

Wonjong Horace Lee\*

# Pain as a Profound Mystery: Proposing Hopeful Anthropocene Pastoral Care and Counseling through Eschatological Self

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**Abstract:** This study examines pain from the perspective of pastoral care and counseling. Specifically, it focuses on the pain caused by the Anthropocene. While the intersection between the Anthropocene and pastoral counseling may not seem apparent, they converge the realistic pain resulting from factors like Malthusian theories and the existential powerlessness faced during impending disasters. Interestingly, this pain is particularly evident among marginalized individuals.

To understand Anthropocene pain from a pastoral counseling perspective, the study introduces two theoretical frameworks: the “eschatological self” and the practical theological understanding of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI). The idea of the eschatological self interprets Moltmann’s theology of hope within pastoral counseling, emphasizing the influence of the future and shifting away from traditional counseling theories that primarily focus on the past’s impact. Within the concept of the eschatological self, an individual’s pain is seen as an opportunity to connect with Jesus, who was crucified. The understanding of practical theology of NSSI highlights the relationship between self-injury and the Christian ritual of baptism. While both involve self-destructive processes, they differ in the convergence of causes and resolution processes.

Building upon these theoretical frameworks, the study presents a new methodology that could be called Anthropocene Pastoral Care and Counseling (APCC). The first task is Anthropocene justice, where attention is directed towards pain and its causes, not solely within an individual’s personal history but within the context of the Anthropocene. The second task is expansion into the community, which, through the intersection with baptism, aims to alleviate self-blame by exposing and expanding individual pain as a shared communal experience. The third task is gaining an eschatological self, wherein individuals discover themselves within pain and undergo theological and psychological development through encounters with transcendent existence. The final task is praxis, where individuals, having experienced

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\*Corresponding author: Wonjong Horace Lee, University of Toronto, Emmanuel College, 75 Queen’s Park Crescent, M5S 1K7 Toronto, ON, Canada, E-Mail: wjhorace.lee@mail.utoronto.ca

and practiced eschatological selfhood, become capable community members who embrace and include others who share similar vulnerabilities.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene, Pastoral Care and Counseling, Eschatological Self, NSSI, Theological Hope

**Zusammenfassung:** Diese Studie untersucht Schmerz aus der Perspektive der Seelsorge und Beratung. Insbesondere konzentriert sie sich auf den Schmerz, der durch das Anthropozän verursacht wird. Auch wenn die Überschneidung zwischen dem Anthropozän und der Seelsorge nicht offensichtlich erscheint, so konvergieren sie doch in dem realistischen Schmerz, der aus Faktoren wie malthusianischen Theorien und existenzieller Ohnmacht angesichts drohender Katastrophen resultiert. Interessanterweise ist dieser Schmerz besonders bei marginalisierten Personen offensichtlich.

Um den Schmerz des Anthropozäns aus der Perspektive der Seelsorge zu verstehen, führt die Studie zwei theoretische Konzepte ein: das „eschatologische Selbst“ und das praktisch-theologische Verständnis der nicht-suizidalen Selbstverletzung (NSSV). Die Idee des eschatologischen Selbst macht Moltmanns Theologie der Hoffnung für die fruchtbare. Es betont die Bedeutung der Zukunft und rückt von solchen Ansätzen in der Beratung ab, die sich auf die Rolle der Vergangenheit konzentrieren. Im Rahmen des Konzepts des eschatologischen Selbst wird der Schmerz eines Menschen als Gelegenheit gesehen, sich mit Jesus, der gekreuzigt wurde, zu verbinden. Das Verständnis der praktischen Theologie der NSSI hebt die Beziehung zwischen Selbstverletzung und dem christlichen Ritual der Taufe hervor. Während beide selbstzerstörerische Prozesse beinhalten, unterscheiden sie sich in der Konvergenz von Ursachen und Lösungsprozessen.

Aufbauend auf diesen theoretischen Rahmenbedingungen stellt die Studie eine neue Methodik vor, die als *Anthropocene Pastoral Care and Counseling* (APCC) bezeichnet werden soll. Diese richtet erstens die Aufmerksamkeit auf den Schmerz und seine Ursachen im Kontext des Anthropozäns und nicht nur der individuellen Lebensgeschichte. Zweitens wird Schmerz als eine gemeinsame Erfahrung verstanden und um die Perspektive der Gemeinschaftlichkeit erweitert. Die dritte Aufgabe besteht darin, ein eschatologisches Selbst zu gewinnen, bei dem der Einzelne sich selbst im Schmerz entdeckt und durch die Begegnung mit einer transzendenten Existenz eine theologische und psychologische Entwicklung durchläuft. Schließlich geht es um eine Praxis, bei der der Einzelne zu einem Teil einer Gemeinschaft wird, die andere mit ähnlichen Vulnerabilitäten annimmt und einbezieht.

