


Article

# Collective Despair and a Time for Emergence: Proposing a Contemplacostal Spirituality<sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** In many ways, the cascading effects of the age of the Anthropocene have accelerated life as we know it towards a certain kind of reckoning, which has only been exacerbated amidst the global inequities present within the COVID-19 pandemic. Trauma studies, as an interdisciplinary field, has recently been linked to the experience of despair at both personal and collective levels. Yet, trauma scholars are increasingly amenable to diverse forms of spirituality and its perspectives as core to the work of addressing suffering in the world, especially for marginalized communities as ways to access the wisdom of bodies, thoughts, emotions, and cultural/spiritual longings. Moving further in this direction, a practical theology which bridges trauma studies with Christian spirituality (and the emphases on spiritually rooted social action and the centrality of the Holy Spirit as the *Paraclete*: helper, counsellor, advocate, and comforter) is timely. This paper imagines how contemporary trauma care approaches might be supported by emergent forms of Christian spirituality enabling greater posttraumatic growth and resiliency and subsequently how this can renew the practice and study of Christian spirituality.

**Keywords:** spiritual practice; trauma; contemplative; Pentecostal



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## 1. Trauma and Despair

Trauma studies, as an interdisciplinary field, has helped to articulate in concrete ways how bodies, psyches, and social communities are suffering and struggling in the face of multiple crises (Silver et al. 2020), and specifically the ways in which a sense of rhythm, space, and time is distorted, leading people within society to experience unprecedented despair. While trauma has long been understood as the absence of trust and safety when it comes to being with one's own body as well as one's intimate relations (Herman 1997), it has only recently been explored as being related to the experience of despair. Panos Vostanis recently wrote that trauma and despair are inseparable, writing that "there can be no trauma without despair (Vostanis 2021)". From Vostanis' perspective, despair is the experience of a person who feels impotent amidst the weight of affliction, unable to resolve the situation on one's own, and feels there is no able assistance to be found. In other words, a person who is in despair is one in bondage to a myopic vision, unable to perceive anything other than calamity. While the description above has been mostly studied intrapersonally, it seems that the experience of despair may also be something felt and passed down at the collective level, as growing numbers of scholars and community care practitioners (New Pluralists 2021) have observed widening polarization, increasing incidences of mass shootings and gun violence, fractures within intergroup cohesion, institutional disaffiliation, and spiritual homelessness attributed to the sense of helplessness many feel. The fissures in our relations can be felt across many social settings, including small groups such as families, organizations such as the workplace, and/or within repeated abusive scandals of

those entrusted to lead larger global institutions. Due to the increasingly commonplace nature of traumatic events in society, the levels of experienced despair across multiple and diverse social groups are becoming intensified (Javanbakht 2022).

One microcosm of this can be found in the context of North American universities, in the aftermath of COVID-19 (Holman et al. 2023); where social justice educators have discussed the status of students in their classrooms as living through “an age of despair” and have linked it to the systemic rise of mental health challenges, racially charged violence, and ecological degradation (Grain 2017). If despair can be experienced at the collective level, contemporary trauma studies tells us that the problem only worsens when it is ignored and the trapped energy remains stuck in our collective body politic unless it is somatically engaged and released (Levine 1997). If collective despair can be understood as the diverse ways in which our society at large tends to lose trust within ourselves, others, and the institutions that support us at large, reintroducing new ways to experience life-affirming relations in any capacity may be instrumental in the long road to recovery from trauma. Furthermore, it is not sufficient to tend to the collective sentiment of despair by taking individual (or one paradigm) approaches; instead, this must be achieved communally and inter-collaboratively, engaging multiple fields and perspectives and disciplines (Hübl and Shridhare 2022). I agree with numerous trauma practitioners who suggest that a multitude of spiritual approaches may be beneficial to incorporate in trauma and despair care practices.

