

2021

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Dimitri Sala OFM
ds.apadmn@gmail.com

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Recommended Citation

Sala, Dimitri OFM (2021) "Pentecostal Culture, or Pentecost of Culture?: Transformation, Paradigms, Power, Unity," *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/spiritus/vol6/iss1/9>

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PENTECOSTAL CULTURE, OR PENTECOST *OF* CULTURE?

TRANSFORMATION, PARADIGMS, POWER, UNITY

DIMITRI SALA

Spiritus 6.1 (2021) 103-122
<http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/spiritus/>
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Keywords *culture, religion, externalization, objectivation, internalization, baptism in the Spirit, transformation, paradigm change, supernatural power, ecumenical unity*

Abstract

This article will explore the relationship between Pentecostals and the broader cultures we inhabit. It will acknowledge that, like all religion, Pentecostalism can tend to create a culture within itself (a “Pentecostal culture”), which at times effects a withdrawal of its adherents from the surrounding world. This necessitates a conscious decision, first to navigate away from that tendency where it exists, and then to define a positive role for Pentecostalism within culture, viz., the transformation of civilization (a “Pentecost of culture”). Thereby the article proposes a more extensive definition of the baptism of the Spirit, looks at how God is already impacting cultures through the contemporary Kingdom-transformation movements of neo-Pentecostalism, and finally, highlights and promotes the specific culturally-transformative contributions already within the essence of Pentecostalism—the ability to change paradigms, the manifestation of supernatural power, and the ecumenical modeling of unity.

Introduction

When I was in ministry school, three required systematic theology courses were offered also from a cross-cultural perspective. I eagerly chose that option because I have an interest in contemplating the economy of God from as wide an angle as possible—a viewpoint that certainly could not omit consideration of what H.

Richard Niebuhr called “the double wrestle of the church with its Lord and with the cultural society with which it lives in symbiosis.”¹ Each of those courses included an exploration of exactly that; but that quest also uncovered the fact that all religion—Christianity included—can have a tendency to *create a culture within itself*, which at times effects a withdrawal of its adherents from the world around them. A conscious decision must thereby be made, first to navigate from that tendency where it exists, and then to define a positive role for our religion within culture, if Christianity is to offer the pathway of salvation to the world.

That is what this article will attempt to accomplish, as specifically applied to Pentecostalism.² It will first explore the inclination of creating a *Pentecostal* culture, then encourage us to decide for a “Pentecost *of* culture” in which Pentecostalism—like all of Christianity—has the specific assignment of transforming civilization around us. As corollaries, it will propose a more extensive definition of the baptism of the Spirit, look at how God is already impacting cultures through the contemporary “Transformation” movements of neo-Pentecostalism, and finally, highlight and promote the specific culturally-transformative contributions already within the essence of Pentecostalism—the ability to change paradigms, the manifestation of supernatural power, and the strength of ecumenical unity.

Religion and Culture

Let us start by exploring the general tendency of religion to form a culture of its own. Here we are indebted to the sociology, philosophy, and anthropology of religion; in this study the work of Peter Berger, a sociologist who has applied sociological theory to the phenomenon of religion, will be specifically helpful.³

Berger begins with the fact that human beings occupy a distinct position in creation. Unlike the rest of the “animal kingdom” we do not operate primarily on firmly directed drives called “instincts,” nor (like animals) is our world made psychologically inhabitable solely because of instinctual drive. Human life takes shape only by our intentional activity—we participate in making the world inhabitable for ourselves. Humanly created “culture,” then, is what provides the structures supporting the psychological and social stability we would lack if left to our biological instincts alone. Society holds a privileged position as a part of culture because of the anthropological fact that humans are essentially social beings.

This “world-construction” consists of three dynamics. First, because we are not self-made by instinct, “externalization” happens as we extend ourselves into the

world through products and activities, material and non-material. This is the “stuff” out of which culture is made, varying of course with the particular humans making it. “Objectivation” refers to the fact that this externalized product of humans called “culture” then has an existence of its own. Hence we can talk about an individual experiencing culture as other-than-self, and even of having a “relationship to” culture. “Internalization” is that very relationship-process by which individuals or groups integrate their culture into their own subjective identity. This is how we often can say that a human is “a product of” his or her culture. Externalization, objectivation, and internalization.

