reinvented them. I must be careful because as transplants we often have to defend ourselves, and that can easily distort the truth. What I have received from my mother, as well as what I have gained on my own, must be subjected to the critical lens of liberation; that is the only way I can be faithful to myself and to other Hispanic women and men. The task is not easy, but the community of my family provides for me a safety net—it gives me an immense sense of security. This is one of the main reasons why, for me, hope is guaranteed, and I always see possibilities. That is why I keep trying to plant my garden. That it has been uprooted several times does not keep from trying again. Though often it is a painful struggle, I believe the struggle for women’s liberation is the best of struggles, and this is why that struggle is my life. ¡La vida es la lucha!\(^{120}\)

\(^{120}\) Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 27.
Isasi-Díaz’s Mujerista praxis of liberations suggests that our creaturely homes are more than just the containers or backdrops to our lives. Our homes are, rather, more like umbilical cords that connect us to sources of life and nourishment and thereby to the Triune God from whom all life flows. Her reflections accord well with Native wisdom, which teaches us that to be home somewhere, to be bound to a place, is to enter a covenant the terms of which transcend property titles, or the status granted by the state. By the wisdom of the Creator, our earthly homes are a meshwork of intangible but critical lifegiving tendrils that connect us not only to our human kin but also to the rest of creation: the soil, water, and air, as well as the plants, animals, and microbiome. Moreover, to be home some place is not only to be bound to matter but also to time, to the histories and events that energize and give shape to places. This living meshwork, these entanglements of love, desire, and need which constitute home, not only provide us with the material sources of life but are also the means by which the Triune God elects to commune with us and thereby create, sustain, reconcile, and redeem us.
To use the poetic language of Isasi-Díaz, our homes inhabit us as much as we inhabit them. As such, to be home is to participate in the Creator’s ongoing work of love toward creation, for when Christians say that God is our home, we do not mean that a sense of home defines God, but rather that home is defined by the revelation of the Triune God’s desires to dwell with creatures and to share the eternal indwelling love of the Father, Son, and Spirit with us finite and fallen creatures. The goodness of home which we experience in this life is thus the gift of the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer; none of us are owed the grace of the life-giving goodness of home, yet God gives it freely.

For this very reason, few experiences in life are more disruptive than leaving home. Nevertheless, when our homes become uninhabitable, when the soil of our lives becomes toxic and transmits death rather than life, or when the umbilical cord that ties us to places and people is radically severed, preventing us from attaining to life-giving nourishment, then a time comes when transplantation to a new source of life, to a new soil, must take place. However, the loss of home and our alienation from the life-giving bonds that bind us to a place leaves us incredibly vulnerable, setting before us the possibility of a return

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121 Isasi-Díaz, La Lucha Continues.
to chaos. How tragic it is to be given a choice between the certainty of death if we remain, and the high possibility of death if we leave our home. Today we live in a time where a third of our world is undergoing this transplantation process simultaneously. We do well to remember that the act of migration and the ensuing uprooting and transplantation that takes place, while at times necessary, is nevertheless an inherently violent process that indelibly affects the transplant(s), as well as the sending and the receiving places and their inhabitants.122

Because our homes inhabit us, even after we leave home, we continue to carry the fragments of home.123 This is true materially, for as biologists and anthropologists are increasingly noting, we humans are “holobionts” whose very anatomy is constituted by the enmeshment of a particular set of creatures residing at a distinct ecological place.124 However, this is also true spiritually, for

122 Of course, there is a spectrum here to which we must be mindful. Leaving your childhood house to move to a new town down the street or even to move to another state (and let me tell you this is for many rural cultures a big event) is not the same as moving to another country or continent where another language is spoken, where the customs and traditions are different and even conflicting with your own.

123 The social mobility inherent to the modern west makes it seem a lot easier to leave one’s home. However, this is an illusion. Leaving home has the same effect that in other culture and in premodern times the punishments of excommunication- a withdrawal from the source of life in the sacraments- and shunning- a loss of the ties to community- would have had.

124 Wirzba, This Sacred Life, 179.
as Natalia Marandiuc argues, the self that God creates, reconciles, and redeems is indistinguishable and inexplicable apart from our attachment to the stories of places, peoples, and events that mark our life from birth to death. Therefore, these fragments of home that we carry anatomically as well as in the form of memory, story, and cultural practices (food, music, dance, and other everyday activities) are a constant reminder not only of the goodness of home but also of the woundedness of our loss. Indeed, these fragments of home remind us of the whole from which we have been uprooted, from the whole in which the fragments made sense and flourished, and in which we made sense and flourished.