Thomas Hübl is one such scholar who advocates for collective practices of healing to be grounded in the wisdom of spirituality; what he calls the superpowers of “relationality and presencing” (Hübl 2020). In his work, he often quotes Daoist, Confucian, and Kabbalistic teachings and sees them (among others) as providing crucial insights as to how we may go about cultivating capacities of social transformation, resilience, and agency amidst the ongoing nature of human suffering, including despair. Additionally, Gabor Mate, who is known for his work in attachment theory and addiction connected to severe and complex trauma, purports that trauma care must overcome Western scientism (without being anti-science) and learn to tend holistically to a person by relating to suffering through the spiritual force of compassion (which he teaches can be cultivated through recovering cultural and spiritual wisdom traditions) that can fully accept the situation without becoming mired in it (Maté and Maté 2022). In light of their work, it seems critical that if trauma care approaches are to be effective when it comes to collective despair, they must take seriously both the need to engage collectively as well as finding avenues which are spiritually resourced and integrative.

While the study of spirituality at large can be understood broadly as the investigation of practices that a person or community engages in to experience connectedness to life-affirming relations (which I define broadly for purposes of this paper as relations with the divine, nature, loving ancestors, or chosen spiritual guides, teachers, or gracious mentors) (Menakem 2021), this paper considers how an emergent fusion of contemplative and Pentecostal–Charismatic streams of Christian spiritualities can be of particular support to those suffering from collective despair, on the edges of their spiritual tradition, and looking for ways to transform trauma.

Interestingly, many spiritual masters throughout the Christian tradition have also attested to the need to address despair and have even offered reflections as to how spirituality is a primary path in overcoming it. While this proposal should not be assumed appropriate for all persons, or even as the preeminent path towards posttraumatic growth, this proposal tells the story of one new emergent Christian spirituality which bridges the Christian contemplative and Pentecostal traditions in order to better support a person or community in identifying sources of care and aid. And, because it remains a stark collective need to find as many restorative approaches to trauma and despair as possible, this article presents another potential way drawing from the rich diversity of Christian spirituality bringing them together to enrich the whole. Additionally, investigating spiritualities that invite us to experience directly the presence of life-affirming relations within is even more

pertinent to collective healing processes after trauma (such as rewiring our neural pathways and increasing the ability to self-regulate (Siegel 2010) and can generate previously unforeseen opportunities to be nourished by the goodness of life which are all too often inhibited due to the confines of trauma. As a practicing and ordained Pentecostal Christian minister myself, I have found this to be true while also recognizing the need to balance the Pentecostal approach with an embodied presence in the now, which seems to emerge best from contemplative streams of Christian spirituality.

## 2. Contemplative Christian Wisdom

There have been numerous Christian contemplative witnesses throughout history who have spoken about the experience of despair as a crucible for spiritual transformation and growth. A few notable names are St. Francis of Assisi and the Peace Prayer and Julian of Norwich (Franciscan and Other Prayers 2014), who reflected that God's wish was to "cure" the sicknesses of impatience and despair in her *Showings* (Norwich et al. 1978). Yet there are two contemporary Christian contemplatives who also spoke at length about the experience of despair on the personal and collective levels arising from late modernity, Raimon Panikkar and Thomas Merton. While there may be other modern Christian contemplatives to draw from, I have chosen to highlight these two prominently due to their explicit acknowledgement of despair and their demand that contemplative Christian spirituality be a path of direct experience which can assist in coping with it.

Raimon Panikkar was a prolific and well-known interreligious theologian, philosopher, and wisdom teacher who was famous for his work in comparative theology and grounded all his theological assertions in his own contemplative and spiritual practice, known famously as "the intrareligious dialogue". Panikkar was extraordinarily committed to addressing the problems of the world through interculturality or a process of a mutual fecundation where all parties are enriched. Panikkar was heavily resistant to theologies of exclusivism or inclusivism, and instead was a proponent for advaitic or nondual spiritual pluralism. While some criticized Panikkar for being too idealistic and removed from the struggles of the poor (Raj 2015), he was adamant that contemplative spirituality must account for (and perhaps even arise from) the experience of despair. In fact, Panikkar went so far as to even speculate how despair is intrinsic to modern life and a natural result of conscientization in the technocratic age. Although Panikkar acknowledged the heavy toll of despair, he was adamant that it does not have to lead to destruction and can open the door for an experience of renewed hope.