Because of these dynamics, material or non-material elements of culture, once produced, cannot so easily be changed by those in relationship with them. These elements can even be said to exert themselves upon adherents of that culture,⁴ at times in ways unforeseen by their originators or not agreeable to some in that culture.⁵

Now given that culture is a construct of human beings, and human lives do in fact change, culture itself is ultimately unstable and needs its own back-up system of maintenance, or “legitimation.” This is what protects it from the threat of chaos when life is altered. But, so important is this need, that

. . . when the *nomos* [meaningful order] is taken for granted as appertaining to the “nature of things,” . . . it is endowed with a stability deriving from more powerful sources than the historical efforts of human beings.⁶

And, “It is at this point that religion enters significantly into our argument.”⁷ Why? Because religion provides the ultimate stability to the two aforementioned functions of any culture, “world-construction” and “world maintenance.” As to the first:

Every human society is an enterprise of world-building. Religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise.⁸

Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established.⁹

In other words, it represents the deepest level of world-construction. How? It articulates the world’s blueprints of meaning from the god(s)—the ultimate “more powerful source” of that culture. As to “world-maintenance” or “legitimation”:

Religion thus serves to maintain the reality of that socially constructed world within which men exist in their everyday lives.¹⁰

. . . religion has been the historically most widespread and effective instrument of legitimation.¹¹

It fulfills this function because it defines how the culture is supported by that same ultimate “more powerful source”—its god(s). Finally, in regard to both functions of world-construction and world-maintenance,

Religious ritual has been a crucial instrument of this process of “reminding.” Again and again it “makes present” to those who participate in it the fundamental reality-definitions and their appropriate legitimations.¹²

Now because of “internalization”—the fact that the aspects of culture become part of the very identity of its members—it is easy to see why there exists a built-in tension when the instability of human experience calls for culture to change with it. If, then, religion functions as the deepest aspect of an individual’s internalized world and its maintenance, it is likewise easy to understand why religion is a candidate for becoming an end in itself, for taking on a life of its own, and even for being, as we spoke of above, an element of culture “exerting itself upon its adherents, at times in ways unforeseen by its originators or not agreeable to some in that culture.”

Religious legitimations arise from human activity, but once crystallized into complexes of meaning that become part of a religious tradition they can attain a measure of autonomy as against this activity. Indeed they may even *act back upon* actions in everyday life, transforming the latter, sometimes radically.¹³

Religion will even play the role of a built-in self-defense when culture is under external pressure that interrupts and threatens the “world” it constructed—whether literally, or in the subjective perceptions of its adherents.¹⁴

Simply put, religion can in fact be so identified with its culture that its adherents confuse one for the other. As definer of reality, it has become the social reality itself. The structures and processes that emerge because of religion evolve into a “plausibility structure”¹⁵—i.e., a sociocultural base for a meaning so fundamental to most that they would never think of questioning it, even

unconsciously. An offensive against religion becomes an offensive against its culture; an offensive against culture becomes an offensive against its religion. Religion has become a culture of itself.¹⁶

“Pentecostal/ Culture”

Pentecostalism is not exempt from this proclivity. To begin with, the nature of Judaeo-Christianity is one of distinction from the rest of the world and its systems (“holiness”). This heightens its tendency to create a *culture of its own*, with but a small step to then use it as a means of withdrawal from the dominant culture. At times throughout history Christians have been known to “live in their own little world,” the “plausibility structure” of which was our religion; Pentecostal Christians are no exception.

Secondly, though Pentecostalism rightfully claims that it is a restoration of an aspect of original Christianity, one would be naive to ignore the fact that even a *re*appearance of biblical realities occurs within a flow of centuries of development, whether for good or bad. And each era carries its own “baggage”—even for a future restoration movement.¹⁷ Revival though it was, the inbreak of Pentecostalism was nevertheless located in a history of Christianity in which there had been a centuries-old tendency to reject the surrounding culture altogether. Starting in the post-apostolic age with Tertullian, then flowering in the monastic movement, Christianity never totally discarded the belief that a solution to the dilemma presented by the world is for Christianity to isolate from it. Later on the Mennonites took up that same solution.¹⁸ Any brand of Christianity has been susceptible to this historical trend lurking as a potential answer to be adopted in whatever degree seemingly suitable.

Pentecostalism adopted that answer as well, and has inclined toward creating its own culture as a “plausibility structure” through several behavioral, liturgical, and theological tendencies. As a result, the more Pentecostalism has settled in these and similar characteristics, the more it too can be said to have created a culture within itself, even to the point of effecting a withdrawal of its adherents from the world around them.

A Pentecost of Culture

Both Scripture and contemporary experience, however, show that the Holy Spirit is not, nor has ever been, satisfied being a prisoner of religious culture—even if it is

Pentecostal culture! Indeed, from the very beginning, it was God’s design that human culture be aligned to his purposes, and that every bit of it be a reflection of his presence. Judaeo-Christianity reserves the position of “creator” to God himself. He is the only “world-maker”; humans are at best his delegated agents, and any “externalizations” which are “objectified” in the human process of world-making are meant to be inspired and governed by him. Even the variety of nations and their respective cultures were meant to be a manifestation of divine design (cf. Deut 32:8, and especially Acts 17:26–27). It was precisely and only because this design was resisted that the Babel affair occurred in Genesis 11 and God then had to select a man and call him *out of* his culture in Genesis 12. If human culture would have remained within its position of being the “externalization” and “objectification”—i.e., embodiment—of God’s intentions, he would not have had to create a distinct culture out of Abram and his family.

