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Pluralism Dialogue Interculture Pluralism Dialogue Interculture

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# CIRPIT REVIEW

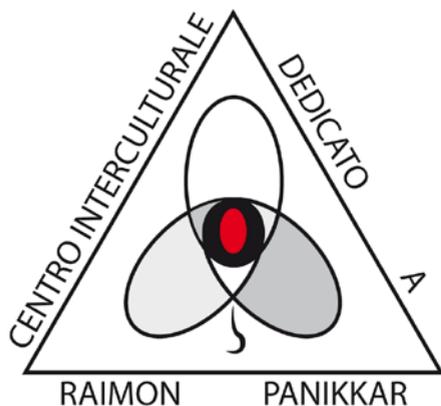
n. 3 - 2012 - SUPPLEMENT



## PROCEEDINGS

George Mason University, Fairfax (US-VA), 2011





## **CIRPIT REVIEW – n. 3 – Supplement**

### **Proceedings**

Rhythm and Vision Conference. In Memory of Raimon Panikkar  
George Mason University, Fairfax (US-VA), April, 9, 2011

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# CIRPIT REVIEW

n. 3 – 2012 – Supplement

## Proceedings

Rhythm and Vision Conference  
In Memory of Raimon Panikkar

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## **CIRPIT REVIEW**

Intercultural Centre dedicated to Raimon Panikkar

Centro Interculturale dedicato a Raimon Panikkar

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## Editorial

Paolo Calabrò  
*CIRPIT Editorial Director*

With this Supplement Issue 3/2012, of our *CIRPIT REVIEW*, the Intercultural Center dedicated to Raimon Panikkar intends to follow up the annual publication of Proceedings of national and international Conferences, on those topics dear to Raimon Panikkar, which gave birth to the Review: pluralism, interculturality and dialogue. In particular this Issue contains the Proceedings of the Conference held in Fairfax (US-VA), at George Mason University, in April 2011, entitled “*Rhythm and Vision Conference: In Memory of Raimon Panikkar*”. It was attended by representatives from many countries, including the United States, New Zealand, India, Australia, Japan, and Italy.

Various countries with different cultures, experiences and languages, joined together for a reflection, not of universal intents, but just of sharing. Similarly to the multicolored fragments of a beam of light split by a prism – to use a metaphor – we face reality in the specific color of our perspective. But not knowing where the prism finishes (and no tower of Babel can return it to us), we need to draw close to one another to try to make the whole idea of how incredibly colorful and harmonious reality is.

We do this through ideas, that is, through our languages which are symbols, aware that no clear conceptual understanding, nor any exhaustive linguistic translation is possible, but only an intercultural meeting. According to the aforementioned metaphor, as no color can be represented by another, so no language (and therefore no idea) can be exactly expressed by another.

Therefore, if our effort is directed at the expansion of our mythical space through our opening to other linguistic (and theoretical) horizons – an attempt that the *CR* summarizes in the background words of the cover: pluralism, interculturality and dialogue, expressed in the authors’ different idioms – nonetheless we are aware that our effort is not an achievement. An awareness that, at its best option, lets those ideas be expressed in their own original linguistic context: hence the choice – that the *CR* has been carrying on since its foundation – to publish the Proceedings in the Conference

languages (in this case English, with the enrichment of the abstracts in the authors' native idioms), in order to safeguard the equal dignity of all cultures and languages.

We'd like to express our thanks to those who have allowed the realization of this Issue: to CIRPIT directors: Roberta Cappellini, Giuseppe Cognetti and Anna Natalini; to Mimesis Publisher, which lists this publication in its prestigious philosophical catalog, and finally, to all the authors, who with extreme accuracy have presented here their contributions. A special mention is made of our dearest Reverend Donald G. Dawe, who unfortunately died in early 2012, to whom this Issue is dedicated.

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## Introduction

Young-chan Ro

*George Mason University, Fairfax (US-VA)*

This volume is the collection of the papers presented at the conference, **Rhythm and Vision: In Memory of Raimon Panikkar** (1918-2010) at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, just outside of Washington D.C., April 8-10, 2011. The conference was the first academic meeting in North America to commemorate Raimon Panikkar who passed away on August 26, 2010. There were several scholarly gatherings and meetings to celebrate Raimon Panikkar's life and his works, but these meetings took place outside of North America, mostly in the European countries including Spain, Italy, and in India. This conference, however, was a scholarly meeting held in the vicinity of Washington D.C. symbolizing the American side of Panikkar's life, especially his contributions to the American intellectual and scholarly community, while he was teaching at both Harvard University (1966-1971) and the University of California at Santa Barbara (1971-1987). Most participants of the conference were either Panikkar's former students who did their doctoral work under his direction or those who were deeply influenced by him and had developed a close personal and professional relationship with him over years and decades. They came from near and far including New Zealand, Australia, India, and Italy making truly an international conference. It was also a sad moment in remembering two of Panikkar's former students at Santa Barbara, Roger Rapp and Warren Lew who died unexpectedly. Both Warren and Roger were special to Panikkar. They were not only his students but also were valuable friends who had worked on many occasions editing Panikkar's writings. Roger, for example, was one of the editors working on the various stages of editing and shaping of Panikkar's writing of *The Rhythm of Being*.

This conference also was an occasion to celebrate the long awaited publication of *The Rhythm of Being* (Orbis, 2010), Panikkar's Gifford Lectures delivered at Edinburgh University, Scotland, in 1989. Panikkar drafted and redrafted, wrote and rewrote this book over two decades after his initial delivery at Edinburgh. *The Rhythm of Being* has a special significance to the participants in this conference. Scott Eastham, the main editor of *The Rhythm of Being*, and to whom Panikkar dedicated his book

came all the way from New Zealand to deliver a keynote speech: “*Rhythm in the Making: Panikkar’s Unfinished Masterpiece*.” Scott Eastham edited Panikkar’s Gifford Lectures, from the recording of Panikkar’s oral lectures at Edinburgh, transcribing them and editing the whole volume. It is meaningful to note that Joseph Prabhu who wrote the Forward to this book was also a participant in this conference. This conference, thus, signifies Raimon’s life and thoughts. It was a gathering of a few of his beloved former students and some of his close friends who were fortunate to get to know the depth of both his personal life and intellectual world in celebrating the publication of *The Rhythm of Being* which is a culmination of his life-long thoughts and ideas developed over several decades.

One of Raimon Panikkar’s close American friends, Donald G. Dawe (1927-2012), Professor Emeritus at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia (now Union Presbyterian Seminary), passed away on June 4, 2012. Donald Dawe was one of the earliest American theologians and scholars who recognized the critical contributions of Panikkar’s approach in understanding Christian faith in the context of a religiously plural world. Donald Dawe was deeply impressed when he met Panikkar while Panikkar was teaching at Harvard’s prestigious Center for the Study of World Religions. Since their initial meeting in 1968 at Harvard, Dawe became one of the earliest American advocates of Panikkar to the theologians and Christian intellectuals in North America. His opening address, “*Raimon Panikkar-Frontier Guide*” was an eloquent illustration and a concise summary of the impact of Panikkar’s thoughts on the American social and intellectual context, especially in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

Dawe was one of those who were close enough to Panikkar in understanding the importance of ritual as Panikkar himself so often performed wherever he was in either Santa Barbara or Barcelona especially at the conclusion of seminar or conference. In the same spirit and manner, at the end of the conference, Dawe with Francis X D’Sa conducted communion worship service where the participants spoke in their own native tongues. Therefore, it is most appropriate to dedicate the current issue of CIRPIT REVIEW in memory of our beloved friend, to Donald G. Dawe.

Lastly, we are most grateful to Roberta Cappellini, President of Centro Interculturale Dedicato A Raimon Panikkar (CIRPIT), who also participated in the conference, made this opportunity possible to publish the papers presented at the conference in this volume of CIRPIT REVIEW.

## **Raimon Panikkar – Frontier Guide**

Donald G. Dawe

*Professor Emeritus, Union Presbyterian Seminary*

Raimon Panikkar lived on spiritual, intellectual, emotional frontiers. It was here where his vision of cosmotheandric reality was formed. But negotiating frontiers is a tricky business. We need guides. Raimon Panikkar was my guide as I crossed three frontiers I faced as a Christian theologian. These are frontiers that we face in religious studies and in our spiritual lives today:

I. Historical Analysis and the Transcendent

II. Critical Philosophy and Ontology

III. Confessional Theology and Human Religiousness

We encounter Panikkar as a frontier guide through his writings. His books have guided and inspired me since I first read *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* in 1968 to my reading *The Rhythm of Being* in 2011. However, I learned the depth and power of his guidance through knowing him as a friend and mentor.

We met in September 1968, when he came to the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University. I had arrived there to be a post-doctoral fellow of the Center with Wilfred Cantwell Smith. I was subsequently with Panikkar in Varanasi in his apartment over a Shiva Temple on the Ganges, then later at my home base at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.