Panikkar wrote the following:

*"Within the framework of dialectical materialism the so-called conscientization leads to despair. With merely historical conscientization the oppressed become conscious that for many of them there will be no liberation at all. In spite of all our most strenuous efforts to opt for the liberation of the oppressed, thousands of children are going to starve today, and millions of refugees and victims of wars are not going to be liberated in their lifetime. We may console ourselves with the view of a brighter future, but what is our answer for those people?"*

*We may wonder, in this context, what is the meaning of life for that immense majority—the aboriginals, the slaves, the outcastes, the starving, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, the women—who have not "made" it? Even in the hardest times and in face of greatest struggles, people could face life with joy and dignity precisely because they have been sustained by some kind of hope. This hope, however, is not merely of the future, but hope in the invisible dimension of life and reality.*

*Here is where traditional cultures speaking of heaven, karma, nirvana, God and brahman have something essential to contribute. To realize that our life has a meaning (sense) which is life, even if we have been invited to the banquet of Life just for a few moments, is the only saving hope for many and another exemplification of what I mean by cosmic confidence". (Prabhu 1996, pp. 283–84)*

In this text, Panikkar claimed a possibility of liberation from despair by experiencing for oneself “cosmic confidence” which is not confidence *in* the cosmos but the confidence *of* the cosmos. For Panikkar, cosmic confidence is the experience of primordial trust at the basis of reality itself and bears the fruit of joy, love, and peace. In his thought, it is a radical emphasis on the present rather than awaiting a future heaven for deliverance from suffering. In his thought, cosmic confidence is not the interpretation of one’s spiritual experience but rather the very factor that makes any experience possible at all. The question remains as to how one might experience this salvation. Panikkar proposed that a “contemplative spirit” would be required and that cultivating it was not based in willpower or a set of particular practices (he conceded that many different practices from across traditions are helpful in different and unique ways), but rather a humble orientation that “accepts life as it is—in love, so as to transform it and all of Reality (Panikkar and Pavan 2018, p. 31)”. Panikkar was convinced that one should not prescribe any singular way to arrive at this liberation (in fact he believed one way or binary thinking needed to be overcome) but choose to describe how the contemplative spirit delivers a certain “transhistorical” (Panikkar 1993, p. 133) experience; or, as I understand it, a way of being grounded in the world that is rooted in one’s ultimate meaning and connectedness to the Whole. A person living in a transhistorical consciousness would model behavior that engages life for the sake of living itself, not for a predetermined outcome. Panikkar claimed that this change in consciousness is a *metanoia* necessary for the *kairos* of our time (greatly characterized by the collective presence of despair and fragmentation). Panikkar advocated that our transformation is not something to be manufactured or produced in a factory but is an extension of what is taking place within the depths of Reality itself, as people move away from “historical consciousness” which has dominated humanity for the last four thousand years. In his own words, he interprets his own ‘transhistorical’ experience as Cosmotheandric Vision (which describes all Reality consisting of the interrelated but distinct tripart dimensions of the divine, cosmic, and human) and that this vision invites us all to uniquely co-participate with Life for the sake of flourishing for all. Panikkar espoused that only the contemplative person would be capable of fulfilling this work, believing that each person’s unique and inner transformation would have macro implications for the whole of Reality.

Thomas Merton was another famous Christian contemplative who was world renowned for his authenticity, courage, and prophetic witness which sprung from his Christian spirituality. Merton was a well-known anti-Vietnam war advocate along with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and claimed that King’s civil rights efforts were something “truly Christian for our time” (Levandoski and Finley 2018). Yet in all of Merton’s acclaim, arguably one of the most prominent themes from his writings was the theme of despair. He seemed to be a person heavily acquainted with despair and would speak frequently as to how it seemed exponentially present in North American society (perhaps even as an unavoidable dynamic on the contemporary spiritual path) as a result of self-interest and greed. For Merton, the presence of despair could lead to unparalleled sorrow but also had the potential to lead a person the other direction and toward a greater spiritual knowing (or what he referred to as “le point vierge”, borrowing from French philosopher Louis Massignon).