Yet in the very words of Abram’s vocation, God made it clear that he intended not to isolate this new culture, but to raise it up and use it for the benefit of all the rest:

I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. . . .
All the families of the earth will find blessing in you. (Gen 12:2–3, NABRE)

The same thought is reflected in Psalm 67, in which the blessing of the Lord is invoked “on us” (v. 1)—i.e., Abraham’s nation—but then is followed by its immediate consequence:

For then the earth will acknowledge your ways
and all the nations will know of your power to save.
Let the nations praise you, O God,
let all the nations praise you! (vv. 2–3)¹⁹

Likewise, the Acts 2 moment that we Pentecostals celebrate as our trademark was not limited to an “Upper Room experience” or a personal spiritual blessing. No! It immediately flowed out of the Upper Room and began to accomplish its ultimate purpose by drawing the various cultures symbolically represented in Jerusalem for the Feast, and then prophetically manifesting the fulfillment of Genesis 12’s vision—the reversal of the Babel crisis (prophetically exhibited through the supernatural understanding of glossolalia), and the assembly of all cultures unto the purposes of God by the people of Abraham.

Subsequent Christian reflection by the Apostle Paul would spell out even more directly that by means of Jesus' death and resurrection-victory, God intended to reconcile not only individual souls to himself and his purposes, but "everything on earth" (Col 1:20). John writes with the same sweeping viewpoint. John 3:16 is so often associated with soul-winning that we miss its even more comprehensive scope. "The world" that God *so* loves is a place occupied by not only humans, but by the "externalized" and "objectified" cultures humans have need to create.²⁰ Likewise, "the world" can certainly mean the world "as a whole"—i.e., collectively instead of distributively (a perspective often missed because of Western emphasis on individuality). If we accept this interpretation, we can also rightfully posit that Jesus meant more than "souls" when he said, "for the Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). God's purposes will reach their fulfillment, then, not with the elimination of nations and their cultures, but by their integration, as the kings of those nations and cultures bring their treasures into the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:24), and the kingdom of this world has actually "*become* the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ" (Rev 11:15, italics mine). All the more amazing in that John minces no words about this world being under a rule of darkness, a darkness in which God's people must be careful not to participate. In simpler words, God is not puritanical; though sin repulses him, neither does he desire to "throw the baby out with the bath water" when it comes to the world he created and wants to save. Culture matters as much to God as the people who "externalize" it.

Christianity, then, has a role within culture. In answer to the question of the relationship between Pentecostals and the broader culture, a conscious decision must be made to steer away from contentment with our own *Pentecostal* culture, and dare to trail-blaze what we will here call "a Pentecost *of* culture."

But just how do we wrap our minds around that?

Transformation

The contemporary word coined by one neo-Pentecostal movement to describe the activity of Christianity upon and within culture is "transformation." This movement encourages us to decide that anything Pentecostal—like all of Christianity—has the specific assignment of transforming society and the world around us, and would propose that the relationship between the church (and thus Pentecostalism) and the surrounding culture is to be one of "Kingdom-transformation."

These assertions are biblically-based, and easy to understand. We pray so often in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, *on earth . . .*" That means here and now, not only "in the sky, by and by." And lest we get lost in theological hair-splitting, the next phrase of that prayer defines what God's will looks like when it is done on earth: ". . . as it is in heaven." Jesus' movement is meant to bring as much heaven to earth as possible. That is what we mean by "transformation."

Jesus also called his followers the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13, 14). The purpose and nature of salt is to change anything with which it comes in contact. Jesus even goes so far as to say that if salt is not fulfilling this purpose, we regard it as useless enough to be discarded (5:13). Likewise, the nature of light is to replace darkness, and no one would think to hide it away when darkness needs to be replaced (5:15). In another familiar verse we are told that in the spirit realm, anything that is of light shines forth in such a way that it conquers darkness (John 1:5). "In the same way," Jesus said, "your light *must* shine in the sight of men" (Matt 5:16, italics mine).

By these pithy Scriptural statements, one can reasonably conclude that the transformation of the world is a defining characteristic for the identity of Jesus' disciples. And we need not relegate this way of thinking only to some recent movement. As far back as 1965 at the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church echoed these very thoughts at the beginning of its watershed document on the relationship between the church and the world:

For the Council yearns to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today. Therefore, the Council focuses its attention on the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives. It gazes upon that world which is the theater of man's history, and carries the marks of his energies, his tragedies, and his triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ. He was crucified and rose again to break the stranglehold of personified Evil, so that this world might be *fashioned anew* according to God's design and reach its fulfillment (italics mine).²¹

This bold statement goes so far as to suggest that transformation of the real world ("along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which" we live!) is so

central to Christianity and the identity of the church that this remaking is nothing less than the Creator's plan and destiny in light of Jesus' death and resurrection!

