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**Index**

- 7 From the Editors
- 9 Introductions to papers

**Articles**

- 13 **Erik J. Ranstrom, Ph.D.,**  
Karma and the Incarnation: An Intra-Panikkarrian Reflection
- 23 **Peter C. Phan**  
Raimon Panikkar's "eschatology": the unpublished chapter
- 39 **Young-chan Ro**  
From Epistemology to Ontology in Raimon Panikkar
- 51 **Mark Banas**  
Interreligious Hermeneutics: Dialectical or Dialogical
- 75 **Anselm K. Min**  
Panikkar's Radical Trinitarianism: Reflections on Panikkar's Transformation of the Christian Trinity into Cosmotheandrisms
- 101 **Joseph Prabhu**  
The Encounter of Religions in a Globalized World: Provocations from Panikkar
- 115 **CIRPIT Activities**



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## From the Editors

Five of the six papers below were presented at a symposium in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in San Diego on November 21, 2014. The AAR meeting has for long been an annual feature, where scholars of religion gather from around the world to discuss various aspects of religion across time and space and culture. In conjunction with the Society of Asian and Comparative Philosophy (SACP), members of both societies have thought the AAR meetings a good opportunity to hold an annual meeting of Panikkar scholars. On this particular occasion, Young-chan Ro and Joseph Prabhu invited contributions to two panels, one for more senior scholars and the other for scholars and researchers, who engaged with Panikkar either as part of their doctoral dissertations or as part of their ongoing research. The papers by Mark Banas, Erik Rangstrom, Anselm Min, Peter Phan, and Young-chan Ro represent revised versions of the presentations made in the San Diego symposium. Some parts of the paper by Joseph Prabhu were presented at the AAR/SACP symposium, but the full paper provided here draws on an essay presented at another Panikkar conference.

The idea both of the call for papers and the decision to publish some of them is at least three-fold: 1. to encourage collaboration and dialogue between more senior scholars and those who are starting out on their study of Panikkar; 2. to make available some of the fruits of such research and publication; and 3. to develop, in general, the field of Panikkar Studies. Those who have worked in the field know that Panikkar is a challenging author both because of the complexity of his ideas spanning many disciplines, times, and cultures, and also because of his equally complex mode of expression. It is encouraging to note that interest in Panikkar's thought is indeed growing and these papers are one indication of that interest.

What follow are short thematic introductions to each of the papers.

December 15, 2015  
Joseph Prabhu  
Young-chan Ro





## Introductions to Papers

**Erik Ranstrom's** "*Karma and the Incarnation: An Intra-Panikkarian Reflection*," is an exploration of the earlier writings of Panikkar in the 1950's and 1960's. According to Erik Ranstrom, Panikkar's Christology was structured based on his understanding of the Incarnation, the event Panikkar understood as the manifestation of "relatedness," between God and humanity. Erik Ranstrom, in this chapter, takes Panikkar's early notion of incarnational Christology and relates it to Panikkar's later interpretation of a Hindu category of Karma. By doing so, Erik Ranstrom is engaging in a *diachronical* dialogue in the context of Panikkar's intellectual and spiritual development by relating his earlier work on the Christian normativity and christocentrism to his later work on his pluralism and cosmotheandricism.

**Peter Phan** engages in the exploration of the so called the unfinished chapter of *The Rhythm of Being*, under the title, "Panikkar's 'Eschatology': The Unpublished Chapter." As most Panikkar readers might know, his last book, the belated publication of his Gifford Lectures, *The Rhythm of Being* was published without the last chapter in omitting chapter 9. Panikkar himself provided the reason for the omission of the chapter by saying, "since delivering the Gifford Lectures twenty years ago, I have hesitated to publish this book, because of the last chapter, which was supposed to be titled 'Survival of Being.' No matter how I reflected on that topic, the results did not satisfy me." Panikkar also admitted, "I have touched the limits of my understanding and must stop here. The Tree of Knowledge again and again tempts one at the cost of neglecting the more important tree, the Tree of Knowledge."<sup>1</sup> Peter Phan somehow managed to obtain a copy of the "unfinished chapter" (chapter 9) and he made a summary presentation of the omitted chapter 9 of the *Rhythm of Being*. According to Peter Phan, this chapter can be divided in three parts, namely, eschatology, the being of time, and the time of being as the title of his essay suggests. Peter Phan, in this chapter, explained that Panikkar's "eschatology" goes beyond the traditional theological sense of the Christian doctrine of the "last things" but examines the destiny of all beings.

**Young-chan Ro** explores Panikkar's ontology in relationship with

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<sup>1</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010, 405

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epistemology. For Panikkar, epistemology and ontology are not two separate issues but are intrinsically related to each other, although he clearly recognizes the difference between these two. One of the unique aspects of Panikkar's thoughts regarding the relationship of epistemology and ontology is that, unlike many of modern philosophers and thinkers, he develops his epistemology from ontology. This is a clear turning point in Western intellectual history that shifts the focus to the significance of being as the source of knowledge. Panikkar developed epistemology from ontology, rather than ontology from epistemology. This paper is an attempt to explore the significance Panikkar's contribution in this new direction of epistemological discourse by taking ontology as the foundation of epistemology and making being over knowledge his priority.

The paper by **Mark Banas** compares and contrasts two pioneers of contemporary hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Panikkar. Both attempt to interpret texts and other cultural expressions in order to achieve a deeper understanding. But in Gadamer's case the focus is primarily cognitive and intellectual, while that of Panikkar is holistic and interpersonal. Panikkar is certainly interested in Gadamer's diachronical and intellectualist hermeneutics, but, as Banas points out, he feels that a different hermeneutics is needed when one is attempting to mediate between different cultures. Panikkar designates this as a diatopical hermeneutics. Banas further emphasizes that in the case of interreligious dialogue, genuine understanding calls not only for discursive mediation, but also for an attempt to go deeper to the levels of mythos and pneuma, levels which also play a significant role in religious life and expression.

**Anselm Min** likewise compares Panikkar's "radical trinity," his cosmotheandric unity of the Divine, the Human and the Cosmic, with the classical Christian accounts of Trinity and critiques him from that perspective. There are at least two focal points of his critique. First, by contending that the Divine, the Human and the Cosmic are three irreducible moments of a unified set of relations between them, Panikkar seems to negate the transcendence of God in relation to the world and in a sense conflate the economic trinity ("God for us") with the immanent trinity (God in Himself). This transcendence according to Min is precisely what is being affirmed in the classical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, God in his sovereignty deciding to create the world, rather than being committed by ontological necessity to do so. Second, Min questions the hidden anthropocentrism of Panikkar's formulation in making the human ontologically equal with both the Divine and the Cosmic. Humans have an asymmetric dependence on the

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Divine and the Cosmic, which renders them dependent on both in such a way that makes it questionable whether we can speak with Panikkar of an equal and co-constitutive relationality binding the three moments of cosmotheandric unity.

Finally, **Joseph Prabhu** seeks to relate some aspects of the contemporary encounter of religions with Panikkar's notions of dialogue and peace. He asserts that Panikkar's idea of dialogue is a personalizing of the relational energy lying at the heart of Panikkar's cosmotheandricism. He then revisits Panikkar's distinction between dialectical and dialogical dialogue, showing in particular how the latter is distinctive and methodologically appropriate for interreligious encounter, where we both ideally seek a communion with the other and through such communion to initiate self-criticism and self-transformation. Prabhu tries to show how different this idea is from the conflictual models of encounter common in our time. Panikkar's philosophy of peace flows from a recognition of the cosmotheandric rhythm that beats at the heart of reality, and is not just a human initiative. It is thus a more holistic and mystical account of peace than most contemporary accounts which place the emphasis on human will. While Panikkar by no means discounts the importance of human effort, he insists that such effort should also be attuned to divine and cosmic energies.



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## **Karma and the Incarnation: An Intra-Panikkarian Reflection**

Erik J. Ranstrom, Ph.D.,  
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### **Introduction**

Raimon Panikkar's incarnational Christology developed at the beginning of his career, while not at the forefront of recent Panikkar studies, is nevertheless for the Christian tradition an innovative contribution that helps theologians make sense of interreligious dialogue. In the course of various works published in the 1950's and 1960's, Panikkar disputes that Jesus is "absolute," and does so with recourse to sound christo-logic. The absoluteness of Christ contradicts the deepest truth of the Incarnation, which is the deep relatedness, a key category even in his later period, between God and humanity in Jesus. The Incarnation and the Christ-event for the more solidly Catholic Panikkar of the 1950's is truly novum, but it is not an absolute and unilateral divine act external to creation and, by extension, the religions of the world. Rather, the Incarnation subsists in a profound communion and reciprocal relationality with the religions of the world. This article seeks to further nuance Panikkar's early notion of incarnational Christology by thinking about it in light of his later interpretation of a Hindu category, karma. Panikkar's commentary on karma is strikingly resonant with the relatedness that he perceives at the core of the Incarnation, and I will attempt to diachronically juxtapose these two "moments" in Panikkar's thinking to elaborate upon the meaning of this relationality in a manner appropriate for Christian discourse.

Before exploring this comparison, two hermeneutical maneuvers require further explanation and justification. First, karma in this article is considered not from its origin and elaboration in Hindu, Buddhist, or Jaina sources, but from the vantage point of Panikkar's cross-cultural and inter-religious "translation." Skeptics from the history of religion may ask whether a study of karma in properly Indic sources is more appropriate for a comparative theological project with the Christian Incarnation than an "intra-Panikkarian" reflection such as I am proposing. While respecting this viewpoint, I would argue that an "intra-Panikkarian" discourse about a Hindu category for Christian theology is legitimate, as it develops more explicitly the comparative logic that may have inspired Panikkar's reading

of karma in the first place. The second hermeneutical question concerns my transposition of the later Panikkar's understanding of karma onto the sphere of his earlier, more traditional Christology. The evolution of basic and fundamental elements of Panikkar's worldview, from the Christian normativity and traditional christocentrism of his early work to the pluralistic myth and cosmotheandricism of his later work, may arguably render such a diachronic dialogue within Panikkar's own career impossible, if not undesirable. Yet, there is a continuity that permits interpreting Panikkar's later work in light of his early work, an interpretation which is necessary if Christian theology is to receive Panikkar's later insights and learn from them. Christ, variously conceived, is at the center of his vision of reality, and has been since the 1940's. Even in a recent text such as the posthumously published *Rhythm of Being*, which reads like a philosophical systematics, Panikkar writes that the hermeneutical key to his entire work is the "totus Christus," and that the "entire destiny of reality is a christic adventure."<sup>1</sup> Panikkar's assent to the encompassing and all-inclusive nature of the Christ-symbol is a deeply traditional instinct that permeates his thought from beginning to end. The crucial issue for Panikkar across his career is whether Christ is defined in a privileged and unique way with reference to the life and destiny of Jesus, or whether Christ is a wider cosmological reality. The later Panikkar opts for the cosmic Christ, though he continues to appeal to the language of Christian revelation, among others, for the intelligibility of his vision. The New Testament's witness to the "scandal of particularity," however, stubbornly resists assumption into a general theory of concreteness and universality, although this is an issue to be taken up elsewhere.

By contrast, during the early stage of his career, Panikkar's reflection on the intersection of the divine, human, and cosmic, what he later terms the cosmotheandric mystery, reaches its climax with a consideration of the uniqueness of the person of Jesus. Here we can discern a general rule that permits an interpretive fluidity and attendant convertibility between Panikkarian texts that span the christological spectrum. Whatever is particularized in reference to Jesus in a unique way in his early work is radically universalized in reference to reality as a whole, or humanity in general, in his later work. Although Panikkar expands the Christ-symbol beyond Jesus in his later writings, articulating profound insights into the christic mystery within this framework, a creedal theologian may profitably

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<sup>1</sup> Raimon Panikkar. *The Rhythm of Being*, (N.Y.Orbis, 2010), 260.

reverse this centripetal dynamic and re-apply them to Jesus. Therefore, if karma has import for the cosmic Christ of Panikkar's later work, it may also have import for the Nicene and Chalcedonian Christ of classical Christian tradition. Panikkar himself gestures towards this possibility. For example, in a tantalizing but undeveloped section at the end of his discussion of karma in "Action and Contemplation," Panikkar writes that the "nature of *karman* may even help to explain as fundamental a Christian insight as the connection of Adam and Adam's sin, as well as the relation of Christ and Christ's death and resurrection, with the whole of humanity."<sup>2</sup> As a Catholic theologian of canon and creed, but also committed to a serious pondering of Panikkar's thought, my interest lies in an interpretation of his work such as this that may enrich the "Great Tradition." The task of this paper is to develop Panikkar's suggestion regarding the implications of karma for Christian theology, particularly in reference to his earlier Incarnational Christology.

### **The Early Panikkar's Incarnational Christology**

In texts such as "Meditacion sobre Melquisedec,"<sup>3</sup> the early Panikkar follows the lead of the Church Fathers and underscores the link between the doctrines of creation and Incarnation. The Great Tradition proclaims that the identity of Jesus must not be imagined in such a way that the Word supersedes or replaces creation, as it would represent a mere Docetism, a shadowy pseudo-human Christ. What the Church Fathers grasped, and Panikkar after them, was that if the composition and contours of Jesus' person and work did not encompass a corporate solidarity with humanity and the cosmos as a whole, then there would be deleterious consequences for the possibility of salvation, as "that which is not assumed is not healed."<sup>4</sup> The insight Panikkar introduces into this venerable tradition is that Jesus' human nature must also encompass the totality of human, religious expression, as *homo religiosus* is indispensable for an integral theological anthropology. Christ is not only Lord of the religions, but also in a certain way subject to the religions, or better, to become Lord of the religions, Christ first had to *become* the religions. To make this point,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., "Action and Contemplation as Categories of Religious Understanding," in *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*. Harry James Cargas, ed., Minneapolis Fortress, 1995, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Raimon Panikkar. "Meditacion sobre Melquisedec." *Nuestro Tiempo*. IX (102): 675-695, 1962.

<sup>4</sup> See the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus.

Panikkar draws upon scriptural texts from the Gospel of Matthew and the Letter to the Hebrews which emphasize Jesus' obedience. But what he underscores is not a description of a merely moral disposition, but a deeper ontological submission to creatureliness, including its religious expressions. Jesus' humanity and the religions of the world are intimately linked. It is for this reason that the religions are figured by the early Panikkar in a consideration of the *full humanity* of Christ.

It is significant that in this vein the early Panikkar mentions Melchizedek, the ancestor of Christian faith whose cosmic priesthood, according to Hebrews, was assumed by Christ, alongside Mary, the mother of Jesus. This association is rich with significance. In order to redeem the world, Christ needed to be truly born of the earth, of Mary, who represents Israel, and beyond Israel, creation itself, represented by Melchizedek, priest of cosmic religiosity. The Marian title theotokos as is evident does not simply guarantee Christ's divinity, but also safeguards Christ's humanity, for according to Panikkar, "Christ himself, Son of God, had need of a mother to be Son of Man."<sup>5</sup> The heights of mariology, far from being a deviation that undermines christocentricity, serve rather as a kind of litmus test for determining whether the integrity of creation is respected in light of the christological mystery. In Joseph Ratzinger's words, "Mariology serves as an indicator of the correct positioning of the christological accents," for "wherever the unity of Old and New Testaments disintegrates the place of a healthy Mariology is lost...likewise this unity of the Testaments guarantees the integrity of the doctrines of creation and grace."<sup>6</sup> The following excerpt from Panikkar's 1952 review of Franz Konig's *Christus und die Religionen der Erde* illustrates this proper balance between Christ's humanity and divinity, his solidarity with creation and his personal uniqueness within creation. Christ's humanity is confirmed by his solidarity and kinship ties to Mary, his mother, and Melchizedek, priest of the cosmos.

The religion of Christ, being the true religion and being uniquely absolute, also has a link and a continuity with the uncircumcised Abraham, the mysterious and cosmic Melchizedek, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, yet this same Christ is also begotten of the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and Redeemer of the universe.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "Meditacion sobre Melquisedec," 683.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Ratzinger. *Daughter of Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*. Trans. John McDermott, S.J., (San Francisco, Ignatius, 1983), 56.

<sup>7</sup>Raimon Panikkar, *Christus und die Religionen der Erde*. Arbor 24: 462, 1953.



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The connection between Christology and ecclesiology supports interreligious dialogue, as both the Church and the religions are grounded in Christ's own person. Panikkar is arguing that the religion of Christ, i.e., the Church, includes, rather than excludes, the religions of the earth, because, Christ's own person includes, rather than excludes, the religions of the earth. In a later work, the *Le mystere du culte dans l'hindouisme et le christianisme*, Panikkar holds that an ecumenical understanding of ecclesiology is traditional in the widest sense of the term as it connects the Church "back to Adam, and in a certain sense, to the origin of the earth."<sup>8</sup> More specifically, it is christological tradition, for "the historicity of Christ involves, precisely as history, a past."<sup>9</sup> Jesus Christ truly represents "something new and unknown," but history itself never commences "newly and absolutely for the first time."<sup>10</sup> Instead, it "is always marked by an intimate relatedness with what has gone on before."<sup>11</sup> According to Panikkar, historical realities, even the Incarnation, "adopt the ambience and form of knowing from which they came."<sup>12</sup>

The connaturality between Christ and the religions is what makes possible a soteriological encounter between Christ and humanity, as Christ participates redemptively within the human religious story, even as this same story determines, to some extent, the very substance of redemption. Just as the early Church was dependent upon the Isaianic prophecy of the suffering servant to comprehend Christ's passion, the universal Church is dependent upon the religions to attempt an understanding of the meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in diverse cultural settings. For, according to Panikkar, Christ did "not take up only the tradition that began with Abraham but also embraces the other great strand in universal redemptive history...Melchizedek, priest and king, the man uncircumcised who stood above Abraham, whom he blessed but did not join or follow, a priest of the world religions."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is incumbent for Christian theologians to reflect upon the mystery of Jesus Christ together with the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., *Le mystere du culte dans l'hindouisme et le christianisme*, trans. B. Charriere, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1970), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., "Meditacion sobre Melquisedec," 681.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 683.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., "Christ, Abel, and Melchizedek: The Church and the Non-Abrahamic Religions." *Jeevadhara I*, (1971) 403.

religions, since “heretofore Christian theology has worked out only one, so to say, of Jesus’ ancestral lines, the Abrahamic,” a glaring omission as “Jesus was and worked before Abraham.”<sup>14</sup> Christ does not only emerge from the heart of the Church in its Eucharist, but emerges from the heart of the Church that has existed since Abel.

Good theology has always advocated the return to the sources, to the origins. Now, so far the Christian sources were generally included in only a limited sense. The Christian tradition is certainly a classic source of theology, [*theologia locorum*], but the Church starts with Adam as well as with Abel. Beside the Old Testament, one encounters in addition another alliance, a cosmic alliance. Even the history of humanity, and in particular its religions, represents sources for theology. Return to the origins, where the divine Logos is expressed in the form of annunciations, inspirations, announcements, where he has pardoned and punished! Return to the sources, where the divine Mercy has made the living water run; return to the sources, where flowed the rivers destined to be carried into the ocean of integral Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

Panikkar cites a late 19<sup>th</sup> century text in comparative religion for illustrative purposes. If, according to H. Hubert and M. Mauss, the “Christian imagination is built on old plans,”<sup>16</sup> theologians would do well to understand the significance of this ancestry in order to understand the Christian mystery. In this sense, interreligious dialogue and comparative theology do not represent a radical and innovative movement within Christian theology. Ironically, such tasks are conservative in that there is a conservation of the tradition of ancient revelation, rather than liberal, in the sense of Christianity breaking free from tradition. There is also a subtle reversal of christological and ecclesiological fulfillment logic, as Panikkar challenges the Church to be conformed to the religions, just as the Word of God, in the words of Louis-Marie Chauvet, is at the “mercy of the body.”

### **Incarnation and Karma**

The later Panikkar’s understanding of karma bears a strong resemblance to his earlier theology of Incarnation. Panikkar finds in karma a Hindu insight that deepens the relational dynamic of the Christian Incarnation. Karma for Panikkar is a symbol of the contingency and finitude of created reality, as nothing, not even the Christ, within creation is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>16</sup> H. Hubert and M. Mauss, “Essay on the Nature and Function of Sacrifice,” *Sociological Annual* 2, (1897) 131, as cited in *ibid.*, 15.

absolute, meaning, without relation.<sup>17</sup> According to Panikkar, “no being can escape the law of *karma*.”<sup>18</sup> Most likely inspired by Buddhist notions of emptiness and co-dependent arising as well, karma for Panikkar “stands for the vision of the unity as well as the contingency of all empirical (or created reality)...it expresses their interrelatedness and thus their unity precisely because no individual being – not even the entire universe – is complete, full, perfect, achieved.”<sup>19</sup> Karma is the “very coefficient of creatureliness” that we may say even God respects in becoming creature, as “everything that is submits to *karman*, because the karmic structure of the universe is the ultimate pattern.”<sup>20</sup> Panikkar goes so far as to interpret the *Upanisadic* expression, the “Lord of *karman*” to mean that the divine itself is constituted by relationality, thereby making God part of the very warp and woof of *karma*. “The Lord of *karman*,” Panikkar insists, “is also within the embrace of *karman*...if it were outside *karman* it would no longer be its Lord.”<sup>21</sup> In a way, this statement from a much later period of Panikkar’s writing echoes the patristic instinct that he echoes in his early christology outlined above.

Karma, as a symbol of interrelatedness, also points towards the fact that a being at any particular time is the product of prior decisions and events that have repercussions for each being in the whole. Panikkar proposes this corporate understanding of karma as an alternative to the more conventional understanding of karma as mere reincarnation, where there is a “lingering of the past personality in the new bearer of the past *karman*.”<sup>22</sup> Karma instead stands for the “cosmic solidarity of the whole creation” in which no act “falls in the void or remains barren and without effect” on the whole.<sup>23</sup> As Panikkar puts it, “the ‘communion of all existence’ is not exactly communion, for there is always strife; the unity of the universe is not precisely unity, for it is also disunity.”<sup>24</sup> Panikkar’s understanding of the brokenness of karma is akin to contemporary understandings of original sin, whereby original sin is “analogous” but not personal sin, that is, birth in a socio-existential situation marked by disunity and discord. Panikkar discusses his situatedness within the ambiguity of Christian karma when he

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<sup>17</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “Action and Contemplation,” 30.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

responds to critics who call for him to move beyond Christianity and abandon the symbol “Christ.” Panikkar responds that voluntarism alone does not determine identity. Karma is a factor.

As intellectual beings born in a particular culture at a particular time and space, we are given the language in which to articulate those beliefs which we may purify, criticize, and change all our lives. One of these matrices is the broadly called Christian tradition...I am not an isolated gnostic. My *ecclesia* is the Christian one...I have seen and ‘suffered’ too many westerners wanting to ‘become’ Hindus and ended by being either artificially uprooted or still Christians in spite of themselves. We cannot deny upbringing, history, archetypes, karma (Christian belonging) is an existential belonging which does not exclude, but precisely demands, a personal intellectual assimilation, an interpretation and critique, of this appurtenance.<sup>25</sup>

In the same section, Panikkar then goes on to affirm his Hindu karma, affirming that he has also been born into the context of Hindu culture and religion.

I would probably not assert so unambiguously my Christian identity if I would not as well confess myself a Hindu. I accept what I believe to be my Hindu *karma*, and I acknowledge my Hindu *dharma*. Both are existential facts that I neither rebuke nor repress. They form part of my being as much as one’s parents are ‘parts’ of oneself. We are what we are, although in this *are* our will and intellect play an important, but not exclusive role...We are cocreators of our own being, but our demiurgical activity is that of shaping ourselves out of given materials and lent instruments.<sup>26</sup>

In conclusion, Panikkar counsels that it is wise to stand before one’s karma with a dual posture of gracious receptivity and critical discernment. One cannot excommunicate oneself from the threads that comprise the texture of the self, in fact, to do so would be anti-human.

### **The Identity of Jesus and the Church in light of Karma**

Moving back to how the later Panikkar’s view of karma may further deepen his incarnational Christology, we see how the later Panikkar considers his religious identity to consist of both a passive act of karmic acceptance and receptivity, as well as an active task of modification and creativity. Jesus’ self-concept and self-actualization in the New Testament is overwhelmingly defined by his freely taking on and accepting the

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<sup>25</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue,” in *The Interreligious Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu, (Orbis, NY, 1996), 263.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-265.

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cumulative history of Israel's covenantal life in its totality, its burden and gift. Jesus stands before the great tradition of ancient Israel with gratitude and reverence, which explains his devotion to the practices of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, but he also transforms its karma from within into something new. This is evidenced, for example, by Jesus' startling redefinition of Israel's messianic eschatological tradition through his own person, and especially, through his suffering. Additionally, Jesus' transformation of the karma of humanity as a whole, although it began with his life, death, and resurrection as a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew, continues with the raised Christ's pneumatic activity in the Church as the *incarnatio continua* of the risen Christ. The raised Jesus, as universal Lord, now has a relationship with all cultures and religions, having entered into the karmic sub-structure of the entire cosmos through his life, death, and resurrection as a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew in Roman Palestine. The Church, as Christ's body, is called to actualize Christ's incarnation, embodying and witnessing to the karmic transformation of all things in Christ, to "the ends of the earth." (Acts 13:47) Perhaps this is a tradition-friendly interpretation of Panikkar's dictum that Jesus is the Christ, but the Christ is not only Jesus. Since all of reality is interrelated, the redemption of Jesus is incomplete without the redemption of the entire cosmos, i.e., the "Christification" of all things.