## **Time of Crisis – Door Of Hope**

The academic year 1968 – 69 was “the best of times and the worst of times.” Graduate education was flourishing; religious studies departments were growing in schools that had never had them before. Poets, musicians, teachers and counselors were finding spiritual riches in religions beyond the charmed circle of the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition sanctioned by our culture.

It was also the time when student protests resulted in violence, as the war in Vietnam dragged on and on. The civil rights movement and the anti-poverty programs languished under the pressure of the war. In the spring of 1969, antiwar protests brought strikes and the occupation of buildings on the Harvard campus. It was ended by the Harvard Bust, a brutal police riot against the students. The forces of reaction were responding to these protests all over the country by repression. It was the beginning of a wave of reaction that has undercut American life ever since.

Student and faculty leaders were busy recruiting followers for their causes to solve the problems that beset us. The schemes went all the way from brute repression from the right to the glorifying of Chairman Mao and his Little Red Book on the left. John Kenneth Galbraith was busy on the Harvard campus with his efforts to do a repair job on the badly battered version of Camelot he had inherited from the Kennedys. American liberalism wanted to regain its moral leadership. The noise level was high. The voices were shrill.

It seemed to be the time for everyone to chose-up sides. In the midst of this, Raimon Panikkar was a strong clear voice that did not join any of the competing sects. He held out a confident but realistic hope. The source of this hope was his conviction that the future is not contained already in the present. We are not caught in the iron cage of determinism, nor left drifting into nihilistic chaos.

The future is emerging fraught with hope and healing but also with threat and destruction. A just and compassionate future is not found by one imperium triumphing over all the others. Hope comes in our moving into the future caught up spiritually, intellectually and ethically in the Rhythm of Being, not in our own private dances. Panikkar attracted attention among students and faculty. His ethical and spiritual guidance was a source of hope among the angry voices on every side. For Panikkar political question are never simply political because political life takes place within cosmotheandric reality.

### **Historical Analysis and the Transcendent**

On a highly secularized campus, people wanted to know what religion had to do with all this? Was human religiousness a witness to the transcendent? Does it give us access to sources of healing and hope, or is it to be explained through studying the social, political, economic, psychological forces in which it functions? Harvard was ready, not without struggle, to understand religion by historical analysis.

This was a time when scholars were producing massive works of “thick-description” analyzing religious rituals, scriptures, community life, ethics, language and art. To be concerned with the life of faith and how religion functions, as we face the mystery of our being, is outside the purview of the modern research university.

People looked at the work of Raimon Panikkar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and the Center for the Study of World Religions as “too missionary oriented” to qualify as academically important. Such thinking was perhaps useful in theological seminaries. Critics, however, realized they could not call Panikkar’s work unscholarly. His massive learning and linguistic virtuosity made that impossible. But he was dealing, they claimed, with subjective question best treated by psychological and sociological study, not philosophical reflection or theological affirmation.

Panikkar guides us over the frontier between historical analysis and the transcendent through his understanding of how the accumulated tradition of a religion functions in the life of faith. The sacred texts, rituals, sites, persons and rules of life of a religious community function religiously because they have the power to point us beyond ourselves to the transcendent. Spiritually they have the power to allow us to actualize our relationship with the transcendent. In the power of the Spirit the accumulated tradition becomes the “means of grace” by which we encounter cosmotheandric reality as healing and hope.

A sacred text, for example, points in two directions:

1. It points behind itself to the historical situation from which it came. It is to be studied by historical analysis.
2. It points ahead of itself to the transcendent and the new being it can create.

To deal with a sacred text in faith is to expect more from it than historical information or ethical rules. When a community designates a text as “inspired,” it affirms its ability to create meaning and hope because it reveals cosmotheandric reality.

The tragic misunderstanding of fundamentalism, that Panikkar implacably opposed, is to distort the historical understanding of a text in the effort to show it is inspired and inerrant. A sacred text does not await historical verification. It is validated by creating new being. Historical analysis does not undercut this power, but it does not create it either.

Panikkar did combat the reductionist argument passed off as scientific or historical that explains religion as an epiphenomenon. Religion is viewed

as an inevitable outgrowth of social, political, psychological, economic, evolutionary forces without reference to the transcendent. Currently the popular reductionist view of religion is arguing on evolutionary, genetic and neurophysiologic grounds to explain how humans became religious. Panikkar holds that religion must be understood in terms of itself. In this he is in the phenomenological tradition, although critical of it in other respects.

Panikkar is our guide in crossing the frontier between historical analysis and the transcendent. The path is no superhighway. It is a way, although a way that disappears as we reach our goal. It becomes “the way that is no-way.”

### **Critical Philosophy And Ontology**

The sharpest objections to Panikkar’s work came from the tradition of the critical philosophy, then current in America. Critical philosophy emerged in the eighteenth century with Hume and Kant who directed attention at how we think. In critical philosophy, intricate speculation is pointless, if our logic is flawed or our language meaningless. By the end of the nineteenth century, critical philosophy took new more radical forms.

The sharpest questions were raised about ontology, or as it is often called “metaphysics,” the science of being. The critics argued that the language of ontology is meaningless or, at best, poetry. Such language may have emotive value but does not identify realities that are open to verification. Significant problems can be defined in ordinary language and are open to verification. Traditional ontologies fail both these tests.

For Panikkar to understand religion requires an ontology because to live in faith is to experience the power and meaning of the transcendent. Cosmotheandric reality is not on empty set but has a meaning and power of its own. But because it is transcendent, it is not something we make, shape or control. It cannot be characterized by ordinary language, or scientific language. Ontology requires a language that does not give the transcendent literal descriptions or reduce it to testable proposition.

Ontology utilizes the language of metaphor and symbol. It is what Panikkar calls “*Mythos*,” a language whose aim is to allow our sharing in cosmotheandric reality as new being. This is to be distinguished from “mythologies” and “ideologies,” whose pseudo-scientific, supposedly descriptive ontologies give the power to domineer thought and action. Panikkar gladly embraces critical philosophy against ideologies and mythologies.

In characterizing cosmotheandric reality Panikkar turns to the philosophical and doctrinal systems of Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism to find his master metaphors. He was determined that cosmotheandric reality is not a conception of vague generalization left floating in eternity with no connection with everyday life. He looks for metaphors to interpret how the transcendent is immanent, and how the immanent is transcendent. He finds in Christian theology two metaphors: “*Perichoresis*” and “*Trinitas*” that became critical keys to his teachings on cosmotheandric reality. He draws other metaphors from advaita and Buddhism.

1. *Perichoresis*, “coinherence” or “interpenetration” is used in Christian theology to characterize the relationship of the human and divine natures of Christ. Panikkar interprets *Perichoresis* as “co-in-dependence.” In Patristic and Scholastic Christologies, in the Christ the human and divine natures do not simply influence one another, they interpenetrate one another sharing their attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*) in one person.

2. *Trinitas* or Trinity is the unique way in which Christians confess their faith in One God. The unity of God is that of a mutually begetting triad of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is a dynamic being. The three persons of the Godhead are one God because they are related by *Perichoresis*. (interpenetration) through the dynamic process of *Trinitas*.

In Christian theology these metaphors are limited to the person of Christ and the Trinity. For Panikkar to use these terms as characterizations of cosmotheandric reality, they had to be freed of this limitation. They are to be used as a characterization of all reality. Cosmos coinheres in Theos that coinheres in Cosmos through a triadic process. This process involves not just one person or one being, but all reality.

Panikkar makes *Perichoresis* and *Trinitas* into metaphors for all reality not by intellectually imposing a foreign meaning to them. He looked at them from the within. Panikkar was steeped in Christian theology not only on the intellectual level but in his spirituality as well. He prayed the faith, celebrated the faith, lived the faith. He did not forget that he was a priest. I was with him when he celebrated the Latin Mass that he had translated into Sanskrit.

He came to know the interpenetration of cosmos-anthropos-theos in dynamic unity from within, from faith. This was not a heteronomous conclusion he reached on his own. It was the unfolding of the real amidst the triumphs and tragedies of human existence.

## **Confessional Theology And Human Religiousness**

Crossing the frontier between confessional theology and human religiosity is for Christians a uniquely acute problem. It was a difficult frontier for me personally. It was here I came to know Raimon Panikkar not only as an intellectual guide but as a spiritual mentor and guide.

I was in the tradition of modern Christian theology stemming from Karl Barth, as interpreted by my teachers Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. It was a tradition of critical theology that taught that Christianity had lost its moral direction and spiritual power because Christians had lost touch with the revelational sources of its faith by merging uncritically into modern culture. We were to regain our prophetic message and spiritual power from returning to the biblical witness, to revelation. As Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer proclaimed, Nazism was the end product of modern culture that was in crisis.