Yet the truth is that we have strayed far from this vision. Although Jesus Christ is the only hope for the world and he has set his mission in place in his body, the church, the world around the church has become less and less inclined to come to it for answers to real problems. The church is hardly ever thought about as world-changers—even by its own members! The Transformation movement is a restoration of that Christian identity as world-changers who pursue aligning “externalized” and “objectified” culture with the original intentions of God *by allowing the Holy Spirit to create in the surrounding culture something which, when “internalized,” would fulfill the prophetically manifest purposes of Pentecost.*

Spirit-Baptism

A closer look at the Greek word for “baptize” (*baptizein*) will reveal some interesting nuances. *Baptizein* was simply a secular term meaning to dip repeatedly, immerse, submerge, clean, or wash by submerging, or (figuratively) to overwhelm.²² It is employed in this secular meaning even in the Septuagint (where we find only four occurrences),²³ with three additional such uses in the Hexapla;²⁴ the only time it appears as part of a sacred ritual is in a Greek Old Testament version of an unknown source.²⁵ It is only in the New Testament that we find multiple uses of the word, and there mostly referring to what is assumed is the rite of baptism, or to the Jewish ritual ablutions. But not only to those: there are times when it is used also in the neutral sense of plunging, drenching, washing, or being “immersed” metaphorically, i.e., overwhelmed (viz., Jesus' passion in Mark 10:38/Luke 12:50).

Among New Testament uses of the word, of course, is in reference to the baptism of the Spirit. But the nature of this baptism occasions a deeper dig into the meaning of *baptizein* as applied here, for the New Testament evidence of what happens in Spirit-baptism suggests that we can rule out the use of “baptism” as a technical term for a ritual. The baptism of the Spirit is not even guaranteed by the ritual we usually associate with the word “baptism”;²⁶ though it can “occur” through a laying-on of hands, it is primarily an inner experience (which is then usually manifest to the senses). So an argument can be made that by New Testament times *baptizein*, as with other Greek words, was used in the secular meanings mentioned above, as an appropriate metaphor to describe a dynamic of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus' disciples. The question then is, “What is that dynamic?”

The classic answer in Pentecostalism is, “that personal experience of first receiving an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” This answer, while not untrue, has nevertheless limited the meaning of the secular word *baptizein* primarily to a solitary event (even if not an external ritual) at a moment in time—an understanding that biblical evidence shows us is too narrow.

First of all, Old Testament individuals—including a pagan—had personal experiences in which it was said that the Spirit “fell on,” “rushed upon,” “came into” them (and the like), even to the extent that it caused them to prophesy, do extraordinary things, or become like another person;²⁷ and in the New Testament, Luke speaks of being “filled with the Spirit” even before Pentecost.²⁸ Yet in none of these examples—including those in Luke—is the happening called being “baptized in the Spirit.” The phrase, then, must mean more than simply an experiential encounter with the Spirit of God.

There are, moreover, two New Testament clues illuminating a wider meaning of the baptism in the Spirit that takes seriously the full nuances of the secular Greek word *baptizein*.

1) We first hear of this reality through John the Baptist. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, however, we are given more information that is an important qualifier: what Jesus will offer will be a baptism with the Spirit “and fire” (Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16). There have, of course, been various interpretations as to what that means. There are those who think it not a qualifier but mere poetry, i.e., as an added descriptor, but nothing more substantial. Then there are those among Pentecostals who, not knowing what to do with “baptism” outside of an association with experiential encounter, make “fire” into another independent sort of baptism, so that now we have three—in water, in the Spirit, and in fire. Below we will see more specifically why there is no need for that; nevertheless the Matthew/Luke qualification suggests that the initial experience of Spirit-baptism is not all that the Spirit has in mind. “With the Spirit and fire” could be a hendiadys—“two sides of the same coin,” so to speak. But whether or not, when “fire” is joined to the secular meaning of *baptizein*, we can only conclude that it means to be “immersed in fire.” And the image of fire speaks for itself. It is of the nature of fire (a) to transform and consume everything with which it comes into contact, and (b) to continue to burn until either it is put out or completely consumes its host, both points at which it ceases to be fire! A baptism “with

the Spirit and fire,” then, begins with a first experience, but is something that of its nature is meant to transform and perdure.

2) Luke, the gospel writer who gives featured attention to the Holy Spirit, also describes the Spirit-baptism with the phrase “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49), another image that speaks for itself. Clothing clearly changes the appearance of a person until it is removed; and if the person allows that clothing to affect his or her self-consciousness, it can contribute to an internal change as well. Being “clothed with power,” then, also connotes not only a singular experience of getting “dressed up” as it were, but something that perdures as long as it is allowed to, and can even transform.