Yet it is important to reiterate that the first moment in this process of conversion is akin to how Panikkar describes his own karmic situation, namely, a gracious, even passive, embrace of the spiritual gifts "inherited" in the Father's house, and a willingness to conform to them in some sense, to be converted by them as a precondition for the fullness of human salvation. Panikkar's early fulfillment theology is arguably more forceful about the need for Christianity to reinterpret itself in light of Hinduism, rather than the opposite, precisely because he sees that the integrity of the relationality at the heart of the Incarnation is at stake, a distinctively patristic concern. It is here that karma may provide further illumination to Panikkar's theology of Incarnation. If the Incarnation and the Church, the entirety of the Christian economy, is utterly discontinuous with creation, Gnosticism is the result and Christianity will be cut off from the earth. It is this excommunication from creation, which engenders a fondness for the "absolute." The early Panikkar throughout his career sees this as potentially lethal for modern, Western Christianity, influenced as it is by imperial homogeneity, disembodied rationalism, industrial modernization, and technological science. In order to reclaim the premodern truths at the heart of the christological mystery, Panikkar believes that the Western Church

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needs to become reintegrated with the ancient spiritual traditions that foreground aspects of religious existence displaced by modernity, which have offered this culture at best a pseudo-salvation. Modern Christian triumphalists, in their rejection of the religions, are severed from the wisdom present in premodern spirituality that is the foundation, and not the adversary, of redemption. Christ should neither be understood nor worshipped *in se*, in a private Catholic sanctuary, but as a karmic Lord who is intimately related to all that is born of the divine in the world, creating a new karmic people in his image.

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## Raimon Panikkar's "eschatology": The unpublished chapter

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### Introduction

This essay is prompted by Raimon Panikkar's mystifying remarks contained in the epilogue of his magnum opus *The Rhythm of Being*. Because these remarks serve as the foil for my reflections allow me to quote the epilogue in full:

Since delivering the Gifford Lectures twenty years ago, I have hesitated to publish this book, because of the last chapter, which was supposed to be titled "The Survival of Being." No matter how I reflected on that topic, the results did not satisfy me. On the contrary, what I wrote seemed to be lucubration, a solemn literary work about something we do not and cannot know anything about. I could only move forward to publication and approve the final revisions when I decided to omit chapter 9.

Led by the enthusiasm aroused by the Gifford Lectures in 1989, I imagined I could tackle a subject that proved to transcend the powers of my intellect.

I must admit that all ultimate questions cannot have final answers, but that we can at least be aware of the problems we have presented. I have touched the limits of my understanding and must stop here. The Tree of Knowledge again and again tempts one at the cost of neglecting the more important tree, the Tree of Life.

How can human thinking grasp the destiny of life itself, when we are not its owners?

This is my humble conclusion to much presumptuous research. It has taken me twenty years to admit this, and I apologize.<sup>1</sup>

### "Lucubration" and "presumptuous research": The unpublished chapter

No reader will fail to be deeply moved by both the irony and poignancy of this confession of Panikkar. Irony, because they come from the pen of a scholar who has written literally hundreds of thousands of words on themes no less transcendent and elusive than the "survival of

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<sup>1</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010), 405.

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being.” Poignancy, because they were written by Panikkar on September 4, 2009, less than a year before his death (August 26, 2010), at Tavertet, Catalunya, when thoughts and adumbrations, or as he puts it, “lucubration” on what might come after his passing were bound to haunt him.

For those unfamiliar with Panikkar, these last words provide both a rare insight into his thinking in his waning years and the philosophico-theological principles underlying his thought about the survival of being. It took Panikkar twenty years to finally have his Gifford Lectures published, which, I presume, had already been written out in full, at least in draft form, at the time of their delivery. Of course, Panikkar did not spend his whole time working on the revision of his Gifford Lectures, busy as he was lecturing and writing other books during the twenty intervening years. Still, by any standard two decades is an extremely long time to get into print a manuscript that was already substantially completed. The reason for the inordinate delay, we are told, is that the last chapter, the ninth of the book, entitled “The Survival of Being,” no matter how much time and effort Panikkar put into it, did not satisfy him. Finally, he consented to the publication of his Gifford Lectures only on the condition that this chapter be omitted.

Was Panikkar’s refusal to publish the last chapter a case of the scrupulous perfectionist who thinks that if granted more time and research he would bring forth a satisfactory result? Panikkar was of course an inveterate perfectionist who kept revising and adding to the manuscript, parts of which went through nineteenth different versions. The reason for the delay was not however perfectionism. From the epilogue, it is clear that the reason for this refusal to bring the chapter into print is of a philosophico-theological and not pragmatic nature, and it is something that, Panikkar informs us, he only grew gradually aware of. In 1989, “led by the enthusiasm aroused by the Gifford Lectures,” he imagined he would be able to tackle the theme of the “survival of being.” Subsequent years-long reflections led him to four convictions. The first is epistemological: The survival of being is “something we do not and cannot know anything about.” The second is ontological: “Ultimate questions cannot have final answers.” The third is theological: “How can human thinking grasp the destiny of life itself, when we are not its owners?” The fourth is ethical: Preoccupying about the “Tree of Knowledge” would lead to the neglect of the “Tree of Life.” The best that can be done is not to find answers to the question of the “survival of being”; rather, Panikkar suggests, it is to be aware of the problematic nature of the question itself.



As a recidivist of what Panikkar calls “lucubration” and “presumptuous research” on death and the afterlife, I was chastened by his apophaticism as well as humbled by his apology for having taken twenty years to admit to the limits of his understanding. But curiosity had the better of my contrition. I wanted to know what the deleted chapter contains, why Panikkar has found it fundamentally unsatisfactory, and whether his view of the “survival of being,” or eschatology, is justified. The first step of course is to obtain a copy of the omitted chapter, and I was fortunate enough to have a friend who possesses a copy of it and allowed me access to it under the strictest condition that I not publish it. I am sure that sooner or later the text will be made public, and most likely is already available to Panikkar’s circle of friends, but let it be known that I bear no responsibility for its dissemination.

### **Eschatology as “survival of Being”**

The unedited and unpublished chapter nine, entitled “the Survival of Being,” is 18,517 words long. It is divided into three sections, entitled “Eschatology,” “The Being of Time,” and “The Time of Being” respectively. Stylistically, it is vintage Panikkar, sprinkled liberally as it is with multilingual quotations, neologisms, and word plays. It is also distinctly Panikkarian in that his thought is as elusive as ever, and even more so here, given the subject matter about which he says that “we do not and cannot know anything,” and the tone is at times oracular, with frequent allusions to arguments elaborated elsewhere. Like any of Panikkar’s writings, it is not readily amenable to analysis and summary. Nevertheless, I will attempt to highlight Panikkar’s key ideas on what he calls the “survival of being.”<sup>2</sup>

It is highly significant that the first section of the chapter is titled “Eschatology.” I myself have put the term in quotation marks in the title of my essay to signal the fact that the “survival of being” as elaborated by Panikkar in this chapter is by no means co-extensive with “eschatology” as this term is traditionally understood in Christian dogmatic/systematic theology, that is, as a treatise on the “Last Things” (*eschata; de novissimis*) such as death, particular judgment, purgatory, heaven, hell, the resurrection of the dead, the end of the world, Christ’s parousia, and universal judgment. Readers expecting Panikkar to discourse on these realities will

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<sup>2</sup> In citing from this text, I cannot refer to the numbers of its pages since it is unpublished. But I assure readers that the quotations are accurate.

be sorely disappointed by his explicit refusal to do so.

What then does Panikkar intend by “eschatology”? Panikkar begins his discussion of the “survival of being” by noting that term “survival” is rather infelicitous since “being” does not “survive” but “lives.” It lives *with*, not *in* time. Being and time are “co-extensive,” albeit not identical with each other. Time does not exhaust being; rather it is the “distension” of being, just as being is also “ex-tension” (space) and “in-tention” (consciousness). By “survival of being”, Panikkar means “fullness of life” and by “life” he means that-which-remains. In this sense, the survival of being can be thought of and discoursed on, as an “ultimate question.” But this intellectual enterprise, Panikkar warns, is both “daring” and “dangerous,” two of Panikkar’s favorite adjectives to describe his entire thought project as embodied in *The Rhythm of Being*. First, daring, because in undertaking it we “enter into a forbidden, or rather an inaccessible path” and explore with our mind “the very boundaries of our spiritual power.” Secondly, dangerous, because in so doing we run the risk of transcending and leaving behind our *humus*, our “earthly ground,” or, to put it philosophically, to abandon our first two eyes and make an exclusive use of the “third eye.” Panikkar recalls Wittgenstein’s celebrated dictum: “Of what one cannot speak one must be silent,” and acknowledges its useful caution, but argues that it is possible and necessary to speak of the survival of being, though not by means of concepts obtained through deduction or induction, but by means words used as “symbols.”

### **Eschatology**

With these methodological and metaphysical preliminaries in place, Panikkar proceeds to elaborate on the survival of being under the three above-mentioned headings, namely, eschatology, the being of time, and the time of being. Under eschatology, broaching first the theme of death, Panikkar notes the obvious truism that we cannot experience our own deaths but only the deaths of others. Through this experience of the death of others, we step outside our individuality and at the same time return to ourselves as individuals, but now as “a knot in a net of relationships.” As a consequence, for Panikkar, the individual dies: there is no *individual* immortality; but because the individual is a knot in a net of relationships that endures, there is *personal* immortality. There is thus a paradox: “On the one hand, death is a most individualistic event: my *ego* dies. On the other hand, death is really experienced as appertaining to a *me* which is not my ego.” Panikkar expresses this paradox in another way by saying that

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death, which is an “apparently most personal and intimate *act*,” is at the same time “the most widespread and public *fact*,” so that “death has become the sign of life.”

From this personal immortality, it is natural to go further and raise what Panikkar calls “the ultimate eschatological question,” namely, “whether humanity as a single entity shall die or not—and, finally, whether Being is mortal or not.” Beneath this question, Panikkar discerns three issues, the first two of which he discusses in this section on eschatology, and the third, more philosophical, in the second and third sections. The first issue is whether monotheism offers the only possibility for affirming eternal life. Panikkar argues that even if God is immortal, humanity could remain mortal. A monotheistic God, as opposed to the Trinitarian God, would not necessarily wish to share God’s immortality with humanity.

The second issue is psychological. Do we need, psychologically speaking, to affirm an immortal God so that our life becomes, as Panikkar puts it, a “divine comedy” and not a “cosmic tragedy”? On the one hand, Panikkar admits, “to live a mortal life to the full one does not need to assume that there is another immortal life.” On the other hand, it seems that human life must have a purpose and meaning, since were it meaningless, this meaninglessness would paradoxically be its meaning or meaningfulness. But it is here, Panikkar points out, that the eschatological problem confronts us today. For the first time in history the end of the world, in Panikkar’s memorable phrase, “the ecological holocaust,” is a human feat and not a cosmic catastrophe or a divine project. Today we are more concerned about the “fate of the Earth” than about the fate of the individual human being.

In clarifying this psychological need, Panikkar appeals to two “pillars.” The first is the fairly widespread belief, despite the omnipresence of death around us, that “there is something that perdures, that is not temporal—whether the individual, the people, humanity or part of it, the cosmos, or God.” Furthermore, we humans are thought to be “a sort of hybrid, not only between Being and Nothingness, Heaven and Earth, but also [between] time and eternity, Goodness and Evil, Life and Death.” Panikkar argues that neither reason nor revelation can provide proof for this belief, and that only the “third eye,” that is, the experience of faith, can allow us “to see both death and immortality, or rather to experience time and eternity in our own existence.” Panikkar hastens to add that he is speaking about faith and not belief, the former being “an existential

awareness open to the infinite, the unknown, mystery, transcendence,” and the latter a systematic formulation of the nature of this transcendent mystery. According to Panikkar, we may have a faith experience of eternity, more precisely, of “*tempiternity*,” a non-dualistic vision of one aspect of reality, but we “cannot say anything about the end of the world or of Being.” Linguistic communication about the experience of tempiternity is only possible among those who share not only the same faith experience but also the same belief-system, which provides a common language for communication.

The second pillar to be taken into account by contemporary eschatology is modern critical or cosmological thinking; it includes two factors. The first is the above-mentioned possibility of the human-made “ecological holocaust” or “biological suicide.” The second is the prediction by scientific cosmologies of the end of the universe. This hypothesis of total annihilation is consonant with the theory of the origin of the universe from Non-being, but there are no criteria either to verify or falsify it.

In the absence of scientific criteria, Panikkar introduces belief in God into this hypothesis. We are then faced, he argues, with two possibilities. The first possibility is that being and becoming are different, with becoming moving toward and achieving completion in being. Becoming may cease, but being will remain eternal, perhaps not named “God” but *nirvana*, *wu*, Non-being, chaos, abyss, etc. The alternative possibility is that being and becoming are not different. Then, if becoming ceases, being also ceases, and vice versa. However, the question about the end of being can only be raised *from* being and *in* time. That is, we can only speak of being as it *was*, *is*, and *shall be*. If this temporal linearity of ontological time is abolished, time itself will be abolished. But, Panikkar notes, if being has existed until now, there is no reason why it should cease to be. Thus, in Panikkar’s conceptual framework, the survival of being or eschatology leads to, and as will be seen shortly, is reduced to the being of time and the time of being.

### **The Being of Time**

The ontological relationship between time and eternity constitutes the third issue that Panikkar believes is implied by the “ultimate eschatological question,” which he discusses in the remaining two sections of the chapter. It is not possible to present here a detailed exposition of Panikkar’s thought on this deeply intricate issue of the nature of time and

eternity and their mutual relationship. As to be expected, both the content and the style of these two remaining sections are vintage Panikkar: subtle and nuanced, allusive and elusive, intricate and exacting, replete with citations from Eastern and Western thinkers in various languages, so that there is a clear and present danger of missing the forest for the trees. Thus, I will try to delineate Panikkar's basic line of thought as economically as possible, without giving all of his supporting arguments, which may prevent a clear grasp of his thesis on the survival of being.

For Panikkar, eschatology is not concerned with the future things but with the *last* and *lasting* things (*ta eschata, de novissimis*). Hence, the real issue in eschatology is not the possible *end* of all things in the future but time and its relation to eternity, or to put it in metaphysical terms, becoming and being.

To explicate this relationship between time and eternity, Panikkar contrasts the Indic concept of time with that espoused by monotheism. The former sees time as the "soul" of the universe and of being, the inherent dynamism of reality, the being of Being-in-time. It is only due to our ignorance (*avidya*) that we see time as different from eternal being, as a sequence of past, present, and future moments, with a beginning and an end. In Indic eschatology, time is not linear; hence, the *eschaton* is not in the future. Rather time is "a dance, a rhythm, the throbbing of the universe pulsating the life of *brahman*." Here, the question about the end of time does not even arise, since "end" is already a temporal notion implying the future.

By contrast, in monotheism, time is created. God the creator is above time and timeless. The world is temporal, whereas God is eternal. Because time belongs to creation and not to God, it is meaningless and self-contradictory to talk about God "before" creation and God "after" creation. In this metaphysical framework, God, by definition, cannot cease to be; only God's creation can. Whether this possibility will actually occur, according to Panikkar, we have no way of telling. However, if it does occur, that is, if creation disappears, then God the creator will also "disappear," in the sense that all appearances for which God is the creator have disappeared. In this scenario, God would revert into absolute solitude (a "monotheistic Absolute") and creation to its atemporal origin, that is, nothingness.

However, Panikkar hastens to point out that in the Christian faith God is not a monotheistic Absolute but is constituted by trinitarian

relations, as is implied by the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Logos and elaborated by the theology of the Suffering God. Reality, to use Panikkar's coinage, is "cosmotheandric." But if this is so, it may be asked whether the disappearance of humanity ("Man" in Panikkarian language) or of the cosmos would entail the disappearance of God. In answer to this question, Panikkar notes the obvious truism that "there is no power capable of annihilating Being because there is no power at all 'outside' Being." But could Being annihilate itself and quietly cease to be? In principle we cannot know Non-being because it does not exist. But even if we do not *know* Non-being, we can certainly *think* of it as a limit-concept, that is, as the limit to our negation of Being. Hence, we can *think* of the *possibility* of the annihilation of Being. Conversely, that which is not thinkable is not necessarily impossible. Therefore, the fact that we cannot think the end of Being does not mean that such an end is impossible. Thus, even if we cannot think the end of the world, or the end of Being, it does not mean that it is impossible.

Now, if the end of Being cannot be thought as impossible, its putative end would have to spring from some mysterious "seed of non-being" (Proclus's *sperma mē ontos*) that is buried deep within Being itself. Panikkar links this seed of non-being in Being with the human capacity for bringing about the "ecological holocaust." Thus, the destiny or survival of Being is intimately connected with that of humanity and humanity's responsibility for the survival of the cosmos. In Panikkar's view, we can no longer hold the two-story conception of the universe, with the eternal and immutable divine world on top of, or over against, the temporal and changeable material world.

So what is the relation between these two worlds—eternal God and temporal world? Panikkar suggests that there are two possible ways to think of this relation. First, we may think that the world may be "beginningless" and "endless" but could have both a beginning and an end. In any case, the world exists because God sustains it in existence. If for reasons incomprehensible to us, God decides to withdraw God's sustenance, the world will end. In this case, however, its annihilation will not make any difference to God since that which disappears is not really real and eternal.

Secondly, we can think that eternal Being by definition cannot cease to be. Only a temporal being can cease to be. The mere act of asking whether Being can cease to be already illegitimately imports the notion of

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time and movement into eternal Being. Panikkar reminds us that the divine act of creation is not a temporal event; God's creative act is a timeless act; it is *creatio continua*. On the other hand, it is possible to think that *nothingness* can happen to Being in the sense that Being no longer "appears," that is, it "dis-appears" as *phainomenon*.

Thus, we can ask: If Being cannot "cease to be" at the hand of an external agent within time, can it annihilate itself? Panikkar points out that this question of his is not the same as Heidegger's: "Why are there beings at all, and why is there something rather than nothing?" Heidegger's celebrated question already presupposes Being. Panikkar's, by contrast, does not ask *why* there are beings or entities; rather he is "pondering the why of all beings together, and then asking about the fate of Being if all beings fail to be." Panikkar goes on to clarify his question: "How will Being 'perdure' in Being if beings cease to be? If Being 'be-ings' in beings, if Being *is* in beings, how would that *is* be if there were no beings? I am not asking 'Why should Being be?' because Being simply is, and we cannot put a why into the *is*. The question is rather: 'Should being always be?' Or, elaborating on that 'always': Might Being not fall into nothingness? What sustains Being in Being? What happens to Being once time is admitted into it?"

In trying to provide an answer to this question of the "Being of time," Panikkar first notes that whereas we know what happens to humanity once God has entered into time, we do not know what happens to *God* once God has entered into human history. The answer of traditional theology is that God remains unchanged. It is argued that there is only a *relatio rationis* and not a real relation, between God and the creature. Panikkar argues that this view is a corollary of "monotheism" and is not what Christian trinitarianism would maintain. The doctrine of the Trinity, he points out, "links the Godhead with humanity and the entire cosmos in the person of Christ." It is only in the trinitarian framework, Panikkar argues, that a satisfactory answer can be found to this question of the Being of time.

But the trinitarian structure of reality, encapsulated in Panikkar's celebrated concept of cosmotheoandrisim, is but the first step. What is further needed is a reflection on the meaning of eternity itself. So far, time has been seen as an essential ingredient of eternal Being. However, in Western metaphysics, eternity is generally understood as "timelessness." The experience of timelessness is common enough, and Panikkar finds it

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exemplified in the act of “reflective consciousness,” by which we attempt to stop the flow of time and to enter into a non-temporal realm. If we do not transcend the flow of time into timelessness, “we live, but our lives are lived on the run, and escape us. We cannot possess life. We cannot even enjoy life, experience life, other than by going along with this flow of time that seems to oblige all things to move and move on.”

How can we escape this go-with-the-flow-but-fragmented life? Panikkar makes two suggestions. First, contemplation. By this act of contemplation, we pierce through the flow of time to reach that “tempiternal core,” which is coterminous with time but incommensurable with it. Contemplation is “that human activity that does not move along with time, but counter to it, perhaps swimming upstream just to remain in one place and experience in depth what would otherwise be swept along the eddies of time.... Contemplation lets us participate in the tempiternal character of reality itself. In and by contemplation we enter an aspect of the real that otherwise remains closed to us.” In contemplation, we remain *in* time but not *of* time. We become, in Panikkar’s coinage, “tempiternal.”

The second suggestion is a metaphysical thought derived from the tempiternity of Being. Panikkar criticizes what he calls “Ego-chronism,” the common tendency to view time as a linear movement running forward to its end. Rather, like Being, time is rhythmic, in which we enjoy life not for the sake of what comes in the next moment, that is, for the sake of something else. On the contrary, “our authentic actions are ends in themselves and not just functions of what is to come. Neither Being or life runs out or away from us.”

One consequence of this experience of tempiternity is that “paradox upon paradox, it does not make much difference whether the world comes to an end or not.” Panikkar is deeply aware that this statement of his is extremely delicate and is liable to profound misunderstanding. As he puts it, one inch to its left is “utter nihilism,” and one inch to its right is “inhuman aberration.” Panikkar clarifies this statement with two observations. First, from the ethical point of view, we should act with the freedom of the totally realized person; that is, we should perform our actions for their own sake, regardless of their outcome or merit, in this case, without consideration of their possible impact on the end of time or Being. Secondly, from the philosophical perspective, Panikkar reminds us that “the Being of time is neither a straight line nor a circle. It is not even temporal, if by that word we mean a punctuated succession of moments....



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The Being of time is the Being to which time belongs. Time is not the whole of Being, nor does it so dominate Being that Being can only be in accord with what we discover time to be.” So, after speaking of the Being of time, Panikkar raises the question: What is the time of Being?

### **The Time of Being**

In the third and last section of the chapter Panikkar explore an answer to that question. He begins by noting that “monotheism,” as mentioned above, has a distinct advantage in defending Being against the threat of the annihilation of life itself at human hands: No matter what happens to the cosmos and humanity, according to monotheism, God remains. However, if Being is constitutionally open, if time is intrinsic to Being, as Panikkar has argued, then it is impossible to say that no matter what happens, reality or Life or Being itself will persist above and beyond the destiny of time. Granted, Panikkar holds that it is impossible to *think* of Non-being. But the impossibility of *thinking* Non-Being does not entail its “ontic impossibility.”

Over against the possibility of Non-being, we can perhaps mount an argument for immortality. Whatever its validity, we cannot, Panikkar notes, take immortality to mean unending life within the flow of time, with its successive fragments, or the survival of the planet, however important the ecological issue is. The survival is not merely cosmic but cosmotheandric. Hence, immortality must be understood within the experience of tempiternity. The issue Panikkar is concerned about is neither the survival of humanity nor the saving of Earth but “the fate of Being, the destiny of the universe.”

To find an answer to this question of the fate of Being Panikkar first has recourse to the Indic notion of time, briefly alluded to above, as “the soul of the universe” or “the soul of Being.” He then connects this notion of time with Plotinus’s concept of life (*zoē*) as “the time of Being” and as “the *spanda*, *nixus*, movement, energy of the Whole.” He then goes on to say that “this Life, this Life-span or Life-time, is the very soul of Being. Being is alive.... This Life is the Divine Mystery, the soul of the Whole, the Life of the entire universe.... Though Man is mortal, matter is mortal, Life qua Life is immortal.”

This ringing affirmation of Life as immortal still leaves unsolved what Panikkar terms “the ultimate eschatological question,” namely, whether Life will cease to be Life if its “body,” that is humanity and/or the

cosmos, dies? Panikkar admits that his cosmotheandric insight offers no simple answer to this question but insists that it does provide some basic orientations. First, it affirms that reality as a whole may disappear and that time will have come and gone. We have to *think* and face the ontic possibility of the disappearance of Being and say: So be it!

Secondly, at the same time the cosmotheandric insight makes such disappearance unlikely as there are everywhere around us signs of a struggle by humans and the cosmos to survive. In response to this possibility of survival, we may decide to “live with all intensity that Life which is unique, precious, infinite, incommensurable, risky, and free.” This option may be called the way of *love*. We may also decide to “take up the challenges of Life so as to live for the maintenance, enhancement, and transformation of all that lives and the good order of the World.” This option may be called the way of *action*.

Thirdly, the cosmotheandric insight provides a differentiated understanding of “disappearance.” We may distinguish between the disappearance of Being and that of its appearance, that is, between the disappearance of *noumenon* and that of its *phainomenon*. The latter can be seen as “a sort of shine, glare, refulgence, beauty, or splendor” or “glory” of the former. Then, if the *phainomenon* disappears, then the *noumenon* also disappears, in the sense that it is “disfigured, degraded, deprived of this glory, beauty, shining power, this light.” In this way, says Panikkar, “we may cause only the disappearance of Being, not its annihilation. What has been, has been, what is, is. There may be no future, but there is past and present.... Real Life is not just a movement forward; it is rhythmic. Life is not history, it is rhythm.... If time *shall* be no more, Being shall be no more. But time was and Being was. And in this time-past of Being lies the whole of Being. From the point of view of Being, from an eternal viewpoint, or from the perspective of consciousness, Being *is*.”