**Schlagwörter:** Anthropozän, Seelsorge, eschatologisches Selbst, NSSI, Theologische Hoffnung

## I. Introduction

Why do humans suffer? This fundamental question, frequently examined in theology, revolves around the quandary of suffering, resulting in the development of historical theodicies. The phrase “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” said by Jesus on the cross is a significant expression of human pain. It can be considered a generative theodicy about the issue of suffering.<sup>1</sup> This inquiry is pivotal in Practical Theology, particularly within Pastoral Care, as it intersects with the Anthropocene’s narrative of ecological crisis and existential dread.<sup>2</sup>

The Anthropocene, initially a geological term, has expanded into a multifaceted concept reflecting humanity’s impact on the planet, leading to significant ethical and epistemological crises. This paper briefly traverses the theological landscape of the Anthropocene, setting the stage for a comparative analysis of its implications on person-focused care and counseling. By exploring the interconnections between the “eschatological self,” Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI), and Pastoral Care, this study aims to enrich the dialog among these domains, offering insights into pastoral care’s role in the Anthropocene era. The proposed Anthropocene Pastoral Care and Counseling (APCC) model centers on justice, expandability, future, and hope, providing a nuanced approach to navigating the complexities of modern existential challenges.

## II. Interplay between the Anthropocene and Pastoral Care and Counseling

### 1. Two Aspects of the Anthropocene, and Theology

The Anthropocene’s definition, while established, warrants a nuanced examination of its origins, scope, and inherent vagueness. Initially framed geologically, it highlights the substantial influence of human activities on Earth’s geology and ecosys-

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1 James L. Chrenshaw *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2 Regarding the emerging forms of new theodicy in conjunction with the advancement of modern science, refer to Hohyun Sohn, “Singularity Theodicy and Immortality,” *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019): 165. Although the study does not directly mention the concept of the Anthropocene, it can be seen as an organizational theological attempt that reflects the ethical perspectives of biological science and medical advancements.

tems, representing a clear shift from earlier geological epochs that were primarily shaped by natural forces.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, the term's significance encompasses its influence on the environment and society as studied in the fields of social sciences and human responsibilities. Clive Hamilton characterizes the Anthropocene as a delineation between human history and planetary history, emphasizing the era's distinctive nature where human actions have irrevocably altered the Earth's trajectory.<sup>4</sup> Also, Donna H. Haraway articulates that the Anthropocene is more akin to a liminal event signaling changes just before a new geological era rather than a new geological epoch itself, and it is an event that we should endeavor to shorten as much as possible.<sup>5</sup> These two ambiguous boundaries prompt the question of why this geological term needs to be examined from a social standpoint and, more specifically, within the context of theological concern.

This perspectival shift towards the Anthropocene as more than a mere geological fluctuation, recognizing it as a collective phenomenon encompassing environmental, social, and ethical dimensions, necessitates a theological lens. From the standpoint of practical theologians, the environmental issue poses significant challenges to the so-called *third world* states. Pamela McCarroll and Hye Ran Kim-Cragg contend that the Anthropocene period has already begun, indicating that environmental changes brought about by human activity are irreversible, and therefore human engagement is a must.<sup>6</sup>

In light of Jason Moore's suggestion to use terms like "*Capitalocene*" and "*Plantationocene*"—which will be elaborated upon in the following chapter—instead of the Anthropocene to highlight the responsibility of established communities rather than individuals for these changes, these theological approaches enable a clearer identification of points of suffering. The conventional geological concept of the Anthropocene recognizes the widespread violence and suffering that arise from the supposedly untouchable domain of nature. In contrast, the theological perspective on the Anthropocene highlights the violence that originates from the social structures established by humans over time.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoemer, "The Anthropocene," *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17f.

<sup>4</sup> Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (New York: Duke University Press Books, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Pamela R. McCarroll and Hye Ran Kim-Cragg, "Introduction to the Special Issue 'Practical Theology Amid Environmental Crises', *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 13, no. 10 (2022): 969.

## 2. Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Plantationocene

It is not immediately clear how the Anthropocene and counseling can be seen to intersect regarding their respective origins. While psychoanalysis emphasizes that “the root of a person’s physical ailments may reside within the depths of their psyche,” counseling has since expanded to include proactive interactions between individuals working in the analytical field.<sup>7</sup> Even though counseling, and pastoral care and counseling, have expanded their area, it is hard to compare their coverage with the Anthropocene, which is associated with *Earth Religiosity*.<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding these distinctions, the Anthropocene discourse has a special resonance and significance within the context of pastoral care because of its connection to “justice” and the logical structure that is part of the Anthropocene.