These clues certainly challenge some *a priori* conclusions. Part of our Christian historical baggage is that we have absorbed as many uses of *baptizein* as we can into an immediate association-by-experience with the water-ritual only and that thereby, when applied to Spirit-baptism, the word seems to imply a single moment. Far better to recognize that for New Testament Christians there was no separate word “baptize” as we know it today: the use of *baptizein* or any of its derivatives probably sounded in New Testament ears more like our secular use of the word “immerse”; like the word “church” when used to translate the Greek word *ekklēsia* (which in Greek simply means “called-out assembly” and was also used in secular society), “baptize” emerged as a historical result of Christians “creating their own culture.” Though we cannot deny that *baptizein* was an appropriate word for that one-time water ritual in the New Testament, and that there it is used as such multiple times,²⁹ to limit its impact to that association alone misses important nuances of the Greek secular word that also appear in the whole of Scripture, particularly when applied to relationship with the Spirit.

If, however, we welcome *baptizein* in its full meanings, the metaphorical connections are even richer. Being “baptized” in the Spirit becomes something greater than a personal moment of encounter (as in the Old Testament), even if it is associated with New Testament salvation as a “Pentecost moment.” This baptism is a plunging, a drenching, a saturation, an immersion into the reality and person of the Holy Spirit that results in a permanent state not unlike catching fire or wearing different clothing. I personally would “fight to the death” that we are meant to have an initial supernatural experience we presently know as the “baptism in the Spirit.” But we have tended to limit the term to this. To be baptized in the Spirit means nothing less than to enter a process of full Spirit-transformation.

This understanding also allows us to make our way back from some of the spiritual and theological detours in which we have trapped ourselves. There would be, for example, no more of a need to insist on a separate water-baptism, Spirit-baptism, and fire-baptism experience, than there is to make a separate “baptism” out of being “clothed with power.” Additionally, our explanation can be a healthy guard against any gnostic-like insistence by some Pentecostals on the need for a particular experience; it would also keep us humble before our non-Charismatic brethren who shy away from believing in the need for our Pentecostal experience, while preserving the fact that (as we mentioned above) an “immersion” is still meant for all followers of Jesus. It will likewise make sense out of the documented Christian record that in the first eight centuries of the post-apostolic church, the baptism in the Spirit with its accompanying charisms was a familiar event immediately following water-baptism. Though spoken of as two “baptisms” in Scripture, they were seen as separable only by exception.³⁰

“Baptizing” a Culture

So let us put this all together. We have just concluded that when *baptizein* is applied to the Spirit, what is described in Scripture is more than a personal Pentecost moment, even if occurring together with the acceptance of the gospel and water-baptism: it is a moment that of its particular nature is to be integrated into ongoing and permanent transformation.³¹ In this thinking, transformation and the baptism of the Spirit are synonymous. Add to this the fact that the ultimate objective of Christianity is not to form an isolated culture of our own, but rather to be agents of the “Kingdom-transformation” of the real world, and it can now be possible to speak not only of baptizing individuals in the Spirit but of, through them, baptizing an entire culture in the Spirit!

By this we are not relativizing the fact that ultimately no one comes into the fullness of God’s plan except by a personal choice of salvation. But we are widening the final picture of his plan beyond “soul-winning”; we are saying that the Great Commission is not targeted at individuals alone. God wants to save and “baptize” not only the banker, but the bank; not only the teacher, but the educational system; not only the criminal, but the penal institution; not only the mayor, but the government—not just the actors in the culture, but the very culture itself. We are also taking seriously the fact that, as in Acts 10, the baptism of the Spirit can manifest before a conscious acceptance of salvation on the part of individuals who are nevertheless open to the Word of witness: so too can it manifest in their culture.

Jesus' agenda for his followers is that when we intermingle with "the kingdom of the world" (Rev 11:15), as in the chemistry of salt and the physics of light, a definitive transformation occurs by the Holy Spirit's presence and work—even to the extent that those who are not believers can be taken up into his purposes.³² A "Pentecost of culture" is *what happens when the Spirit-experience of Christians flows out to the surrounding culture, immersing it to the extent that it produces new "objectified externalizations" from God that can be "internalized," all toward the ultimate goal of the salvation of that entire culture.*

Mere theory? Only a Christian dreamer's proposition? No. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Order of Friars Minor to which I belong, was known to be a cultural climate-changer in the thirteenth century. One of his contemporaries writes,

And thus it happened that [because of Francis' influence] in a short time the face of the region was changed, and it took on a more cheerful aspect everywhere. . . . The former dryness was rooted and the crops sprang up quickly. . . . *Thanksgiving and voice of praise* resounded everywhere.³³

Another account is told of how one of the friars was sent by Francis to cast out territorial demons afflicting a city to the point of its imminent destruction through civil war. "Soon after the city returned to peace and the people preserved their civic rights in great tranquility."³⁴