This experience of Being within time, of Being that was and is and maybe shall be no more, of the “rhythm” of Being, is what Panikkar calls “the sempiternal experience.” This sempiternal experience generates the cosmotheandric insight, which in turns undermines the monotheistic certainty on the “survival” of Being/Divine no matter what happens to the Human and the Cosmic. In Panikkar’s view, we have lost ontological innocence and must admit that “all can disappear, everything, all that to which we are able to say ‘this.’” This experience of the possibility of the disappearance of Being however leads to neither nihilism or atheism. It

only rejects the making of our intellect into the final arbiter of reality—the disease Panikkar calls “the cancer of the mind.” It also rejects the silencing of the question about the survival of Being, as the Buddha attempts to do. In the end, Panikkar suggests we speak of the “rhythm” of Being rather than its “survival.” In this age of the rhythm of Being, we can no longer say: “Only a God can save us,” or “We have to save ourselves,” or “There is no salvation at all.” Thus, “it is not human self-reliance, or trust in God, or confidence in reason. It is the sober and clear acceptance of reality as it is, because this *is* is not a previous or static Being. We ourselves constitute that *is*, and form reality. Man is this extraordinary creature that flares up amidst the real and, ever searching for it, co-works to forge it.”

### **Lucubration and presumptuous research?**

The foregoing pages represent my attempt to forge a more or less straight path through the labyrinth of Panikkar’s chapter “The Survival of Being.” To reduce anyone’s 18,571 words to 5259 words while preserving their substance is in itself a herculean task, and to do so with Panikkar’s chapter on eschatology is going to where angels fear to tread and where only fools would rush in. I must confess that at times I felt I have connected the dots together where the pattern of thought is at best blurry, and have imposed a logical structure onto Panikkar’s various statements that remain largely oracular.

How far my summary of Panikkar’s eschatology is accurate I leave to Panikkar scholars to judge. In the meantime, let us revisit Panikkar’s refusal to have the chapter on eschatology published because it contains, in his judgment, nothing more than “lucubration” and “presumptuous research.” I have identified above Panikkar’s four reasons for this refusal: The first is epistemological: We do not and cannot know anything about the survival of being. The second is ontological: Eschatological questions by their very nature cannot have final answers. The third is theological: Humans cannot grasp the destiny of life itself because they are not its masters. The fourth is ethical: To be concerned with eschatological issues may lead to the neglect of this-worldly duties. The best that can be done, according to Panikkar, is not to find answers to the question of the “survival of being” but to be aware of the problematic nature of the question itself.

It is clear from the above survey of Panikkar’s eschatology that it has successfully eschewed these four pitfalls. Thus, Panikkar makes a clear distinction between “knowing” the end of Being and “thinking” about it;

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the former is inherently impossible, the latter is not only possible but also necessary. Answers to the ultimate eschatological question of whether Being will survive have been shown to be in principle not available; the only answer we have is not about the end but the *rhythm* of Being. Human beings (or “Man” in Panikkarian language) are not the masters of Life but are “co-workers” to forge Life or Being. Finally, the way of love is intimately connected with the way of action that must be performed for “the maintenance, enhancement, and transformation of all that lives and the good order of the World.”

A puzzling question then arises: if Panikkar has elaborated such an eschatology, free from the four misconceptions he outlines, why should he not have been pleased with it? Why does he think that it is no more than “lucubration” and, worse, “presumptuous research”? On the superficial, that is, stylistic and organizational levels, the chapter still needs extensive editorial work before it is publishable, but it is something that his former student Scott Eastham, to whom he dedicates his book, could have done competently. Consequently, I suspect that the reason for Panikkar’s dissatisfaction with the chapter and refusal to have it published lies much deeper. There is no doubt that Panikkar has struggled mightily and for a long time to elaborate an eschatology that would be coherent with the basic epistemological and metaphysical principles of his thought system. In the end, however, on his own admission, he did not think that he was successful. In mentioning below the three *aporias* I see in his eschatology I am not suggesting that those are the issues he was struggling with; rather I believe that they are the problems bedeviling his eschatology.

First, there is an internal incoherence in his answer to the question of whether Being can “survive.” His distinction between “knowing” and “thinking” is a useful epistemological warrant for his position that we do not and cannot know anything about the end of Being. However, Panikkar insists, at least we can *think* about it. Without this possibility much if not all of this chapter on eschatology would remain blank. But if what Panikkar writes here represents only what we can *think* about the end of Being, then his later affirmation that Being, or Life, or Time will perdure insofar as it *was* and *is*, though perhaps not *shall be*, still remains only a *thought*, and not an ontological affirmation. To attribute an ontological value to this statement would require that Panikkar abandon or at least severely modify his epistemological apophaticism. Interestingly, Panikkar cites the teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) that “between the Creator and the creature we cannot point to any likeness without acknowledging that

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between them there is a greater unlikeness.” But the *maior dissimiludo*, which the council affirms, cannot be invoked to justify the total agnosticism and apophaticism that are implied in Panikkar’s statement that eschatology is “something we do not and cannot know anything about.” Rather, the council, as well as subsequent Catholic theology, does acknowledge that we can and do know *something* of eternal life and God (*via affirmativa*) but it holds that this knowledge of that something of eternal life and God must be denied in its this-worldliness (*via negationis*), and brought to its transcendent reality (*via eminentiae*).

Of course, were we asked what exactly we know of eternal life and God, we must humbly acknowledge that we do not *know*, that is, we do not know it the way we know things of the material world such as cats and dogs (and even then we do not know them very well!). Rather, our knowledge of eternal life and God is necessarily and unavoidably wrapped in negative terms (in negation and transcendence), and should end in worshipful silence. Perhaps it is to this final “silence” that Panikkar points, and if so, he is not alone but joins the multitudinous crowd of witnesses of Christian mysticism.

Secondly, on the basis of his cosmotheandric insight and the tempiternal experience Panikkar makes a distinction between the disappearance of Being (*noumenon*) and the disappearance of its temporal manifestation (*phainomenon*) and suggests that the disappearance of the latter will cause “this glory, beauty, shining power, this light” of Being to be “disfigured, degraded.” This allows him to affirm that “our power is limited and that we may cause only the disappearance of Being, not its annihilation.” No doubt, this is better than holding that God remains unaffected and unchanged by temporal events. But this distinction seems to function as a *deus ex machina* descending from on high in time to save us from total despair at the possibility of the absolute annihilation of Being, which we can *think* about. Why not, for sake of consistency, say that such annihilation of Being or Life as such and as a whole is not an “ontic impossibility,” even if we may *think* (albeit not *know*) that it is unlikely or impossible? If however this alternative is not a live option for believers, at least Christians may say that in the death of Christ on the cross, Being or God (*noumenon*) has “disappeared” and indeed has died in God’s *phainomenon*, and that divine glory and beauty has been “disfigured, degraded.”

Thirdly, I mentioned above that Panikkar reduces eschatology to the

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question of the “survival of Being.” Of course, the survival of Being, however it is understood, is *the* foundational issue of eschatology, Christian and otherwise. Nevertheless, this substantive reduction, as helpful as it is in focusing our attention on what is foundational, is extremely unfortunate, at least from the Christian perspective. As Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and many of their followers have argued, Christian discourse about the Last Things, while preserving the essentially analogical character of all speech about God and the “afterlife,” may and must say something about these Last Things, including death and dying, heaven and hell, the resurrection of the dead and Christ’s glorious “return,” universal judgment and the consummation of human history. Christians do have some knowledge of these eschatological matters on the basis of what God has accomplished in Jesus and of God’s faithful promise to do for all humans what God has done for Jesus. Hence, they can and must speak about them, without falling into the error, widespread among fundamentalists of all religions, of thinking that this discourse is an advance “preview” or blow-by-blow report of what will happen in the afterlife. Eschatology is essentially Christologization of anthropology in the future key. Of course, this type of eschatological discourse falls entirely outside the purview of philosophy qua philosophy. But for Panikkar the philosopher and the theologian such eschatology should not be off-limits.

My three above observations are made with the proviso that my exposition of Panikkar’s eschatology is accurate. If it took Panikkar twenty years to realize the limits of his understanding of eschatology, it will take me no more than a minute to acknowledge that I might have misunderstood, or have not understood at all, what he has written about it. However, the mere reading of his magnum opus, and especially its unpublished chapter, has allowed me to reach up to a great mind, even if my reach is greater than my grasp.

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## From Epistemology to Ontology in Raimon Panikkar

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### Introduction

The most important reason for Panikkar's taking ontology seriously, as the foundation of his critique of modern epistemology, is that modern epistemology is based on reason and rationality alone. What is wrong about epistemology based on reason and rationality? To date the scientific approach and analytical thought have been the absolute criteria for modern epistemology, which takes an *a priori* structure or frame of knowledge such as reason and rationality. This has made reason and rationality detached from human experiences. Panikkar never denied that reason and rationality are legitimate tools and means of acquiring knowledge. What Panikkar challenged, however, was that reason and rationality as the sole and absolute criteria for getting knowledge. Instead, human beings have an ability to know and understand through channels other than reason and rationality. Mysticism, for example, illustrates an immediate, direct, and intuitive knowledge based on experience. What Panikkar tried to do was to explore and attempt to establish an epistemology based on ontology. From the Western philosophical and intellectual perspective, epistemology was viewed as a rigorous intellectual discipline with highly elaborated schemes and structures as seen in Kant and in Descartes, among others. Panikkar boldly challenges this basic presupposition of modern epistemology by introducing an ontological dimension into his epistemology. Panikkar's argument can be summarized as follows: epistemology cannot exist apart from ontology; epistemology cannot determine "ontology," i.e., ways of knowing should not determine ways of being; ontology is a source of inspiration for developing epistemology not that epistemology is the determining factor of ontology.

Panikkar's critical view of modern Western epistemology stems from his deep-seated suspicion and doubt of modern mentality or ways of thinking. The rise of modernity was deeply rooted in the "Enlightenment mentality" referring to the Enlightenment in 18<sup>th</sup> century in discovering the power of reason and rationality that sets apart modernity (the age of reason) from the mediaeval age. Now, we are entering into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the

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postmodern age. Panikkar, long before the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, had begun his project to overcome the consequence of modernity especially concerning reason and rationality. However, we should not misconceive Panikkar's project in thinking that he tried to convince us to dismiss epistemology itself and go for ontology alone. In other words, Panikkar's attempt does not necessarily mean that we abandon the rational mind all together. For Panikkar, reason and rationality are also part of being a human, and both play an important part in understanding reality. Rather the rational mind can be an indicator or a guide to reality, being, and the way. But we should not confuse the indicator of reality with reality itself or "the finger" with "the moon" in "the finger pointing at the moon" found in the Zen Buddhist tradition. Likewise, the purpose of Panikkar's argument is not to discard the role of reason and rationality as a means in the epistemological process. However, for Panikkar, we should not confuse the medium of knowledge with knowledge itself. For him, being is a larger category than reason and rationality, and being is alive and dynamic and cannot be reduced to a mere skeleton of logic. Further, being is multi-dimensionally and interactively constituted. No single being can exist on its own being. Every being is interdependently related to each other as found in the Buddhist idea of *paratityasamudpada*, the Buddhist doctrine of dependent –co-origination, or in Panikkar's "cosmotheandric experience."

### **From Epistemology to Ontology**

Before we go further into this inquiry, we may take a look at what had happened in the history of humankind, especially in Western civilization. The rise of modernity in the West is truly a remarkable event. With the decline of the Middle Ages, modern times began to emerge around the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the Reformation, the Renaissance (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Enlightenment (18<sup>th</sup> century), the French Revolution (1789-1799), and the Industrial Revolution (1820-1840). These historical events that occurred in the West characterized what we now call "modernity" or "modern mentality." What follows from these historical events were certain characteristics that have shaped the "modern" West. What Western modernity has produced were "individualism," "individual human rights," "anthropocentric worldview," "democratic government," "analytical approach," "scientific method," "reason," "rationality," etc. The rise of modernity has changed the way we think, the way we live, our sense of value, and worldview in a profound way. The "Modern West" was a product



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of these remarkable historical events experienced in the West.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the concept “modernity” is a uniquely Western product in terms of its origin. With the rise of modernity and the modern mentality, the West has produced remarkable results so that the whole idea of modernity has become a universal concept or a global standard. The term “globalization” has become so globalized that we simply use this term without any critical thinking of it. We may, however, observe that the so called globalization is in fact universalizing one particular system, one certain worldview, one value system as the standard.

One of the clear outcomes of the modern mentality is that “reason,” “rationality,” “analytical thinking,” “scientific mind” or “scientific thinking,” and “individual rights” have become a universal and global standard to perceive reality and the world or to judge values. In the area of epistemology, “reason,” “rationality,” and “scientific mind” have played a critical role in understanding “reality” or “being” in modern philosophy starting with Kant and Descartes. Reason and rationality became the absolute standard in judging what “real” is or even what “being” is. Mostly, the Western tradition has elevated “reason” and “rationality” as the universal norm in approach to reality, and the analytical approach and the scientific method have dominated in ways of “thinking,” and “thinking” itself was governed by reason and “science.” If you do not think rationally and scientifically, you are not “thinking” properly. The rise of “modernity” has had a greater impact on the rest of the world than any other historical moment in modern history.

Panikkar was deeply concerned about “modernity” and he wrote a delightful essay called “The Contemplative Spirit: A Challenge to Modernity.”<sup>2</sup> In this article, Panikkar challenged “modernity” in terms of the way we live, the way we think, and the way we value. This is one example of how he views the problem of modernity. In the process of

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the East in general did not have this historical experience, though it went through different kinds of historical moments when we look the Asian situation. In short, the concept modernity did not rise in Asia at the least until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, most Asian countries were in rush to catch up the western sense of modernity in the last 50 years.

<sup>2</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality* (Opera Omnia vol. 1.1), New York: Orbis Books, 2014, 31-42. The original form of this article was published in *Cross Current* 31 (Fall 1981; 261-72, under the title of “The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity.”

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modernity, in spite of all the brilliant achievements, we have lost some fundamental insights in understanding the universe, the divine, and the human, namely, the “cosmotheandric vision.” Furthermore, as discussed above, Panikkar challenges the modern epistemology developed after Kant and Descartes in making “reason,” “rationality,” and “scientific thinking” as the absolute standard and the final criterion of knowing and understanding. Panikkar is especially critical of the dualistic division between epistemology and ontology that resulted in making epistemology over ontology as discussed above and in the case of Descartes’ famous dictum, “*cogito ergo sum*,” This is a clear case, according to Panikkar, of elevating epistemology over ontology, “rational thinking” over “being” or “reality.” In this modern mentality, “thinking” has been reduced to and identified with “reasoning.” In an attempt to overcome this dualistic tendency, Panikkar takes a non-dualistic (or a-dualistic) and an *advaitic* approach. This non-dualistic approach is deeply rooted in Panikkar’s mystical awareness in stressing the way of “being” that shapes the way of thinking, rather than “thinking” defines “being.” In this sense, his epistemology is not based on a rational and intellectual frame as a tool to obtain and grasp knowledge, what he calls the “epistemology of the hunter” as will be discussed in the following pages. Instead, Panikkar’s epistemology is ontologically oriented in taking “being” as a source of inspiration rather than “thinking” and “reasoning” define “being” or “reality.” Since Descartes, Western philosophy tried to understand “being” or “reality” from the perspective of “rational” thinking, and intellectual analysis in employing “language,” “term,” “concept,” “rationality” that have played a critical role in shaping “knowledge.” In this process “knowledge” is “obtained,” “acquired,” or “gained,” through a tool, an intellectual “network.” As a result, we no longer distinguish the difference between the “ways of knowing” “reality” and “reality itself” i.e. epistemology and ontology. Furthermore, we often identify the knowledge gained through our intellectual tools with the reality itself. By doing so, we inevitably reduce “reality” or “being” into the process of how we obtain or capture the “knowledge” of reality. According to Panikkar, the modern Western philosophical and intellectual tradition was shaped by this kind of epistemology, i.e. in using a certain intellectual framework of thinking, namely, a purely rational interpretation or scientific view of reality or being. Consequently, we see the dominion of epistemology over ontology. In this process, reason, rationality, language, and concept are set for a weapon to

capture or attain the knowledge of reality. This is what Panikkar calls “the epistemology of the hunter.”<sup>3</sup> The hunter’s epistemology is an active, an aggressive, and a readymade process to “obtain” and to “acquire” knowledge. The “tools of the hunter’s epistemology” are “reason” and “rationality.” Reason has become not only the “tool” but also the “judge” in determining “truth” and “reality.” Panikkar’s idea of “the epistemology of the hunter” is an important metaphor deserving further discussion and contemplation. Roberta Cappellini, for example, has also taken Panikkar’s idea of “the epistemology of the hunter” seriously in discussing the intrinsic problem of the epistemology developed in the Western philosophical history from Parmenides to Kant and to Descartes. Epistemology in this philosophical tradition was the dialectical method of ‘the armed reason,’ based on an instrumental reason.<sup>4</sup>

### Postmodern Perspective

Panikkar never made an explicit statement about “postmodernism” or “post modernity.” Nor did he identify himself with as a “postmodern thinker.” His visions and insights are, however, we may say that close to what we call “postmodernism.” As Panikkar developed his idea of relating epistemology to ontology is one of most compelling aspects that shows that he is breaking new ground in thinking about thinking and being. In this sense, it is quite inappropriate to apply the term “ontology” to Panikkar. He never wrote an “ontology” *per se*. For him, it is totally inadequate to say, “ontology” (*on+logos*) because “on” (“being”) does not belong to the realm of “logos.” In this sense, the term “ontology” is pretty much a modern concept in thinking of everything in terms of “logos,” “terms,” and “concept,” the product of reason and rationality. Being was under the domain of “logos.” Panikkar made a radical turn in thinking the other way around in terms of understanding being (or beings) or reality. For Panikkar being and reality are interchangeable. For him, Being or beings must not be conceptualized. Instead, Panikkar thinks “ontonomy” is a proper word in describing the nature of being. The conceptualized being is no longer a real being. Being is be-ing and not to be objectified. The process of conceptualization inevitably takes “reason” and “rationality” as a powerful tool and an intellectual instrument through which being is reduced to a

<sup>3</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery*, Minneapolis: 2006 Fortress Press p. 56

<sup>4</sup> M. Roberta Cappellini, “Panikkar’s intra-inter-dialogical philosophy: *imparative* vs. *comparative*?” CIRPIT REVIEW, Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, n.5-2014, 48

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certain framework of thinking. In the process, the real being loses its dynamic vitality. Being is not an individual entity to be comprehended as an object of our thinking. As found in the wisdom of Laozi, “The *dao* that can be spoken of is no longer the real or constant *dao*” (Daodejing 1) or “those who speak do not know, those who know do not speak” (Daodejing 56). Once our language conceptualizes being or reality, it loses its essence. This is what Panikkar characterizes as “the hunter’s epistemology.” We only capture the object that our net can catch. Here we see something profoundly wrong about modern epistemology because the net, the tool, the instrument we use to catch or obtain will eventually reduce to a pre-designed and a readymade form of knowledge. We cannot catch the whole, the totality of being but the total sum of different and unrelated individuals.

For the same reason, Panikkar thinks of human beings not as an individual entities but he understands that a human being is already community.<sup>5</sup> Without saying anything further, we can see clearly that Panikkar does not belong to the realm of “modern” thinker. In fact, he tried to show us how we lost the pre-modern vision of totality of being including human beings. On the other hand, he never advocated going back to the Mediaeval age or any pre-modern mentality. We can’t go back to the past or set the clock backward. What Panikkar advocated was the lost vision in the last three or four centuries in Western civilization under the name of modernity. This was really a challenging task for Panikkar. For this reason, I would call him a postmodern thinker who thinks of the nature of being beyond the domain of “reason” and “rationality” and even beyond “thinking.” He also thinks of human beings or any being beyond individualism. For Panikkar, being is not an individual but in *relation* and in *solidarity*.<sup>6</sup> Being has to be taken as a “totality” not as an individual or a part. For him “totality” is not sum of different parts. Each part is already totality, *totum in parte*. Not only does part stand for the whole, the whole is in part. For this reason, when Panikkar encounters the issue of being, he has to encounter the problem of whole and totality. For him being without relating to totality is not be-ing or becoming. Here he could not avoid the idea of the divine. For this reason, his idea of being inevitably becomes Being, reality, and divine. He does not separate “ontology” (discussion of being) from “theology” (discussion of divine). The Divine is not separated from the universe and the human as the destiny of Being. We cannot

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<sup>5</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, New York: Orbis Books, 2010. 58

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 58-59

exclude the Divine from sharing in the destiny of Being.<sup>7</sup> The Divine while immanent in the cosmos and in us, surpasses all our categories so that it gives a transcendental point of reference. Panikkar characterizes the fundamental nature of this relationship not in terms of causality or a sheer mechanism but as a universal correlation, *perichōresis*, ‘the relation of all with all is one of inter-in-dependence.’<sup>8</sup> Although Panikkar recognizes an individuality and a personal dimension of individual being that is somehow governed by what he calls “ontonomy,” he sees in general, a sort of total solidarity what he calls “Being.” There is a certain common destiny he would call solidarity, *karma*, *dharma-kaya*, *Buddha-kaya*, *ecclesia*, *qahal*, *umma*.<sup>9</sup> Panikkar does not mean by saying all this to identify the fate of one is the fate of all. His emphasis, however, is to say that reality as a living organism is a traditional idea in both East and West. Indeed, the idea of *anima mundi* is common in all traditions. This is the mystery of Being.

One of the reasons for Panikkar so powerfully arguing against the modern epistemology is due to the fallacy of mistaking the logic of concepts with the real process of Being.<sup>10</sup> The complexity, subtlety, and mystery of this solidarity of Being cannot and must not be conceptualized or constructed as a form of epistemology. Conceptual epistemology cannot grasp the “destiny of Being.” We can neither construct nor intellectually manufacture reality in the name of epistemology based on reason and rationality alone. Being is greater than “logos” (rational principle or reasoning process). The destiny of Being is larger than any epistemology can grasp. Panikkar’s idea of “destiny” is not an individual “fate.” Here the idea of “destiny” is fundamentally relational as a connected being in the real process of being or Being. Panikkar uses “Being” to denote the idea of God. For him Being is an all encompassing reality. We are intrinsically related to one another. This intrinsic relatedness is not a substance and yet it is real relation as a non-dualistic way, *advaita*. For Panikkar, this relatedness is a destiny of beings and Being. This ontological awareness is the key to his epistemology. The process of knowing includes the knower and the known. It is non-dualistic and knowledge has to become knowledgeable.

Western epistemology is based on a dualism splitting between subject and object, the knower and the known. There is a clear separation

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 60

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 60

and distinction between the knower and the known. Moreover, the knower's epistemology determines the known. Western epistemology was not based on relation but on dichotomy. For this reason, Panikkar aptly characterizes modern Western epistemology as the "hunter's epistemology." Since the last couple of years, after my presentation on the idea of the hunter's epistemology vs. the farmer's epistemology, I have received quite a few responses to my paper. Some criticized the vagueness of my proposal, some encouraged me to develop this project further. Panikkar, of course, never used the phrase, the farmer's epistemology. What I am trying to do is to explore a direction that Panikkar was developing. He did not develop his own epistemology *per se*. For him it is impossible to develop an epistemology independent of ontology, cosmology, and anthropology, what he calls "cosmotheandricism" or "theanthropocosmic vision." Before we go any further, I would like to discuss the "farmer's epistemology" at greater length.

As Panikkar used the idea of the hunter as the knower to catch the known, I am using the farmer as an idea to understand the process of knowing. According to Panikkar, the real question of epistemology is "how can we know the known?" The question itself has an ontological implication. Panikkar's answer to this question is no longer in the realm of epistemology but it delves into ontology:

"The answer obviously transcends the epistemological plane. If we were to succeed in knowing the knower, the knower would become the known, and no longer be the knower, unless both coalesce and there is identity between to know and to be. Epistemology becomes ontology and perfect ontology arrives at the identification between the  $\nu\omicron$  and the  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ , being and thought."<sup>11</sup>

Here we see that Panikkar turned the epistemological question into an ontological answer. The hunter's epistemology has no ontological concerns because the hunter simply catches what he sees and what he wants. This epistemology divides subject and object, and the subject controls and conditions the object. This is an aggressive and invasive epistemology. As seen above, Panikkar's epistemology requires ontology. This means that the process of obtaining knowledge is not simply an active process but it involves the passivity of "receiving" and "becoming." I am using the image of farmer in the place of hunter. The farmer unlike the hunter must be able to prepare to receive by toiling the earth and fertilizing the soil. This

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 64

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agrarian and agricultural metaphor shows that epistemology must be based on the earth to embrace external objects to make its own products. This is profoundly an ontological process. It also shows the “cosmotheandric” or “theocosmoanthropic” process of “knowing” including the cosmos, the human, and the divine in trinity. Real knowledge must intrinsically relational. In this sense, the ontological assumption is vital in the process of knowing. The knowing process is no longer simply targeting and shooting the object. “The epistemology of the hunter” represents the nomadic culture of the ancient Mediterranean world, the home to the Abrahamic tradition including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The nomadic nature of the hunter’s epistemology is linear and horizontal in the way of developing reason and rationality. The farmer’s way of thinking, however, is not only horizontal but also vertical in the sense that the whole process of planning and growing is more comprehensive and even complex by taking all things in the cosmos into consideration, the fertility of the earth, the grace of heaven, movement of air and atmosphere, human efforts etc. The hunters move horizontally in selecting their targets, the farmers must stay and adjust to the environment and prepare to accept and ready to adjust to be part of the universe. There is no dichotomy between the catchers and the captured found in the case of the hunter. The farmer’s epistemology represents the Asian cultural, intellectual, and spiritual traditions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and other native traditions in developing epistemology as part of the cosmological process, the idea that intelligibility and knowledge are not a human product but are ways of relating to nature and universe.