Intellectually that meant that the only possible theology was a confessional theology. Once theology makes God a general idea to be proved or disproved. Once the commandment to love is made subject to ethnic groups or national interest, or values determined by culture, the demonic will inevitably emerge.

This was a dramatic and convincing theology to my generation just emerging from World War II. But it suffered from a fallacy of which we were blithely unaware. The “world” to which this theology was addressed was the world of western Christendom in Europe and North America. It did not seem to notice the two thirds of the world that lived outside this charmed circle of our concern.

We insisted on confessional theology as a means of solving our problem, with no comprehension of the problems of the anyone else.

When I met Panikkar, my confidence in confession theology was eroded by my students and colleagues at Macalester College where I was teaching. I started out thinking Panikkar would help me to develop a neat scheme for fitting all those other religions into a scheme in my confessional theology.

As I spread these speculations out to Panikkar, he was a direct and forceful spiritual guide. He listened carefully and then said to me, “Don, that’s nothing but fundamentalism.” It was a put down I shall never forget because it was the beginning of realizing that my story is not the only story. We cannot live in a religiously plural world by granting none Christian religions the vague possibility of salvation through “extraordinary means of grace.” No amount of fancy intellectual footwork can compensate for

blindness to two thirds of the human family. I have to accept the spiritual authenticity of those whose faith is shaped by traditions other than my own.

In developing our understanding of cosmotheandric reality, Panikkar has given us the intellectual tools for shaping a religiously plural world redeemed by compassion and shaped by justice. We do not look at other religions to see if we are all saying the same thing. They are not. We enter into the faith of other communities respecting what they are and what they have to add to the human spiritual patrimony.

Our vision is not uncritical. Religion has a shadow side of tragic proportions. We are not called upon to sprinkle holy water on the absurd and destructive in any religious tradition. We are enabled to rejoice in the peace, joy and hope faith brings to all people. But we do look and listen under Panikkar's guidance to hear the Rhythm of Being.

*Richmond, Virginia*

*April 4, 2011*



## **Rhythm in the Making: Panikkar's Unfinished Masterpiece**

Scott Eastham

*Senior Lecturer, Massey University, New Zealand*

*A work of art is meant to be completed by the beholder.*<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Keynote Address: An account of the summer of 1990 which the author spent in Tavertet with Panikkar editing his Gifford Lectures into the early drafts of *The Rhythm of Being*, including a positive interpretation of the oddly 'unfinished' character of the book as finally published.

### **Aesthetic: Incomplete is 'Cool'**

Raimon Panikkar's *Rhythm of Being* has finally been published, but lacks... finality. A concluding chapter has been omitted, replaced by an apology for "much presumptuous research... about something we do not and cannot know anything about."<sup>2</sup>

What's going on here? There are several unsatisfactory biographical responses: old age, physical or mental frailty, maybe just tiredness, or vanity, or humility, or...? Or none of the above! Who can say for sure yet whether Panikkar failed to bring off his *magnum opus*, or ultimately succeeded in conveying something of the 'unfinishable' character of such a

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Wesselow, *The Way of the Maker*, S. Eastham, ed., Lanham/New York/Oxford (University Press of America), 77.

<sup>2</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being - The Unbroken Trinity*, New York (Orbis) 2011, 405.

project? “Reality is a sketch we are all trying to make,”<sup>3</sup> he claims at the outset, a remark which leads in a more positive direction.

Think of the Impressionists. If a visual image really just consists of daubs of colour and light, then it must be more or less consciously re-envisioned by each viewer at each viewing, like the ‘authorless’ Veda. In the 19th Century the ancient art of painting was visibly straining to come to grips with photography’s new power to ‘capture’ images. Or consider McLuhan’s ‘cool’ media in the 1960s. He saw that cartoons or pixels on a TV screen, unfinished to the naked eye, were completed in the mind’s eye and therefore more compelling, engaging, almost irresistible. In periods of rapid technological change like the shifting media maelstrom we face around us today, McLuhan saw that ‘cool’ trumps ‘hot’ – finished high-definition forms – every time. Why? Because such ‘rough’ works are more readily recomposed and amalgamated into new media forms. Analog photos and music are of much higher fidelity than digital, but we gladly trade them for the convenience and multimedia versatility of the digital world.<sup>4</sup> These days the Internet may be the ultimate ‘cool’ medium: it is participatory, evolving, involving – and utterly inchoate until you begin to search, select, cache, comment, share, etc. But to stay with artistic endeavor: Think of all the famous ‘apologies’ that leave a kind of openendedness to masterpieces like Dante’s *Paradiso*, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare’s final play, *The Tempest*, or in our own time Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*.<sup>5</sup> What do you make of Leonardo’s own projected *Opera Omnia*, an encyclopedic compendium he intended to draw from his notebooks – one last project he failed to complete? Those who aim high tend to fall short, at least in their own estimation.

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Francis Fukuyama, “All Hail... Analog?,” *Wall Street Journal*, 26 February 2011, <http://goo.gl/5Fq9M>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dante’s *Paradiso* XXXIII, 133-136, where Dante likens himself, before the triune mystery, to the geometer unable to square the circle; or Chaucer at the close of the *Canterbury Tales*, NY (Houghton) 1961, 265: “Wherefore I biseke you mekely, for the mercy of God, that ye preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes; and namely of my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanieties, the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns...”; or indeed Shakespeare taking leave of the stage in *The Tempest*: “As you yourself from crimes would pardoned be, Let your indulgence set me free”; or Pound’s closing Canto (CXX): “I have tried to write Paradise ... Let the Gods forgive what I have made/ Let those I love try to forgive what I have made.” (Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*, Canto CXX.).

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The distinction between *logos* and *mythos* in Panikkar's work functions much like that between text and context in literature, or between figure and ground in painting. The *mythos* is not the high-definition figure in the foreground, it is the ever-deepening horizon in the background, which tends to retreat from the eye. Think of those strangely unstable mountains looming behind the Mona Lisa...

Nevertheless, Panikkar's *Rhythm of Being* still looks a little messy, and I don't mean just the sloppy proofreading. The book's terminology mostly began life in English with his early books on *Trinity* and *Worship*; became more flexible and fluent in compilations like *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics*<sup>6</sup> and *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* from the 1970s; and then first really crystallized as a 'whole' in *The Cosmotheandric Experience*. *Rhythm of Being* articulates the divine dimension of that emerging threefold *mythos* in its mature form, but the terminology is still evolving and exploratory. The book took 20 years to appear, so it is not surprising that it feels a little 'overripe' here and there. It has clearly been overwritten more than once (which renders parts of it too finely-tuned, too 'hot,' to be totally 'cool'). But what seem to be repetitions may simply be reiterations, that is, the threefold pattern reiterated in each of its three folds, etc. The text never quite drones, yet Panikkar seems insistent that the book itself display this 'rhythmic' character.

In the end, he says he used an editorial 'axe' to cut through the overgrowth. He would only write about things he had personally experienced. It was this editorial axiom which would not permit the final chapter on "The Survival of Being." How indeed could your reflection survive the collapse of Everything? I think what he wanted was to keep the rhythm going, or as they say in California, "keep the vibe alive."

Perhaps it would help if I filled in some of the early days of the book's life-story.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics*, New York (Paulist) 1979 for, e.g., *mythos* and *logos*, the 'God of Being' and 'Being of God', symbol rather than percept or concept, etc.

### **Anecdotal: An Interlude of Farce<sup>7</sup>**

In oral cultures, the storyteller usually tells any story from the very beginning, often all the way back to the moment of creation. In that way, the ‘whole story’ is never forgotten, since it forms the proper context for recounting any recent event. Everything appears in the light of the whole, as a part of the whole, rather than piecemeal – in arbitrary and disconnected fragments like our daily news in western media: a chaotic mash-up of random ‘facts’, a glut of ads, ‘and now to sports.’ That more traditional method of recollection would take me back at least to *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics*, and to the terminology first fully established in English there in the mid-1970s, but it would also take far too long for this occasion.

So let’s say the project began for me, here in the Washington D.C. area, with a phone call sometime in 1988, when Panikkar told me he would decline an offer to give the Gifford Lectures in May of 1989 unless I agreed to edit the volume that would emerge. Okay, well... what do you say? I considered the Gifford Lectures to be the highest podium in English, with the likes of William James and Etienne Gilson as illustrious predecessors. So of course I accepted. Fortunately, I was able to get myself to Edinburgh at the close of classes in Montréal to hear the lectures in person – spending three delightful weeks rooming and roaming around Edinburgh with Gerard Hall, who was at the time completing his ground-breaking Ph.D. dissertation on Panikkar’s religious pluralism at CUA. The first lecture was magical. It opened with music – a haunting flute solo<sup>8</sup> – for the only time in a hundred years. Something new was afoot, and the music set the mood perfectly. But I looked around with increasing alarm as I realized that the whole thing, the Centennial Gifford Lectures no less (by Panikkar’s reckoning), was not being recorded! I happened to have a little mono recorder with me, and turned it on. The quality was poor, so next day I rushed out to buy a proper microphone which I was able to secure to the podium right under his nose. The subsequent lectures came out clearly.