A different time, only to be enshrined in history? No. We have already referenced the recently birthed neo-Pentecostal movement of "Kingdom-transformation."³⁵ Since the 1990s, participants in this movement have undergone the paradigm shifts described in this article. Its local church leaders are viewing their role as not only pastors of their congregations, but as "pastors" of their cities. Though not without trials and the difficulties inherent in extending the Reign of God, the results are nevertheless amazing as cultures and subcultures begin to be transformed through Christians who are baptized in the Spirit.³⁶

In this movement, then, the "baptism" of the Spirit is contained neither in an individual soul, nor within the four walls of the church. A cultural climate change begins to take place where Transformational Christians have influence. They think biblically but when necessary speak and act secularly. They demonstrate the power of the Spirit by providing supernatural answers to "worldly" issues. They encounter modern-days Cyruses who are not part of God's people (yet!) but are willing to act

as God's anointed agent of his purposes on the earth. Some even invite believers to counsel them in advisory capacities as modern Josephs or Daniels. And like those biblical men, when asked the question of how or why these things have transpired, Christians have the opportunity to testify to the hand of our God, producing in many cases the "internalization" of personal salvation on the part of those who witness God's work. The result: in these places, the world is now looking to the church for answers, transformation is happening, the kingdom of this world is on its way to becoming the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ (Rev 11:15) and cultures exhibiting new "objectified externalizations" are beginning to be "baptized in the Spirit."

A "Natural" for Pentecostalism

Finally, the good news for Pentecostalism in all this is that "baptizing a culture in the Spirit" is not something new that must be seemingly materialized out of nothing. Pentecostals already bring the tools necessary to this assignment. Planted in the essence of Pentecostalism are attributes that lend themselves to cultural transformation that, then, only need to be released! What attributes specifically?

The Ability to Change Paradigms

The essence of Pentecostalism is God moving "outside the box," and us yielding to the wind of the Spirit (John 3:8). Paradigm-shifts for a true Pentecostal, then, should not be as big a "jump" as for the average population. We are familiar enough with going beyond what is secure, and with risk-taking, even at the expense of our own egos—features necessary for paradigm changes and for the sometimes-clumsy learning curves that go with them. Our initial experience of Spirit-baptism was a quantum leap-of-faith orienting us to a faith for seeing God do even more and different things. The unknown dimensions of Pentecostal life consistently demand a position of humility—a quality also needed for paradigm shifts. Spontaneity, variety, and intuitiveness provide a steady diet of "mind-bending," another ingredient in paradigm changes. Being accustomed to hearing prophetic "dreams and visions" (Acts 2:17) positions us for "the new."

All these qualities predispose us to the paradigm shift of navigating away from the tendency to create a religious culture of our own, (back) to a mindset in which the church's purpose (not only its side-effect) is to change the surrounding culture and reorient it toward the Kingdom.³⁷ And for Pentecostals, since the down

payment we already personally received convinces us that the rest is not too far behind, it is not difficult to imagine dedicating ourselves to what God has already spoken as his plan for the nations, because we are already living in and experiencing the moment in which he said that would happen—the Day of the Lord.

The Manifestation of Supernatural Power

The power manifestations common among us have attuned us to God doing the impossible: so God changing a whole culture is not as unbelievable as perhaps for others. Also, the supernatural is the very means God will use not only to do the work, but for us to gain the trust of the culture. Solving social problems through supernatural revelation and/or a power-manifestation is a “language” everyone understands, and certainly passes the litmus test of relevance. This, then, gives us access to influence: those who provide effective solutions that escape even the experts will be the ones sought after for other problems. It is amazing how governments relax their “church-vs.-state” laws and ideologies when the answer to their issues is found by the inbreak of God’s raw power—especially when they are desperate. And God’s power is something true Pentecostals desire (if not used to) welcoming.

The Strength of Ecumenical Unity

Though we have not specifically mentioned it, it can well be imagined that this type of cultural transformation is rarely accomplished by one person, or even one congregation. The power necessary to shift the trends of a society must usually reside in a whole movement; and the success of that movement rests on its ability to accomplish its vision “as one”—i.e., in unity.³⁸ Transformation ministries typically press for a “church of the city,” meaning that Christians need to see themselves first as members of the body at large in a particular locale, then as individual congregations. Oftentimes pastors will lead both special and regular gatherings for the whole church of their city. And participants in the movement repeatedly become aware of the delightful effectiveness this unity brings to their endeavors when it is present.³⁹ Likewise, unity and love are necessary to maintain the stability of relationships in the midst of change—and change is a synonym for “transformation.”

Pentecostalism has been marked from its inception with characteristics of unity that can easily be transferred to a movement of transforming culture.⁴⁰ So unity is already in the DNA of the Pentecostal experience. We are acclimated to “talking the same talk” when in the Spirit, and are no strangers to a unity not of

human calculation. A considerable number of Pentecostals are already frontrunners of a unified church—often without even being aware of it! If any group in the church, then, is predisposed to the unity necessary to carry out Kingdom-transformation, it is Pentecostalism. It is no surprise that at the forefront of Transformation movements also one will always find Pentecostals.