Merton wrote:

*We... have to reach that same “point vierge” in a kind of despair at the hypocrisy of our own world. It is dawning more and more on me that I have been caught in civilization as in a kind of spider’s web, and I am beginning to say “No” louder and louder, though surrounded by the solicitude of those who ask me why I do so. There is no way of explaining it, and perhaps not even time to do so. (Merton 1994, p. 278)*

For Merton’s personal spiritual life, the experience of despair created a yearning to live in resistance to the status quo of society and led him to realize *le point vierge*. In Merton’s contemplative writings, *le point vierge* is the depth dimension from which life’s spontaneity unfolds, inviting greater freedom, love, and justice in solidarity with all others. Merton sees this as a distinctly alternative way of living in relation to dominant society, and ultimately not a path removed from life and/or its struggles but draws a person deeper into embodied

social witness. James Finley, who is a famous Christian contemplative in his own right, was a spiritual directee of Thomas Merton and recalls the following words from Merton, “We did not come to the monastery to breathe rarified air beyond the suffering of this world. We came here to experience the suffering of the whole world in our hearts. That’s why we are here” (Finley 2018). Through this quote, we can see the infusion of contemplation and action at the core of Christian contemplative wisdom and calls for all those who aim to practice a contemplative lifestyle to be in touch with (but not overcome by) the ills of society, and especially for those living in the despair that accompanies systems and structures borne from late-stage capitalism, in order to co-participate in its transformation.

While each of these two wisdom teachers spoke profoundly about the ways in which contemplative experience offers a revolutionary path for those feeling the weight of despair, they also both emphasize how important it is for a person to directly experience life-affirming relations on the road to liberation. Yet, without the field of trauma studies in their time, neither explicitly considered what a practical experience of this might entail. Here is where Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality is important to bring into the conversation, as it is a practice and tradition which centers upon cultivating a person’s direct connection with the Holy Spirit (the divine advocate, teacher, and counselor). Herein lies an opportunity for contemplative Christian spirituality to find a fruitful dialogue partner with both trauma studies and Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality with its emphasis on the distinct role of the Holy Spirit as *Paraclete* and introduces practices wherein each person can experience the Spirit as a way to deepen and expand relations of love with all life.

### 3. Pentecostal–Charismatic Spirituality

While the contemplative teachings referenced above implicitly rely on a Trinitarian and relational understanding of the divine (and in so doing, embrace the Holy Spirit prominently), they do not focus in on the presence of the Holy Spirit, instead distinctly choosing to secularize their language (such as in cosmic confidence or *le point vierge*). Yet when bringing contemplative Christian spirituality into dialogue with modern Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality, both spiritualities are mutually enriched. On the one hand, contemplative Christian spirituality can rediscover the personal source of divine wisdom available (as well as the centrality of personal empowerment), while Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality leans away from certain teachings that promote an “escapist” spirituality (Yong 2014, p. 50) rather than living fully engaged in the here and now while confronting exclusivist, supremacist, and/or nationalistic tendencies which have accompanied it due to histories and legacies of white supremacy and colonialism (Yong and Yong 2020, pp. 214–27). Both of these enrichments significantly benefit historically marginalized persons who have continued to claim and find empowerment in their own Christian spiritual heritage while dismantling religiously defended structural injustice (Alexander and Yong 2009, p. 3).

Hence, in this section I would like to place intentional focus on the ways in which Pentecostal–Charismatic spiritual practices of prayer, or what is known as “praying in the Spirit” (which seeks and calls upon the Holy Spirit explicitly in order to tend suffering) (Johns and Stephenson 2021, p. 18), accomplishes three important tasks related to trauma and despair: (1) each person is invited to experience sacred care directly; (2) the person finds newfound abilities to co-create spaces of nurturance, wisdom, and comfort through relationality, openness, and discernment; and (3) the Spirit begins to move in a person’s life as a creative force which accentuates fluidity, movement, and non-linearity, inviting us toward a continuous practice of revolutionary life that transforms the systems and structures which produce harm in the world.