Contrary to Panikkar’s remarks in the Preface to the volume, no transcript was ever made from those tapes. I still have them, and I would have been the one to transcribe them.<sup>9</sup> I suspect Panikkar was thinking back

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Norman O’Brown’s raucous chapter “An Interlude of Farce,” *Closing Time*, New York (Vintage) 1973: “Farce is the mode of consciousness in which a people take leave of their history.” (53).

<sup>8</sup> Claude Debussy, *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faun*.

<sup>9</sup> While writing my dissertation, I worked for and later managed a court reporting company in San Francisco. Panikkar was difficult to transcribe for those unfamiliar with his manner

to *Blessed Simplicity*, where we had indeed been obliged to work from a woefully inadequate transcript, which had to be retranscribed on the hoof. That *modus operandi* proved so irksome and awkward that this time I edited the full set of his lecture notes instead, transcribed into WordPerfect for the computer by his secretary in Vic at the time, Josep Paré.

They resembled, to begin with, ten roughed-out articles. Panikkar's lecture format permeates them, and may account for some of the 'reiterative' quality of the eventual book. There is a threefold patterning similar to those he used in his outline sketches for lectures, full of horizontal Y-forked distinctions, usually two-or three-pronged lead-ins to a nondual resolution: >—. (I once saw him lecture from a page that consisted *only* of a half dozen of these little 'divining rods,' without any words at all on the page.) In this case, the lecture notes sent to me in Canada afterwards were extensive, even unnecessarily wordy. He had trimmed them drastically for the actual lectures. I spent a good deal of time trying to eliminate redundancies, especially in the first two lectures. But by the time the book was published, much of that reiterative patterning had crept back in through his revisions. It's simply the way he goes about lecturing, by 'thinking aloud' – always tending to return to the whole story, since lecturing is an oral format. Beyond this, Panikkar's rewrites can pop up anywhere. He often rewrote backwards as well as forwards, adding for instance a new beginning sequence on method long after apparently finishing an article or chapter.

The year following the Gifford Lectures (1990) saw my little family (wife Mary and two daughters, one only four months old) shift to Tavertet for the entire summer to work with Panikkar on the lectures... a beautiful, isolated spot for three months of intensive slave-labor!<sup>10</sup> The stunning beauty of the landscape is recounted in my 'Introduction' to *The Cosmotheandric Experience*. While this was a splendid scholarly experience for me – "To study with the white wings of time passing, is not that our delight"<sup>11</sup> – it was also a difficult and daunting summer in many ways,

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and mannerisms.

<sup>10</sup> We stayed in Can Casals, a house at the edge of town clinging to the cliff-top, while Panikkar himself resided up a little hillock at Can Feló, with a view over the whole town. Vivarium was under construction below and between the two houses, the main room in good enough shape by summer's end for me to deliver a lecture there on the history of glass technology and 'focus' in the media. (To my surprise and delight, Panikkar translated for me that time, into Catalan for the local audience.)

<sup>11</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Pisan Cantos*, R. Sieburth, Ed., New York (New Directions) 2003 Canto LXXIV, 435-6, 15. The entire passage seems apposite:

especially for Mary, relegated to child-care, food provision, and laundry-duty. Panikkar likes to speak of not throwing out the baby with the bathwater, but I can testify that he had no experience whatsoever with howling, splashing infants in bathtubs – a daily ritual for us in the sometimes blistering heat of the Tavertet summer. Meanwhile, life went on according to the Catalan rhythms, the big midday meal and the long siestas in the heat of the day, the occasional fiesta, the evening meals in the village going on until the last Catalan *cançó* had been sung well after midnight. Warren Lew from Santa Barbara drove up the mountain roads for a brief visit, and Camellia MacPherson from Canada joined us too for a few days.

Since I had spent many hours reviewing both notes and tapes the preceding year, we were able to produce very nearly a chapter a week. The PC I was given turned out to have a ‘ping-pong’ virus and unexpectedly erased one entire chapter (“The Divine Mystery,” notoriously elusive), which I had to reconstitute from notes and memory. In the published volume, some of the original lecture-chapters have been conflated (Appendix A), but we made good progress in nailing down a text that reflected the actual lectures, as well as refining what he wanted to say there. Each chapter went through about three to four complete revisions. At this point they were still “The Gifford Lectures,” without footnotes. Usually I would produce a draft from his notes, and he would revise that; I would revise his revisions, he would react to that; I would polish the ‘finished’ text, and we’d move on to the next. The pace was relentless, the work as fascinating as it was demanding. If only we had a little more time to dwell on each of the vast topics!

We had always worked well together in such intensive sessions, and about ten weeks flew by before I knew it. I did not at the time think of it as our last major collaborative project. The whole endeavor must have taken considerable energy because despite eating well and with gusto I lost between 15 to 20 pounds (and in those days I did not carry so much excess baggage). We had two one-day getaways with Panikkar and his wife Maria, our gracious hostess – who had also accompanied him to the lectures in Edinburgh – one expedition to neighboring Vic, where my shy eldest daughter surprised us all by leaping boldly into the *sarabande* at the plaza,

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to study with the white wings of time passing

is not that our delight

to have friends come from far countries

is not that pleasure

nor to care that we are untrumpeted. (LXXIV, 435-39)

and a second excursion into the Pyrenees at Nuria via Ripoll – from which we descended only to discover that the media had been frantically trying to contact Panikkar all day– he had just won the Machado Award, Spain’s highest literary honor. In odd hours, we also had plenty of chances to explore the exhilarating cliff walks and hidden paths near Tavertet together. In those days Panikkar got around the place like a spry 72-year-old mountain goat.

But our time in Spain was rapidly drawing to a close. My wife Mary, bilingual in Spanish, had not gotten to see much of the Spain she loved, and the children were going stir crazy with all this scholarly peace and quiet. I requested a three-day weekend away for the family in Barcelona, as he himself was heading to Holland for a conference called “Art Meets Science and Spirituality.” No problem, said Panikkar, shortly after my four-year-old had invaded his study yet again, and off we went by car and train to the city. We had a spectacular time there, too – rambling along the Ramblas, reconnoitering the Gothic Quarter, discovering Gaudí and Miró and early Picasso, letting the kids play with the pigeons in Plaça Catalunya, etc. But in retrospect, I have to think that that little side-trip may have broken the ‘rhythm’ of producing the book. We had gotten up readable drafts of all but the final chapter, so I assumed it would be straightforward to pick up where we left off in the last ten days or so. But it proved otherwise. The final chapter never really gelled, and we both knew it. The household at Can Feló was in a mild uproar by then anyway, since a Dutch film crew from the conference was set to arrive (just after our stay) to film the Tavertet sequences sandwiched into the televised ‘Proceedings’ series.

In retrospect, returning from Barcelona to work on the end of the book proved to be an unusual experience in my 30-plus years of editing Panikkar. Maybe it was just fatigue, but I felt an odd distance from the text; the work seemed mechanical. I felt we were spinning our wheels, running through terminological devices from the ‘70s and ‘80s, making all the nice distinctions about something so elusive – basically not just the end of the book, but the end of everything!– that the chapter never really came together. He kept trying to say “there is no pre-existing pattern,” in threefold, I might even say ‘omnitrangulated’ ways.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps he was at that point reaching for the sky, touching the limits of his own *mythos*. During this frustrating week I produced (in self-defense?!) a one-paragraph spoof of his style called ‘The Baby & the Bathwater,’ which I made bold to

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<sup>12</sup> “Omnitrangulated” and even “omniintertriangulated” are terms I have found applicable beyond my work on R. Buckminster Fuller; cf. S. Eastham, *American Dreamer*, Cambridge (Lutterworth) 2007.

place at the start of the manuscript for him to find after we'd left, a little half-serious joke between friends. One of the things I most miss about Panikkar is his dry sense of humor; I'm sure my little parody did not strike him as disrespectful. At least I could finish one page properly, I thought at the time. A single page had to be held open in the WordPerfect document to stabilize the pagination for the rest of the book. A brief 'Pseudo-Acknowledgment' seemed to fit the bill, and this is what came out that August of 1990. Over the intervening years, the farcical concluding lines seem to have acquired an echo:

### ~~ACKNOWLEDGMENTS~~

I acknowledge God, Man, and Cosmos, with qualifications. I have no intention of omitting anyone, or anything – not even nothing, for that matter. Far be it from me to throw out the baby with the bathwater. I must therefore give due credit not only to the bright-eyed baby, but to the dirty bathwater as well. A sole question remains, and it is ultimate: *Who will scrub the tub?* On the one hand, we have the soap. On the other, the rag. If we put the soap on the rag, we shall soon run out of soap. If we put the rag on the soap, we may never find it again. The risk is real: The entire affair may go down the drain at any moment. Is there a middle way? With our third eye, the *ajna* of the indic traditions, or the pineal gland for the latter-day phrenologists of modern science, we discern that we are covered with Water. *Idam sarvam*, “all this” or “this All” is all too obviously all wet. But are we in the tub of water, or the water of the tub? To our senses (which are very slippery) and our intellect (even more so), no answer presents itself. But no answer is no answer. Is there then no question? What I am saying is that there is no question there is no question. We have only to pull the plug.