### **Theological Implication**

Panikkar goes one step further and turns the whole question of epistemology of the knower and the known into a deeper and profound issue concerning the divine. For him, the question of knowledge is a profoundly a theological issue. The question we ask, for example, an ultimate question, turns the very question into the Ultimate, and the answer comes from the experience of being identified with Being. If we follow Panikkar’s basic assumption that to know is to become the known, God knows the world, God becomes the world and is identified with it.<sup>12</sup> Here we see that Panikkar’s “ontological epistemology” or the “farmer’s epistemology” has a deep implication in understanding God, a theological process: “the question

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 64

about God or the ultimate becomes almost by definition the ultimate question.”<sup>13</sup> The true *knowledge* is possible only when it is related to *becoming* and *be-ing*. For Panikkar, being is *be-ing*, *becoming* and coming to be. His ontology is dynamic and organic. The best way to describe his ontology is rhythm. It is not a “logos” but a movement, and the movement with rhythm. For Panikkar “beings” and “Being” are neither separated nor divided. He uses “Being” for the “ultimate reality” while beings in an ordinary sense of a particular being. However, Being is in beings and not detached from ordinary beings. The question of the whole is the question of Being and vice versa. The question of God or the Divine is fundamentally the question of the whole because God has to be the whole. Nonetheless, the whole is not just sum of all parts nor an abstract metaphysical notion or concept. The whole may go beyond the parts and the concrete, but it does not detach itself from the parts. This is the dynamics of Being. The whole is Being, and yet the whole is in the concrete, *totum in parte* and the concrete represents the whole, *pars pro toto*. In other words, if we may borrow Heidegger’s terminologies, Being is both “ontic” and “ontological” in this particular sense.

Panikkar takes the word “destiny” seriously in describing Being or the Divine, not in terms of pre-determined destination but in the sense of *free* destination. The whole has its own intrinsic destiny. Being is our common destiny and God is “destiny.” For him, “destiny” is an open process. It does not have a ready made path or a pre-ordained way. Then why does he use the word “destiny”? In spite of all the possible misunderstanding and misinterpretation, Panikkar chose the word “destiny” in describing the nature of Being. For him, “destiny” is neither a pre-determined “fate” nor a blind open process totally detached from any particularities. “Destiny” for him was a profound word in showing both the freedom and obligation. We are free to pursue our own way and yet no one can escape or free from of the complexity and mystery of the fundamental relatedness, *perichōresis*. God is not only in relation but God is relation.

## Conclusion

I only touch the surface of what Panikkar tried to show us in terms of his idea of being in relation to his idea of knowledge, epistemology. What he has expounded is remarkable in terms of his insights to see the whole issue of modern epistemology. The issue regarding epistemology cannot be

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 65



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dealt with epistemology alone. As a postmodern thinker and as a mystic, Panikkar contemplates the whole idea of epistemology from entirely a different perspective. His attempt to relate the epistemological concern to his ontology is the most fruitful in his attempt to re-evaluate “modernity” or the “modern mentality.” As a mystic, he clearly felt a new vision of God and the ultimate. Panikkar’s ontological epistemology reveals Being in “destiny.” The traditional epistemology defined God as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. We are also familiar with the concept of God as eternal and immutable. All these definitions of God and the concept of God are based on a certain epistemology to capture and grasp the ultimate and the infinite in terms of pen-ultimate and finite language. Panikkar’s attempt was to get out of this kind of conceptualized and framed way of defining and limiting the mystery of God to satisfy the epistemological needs. Panikkar in a revolutionary way turned around this kind of epistemology by expounding the ontological (not in terms of surrendering our being to epistemology or ways of knowing). Panikkar’s idea of “destiny” is meaningful here. It shows a certain sense of cosmic trust, confidence, and humility.



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## **Interreligious Hermeneutics: Dialectical or Dialogical**

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### **Introduction**

One of the main obstacles in comparing methods of interreligious hermeneutics is not only doing justice to both positions, but also using components and categories of both sides which are at least equitable to some degree so they can be seen side by side. This is the only way for a comparison to be clear. I have chosen to use Gadamer's notion of a dialogue based upon a dialectical method and Panikkar's notion of a dialogue based upon dialogical principles. This is where the differences between the two can be seen more acutely.

The two figures do have some shared components in an interreligious endeavor. It seems clear that interest remains a condition of hermeneutics for both. If one is not interested, understanding will fail before it even begins. It is also quite evident that both are concerned about application. One cannot fully understand by being a non-participating observer. Gadamer invokes Aristotle in this regard and Panikkar focuses on an intrareligious event, a sort of converting in order to fully understand, in which Panikkar himself may be the best example. The differences, however, comprise the main theme of this treatise. Gadamer's view is a dialectical process of expanding one's horizon through a fusion with other horizons in a diachronical fashion. It is about seeking truth by maintaining an open perspective. Panikkar's view critiques this by claiming that dialectics cannot incorporate symbolic difference. Interreligious dialogue involves both risk and reciprocity where a mutual fecundation can create a new innocence. It is ultimately a religious act where both parties can commune together.

### **Gadamer's Diachronical Hermeneutics and Dialectics**

In developing his philosophical hermeneutics, the main contenders Gadamer was fighting against were Romanticism and historicism.<sup>1</sup> In Romanticism, the issue was driven by a psychological interpretation, most

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<sup>1</sup> See also, Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 107.

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notably by Schleiermacher – one must understand the author better than he understood himself. The method detached itself from the content which resulted in the main thrust of hermeneutics to focus on recreating an original context, both grammatically and psychologically. In historicism, the text only became a source for the larger project of understanding universal history. This culminated in Dilthey where the homogenization of subject and object coalesced, thus causing failure for any methodological grounding. In his attempt to remedy this situation, Gadamer focuses not on creating another method of hermeneutics which might ultimately fail, but on a philosophy of hermeneutics to describe how understanding occurs in the process of interpretation or recovery of historical texts. His main German sources for this endeavor are Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger while his main Greek sources are Plato and Aristotle.

Hermeneutics, for Gadamer, is a philosophy of interpretation and understanding which resolves the tension between familiarity and strangeness. The philosophy of hermeneutics has a necessary condition of difference. In religion, familiarity means belonging to a tradition. Other ideas or objects beyond this familiarity exhibit the quality of strangeness in relation such as foreign religious doctrines or symbols. Hermeneutics clarifies the conditions from which the strange becomes the familiar since in Gadamer's view meaning derives from the familiar – the tradition to which one belongs. Only in this way is the tension resolved. One must find a way to make what is alien one's own. Gadamer rejects the Romantic view that avoiding misunderstanding should be the focus. He advances the opposite; the alien is only understood when couched within that which is familiar.<sup>2</sup>

In Gadamer's corpus, one of the main entities which he identifies as alien is history, or more specifically, historical texts. After the end of the medieval world when European groups began to form the precursors to contemporary political states, a newly emerging view of history appeared where the past had become alien.<sup>3</sup> Historical knowledge of the past was no longer a given, but was subject to interpretation. A gap manifested itself between the familiar, the contemporary world, and the alien, the past. This gap is one of temporal distance which concentrates Gadamer's hermeneutics

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<sup>2</sup> For more clarity on this issue see Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge, trans. and ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, Frederick G. Lawrence, trans. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 98.

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on the diachronical process.

Gadamer assigns temporal distance a positive value; it makes knowledge of history possible. This distance is not so much of a gap to be bridged as it is a condition of the possibility of understanding history. It is no coincidence that Gadamer follows Heidegger in this respect. When Heidegger interpreted *Dasein's* mode of being in terms of time, understanding became existential giving primacy to a lived existence. It is often difficult to evaluate the present because no patterns are evident. Patterns are established temporally and only present themselves over the course of time making judgments from historical distance easier. Temporal distance provides the custom and tradition with which to make such judgments. One does not, however, have a choice as to which tradition to employ in order to understand. Gadamer agrees with Heidegger that human existence is not Hegelian self-projection, but a thrown-projection. Views are passed down through time, one is born into a tradition, and one then becomes productive in its continuity.

Temporal distance poses less of a difficulty for Heidegger than Gadamer. Jean Grondin's view is that Heidegger is concerned about the hermeneutics of existence as a whole while Gadamer is more concerned about textual hermeneutics.<sup>4</sup> Gadamer's usage of temporal distance in textual hermeneutics does create one difficulty though, namely, the silence caused by political conquest. Grondin states:

It is, for example, entirely conceivable that passages judged unfit in a certain age, without which they will perhaps remain forever unintelligible, have been expurgated from classical texts. And who has ever compiled the history of the conquered or of people decimated so that they have been lost without trace? If it can be of great help, temporal distance can also be obscuring.<sup>5</sup>

In discussing this very issue in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer admits that the historical significance of something can best be known only when it belongs to a closed context, yet this is not the end of the historical problem. Understanding begins – something only becomes of interest – when

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant, Continental European Philosophy Series (Montreal: McGill's-Queen's University Press, 2003), 83. Grondin produces in chart form six main differences between Heidegger and Gadamer on the ontological nature of the circle of understanding.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

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something addresses us.<sup>6</sup> In the case of political conquest, interest obviously not only ceases, but is proactively suppressed. The winners write the history. In this case, historical texts are lost, and understanding is subdued. Should a future generation become interested, the textual sources are limited at best or nonexistent at worst. Even in such a case, Gadamer contends that new possibilities with new prejudices create resurgent understandings, implying that the meaning or interpretation of an oppressed people can speak once again.

The idea of oppression reawakens Gadamer's concept of prejudice. Gadamer confesses, "To imagine that one might ever attain full illumination as to his motives or his interests in questions is to imagine something impossible."<sup>7</sup> One can never become fully aware of hidden or unconscious presuppositions. But at the same time the task "is not merely that of clarifying the deepest unconscious grounds motivating our interest but above all that of understanding and explicating them in the direction and limits indicated by our hermeneutic interest."<sup>8</sup> The work performed by Gadamer's usage of the term prejudice is of no little importance since one's prejudices essentially create one's horizon. It allows for the possibility of interest.

The idea of interest represents a condition for hermeneutics because when something does become of interest, and has something to say, one is then open to enlarging one's horizon. One must search for the right horizon to address the question evoked by any given tradition. Since the original historical and cultural context of the text has ceased to exist, where is one to look? Gadamer's answer is that one must look to the present because an anticipation of meaning guides the effort to grasp the meaning. The tension between the text of a historical tradition and the present inquirer did not originate in the past but rather its kinetic power exists in the present inquiry itself. Since horizons are not static but dynamic, they are not isolated in and of themselves. They are formed from, and incorporate, the past. Thus Gadamer asserts that there is neither an isolated present horizon nor an isolated past horizon because understanding is always a fusion of the two. At this juncture, Gadamer is clearly dependent upon the circle of understanding in Heideggerian thought to accomplish his own philosophy of

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<sup>6</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, trans. rev., (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2002), 298-299.

<sup>7</sup> Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, 108.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

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hermeneutics. The historical horizon does not exist, but is a projection from the present horizon. Hermeneutics is a production of the fusion of horizons between the present and the projection of a historical horizon. This reciprocity occurs at both the level of the individual and the level of tradition.

Gadamer's model of textual hermeneutics can be adapted for interreligious hermeneutics by metaphorically treating religious traditions as texts. In this case, the alien, rather than being a text separated by the gap of historical distance, is a foreign religious tradition, separated by a religious-cultural gap. A fore-understanding (Heidegger) or set of prejudices (Gadamer's horizon) is comprised of two concerns which I shall pose in an interrogative format. The first question is how has one's own religious tradition historically understood another tradition on the larger scale? How has the home tradition characterized the foreign tradition throughout the course of its historical existence within the home tradition? The second concern is to what extent has the individual been influenced by that *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* (historically-effected consciousness)? Presumably, as more contact with other traditions continues, so the future will be shaped, but this also expresses human finitude. The ground for interpretation is the cultural and religious backgrounds which have developed naturally rather than being something necessarily intentional. One is seldom aware of how much the home tradition shapes the view of the foreign tradition.

The insight of the concept of *docta ignorantia* is helpful in this regard. One must know that one does not know and in that negativity a positive possibility is cultivated. Individuals cannot really ask questions unless they know that they do not know. Religious adherents do not wonder if their perception of a foreign religious tradition is misguided unless they suspect they have somehow been misled by their religious tradition's collective or individual religious understanding of that foreign tradition. Disequilibrium, at some level, creates interest. When a person is satisfied with their own religious tradition's interpretation or understanding of any given foreign tradition they do not have reason to question it. In Gadamer's terms, the question will not even arise unless it becomes a subject of interest.

If the question does arise, the dialectical process begins. Gadamer fuses together the form of the Hegelian dialectic, the form of the Platonic dialogue and the form of Heidegger's circle of understanding to create his

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innovative form of hermeneutic dialogue. The dialectic that Gadamer employs, however, is not a pure Hegelian dialectic interpreted in a supercessionist manner. He argues that one does not always have to follow their tradition when faced with a choice. Upon reflection, does the choice come from within the tradition itself or are other possibilities accepted? Are previous views necessarily dissolved?<sup>9</sup> The Hegelian form of idealistic reflection does not apply here. There are choices, but the choices are limited in the hermeneutical fashion of Heidegger by working out the possibilities from the projection of Being. The notion of a dialectical process, however, most likely does come from Hegel since he is clearly the primary progenitor of its German development.

The challenge to identity comes from the other and this is one reason why interreligious hermeneutics is becoming more necessary. Later in life, Gadamer himself believed that we must enter into a conversation with the world religions.<sup>10</sup> He was also concerned about whether this dialogue of the religions themselves is even possible and whether one can actually arrive at it by going beyond the philosophical discussion. Though Gadamer lived an incredibly long life and significantly advanced the establishment of the foundation of the philosophy of hermeneutics, Gadamer never fully elaborated what he had in mind concerning interreligious hermeneutics. This indeed represents a limitation in applying his hermeneutical theory to religion.

Upon reflection, three other questions also arise in this regard. First, is a fusion of horizons always possible in the dialectical sense? Some societies focus more on the principle of non-contradiction while others focus more on the principle of identity. The failure of horizons fusing in Gadamer's vision may be a failure of categories of thinking. There is no simple way to overcome the strangeness of an alien religious tradition when the philosophical rules governing the conversation are incommensurable. Second, there is also the concern about language guiding the political control in a relationship. Gadamer does not address the political question or the potential hostility which may be engendered by such issues. Third, what about the situation of multiple discourses? Gadamer rejects the idea of a

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<sup>9</sup> Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy: Hans-George Gadamer in Conversation with Riccardo Dottori*, trans. by Rod Coltman with Sigrid Koepke (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003), 129.



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dogmatic objectivism on the grounds that this distorts the hermeneutical process. The dialectic of dialogue via the ongoing fusion of horizons becomes the equalizing factor in the equation, but this is not the case in interreligious hermeneutics in which discourses can occur on multiple levels. So even though Gadamer claims a dialogue with world religions should take place, he does not offer an appropriate hermeneutical theory within which such relationship should operate.

Gadamer states that the logical structure of openness possesses a direct relationship to the logical structure of a question which leads him to the Platonic model of dialectic as a source for his hermeneutics. But, as explained earlier, Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* is also a source for hermeneutics, especially when Gadamer ascribes particular importance to the circle of understanding. If hermeneutics is about the business of making familiar that which is alien or strange, as Gadamer indicates, then what exactly is the alien or other? If the Platonic model is used, the alien is another entity which opposes the familiar since knowledge always means considering opposites, and according to Gadamer, is dialectical from the ground up.<sup>11</sup> If the Heideggerian model is used, the alien is somehow within *Dasein* itself since the circle of understanding is a continual series of the understanding projecting itself and filling in meaning when disclosedness occurs. Meaning is in reference to an existential relationship to *Dasein* and likely not a relationship to fixed entities such as the Platonic forms. The tension for Gadamer's hermeneutical model lies specifically in the source for negativity. Is the source another horizon, another entity or person, or *Dasein* itself? Gadamer does not make clear the relationship, if any, between the Platonic conversational model and the Heideggerian existential model of hermeneutics. There is room for a charge of at least some level of inconsistency here.

Despite any failings, however, my argument is not that Gadamer's hermeneutical theory should be rejected in its entirety. My argument is that a hermeneutical theory which is to be applied to an interreligious context must be based on something more than diachronical hermeneutics and dialectics. Interreligious hermeneutics must be able to pierce the *logos* and mediate between two *topoi* – two places of understanding – and become diatopical. In order to be effective, it must be a dialogical dialogue. This is the view propounded by Panikkar.

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<sup>11</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 365.

## Panikkar's Diatopical Hermeneutics and Dialogical Dialogue

In a rather satirical fashion, Panikkar illustrates a hermeneutical problem with this example:

[I]f I smile at an ape it sees my teeth and may attack me. We take for granted that smiling is a sign of sympathy; it is not true. There are indeed major problems in understanding the different religions.<sup>12</sup>

Tackling a problem from a hermeneutical standpoint requires more than one point of view. An understanding of the other side, indeed, a conversion, is necessary. This is the gist of Panikkar's interreligious hermeneutics. I will explain in a concise manner Panikkar's view of the dialectical method. This will be followed by a short list of possible hermeneutical methods to overcome such diversity, including the dialectical method, all of which Panikkar claims fall short of the hermeneutical goal of understanding. Finally, Panikkar's view of diatopical hermeneutics and dialogical dialogue will be briefly offered as the solution.

In a dialectical method, one could proceed in one of three ways, Panikkar argues. First, in essentialist thinking, one could postulate an essence of religion from which and within which all traditions participate. Second, in existential thinking, the real problems and lived features of religion create its instantiation. The concept of religion is not exhausted in a single instance of it, but this brings up the problem of the one and the many. Third, substantial and functional thinking is concerned with the static structure and dynamic function of religions. In substantial thinking, religions have little hope for cross-understanding, since each possesses a single, rigid body of thought, and in the functional thinking, religions can be potentially equivalent since they can be equated by virtue of performing the same function. But this, too, would create a logical problem since religious goals of salvation or liberation imply that not attaining or achieving the goal results in some kind of negative effect. Religious traditions declare that salvation or liberation is through this path and this path only. Panikkar concludes that these dialectical options do not adequately address the whole complexity of our integral existence.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, "Man and Religion: a Dialogue with Panikkar," *Jeevadhara* 11, no. 61 (January-February 1981): 7.

<sup>13</sup> See R. Panikkar, "A Dialectical Excursus on the Unity or Plurality of Religions," in *Perspectives on Guru Nanak: Seminar Papers*, ed. Harbans Singh (Patiala, India: Guru Gobind Singh Department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, 1975), 349-355.

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In Panikkar's religious terms however, "one cannot speak of an absolute since there is no one myth shared by all."<sup>14</sup> In so writing, Panikkar decries the possibility of a universal essence of religion. But although the lack of a universal essence may be acknowledged, another difficulty arises in how to compare religious traditions. The term religion is not univocal and to compare religions in a philosophical manner implies a neutral ground. Thus, "Unless we assume that reason (ultimately 'our' understanding of reason) is the neutral, universal, and sufficient criterion for evaluating religions, we cannot assume at the outset that all religious traditions can be justly and truly measured with the same *metron*."<sup>15</sup> Panikkar mentions that, "Only a universal Subject, an absolute I, could reasonably make a statement with universal validity."<sup>16</sup> The idea of a neutral ground in religion is "inherently self-contradictory since such a ground should be human and not-human at the same time. Put in the form of a *sūtra*: How can there be a No-Man's land in the land of Man?"<sup>17</sup> According to Panikkar, the hermeneutic must come from within, not from without, the human person.

One interpreter of Panikkar, Dankfried Reetz, asserts that the awareness of religious traditions creates a dynamic process "in which the problem of cultural, religious, confessional pluralism has not only become acute but in which a common urge for universality drives men to strive for a synthesis."<sup>18</sup> This process must ultimately meet in religion.<sup>19</sup> One might think that Panikkar, heavily steeped in Catholic circles, would make

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<sup>14</sup> R. Panikkar, "Intrareligious Dialogue," *Interculture (Montréal)* 20, no. 4, issue no. 97 (October-December 1987): 28.

<sup>15</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, "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*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 103.

<sup>16</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 245.

<sup>17</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, "Hermeneutics of Comparative Religion: Paradigms and Models," *Journal of Dharma* 5 (January-March 1980), 41.

<sup>18</sup> Dankfried Reetz, "Raymond Panikkar's Theology of Religions," *Religion and Society* 15, no. 3 (September 1968): 33.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 35. "Panikkar's thesis is that only religion is able to bring about this cultural opening and to pave the way..."

Christianity the measuring rod. But Panikkar's approach is to allow all religious traditions to speak from their respective *topoi*. Panikkar claims there are "no cultural universals," rather there are "numerous classes of intelligibility, many ways of being aware of reality and of participating in it. That is the intercultural challenge."<sup>20</sup> With religious traditions viewed in the plural rather than possessing some sort of singular essence, the issue focuses on the question of relationship. How should their relationship be understood?

Panikkar desires the picture to come from the religions themselves rather than from an outside discipline. He asks, "Could it be that we treat religions as mere sociological constructs and have developed a nonreligious notion of religion?"<sup>21</sup> Panikkar entreats that the existence of religious diversity creates reactions which often fall into one of three camps. The first is an aggressive attitude leading towards exclusivity. The second is a regressive attitude, leading towards indifferentism and tolerance. The third is a progressive attitude leading towards an eclectic mix of options and possible relationships. As opposed to these options, Panikkar prefers the attitude of pluralism, albeit not in a manner which encroaches upon religious identity. He proffers the metaphor of a rainbow:

Seen from the outside, one colour is only one colour. There are several colours and one colour cannot claim monopoly of all the colours. Seen from within, I am able to see all the colours in my own colour. I am in the violet, from there, I would see the whole rainbow. I am not seeing less than what you are able to see from outside. So I am bound to see if I am deep enough all the religious experiences of mankind from my own religion...My assumption is that nobody is outside the rainbow; only that some see it all from one colour and others from another colour.<sup>22</sup>

Religious adherents see the parts as the whole and only see and understand the whole as the sum of their parts. Colors help express the relational quality of religious thought and the understanding of religion – and therefore also of religious identity – comes from within the contexts of religious traditions themselves rather from an outside source or agency.

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<sup>20</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "Religion, Philosophy and Culture," *Interculture (Montréal)* 31, no. 4, issue no. 135 (Summer-Fall 1998): 107-110.

<sup>21</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "Religious Identity and Pluralism," in *A Dome of Many Colors: Studies in Religious Pluralism, Identity, and Unity*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Kathleen M. Dugan (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 23.

<sup>22</sup> Panikkar, "Man and Religion," 13.

But where does this model leave Panikkar in an interreligious hermeneutical situation? How can one color understand another color? Panikkar states:

We cannot combine all colors in one supercolor. We recognize colors and we may have a concept of color, but color does not exist. There is only the concept of color. Some would say that color denotes the essence of color, but this alleged essence of color, realized as it may be in green or blue, is still not identical to green or blue.<sup>23</sup>

It seems as though Panikkar may have created an impasse by using the rainbow metaphor to describe the pluralistic attitude. Can green ever understand blue? The solution is found in the symbols and myths which underlie the faith and specific beliefs of the colors, or rather, what the colors represent: religious traditions.

To relate Panikkar's pluralistic attitude to his interreligious hermeneutics, consider his diatribe on peace, *Cultural Disarmament*. This text explains the religious dimension of peace, and asserts cultural disarmament as the condition for political peace. He describes peace as "one of the few positive symbols having meaning for the whole of humanity. Peace is the most universal unifying symbol possible."<sup>24</sup> Symbols are essentially the building blocks of myths. Panikkar argues that imposed peace is a contradiction and that there is no peace without freedom. But this kind of freedom is more than just freedom of choice where "the options are restricted to what the supply offers,"<sup>25</sup> as in a supermarket. True freedom has to do with a person's ontonomy; participating in a reality which possesses a harmonious structure and standing in a relationship with respect to the totality of the whole. Panikkar treats peace as a possible candidate for a transcendent notion, yet the problem, as with any transcendent notion, "is its material recognition, its concrete notion."<sup>26</sup> This is more complex than to identify it solely at the individual ethical level, such as the conscientious objector might do. It runs deeper than that, for, "[a]s long as the two parties do not commune in the same myth, there will be no peace."<sup>27</sup> The connection must take place at the mythic level else it will be nothing more

<sup>23</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "Religious Identity and Pluralism," 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

than superficial. Interreligious hermeneutics in the form of dialogical dialogue is necessary because “nobody is a self-sufficient monad.”<sup>28</sup> Rather than coming to eat at “your” table or “my” table, we must create “our” table together.

Like Gadamer, hermeneutics for Panikkar is a productive activity of overcoming distance. This distance only occurs when innocence is lost, namely, when what one understands (stands under, as in a myth), becomes in some way challenged or problematical. Up until this point, hermeneutics is not necessary, but when the gap appears, one cannot simply go back to a prior state of unawareness. Innocence, once lost, cannot be regained. Panikkar outlines three possible ways to overcome this gap: 1) Morphological hermeneutics, the process of learning within a single context or culture. It is a homogeneous form of hermeneutics, being based on analogy and explanation from an equal footing within the same myth (e.g., socialization of a child, religious education, etc.). One becomes educated in the ways of a tradition and so becomes cultured. This form of hermeneutics does not apply to an interreligious context since it exists only in cases of intra-myth understanding. 2) Diachronical hermeneutics, the gap is not exclusively factual, but temporal as well. One must examine the context, proceeding from present to past in order to arrive at meaning. Gadamer’s hermeneutics fits into this category as well as other temporally-based dialectical methods of hermeneutics. 3) Diatopical hermeneutics, which comes from the term *topoi*, or place (*loci*). It cannot be assumed *a priori* that the patterns of understanding are the same with each party involved. The boundary to be crossed is not strictly from present to past or vice versa, but present to present. It is not proper to make a direct one-to-one correspondence in a diatopical situation. For example, Panikkar relates a conversation he once had with Karl Rahner. Panikkar told Rahner he could accept his view about anonymous Christianity “provided he accepted also that he was an anonymous Buddhist.” Panikkar said Rahner replied “he did not know much about Buddhism. Then I [Panikkar] retorted that if he did not know much about it he should not call a Buddhist an anonymous Christian either.”<sup>29</sup> Buddhism and Christianity represent two different *topoi*, places of understanding.