First, when looking at the Johannine representation of the Holy Spirit (John 14–16) as *Paraclete* (translated to helper, advocate, counsellor, and comforter), it has long been assumed with mainstream Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality that the Spirit invites a person to directly encounter God in a radical or supernatural way. However, there is a subtly nuanced way to view this; as the very divine power to tend suffering in non-reactive, wholesome, and integrative ways. Mark Cartledge has discussed the powerful implications



of how Pentecostal spiritual praxis can transform practical theology at large and advocates for Pentecostal–Charismatic spiritualities to be freshly articulated so that they are in greater solidarity with the ills of those marginalized in society, speaking truth to power, and avoiding any hegemonic tendencies (Cartledge 2020, pp. 163–72). But what keeps a person on the path of bold and empowered social change? Anthea Butler (2007, p. 3) demonstrates how it is the direct encounter with the Holy Spirit which enables “moral, spiritual, and physical fuel to negotiate and obtain power. . .” for those most marginalized in society, such as African American women. In this direction, Pentecostal–Charismatic spiritualities should be represented in ways that are suffering-sensitive and trauma-integrating through the experience of the Spirit, who offers assurance, comfort, and consolation. More precisely, against the backdrop of trauma and despair, it becomes evident that the prominent role of the Paraclete is to empower ways of being that are supportive, compassionate, just, and patient (Yong 2012). Relying upon the Spirit’s leading would require one to remain open to experiences of connection, expansiveness, and generativity (even in the places and amongst the people least expected, such as those marginalized by the dominant in society), which are all crucial for those recovering from trauma and despair. The practice of pursuing the Holy Spirit through prayer (and subsequently the call to live in a Spirit-filled way) is one where a person partners with the divine to experience connection and finds ways to co-create emergent paths of healing and transformation. It is also important to emphasize here that while the Spirit guides each person toward embodied transformational actions that are localized, personal, and unique, all of these dynamics unfold in the context of wider relationships, community, and larger society, not only for the benefit of an individual (Land 1993).

Secondly, the practice of praying to and in the Holy Spirit fosters a posture of “radical openness”, as Jamie Smith calls it, to the divine which lovingly engages the complications and complexities of life so that it is addressed winsomely and toward wholeness (Smith 2009). Radical openness is not the same as radical relativity, but rather a way of living that requires discernment and constantly asks the following question: where might the divine be revealed afresh? It is in an orientation of radical openness that potential disruptions and interruptions along the way are seen not as obstacles but part and parcel of the spiritual path. In this sense, within Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality lies a possibility of not dismissing suffering but cultivating the ability to be with it in a more nurturing, caring, and creative way. Because the way of the Spirit is uncontrollable and unforeseeable, the necessary stance to being Spirit-led implies humility, listening, attentiveness, and a practice of conscious waiting. We might redefine healing then as not a preferred destination to arrive at which can be manufactured, imposed, or forced upon externally, but as a gift continuously granted through an experience of restorative connection in one’s relations. Further, healing can only be experienced through consent. Simply put, Pentecostal–Charismatic spiritual practice can open the door for a more compassionate and trauma-informed engagement in the world through respecting the agency and participation of each person. A Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality insists that there is hope for new and creative ways to move towards healing collectively, but the primary requirement is to be honest, respectful of where each person is at, and engaged through open heart–mind–body-ness and sensitivity to one’s limits.

Finally, the practice of praying in the Spirit gifts practitioners with ways of empowered living and can be understood as an invitation to live in the world with a commitment to reduce harm and rejoice in life’s flourishing. Examples of this can be found through the liberationist work of Samuel Solivan (1998) or the mystical approach found in Daniel Castelo’s analysis to embed Pentecostal spirituality in the larger ancient Christian spiritual tradition so as to non-violently affirm growth, ignorance, and struggle in the human experience (Castelo 2017, 2020). For each of these thinkers, the characteristics of a Spirit-filled life involves failure, forgiveness, solidarity with suffering, and being loved through and through, despite our imperfections (Sutton and Mittelstadt 2010). It is clear from their work that a Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality contributes to fresh ways of witnessing

and/or being with the suffering of the world (beginning with and including oneself) that do not seek to hide pain but are endowed with empathy, understanding, and mercy. Ultimately, the Pentecostal–Charismatic spiritual practice of prayer offers ways of finding grounding, support, and resources to tend to the world in its suffering through the comfort, guidance, and leadership of the Holy Spirit. This practice ushers in new possibilities of what it practically can look like to regain trust in life, in the divine, within the depths of one’s own experience, and within the wider community.