It is not surprising then that immigrants often draw near to others from the same nation or region when they arrive on new shores. For this conglomeration of immigrants represents an attempt of migrants to put the fragments of home they each carry together to try to rebuild a semblance of the whole. Even if they know that it is an impossible task, the task of mimicking architecture without the same source materials, or of trying to remake food without the same ingredients, or of trying to sing songs of home in a new land,

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immigrants nevertheless find solace in the attempt while knowing deep inside that things are just not the same.

Those far too wounded by the act of uprooting may also try to forget about the fragments they carry and try to see themselves in a new way, as if they had always belonged to the new place they inhabit. However, this act of assimilation is more often than not a mistake doomed to failure. To live as if we are not bound to places is to live a half-life, to be at best confused, and at worst to live in ways that are destructive to ourselves and to others with whom we share a common home. The act of forgetting and denying the fragments of home we carry thus leaves a damaging mark on the soul, a mark that inhibits the formation of new lifegiving bonds of love to a new place. It creates the false impression that we can overcome these attachments and float freely from the soil and from places. Never forming deep roots, we also limit ourselves from ever gaining a real attachment to the soil, from savoring the love that comes from it, and ultimately from receiving the gift of home from the Creator.

There are also those who unable to live with the fragments of home and decide to return home in search of healing and restoration. Yet this too is not always a wise decision. If they return too soon, they might find that the
conditions which forced them to flee, the violence and death of a broken home, awaits and consumes them. If, however, they wait too long, then the self that returns home has fundamentally changed. Change is inevitable. Our homes are ecological sites of enmeshment that are constantly changing with or without us, in response to events in the natural world and in response to human events as well. Yet, it is not just that our homes change in our absence, but we also change slowly as we take root (whether we want to or not) in a new place, as we drink from the goodness, and perhaps the bitterness too, of that new soil, as we participate in new (his)stories. The self that God is creating, reconciling and redeeming is now inexplicable without the new land, its people, animals, plants, soil, water, etc. To return home becomes a double transplantation, and soon the feeling ensues that wholeness is an impossible dream. It would seem now for these transplants that try to return home that there is no longer a home where they make fully sense, where they are fully at rest. They are now in-between; they are now what Isasi-Díaz describes as a multi-sites person, a person with two or more stories, anatomies, spirits even. They are what Anzaldúa describes as a mestiza, a term that defies the simplistic racial nomination given it by the colonizers. This double alienation tastes of death, of being only loosely tied to the
world, able to fall into the abyss at any time, no longer anchored to the land, its stories and its peoples.

Yet God is present in the midst of our grave disruptions, in the midst of our exile. The Spirit who binds creation together, dispelling chaos is present too, mourning with creation when creation unwinds, when it becomes fragmented, and chaos and alienation appear to ensue. In fact, the Spirit and the Word, who together bring creation and being into existence out of nothingness and chaos, are alone those who are suited to bring about newness and reconciliation from the chaos of exile and non-existence. As such, Christians can hold onto a special hope to allow us to make such a tragic choice. The God who made a place for us, and blessed us with the gift of home, can do this again in a new land. The Spirit who wove together creation in our mother’s wombs and who weaves together creation throughout our lives so that we may have life and being, that same Spirit can weave us together anew in the land of our sojourn. The Lord who gives us the gift of home can restore that gift when we and others have done much to destroy it.

Thus, by the grace of God, these fragments of home that we carry are the very same that God uses in order to restore us, to heal us, to provide us with the
gift of home once again. These fragments of home are thus critical to the work of transplantation, to our work of adapting, re-binding, and flourishing in a new home in the aftermath of migration. The artwork or craft of transplantation involves knowing how tend to the fragments of home that we carry with us so that they help us grow and flourish in new soil. Many migrants know this work intimately and personally.

The metaphor of transplantation offers migrants and citizens a practice for dealing wisely with the loss and desire for home of the migrant and the native’s desire to protect and preserve their home. As an agrarian metaphor, transplantation acknowledges the porosity between migrants and natives and the places they inhabit. Places of origin for migrants and citizens are more than simply containers for their lives. Migrants and citizens, as I have argued, are constituent parts of the places they inhabit. As such, prudential judgment must be made both in uprooting and transplanting. Transplantation thus reckons with the challenges posed to the migrant of being uprooted from their home and the reorientation necessary to live and to thrive after being replanted in a foreign soil, as well as the challenges for the native of adapting to the changes.
precipitated not only by the presence of the transplant but also the presence of that transplant’s soil.

Transplantation is an image with significant biblical roots. Reflecting on Psalm 137 through the lens of her experience as an exiled Cuban livening in the US, Isasi-Díaz writes, “I often continue to turn to Psalm 137, not to try to understand what exile meant for the Israelites and to learn from them, but to find someone who understands me!”¹²⁶ For her, the psalm does not make a normative but a descriptive claim. Her life is one that bears witness to the complexities of exile, of memory and loss, and of longing, and Psalm 137 helps her narrate that.