It is necessary to take into account the viewpoints of academics who support world-ecology theories, like Jason Moore and Donna Haraway, in order to obtain a more substantive understanding of the reasoning behind the relationship between counseling and the Anthropocene. They state that “Capitalocene” rather than “Anthropocene” is a more appropriate way to describe our time. The reason for this is that fundamental problems like capitalism, power and class relations, human-centeredness, the dualistic conception of nature and society, and the functions of the state and empire are not fundamentally addressed by the Anthropocene.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, we will stick with the term *Anthropocene* because it captures the contemporary global situation from a humanities standpoint and allows for simultaneous interpretations into the Anthropocene, *Capitalocene*, *Plantationocene*, and even the *Chthulucene*. From this vantage point, we will primarily use the term *Anthropocene* for convenience in this study, but it should be understood to encompass a broad meaning that embraces a variety of modern issues, as interpreted in the *Humanistic Anthropocene*, in accordance with Moore and Haraway’s perspectives.

The Anthropocene’s extension into the Capitalocene and Plantationocene epochs implies that these crustal changes can be traced back to plantations and capitalism as their root causes; the underlying characteristics of capitalism and large-scale farming, namely, dehumanization, non-livingness, anti-ecology, and a

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<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future Prospects of Psycho-Analytic Therapy* Vol.11 (London: Hogarth Press, 1919); Antonino Ferro and Roberto Basile, *The Analytic Field: A Clinical Concept* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Jason W. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, California: PM Press, 2016).

lack of community spirit, are responsible for environmental degradation and global catastrophism. Because the Anthropocene fundamentally transcends anthropocentrism and demands a humble recognition of our relationship with other life forms on Earth, it necessitates elements like uncertainty, learning, ethical deliberation, and the responsibility to learn. This applied science requires that the Capitalocene and Plantationocene be acknowledged as historical and philosophical epochs within the Anthropocene, recognizing them as the foundation for the issues raised during that time.

### 3. Anthropocene and Suffering: Realistic Pain

The Anthropocene, intriguingly, defines the causes of historical or philosophical issues, often framed as “someone suffers due to the Anthropocene.” The scope of this suffering varies, potentially impacting nature, Earth, marginalized communities, or humanity at large. The critical element is the undeniable suffering of *someone or something*. Additionally, the Anthropocene represents an academic endeavor to pinpoint its causes.

How is the Anthropocene capable of inflicting suffering on humans? Often, the Anthropocene’s apocalyptic implications are seen as heralding the end of humanity, not just the Earth’s community. Recent studies, suggest the COVID-19 pandemic as an Anthropocene-driven event, affecting survival and humanity itself. Perhaps it appears that humans are the most decisive existential victims of the Anthropocene.<sup>10</sup>

In counseling, human suffering is often seen as an inherent part of existence from an existential perspective and as influenced by past events from a phenomenological view.<sup>11</sup> However, traditional counseling often lacks a direct link to social movements advocating communal change, leading to a limited sensitivity towards suffering caused by natural laws. This is evident even without explicitly referencing the Anthropocene.

A case in point is the critical issue of declining birth rates in South Korea society. In 2019, South Korea’s birth rate was 0.92, dropping to 0.78 in 2022, the lowest among OECD countries. To understand these figures, Woorim Ko used Thomas R. Malthus’ theory, suggesting that capitalist logic and competitive dynamics, rather than population density, are what are causing this decline.<sup>12</sup> This cultural tendency

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<sup>10</sup> Andreas Malm, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century*, First edition paperback. ed., Coronavirus pamphlet series, (London; New York: Verso, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Daniel J. Louw, *Meaning in Suffering* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Woorim Ko et al. “Population Density as a Major Determinant of Fertility in Korea,” *Discourse and Policy in Social Science* 13, no. 2 (2020): 129–153.

affects people's autonomy and stifles their aspirations for the future, in addition to posing problems for the country and local communities. In other words, the natural laws of societal suffering and individual pain, manifested by resource depletion and intensified competition, are directly realized.

#### 4. Anthropocene and Suffering: Existential Powerlessness

In the Anthropocene, humans grapple with *existential powerlessness* amid the realistic and societal suffering this era engenders. This feeling is particularly acute among the vulnerable. The 2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights that climate change impacts low and middle-income countries disproportionately. Kulp and Strauss predicted that by 2050, over 300 million people will lose their homes due to continuous sea-level rise, with a significant number of them coming from relatively less affluent Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, and Indonesia.<sup>13</sup>

Environmental disasters have a profound effect on mental well-being, especially when compounded by social inequality and systemic racism.<sup>14</sup> This leads to "existential powerlessness," a belief that these issues are beyond individual resolution.<sup>15</sup> Existential powerlessness is also connected to self-injury, as it manifests when individuals experience pain that 1) is directly linked to their life, 2) undermines their agency, 3) occurs in a state of social vulnerability, and 4) cannot be resolved through individual means.