The problem, contends Panikkar, is that this third type is often mistakenly conflated with the second type. There is ultimately no escape

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>29</sup> Panikkar, “Man and Religion,” 20.

from an either/or proposition. Panikkar offers the example of asking: do you believe in God or don't you? Not only is this problematical on the point of the meaning of the term 'God' (can God be equated with 'kami' in Japan, the mandate of Heaven or the Tao in China, or any number of deities in India?), but also when the god/no-god schema is not present. In such conditions, the question loses its sense. The dialectical method representing the second type is a way of logical resolution. It endows the *logos* to discriminate between truth and error via reason. This assumes a great deal regarding the universality of reality and how reality is to be understood. According to Panikkar, dialectical hermeneutics assumes "reality must obey the principle of non-contradiction interpreted ontologically."<sup>30</sup> But it is a grand assumption that the conceptual definition of hermeneutics be imposed in each and every interreligious situation. Panikkar's position rests precisely on the opposite assumption: "the ultimate nature of reality does not have to be dialectical."<sup>31</sup> There is no necessity in imprisoning reality in a dialectical framework, subordinating reality to mind. The universalization of the dialectical method only results in a dialectical totalitarianism.

As detailed in the previous section, Gadamer's method of diachronical hermeneutics and dialectics employs such a method, which is thoroughly steeped in Western thought. This is the crucial difference, since "western thought is basically conceptual, while eastern thought instead is symbolic."<sup>32</sup> In the dialectical method, one is using the categories of one's own culture to study another culture. What happens when the categories used to approach an interreligious encounter only come from one side of the equation? The political question then comes to the forefront again. An interreligious situation "requires a dialogical method in discussions about reality, and therefore cannot be content with a dialectical method, which, by silencing my objections, may masquerade conquest as conviction."<sup>33</sup> The dialectical method creates a power relationship by imposing its categories of understanding. Panikkar associates the dialectical method with modernity. In this case, the 'modern' myth is the necessary condition for

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<sup>30</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "Rising Sun and Setting Sun," *Diogenes* 50, no. 4 (November 2003): 8.

<sup>31</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>32</sup> Panikkar, "Rising Sun and Setting Sun," 8.

<sup>33</sup> Raimon Panikkar, "The Religion of the Future or The Crisis of the Notion of Religion: Human Religiousness." *Interculture (Montréal)* 23, no. 2, issue no. 107 (Spring 1990): 20.

dialogue and the fecundation of cultures because this would create a colonial relationship. Conquest is imposition rather than an attempt to understand since the flow is non-reciprocal and is marked by a lack of engagement.

The argument between Western concepts and Eastern symbols possesses more than just a political aspect. It is also a religious argument as well. Concepts claim objectivity “once the premises on which they [are] based are accepted,” establishing their validity, but “the symbol is only a symbol for those who recognize it as such.”<sup>34</sup> The crux of the issue becomes clear when the foundation of religion is realized. Thus the symbolic difference, the bridge between the experience and its expression, represents an important concern. The symbolic difference cannot be understood through the dialectical method since it is not based on conceptual thinking.<sup>35</sup> The only way out of the impasse, the only way to resolve an interreligious hermeneutical situation, is through diatopical hermeneutics and its main articulation: the method of dialogical dialogue in which both parties must commune in the same myth.

How is such an undertaking possible? This is a question asked by the dialectician, who assumes the conceptual gap is unable to be overcome. Even though religions do not say the same thing and are perceived as incompatible on the conceptual level, Panikkar believes that mystics “do not perceive this incompatibility: they have attained experience of the substance, so to speak, and they discover that under the respective clothing is concealed the very body of reality.”<sup>36</sup> So what is the difference, the factor which allows mystical traditions to extend beyond the conceptual and dogmatic formulations of religious traditions? One must realize the limitation of the self in order to open up to others. In this endeavor, the ‘other’ must become ‘self,’ as Panikkar states, “to understand the other as ‘other’ is not to understand him as he understands himself, because the other does not understand himself as ‘other’ but as ‘self.’”<sup>37</sup> One’s myth does not even become apparent until it is truly confronted with the myth of another.

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<sup>34</sup> Panikkar, “Rising Sun and Setting Sun,” 9.

<sup>35</sup> For further elaboration on Panikkar’s understanding of the symbolic difference see Mark Banas, “Raimon Panikkar’s Symbolic Difference & Religious Faith,” *Interreligious Insight* 7:1 (January 2009) 40-47.

<sup>36</sup> Panikkar, “Rising Sun and Setting Sun,” 12.

<sup>37</sup> R. Panikkar, “Cross-Cultural Studies: The Need for a New Science of Interpretation,” *Monchanin* 8:3-5 (June-December 1975): 13.



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The encounter which instigates this realization is an experiential encounter with another religious tradition.

Intrareligious dialogue, if it is to be a genuine encounter, clearly involves risk. The dialectical approach only produces a minimalistic attitude. The point of meeting is not “a neutral dialectical arena that leaves both of us untouched, but a self that besides being myself is also shared by the other.”<sup>38</sup> The risk is not only giving up traditions and doctrines held dear, but also that these may be altered in the process, up to and including possible conversion to the other. The person engaged in an intrareligious dialogue “enters unarmed and ready to be converted herself. She may lose her life – she may also be born again.”<sup>39</sup> Panikkar provides the example of one who learns about the outcome of a detective story before the novel is finished.<sup>40</sup> The tension is removed and the act of reading changes its nature to how well the author composed the plot. Without putting one’s beliefs at risk, the outcome of the plot is already known. Only when the plot is not predetermined to a path of lesser risk and resistance – in a word, open – can the encounter proceed in a genuine fashion. Only then can an interreligious experience be truly productive and creative.

In dialectics, concepts are ultimately regarded as things. The intrareligious encounter which leads to a dialogical dialogue ultimately deals with people who are not regarded as things. We must see our neighbor not only as *something* else, but as *someone* else – not only as an object of observation or cognition, but as another source of intelligibility. Equality is a necessary condition for dialogue. The reason for this is to be able to sincerely comprehend the myth of another. The other person becomes a source of understanding, not in the sense of a work of art or a historical text (like Gadamer), but in the sense of one who has a genuine belief in a religious symbol, a living faith, which is not reducible to the categories of one’s own beliefs.<sup>41</sup> The source is not doctrinal, but existential, due to its base in religious experience.

Whereas a dialectical dialogue is about objects with reason as the final arbiter, dialogical dialogue is about subjects in which the personal encountering of myths is the final arbiter. Panikkar states that “a complete

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<sup>38</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 74.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>41</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 33-34.

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*dialogos* should be at the same time a *diamythos*. The respective *logoi* are bearers of meaning and life only within their respective *mythoi*. And it is by means of dialogue that we reach the myth of the other and create a climate of communication.”<sup>42</sup> This imparts the core of Panikkar’s interreligious hermeneutical method, the essence of dialogical dialogue as a piercing of the *logos* to attain a truth that transcends it. This method integrates the witness and testimony of another’s religious experience which is based upon religious symbol and myth rather than a conceptual horizon. It represents a relationship of reciprocity in which both parties are opening up themselves, revealing each other’s religious myth in a dialogue of trust which otherwise would remain hidden.

Panikkar does indicate that a dialogical dialogue may fail. One case he cites is when one or more of the parties possess a position of totalitarianism in which domination is an inherent feature of a religious view. In this case, Panikkar speculates, “Sometimes dialogue may not be possible, but it should never be closed *a priori*. One has even to reckon with the possibility that the totalitarian view may be right, even if at a given state of the dialogue one cannot agree with it.”<sup>43</sup> But in all other cases, theoretically speaking, it is only universality which must be transcended for a dialogical dialogue to obtain. Panikkar suggests, “Only the claim to absoluteness and the claim to universality are to be overcome; nothing else stands in the way.”<sup>44</sup> If such claims are overcome, then each partner in the dialogue can produce a creative mutual fecundation.

Agreement at the level of symbol and myth, however, is a necessary

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<sup>42</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, “The Ongoing Dialogue,” *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* 2 (1989): 10.

<sup>43</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, “Toward An Ecumenical Ecumenism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19, no. 4 (Fall 1982): 784. Likewise in “Religion, Philosophy and Culture,” 117, Panikkar, referring to the hermeneutics of interculturality, contends that “one cannot presuppose *a priori* that the intentionalities which have made it possible for these different contexts to emerge, are equal.”

<sup>44</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, trans. Annemarie S. Kidder (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 158. In addition, see Anselm Min, “Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others: Towards a New Paradigm.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 599. “Without the sharing of a horizon higher than the absolute claim at stake and of a dominant interest more ultimate than one’s ultimate concern in question, it would not be reasonable to demand the renunciation of absolute claims as a condition of dialogue.”

condition for mutual fecundation to obtain since one's understanding of the whole is based on the symbolic difference. "We cannot respond to the same symbol if you and I do not come together," insists Panikkar.<sup>45</sup> An objective, theoretical, or dialectical agreement will not bring two parties together on the symbolic level. Opposing religious adherents may agree on some points intellectually, but still be enemies in many other arenas. One can only see religious symbols based in experience when the other manifests a different set of symbols based on a different, albeit often similar, religious experience. Prior to a genuine religious dialogue, a religious adherent's view of the world can be described as religious innocence. Mutual fecundation occurs through the medium of dialogical dialogue. When one becomes aware of religious symbols and myths which underlie the acceptance of religious reality, the first innocence is lost, but a new innocence is also created,<sup>46</sup> thereby rendering mutual fecundation as a process which best describes the outcome.

Since there is no neutral ground outside religion to compare religion qua religion, Panikkar dislikes the notion of describing this process as comparative religion. He believes this is an improper usage of language. He maintains, "We cannot compare (*comparare* – that is, to treat on an equal – *par* – basis), for there is no fulcrum outside. We can only *imparare* – that is, learn from the other, opening ourselves from our standpoint to a dialogical dialogue that does not seek to win or to convince, but to search together from our different vantage points."<sup>47</sup> The goal is not to craft a universal theory but simply to deepen mutual understanding in an open process. But at the same time, "[a] fruitful dialogue has to agree on the parameters to be used in the dialogue itself, otherwise there is only talking at cross-purposes."<sup>48</sup> There must be some point of agreement which is usually seen, at the least, in the fact that both parties have an interest in dialoging in the first place. There may be other aspects of culture which aid in the fecundation process as well.

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<sup>45</sup> R. Panikkar, "Symbols and Reality: The 'Symbolic Difference,'" *Monchanin* 8, no. 3-5 (June-December 1975): 21.

<sup>46</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, "The New Innocence," *Cross Currents* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 7-15.

<sup>47</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?" in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 141.

<sup>48</sup> Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges," 103.

Though the concept of religion may be variedly rooted in differing religious myths and though its impact may affect differing aspects of culture in each case, religion can remain as one possible common theme. Panikkar writes on the notion of plurality in religion:

In other words, on the one hand, religions can be many because there is *one* religion. Diversity implies oneness. Otherwise it would not be diversity but sheer otherness. A thing is different from another insofar as it is a different thing. Religions are different specimens of one thing called religion. On the other hand, religions can be *many* only because the *oneness* of religions is not so absolute as to be exhausted, as it were, in a single religion.<sup>49</sup>

Religion, like the term culture, can be a difficult term to define, yet both of these terms have interpenetrating features such that they are often rendered interdependent.

Consider Panikkar's definition of fecundation in the context of cultural change: "The word, like the synonymous *fertilization*, suggest[s] an internal cultural change due to an external seed which has been introduced into the host culture and given birth to a new type of self-understanding and ultimately of culture."<sup>50</sup> Thus Panikkar vouches, "All cultures are the result of a continuous mutual fecundation."<sup>51</sup> Panikkar argues that the idea of mutual fecundation between the understandings of religions also includes cultural concepts as well, but not in the sense of strict utilization such that one religion "borrows" from another. Borrowing implies that ownership is not present and this is precisely what Panikkar wants to avoid. For example, the utilization of other cultural forces and thought patterns to understand religion occurs at many places in history, but such occurrence is a matter of interpenetration and interdependency rather than one of simple utilization. In Christianity, Panikkar states that "we cannot say whether the Fathers of the Church were 'utilizing,' or just the opposite, and in fact much of the polemics and tension in the Patristic period are due precisely to the coexistence of both processes: that of 'utilizing' and that of being utilized."<sup>52</sup> On the next page he adds, "A parallel example would be that of the Buddha interpreting the already existing concept of *nirvana* in a new

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<sup>49</sup> Panikkar, "A Dialectical Excursus on the Unity or Plurality of Religions," 351.

<sup>50</sup> R. Panikkar, "Indic Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism from the Perspective of Interculturation," in *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective*, ed. Kuncheria Pathil (Delhi: ISPCK, 1991), 265.

<sup>51</sup> Panikkar, "Religion, Philosophy and Culture," 113.

<sup>52</sup> Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 89.

and original way.”<sup>53</sup> The logical analogy means an ontological analogy is also present in the incarnating of religion into the linguistic usage of a contemporary culture. A misunderstanding would be to interpret the direction in only one way: from culture *to* religion. Thus one could not truly affirm that a Christian doctrine of the Trinity existed prior to the Christ event, yet at the same time, the early formations of many Christian doctrines were either Jewish or Greek in nature. A completely new vocabulary would have been unintelligible at best and impossible at worst.

So what exactly is Panikkar advocating regarding the fecundation process? He claims that it “does not need to be an invasion of foreign goods, ideas, or people for the sake of profits, material or spiritual.”<sup>54</sup> One condition of a translation is that a translator be present. Good linguistic translators live in the other culture: “You cannot immerse yourself in the universe of discourse of the other if you do not sincerely live in the universe of life of the other culture.”<sup>55</sup> The translator must make the foreign culture her own thereby making the translator the meeting point. But there is more.

The advancement of mutual fecundation does not occur in a cultural vacuum. It is not altogether different from how religions themselves develop and change throughout history. Panikkar submits the process of development possesses a pattern of problem, dynamism, and solution with its respective underlying reasons. He cites the problem of the Council of Jerusalem as an example:

‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ Unless you are circumcised according to the philosophy of Plato or of Aristotle or of Thomas or of a Luther or of Marx or of Heidegger you cannot be saved, because you will not be able to express adequately the Christian mystery and thus will fall into heresy.<sup>56</sup>

In this case, the growth of a religious tradition was constrained not only religiously and geographically, but also politically, culturally and

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>54</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “Can Theology Be Transcultural?” in Panikkar, Raimundo, et al. *Pluralism and Oppression: Theology in World Perspective*, ed. Paul Knitter, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 1988, vol. 34 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 15.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>56</sup> R. Panikkar, “Christianity and World Religions,” in *Christianity*, Guru Nanak Quincentenary Celebration Series (Patiala, India: Punjabi University, 1969), 118. Panikkar’s Biblical quote is from Acts 15:1.

philosophically, making the change motivated by a similar dynamism. The solution involved a compromise which was necessary for the continuity of Christianity outside of the circles of Judaism. The reason was the identification of the particular dogmas with the general faith and purpose of the Christian message. This pattern can be found throughout the history of all religious traditions which have moved forward beyond their original contexts.

When religious traditions move into other cultural contexts, a process of mutual fecundation takes place. This is evident in China or Japan, where Buddhism integrated with Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto. Some Taoist deities and Shinto kami were retrospectively interpreted as former Buddhas or bodhisattvas who helped point the way. Thus in a meeting of Asian bishops in Manila in 1977, Panikkar had no impediment articulating the following:

If the first Christians of the diaspora could abolish circumcision, if the patristic age could formulate the central Christian mystery in hellenic categories, if the scholastic period could go so far as to equate God with Being, and if western modern times have so utterly transformed the Christian self-understanding as to make it a Christian humanism, should we deny Asia the right to its own creative contribution to the crown of the 'Catholica?'<sup>57</sup>

To answer Panikkar's question, many Asian theologians have contributed to Christianity by creatively formulating Christian doctrines and teachings with traditional Asian imagery.<sup>58</sup> The process of mutual fecundation of religious traditions has already occurred and is occurring now. When Panikkar persists in saying that there "is no such thing as 'non-Christian religions,'"<sup>59</sup> he means that there are no necessary conditions which prohibit Christianity from having a meaningful engagement with other religious traditions. Beyond Christianity, I believe he would also advocate the same for any two religious traditions.

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<sup>57</sup> Raymond Panikkar, "Social Ministry and Ministry of Word and Worship," in *Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church: Hong Kong February 27-March 5, 1977*, ed. Pedro S. DeAchétegui, (Manila: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1977), 258.

<sup>58</sup> For example, M. Thomas Thangaraj, Jung Young Lee, C.S. Song and Kosuke Koyama, to name a few.

<sup>59</sup> R. Panikkar, "The Church and the World Religions," *Religion and Society* 14, no. 2 (June 1967): 61. In this article, Panikkar lists reasons from psychological, scientific (phenomenological), philosophical, and theological points of view to support his claim.

Panikkar, perhaps not surprisingly, assigns the phenomenon of mutual fecundation a religious interpretation. It is not a “mere academic device, or intellectual amusement, but a spiritual matter of the first rank, a religious act in itself which as such involves faith, hope, and love. Dialogue is no bare methodology, but forms an essential part of the religious act par excellence.”<sup>60</sup> One can love a neighbor as an object, but true love involves acceptance and identification. In the end, love of another is also love of self held together in the ground of a new innocence which mutual fecundation provides. In another place, Panikkar again states the “meeting of religions is a *religious* act – an act of incarnation and redemption. It is an encounter in naked Faith, in pure Hope, in supernatural Love – and not a conflict of formulae, an expectation of getting them ‘over’ (where to?).”<sup>61</sup> It is more than two friends having a casual conversation or a group of students engaging in mental gymnastics. It is being redeemed to a new state of innocence – a place where both parties can commune in Being together.

Panikkar also finds the ecumenical task within himself. He represents a good example of one who has gone through an in-depth intrareligious dialogue on several occasions. Ewert Cousins’ article on Panikkar describes historical mutation as involving a great deal of creativity. Individuals who manifest this creativity within a mutational context are in touch with both the past and present contexts to both formulate and fulfill a new understanding; in a sense, they already are living in the future. Cousins states, “I suggest that Raimundo Panikkar is such a ‘mutational man,’ one in whom the global mutation has already occurred and in whom the new forms of consciousness have been concretized.”<sup>62</sup> He is cross-cultural by birth and is trained in multiple disciplines.<sup>63</sup> One could argue that Panikkar represents a unique case; certain features of his life manifest causal

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<sup>60</sup> R. Panikkar, “Faith and Belief: A Multireligious Experience,” *Anglican Theological Review* 53, no. 4 (October 1971): 226.

<sup>61</sup> Raymond Panikkar, “The Challenge of Hinduism,” *Jubilee* (January 1966): 33.

<sup>62</sup> Ewert H. Cousins, “Raimundo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future,” *Cross Currents* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 143.

<sup>63</sup> Scott Eastham, “Introduction,” in *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* by Raimon Panikkar, ed. Scott Eastham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), v. Scott Eastham asks how one person can be all these things. “You are told that his father was Indian and Hindu and his mother Spanish Catholic, that he holds doctorates in the sciences, philosophy and theology, that he speaks about a dozen languages and writes books and articles in at least six.”

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conditions which led to his view of interreligious hermeneutics as a dialogical dialogue producing a mutual fecundation. Perhaps there are few individuals who possess the variety of religious experiences as Panikkar, but there are many who have confronted the experience of more than one religious tradition. For them, it was not a dialectical experience, but a dialogical dialogue – a piercing of the *logos* as it were, which stimulated a mutual fecundation within.

Panikkar is not suggesting a wholesale disposing of the dialectical method. He consents that in order to overcome the *logos*, the dialectical method is insufficient, but at the same time he believes that we should not despise or discard dialectics or the *logos*. We should use them as much as is feasible, while simultaneously remaining aware that dialectics and *logos* are not the only data. The dialectical method is necessary, but not sufficient. Dialogical dialogue challenges us on a much deeper level. It complements, but does not replace dialectics. Through dialogical dialogue, the ultimate spheres of reality pertaining to human religious existence are opened up on the existential and personal level, using and trusting the other as a source. The goal is not to bring the process to an end, “but to convert dialectical tensions into creative polarities. Thus the ecumenical task is infinite; it is never finished and never should be finished, for it is a constitutive part of the human pilgrimage.”<sup>64</sup>

### **The Hermeneutical Priority of Dialogical Dialogue**

Gadamer’s hermeneutics begins with the distinction between familiarity and strangeness. He relates the major components of temporal distance, interest, and the circle of understanding, and finally relies upon dialectic as the method of hermeneutical understanding. The weaknesses highlighted were whether or not a fusion of horizons was always possible, the political question of language, as well as the question about multiple discourses.

Panikkar outlines the dialectical options of essential, existential, and substantial or functional thinking and rejects all of them as inadequate. He describes the problem that interreligious hermeneutics is trying to address as a lost innocence. Given his view of faith as the symbolic difference, interreligious hermeneutics based on dialectics fails because the meaning of religious symbols cannot be equated on the level of the *logos*. The best this form of hermeneutics can do is set off the political question, which then

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<sup>64</sup> Panikkar, “Toward An Ecumenical Ecumenism,” 783.



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makes hermeneutics into a game of power relationships. In response he advocates that the innocence can never be recovered; it can only be made new again. The new innocence begins with an intrareligious dialogue, which then can lead to a *dialogos* – a piercing of the *logos* to the level of myth. That which is other then becomes a source for mutual fecundation. This is dialogical dialogue, the new state of innocence.



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## **Panikkar's Radical Trinitarianism: Reflections on Panikkar's Transformation of the Christian Trinity into Cosmotheandricism**

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### **Introduction**

The Trinity, it is well known, has been Raimon Panikkar's lifelong preoccupation. One can say it constitutes the center and foundation of his thought. It also provides his horizon for interpreting the many crises of the contemporary world and his solution to those crises in the form of cosmotheandric spirituality. Nevertheless, his Trinity is no ordinary Trinity but a "radical" Trinity, a Trinity of the most provocative kind. He proposes his cosmotheandric version of the Trinity as a way of deepening the classical Christian doctrine of the Trinity and broadening it on the basis of the many seminal insights of other cultures. It is a fruit of an intercultural approach to Christian theology, which he considers most appropriate in the era of globalization. I propose to present, first, an outline of cosmotheandricism, Panikkar's radical version of the Trinity; secondly, his interpretation of the classical Christian version from which he is drawing his own; and thirdly, reflections on the difference between his cosmotheandric Trinity and the classical Christian Trinity.

### **Radical Trinity as Symbol of the Cosmotheandric Structure of Being**

Panikkar's developed understanding of the Trinity is captured in the three words: "Being is Trinity" (RB 37).<sup>1</sup> The rest, one can say, is

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the following abbreviations for works by Raimon Panikkar:

SG: *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Orbis, 1989; original Spanish edition, 1970)

TREM: *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Orbis, 1973)

UCH: *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Completely Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981; original edition, 1964)

CE: *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (Orbis, 1993)

C: *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Orbis, 2004; original Italian edition, 1999)

EG: *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006)

RB: *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010)

commentary.

By the Trinity, which he also calls “unbroken” Trinity (RB 56) and “radical” Trinity (RB 259), Panikkar refers to the ultimate triadic structure of being consisting of the radical relativity of the divine, the cosmic, and the human nicely summed up in the term, “cosmotheandrim.” It is an attempt to achieve an *advaitic* or non-dualistic view of being as a whole beyond the fragmentations and dichotomies perpetuated by intellectualism and technocratic culture: each member of the whole is in its own way a reflection of the whole, where each is related to all others in the whole in a way that respects both the independence of each in its irreducible uniqueness and the interdependence of each with everything else, in what Panikkar calls “inter-in-dependence.” The three foci of this interdependent whole are humanity, nature, and the divine, which constitute *one whole* in the organic, not mechanical, sense. Panikkar proposes to study each of these foci in their interdependent wholeness with the other two, not in separation or independence from them, beyond what mere anthropology, cosmology, and monotheistic theology can each contribute by itself, and to do so with the third eye, the *advaitic* intuition into the wholeness of being, beyond the fragmentations of the senses, the first eye, and those of the intellect, the second eye. The Trinity is a paradigm of this holistic view. It is an “unbroken” Trinity because it pervades all things despite all the necessary distinctions. Panikkar considers this cosmotheandrim a human invariant across cultures, a crosscultural universal in a limited—not absolute—sense, “an original and primordial form of consciousness” (CE 55). For him, the Hindu doctrine of Brahman/Atman and the Buddhist doctrine of *pratityasamutpada*, the doctrine of the interdependent origination of all things, are functional or homeomorphic equivalents of this cosmotheandric trinity (RB 267-68).