I would argue that if Psalm 137 is a helpful psalm to describe the experience not of only of Cuban-Americans but of many migrants in the US and around the world, then Psalm 1 can help migrants see how their transplantation into other lands is a source of redemptive possibility and how their lives can be icons that witness to God’s eschatological homecoming. For in Psalm 1, we learn that the blessed person shall be “like a tree מַשָּׁתִּל (transplanted) by rivers of waters that brings forth fruit in its season and whose leaves shall not wither and whatever she does shall prosper” (Ps. 1:3). Though the verb shatul is often

¹²⁶ Isasi-Díaz, Mujerista Theology, 37.
translated as “planted,” it actually means to transplant. It is not the native tree that flourishes and that is the image of the wise and righteous person; in the Biblical economy it is the transplant that has been uprooted and replanted by God who bears fruits and prospers.

Indeed, Psalm 92 alludes to the river of Psalm 1 as being the river that flows from the house of the Lord, such that, “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.” (Psalm 92: 12-14). Thus, Jon Levenson reminds us that the trees in the temple, the house of God in creation, is full of trees transplanted from Lebanon which serve as signs that anticipate the resurrection.127 Transplantation in Scripture is also thus a sign that anticipates New Creation and the resurrection, the final and all-consuming homecoming of God.

As Barth reminds us, Adam and Eve are transplanted into the Garden of Eden according to Genesis 2:8, and indeed the story of Israel, from Abraham

onwards, is the story of individuals, a family, and a people who are transplanted. In the New Testament, the church itself is made up of the transplanted Jewish people of God and the transplanted Gentiles who have now been made at home with Jews and who are bid to come to the house of the Lord through Jesus Christ. In this metaphor, Christ and the Holy Spirit are the gardeners of creation who are gathering different parts of creation that were once distant or alienated, as part of God’s work of homemaking in creation.

Isasi-Díaz’s reflections on her own migration and transplantation to the US point to this critical relationship between agrarian theologies of place, Latinx theologies of mestizaje, and the ethics of migration. What would it mean to live together with the knowledge that we carry places with us, and how might this impact how we think of immigration policies, which often reduce migrants to either an economic calculus or to precarious people to be helped? How many ethics of hospitality to the immigrant ignore the real dangers, as well as the redemptive possibilities present not only to the immigrant in her sojourn but to

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128 The same verb for transplant is also used in the prophets Jeremiah 17:18 and Ezekiel 17:18. In Jeremiah the image of the transplanted tree of Psalm 1 is used to juxtapose those accursed with exile. The opposite of exile is not sedentary native, it is the transplant. In Ezekiel, the prophet asks if those transplanted by the Lord in the diaspora will flourish once again invoking the image of Psalm 1.
her sending and receiving communities (human and other-than-human)? How much anti-immigrant rhetoric is unaware of the way in which all of us, whether migrants or sedentary, carry fragments from different homes around the world in our bodies and in our mestizo cultural traditions? How often does the church overlook these cultural points of joining at the nexus of migration and homecoming as merely ‘worldly’ activities or as presenting material needs and wants rather than as the sites of the Spirit’s work in establishing the eschatological homecoming of God? These questions are the work that lies ahead of the church as the crisis of home continues to produce woundedness and redemptive possibilities not only in the Americas but throughout the world.

5.7 Conclusion

To be human is to live in the migration-home nexus. Even in an almost unimaginable prelapsarian world, migration would still take place. Even in Eden, God still calls Adam and Eve to populate the earth, and this cultural mandate becomes the impetus for movement, for migration. Exile is one among other fallen forms of migration, but exile always already implies a home. To be a human creature is thus to be in a constant movement inward, more and more at
home with God and God’s other creatures, always moving toward rest. This is not restlessness. This is not an aimless wandering or a constant fugitivity. It is rather a constant homecoming as our visions and memories of home are transfigured and transformed through the intimate joining of all parts of creation through Christ by the Spirit. Migration and home are, therefore, both teleologically ordered to the Creator’s love for creation made manifest in the Spirit’s work of joining all things together in Jesus Christ, the journeying and homecoming God.
Conclusion

This study began with my story as a Peruvian immigrant living in the United States and the longing for home that I experienced amid the socio-cultural, economic, political, and spiritual forces that had evoked a deep sense of alienation. My experience opened a constellation of questions, but here I have tried to address two in particular: “What does a truly flourishing human life look like in view of the realities of migration and home?” and “Can Christianity, despite its role in the formation of the wound of homelessness in the Americas, offer a vision of migration and home that leads to flourishing and the concomitant moral and political demands that such a vision entails?”