### III. Eschatological Self and Pastoral Care and Counseling Understanding of Self-Injury

This study aims to introduce two existing theories in pastoral counseling that, although at first glance seemingly unrelated, converge on the same axis in the context of the eschatological age, thereby facilitating a dialogue between the eschatolo-

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<sup>13</sup> Scott A. Kulp and Benjamin H. Strauss, "New Elevation Data Triple Estimates of Global Vulnerability to Sea-Level Rise and Coastal Flooding," *Nature Communications* 10, no. 4844 (2019), accessed Mar 20, 2025, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-019-12808-z#change-history>.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas J. Doherty and Susan Clayton, "The Psychological Impacts of Global Climate Change," *The American Psychologist* 66, no. 4 (2011): 265–276.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander J. Hilert, "Counseling in the Anthropocene: Addressing Social Justice Amid Climate Change," *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development* 49, no. 3 (2021): 175–191.

gical self and pastoral counseling. The first theory discussed is the Eschatological Self, a teleological notion derived from Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and developed in the pastoral counseling field. The second theory presents a novel counseling approach to self-injury by examining the theological components of self-injury and connecting them to the religious rite of baptism.<sup>16</sup>

## 1. Eschatological Self

### a) Theology of Hope, Hope of Eschatology

Jürgen Moltmann's theology, centered on Christian faith amidst suffering, is framed within the eschatology of hope, encompassing four aspects: the event of the cross, the eschatology of resurrection and new creation, the eschatology of hope, and the eschatology of suffering and pain. Each aspect connects to the Anthropocene in terms of pastoral care.

First, Moltmann reinterprets Jesus' crucifixion. Traditionally, Jesus Christ is understood as having a divine nature that cannot be harmed and a human nature that was damaged on the cross. However, Moltmann redefines Jesus' death as "the event that happened for us" and argues that Jesus is a being with one nature, experiencing rejection and abandonment.<sup>17</sup> He sees the event of the cross as a trinitarian event, where the Son's rejection and abandonment by the Father paradoxically bring the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit into closer unity through their will to love the world.

Second, Moltmann regards resurrection as total recreation, not just restoration. He critiques traditional eschatology's focus on specific events and proposes that eschatology is about hope for a new world and living a Christian life in union with Jesus. While faith in resurrection implies a "Christian life practiced in the world," it also signifies that the "resurrection of the world" is still "not yet" (*noch-nicht*). However, Jesus Christ's triumph over death confirms that the world and its end are decisively determined.

Third, the Eschatology of Hope, a key aspect of Moltmann's theology, challenges traditional theology's focus on specific end-times events. Moltmann argues that es-

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<sup>16</sup> Won Jong Lee, "Understanding of the Hope of Theology from the Perspective of Pastoral Care: Focused on the Moltmann's Theology and Eschatological Self," *Theological Forum* 105 (2021): 33–58.; Won Jong Lee, "Baptism and Non-Suicidal Self-Injury, the Similarities and Differences between the Two Rituals," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 124 (2022): 303–334.

<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

chatology is fundamentally an “awareness of hope” and “awareness of the historicity of truth.”<sup>18</sup> Since the resurrection of Jesus, humanity has been dwelling within the eschaton and essentially living in the world of the end times. Moltmann emphasizes that, just as the Christian faith acknowledges the suffering of the cross, it also embodies hope, urging Christians to actively seek hope in their lives.

Finally, the eschatology of pain and suffering posits that human pain is both a contemporary reflection of Jesus’ crucifixion and a participation in the event of 2,000 years ago. He believed that humans cannot experience the “blood-shedding Jesus” without suffering. This concept echoes Hegel’s idea that the negation-free Father expands his realm through interactions with the saints. In this eschatological view, those who suffer share in Jesus’ suffering, leading to spiritual transformation through their experiences of pain.

### **b) Eschatological Self: Let the Future Decide the Present**

Psychoanalytic theory often considers people as anchored in the past, with therapists acting as a “black screen,” as Sigmund Freud first suggested. However, introducing the theology of hope in pastoral care and counseling challenges this causal relationship. It raises critical questions: Does the past truly govern the present? If not, how does the future integrate into our current lives?

In response to these questions, Robert C. Dykstra introduced the idea of the Eschatological Self in his book *Counseling Troubled Youth*, and this concept was further developed in my previous research, *Understanding the Hope of Theology from the Perspective of Pastoral Care*.<sup>19</sup> It underscores the necessity of understanding and interpreting the interplay between pain and hope in the context of Jesus’s presence, highlighting the complexities inherent in their practical application.

The Eschatology of Hope posits that the future, alongside the past, influences the present. In positive psychology, this future orientation is called hope; in theology, it is eschatology; in analytic psychology, it is referred to as a dream or transcendence. Dreams symbolize unconscious psychological activity, crucial in psychoanalysis and counseling. Thomas Ogden even proposed a direct correlation between a client’s incapacity to dream and their ability to change during therapy.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Robert Dykstra, *Counseling Troubled Youth* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Lee, “Understanding,” (n. 16).

<sup>20</sup> Thomas H. Ogden, “This Art of Psychoanalysis,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 85, no. 4 (2004): 857–877.