What, then, is trinitarian about this cosmotheandric trinity? The basic idea of the cosmotheandric trinity is the intrinsic interconnectedness of the three realms, each regarded as irreducible to the other, the human, the cosmic, and the divine, or Earth, Heaven, and Man, which constitutes the ontological solidarity of all beings. Man is not the world any more than man or the world is the divine. There is also differentiation and originality to each being, not only to each of the three realms, but each being is also intrinsically related to all others in the order of being as such or ontology,

which is neither autonomy nor heteronomy. The connection is neither monarchical nor logical nor causal but ontological. The cosmotheandric intuition is “not a tripartite division among beings, but an insight into the threefold core of all that is, insofar as it is” (CE 61). That is, every being is in itself cosmotheandric, with the Eucharistic bread that is at once divine, human, and material, as a paradigmatic example (CE 69). This inter-in-dependent or perichoretic relation among all beings is not unilaterally determined by any one factor. Each being is in some sense free yet also connected to all others. Each being has a role in determining the destiny of being. Cosmotheandricism has no room for anthropocentrism, cosmocentrism, even theocentrism because the universal inter-in-dependence of beings abolishes all centers (RB 276-278; CE 60-61, 150-152).

Central to Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision, then, is the ontological primacy of relation over the substantiality of things. When we reify reality into substances in their isolation, we run into the problem of either monism or dualism. In the paradigmatic relationship between God and the world either God absorbs the world into his own being, resulting in monism, or they are simply opposed to each other without an internal relationship in an inexplicable stark dualism. This fragmentation is the product of intellectualism and rationalism that isolates the multiplicities of the world and reifies them each in its own independence. The alternative, however, is not to deny the real differences among things but to locate such differences and identities on the more primordial level of constitutive relations. It is relations that constitute each in its distinctive reality yet also relate them to one another. On this view reality is neither one because many things do exist, nor many because they do not exist in their absolute independence but only in a mutually intrinsic, constitutive relationship. What is ultimate is not substantiality but relationship, which is neither one nor two. This, then, is the heart of the *advaitic* insight that sees reality in a non-dualistic way. Applied to the relationship between humanity, nature, and the divine, this means that the three are not reducible to one another yet constitute a whole in which each is connected to one another in a mutually constitutive relationship (RB 53, 60, 218-219).

How is this constitutive interconnection among the three realms concretely manifested? First, how are material things and the world or cosmos in which they exist related to human beings and to the divine? For Panikkar, everything that is has a constitutive—not merely external or accidental-- relationship with the world of matter/energy and space/time.

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Even when we speak of non-temporal, non-spatial beings, we either use worldly metaphors and/or identify them by negating their relationship with the world. In both instances the world remains the unavoidable referent even if it is only a negative one. We cannot speak of truth without also relating it to the human mind who knows it and to the many worldly objects that the truth is about. Any overcoming of the dualism of matter and spirit depends on the recognition of this cosmic dimension as an equally constitutive dimension of every being. Our birthplace is more than geography and history; it is part and parcel of our own deepest identity, an embodiment of our very subjectivity. Human beings are microcosms or reflections of the universe. The existence of the world is “the final foundation for the belief that something exists” (CE 66). Why anything exists can be asked only on the presupposition of an existing world. Without a relationship with the world things become “abstractions.” Panikkar does not abolish the distinction between the three realms, but he does insist that “a God without the World is not a real God, nor does he exist” (EC 64). The cosmic dimension is “equally” (CE 65) constitutive of the divine and the human as these are constitutive of the cosmic. The world is God’s own world or God’s body analogically. Universal relativity means that “God is only God for the creature and with reference to it. God is not God for himself” (TREM 26) (CE 64-66).

In what seems to repeat the debate between realists and idealists in modern European philosophy, Panikkar argues that material things are not what they are concretely without their constitutive relation to human consciousness although we cannot quite say that they are *made* by human consciousness. “A stone of which no consciousness could be aware would not be a stone” (RB 282) but an abstraction. “A real stone does not *really* exist without a constitutive link with the human mind, but nevertheless is not a product of the mind. The reality of the stone and the human mind belong together” (RB 283). Every real being has a constitutive relationship with human consciousness in the sense that “thinkability and knowability as such are features of all that is” (EC 63).

This, of course, is a thoroughly Aristotelian and Thomistic proposition, but Panikkar goes one step further by arguing that this thinkability is precisely thinkability by *human* beings and implies a relation to *human* consciousness. Whatever we say, affirm, or negate about anything whatsoever is necessarily connected with human awareness as its ultimate a priori condition, although this is not quite Panikkar’s language but that of transcendental philosophy. Even when we affirm the possibility

of a consciousness utterly independent of the human or the existence of things completely unknown to human beings, we can do so only by virtue of their relationship, even if negative, to human consciousness equipped with the capacity of self-negation. Positively or negatively, “Man’s being enters into relation with the whole of reality. The entire field of reality lives humanized in him” (CE 62). This does not mean that every being is reducible to consciousness, although it does mean that every being is “pervaded” by and “coextensive” with consciousness. Nor does this mean that an entity ceases to exist when no human consciousness is conscious of it. The relation between consciousness and existence is not a causal but a transcendental relation. Things existed long before human beings arrived on the scene, but to think of them as existing independently of human consciousness is still to think of them in relation to human consciousness even if in a negative relation, and is meaningful only in function of the reflective capacity of human consciousness. It is still human consciousness that can think of things as existing independently of that consciousness. Apart from this transcendental relationship to human consciousness beings lose their concreteness (CE 63).

What about the stone’s relation to the divine? For Panikkar the relation of the stone to the divine lies in the fact that the stone embodies a certain depth, something uncanny, a mysterious stubbornness and independence irreducible to human knowledge, a groundless abyss, all of which point beyond themselves to the infinite, something true of the cosmos as a whole. This “abyssal” dimension indicates both transcendence and immanence, transcendence in that it transcends itself and everything else by pointing beyond itself to all other things and to the divine with whom it enters into a constitutive relation that defines its identity, infinite immanence in that it has a depth in principle irreducible to the intellectual dimension, something that makes growth, life, and freedom possible. For Panikkar “everything that is, is because it shares in the mystery of Being and/or Non-Being, some may prefer to say” (CE 61). This divine dimension is not an external foundation for finite entities but their “constitutive principle,” which Panikkar compares to “the Thomistic act of existence which confers existence on beings without being, properly speaking, an ingredient of ‘being.’” (CE61, RB 283-284).

What about the relationship of human beings to the cosmic and the divine? As Panikkar loves to quote Pascal, a human being “is more than man because man infinitely surpasses man” (e.g., TREM 72). In this infinity

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human beings embody an awareness that they are part and parcel of a whole of which they cannot have an objective knowledge because they are too deeply involved in that whole. It is this awareness of the real that pervades all human acts. This consciousness of the whole, however, is not a solipsistic or individualistic consciousness which I can master but “a cosmic light in which we share” (RB 302), something transindividual, “an echo of transcendence” (RB 303). Human beings cannot avoid the consciousness that there is “more” to reality than meets the senses and the intellect, something “other” and “above,” “Being,” or something “divine.” This openness to the “more,” the “unknown,” the transcendent and infinite is a constitutive dimension, the “faith” dimension, of human being (RB 305-308). It is by virtue of this self-transcendent consciousness that the human being is the mediator between heaven and earth. “Man may not *be* the center of reality, but we *stand* at the crossroads of all we are able to do, think, and say. The three realms of which we are aware meet in Man. We are a meeting point of those three dimensions, which we discover above, within, and below us: the spiritual, the intellectual, and the material” (RB 304).

What, then, is the relation of the divine to the human and the cosmic? The divine is not an object among other objects and cannot be spoken of in the same categories that describes other things. For Panikkar the divine is not even a supreme being who is purely transcendent and substantial with no relation to the human and material world. The divine must be rescued from this monotheistic isolation from the world in pure transcendence and absolute otherness. The divine is indeed independent from the world but not isolated from it. The divine is different from the world but not in the same way that one thing is different from other things in that world (RB 319). He describes the divine in terms of three features, emptiness, freedom, and infinitude. We are aware of being and at the same time of its limits, the absence of being, which is not the negation of being but the emptiness surrounding being in its difference from beings and making beings and their knowledge possible as their horizon, an absence therefore inseparable from the presence of something whose absence we experience as emptiness (RB 89-90). The divine is this emptiness present in all reality; being is not bound or limited by logical structures. The divine is present as the absence of every reality, everywhere. It is this pure emptiness that also allows being to be free in the sense of self-constitution because there is nothing outside being that can constrain it. Freedom is the identity of a being with itself. The divine is not an external power over us or over



nature. It is the experience of this freedom that reveals the divine dimension of the real. The divine is also the seat of infinitude. It is a feature inherent in every being that makes it transcend any fixed limit and opens it to further change and growth. It also transcends all things. In short, the divine is present in the emptiness, freedom, and infinity of being immanent in all beings but also transcending them all by pointing beyond them and giving them a depth, an interiority, and self-transcendence irreducible to objectification. For Panikkar these three features, emptiness, freedom, and infinity, also correspond respectively to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the traditional Christian Trinity, which I will present in the next section (RB 304-318).

With regard to the controversial proposition that “a God without the world is not a real God, nor does he exist” (CE 64), Panikkar is at pains to clarify. A being can be indeed without another being. Birds can be without oceans, for example. However, he insists on distinguishing between actuality and possibility. If both A and B actually exist, then *in fact* there is no A without B and vice versa even if A could be without B and vice versa. Knowledge of what is actual does not coincide with the prediction of what is possible. A theist can *think* of a God without creatures, but “this ‘God’ does not exist because the actual God, the God that in fact exists, *is* God with creatures. Of course, “a necessary being without creatures is thinkable, a contingent being without a Ground is unthinkable,” but these are valid as ways of thinking, not as ontological statements about God or the world. We should not extrapolate what is logically necessary into what is actual (CE 70).

### **Panikkar’s Interpretation of the Christian Trinity**

How does Panikkar get to this “radical,” cosmotheandric Trinity from what is originally a Christian doctrine of the Trinity? What is the Christian Trinity for him? The main point of the traditional Trinitarian theology, for Panikkar, is that ultimate reality is neither one with three modes (modalism) nor three as substances (tritheism) but “pure relationship” (RB 225). The divine is the infinite relationship that enters all creatures. This is a revolutionary doctrine. God exists in the infinite difference between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each irreducible to the other, yet also in perfect indwelling or *perichoresis* of each in the other two. Ultimate reality, therefore, is irreducible to either a single being or many beings but consists of constitutive, perichoretic relations, where being is Logos without being reducible to it because there is also the Spirit. The

Trinitarian vision avoids both monism and pluralism by preventing the reduction of reality to intelligibility that tends to break up the wholeness of things into independent, unrelated substances. In this sense Panikkar sees *Advaita* and Trinity as sharing a similar structure of human thinking and an analogous vision of reality when considered as two mythic visions (not as two systems of belief) (RB 224, 226).

In one of his earliest formal discussions, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (1973), Panikkar sums up his cosmotheandric vision of reality in three propositions. (1) The language of personal pronouns (I, you, she/he/it) expresses a universal and ultimate structure of human experience which reflects the Trinity, which is “the ultimate paradigm of personal relationships (and neither substantial nor verbal).” (2) For all their differences all things are radically interrelated, and “the Trinity as pure relation epitomizes the radical relativity of all that there is.” (3) The distinctions between creator and creature, God and the world, “should not overshadow the fundamental unity of reality,” and “it is the Trinity which offers us the ultimate model of this all-pervading constitution of reality.” The model of personalism enables us to understand the Trinity better, and “the mystery of the Trinity opens us up so that we may grasp better the ultimate constitution of the real” (TREM, xiv-xvi).

The Trinity may or may not be the ultimate model or key to the ultimate structure of reality, but what is the Christian Trinity in the first place? How does Panikkar interpret the Christian doctrine of the Trinity itself?

Panikkar interprets the Father of the Christian Trinity as the nameless Absolute like the Brahman without attributes or the unnamable Tao. For early Christians God primarily meant the Father, and the first Trinitarian formulation spoke of God, Christ, and Spirit, not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, although as the Son of God and the Spirit of God these are equal to the one God as God. Following what he calls the Greek tradition Panikkar says that “everything that the Father *is* he transmits to the Son. Everything that the Son *receives* he *gives* to the Father in return. This gift (of the Father, in the final analysis) is the Spirit” (TREM 46). From this basic idea of the generation of the Son in which the Father gives himself fully to the Son, Panikkar draws a conclusion that is rather central to his vision but that may be rather controversial in light of the classical Christian tradition (to which I will return):

If the Father begets the Son (and this is a total generation since the Father

gives himself fully to the Son) that means that what the Son is, *is* the Father, i.e., the Son is the *is* of the Father. In the formula of identity “A is B” or F is S,” what F is is S.

F, *qua* F, separately, in itself, *is not*. S is what F is. To the question: what is F? We must reply: it is S. To know the Son *qua* Son is to realise the Father also; to know Being as such implies to have transcended it in a non-ontical way (TREM 46).

For Panikkar this means that the Father as Absolute *is not*. He has no ex-istence, not even that of Being. In generating the Son the Father has totally emptied himself of everything including Being and including the possibility of being expressed in a name that would speak of him alone apart from any reference to the generation of the Son. As the speaker of the Word the Father is known only in the Word to the point that “he is nothing outside this speaking which is his Son” (TREM 61). The Father is so “totally outspoken that saying all that he is in his word, there is nothing left in him” (TREM 61). Nothing can be said of the Father “in himself” or of “the self” of the Father. This is the “essential apophatism of the ‘person’ of the Father” (TREM 46-47). Panikkar likens this radical kenosis of the Father to *nirvana* and *sunyata*. The doctrine of creation out of nothing means creation “out of himself,” i.e., nothing, no being because all being has been emptied out of the Father in the generation of the Son (TREM 47).

For Panikkar both the identity and otherness of the Father and the Son are equally total and infinite. One can go to the Father only through the Son because there is no self of the Father in himself apart from the Son. Every word about the Father can only refer to the Son of whom the Father is the Father, to his Word, which “completely expresses and consumes him” (TREM 48). The Father has no being because the Son is his being. The Father has no knowledge of himself because the Son is his (non-objective) knowledge. For Panikkar, in fact the Father could not be the source of being if he were Being. “In himself,” the Father is not even an “I.” “He affirms himself only through the Son in the Spirit. He does not affirm himself, he affirms” (TREM 48). The source of being can only be not being. Only silence is appropriate about the Father or God. “God is Silence total and absolute, the silence of Being” (TREM 48). This is the result of the “constitutive relations” that makes the Trinity what it is. As non-being the Father draws all things to him, but no one can reach him because he is not, because he is not a specific “end” to attain. Devotion to the Father, therefore, is a movement towards ... but towards no place, no where. Logos or Being is the image, manifestation, epiphany, or symbol of what is beyond

being and expression. The Son is “the visibility of the invisible” according to Irenaeus. The Son is “the Father made visible, because there is nothing else to see of the Father except the result of his paternity, namely, the Son. But to see the Son is to see him as Son of the Father and thus to see the Father in or rather through the Son (and not in himself since he is nothing)” (TREM 49). In other words, for Panikkar, the Father, ineffable, beyond all predication, beyond being, is the ultimate ground of all things, like “the invisible bedrock, the gentle inspirer, that unnoticed force which sustains, draws and pushes us. God is truly transcendent, infinite” (TREM 50).

Who, then, is the Son? While the Father lies beyond all predication, it is of the Son, the Being of the Father that also manifests the Father that we can predicate being and action. The Son is the person who is, acts, and creates. In him everything exists and through him all things were made. He is the beginning and end, the alpha and omega, of all creation. He is the only one of whom we can also predicate “person” in analogy with creatures because within the Trinity the person is neither a univocal nor an analogical term as the classical tradition admitted. As such, he is properly God while the Father is properly the Source of God. In the context of genuine Trinitarian theology speaking of the divine nature or even of God is to speak in abstractions because “there is no God except the Father who *is* his Son through his Spirit” (TREM 52). We can still speak of three “persons” for want of a better term to the extent they are real relative oppositions but without “substantializing them or considering them “in themselves” because “a person is never in himself but by the very fact that he is a person is always a constitutive relation” (TREM 52). It is only with the Son, the being and subsistence of the Father, that human beings can enter into a dialogical relationship, and in this sense the God of theism as a personalist religion is the Son, not the ineffable Father nor the immanent Spirit.

The mystery of the Son was manifested in Christ according to Christianity. As the principle of manifestation or revelation of the divine mystery to humanity, Christ is the unique link and mediator between creator and creature, absolute and relative, eternal and temporal, the only mediator, the only way to God. As such, Christ is the mediator of creation, redemption, and transformation of the world. “Beings *are* insofar as they participate in the Son, are *from, with* and *through* him. Every being is a christophany, a showing forth of Christ” (TREM 54; 68). Panikkar is here careful not to identify Christ with Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is Christ, but, insists Panikkar, Christ is not reducible to Jesus. The unique mediation, the sole way to God that Panikkar attributes is not to Jesus but to Christ, and

Christ is the Christian designation for the principle of manifestation of the Absolute which other religions call by different names, such as Isvara, Tathagata, Li, even Jahweh. Panikkar faults the church for “eclipsing” the essential, evangelical truth that “Christ *is* the Son, the Icon, the Image, the Word, the Glory, the very Being *of* the Father and that his Spirit is none other than the Holy Spirit” (TREM 55). It is a decisive Christian contribution to discover the God-person in Christ, but this affirmation must be accompanied by the recognition that “the Father is ‘greater’ than the Son and that only in the Spirit is this interpersonal communion realized—and in a dialogue on an equal footing between *me*, man, and *him*, God”(TREM 54).

In this regard it is important to note that Panikkar does not believe in the historical reality of the Incarnation of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth, as does classical Christian theology. For those enlightened by the Spirit, the statement that “the Word was made flesh” means that “it is in reality the flesh which is made Word.” Here he appeals to Aquinas but without explaining Aquinas’ doctrine of the real assumption of human nature by the Word. For Panikkar “the descent of God” cannot be “real,” while “our own ascent to divinity can be “absolutely real.” The real truth about the Word is not that he “decided one fine day to ‘descend’ here below” but that as the Word of God he was, from the beginning of eternity, “the first born of creation, the first Principle of all things even before the foundation of the world” (TREM 67). He is not merely denying the truth of the Word becoming flesh in the mythological sense, which Aquinas also does deny, but also in the sense of the Word really assuming in time the human nature of a particular individual, Jesus of Nazareth. What is true for Panikkar is only the eternal universal relationship of the Word to the world of creatures as their principle and paradigm, not the historical event of the actual incarnation of the Word in a particular human nature (TREM 67).

If the Father refers to God the transcendent in the strict sense of the word so that we cannot even attribute to him the name of God, and if the Son is the revelation of the Father in the world of space and time so that the Son or Logos is the God for us, the Spirit stands for the revelation of God immanent. Immanence here is not just the negation of transcendence, nor does it mean even the divine present in the depth of the human soul. For Panikkar the Spirit refers to the ultimate interiority or inner-ness of every being, the foundation or *Grund* of both Being and beings. In the first place immanence means God’s own immanence to himself; only God can be immanent to himself. It refers to the bottomless infinite depth of divine life

“infinitely interior to itself” (TREM 59). Secondly, behind the different levels of “surfaces” there is in every being a within-ness or interiority of that being to itself. When we pass beyond this interiority of beings to themselves we meet God and *nothing* or nothingness. The Spirit refers to this deepest level of the divine. Fully aware of using inadequate and even dangerous images Panikkar goes on to ask: “could one not say that in spite of every *effort* of the Father to ‘empty himself in the generation of the Son, to pass entirely into his Son, to give him everything that he *has*, everything that he *is*, even then there remains in this first procession, like an irreducible factor, the Spirit, the non-exhaustion of the source in the generation of the Logos? For the Father the Spirit is as it were the return to the source that he is himself” (TREM 60). This Trinitarian movement refers to the perichoresis of Father, Son, and Spirit, “the dynamic inner circularity of the Trinity” (TREM 60).

As the communion of the Father and the Son, the Spirit is immanent to Father and Son jointly. In one and the same process the Spirit passes from the Father to the Son and from the Son back to the Father. As the Father has no self in himself but only in the Son, and as the Son has no self except as the Thou of the Father, neither does the Spirit have a self in himself but only in the communion of the Father and the Son whose Spirit it is. The Spirit is the *we* between the Father and the Son, which also encompasses the whole universe. As the bond of unity of the Father and the Son, the Spirit both distinguishes and unites them. Father and Son are *advaita*, neither one nor two.

As the Father has no name because he is *beyond* every name, the Spirit can have no name either because it is on “this” side of every name, even that of Being. Being and beings only belong to the kingdom of the Son. The Spirit is “the limitless ocean where the flux of divine life is completed, rests and is consummated,” where *theosis* or divinization of humanity takes place. One cannot have “personal” relations with the Spirit but only a “non-relational” union with it. One cannot pray *to* the Spirit but only *in* the Spirit, or, rather, the Spirit prays *in* us. As the deepest nameless presence of the divine the Spirit is in fact the *Atman* of the Upanishads in its identity with Brahman.

For Panikkar, then, the Father refers to the Source, the Son to Being, and the Spirit to the return to the Ocean of Being, which he further explains following *Ephesians* 4:6. The Father as the Source of Being is “above all,” *super omnes*, beyond Being, the ultimate I. The Son is through all things,

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*per omnia* because he is Being through whom and for whom everything was made, and all things are only by participating in Being. The Son is the Thou of the Father scattered through the many *thous* of the world. The Spirit is within all things, *in omnibus* because it is immanent in all things as their dynamic power and end. Thus “Being--and beings—only exists insofar as it proceeds from its Source and continues to flow in the Spirit” where the Spirit is “that *we* inasmuch as it gathers all of us, who were mostly ‘he, they’ into the integrated communion of that perfect reality” (TREM 68-69).

After presenting his own interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity Panikkar goes on to draw out or develop the integral significance of that doctrine for our time with its kairological demand for integration of the various essential dimensions of reality that have existed in mutual alienation and tension. This is why he prefers “theandric” or “cosmotheandric” to “Trinitarian” as a description of the holistic, “catholic,” or synthesizing significance and function of the doctrine. Catholic theology tended to confine the mystery of the Trinity to the sphere of the immanent Trinity and neglect its integrating significance for the sphere of the economic Trinity, i.e., creation, incarnation, and transformation of the world. At the heart of the Trinitarian mystery, however, is the revelation of the unity of the divine and the human in Christ, who as a human being represents all humanity and all creation while also representing the divine as the Son of the Father whose Spirit is also the Holy Spirit. Christ is the paradigmatic symbol of the cosmotheandric unity of God, humanity, and the universe, the transcendent apophatism of the Father, the fulfilling immanence of the Spirit, and Christ’s “homogeneity to man” (TREM 72). As such, Christ is “the living symbol for the totality of reality: human, divine and cosmic” (UCH 27)., and “that symbol which ‘recapitulates’ in itself the Real in its totality, created and uncreated” (UCH 28). Panikkar thus justifies the substantive transformation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity into cosmotheandricism on Christological grounds, in particular the unity of the human and divine and the “recapitulation of all things” in Christ, a rather well known doctrine since the most ancient times.<sup>2</sup> “God becomes man so that man may become God,” as so many Fathers of the church have said. Only a Trinitarian notion of the divine allows the incarnation of the divine in the human and the cosmic. It is only because God is life in the immanent trinity, involving communication, donation,

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<sup>2</sup> For an exegesis of the cosmic Christology of Panikkar, see Gerald T. Carney, “Christophany: The Christic Principle and Pluralism,” in ICRP, 131-144.

love, and expansion that God can enter creation through the incarnation in the economic Trinity and involve himself deeply in the history of humanity and the whole creation (RB 259-260). The Christian theology of the cosmic Christ recapitulating all things in himself, divinizing the world and rendering the divine worldly is as such “unknown” to other religions, but Christ has been operating in the entire universe including religions and producing the cosmotheandric reality and consciousness everywhere. Hence the “unknown Christ” of Hinduism and other religions (UCH 169).<sup>3</sup>

Trinitarian theology properly understood as including its “economic” dimension is best equipped to integrate the three types of the universal religious consciousness of humanity, the spirituality of iconolatry or the way to God through created images, personalism, the way to God through personal relations, and *advaita*, the way to God through union beyond all dualism, and to synthesize their further development into the ways of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Panikkar’s aim in *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* was “simply so to enlarge and deepen the mystery of the Trinity that it may embrace this same mystery existent in other religious traditions but differently expressed” (TREM 42). To be sure, his interpretation of the Trinity “goes beyond the traditional idea given by Christianity,” but “there is, despite the development or deepening that takes place, a very real continuity between the theory of the Trinity that I outline below and Christian doctrine” (TREM 43) (TREM 71-72).

Cosmotheandricism seeks to integrate, synthesize, and reconcile the three dimensions of reality in terms of their mutual, intrinsic or constitutive, orientation or ordination and by denying sharp oppositions and exclusiveness among them. Infinite and finite (humanity, cosmos) are not opposed because humans are oriented towards the infinite from the very beginning and because the infinite exists precisely as the end of human existence. There is no purely transcendent God as there is no purely natural and independent humanity. God and humanity are indeed distinct but not opposed; they are not simply one, but they are not two (*advaita*) either. It is this mutual interconnection that constitutes reality, and in this sense, “reality itself is theandric” (TREM 75). By the same token we suffer when this theandric wholeness is destroyed through an exclusive emphasis on only one dimension. Atheism and nihilism—and Buddhism—are witnesses to

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<sup>3</sup> For a Panikkar-inspired search for a homeomorphic equivalent of cosmotheandricism in Confucianism and Daoism, see William Cenkner, “Interreligious Exploration of Triadic Reality: The Panikkar Project,” *Dialogue & Alliance* 4:3 (Fall 1990), 71-85.



the spirituality of the Father in his ineffable “nothingness,” but they are deviations because they “are severed from the living Trinity” (TREM 78). Humanism is a healthy reaction against an excessive anti-natural supernaturalism but lapses, without a sense of the whole, into sheer naturalism: “One cannot eliminate from the mystery of the Christ the dimension of the Father in which it finds its fullness and consummation” (TREM 79). Angelism is the spirituality of the Spirit taken to a one-sided extreme, and falls into pantheism without integration into the Trinity. Cosmotheandricism integrates the immanent and economic Trinities and integrates all the dimensions of reality by broadening the significance of the union of finite and infinite, human and divine in Christ, and thus presents itself as a religious response to the multifarious oppositions and dualisms of the contemporary world (TREM 73-82).