Throughout this dissertation I have sought to locate the realities and experiences of home and migration within the Triune drama of God’s creative, reconciling, and redemptive work and within the story of the Americas—its peoples, lands, and cultures, from the moment of colonization up to our current modern moment. I now want to offer some concluding reflections on the contributions this study seeks to make to the church and the academy as well as to suggest where I plan to develop this work.
6.1 Moral and Political Theology at the Migration-Home Nexus

This study intervenes in contemporary conversations in moral and political theology about the shape, ends, and limits of a truly flourishing human life with respect to the realities of home and migration. At the heart of the pursuit of a flourishing common life is how we conceive of home, our common dwelling with and in the world, not only with other members of the human species but with our other-than-human neighbors. Yet, crises including the industrialization and commodification of the land and its resources which is rendering the earth less habitable for all species; an increasing number of displaced peoples; and socio-economic exclusion and marginalization along class, ethnic, racial, gendered lines affect how we imagine and perform home. To reflect on the meaning and importance of home in this age of mass migration, looming ecological catastrophe, and nationalist, classist, racist, and gendered forms of violent exclusion is thus to ponder not the pre-political but rather the heart of any attempt to craft a radically democratic politics. How should we organize our lives economically, politically, and ecologically in ways that make possible the cultivation of a common flourishing home between all creatures?

As I argued in the previous chapter, too often we are presented with moral and political frameworks that view the human as either deeply rooted in
strictly-bounded communities and thus called to the preservation of the cultural, social, and political boundaries of said communities, or else as a fundamentally mobile cosmopolitan, nowhere at home and everywhere at home, called to be a transgressor of boundaries, a border-crosser, a migrant. I have argued that these two choices represent a false binary, for a truly flourishing life takes place at the nexus of migrations and homecomings and the interplay and negotiations of life at this nexus. To be human is to be rooted in particular and concrete communities which were themselves forged through migrations and the new forms of political, economic, and cultural life that emerged from these migratory encounters. Thus, if human life is ordered to both the goods of home and migration, this entails a radical shift in how we craft moral and political theologies of migration and home. To get at what I think this shift ought to look like, let me first recall what I described in the introduction as a void in both moral and political theologies of migration and home.

One of the motivating questions for this study’s focus on the migration-home nexus has been the urgency I experienced as an immigrant to reflect on my own concrete moral responsibilities as a migrant. Growing up in the US, the conversation about the ethics and politics of migration was about migrants, but it
did not address my questions as an immigrant. These included my civic responsibility to this people here and now; whether I had a civic responsibility to those in my native land; and how to cultivate a sense of home in a way that is faithful, hopeful, and loving. The silence from both the academy and the church before these questions implicitly suggested that migrants are only the passive receivers of the moral agency of their hosts. Contrary to this, I have argued in this study that immigrants are moral agents whose everyday decisions and negotiations to cultivate a sense of home in the places to which they migrate while also being responsible for the people they left behind constitutes their active moral agency in the world. I used Bocccagni’s term ‘homing’ to describe this active agency. Indeed, paradoxically, migrants offer us a unique window into the practices, habits, virtues and vices which are endemic to the practice of cultivating of a common flourishing home with others.

This moral agency of migrants and their homing practices represent an area in the fields of moral and political theology in need of further reflection and investigation. Moral and political theologies of migration have had too narrow a focus on the host’s practices of hospitality and theologies of home have too often looked to the already settled and established in the land to discern practices of
homemaking. In the terms of Latin American liberation theology, this study calls for moral and political theologians to see the eruption of migrants into history as agents whose everyday efforts to find home drive the development of cultures, economies, and politics from the underside of history.