Ironically enough, as we all know by now, 20 years later he ended up ‘pulling the plug’ on the entire final chapter. It was bathwater after all. Rhythm properly has no ending, he tells us at the beginning of the book. The only way a rhythmic sequence can properly come to an end is by artificially breaking the strophe. In Greek this is quite literally a catastrophe, a *kata/strophe*.

After that summer, I don't know the full story of what happened to the manuscript. I had received it as a rough second draft; I left it at M7, manuscript seven. The book has changed quite a bit since then, but about 70-75% of the present volume was produced that summer. The overall

authorial ‘voice’ is intact, and still rings true: It is Panikkar speaking. For a long while, I thought he would send me a revised draft of the final chapter, but that never happened, despite my best efforts to suggest clever ways to close the book. I do know it lay dormant for several years. I guess I’m fortunate he dedicated the book to me; otherwise people might think I’d made such a mess of it that it took him twenty years to fix it! To me it seemed to be simmering on a back burner all the while, as more urgent projects demanded Panikkar’s attention. I believe Ignasi Boada spearheaded the effort a decade ago to revise and add new sections, as well as getting the notes in order (I had dealt only with the text of the lectures), and I also know that Joseph Cuneen and Roger Rapp and others contributed corrections to the English, diacriticals for the original language quotations, and suggestions about the last couple of drafts. The present incomplete volume emerged, in his words (at about the 14th draft), as “a communitarian effort.” Incredibly, it still needs editing here and there, as well as a serious proofreading, which the publisher failed to provide. “No work is perfect,” he wrote me after he had at last agreed to release it. But in this case, Orbis failed to provide even the subtitle of the volume, *The Unbroken Trinity*, and somehow managed to misspell the author’s name on the spine.<sup>13</sup>

### **Advaitic: The Great Turning**

My experience with this book has perhaps led me to see it more as a do-it-yourself project than a finished text. Nevertheless, I will assert here that while it may be *un*-finished in its *ex*-plications, it is quite possibly *in*-finite in its *im*-plications.<sup>14</sup>

Look at the aspects still to be developed, the sketches toward an entire *kosmology* and *anthropophany*, for instance, their further (presumably threefold) patterns yet to be articulated. A great deal of follow-up is implied

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<sup>13</sup> I will forego listing all the sorts of errors, some hardly noticeable, that need attention before a second edition or translation is undertaken. But they certainly include the shortcomings noted in Appendix B.

<sup>14</sup> “The cosmotheandric experience... is an open, never closed experience. Whole does not mean complete, but undivided. The cosmotheandric experience puts us in touch with the real in an undivided manner. Precisely because the real is also divine, this contact with reality is never finished, never completely ‘touched’ or wholly embraced. In a sense, it is an experience of the (dimension of) ineffability, infinity, numinosity, freedom ... inherent in everything.” (Rhythm, 322.)

here, to ‘real’-ize the ‘speaking’ of the kosmos (*kosmos-legein*), and to ‘monstrate’ the full stature of human(e) being.

Some of the terminological novelties work well, others are less successful. I think *inter-independence* works, but I am dubious about *adual*.<sup>15</sup> In effect, I have to turn to others and ask, “How do you ‘hear’ it? Can you work with that?”

Panikkar’s vast ‘sketch’ in *Rhythm* has to my mind three grand moments, beyond offering the overarching rubric of *rhythm* itself: 1) the long overdue critique of monotheism, including its atheist appendix, 2) the challenge to the modern scientific mindset, tracing this blinkered Western view all the way back to Parmenides’ equation of Thinking and Being, and 3) the multi-millennial unfolding of the divine dimension of the cosmotheandric *mythos*, including that rare autobiographical interlude with Heidegger in the Black Forest. Beyond this, the whole book is a pæan to a third form of awareness – whether called symbolic or mystical or ‘adual’ – that is not confined to either monistic or dualistic postures of the mind.

*To sum up -*

I think *Rhythm of Being* has the advantage of performance art, that you can see the artist at work. It shares the disadvantage of performance art too, so that if you’re not ‘there’ already, you might miss it entirely. Music might be a more apt analogy: Like Bach with his *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Panikkar lays down his theme and does ‘The Theological Variations’ in various keys. These variations are as I have said not so much a repetitious drone as they are reiterative, like ocean waves swelling up, then cresting and crashing to shore. It is for us to carry on with the rhythm, to find ways to play that threefold theme on our own ‘instruments.’ “I believe in an ultimate and absolute Rhythm,” the poet Ezra Pound once declaimed.<sup>16</sup> The open secret

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<sup>15</sup> Fine if it just occurs in *Rhythm* as a last effort to get it right; very problematic if the terminology has to shift in all his previous works when they are republished. Among other things it just won’t work: It ‘sounds’ like ‘a dual’ or even ‘a duel;’ even ‘undual’ would get the point across more effectively. Part of Panikkar’s problem here is that the English language has undergone a ‘coarsening’ over the two or three decades he’s been away from it. People are no longer ready to handle nuance or subtlety at all, let alone lexicographical hijinks of the sort Panikkar favors to the end. Yet he’s right grammatically, and he’s correct that ‘non-dual’ can be in some contexts misleading or seem too negative.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ezra Pound, “A Retrospect,” in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, New York (New Directions) 1968, ‘Credo,’ 9: “I believe in an ‘absolute rhythm’, a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed.”

here is that there is no secret (*mahaguha*),<sup>17</sup> nothing held back as the Buddha said of his own teaching, which puts *Rhythm* in our hands as an ‘open book’ to be inscribed down the generations. *Oremus*.

The best analogy for where to go now that *Rhythm of Being* is out might be an architectural one, or even ‘architectonic’: the Sagrada Familia Cathedral in Barcelona – stunningly grounded in the rhythmic patterns of natural forms, involving international architectural collaborations which span the 20th Century and will run well into the 21st, funded entirely by voluntary donations, it now emerges as a truly “communitarian effort” which forms as it were a monumental ‘ground-chord’ in the signature style of Catalunya.<sup>18</sup> Antonin Gaudí is at once the apotheosis of *art nouveau*, and a genuine innovator, taking his design tips from nature’s patterns.<sup>19</sup> With no plans or blueprints and only a very few of his models surviving the vandalism of the Civil War, Gaudí’s cathedral simply *inspired* people to take it up where he left off. Perhaps we are beginning another such effort today by gathering from far and wide to discuss Panikkar’s book: “It is the function of this dialogue to disclose or eventually create the field in which a symbolic consciousness can operate.”<sup>20</sup>

Important as it is to get straight what Panikkar was driving at in *The Rhythm of Being*, I think it asks more of us. The scholarly enterprise focuses on clarifying the object of its study, which is all well and good. But this book calls for the transformation of the subject too, a radical turnabout from any ‘objective’ method. Panikkar’s *Rhythm* came out about the same time as Stephen Hawking’s *Great Design*, which topped the bestseller lists by asserting pointblank that philosophy was ‘dead.’ If we don’t undertake this great turning, which begins by challenging each one of us in unique ways, we might as well give up the ghost of philosophical inquiry and hope that Hawking’s vague ‘M-theory’ has some deep hidden dimension that will somehow encompass all the aspirations of the human spirit.

After familiarizing oneself with the themes, the best way to make something of this book may well be to begin thinking *from* the threefold *mythos* Panikkar sketches, not just toward it. The myth stands *under*,

<sup>17</sup> *Rhythm*, Ch. VI, A: “The Invisibility of the Obvious,” 263 sq.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *National Geographic*, December 2010, “Biomimetic Architecture: Gaudí’s Masterpiece,” 24-7.

<sup>19</sup> Maybe even including the early neural imaging of his contemporary Santiago Ramon-Cajal.

<sup>20</sup> *Rhythm*, 206.

behind, ‘over-against’ the *logos*. Otherwise it’s futile, like looking for darkness with a torch; the new myth will recede before the light of the *logos*. Yet any word, any *logos*, can only emerge from its own ‘horizon of intelligibility.’ Until you find yourself thinking – no, living – *from* this triple horizon (and not just knowing a lot about “Panikkar’s concept of...” whatever), I reckon you are probably not getting the whole message.