Conclusion

It is exciting, even thrilling, to conceive that the Holy Spirit continues to expand and bring greater revelation to what he purposed through the early twentieth-century Pentecostal outpouring. A classic Protestant perspective on the Reformation is that here the Spirit began gradually restoring all that time had obscured in the body of Christ—first the gospel, then evangelism, then healing, then the charisms and baptism of the Spirit, then (for those who would adhere to it) the Ephesians 4:11–12 fivefold offices in the church. It is now possible to add to that list a restoration by which Pentecostal Christians, as in Acts 2, come out of our *Pentecostal* cultural and are used as agents of Kingdom-transformation and bring forth a Pentecost *of* culture. This would seem—and already is in some places—but the next step for Pentecostals, who by our own spiritual experience are already acclimated to the paradigm-shifts, power, and unity necessary to take up this move.

From my own Catholic perspective, a Pentecost of culture is nothing more and nothing less than an answer to the traditional prayer to the Holy Spirit invoked by Pope Leo XIII over the twentieth century—a prayer to which God responded the next day by the first manifestation of modern Pentecostalism on January 1, 1901, in Topeka, Kansas—and the same prayer invoked by a group of Catholics in 1967 at Duquesne University—to which God responded by another baptism in the Spirit that became the impetus for the “charismatic renewal” of the worldwide body of Christ —

Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of Your faithful,
and enkindle in them
the fire of Your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,
and You shall renew the face of the earth.

The prayer prophesies that by our re-creation God would renew not only the culture of the Church, but “the face of the earth”!

Dimitri Sala, OFM (ds.apadmn@gmail.com), is a Franciscan Friar-priest in an apostolic itinerant ministry of the Word, based in Chicago, Illinois, USA.



Notes

- ¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), ix.
- ² This article was originally presented as a paper at the 46th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies (Ecumenical Interest Group), St. Louis, Missouri, March 11, 2017, but has been edited for the purposes of this journal.
- ³ What follows is a synopsis of his insights in Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Random House, 1990), 4–9. Quotations from other sections of the book will be footnoted.
- ⁴ For example, the plow was invented at a stage in which it was deemed useful in its culture; but that invention has since compelled us to arrange our entire agricultural activity around it such that, over time, no one would attempt farming without one.
- ⁵ As a non-material example, every human culture must employ a language, but in turn we find we are limited, even dominated, by that language’s idea-structures. Another contemporary material example is the computer, which, for better or worse, has completely reshaped civilization! The issue of somehow being “stuck” in our culture has provided much fodder for philosophers and writers of literature down through the ages. The theme of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, for example, explores whether the scientific revolution in Western culture had not in fact “created a monster.”
- ⁶ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 25.
- ⁷ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 25. It will be helpful here to define the term “religion.” Synthesizing for our purposes all that can be said about it, religion is the human response to a revelation of transcendence within our existence and experience. That response includes the resultant beliefs, actions, and social organization of those who receive the revelation.
- ⁸ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 3.
- ⁹ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 25.
- ¹⁰ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 42.
- ¹¹ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 32.
- ¹² Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 40.
- ¹³ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 41.
- ¹⁴ Here we can see why religion becomes such a useful tool to power-mongers who employ it as a means of psychological or even physical coercion—especially when under duress from

other groups with which it must contend. People from his own culture were more eager to kill Jesus (and in Acts, his followers) than those outside of it.

¹⁵ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 45.

¹⁶ A clear contemporary example is Islam. It has been so identified with Middle Eastern cultural forms that, for example, though the Quran itself does not say it must be read in Arabic, Muslims popularly believe so—some even claiming that salvation is limited to interacting with the Arabic original. (For a discussion of this issue, cf. <http://progressive-muslim.org/is-it-compulsory-to-read-quran-in-arabic.htm>.) This is but one internal and external conflict of Muslims attempting to conceive of their religion as other than completely identified with Middle Eastern culture.

¹⁷ “There is no getting around the fact that such a process of rediscovery [of the essentials of Christianity] will entail a serious reconsideration about what the church’s history means for today’s church. Before we can responsibly go into the future, we must go back.” D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdsman Pub. Co., 1999), 13.

¹⁸ For a discussion of this tendency and its history, cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 45–82 (Chapter 2), which entitles this stance, “Christ Against Culture.”

¹⁹ The first use of “nations” actually translates the Hebrew word *goyim*; the second and the third translate the Hebrew word *‘amim*. (The Septuagint also follows the text literally and is faithful to using a separate term for each of these Hebrew words.) If one is to interpret *goyim* as it is mostly used (“gentiles”) and *‘amim* as it is mostly used (“people-groups,” or “nations”) there would be more than a Hebrew parallelism going on here: this may be a direct reference to Israel’s received blessing specifically affecting outsiders (the earth, which includes those outside Israel, and the *goyim*) who, once their consequential blessing was received, would then join in with Israel (who is also an *‘am* [nation]) to praise God!