As a Reformed liberation theologian, I have also sought in this study to rearticulate this notion that migrants are political and moral agents in history by applying a distinctively Trinitarian lens to the reality of migration and home. As those struggling for home and for life in the land of exile and death, humans are neither the subject of a modern story of progress nor of a post-modern story of declension, but rather with all creation, we participate in God’s story revealed in Jesus Christ, a story which begins with a homemaking God and opens up to the redemptive homecoming of God at the end of the age to dwell with creation for all eternity. In view of this, I have sought to describe how it is that migrants, in their search for home, participate in the Triune life of God. I thus argued in chapter four that as the Spirit binds migrants to the crucified and risen Christ, and therefore as migrants are drawn into the Triune life, migrants become agents and subjects in God’s history of creation, reconciliation, and redemption.
Through stories like the *Nican Mopohua* which offer us a window into the lives of natives with Europeans amid the brutality of the colonial encounter in the Americas, I have highlighted how the political, economic, and socio-cultural negotiations that natives made in order to survive became the site of the Holy Spirit’s reconciling and redeeming work in creation. It was through those such as Juan Diego, the displaced and the exiled in the time of colonial encounter, those who inhabited the peripheries, that the seeds of the Word of God were planted in the Americas. It is still through people like Juan Diego that even today, the Spirit continues to bring forth God’s redemptive homecoming and the renewal of creation into the current order of things. This has strong implications especially for many—the undocumented, the irregularly documented, and the unwanted migrants—who today inhabit the margins of society. It means that the migrant’s search for home and the encounters, entanglements, and negotiations that condition and are produced by this search are the sites of the Spirit’s ongoing healing work in creation. Accordingly, they participate in the Triune God’s creating, reconciling and redeeming work.

Political and moral theology, then, needs to be more attentive to these sites of encounter and joining between migrants and native/citizens and to the
socio-cultural, political, economic mestizaje that emerges. These sites of encounter and new forms of being and knowing in the world are the preferred sites of the Spirit for transforming creation into the eternal dwelling of God. Deep attentiveness to the material conditions of life and to how the Spirit is at work in and through these restoring, healing, befriending, redeeming and transfiguring: this should be the heart of the work of political theology. Latinx scholars can help moral and political theology to avoid the dual mistake of over-spiritualizing migration and home in a way that obfuscates these actual everyday negotiations, while also rejecting the notion that these quotidian realities don’t point beyond themselves to the work of God in the world. In truth, the way most migrants experience the wounds of losing home and the desire for home is always already through the lens of faith. For migration is not a transaction or coldly calculated phenomenon. Migration and the search for home are realities driven by love and desire, as well as by fear and the grief of loss. As such, for many of us migrants, our leaving home and attempts to cultivate a sense of home in the world are impossible to conceive apart from the God who accompanies us in our journey, the God incarnate in Jesus Christ, the homecoming and journeying Lord.
In sum, I have tried to answer the question of a truly flourishing human life in view of migration and home through a distinctively Christian, christocentric, and Trinitarian frame that shows that a truly flourishing human life has as its supreme telos participation in God’s own life, which I have described as God’s redemptive homecoming in creation. But such a vision cannot be disentangled from lo cotidiano, or from the everyday material conditions and realities of life here, now, and among these people in our struggle for home. And that means it cannot be disentangled from the task of cultivating a common life with those who hold different vision of the good, true and beautiful and amid asymmetries of power. However, we also cannot hope to discern God’s work in the world through the migrant’s search for home apart from understanding the political, social, economic, and spiritual malformities that constitute our time. It was to these malformations and how they are revealed in a unique way in the context of the Americas that I turned in chapters 2 and 3.
6.2 Toward a Theologizing of the Americas

This dissertation has gestured toward the need for an examination of the history of the lands, peoples, and cultures of the modern Americas through a distinctively theological lens. To clarify, many works already offer descriptions of the theological production that emerges out of the context of the Americas, i.e., theology from the socio-cultural contexts of the Americas. My aim has been different. What I have sought instead is to examine the history of the lands, peoples, and cultures that constitute the Americas as sources of theological content, that is, as subjects of theological study and analysis and not merely the social location within which theological knowledge is produced. Let me further explain both why I think this work is critical and how I have tried to approach this work through this study.

Over five centuries after the conquest and colonization of the Americas, this event continues to ripple out in history, shaping not only the peoples, land, and cultures of the Americas but of the entire world. In many ways, we are still witnessing the unfolding of new ways of being and knowing in the world that developed at the site of brutal encounter between European and Amerindian peoples in 1492. This historic event is also significant in a unique way for the church and its theology, given the church’s entanglement with the economic,
political, and socio-cultural colonization of the land and peoples of the New World. Indeed, the emergence of the modern Americas through the birth canal of colonial Christianity is a sign of the times, an event that shines with special luminosity in not only human history but in the history of salvation. However, in order to interpret the way in which the Americas participate in God’s redemptive work in history in a way that does not succumb to vicious forms of triumphalism and exceptionalism, it matters from where and through whose perspective and voice one interprets this ongoing historic event.