People ask how I respond to *Rhythm*, or to the dedication. I don’t know what to say. Immediately after the Gifford Lectures, I wrote a very Panikkar-like piece called “How Is Wisdom Communicated?” for *InterCulture* (1990). Working on Panikkar’s book also helped me sort out *The Radix* (1991), a philosophical poem published the following year. But in a sense, I’ve been responding to *The Rhythm of Being* for 20 years, ever since the actual lectures, taking up not only the themes but the triadic *mythos* as a springboard for just about everything I’ve undertaken since then.

In my experience, there is no pre-set path, no guaranteed ‘way’ to the goal: “To freedom you are called.”<sup>21</sup> I think Panikkar trusted his readers would find out for themselves – if I may retranslate Antonio Machado’s phrase – that “the way is in the walking”.<sup>22</sup>

## APPENDIX A - The Lectures

Digital (MP3) copy of R Panikkar’s Gifford Lectures,\* *The Rhythm of Being* –

(“Trinity & Atheism: The Housing of the Divine in the Contemporary World”) April-May 1989, David Hume Tower. University of Edinburgh.

### Original 10 Lecture titles and dates:

1/ Introduction: Rhythm	25 April 1989
2/ The Destiny of Being	27 April 1989

<sup>21</sup> Galatians 5:13.

<sup>22</sup> “*caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar,*” the Machado line weakly translated in the published *Rhythm* Introduction (12) as: “Wayfarer, there is no way,/ you make the way while you go.” NB: He cites Machado, not Escriba (author of *The Way* in Spanish, the book which launched Opus Dei).

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3/ The Dwelling of the Divine	28 April 1989
4/ Unsatisfactory Theisms	01 May 1989
5/ The Divine Mystery	02 May 1989
6/ The Radical Trinity	04 May 1989
7/ The Cosmotheandric Invariant	05 May 1989
8/ The Divine Dimension	09 May 1989
9/ The Emerging Mythos	11 May 1989
10/ Trinity & the Survival of Being	12 May 1989

\*Plus the Edinburgh SEMINAR: *Cross-Cultural Method*

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## **APPENDIX B – Some Errata & Corrigenda**

- The author's name on the spine of the book should not be 'Panikkara'.
- The subtitle "The Unbroken Trinity" (explicitly discussed on 37-8) has been omitted entirely by Orbis.
- The Index is sketchy and inadequate (RP would probably insist on full indices, *nominum et rerum*), and the Bibliography referred to in the text does not even exist!
- Multiple internal references remain to the book's final chapter, now omitted.
- Quotations of English versions of various authors are often from simply terrible translations which should have been redone to suit RP's inferences from them.
- Even English citations from the *Rg Veda* (e.g., on 'the Word'!) are not taken from Panikkar's own *Vedic Experience*, but from old translations his work superseded.
- People working on the notes (unfamiliar with his work in English?) have not cited his own revised articles in *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics* and elsewhere, instead relying on earlier or partial versions.
- Literally scores of 'bonehead' typos proliferate throughout the text; most could easily have been repaired. Orbis (Bill Burrows, to me directly)

claimed they would proof the book, but this has not been done, or done properly.

•More subtle, but perhaps more serious, are dismaying slippages in tone and diction (use of prepositions, especially; and what I discern are transitions from one draft to another, etc.) which leave a native English reader with the impression that they cannot wholly ‘trust’ the text as printed. (Some of this is Panikkar’s fault, as he will sometimes ‘push’ the limits of the language to the breaking point (e.g., “adual”).)

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## How Trinitarian is Panikkar's Trinity<sup>1</sup>

Francis X. D'Sa, S.J.

Pune, India

*There is a perichōrēsis between the three.  
The Divine contains, and is everything,  
but so are Man and the World as well.  
Each is the Whole, and not just in a particular mode.<sup>2</sup>*

### Abstract

The following contribution examines the function of “three” in the doctrine of the Trinity in general and in Panikkar’s understanding of the Trinity in particular. Tradition has always emphasized the specific differences between Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Their dynamics are so different that one cannot substitute the role of one person with that of another. Though tradition is inclined to overstress the three of the three persons there is genuine concern to maintain their unity. The aim here is to clarify why the stress has been on three. The expression “three persons” in the trinitarian context, it is suggested, symbolically points only to what we humans can say of the ineffable mystery. But that is not all; what one experiences here can at best be evoked through a metaphoric expression of their perichoretic nature without giving up the element of mystery.

### The “Three” in the Trinity

No Christian Theologian or Thinker would take the Trinity literally. At the back of the mind is probably at work St Augustine’s alleged *bon mot*

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter V The Triadic Myth: *Advaita* and Trinity, *The Rhythm of Being*. The Gifford Lectures (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 403.

regarding the Trinity: “Qui coepit numerare coepit errare.” Hardly anyone, I presume, will disagree with this. On the other hand we still do keep on speaking of *three* persons, *three* definite persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit of the Christian Trinity) or the *three* dimensions, (the Cosmic, Human and Divine) in Panikkar’s cosmotheandric intuition, or the *three* centres of Reality, (Man, World and God).<sup>3</sup> Whether we call them persons or dimensions or centres, what is clear is that in spite of the differences in nomenclature there are specific characteristics and specific dynamics associated with them.<sup>4</sup> Clearly the implication is that the “Three” in the Trinity has to be taken seriously.

Briefly, the point that needs to be examined is this: On the one hand official Christian Tradition insists on speaking of the *three persons* of the Christian Trinity. On the other hand, it is also clear that it would be catastrophic if the number three would be taken literally. To do so would be the end of the Trinitarian Mystery. The Three are Three in One and One in Three. So how do we steer clear between the Scylla of not interpreting the number three univocally and the Charybdis of tradition’s insistence on the three of the Trinity?

In chapter five “The Triadic Myth” of his latest work *The Rhythm of Being* Raimon Panikkar discusses rather elaborately the two homeomorphic equivalents: Trinity and *Advaita*.<sup>5</sup>

From my perspective *Advaita* does not confront us with any major problem because of its formulation as non-dual, a-dual, etc. But Trinity does create problems; though one denies the number three, almost all christian trinitarian elaborations keep on stressing the specificity of the three persons. This seems to be confirmed by the way the specific characteristics of each of the three persons are worked out in the standard treatises on the Trinity. Panikkar’s treatment of the Trinity is without doubt very different from these treatises but he too stresses the *three* dimensions. However he

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<sup>3</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “Philosophy as Life-Style”, in: A. Mercier/M. Vilar (Eds.), *Philosophers on Their Own Work IV* (Bern/Frankfurt/Las Vegas, 1978 [193-228]), 206. In a revised version of this article published in Panikkar’s book *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), 97 he has reformulated this thus: “God, Man and World are forms of the three original attributes of reality and not substances, artificially elevated as such.”

<sup>4</sup> A good example is Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik I*, München <sup>6</sup>1960: 324-499. Here one gets a rare but ‘realistic’ account of the inner life and movements involving the three persons of the Trinitarian Mystery!

<sup>5</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, 227: “Reality is *advaita*; it is trinitarian.”

inevitably brings in their *perichōrēsis* whenever he draws attention to the Whole. How? This is what I wish to reflect upon in what follows.

### **Panikkar and Advaita**

The points that Panikkar makes about *Advaita* are the following:

a) “*Advaita* overcomes the structures of positing the logos to integrate the *pneuma* (spirit) in our approach to reality. This is the task of love, not as second fiddle to knowledge, but as the first born of the gods.”<sup>6</sup>

b) “*Advaita* is spiritual knowledge that does not need rational evidence in order to gain an insight into the nature of things.”<sup>7</sup>

c) “*Advaita* amounts to the overcoming of dualistic dialectics by means of introducing love at the ultimate level of reality.”<sup>8</sup>

d) “Reason alone cannot reach the *advaitic* intuition because the adualistic structure of reality opens up only to a loving knowledge or a knowing love for which we lack a proper word since the divorce between *gnōsis* and *eros* (or *agape*, or for that matter, even *philia*). When love is set aside, only the dialectical method is open to us...”<sup>9</sup>

e) “*Advaita* was usually translated as ‘nonduality...’” European Indologists interpreted *a* in *Advaita* as a negative particle. “In fact the *a* of the *advaita* intuition does not connote a dialectical negation, rather, here the *a* is a primitive prefix pointing to an ‘absence of duality’”.<sup>10</sup> We understand A-bhaya as absence of fear, not as “non-fear”.

Similarly Panikkar prefers to render *advaita* as ‘aduality’ (or ‘adualism’), absence of duality.<sup>11</sup> But he warns us here: “*Advaita* cannot be reduced to a concept.”<sup>12</sup> For “Reality is-not one; reality is-not two (*advaita*).”<sup>13</sup> This takes one beyond the range of concepts. Here one begins to sense why Panikkar asserts: “The authentic insight does not play a

<sup>6</sup> Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, 216.

<sup>7</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 216.

<sup>8</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 216.

<sup>9</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 216.

<sup>10</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 216.

<sup>11</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 216.

<sup>12</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 217.