#### 4. Proposing a “Contemplacostal” Spiritual Praxis

As we consider the presence and projected increase in collective despair where trust is repeatedly lost across multiple levels, we know that the opportunities for posttraumatic growth abound and will therefore require creative and emergent spiritual resources to aid us in becoming more grounded, integrated, and compassionate. My hope is not only to provide further spiritual resources that can assist personal and collective efforts seeking to transform lingering effects of trauma but also to provide new insights as to how Christian Spirituality might be reimagined during our growing and multiple crises. What is even more intriguing is the ways in which aspects integral to posttraumatic growth such as direct experience of the sacred, relationality, confidence amid unpredictability, and creativity will emerge at the core of the Christian spiritual life.

Here, I propose a new “contemplacostal” vision that may begin to inculcate posttraumatic growth work and the Christian spiritual imaginary. For me, it is important to retrieve the contemplative tradition’s emphasis on the present and bring that into conversation with the Pentecostal–Charismatic spiritual practice of praying in the Spirit<sup>1</sup>. The result is a “contemplacostal vision” of Christian spirituality which remains committed to engaging the moment with courage while also resourcing oneself in the presence of the Holy Spirit. A contemplacostal spirituality then would not be limited to one practice or another, but would rather contain (at least) the following five themes, which all have direct relevance for engaging suffering and despair in the world and are relevant when it comes to posttraumatic growth: (1) an ability to compassionately engage suffering without being mired in it; (2) the acknowledgement of our relational identity; (3) a recentering of the direct experience and empowerment of the Holy Spirit (not as possessed by Christians but which they may have a unique perspective on) whose fruit is comfort, freedom, and loving guidance; (4) an equal emphasis on process as outcome; and (5) an unabashed sense that significant transformation occurs when there is spaciousness to entertain creative and spontaneous action at the localized and personal levels.

First, a contemplacostal approach asks that we become radically honest with our lived experiences and paradoxically insists that our love shines through moments of imperfections. While experiences of trauma, despair, and desolation are not often the moments we think of as a place for love to shine through, they hold the potential to be moments where we begin to realize a different way, a way of tenderness, nonviolence, and companionship with life. Thus, a contemplacostal vision demands that authentic spirituality be prudently in touch with our tears, frailty, anxieties, and doubts as the very ground from which personal transformation unfolds. A contemplacostal vision understands each of these “negative” aspects to be various facets of the human experience and asks that we transform them to lead us toward greater solidarity and compassion for the world. For those who are undergoing or seeking to recover from trauma and despair, an ability to face the harm which was suffered and relate to it in a new way is paramount, and a contemplacostal spirituality is in resonance.

Secondly, a contemplacostal approach is deeply relational and highlights the limitations of the individual. Within a contemplacostal vision, there is an intuition that nothing exists in isolation, and hence we are called to give and receive loving support to one another. Relational support should not only be considered from human to human but also resourced by the divine, the spiritual saints and guides who have come before us, as well as the more than human life which we can learn from and with. A contemplacostal approach affirms

the wisdom of the community and the fact that we are called to rely upon one another in times of trouble and not approach the healing path through any one paradigm alone. In posttraumatic growth work, this vision entails a network or plurality of communities, practices, and teachings that can nurture life and encourages that healing companions be agents to assist those suffering in identifying new spaces or communities to grow in and with.

Thirdly, a contemplacostal approach consciously seeks to taste and touch the core of our own lives through firsthand spiritual experience with the sacred (the person of the Holy Spirit), and out of that, to incorporate the various dimensions of our lives in tandem with our deepest spiritual desires (such as harmony, connection, joy, etc.). A contemplacostal approach centralizes both the encounter of the Spirit and the ongoing role that the Spirit plays as the advocate, helper and guide, but recognizes that this experience can come outside of religious institutions and is not an experience limited to only those who identify as Christian (Yong 2008). A contemplacostal approach contends that the Spirit cannot be possessed or manipulated by one experience or one group, but instead that the Spirit continually meets us in new ways and is ever present in all our diverse relations. A contemplacostal approach involves tending to our shadows, admitting our failures, and being radically honest with our own tradition, its shortcomings, and the need to rediscover the Spirit beyond our predetermined confines. This vision would support those seeking to transform trauma and despair by encouraging practices that get people in touch with the sacred in whatever ways that makes sense to them, whether it be in nature, prayer, community, or justice seeking. It also encourages those who are on the road of healing to look towards previously unconsidered spiritual practices as potential ways to meet the Spirit anew.