There are two reasons why I think the church and her theologians need to theologize more critically about the history of the lands, peoples, and cultures of the Americas. First, the Americas are a major locus for theological reflection today because, as I argue in chapter two, the Americas represent what decolonial scholars describe as a unique enunciation of ‘colonial-modernity.’ The colonization of the Americas was not only about the physical conquest of the lands and peoples of the Amerindians and the subsequent development of the transatlantic slave trade. In and through these political economies, new ways of being and knowing in the world began to emerge to justify and reify the colonial order. Ordered around the logics of capitalist commodification of the land, a
segregationist mentality that cataloged humans into racial, ethnic, national, and other cultural enclosures, and the systemic destruction of native wisdom, this new colonial epistemology produced a view of the human as detached from the land and thus fundamentally displaced. This new way of imagining how humans relate to the earth not only drew in distorted ways on Christian doctrines, but deeply shaped and influenced how theology is done in modernity.

The colonization of the land, peoples, and cultures of the Americas casts a profound shadow not only in human history but in church history. However, we must not study this shadow simply for the purposes of describing its dark shape. Rather, we must study this shadow as the distortion of and the absence of light out of which it was cast. This light is the pregnant hope of new possibilities, of new forms of life, of fellowship, of friendship and union that the encounter between peoples and cultures in the Americas in 1492 should and do represent. Yes, we must examine the history of the Americas as the history of the development of theological malformations, but only in order to better understand how to dismantle the house that colonialism built and view with greater clarity the positive and constructive ways of being at home in the world that developed out of the encounter and joining between European, African, and
Amerindian peoples, as well as all later groups who encountered each other in the Americas.

Thus, we must engage in theologizing the Americas not only because the Americas are a site of enunciation of colonial-modernity, but because the Americas are as such also a unique site of redemptive possibilities. In chapter 3, I argued that insofar as the history of the Americas bears witness to the wounds of a theological crisis of home grounded in racial-capitalism’s displacing logics, the Americas are also by the grace of God a unique site of redemptive possibility of homecoming. I argued that these redemptive possibilities gain clarity when perceived through the hermeneutics of mestizaje so central to Latinx theology. I showed how stories like that of Juan Diego’s encounter with the Virgin of Guadalupe can serve as icons to point us to the work that God was doing through the encounter between peoples of the Americas, despite of and yet amidst the brutality of colonialism. The Nican Mopohua tells a truer story about the lands, peoples, and cultures of the Americas than other stories, like Manifest Destiny. Guadalupe beckons us not only to listen more closely to natives and to learn through them to listen to the land and the creatures of the land, but it also beckons us to read Scripture and the tradition in new ways. The story itself does
not magically have this effect on people, and indeed, as I noted it can be misused in many ways to craft visions of nationalism and even anti-indigenous sentiment. Yet, it is precisely the task of the church to read this story through the lens of the cross and resurrection and through it to seek out the work that God is doing in the land amid the exiled, the displaced, and the poor, then and today.

At this point it is critical to address the temptation found in any attempt to theologize history: that of performing a triumphalist understanding of the human spirit as the agent of history and the human as the center of the cosmos. Inevitably, we tend to fill in ‘the human’ with the particular provincial understanding of humanity that emerges from our people. Not only is this fundamentally idolatrous, but it makes the mistake which Barth was so afraid of, the baptizing and naturalizing of sinful human understanding of ourselves, the world, and God.

The agent of history is not the human spirit but the Holy Spirit. Humans in their daily being and doing can either bear true or false witness to the Spirit’s work of redeeming creation. I have argued that to discern the Spirit sanctifying creation we do need to look at history but keeping some important hermeneutical criteria in mind. The first criterion is that of the preferential option
for the poor. The Spirit not only opts to befriend matter, as Eugene Rogers argues, but the Spirit tends to befriend wounded matter, wounded flesh. And we know this because the Spirit which we seek to discern in history is the Spirit sent to the world to make the crucified and risen one known. That is to say, the Spirit points creation to the crucified and risen Christ and the Spirit summons creation to witness to the crucified and risen Christ. Therefore, it is not by looking at those who have a stable sense of home in the Americas, but by looking to the poor, the marginalized, and the displaced that we see the Spirit most at work, liberating and healing creation from its bondage to sin and death. Precisely in the displays of resistance by those on the margins—the displaced natives and Africans, the mestizo children of the conquest alienated from their native and European parents, and indeed the historically marginalized and exploited migrant communities from Asia and other places in the world that shape the history of the Americas—we see the Spirit of God at work, liberating creation from its bondage to sin.