<sup>13</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 217.

dialectical game in order to prove the experience.”<sup>14</sup> And finally: “*Advaita* does not renounce the intellect, but it does not enthrone the intellect as the unique reality.”<sup>15</sup>

Clearly Panikkar is not talking about Shankara’s *Advaita* in much the same way that when treating of the Trinity he is not talking (primarily) about the Christian Trinity, “*but about the depth of the human experience, as exemplified in both these traditions*”.<sup>16</sup>

Panikkar’s stance about *Advaita* is this: It is an insight that is applicable to reality. “*Advaita* is an experience.”<sup>17</sup> It “challenges the primacy of rationality over both intellect, on the one hand, and reality, on the other”.<sup>18</sup> *Advaita* states “*that the ultimate character of the real cannot be breached by reason*”.<sup>19</sup> For *advaita* “uniqueness is not a number”.<sup>20</sup> *Advaita* as non-dual reveals the absence of duality.<sup>21</sup> “*Advaita* denies the absolute identification of knowing (thinking) with Being not because the intellect is weak, but because reality is stronger.”<sup>22</sup> Finally “adualism asserts that Being is irreducible to *cit, intelligere, percipi*, or intelligibility in whatever form.”<sup>23</sup>

As I see it Panikkar *Advaita* is not at all concerned with number be it “the One” or “two” or “three”. His elaborate reasoning points out: *Advaita* is not about numbers and numbering. The “That One” of the Upanishadic traditions is definitely not a numeric expression. It is, as he repeatedly asserts, symbolic language.<sup>24</sup> More about this later.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 222.

<sup>15</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 223.

<sup>16</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 227. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 222.

<sup>18</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 222.

<sup>19</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 217. Emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 217: “From the *advaitic* perspective, uniqueness is not a number. Any quantification of reality destroys uniqueness and constitutes an abuse of our mind. Yet *advaita* affirms that the “one” reality reveals the absence of any duality; that reality has absence adhering to the one so as to disallow any numeric “one” lest we fall into a mere formal abstraction.”

<sup>21</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 217.

<sup>22</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 218.

<sup>23</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 218.

<sup>24</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 240-241: “Spiritual knowledge uses symbols. Its language is not conceptual; it is symbolic. The intentionality of the mystical symbol does not refer to anything objectifiable outside the symbol itself and yet is not identical with the symbol.

## Panikkar's Trinitarian Versions

Panikkar's trinitarian preoccupation began inchoatively with *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964) and its different editions. Overlooking the different changes in its various revisions and editions I find in the revised and enlarged edition of 1981 (of which I have the First Indian Reprint of 1982, [Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 148]) the following:

The dogma of the Trinity presents itself as an unexpected answer to the inevitable question of a mediator between the One and the Manifold, the Absolute and the Relative, between Brahman and the Word. This is in my opinion not just a Vedāntic problem but, in the ultimate analysis, one of other cultures also.

The Epilogue of that same book (169) concludes with these words:

Whatever God does ad extra happens through Christ. Thus, recognizing the presence of God in other religions is equivalent to proclaiming the presence of Christ in them, 'for in him all things subsist.'<sup>25</sup>

In his *The Trinity and World Religions. Icon, Person, Mystery* (1970) Trinity became really thematic. The Indian version came out as *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man. Icon, Person, Mystery* in an enlarged second edition in London (DLT) 1973 and in New York (Orbis) 1975.

In these first reflections Panikkar concentrates thematically on the uniqueness of the *three* Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I take the following as its mission statement: "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."<sup>26</sup>

"The Father has no being the Son is his being."<sup>27</sup> "The Son is the visibility of the invisible', St Irenaeus repeats."<sup>28</sup> Panikkar draws our

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"The symbolic difference, that is, the difference between the symbol and the symbolized, lies in the very relation between the three: the symbol (which implies itself), the symbolized (which is the selfsame symbol), and the 'symbolizer' (who is the subject for whom the symbol is real symbol). The symbol had no external referent. Through the symbol, spiritual knowledge touches the fringes of the mystery."

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly but none the less astonishingly one encounters the expression 'theandric' in this early work (90 and in 91 fn 128).

<sup>26</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man. Icon, Person, Mystery* in an enlarged second edition (London: DLT, 1973), 46.

<sup>27</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 48.

attention to the fact that the Son is “*God-from God and Light-from Light*”<sup>29</sup> and “that the Father from which the *God-from* comes is properly speaking the *Source of-God*. This *of-God* is precisely the Son”.<sup>30</sup> “Christ, manifest or hidden, is the only way to God. Even by definition the unique link between the created and the uncreated, the relative and the absolute, the temporal and the eternal, earth and heaven is Christ, the only mediator. Between these two poles everything that functions as mediator, link, ‘conveyor’, is Christ, the sole priest of the cosmic priesthood, the Lord *par excellence*.”<sup>31</sup>

“When I call this link between the finite and the infinite by the name Christ I am not presupposing its identification with Jesus of Nazareth. Even from right within Christian faith such an unqualified identification has never been asserted. What the Christian faith does affirm is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ...”<sup>32</sup> “The reason I persist in calling it Christ is that it seems to me that phenomenologically Christ presents the fundamental characteristics of the mediator between the divine and cosmic, eternal and temporal, etc., which other religions call *Íšvara*, *Tathāgata* or even Jahweh, Allah and so on – at least when they are not seeking to distinguish between a *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* brahman. It is not without a deep and prophetic intuition that much of neo-hindu spirituality speaks in this way of ‘christic awareness’.”<sup>33</sup>

Again: “Every being is a christophany a showing forth of Christ.”<sup>34</sup>

Not surprisingly Panikkar works out (parallely to the three Persons) the *three* kinds of spiritualities that correspond to the uniqueness of the three persons: Karma-Marg is the spirituality of cultic action, Bhakti-Marg is the spirituality of personalism and Jnana-Marg is the spirituality of silence, awareness and meditation. In the first Panikkar discerns divine immanence, in the second personalism, and in the third apophatism.<sup>35</sup> Later on when the cosmotheandric intuition ripens the spiritualities will focus on the *three* dimensions of reality: the Material, the Personal and the Divine. With that what started as reflections on the Christian Trinity is so fully opened up that it comprehends the Whole of the Real, the Whole of Reality. The really Real

<sup>28</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 51.

<sup>31</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 53.

<sup>32</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 53.

<sup>33</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 9-40.

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is cosmotheandric (or theanthropocosmic); whatever is real is constituted by the cosmic, the personal and the divine dimensions.

Panikkar then goes on to state:

...my desire is simply to show how in the light of the Trinity the three forms of spirituality described above can be reconciled. It is in actual fact only a trinitarian concept of Reality which permits us at least to indicate the main lines of a synthesis between these three apparently irreducible concepts of the Absolute.<sup>36</sup>

...my aim at present is simply so to enlarge and deepen [the understanding of] the mystery of the Trinity that it may embrace this same mystery existent in other religious traditions but differently expressed.

The Trinity, then, may be considered as a junction where the authentic spiritual dimensions of all religions meet. The Trinity is God's self-revelation in the fullness of time, the consummation both of all that God has already 'said' of himself to man and of all that man has been able to attain and know of God in his thought and mystical experience. In the Trinity a true encounter of religions takes place, which results, not in a vague fusion or mutual dilution, but in an authentic enhancement of all the religious and even cultural elements that are contained in each.

It is in fact in the Trinity that a true place is found for whatever in religion is not simply the particular deposit of a given age or culture. Only by a deepening of trinitarian understanding will such an encounter in depth come to pass, the synthesis and mutual fecundation of the different spiritual attitudes which comprise religions, without forcing or doing violence to the fundamental intuitions of the different spiritual paths.<sup>37</sup>

In the chapter on The Trinity Panikkar brings in *Advaita*<sup>38</sup>:

The *advaita* which helps us express suitably the 'relation' God-World is again a precious aid in elucidating the intra-trinitarian problem. If the Father and the Son are not *two*, they are not one either: the Spirit both unites and distinguishes them. He is the bond of unity; the *we* in between, or rather within.

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<sup>36</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 41.

<sup>37</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 42-43.

<sup>38</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 62.

The final chapter of the book is Theandristm<sup>39</sup>. Theandristm is the classical and traditional term for that intimate and complete unity which is realized paradigmatically in Christ between the divine and the human and which is the goal towards which everything here below tends – in Christ and the Spirit.

## The Problem

In all of Panikkar's attempts to interpret the Trinity relevantly for our times the role of "three" (not one, not two) persons is undeniable. The three persons (Father, Son and Spirit) play an important role in his first attempts to reinterpret the Christian Trinity. Even the three spiritualities correspond to the three Margas.<sup>40</sup> There is also the triadic myth, the cosmotheandric or the theanthropocosmic intuition, the search for trinitarian structures and motifs in other religions and cultures, etc. Undeniably in Panikkar's writing on the Trinity "three" is important.