Introducing eschatology into counseling becomes feasible with a framework linking the psychological term “dream” with the theological “eschatology.” Here, the question “Can people hope for the eschaton?” replaces “Can the client dream?” Moltmann’s eschatological theology provides the basis for this relationship between dreams and the end times. Early psychoanalytic approaches focused on the individual client, often overlooking the “third agent,” an aspect well-covered by Practical Theology through attention to environmental, societal, and systemic issues. This approach can invigorate theological perspectives on concepts like “dream” or “hope.”

In Christian belief, encountering Jesus on the cross amid current suffering connects the 21st-century believer with the first-century suffering Jesus. From an eschatological perspective, this encounter signifies transcending time and space to collaborate with Jesus in establishing a new kingdom in the end time. In counseling, this viewpoint suggests that present suffering is not constrained by history. Dykstra views hope as a transcendent force capable of revising the past and shaping the present. Thus, the eschatological self allows the future to reinterpret the past and influence the present, rather than being dictated by the past.

## 2. NSSI with Practical Theology

### a) Why It has to be “Pastoral Care and Counseling”

Despite the designation of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) as a research priority in the *DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders)* in 2013, and its distinction from suicide, practical theological research on self-injury remains notable scarce. From Baruch Spinoza’s perspective, understanding self-injury is challenging within a theological framework that esteems human life, given his concept of conatus as the effort to maintain self-existence. This study proposes three persuasive arguments for using pastoral counseling as an innovative and effective approach to comprehend and address NSSI. It emphasizes the co-relationship and asking-answer-corresponding dialogue rather than implying an academic or historical relationship.

First, the concept of *guilt* is central to understanding both NSSI and pastoral counseling. NSSI is often a form of self-punishment, echoing emotions like or wrongdoing.<sup>21</sup> Experiential Avoidance Model (EAM) of NSSI suggests that self-injury

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<sup>21</sup> Laurie MacAniff Zila and Mark S. Kiselica, “Understanding and Counseling Self-Mutilation in Female Adolescents and Young Adults,” *Journal of counseling and development* 79, no. 1 (2011): 46–52.

aims to escape or alleviate negative emotional arousal, such as anger, shame, sadness, or despair, closely related to feelings of guilt.<sup>22</sup>

Second, NSSI and pastoral counseling relate to purification rituals. Self-injury has a dissociation or transformational function that enables people to temporarily forget or find solace in their distress through bodily suffering. This transformation has an immediate purification function. Previous research highlights its role in providing transient relief, evolving into a functional condition that perpetuates self-injury in those experiencing pain.<sup>23</sup> This notion aligns with the Christian rite of baptism, linking self-injury to concepts of guilt and purification.

Lastly, environmental factors significantly influence self-injury. Key contributors include childhood abuse, critical family environments, and genetic predispositions towards emotional or cognitive reactivity. Childhood physical or sexual abuse and unstable parental relationships are also significant factors.<sup>24</sup> In pastoral counseling, these environmental elements are crucial in analyzing spirituality and society. Scholars like Seward Hiltner and Larry Graham emphasize the importance of family, societal, cultural, natural, and spiritual systems in understanding psychological issues, particularly in relation to hope and pain.

### **b) Similarity of Baptism and NSSI: Self-Destruction Function**

Baptism, a sacred ritual involving the confession of sins and symbolic rebirth, can be viewed as potentially harmful to the body's respiratory system, as it disrupts the natural process of breathing. The significance of this lies in the restoration of genuine human nature through self-denial, symbolizing the renunciation of the physical body's sinful past and a move towards spirituality. Although radical or dysfunctional behavior does not directly inflict physical harm, baptism symbolically represents self-destruction and the subsequent restoration of integrity.

The self-destructive process that takes place in baptism is subjective. The ongoing debate surrounding infant baptism is primarily attributed to the lack of subjective confession of faith by the individuals being baptized. The emphasis on sub-

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<sup>22</sup> Alexander L. Chapman et al. "Solving the Puzzle of Deliberate Self-Harm: The Experiential Avoidance Model," *Behaviour research and therapy* 44, no. 3 (2006): 371–394.

<sup>23</sup> Colleen Jacobson and Kristen Batejan, "Comprehensive Theoretical Models of Nonsuicidal Self-Injury," in *The Oxford Handbook of Suicide and Self-Injury*, ed. Matthew K. Nock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 308–320 ; Edward A. Selby et al. "Comprehensive Theories of Suicidal Behavior," in Nock, *Oxford Handbook* (n. 23): 286–307.

<sup>24</sup> Bessel A. Van Der Kolk et al. "Childhood Origins of Self-Destructive Behavior," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 148, no. 12 (1991): 1665–1671.

jectivity in baptism is because non-subjective self-destruction is difficult to connect with true self-emptying and the restoration of spirituality.

Self-injury, which is a clear and visible form of self-destructive behavior, can be intriguingly linked to baptism due to its purifying nature. Motivated by personal and social factors, self-injury reflects vulnerability and can be linked to a new understanding of life, recognizing the reality of physical harm and the potential for death.<sup>25</sup> It serves to manage personal issues like excessive emotional arousal or social neglect, fulfilling desires through self-destruction. Although this resolution may be temporary and maladaptive, it essentially involves eliminating what is considered negative and acquiring what is considered positive through self-destructive actions.