The second criterion is that we must look at the sites of collaboration and joining between peoples and cultures as the sites of the Spirit’s work. Encounters and entanglements between peoples, cultures, and lands can serve as icons that
bear witness to the Spirit’s work of joining all things in creation to Christ. The Spirit works to join peoples in resistance to evil in the world, so it is to these joinings and their surprising negotiations and new forms of life that we must pay attention. We discern the redemptive work of the Spirit through lands, peoples, and cultures of the Americas and the entanglements and forms of *mestizaje* that take place between these by staying close to flesh and close to the soil. The material conditions of life, and their arrangement into political economies and ecologies, are the very concrete sites of the Spirit’s redemptive work. Therefore, theologians need to do a better job at studying the everyday lives of peoples— their eating, dancing, singing, fellowshipping, resting, burying traditions, their day-to-day interactions with each other and with the soil and the creatures of the soil—because the Spirit of God restores and redeems creation in and through these material relationships and activities. It is also precisely at the level of these day-to-day realities that colonial practices of racial capitalism do their most malformed work. Thus, our theologies must be ever more attentive to how the faith illumines and is illumined by the concrete material conditions of existence and the political economies and ecologies which shape these.
If we are to look for the entanglements and collaborations between peoples and creation as unique sites of redemptive possibility, then I agree with Jennings that the church and the theological academy must move beyond their current racial, ethnic, and national enclaves. While we must acknowledge the deep contextual character of theology, a theology of the Americas cannot be done from simply the experiences of one cultural, ethnic, racial, or social group. It will require the collaboration and contribution of all peoples and cultures. It will also require, as Jennings argues, doing theology out of the forms of co-perceiving and co-sensing the world between peoples. Thus, a theology of the Americas, properly speaking, must engage in the difficult work of thinking Latinx, Asian-American, African-American, Indigenous, and all other forms of experience together, not minimalizing or disregarding the difference of these communities but focusing on their points of interaction.

Life takes place at the intersection of migration and home, of journeys and homecomings. It is here that the Spirit helps us both to cultivate homes in the world that look forward to God’s eschatological homecoming at the sites of creaturely joining and cultural *mestizaje*. Therefore, *mestizaje* here serves as a key hermeneutic for seeing the Spirit’s redemptive work in history, in turning
peoples and places into icons of the redemptive homecoming of God. Reconciliation between peoples is not only the goal of a theology of the Americas, but also the means. It is only as peoples journey together and learn from each other new ways of seeing and relating to the earth that the peoples of the Americas will develop ways of inhabiting the world that resist the machinations of racial capitalism. This is not to be reduced to a bland least-common-denominator theology. Each person will need to bring their places and their peoples with them to the task of theologizing with others from different places and cultures. Theology will need to be much more fine-tuned to the art and practice of transplantation. I have tried to perform this in my dissertation by engaging in an act of transplantation, bringing Barth’s theology of home to the context of the Americas.

6.3 Transplantation/Ressourcement from the margins

Finally, this study has intended to make a methodological contribution both to the fields of Reformed and Latinx theology by engaging in a mode of ressourcement from the margins, as I sought to transplant Barth’s theology of home into the context of the Americas. To achieve this transplantation required putting pressure on Barth’s theology, particularly around the question of
whether his christocentric approach could actually offer a way of dealing with
one of the darkest tragedies of colonialism—the use of Christianity to destroy
native cultures and thereby native wisdom concerning ways of being at home in
the world. Ultimately, I argue for interpreting Barth’s christocentrism in such a
way that his proposal that Christ is the principle behind the creation, at the
center of creation, and the chief end of creation, becomes not a denial of all
cultures but rather the need for all cultures to be illumined in the light of Christ
so as to be made witnesses to the Triune drama of redemption. Yet, this is not
something that is primarily done by the theologian at her desk. This redeeming
of cultures happens in the eventfulness and actuality of life as the Spirit
incarnates Christ in the world and deals with peoples, cultures, and lands joining
them to Christ. Theologians are at best witnesses to this work of joining.

I chose Barth because in his rejection of certain crucial aspects of the
modern liberal theological project, he was unknowingly fighting against
theological malformations that grew in the colonial soil of the Americas. More
crucially, in pointing us back to the strange world of Scripture and in setting our
gaze on Jesus Christ as the homecoming and journeying Lord, Barth was offering
us an alternative understanding to the trajectories of modern understandings of
home that lead down the path of either ethno-nationalism or rootlessness. This is why I found Barth to be a critical dialogue partner and collaborator in thinking through home in the context of the Americas. Yet, I know some might experience a certain discomfort with this mode of doing theology, arguing perhaps that to import theologies from Europe is to participate in the ongoing epistemic colonization of the Americas. After all, how is mobilizing Barth’s Reformed theology to think through to the crisis of home in the Americas contributing to our stated goal, as liberation theologians, to “drink from our own theological wells?”