²⁰ “‘The world,’ ‘this world’ in John invariably means the world of men *and their affairs*. . . . (italics mine),” referenced in his commentary on John 3:16 in Bruce Vawter, C. M., “The Gospel According to John,” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Vol. II*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, S. S., Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, S. J., and Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968), 423; “Besides referring to the universe under man’s direction, ‘the world’ can refer even more directly to the society of men. . . .” Raymond E. Brown, S. S., *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1970), 509.

²¹ “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” par. 2, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S. J. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), 200. In another citation of the same paragraph, “fashioned anew” is translated, “transformed” (John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994], 89).

²² Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1889), 94.

²³ 2 Kgs 5:14; Judg 12:7; Sir 34:25; and Isa 21:4.

²⁴ Job 9:31; Ps 69:3; and Jer 38:22.

²⁵ Lev 6:21; “an unknown source” as cited by Edwin Hatch & Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 190.

²⁶ Cf. Acts 8:14–17. Likewise, in Gal 3:4–5 Paul the Apostle goes through pains to emphasize that his readers did not have or see these experiences because of some external observance.

²⁷ Num 11:25 and 24:2; Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; and 15:14; 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 16:13; and 19:23; 1 Chr 12:19; 2 Chr 15:1; 20:14; and 24:20; Ezek 2:2; 3:14, 24; and 11:5.

²⁸ Luke 1:15, 41, and 67.

²⁹ In these cases the verb is in the aorist tense, denoting a simple completed action.

³⁰ Kilian McDonnell and George Montague, eds., *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) presents an anthology of Patristic writings that validate this claim.

³¹ This squares away even with those who want to identify the baptism of the Spirit with the Sacrament of Confirmation. Catholic and Orthodox sacramental theology sees ritual as an action that only makes sense when initiating in the recipient the divine activity it symbolizes.

³² Even in the Old Testament, God was operating for his purposes in cultures not his own. Did not the people of Nineveh turn their faces toward him? Did not Nebuchadnezzar acknowledge the God of Israel? Did God not call Cyrus his anointed (Isa 45:1) irrespective of the fact that the king was not part of the Holy People? The Hebrew word in that verse is *limshihu*—a construct of the root word *mashiah*, which would refer to the anointed kings, priests, and prophets, and which we usually translate as “messiah”!

³³ Thomas of Celano, “The First Life of St. Francis,” in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, 3rd rev. ed., ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), 259.

³⁴ Thomas of Celano, “The Second Life of St. Francis,” in *St. Francis of Assisi*, 451.

³⁵ The most prolific groups of this movement are Transform Our World (<http://www.transformourworld.org>), led by Argentine Apostle Ed Silviso, and World Trumpet Mission (<http://www.worldtrumpet.com>), led by Ugandan Prophet John Mulinde. The movement also has gained great traction through the neo-Pentecostal “New Apostolic Reformation,” particularly through the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, or “I.C.A.L.” (<http://www.icaleaders.com>), led by Apostle John Kelly (successor to Apostle and Professor C. Peter Wagner), and through the International Prayer Council (<http://www.ipcprayer.org/ipc-home>), led by John Robb. For a more detailed introduction to the Transformation movement, cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transformational_Christianity.

³⁶ For examples and more information, cf. the websites listed in the previous footnote.

³⁷ In the movement “Transform Our World,” the basic introduction to and training for Kingdom-transformation begins with the essential paradigm shifts that the founder Ed Silviso has identified as necessary for the church to fulfill this mandate.

³⁸ In my own Transformation initiative in Chicago, we have come to terms with the fact that, with what we are facing in the culture around us (record-breaking violence, entrenched systemic politics and corruption, etc.), Kingdom-transformation will need an entire spiritual army, not just an isolated battalion. Therefore, we have begun a prototype intentionally asking the question of God, “What must we do together, that we *cannot* do apart?”

³⁹ A “Transform Our World” intercessor once wrote, “Seems so interesting and exciting to me, how in a global movement, global people-interconnections, experiences and insights are helping bring to light the need for/helping confirm/or suggest/the way of healing to occur as a step on the road to nation transformation, by the Holy Spirit’s power, at every level.” (Annita Maat, e-mail message to author et al., 27 April 2016). Likewise, when our five Chicagoland multi-cultural “battalions” (cf. previous footnote) have come together in intentional unity, the prayer experiences have been unprecedented in the Lord’s inhabitation.

⁴⁰ “Charismatic renewal is inherently ecumenical.” Peter Hocken, *Pentecost and Parousia: Charismatic Renewal, Christian Unity, and the Coming Glory* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 1. In context he uses the term “ecumenical” to refer to unity in the church, not to the unity of all religions.