**Table 1:** Similarities of Baptism and NSSI

	<b>Baptism</b>	<b>NSSI</b>
Self-destruction behavior	Going into the water and holding one's breath	Directly harming one's own body through various methods.
What is eliminated	Personal sins (including communal sins) from the past	Negative emotions or indifference
What is acquired	A new self, accompanied by the Holy Spirit	Temporary relief (reinforcement)

### **c) Difference between Baptism and NSSI: Convergence of Causes and Resolution Processes**

Although baptism and NSSI may have overlapping principles and objectives, they differ significantly in their outcomes. Baptism is generally a singular ritual that has beneficial and curative consequences, whereas NSSI operates as a recurring and dysfunctional encounter. This study indicates that the primary distinctions between them are found in the correlation between reasons behind their occurrence and the approaches used to solve them.

Baptism, a communal ritual, extends and addresses personal internal issues within a communal context. Encompassing individual dedication, it encompasses the act of admitting wrongdoing, cleansing oneself from personal transgressions,

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<sup>25</sup> Two widely accepted theories related to NSSI are Jacobson and Batejan's Comprehensive Theoretical Model and Chapman et al.'s Experiential Avoidance Model (EAM). For further information on these theories, refer to Jacobsen and Batejan, "Comprehensive Theoretical Models," (n. 23); Edward A. Selby et al. "Comprehensive Theories," (n. 23); Chapman et al. "Solving," (n. 22).

and reinstating the inherent qualities of humanity, thereby transforming personal sin from a deeply personal level to a more expansive social and communal sphere.

NSSI represents a reversal of the convergence seen in baptism, as it emphasizes the redirection of negative emotions and causes towards oneself. This process entails that the underlying factors contributing to self-injury—such as genetic emotional reactivity, childhood abuse, familial hostility, loss from early separation, and low pain tolerance—are beyond one's control. Consequently, self-injury becomes a means of self-restoration, using methods perceived as within personal control, albeit in a self-destructive and maladaptive manner.

**Table 2:** Differences between Baptism and NSSI

	<b>Baptism</b>	<b>NSSI</b>
Cause	Personal sins (including social sins)	Social attachment factors.
Resolution Process	Mutual resolution and purification through communal disclosure	Self-injury.
Convergence Relationship	Expanding personal matters into a communal context	Reducing social matters into personal ones.

### III. Anthropocene Pastoral Care and Counseling (APCC)

The Anthropocene presents humanity with unique suffering due to natural and geological transformations caused by human activities. This epoch, characterized by substantial modifications to the Earth, is linked to human distress, including species extinction and societal system-induced suffering, with capitalism and plantation systems as significant contributors.

Practical theology must move beyond examining geological transformations to explore individual encounters with suffering. The study of the Anthropocene in practical theology should prioritize a personalized approach over a narrow focus on geology, science, or phenomenology.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> One of the scientific approaches to addressing the Anthropocene is “sustainable development.” Interestingly, from a philosophical perspective, it is paradoxical that the problems arising from humanity’s capital-driven development within the Anthropocene can be improved through another form of civilizational development. For instance, David W. Orr has anticipated these issues and dis-

The psychological and practical suffering caused by the Anthropocene affects everyone, though its expressions vary. The geological, environmental, and cultural changes present distinct mental health challenges, particularly impacting vulnerable populations. Thus, pastoral counseling requires a specialized approach to address these issues. This study identifies correlations between NSSI and the Anthropocene, highlighting similarities such as genuine pain, powerlessness despite social responsibility, theological ideas like guilt and community, the concept of extinction, and hope from eschatology. These factors are crucial in the initial stage of APCC.

This study identifies correlations between NSSI and the Anthropocene, highlighting similarities such as genuine pain, powerlessness despite social responsibility, theological ideas like guilt and community, the concept of extinction, and hope from eschatology. It aims to elucidate APCC by outlining its four stages and tasks. These stages, while not strictly sequential, progress from one task to the next in both theoretical and counseling contexts. Each stage requires specific attributes in the counselor and cognitive transformations, ultimately achieving a transcendent self amidst the Anthropocene's bleakness and cultivating the ability to envision a hopeful future.

## 1. First Task: Anthropocene Justice

Caregivers and counselors should incorporate social change and justice when assisting people involved in complex social problems. In the Anthropocene Pastoral Care and Counseling (APCC) framework, extra emphasis on Anthropocene Justice is essential.<sup>27</sup>

Addressing Anthropocene Justice involves clarifying potential misconceptions. It is not about instructing people on what is just but about acknowledging personal suffering and understanding its roots. It might be misinterpreted as forcing individuals to accept their pain, akin to structural violence. Instead, it requires a proactive approach to global suffering, rather than mere acknowledgment or conformity.