Fourthly, a contemplacostal approach assumes that the process is just as important as any outcome. Rather than justifying the means by the end, a contemplacostal approach embraces fluidity, non-linear dynamics, changes in pace and rhythm, and a willingness to alter course when necessary. A contemplacostal approach presumes a certain openness to mystery that is to be discovered in community, ongoing discernment, and faith. In posttraumatic work, it is easy to fixate on the end goals or our desire for predetermined results, but life in the Spirit reminds us that there is more at work than we can often see at first glance and to remember that each micro movement of compassion towards ourselves is exactly the work we are called to do letting go of transformations according to our own timelines.

Lastly, a contemplacostal approach places focus on the embodied, small, and micro as the creative locus of macro transformation. A contemplacostal approach seeks to engage and transform everything through the inner spirituality of one's person and integrating that with outward embodied social actions. In one sense, this could be summarized as the person who practices spaciousness and connection within as connected to a practice of spacious, spontaneous, and creative without. Christian spirituality has long embraced the notion that human beings are microcosms of the macrocosm and that each change which takes place within each being, regardless of how subtle, has ripple effects on all reality. In this vein, there is great hope in each and every little step made in tending to trauma, and the ways that open up pathways of restoration for all life. In posttraumatic growth work, this perspective invites persons and communities to entertain a willingness to live in bold, different, and radically new ways (or perhaps to even create emergent spiritual practices such as this vision exemplifies). A contemplacostal vision empowers people to transform and incarnate their lives with fresh meaning and insight, in each unique moment, embracing the reality that life will likely look very different from before. A contemplacostal approach also knows that revolutionary living is not always easily discernible upon first glance, but trusts the process as one of a lifelong invitation to learn, grow, and transform.



## 5. Conclusions

Against the backdrop of widespread trauma and despair, it seems that the moment is ripe<sup>2</sup> for a new and necessary fertilization and convergence to occur between the Christian contemplative tradition and modern Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality, which are characterized by an embodied presence amidst difficulty in the here and now, a resourcing vis a vis a direct experience of the sacred, relationality, and spiritual empowerment to live creatively. On the one hand, contemplative Christian spirituality is deepened by adopting Pentecostal–Charismatic spiritual practices of calling unto the person of the Spirit, and through this finds greater encouragement to live fully in (and for) the present moment, not denying or minimizing anything but co-participating in its transformation. On the other hand, Pentecostal–Charismatic spirituality is granted an emphasis on the present rather than looking to a future elsewhere of salvation. Bringing the two together builds a bridge within the larger Christian spiritual tradition to find creative genius to embody sacred witness that is sensitive to both trauma and despair, as well as the long road to posttraumatic growth in a world where trauma will inevitably reoccur. It is also important to note that this convergence can largely benefit communities who have been marginalized by oppression in the world, whether due to race, gender, class, disability, or other factors, because the vision is one of personal agency, relational power building, and a heightened capacity to tell and speak truth, regardless of how it may upset the status quo.

A contemplacostal vision relies upon the experience and power of the Holy Spirit (which Christians do not own or possess) as the gift poured out to all of life and works in and through and beyond us toward unexpected places, peoples, and actions ultimately to promote freedom, flourishing, and joy. A new contemplacostal emergence calls forth a new imagination in the spiritual and intercultural dimensions of tending to suffering and resources the work with presence, power, and possibility. I have outlined above a few of the themes and potentials that may open up if entertained. While it would be prudent to avoid specifying a contemplacostal approach as the only way of resourcing trauma work or renewing Christian spirituality, this vision is an offering that seeks to elucidate how Christian spirituality can be transformed as we seek to become people who engage deep suffering with deeper love.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I am aware that some other strands of Pentecostal-Charismatics may have reservation about the way I understand and describe what ‘praying in the Spirit’ involves (including that there may be more nuances important to identify), and while I am sympathetic to this, my goal remains to tease out the empowered aspect of Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality which comes through conscious attention to the divine’s presence within, among, and all around.
- <sup>2</sup> Raimon Panikkar discusses the emergence of a new kairological moment within Christianity which centralizes on the experience of the Spirit as primary. See (Panikkar [1987] 2005) . “The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness”, in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*.

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