Panikkar is a theologian of the “signs of the times” that has become an essential part of the theological method since Vatican II. So he sees a global trend today towards a greater appreciation of human dignity, the increasing significance of the cosmos, mutual respect and dialogue among religions, the crumbling of the wall between sacred and profane, a search for profound spirituality, and an increasing resistance to all exclusive particularisms, all of which cry out for integration and synthesis but without sacrifice of legitimate identity and particularity. Panikkar proposes Trinitarianism broadened into the “radical” Trinity of cosmotheandricism as his vision of the future, a response to the many divisions of our world. It is through this cosmotheandric interpretation of the Trinity that he also sees the possibility and urgency of the encounter of world religions that will be mutually enriching at a level that is most fundamental to each religion but also transcends each to something universal (TREM 55-58).

For Panikkar, the problem with the Christian Trinity is that for some fifteen centuries the emphasis has been on God’s transcendence and monotheism with a minor modification entailed by the Trinitarian doctrine for fear of offending inherited Jewish monotheism and all the ruling monisms, religious, political and economic. Trinitarianism is a critique of and threat to all monisms. Once we rescue the Trinity from this history of suppression and oblivion and put the same emphasis on the immanence of God in the world, we can see the Trinitarian structure of the divine “percolate, as it were, through all his creation” (RB 227). Once we do that, it is no longer a question of whether it is the Vedantic *advaita* or the Christian Trinity or the Buddhist *pratityasamutpada* but that of the depth

and structure of human experience in general, for which these traditions can serve as examples.<sup>4</sup>

### Reflections on Panikkar's Radical Trinitarianism

Among Panikkar's many positive and profound contributions I would like to highlight two before going on to a more critical engagement with his Trinitarian and cosmotheandric vision. One is his Trinitarian ontology, and the other his cosmotheandric spirituality as spirituality. The first refers to his attempt to draw out a universal ontology from the implications of the Christian Trinity. If the source of all reality is indeed the triune God according to Christianity, it is only coherent to think that the structure of the world and things in the world would somehow reflect the structure of their divine source. The traditional approach has been to see the "traces" and "images" of the Trinity in creation. So, in Aquinas the Father is represented by the substantiality of things as source of their own agency or (secondary) causality, the Son by their formal, essential structure, and the Holy Spirit by their teleological relations to God and other things. Aquinas also sees the whole of creation as a teleological movement to the triune God.<sup>5</sup> However, Aquinas has not anywhere attempted to produce an ontology as such that systematically and comprehensively reflects the structure of the triune God as such. It is a tribute to Panikkar that he is one of the first to undertake this project in the modern world. (Hegel may be the other thinker that comes to mind on this point. In my view, however, it is not so much the Trinity that is being reflected in the structure of the world in his system as the world that is being projected into the Trinity.)

The second major contribution I want to highlight is the compelling

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<sup>4</sup> For a very sympathetic exegesis of Panikkar's radical trinitarianism, see Ewert Cousins, "The Trinity and World Religions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (1970): 476-498, and his essay, "Panikkar's Advaitic Trinitarianism," in ICRP, 119-130. In the former essay Cousins makes the insightful observation that we can interpret Panikkar as trying to universalize the significance of the Trinity not only on the basis of the doctrine of vestige in Augustine and the cosmic Christology of the Greek Fathers but also on the basis of the method of "appropriation," i.e., appropriation of certain essential divine attributes to one of the persons, ineffability to the Father, personality to the Son, and immanence to the Holy Spirit, making it possible to embrace Buddhism as religion of the Father, Christianity as religion of the Son, and Hinduism as religion of the Spirit within the Trinitarian framework.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 45, 7; *Summa contra gentiles*, 4, 26, [8]. Also see my *The Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 26-38.

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necessity of his cosmotheandric spirituality in our time of ecological poverty and the gathering imperative to overcome dualistic, oppositional thinking without ignoring distinctions and differences. Cosmotheandricism provides the non-dualistic approach not only to the primordial relations between the divine, the human, and the cosmic but also to our philosophical and religious thinking in general. There are plenty of dualisms today, and one may think, as I do, that changing our thinking from dualism to non-dualism is not the only approach any more than it is by itself an adequate solution to the problems, especially our intractable social problems arising from centuries of reciprocal misunderstanding, animosity, and oppression, but the non-dualist approach is an important approach that should be a component of all other approaches precisely because it refuses to reify the contending issues and parties in their mutual exclusion and opposition and goes into the profounder sources of the conflicts, i.e., mutual interconnectedness of the parties and issues involved. It is a tribute to Panikkar's cosmotheandricism that it seeks to cultivate the fundamental ontological interconnectedness and harmony at the profound, primordial level of being itself.

For all my appreciation and fascination with Panikkar's contributions, their visionary profundity and their compelling contemporary relevance, which I have expressed both here and elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> I have some serious disagreements with his interpretation of the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity and on the content of his cosmotheandric trinity. Here I will first discuss two issues regarding his interpretation of the classical Christian Trinity, the nature of relation vs. substantiality and the relation between monotheism and trinitarianism. I will then go on to raise two systematic issues on the content of his cosmotheandricism, the crucial ambiguity of the concept of the mutual constitution of God and the world and the ontological equality of the three realms, the human, the cosmic, and the divine.

The first issue I raise with his interpretation of the classical doctrine of the Trinity is his systematic reduction of the three persons to relationality, which misconstrues the point of the classical doctrine of divine persons as "subsisting" relations, which preserves both the constitution of persons by relations and the subsistence of those relations as persons, i.e.,

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<sup>6</sup> See my essays, "Loving without Understanding: Raimon Panikkar's Ontological Pluralism" mentioned above, and "The Challenge of Radical Pluralism," *Cross Currents* 38:3 (Fall 1988), 268-75.

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incommunicable substances (in the primary sense of “substance”) or subjects. The point of the classical doctrine is neither the existence of three substances without internal, constitutive relations, which would be tritheism, which it rejects, nor the existence of relations without subjects whose relations they are, which does not make sense, neither to reduce God to substantiality without relations nor to reduce God to relationality without substantiality, but to affirm both substantiality and relationality as coequal elements of divine being in such a way that substantiality is thoroughly relational and relationality is thoroughly substantial, to affirm that in God the substantial identity of a person with himself exhaustively coincides with the relationality of a person with an Other so that there is a perfect identity or coincidence of substantiality and relationality, of identity and difference in God. To be the Father is indeed to generate the Son in such a way that the identity of the Father lies precisely and wholly in the generating relation with an Other, the Son, but this does not mean that the Father ceases to be a being with an identity of his own and simply merges and disappears in the Son, which does not make sense, but that in this relation the Father remains Father, precisely himself, in such a way that the Father is Father only insofar as he generates the Son, just as he can generate the Son only because he remains Father.

This is also the infinite difference between the divine being and finite beings like human beings. In God the identity of a divine person is wholly identical with his relation to an Other, with no alienation between identity and otherness. In the case of human and other material beings, however, there is always some degree of unsublated [*unaufgehobene*] difference between one’s substantial identity with himself and his relations with Others. I am often fulfilled as myself in my relations to an Other or, to put it in Hegelian terms, feel at home with myself in my otherness, but it is also true that my relations to Others are often enough so oppressive and stifling of my identity that I feel alienated from myself precisely in those relations to Others. I can also confine myself to myself and resist relations to Others as threats to my own identity. It is part of ontological finitude that identity with oneself and relations to Others are never wholly coincident precisely because both identity and otherness are something *given*, not always under the control of a being in whom essence and existence are really distinct. It is in God and in God alone that such an identity of identity with oneself and relations to an Other obtains. This, I think, is the point of the classical doctrine of “subsisting relations.” Relations are not of the order of accidents as in material beings but constitute the very substantiality

of the divine person as person. Substance and relation are not mutually external or opposed as in the case of finite material beings but exhaustively constitutive of each other in God.

This exhaustive identity of identity and otherness, of substantiality and relationality in God is possible because of the unique nature of the immanent processions. The Father “begets” the Son by communicating his “numerically identical divine nature” to an Other, which makes the Son “consubstantial” with the Father and equally divine while also distinguishing himself as Father from the Son he generates. The divine nature, or “substance” in the secondary sense, remains identical in both Father and Son, while they remain incommunicably distinct from each other precisely in their relationality. These relations, however, are not external to the divine nature in reality although they remain conceptually distinct, which means that the relations also subsist in the divine nature, thus constituting and distinguishing the persons. Relations in God are indeed *constitutive*, but they are constitutive of *persons*, subjects with their incommunicable substantiality or identity or “individual substances of rational nature” analogically understood. That is, the divine relations are not only *constitutive* but also *subsisting*, which is not true of material or human relations, which are often constitutive but never subsisting. We never see a human “father” walking around as an individual but only an individual person who happens to be related to Others as their father. The divine Father does subsist precisely as divine Father, i.e., in begetting the divine Son.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, as we saw in the second part of this essay, Panikkar seems to reduce the divine persons to “pure relationship” without substantiality, blaming substantiality for many things as has become fashionable today among many theologians. This tendency is especially

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<sup>7</sup> For an exposition of Aquinas’s theology of the divine person as “subsisting relation,” see my *Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 178-191; see also Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, tr. Michael G. Shields and ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007; vol. 12 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*), 231-436, where Lonergan deals with divine relations as subsisting relations, divine persons considered in themselves, and divine persons considered in mutual relations.

prominent in his reductive interpretation of the Father. For Panikkar “what the Son is, is the Father, i.e., the Son is the *is* of the Father. In the formula of identity ‘A is B’ or ‘F is S,’ what F is is S. For, qua F, separately in itself, is not” (TREM 46). Again, the Father is so “totally out-spoken that saying all that he is in his word, there is nothing left in him” (TREM 61). Nothing can be said of the Father “in himself” or of the “self” of the Father. Panikkar’s interpretation does convey one of the essential points of the classical tradition, the thoroughly relational constitution of the three persons, that the immanent processions do communicate the totality of the divine nature and thus constitute the persons as divine. The Father shares the totality of his divine nature with nothing of that nature remaining reserved for himself precisely because the divine nature is indivisible and can be communicated either in *toto* or not at all. It cannot be parceled out between the three persons.

The other point of the classical tradition, however, a point that Panikkar seems to miss, is that the Father does not cease to be Father, the unbegotten God, when he communicates the totality of his divine nature. It is precisely the privilege of the divine to be able to share the totality of his own nature without emptying himself and ceasing to be himself. The sharing of the total divine nature makes possible and necessary what is called perichoresis, i.e., each person dwelling in the other with the totality of one’s own being, not with only part of one’s being, as in finite relations, because each shares the totality of the numerically identical divine nature. In this regard, the language of “emptying” so popular today as well as with Panikkar is a very misleading metaphor that quantifies the divine nature. Of course, when I empty myself of my self completely, I cease to be, and there is nothing left in me. What Panikkar does is to quantify the divine nature and fail to distinguish between what constitutes the “what” of the persons, their divine nature, and what constitutes the “who” of the persons, their relational but distinct identity. To put the stress only on the divine nature shared without an equal emphasis on the distinctive identity not reducible to the divine nature would be to reduce the triune God of Christianity to the one God pure and simple. Only the Father subsisting in the divine nature can communicate the totality of that nature and beget the Son, and the real, not merely conceptual, distinction between the generating Father and the generated Son must be maintained if we are to remain Trinitarian in the classical sense. The Father as the *fons et origo* of divinity is *not* the Son whom he generates. In begetting the Son the Father does share the totality of his divine nature but does *not* surrender his subsisting, substantial identity

precisely as Father, the unegotten God. In this sense, the Father does remain “in himself” as distinct from the Son “in himself.” They do not merge into each other without a real personal distinction and identity. As Gregory Nazianzen and many others said, the Son is *not* the Father although he is *what* the Father is.<sup>8</sup>

The second issue to be raised with regard to Panikkar’s interpretation of the classical Trinity is his constant opposition of monotheism and trinitarianism, something also found in Juergen Moltmann. As he puts it, “either God is not one God or Christ is not (that one) God” (RB 257), which also means opting either for one God or for a triune God that also includes the divinity (and humanity) of Christ. Panikkar opts for his christic experience and therefore for the triune God which makes that experience possible and rejects monotheism. In Aquinas and the classical tradition, however, there is absolutely no opposition between the one God and the triune God, between the treatise *de deo uno* and that *de deo trino*. He does not in any way deduce the trinity from the implications of the one God, which would be sheer rationalism. The trinity is knowable only through divine revelation accepted in faith, but he interprets the one God in such a way that the one God can also be a triune God. Whether the one God can also be a triune God depends on how one understands the one God, that is, on one’s ontology of divine being. If this one God is also a being who understands and loves in the way proper to the divine, then the immanent actions of self-understanding and self-loving on the part of the one God, the Father, can terminate in the generation of the Word and the spiration of the Holy Spirit, each exactly identical with the Father in the numerically identical divine nature communicated to each yet also really different from the Father as terms of relational opposition. No finite being can do this because no finite being can truly give one’s numerically identical nature to someone else without ceasing to be oneself; finite natures are natures given to one, not givable to an other while also remaining oneself.

It is precisely the numerically identical divine nature that makes the Father divine and that also makes it possible for the Father to share that nature by the processions of the intellect and will with two other persons. It is the indivisible divine nature that makes the one God necessary, and it is the same divine nature that can only be shared as a whole without division that also makes the triune God possible without producing three Gods. For

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, 5<sup>th</sup> *Theological Orations*, ix.

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Aquinas, as for the Fathers of the church, the opposition between monotheism and trinitarianism is a false issue. Panikkar fails to really appreciate the arguments of the classical theological tradition. No church Father ever opposed the one God to the triune God. The struggle was not between monotheism and trinitarianism but how to interpret monotheism in such a way that one can believe in God who is both one and triune without falling into modalism or tritheism.

I am inclined to think that the real reason why Panikkar always opposes monotheism and trinitarianism is his assumption shared by many postmodernists today that the original sin of Western culture is its intellectualism which is essentially monist and seeks to reduce all things to the one, such as one truth, one reality, one God, one Empire, one Church, which in turn is an expression of an underlying will to power, the will to reduce, dominate, and exclude all resistant otherness. It is this assumption of the will to monism as a source of all evil that drives so many postmodernists to deconstruct and unmask any and all claims to the unity of the same.<sup>9</sup>

While I am willing to grant much truth and validity to this deconstructionist critique of all ideologies,<sup>10</sup> I also insist that there is something false about this claim when carried too far. It is false if it assumes that unity is intrinsically evil. Unity simply means lack of inner dividedness and therefore internal coherence, which is in fact one of the transcendental perfections Panikkar loves to talk about; the opposite of this unity is internal fragmentation. It is also false in that it condemns unity and oneness without regard to the content of that unity. Often the very nature of the thing whose unity is at issue may demand unity. Are we going to say that we need many presidents because one president is a bad thing, that we need many fathers and many mothers because one father or one mother is a bad thing? The very nature of presidency requires only one president, that of fatherhood and motherhood requires only one father and one mother. The very nature of God, one can argue, requires only one God, not many Gods.

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<sup>9</sup> I provide an appreciative critique of this postmodernist tendency in Levinas and Derrida in my book, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2004), 7-88.

<sup>10</sup> For my appreciative critique of Derrida and other deconstructionist postmodernists, see my *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York: NY, T & T Clark International, 2004), 1-89, dealing with Levinas, Derrida, feminists, and ways of sublating postmodernism.



Whether one is bad depends on the nature of the thing whose unity is at issue. To dismiss unity as intrinsically evil without looking at its content is sheer formalism, and under certain circumstances it could be a very bad ideology, as, for example, sowing division and producing multiple factions in the struggle against oppression. We may want to remember that even “pluralism” and “multiculturalism” are increasingly exposed as ideological attempts of a capitalist society to coopt real differences. What is truly false about the dismissal of monotheism, however, is the projection of the (human) sociology of power into the nature of the divine and the consequent univocal, anthropomorphic reduction of God to one among other competing objects of human loyalties. Our relations to God as part of the network of human relations in their totality can be a legitimate object of sociological analysis, but it is sheer anthropomorphism and projectionism to subject the ontology of the divine to the all too human sociology of power. No great classical theologian ever tried to substitute a sociology of power for a theology and ontology of the divine.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the content of Panikkar’s cosmotheandrisms, there are two systematic issues I would like to raise, the crucial ambiguity of the concept of the mutual constitution of God and the world and the ontological equality of the three realms, the human, the cosmic, and the divine.

First, on the mutual constitution of God and the world. We have seen Panikkar insisting on a number of occasions that relation to the world is constitutive of God, that God “in himself” does not make sense, that “a God without the world is not a real God, nor does he exist” (CE 64). A God whom we can *think* as existing without creatures “does not exist because the actual God, the God that in fact exists, *is* God with creatures” (CE 70). I think Panikkar is quite correct that the *actual* God is God with creatures, but this does not mean that God is reducible to what he is for and with creatures. The classical tradition did not deny that the only and actual God that does exist is the God who has created the world and entered into a relation with the whole of creation, but the same tradition also argued that creation means the production of the entire being of the creature “from nothing” and shows an infinite difference between the creator and the creature and that the being

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<sup>11</sup> For my critique of contemporary tendencies to project a sociology of power into the doctrine of God, see my essay, “The Humanity of Theology: Aquinian Reflections on the Presumption and Despair in the Human Claim to Know God,” in Anselm K. Min (ed.), *Rethinking the Medieval Legacy for Contemporary Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 187-190.

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of the creator infinitely transcends that of the creature. Creatures do not and cannot reflect the infinite perfection of the creator in his eternal essence. The distinction between God “in himself” or in his essence and God “for us” or as manifested in his creative relation to the creature is necessary and essential. God is necessarily a creator and implies a relation to the creature but only if he decides to create, and whatever relation he enters into with creation is itself something God has eternally decided to give to himself, not by the necessity of his divine nature but only by the free decision of his will.

The argument often made by Hegel and Whitehead and their contemporary followers that “creator” implies a necessary relation to the “creature” because the idea of creator who does not create does not make sense fails to grasp the crucial point that such necessity is itself contingent on the free will of the creator. God is necessarily related to the created world but *only* if he has eternally but freely decided to create it. The actual God, therefore, is not reducible to his being for or with the creature. It is indeed the same God who creates the world and enters into a necessary relation with it and who at the same time infinitely transcends that world, but it is precisely because of his infinite ontological transcendence of the world in his own being that he can also freely create the world out of nothing. God in himself is the same as God for us, or, as Rahner would put it, the immanent Trinity is the same as the economic Trinity, while denying that the former is simply reducible to the latter. The possibility of the economic Trinity is rooted in the reality of the immanent Trinity. The economic manifestation of God in creation and redemption is possible precisely because of the kind of being God is in the immanent Trinity or in his own essential being, which, however, infinitely transcends his manifestation in and through his created effects. The “actual” God is indeed God “for us” but only because God “in himself” is more than God “for us.” Panikkar does not seem to accept the reality of the immanent Trinity and seems so eager to reduce it to the economic.

The second but related issue I raise about cosmotheandricism is about its claim that the three realms, the cosmos, humanity, and God, are “equally” mutually constitutive and mutually “irreducible” (CE 64, 65). The relation to God is constitutive of the human and cosmic realms, as relations to these are constitutive of the divine. The relation to humanity is constitutive of the divine and the cosmic as these are constitutive of the human. The relation to the cosmic is constitutive of the human and the divine, as these are constitutive of the divine. The three realms are ontologically equal with each other, distinct from each other in their

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respective irreducibility, and equally constitutive of each other in their mutual relationality. For Panikkar “the variety of beings, including the theological difference between the divine and the created or God and the world, should not *overshadow* the fundamental unity of reality,” which consists precisely of the mutually constitutive relations of all the beings and realms of the universe (TREM xv, emphasis added).

This theory of the equal mutual constitution of the three realms raises a number of issues. The first is the question of whether Panikkar really believes in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The classical doctrine of creation, if taken seriously, requires recognition of an infinite, transcendental distinction between the creator and the creature. If creation means the very production of the being or *esse* of beings, only a being whose very essence is to be can be the proper cause of the being of creature, just as only an essentially intelligent being can be the proper cause of order and meaning. The creature by itself remains nonbeing in the absolute sense unless called into being by the creator, and remains a mixture of being and nonbeing, always contingent, vulnerable, and dependent. The creature is thoroughly dependent on and totally relational to the creator, but the creator is not dependent on or relational to the creature unless the creator gives himself a relation to the creature by deciding to create it. The ontological difference between creator and creature is radical. This would mean either that the difference must indeed “overshadow” the unity of creator and creature or that Panikkar does not mean creation out of nothing by the many references to creator and creature, especially in his earlier works but something else altogether. I am afraid that his reference to the *ex nihilo* is no more than a very elusive allusion to the nothingness inherent in all being.

If he does mean something different in such a way that the difference of creator and creature could be subordinated to and integrated into the mutually equally constitutive relational unity of the universe, this seems to raise another issue. Can we really take each of humanity, nature, and God as mutually irreducible yet equally constitutive of the other two so that we are confronted with three ultimates, three simple givens we cannot further explain, or should we introduce some hierarchy into their relationship? Are the three poles equally dependent on one another? Are humans as dependent on the material universe as the material universe is dependent on the human? Human beings are part of nature and depend on nature for their very survival. Is the cosmic dependent on the human for its very survival? Isn't it true that the universe had been there for billions of years even before

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humans came on the scene, and will continue to be there even after we humans may be gone? We do damage the planet through all the ecological disasters we inflict, but isn't it a bit of an anthropocentric hyperbole to speak of "ecological holocaust" as though we had the power to destroy the entire universe, even apart from the fact that we destroy ourselves first in the same holocaust? Likewise, is the divine equally dependent on the human and the cosmic as these are dependent on the divine, and if so, in what sense is the Divine divine? If we cannot describe the divine in human categories, which is quite true, what is there about the nature and being of the divine that makes the application of human categories inappropriate to it? Is the Buddhist and postmodern language of emptiness, freedom, and infinity the only language appropriate to God? Unfortunately, as far as I know, Panikkar nowhere provides an ontological analysis of the being of God, humanity, and nature, of what makes the divine divine, the human human, and the cosmic cosmic precisely in their mutual difference.

I also wonder why Panikkar is so emphatic on the equal mutual constitution of humanity, nature, and God. Is it unworthy hierarchical thinking to recognize that we humans depend on the material universe far more than the universe depends on us, to recognize that the human and the cosmic depend on the divine far more than the divine depends on us if it ever does? Or is this fear of hierarchical thinking itself an inappropriate projection of the human political ideal of equality into the rest of reality where it does not make any sense at all and therefore a subtly disguised anthropocentrism projected into the cosmic and the divine?

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## **<sup>1</sup>The Encounter of Religions in a Globalized World: Provocations from Panikkar**

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“Among those who have made the transition [to the future] some become mediators of the future for others who can make passage...I suggest that Raimundo Panikkar is such a spiritual mutant, one in whom the global mutation has already occurred and in whom the new forms of consciousness have been concretized...they are cross-cultural, for in them the great cultural traditions—formally distinct through their diverse historical origin and development—now converge, making these mutants heirs, for the first time in history, to the spiritual heritage of humankind. As such they become multi-dimensional, for they combine the polarities of the East and the West, outer and inner consciousness, science and mysticism, mythic and rational thinking, pragmatic involvement in the world and spiritual detachment.” Ewert Cousins<sup>1</sup>

One of the consequences of contemporary globalization has been the encounter of religions and religious personalities. While it is true that in pluralistic countries like India and the United States, religions have for long been in contact with one another, this contact intensifies under the compression of time and space that is a structural feature of globalization. This meeting of religions has had decidedly mixed results. On the one hand, there has been genuine dialog and the transformation that goes along with such dialogue; but on the other hand, the encounter has also produced much antagonism and, often, violence. In circumstances such as these, it is instructive to revisit the thought of Raimon Panikkar, one of the pioneers in the twentieth century of inter- and intra-faith dialogue. Panikkar’s rich reflection on dialogue was, however, part of a comprehensive world view which both framed and reflected it. It is important to emphasize this because his contribution is often, especially in parts of the West, restricted to his practice of dialogue. As a corrective to this reductive view, it is salient to point out that his practice of dialogue was itself part of an overarching philosophy of dialogue and the latter in turn can be seen as an offshoot of his pluralistic world-view.

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<sup>1</sup> Cousins, Ewert, *Christ of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Rockport MA: Element, 1992, pp 72-73

I shall accordingly divide this paper into three sections: the first will deal with his metaphysical world-view; the second with the different dimensions of his philosophy of dialogue; and the third with one very important aspect of the theory and practice of dialogue, namely his philosophy of peace and the alternative it provides to some contemporary forms of politics.

## I. Panikkar's Cosmotheandricism

What for long has driven and unified Panikkar's thinking has been his cosmotheandric vision of reality, what he calls the "trinity" of cosmic matter, human consciousness, and divine freedom in co-constitutive relationality. These three basic and irreducible dimensions of reality interpenetrate each other and exist only in relation to one another:

There is a kind of *perichoresis*, 'dwelling within one another,' of these three dimensions of Reality the Divine, the Human, and the Cosmic.<sup>2</sup>

And then again:

There is no matter without spirit and no spirit without matter, no World without Man, no God without the universe, etc. God, Man, and World are three artificially substantivized forms of the three primordial adjectives which describe Reality.<sup>3</sup>

Panikkar's use of the theological term *perichoresis* taken from the discussions about the Trinity by the Greek Fathers and paralleling in a loose manner the three moments of the eternal dance of Siva Nataraja—creation, destruction, and preservation—is deliberate and is designed to articulate its "trinitarian" structure.