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tinguished between “ecological sustainability” and “technological sustainability.” Saito Kohei, on the other hand, has referred to sustainable development as the contemporary opiate of the masses, obscuring the reality of capitalist-driven unsustainability. For further information, refer to David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) and Kohei Saito, *Capital in the Anthropocene* (Madrid: Ediciones B, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Jane Goodman, “Starfish, Salmon, and Whales: An Introduction to the Special Section,” *Journal of Counseling & Development* 87, no. 3 (2009): 259.

This approach aligns with social justice advocacy emphasized in clinical psychology and counseling.<sup>28</sup> APCC focuses on suffering considering its origins and impacts on specific people, rather than the counselor's qualities or ethical consciousness. It recognizes that past experiences are connected to present Anthropocene pain.

The initial phase of APCC can be through the lens of postcolonial theolog, wherein the practical theologian addresses matters of systemic malevolence by intercultural comprehension. This involves recognizing Anthropocene pain, often overlooked in the suffering one, and understanding the resulting class, racial, and regional disparities.

During the first stage, caregivers and care receivers strive to comprehend concerns within the Anthropocene context. Humans are influenced by society, and concerns about personal existence become prominent. At this stage, the receiver gains two therapeutic effects. Firstly, they achieve a precise understanding of ambiguous personal distress and situations. Techniques tracing present problems to the past may seem clear in a counseling report but present inherent ambiguity in resolving issues since no one can modify the past.

Consequently, personal pain and circumstances often become unclear due to "psychological causality." APCC addresses this by focusing on the contemporary period, enabling clear acknowledgment of anguish and predicaments. Secondly, APCC discontinues the oppression on individuals' lives, confronting both environmental and self-imposed oppression. It provides psychological respite from environmental oppression and psychologically obstructs self-imposed oppression.

## 2. Second Task: Expansion into Community

Following the stage of Anthropocene Justice, it becomes necessary to reflect on the convergence of causes and resolution processes, as illustrated by the correlation between NSSI and Baptism. To address feelings of helplessness or pain caused by the Anthropocene at an individual level, it is crucial to understand communal approaches to these issues. The pastoral approach combined with community discourse stands out. While NSSI is a private struggle, baptism teaches the importance of psychological resources that collectively acknowledge both social and personal pain. Handling social factors privately can result in counterproductive behavior si-

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<sup>28</sup> Ronald E. Fox, "Advocacy: The Key to the Survival and Growth of Professional Psychology," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 39, no. 6 (2008): 633–637; Mark S. Kiselica and Michelle Robinson, "Bringing Advocacy Counseling to Life: The History, Issues, and Human Dramas of Social Justice Work in Counseling," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 79, no. 4 (2001): 387–397.

milar to NSSI. Thus, APCC requires not only an individualistic Anthropocene viewpoint on distress but also a stage where this distress can be articulated and processed within the community.

Expressing pain within a community is a kind of ritual that signifies the understanding that the pain experienced by individuals is not solely their own. LaMothe referred to this as *normalization versus self-blame*.<sup>29</sup> If individuals fail to recognize themselves as being influenced by the power of the Anthropocene and its influence on the earth, they would bear the sole responsibility for the causes and consequences of their pain. This tremendous burden leads individuals into a cycle of self-blame and unresolved anguish. However, when they become aware that this is a result of global and cultural changes known as the Anthropocene, it is no longer a problem for which individuals alone are responsible. Instead, it becomes a problem that should be shouldered by the larger society, developed countries, capitalism, and agribusiness. This is precisely the *expansionary convergence of causes and solutions*.

Two impediments to this task are:

- 1) **Finding Supportive Communities:** Finding a community that can adequately support individuals experiencing pain is challenging. While it would be ideal for larger communities to acknowledge social vulnerabilities, this is often not feasible. Therefore, individuals aware of Anthropocene-induced pain need smaller-scale communities where their pain can be shared and accepted. Pastoral counseling should facilitate the formation of communities where acceptance is experienced through clinical connections, local communities, or religious groups. In difficult cases, smaller communities like the counselor-client relationship or families may still be effective.
- 2) **Psychological Resources for Disclosure:** There must be psychological resources for individuals to voluntarily disclose their pain. In some churches, participating in baptism with a bare body signifies self-denial and openness. This process requires courage and support from community members. High counselor competence and ethical awareness are essential for individuals to acknowledge and publicly declare their pain and social vulnerability. Counselors must remind socially vulnerable individuals that their disadvantaged position is not solely their fault and that they deserve social acceptance and compassion. Initially, individuals may prefer self-harm to public disclosure, but APCC counselors must encourage them to understand that, like the transformed Earth, their suffering is not solely their fault due to external factors like capitalism and agribusiness.

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<sup>29</sup> Ryan LaMothe, “Giving Counsel in a Neoliberal-Anthropocene Age,” *Pastoral Psychology* 68, no. 4 (2019): 421–426.