This dissertation as a whole presents not only an argument for doing theology out of the encounters and entanglements between peoples and cultures, even distant ones, but indeed, in using Barth to think through our crisis of home in the Americas, I have tried to perform theology in that very form. The language of “theological wells” can seem to paint the false picture of theological traditions as distinct and separate systems or structures, like separate pools of water. This is simply not a true vision of how theological traditions develop or relate to each other and it is not exactly a true picture of how wells function either. Indeed, individual wells of water that spring forth from the ground draw on a common
source that is the groundwater. So too our theological traditions, though distinct in their emplacement and embodiment, draw on a common source, which is Jesus Christ through the mediating grace of the Holy Spirit. The river that runs from the throne of God waters all creation, renewing all things, giving life to all, and indeed binding all things together in a common source. Thus, the path forward I’m proposing is one in which we do theology out of the entanglements of traditions and peoples, out of migrations and homecomings. I believe that Latinx theology in particular can live into its own contribution to the global church by looking to these surprising collaborations which may emerge between peoples, lands, and traditions.

I have often asked myself if it would have been better if my parents never brought me here to the United States, if we had never torn ourselves from the loving meshwork of the family, soil, people, and cultures of our birth. Would it have been better if we stayed? As a scholar exploring the history of the Americas and their peoples, I have been vexed by an equally disconcerting question—would it have been better if the Europeans had never crossed the Atlantic Ocean? Is it even worth it to ask such a question?
I believe that underneath these questions lies a profound pain evoked by a wound in the very fabric of creation. We would not ask such questions if they were not prompted by the losses incurred in being displaced and the challenges of trying to cultivate home in a strange land and among a strange people. Yet there is also goodness and beauty that emerged from these migrations, and not just abstract goodness and beauty. I see these qualities every day when I look at my own kids, the children of the daughter of a Midwestern farmer and a Peruvian immigrant. I could not imagine a home now, in the United States or anywhere in the world, that did not include my wife’s family. Yes, we need to acknowledge the deep losses, but we also need to look for signs of hope and goodness and beauty worth celebrating and delighting in, within and amid the wound. We must try to discern how the Spirit is working in and through these wounds, in and through our encounters and the negotiation and struggles they

1 In this key sense, Augustine is right. During this age our hearts remain restless. We are not fully at home here and now and among our peoples. Both our sinful desires and the structures of oppression and sin that destroy our homes prevent us from experiencing the goodness of home in this age in its fullness, thus we remain always to a degree restless. Yet, even in this history of restlessness, the Spirit is restoring, healing, and transforming creation into our eternal home with God, a reality that won’t be consummated until the age to come. Thus, we are not called to be homeless, but rather we are called to strive after the perfection of our desire for home through the disciplining and intensification of our love for creation at particular places, our love for our neighbor particularly when our neighbor is a stranger, and our love for God the homecoming Lord.
produce, to bring about New Creation. In the Americas, we are all children of a wounded history, filled nonetheless by the grace of the Spirit with redemptive possibilities, opening up to God’s eternal homecoming in our midst.

This reflection emerged from the wound of homelessness of an undocumented immigrant living in the United States. But it also emerged as a need to celebrate the goodness of life as it emerges from the cultivation of a common flourishing home: at the intersection of migrations and homecomings, of peoples, and the lands and cultures that they carry with them to new places. I have argued that these sites of negotiation, as well as conflict, are also the sites of the Spirit’s work of binding and joining all things into the resurrected Christ, through whom they are reconciled and renewed. All of our little stories bear witness to the grand narrative of God’s redemptive homecoming in creation.
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Biography

Prior to his doctoral studies at Duke, Alberto La Rosa Rojas attended Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL where he was awarded a Bachelor Arts with a Major in Theology and Minors in Philosophy and Chemistry in May of 2012. He went on to receive a Master of Divinity degree, awarded in 2016 at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI. He currently serves as the Advisor for the Presbyterian/Reformed House of Studies at Duke Divinity School. He has published a peer-reviewed book chapter titled, “A Migrant at the Lord’s Table: A Reformed Theology of Home” which appears in Reformed Public Theology: A Global Vision for the Life of the World, edited by Matthew Kaemingk (Baker Academic Press, August 2021). His fellowships and honors include the Kenan Institute for Ethics, Religions & Public Life Graduate Fellowship, the Golieb Fellowship in Interfaith Education & Engagement, the Hispanic Theological Initiative Lilly Fellowship, the Kenan Institute for Ethics Graduate Fellowship, the Th.D. Doctoral Fellowship, and the Systematic Theology Award Hebrew Reading & Exegesis awards given at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Mi. He is also a 2012 Lincoln Laureate of the Lincoln Academy for the State of Illinois. He is a fellow at the Hispanic House of Studies at Duke Div. School and of the Fellowship of Protestant Ethics. He is also a graduate student member of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Christian Ethics. Finally, La Rosa Rojas is a Licensed Candidate of the Reformed Church in America, Holland Classis (Holland, MI).