The main thesis that Panikkar wants to proffer is the triadic structure of Reality comprising the Divine, the Human and the Cosmic in thoroughgoing relationality. In saying that "God, Man and World are three artificially substantivized forms of the adjectives which describe Reality," Panikkar is pointing to his own version of the Buddhist *pratityasamutpada*, the espousal of what he calls "radical relativity." There are no such things or beings as God or Man or World considered as completely independent entities. Not only are they dependent on each other, but this dependence is

<sup>2</sup> Panikkar, Raimon, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel—A Meditation On Non-Violence," *Cross Currents*, 29, no. 2, 1979, pp 214-216.

<sup>3</sup> Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-style," in *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p 97.

not just external, but rather internal, i.e., constitutive of their being. Panikkar coins the term “interdependence” to express this relationship.

As to the appropriateness of taking a Christian theological symbol to describe what is essentially a philosophical and poetic vision, Panikkar makes at least three responses. First, the symbol of the Trinity is not a Christian monopoly, but in fact is common in many other traditions. Second the relationships and movements within the Trinity provide a precise and vivid model for the dynamism of the different dimensions of Reality that Panikkar wants to articulate. Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and a significant theologian in his own right, has captured this dynamism well in a perceptive essay on Panikkar entitled, “Trinity and Pluralism,” in which he writes:

For Panikkar, the Trinitarian structure is that of a source, inexhaustibly generative and *always* generative, from which arises form and determination, “being” in the sense of what can be concretely perceived and engaged with; that form itself is never exhausted, never limited by this or that specific realization, but is constantly being realized in the flux of active life that equally springs out from the source of all. Between form, “logos,” and life, “spirit,” there is an unceasing interaction. The Source of all does not and cannot exhaust itself simply in producing shape and structure; it also produces that which dissolves and re-forms all structures in endless and undetermined movement, in such a way that form itself is not absolutized but always turned back toward the primal reality of the source.<sup>4</sup>

Third, even for Christians, Panikkar feels that the doctrine of the Trinity should not be treated, as it often is, as a recondite teaching about the inner life of God cut off from the rest of life and experience. Rather, so potent and rich a symbol it is that it invites further deepening and development, preferably by intercultural and interreligious communication. Panikkar is by no means alone in wanting to articulate the logic of the Trinity philosophically, and with reference to the whole of reality. Thus, Hegel likewise saw the Christian Trinity as the *Grundstruktur* for his entire dialectic and conceived of his philosophy as a translation of the doctrinal core of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Of course, Panikkar’s is a quite different philosophical style than Hegel’s, but the aim in both cases is the same—to “expand” and

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<sup>4</sup> Williams, Rowan, “Trinity and Pluralism,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1990, p 3.

<sup>5</sup> Splett, Jorg, *Die Trinitaetslehre GWF Hegels*. Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1965.

articulate Christian doctrine as a model of Reality. In offering the Christian symbol of the Trinity as a resource for interpreting reality, and in showing its homeomorphic equivalence to the Hindu notion of *advaita*, Panikkar is engaging in an exercise of comparative theology where symbols of particular traditions are shared with the idea of testing their applicability and fruitfulness to contexts beyond their original ones. This is a process that Panikkar describes as “mutual fecundation.”

This ontological pluralism matches a corresponding epistemological pluralism where Panikkar attempts to fuse three different modes of thought, sensibility, and consciousness which he calls *mythos*, *logos*, and *pneuma*. The mutual relation between these three notions can be succinctly expressed: *mythos* is the unthought, *logos* is that which is thought, while the *pneuma* is the unthinkable. *Mythos* is the unthought because it is the background, the source and origin of what is thought, and, therefore, cannot be made the object of thought. *Logos* covers the whole range of thought from sensibility at the “lower” end of the cognitive spectrum to speculative ideas at the “higher” end, what the tradition of German idealism designates as *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, and what the medieval Latin tradition calls *ratio* and *intellectus*. The *pneuma* is the ever new, the unpredictable, the wind that blows where it will. As Panikkar expresses it “the unthinkable does not exist in itself as a fixed dimension: at any given moment it is the provisional, the historical that accomplishes itself in the future, in hope...Receiving the *pneuma* is permanent passage, a *pascha*, a pilgrimage: the procession from *mythos* through *logos* to *pneuma* is endless. Precisely the pneumatic dimensions guarantees the constant openness into which we may take a step forward.”<sup>6</sup>

Panikkar’s *advaita* in a sense is a *via media* between the rationalistic, dialectic of a Spinoza or a Hegel tending toward monism and the non-rational *advaita* of a Sankara or a Ramanuja. Like the former, Panikkar regards the world as fully real and reason as an essential instrument in our engagement with it. Unlike them, however, for Panikkar is only an aspect, crucial and essential as it is, of a wider dance or procession of consciousness that also incorporates the mythic and the pneumatic. Like the latter, he wants to overcome the dualism of knower and known without, on the one hand, postulating the “self-thinking Thought” (*noesis noeseos*) of Hegel, who follows Aristotle here, or, on the other hand,

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<sup>6</sup> Panikkar, R. *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979, p. 347.



wanting to transcend reason completely. Furthermore, unlike Sankara, Panikkar does not see the world as mere appearance.

There is thus at both ontological and epistemological levels a relational energy at the heart of Panikkar's *Weltanschauung*, an energy that he refers to by various symbolic notions—"advaita," "pratityasamutpada," "trinity," "perichoresis," "dance," and finally the "rhythm of being," the title of his last book, and unfinished symphony—all of which are homeomorphic equivalents. The trinity is the ontological foundation of Panikkar's multifaceted doctrine of pluralism, which is a quite different notion from what is usually understood by that term. In the debates between exclusivists, inclusivists, and pluralists, pluralism has come to mean the liberal idea of many equally valid paths to salvation or the view that the various religions constitute phenomenal manifestations of one transcendent *noumenon*, a *Ding-an-sich*. Panikkar's view is almost the opposite. He does not think that one can trump religious pluralism by metaphysical universalism because there is as much diversity in metaphysics and in conceptions of the Ultimate as there is in religion. Furthermore, the Mystery by definition cannot be objectified or made into some neutral transcendent essence of which the different faiths are manifestations. Panikkar adopts a radically apophatic attitude towards the Mystery. He is deeply sympathetic to the "Neti, Neti" (not this, not this) of the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad*, the mystical doctrine of the indescribability of the Absolute. In the same vein, he is sympathetic to the Buddhist idea of *sunyata*, the radical "emptiness" of Reality. This emptiness is compatible with, and can contain a relational core, because it is to be interpreted in dynamic rather than static terms.

If the liberal view of religious pluralism can be expressed cryptically as "many paths to one and the same mountain," as in the influential view of John Hick,<sup>7</sup> Panikkar's might be described as many paths up different mountains, paths which thus remain incommensurable with one another. Pluralism for Panikkar is the negotiation in respect and love with such incommensurability.

## II. Panikkar's Philosophy of Dialogue

The relational energy at the heart of Panikkar's ontology is given expression in his theory and practice of dialogue for which he is best known, at least in large parts of the West. Dialogue can be seen as a

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<sup>7</sup> Hick, John, *An Interpretation of Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

personalizing of this relational energy. At its deepest level, it can be regarded as a mutual recognition of the cosmotheandric Mystery expressing itself in oneself and the other. But given the inter-relatedness and co-relationality of all being, the other should be seen as an alien other (an *alius*), and even less as an “it” (an *aliud*). The other is properly speaking another self, or in Paul Ricoeur’s felicitous phrase, “oneself as another,” and conversely the other as oneself. The idea that the “I” would not strictly speaking even *be* without the other, that the other is my own self externalized, and that both selves are expressions of the Mystery—it is this idea that provides the ontological ground for Panikkar’s philosophy of interpersonal dialogue.

Of course, Panikkar is quite aware that much of what is called dialogue operates at a purely cognitive level where the focus of the dialogue is doctrine or ideas. This is what sets up the important distinction between dialectical and dialogical dialogues. Dialectical dialogues take place at the level of doctrines and ideas. When conducted at the interpersonal level, they tend to treat members of other religions either as objects of cognitive inquiry, or as subjects that are to be objectively examined and discussed. Needless-to-say, such dialogues have their legitimate place at the institutional or organizational level. Thus, when the Catholic church changes its official position of “no salvation outside the Church” (*extra cathedra nulla salus*), or when Hindu society decides to make *sati* (or the self-immolation of widows) illegal, we can speak of these changes coming about as a result of dialectical dialogues.

By contrast, dialogical dialogues involve the whole person and not just his or her cognitive dimension. They treat others not primarily as purveyors of objective thoughts or ideas, but as other selves (an *alter*), who are independent sources of self understanding and of a world-view not reducible to one’s own. As Panikkar says

The dialogical dialogue is not concerned so much about opinions as about the different viewpoints from which the respective opinions are arrived at. Now, to deal with the perspective means to deal with very fundamental springs in the knowing subject. A new epistemology is required here. Just as any knowledge of an object requires a certain con-naturality and identification with the object to be known, any knowledge of the subject necessitates also a similar identification. This is what has led me to formulate the principle of ‘Understanding as Convincement.’ We cannot

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understand a person's ultimate convictions unless we somehow share them.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis of “understanding as convincement” needs to be carefully understood because it is often misinterpreted. Panikkar is saying that one has to enter into the very *mythos*, the fundamental well-springs of the thought and sensibility of one's dialogue partner and in the process to touch on one's own *mythos* to the extent possible. To understand is in a sense to “stand under” the thinking and feeling of the other, not as an alien other (an *alius*) as is very often the case, for example, in psychoanalysis, where the methodological move of distanciation in the interests of “objectivity,” and still less as an “it” (an *aliud*), as in the objectifying stance of much social science. When Panikkar talks of “standing under,” the new epistemology he refers to in the quotation above points to a loving knowledge, an attempt to participate sympathetically, but also critically in the other's myth or horizon of intelligibility:

The dialogical dialogue challenges us on a much deeper level than the dialectical one. With the dialectical dialogue we are unable to explore realms of human experience, spheres of reality, or aspects of being that belong to the first and second persons, that is, to the ‘*am*’ and ‘*art*’ aspects of reality. In other words, with the dialectical dialogue, we can only reach the ‘*it is*’ aspect of the real and cannot be in full communication with other subjects and their most intimate convictions. With the dialectical dialogue, we may discuss religious doctrines once we have clarified the context, but we need the dialogical dialogue to discuss beliefs as those conscious attitudes we have in face of the ultimate issues of our existence and life. In the dialogical dialogue, I trust the other not out of an ethical principle (because it is good) or an epistemological (because I recognize that it is intelligent to do so), but because I have discovered (experienced) the ‘*thou*’ as the counterpart of the I, as belonging *to* the I (and not as not-I). I trust the partner's understanding and self-understanding because I do not start out by putting my ego as the foundation of everything. It is not that I do not examine my partner's credentials (he could be wicked or a fool), not that I fall into irrationalism (or any type of sentimentalism), giving up my stance, but that I find in his actual presence something irreducible to my ego and yet not belonging to a non-ego: I discover the thou as part of a Self that is as much mine as his—or to be more precise, that is as little my property as his.<sup>9</sup>

This seeking of our common divinity, the *Atman*, in one another in and through dialogical dialogue and making it a methodological requirement is

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<sup>8</sup> Panikkar, R. *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999, p 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p 38.

the challenging new element that Panikkar adds to the general discussion on dialogue. It requires us to transcend and go beyond our egos to a genuine communion with the other seen as a Thou to one's I. At the same time, it is important to see this requirement both as a hermeneutical and existential one, both as a requirement of sympathetic understanding and of respect for the other as a source of independent thinking and feeling, not reducible to one's own. It is also salient to stress that this sympathetic understanding by no means implies either an uncritical acceptance of the other's views or a surrender of one's own.

It should also be clear that dialogical dialogue as Panikkar understands it has two vectors: the deep and searching conversation with the other seen as an *alter*, but equally a dialogue with oneself where the views of the other challenge one's own. Both elements are intertwined. The dialogue with the other is also the occasion for a profound dialogue with oneself opening the way to a possible transformation. Otherwise expressed, the *inter*-religious dialogue implies an *intra*-religious dialogue and vice versa.

Both dialogues, dialectical and dialogical, presuppose a dialogical *attitude*, a disposition to be in relationship with the other. Dialogue may be regarded as underlying Panikkar's pluralism in its operational aspect. Pluralism is not just diversity but the *engagement* with differences and otherness, differences which may sometimes be incommensurable. Needless-to-say, such stark and incommensurable differences may well lead to conflict, and, in fact, there are some like Samuel Huntington, for example, who see conflict as inevitable. Panikkar, of course, recognizes the risk of conflict but embraces the dialogical attitude with the goal of avoiding conflict and attempting to reach deeper understanding for the sake of both social harmony and personal growth.

It is worth spelling out the presuppositions and implications of such a dialogical attitude, because it is at variance with a more common attitude that sees difference and otherness as intrinsically conflictual. By contrast, the dialogical stance is one that seeks mutual understanding and respect, even when, and especially when, there are sharp differences between two or more positions. As a way of highlighting the contrast between these two sharply differing stances, I shall designate them the dialogical model vs the "clash" model, named after perhaps the most well-known proponent of such a position, the late Samuel Huntington.

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First, a dialogical attitude expresses a broad-mindedness and an appreciation of the complexity of truth, as expressed, for example, in the Jain notion of *anekantavada*, the many-sidedness of truth. It follows that dialogue between these different sides enriches and enlarges one's perspective. By contrast, the clash model tends to see matters of truth in univocal and ideological terms and frequently criticizes the dialogue model for being indeterminate and relativistic.

Second, given the recognition of the many-sidedness of truth, the dialogue model implies both openness and tolerance. This does not at all entail indeterminacy or relativism. Panikkar used to employ the image of people looking out at a mountain from respective windows or viewpoints. It is quite possible, especially if one is unaware of other windows in the vicinity, to absolutize the view from one's own window, until others point out their different views of the mountain garnered from their own windows. One may, of course, try to experience these different views for oneself, but even without doing so one may no longer absolutize one's own view once one is made aware of other viewpoints. One may still want to argue for the relative superiority of one's own view, depending on what particular features of the mountain one considers crucial. The clash model, however, tends to think that there is only one valid view, or at most a very limited number, and is quite convinced of the absolute superiority of one's own viewpoint.

Finally, the clash model tends to see cultures as largely monolithic, homogeneous, and oppositional to one another, whereas the dialogue model sees cultures by and large as heterogeneous and interactive. Thus, to take one example from Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations*, he presents Islam as a largely homogeneous civilization, ignoring the fact that the 1.6 billion Muslims who comprise the present Muslim world population span many different cultures, Indonesian, Indian, Pakistani, Central Asian, and Arab to name just a few. Given that that internal diversity, it is highly problematic in analytical terms to talk of a largely homogeneous "Islamic civilization." Together with this attitude towards culture, the picture of politics in the clash model is invariably oppositional and ideological: "the West vs the rest" or "Us" vs "Them." Needless-to-say, the dialogical model sees cultures and political systems as being diverse, and it is precisely this diversity that makes dialogue both possible and necessary.

Given both the conflicts that exist in the world and the arms arsenals that nations and terrorist groups possess, it is quite obvious that we live in

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dangerous times. Whether it is religion, political ideology, race, ethnicity, or economic inequalities, or some combination of these factors that contributes to the discord, it is clear that viable ideas of dialogue leading to understanding and peace are badly needed in our war-torn world. Peace is not just a wish or an ideal, but a state of affairs that has to be actively worked for. The path to a true and lasting peace requires more than just dialogue. It requires at a more fundamental level a dialogical attitude, a disposition of heart, mind, and will which aims at and works for the overcoming of absolutism, greed, selfishness, and egoism. Panikkar's notions of pluralism and dialogue, which I have tried to explicate and comment on in this essay, have much to contribute to the building of both inner and outer peace as I will briefly outline.

In a sense, Panikkar's central intuition of a cosmotheandric harmony in its adroit balancing of the human, the divine, and the cosmic is itself an aspiration for peace. Panikkar thought about and lectured on peace quite systematically, and some of the fruits of his reflection are collected in an important volume entitled *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace*<sup>10</sup> Here I wish to focus on just three inter-related aspects of his wide-ranging ideas about peace concerning (1) his idea of interculturality, (2) his philosophical anthropology and associated ethic, and (3) finally, a personal peace-oriented spirituality.

Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" model is undergirded by the fear of perceived threats that the U.S. and the West might face at the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Its immediate context was the demise of communism and with it the end of the Cold War in which Huntington as a key advisor to the U.S. State Department had been involved. Now that the former Soviet Union was no longer a rival and threat, the question that most engaged Huntington was the perceived dangers that the U.S. was likely to face as the sole and sovereign imperial power. Needless-to-say, Panikkar's views about the dialogue of cultures are at the opposite end of such imperialism. Not only are they opposed to the claim of superiority, material or otherwise, of any one culture; they actively invite and promote a fair and equal dialogue among cultures.

It would, I believe, be incorrect to describe his views on this matter as "multicultural" because on the whole multiculturalism has come to mean

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<sup>10</sup> Panikkar, R. *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

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the affirmation and celebration of cultural difference for its own sake. Panikkar, however, wants not just to celebrate cultural difference but to engage with it—a much more challenging and urgent task. Too often, perhaps under the impulse of a certain understanding of postmodernism, difference and otherness are granted a privileged status and almost absolutized, so that one ends up with isolated ghettos of difference having little or no communication with one another. Panikkar's philosophy ( and practice) of dialogue by contrast lays out the presuppositions, conditions, and norms of precisely such intercultural communication. As a way of distinguishing Panikkar's position from such multiculturalism, it is preferable to call his position intercultural and intracultural rather than multicultural. It is intercultural insofar as it advocates a full scale dialogue between cultures, and it is intracultural because, unlike Huntington, Panikkar recognizes the hybridity and heterogeneity of cultures. It can be argued that the "purity" and homogeneity of culture that Huntington avers is a myth.

There is a political edge to this intercultural plea. Panikkar is quite aware of the political and economic dominance of the modern West, and of what Husserl, and following him Heidegger, called the "Europeanization of the earth." Under the impact of such dominance, whether in the guise of neoliberalism, the "Washington consensus," or economic globalization where cultures are either disappearing, as in the case of many indigenous cultures, or being homogenized, Panikkar's plea for interculturality is also an appeal for cultural autonomy and pluralism. At its most basic, interculturality stands at the opposite pole to cultural colonialism, the misguided belief in the unquestioned validity and superiority of a single culture. Such monoculturalism usually goes along with an ideology of evolutionism and developmentalism, in which other cultures and perspectives are placed on a single evolutionary scale and subsumed within what is purported to be the most "complete" or "fulfilled" item on that scale. As opposed to such supercessionism, interculturality espouses the democratic and pluralistic ideals of a basic respect for cultural autonomy and difference, with the further specification that these different cultures remain open to, and attempt to learn from, one another. Peace at this level calls for the creation of a framework of peaceful co-existence among the various cultures, races, and religious traditions of the world within a single inter-connected ethos.

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At the level of philosophical anthropology, I would highlight Panikkar's focusing on the "you" or "thou" character of personal and interpersonal existence. In Martin Buber's famous characterization of human life, he distinguished between I-Thou and I-It relations, the former covering personal and the latter non-personal relations. One of Buber's fundamental strictures is that persons (I's and Thou's) are ontologically and ethically different from things (Its), and should not therefore be treated as Its. Or in Kantian language, persons should be regarded always as ends in themselves and never as means to an end. But even when we focus I-Thou relations, the tendency is to regard the I as primary and the Thou as, in a sense, secondary, as addressed by and subordinated to the I. This makes for egocentricity, and even if one balances this egocentricity by a stipulation of reciprocity, we end up with a reciprocal egocentricity. Panikkar by contrast, like Levinas, makes the You aspect primary. Instead of starting with a sovereign human I, he suggests that God or the Divine should properly be regarded as the real I. We humans are a Thou to the divine I, and by extension a Thou also to the cosmos and our fellow humans. Thus even though human consciousness remains crucial to the cosmotheandric mystery, its role is primarily as a registering consciousness, a mirror of the Real. Certainly each of us shares this destiny in a unique and individual manner, and we bear responsibility for being this mirror authentically. Panikkar's emphasis on the You character of our existence, our being *called* to respons(e)-ibility, is meant to shake us out of our egocentricity, to de-center us from our egos, and move us in the direction of a reflecting Self.

Levinas has drawn out some of the ethical implications of this de-centering of the self with his idea of ethics as first philosophy, displacing the primacy that is usually accorded to ontology. In seeing ourselves called to responsibility to God, our fellow humans, and nature, much of the human *hubris* that has bedeviled ethical-political life can, theoretically at least, be overcome. It is important to see that Panikkar's philosophy of radical relativity of the human cosmic and divine displaces, as all authentically dialogical philosophy does, the long tradition of Cartesianism in the modern West. Descartes himself may well have grounded the certainty of self-consciousness in divine creatureliness (the idea that we are made in God's image), but with the progressive secularization of the modern West this divine ground was set aside and self-consciousness was increasingly seen as self-grounded. From Descartes onwards, the tendency is to privilege the human at the expense of the divine and the cosmic, a development that reaches its logical conclusion in the Nietzschean conceit of the



*Uebersch.* That apotheosizing of the human has had disastrous consequences, and it is a welcome and urgently needed corrective to give the human its proper role as a mirror and reflector of the Real, rather its creator or originator.

This philosophical background might help to contextualize and make sense of Panikkar's distinctive peace-spirituality:

Peace means participation in the constitutive rhythm of reality and a harmonious contribution to this same rhythm. We, too, are responsible for the harmony of the universe. In cooperating with the universe, we enhance and transform it. This cooperation, this *synergy*, is active and passive all at once.

This participation, this sharing, requires a taking part, actively and passively, in the adventure of being.<sup>11</sup>

This is a distinctive view of peace, one that does *not* emerge from the human will. The more comprehensive and profound peace that Panikkar points to comes to us rather from the harmony of Reality itself, which we both reflect and contribute to, both receive and shape.

In one of the entries in his remarkable spiritual journal, *Markings*, Dag Hammarskjöld writes:

The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you, the better you will hear what is sounding outside. And only he who listens can speak. Is this the starting-point of the road towards the union of your two dreams—to be allowed in clarity of mind to mirror life, and in purity of heart to mould it?<sup>12</sup>

Panikkar would have strongly resonated with this insight of Hammarskjöld. Peace is not essentially of our human making. It is rather a gift from and of the cosmotheandric synergy. It is not even a gift from the Divine, if the Divine is conceived merely as “the other.” The Divine is neither oneself, which would be a form of pantheism, nor another, which would be a form of dualism or monotheism. Panikkar is rather a non-dualist. In this non-dualistic perspective peace is the energy that flows from the harmonious balance of the human, the cosmic, and the divine.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p 16.

<sup>12</sup> Hammarskjöld, D. *Markings*, trans. B W. H. Auden & Leif Sjoberg. London: Faber & Faber, 1966, p 35.

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Panikkar is obviously not opposed to human efforts at peace, which would be absurd, but he is aware of the irony of the many wars that have been waged in the name of peace. Peace for him in our time reflects a *new reality*, the proper balancing of the forces of the human, the cosmic, and the divine without granting ontological priority to any of them in isolation.

If nothing comes to us simply given, but rather everything is built, then we shall not be able to receive peace as a gift.

And here is the great current temptation: to wish to build peace as we manufacture anything else. Hence the fact that a profound reflection on peace interrogates us concerning the very foundations of current culture, a culture built on technoscience. Obviously, there is no question of turning the clock back, or of feeling the nostalgia of a lost paradise. It is a matter of being conscious of the anthropological change that is transpiring, in which it falls to us to be actors and spectators. The task is enormous. We do not even have the words to use.<sup>13</sup>

The task is indeed both novel and momentous. The existing literature on peace is usually divided among idealists and realists, the former focusing on the “ought,” and the latter on the “is.” This is, however, a false dualism, as Hegel and many others have pointed out. An authentic be-ing has a dynamic character expressing both being and becoming, the existent reality and the reality that is coming to be. Panikkar’s insistence on *living* the cosmotheandric harmony is his way of moving beyond this dualism and moving to a deeper dimension of be-ing. It is his contention that the new historical reality that is dawning requires this *metanoia*, this profound transformation of our be-ing and our modes of living.

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<sup>13</sup> Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p 11.



## **CIRPIT**

### **Intercultural Center dedicated to Raimon Panikkar Italy**

CIRPIT, a Center for international, inter-university studies, founded in June 24, 2009, under Raimon Panikkar's patronage and honorary presidency, is a no-profit organization that promotes intercultural initiatives and dialogical practices inspired by his philosophy.

CIRPIT activities are open to all disciplines (humanistic and scientific) and aim at creating a national and international network of people, associations, and institutions interested in Panikkar's philosophical legacy and in contemporary intercultural studies and interfaith dialogue.

Its founding members are M. Roberta Cappellini, Giuseppe Cognetti, and Anna Natalini.

#### **ACTIVITIES OF THE CIRPIT:**

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2. Academic, international Publications, in collaboration with Mimesis Publisher (Milan), a journal, *CIRPIT Review*, and a book series, TRIQUETRA.
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