### 3. Third Task: Gain Eschatological Self

Recognizing societal roots of pain can alleviate self-blame, but earlier counseling stages do not provide the necessary resources to address these issues. Left unresolved, projecting responsibility onto society breeds negativity. Thus, the third APCC task cultivates confrontation and hope through eschatological self-hood.

In the third task of APCC, pain is approached differently. While earlier stages emphasized the negative aspects of pain, the third stage explores its positive aspects. From an eschatological standpoint, pain is unavoidable and must be humbly acknowledged. It transforms into a transcendent phenomenon, allowing individuals to encounter a divine entity who empathizes with their anguish. If this pain originates from societal oppression and discrimination, it can be seen as encountering Jesus on the cross.

The initial stages of APCC do not negate or serve pain but establish a boundary enabling one to confront pain without succumbing to it. This is similar to Daniel chapter 3, where Daniel's friends entered the fiery furnace and were protected by a fourth presence. They faced the fire without being consumed by it, maintaining objectivity toward pain and discovering themselves within it. This leads to deeper theological and psychological development (Lester 1995). By understanding the profound mystery within pain, one gains psychological resources for future hopeful eschatology, rather than being defined by the past.

The Eschatological Self mediates transcendence. This process contains symbolic and mythical elements, making it hard to determine through a simple survey. If such determination were possible, it would be baseless optimism rather than eschatological self. Research and discoveries in this area should occur in the qualitative realm, reflecting theological hope.

Eschatological selfhood emerges emotionally, not as a transcendent being looking down from authority, but through shared suffering. Experiencing eschatological self allows special situational empathy among those who share the experience of suffering together.

### 4. Final Task: *Praxis*

Practical theology must incorporate praxis to be complete, as its name suggests. The final task of APCC, akin to Moltmann's theology, is to advocate for social change and theological movements. Theology, by its nature, must engage with the public sphere. For APCC to be a methodology grounded in practical theology, it must exert public influence and connect to theological truth.

Completing APCC's three tasks equips individuals with a profound awareness of their problematic situations, along with psychological resources and theological insights to foster change. They embrace hope and future possibilities, moving beyond resignation to the past. The praxis of APCC focuses on fostering communal change and social education with theological nuance, rather than dismantling civilization or transforming capitalism to end the Anthropocene.

Individuals who have navigated suffering through APCC become new counselors and caregivers. Their direct experience with APCC and similar suffering, often shared by the socially marginalized, uniquely qualifies them. Despite personal changes, their external circumstances, including societal marginalization and threats posed by the Anthropocene, often persist. This equips them to empathize deeply with others sharing similar vulnerabilities.

Experiencing and practicing eschatological selfhood involves inviting others to the first stage of APCC and ultimately assisting them in acquiring eschatological selfhood. Through this final task, APCC establishes itself not merely as a one-time counseling technique but as an ongoing social and cyclical movement of pastoral counseling, thus positioning itself within the framework of a social movement.

## IV. Conclusion

According to the Gaia Earth theory developed by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, Earth and humans share an intertwined destiny. Fundamentally, the Anthropocene, capitalism, and industrial agriculture originated from a lack of relationality.<sup>30</sup> Chakrabarty emphasizes that the unintended consequences of human actions caused the Anthropocene; focusing solely on human behavior is unproductive. Instead, the Anthropocene represents moving beyond anthropocentrism and individualism to restore community and relationality, engendering a healthy, functional society and planet.

How can practical theology contribute to the transformation of the Anthropocene world? Practical theology is not, by itself, prepared to offer scientific or technological remedies. Solving Anthropocene problems necessitates worldwide interdisciplinary cooperation. Hence, the primary concern of pastoral care should be to examine the influence of the Anthropocene and to address the resulting distress experienced by individuals and communities.

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<sup>30</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 1 (2014): 1–23.

This research integrates dialogues between theology, psychology, and practical theology into interdisciplinary Anthropocene research. Humans confront natural suffering so ingrained that discerning its origins is difficult. We are familiar with such suffering among marginalized groups. Clinical counseling examines the dynamic field composed of counselor and client. However, recent research expands that field to encompass environments and communities, providing non-introspective solutions.

Still, counseling alone is insufficient to tackle the systemic issues that marginalized groups face, which subject them to prolonged suffering and a lack of agency. Failure to recognize the structural underpinnings of suffering leads to self-blame. In the end, individuals fall into a self-perpetuating abyss.

This study highlights the Anthropocene's influence from societal to individual levels. Additional research informed the proposed Anthropocene Pastoral Care and Counseling approach grounded in practical theology. Its four main tasks are: 1) recognizing the problem, 2) fostering community acceptance, 3) bolstering eschatological selfhood through hope, and 4) expanding to alleviate societal suffering. This serves as a methodology for counselors while tackling inequality and suffering.

Suffering remains profound and mysterious. Understanding societal causes, while finding meaning amid suffering, must be pursued concurrently. Locating the suffering Jesus to achieve eschatological selfhood supplies resources to reality-transforming hope. Within that mystery, restored relationality and humanity await.