Expressed in a straightforward manner, the focus in all these attempts is always on *three* persons, *three* spiritualities, *three* mārgas, *three* dimensions, *three* invariants, *three* structures, etc. Even if we take *three* as a symbolic expression as Panikkar does why has it to be *always three* and not four or even seven - four and seven are probably equally universally employed symbolically in the diverse religions and cultures? What is it about three that it has *always* to be there?

When speaking of the really Real the Upanishads point to *tad ekam*, "that One". Clearly the *ekam* here is not a number. Taken together with *tad* it is more of a demonstrative than a numeral.<sup>41</sup> At the same time the *ekam* has the nuance of uniqueness; it is not subservient to reason (logos). It belongs to the mythos-level, the level of faith. The measure in which one shares in this myth (or horizon of understanding) is the measure of the myth's relevance and vice versa.

But there is a possible difficulty with the "three" of trinitarian attempts. The trinitarian "three" is usually accompanied by the remark that it is not a numeral and that it is a symbol. However what appears to be generally missing is the attempt to show in what way it is symbolic

<sup>39</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> *The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man*, 9-40.

<sup>41</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 49: "Even many of the defenders of Oneness specify that there is a Super-One and that even the One is not a number but a symbol of harmony we are speaking about."

language and how that symbolic language hangs together with the “three” of the trinitarian treatises.

On the one hand we have elaborate and illuminating discussions in the trinitarian field. On the other there appears to be a lack of connection between these discussions and the role and function of the symbolic “three”. In Panikkar’s voluminous writings it is quite possible that one overlooks the “missing links”. Normally Panikkar begins by following the beaten track of tradition but mostly as a springboard. He then takes off in an intercultural and interreligious direction – which makes better sense today.<sup>42</sup>

## Response

In our case it is of crucial importance to ascertain if Panikkar has commented on or discussed elements that are germane to his argument. Some of the groundwork required to understand and answer the questions we have raised above is to be found in his discussion on themes such as the symbol “three”, rhythm, the Whole, the significance of *advaita*, the cosmotheandric intuition, the trinitarian *perichōrēsis*, etc. in his *The Rhythm of Being*. There he discusses these topics as and when the opportunity arises. Given the many details, readers unfamiliar with Panikkar’s mode of proceeding may not be in a position to follow his logic. Accordingly I shall expose the main lines of the argument in two steps. In the first step I shall comment briefly on the main metaphors that are part of his argument. In the second step I shall introduce Panikkar’s statements which corroborate the way I have spelled out his argument in the first step.

What Panikkar calls the Whole, refers to the Whole of Reality (i.e. the Real) that cannot be grasped. Most of it lies beyond our grasp.<sup>43</sup> If we wish to understand and “speak about” Reality we have to employ the language of symbols, not of concepts.<sup>44</sup> Their difference lies in this: Concepts are “clear-cut”, and have “fixed” meanings. But symbols are polyvalent; their meaning cannot be fixed. The dialogue between context and human preunderstanding gives birth to meaning. Speaking of the Whole is done with the help of

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<sup>42</sup> I have constantly to remind myself that Panikkar’s horizon is intercultural and interreligious!

<sup>43</sup> See my “Fullness of Man or Fullness of the Human?”, in: Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 2004), xi-xvi.

<sup>44</sup> Panikkar, “Words and Terms”, in: *Esistenza, Mito, Ermeneutica* (scritti per Enrico Castelli), Ed. M. M. Olivetti (Archivio dei Philosophia, 1980) Padova (CESAM) II, 1117-133.

symbolic language: symbol “three”, rhythm, *advaita*, the cosmotheandric intuition, the trinitarian *perichōrēsis*, harmony and so on.<sup>45</sup>

Here one might object: The help of symbolic language is appreciated. However the “three” in trinitarian treatises appears to be indispensable, also in Panikkar’s stress on *three* persons, *three* spiritualities, *three* mārgas, *three* dimensions, *three* invariants, *three* structures, etc. Can it be really symbolic?

First a preliminary remark after which I shall answer this objection in two steps.

The preliminary remark draws attention to the fact that for Panikkar Reality as a Whole cannot be objectified, it cannot become fully an object of our knowing. Yes, some aspects are amenable to objectification but independently of whether we employ symbolic language or not Reality as a Whole cannot be objectified. Having said that we have to assert that the best way to approach Reality is with the help of symbolic language.

The first step of the argument begins by stating that all human knowing is approximative und selective. We say the earth is round; but it is not really round. It has ups and down that could never make it round. However it is said to be round not only because it *appears* to be round from a certain distance but more especially because these ups and downs don’t really count in the kind of numbers game that astronomy plays. These ups and downs make no difference in a world which employs light years (=the speed of light) as the norm for measuring astronomic distances!

Again in daily life we say that the distance, for example, between Pune and Mumbai is about 180 km but this again is inevitably approximative; we can never have accuracy in these matters. We simply overlook the demands of accuracy because accuracy in the strictest sense is not possible where physical measurements are concerned. We take refuge in heuristic devices. Here accuracy is a pragmatic kind of accuracy. For example, when you calculate in terms of light years our seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, etc, make no real difference in the scientific enterprise. Also in our everyday situation it is enough to state the (approximate) distance between Pune and Mumbai. A couple of meters

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<sup>45</sup> *The Rhythm of Being* 240-241: “The senses express themselves with signs, which need to be interpreted by the intellectual language of reason. Reason uses concepts. Spiritual knowledge uses symbols. Its language is not conceptual; it is symbolic. The intentionality of the mystical symbol does not refer to anything objectifiable outside the symbol itself and yet is not identical with the mystery... Through the symbol, spiritual knowledge touches the fringes of the mystery.”

more or less do not challenge the (approximate) result because that is not sought and that is not what matters.

When we come to the personal sphere we realize that the core of our “person” language is of a different genre, it is symbolic. Here physical measurements do not carry any weight, they are simply irrelevant. The core of religion and faith is expressed in the language of symbol, metaphor and parable. Its intentionality is primarily to transform, not so much to inform. In this sphere the ladder of information leads to transformation. One has to go beyond information.

Take another example, namely the rainbow! We speak of seven colours though we clearly see that in the rainbow one colour flows into the other and that it is not possible to ascertain where one colour begins and where another ends. *Speaking of seven colours is a heuristic way of speaking of the whole!* But one might ask: Why seven and not nine colours? The objection is well taken. When we look at a rainbow we see the whole as a continuum in which not three but “seven colours” *stand out* (that is, *if we overlook the areas where the colours flow into one another*). True, there is pragmatism at work here when we speak of “seven colours” and not eight or nine. We are aware that there are no seven colours and that the whole is just one continuum. *The phrase “seven colours” is a heuristic way of referring to the Whole.*

In step two we shall encounter Panikkar’s statements which corroborate what we are here asserting. Panikkar argues in a similar fashion about “units”, “three”, “three dimensions”, “three organs”, etc.

As we stated earlier, Panikkar employs different metaphors to bring out the a-dual or non-dual character of Reality (in general) and of the trinitarian metaphor (in particular). In the quotations that follow the highlighting is mostly mine.

#### a) Rhythm and the Whole

Rhythm is always perceived as a Whole. It has no real parts. Any partition would destroy the rhythm, which is not the sum of its components. Each sound, if isolated, would make no rhythm, nor would it do so if each sound were not ‘inside’ its neighbors, so to speak. As we have already hinted, rhythm demands a certain type of *perichōrēsis* (a dancing interpretation - as we are going still to comment upon), being so intertwined that we are not able to decompose the “units” without destroying the true rhythm. If you do

not perceive the Whole, there is no rhythm. Meleta to pan, as we said before; experience the melody of the Whole, as one may freely translate it.<sup>46</sup>

This quotation pretty well sums up how the diverse thematic strands hang together. Firstly there is the phenomenological statement about the perception of the Whole. We never perceive a single entity by itself, our perception is always a whole. We never ever perceive just one thing or one person, one tree or some object; we perceive a certain world, a certain panorama that keeps on changing as we move around. There are no black holes in our panorama. Over against this background there is at the same time a powerful statement against “parts”, “components” and “units” because these are abstractions.

That rhythm is perceived in the Whole is an important statement in the context of our discussion. But more importantly rhythm ensures the wholeness of the Whole. Finally and most relevantly there is *perichōrēsis*, *the ceaseless and constitutive interpenetration of the three dimensions or three persons or three centres of reality*. All these metaphors are organically connected with and related to the major metaphor *perichōrēsis*. The “three” of these metaphors refers to the fact that the three dimensions, the three persons, the three centres, etc. are all part of a heuristic device that refers to the Whole. Readers who may not be familiar with Panikkar’s thinking might overlook or perhaps underestimate the role of *perichōrēsis* in his reflections on the Trinity. In my view it is the cornerstone of his trinitarian, *advaitic* or pluralistic perspective.

b) “A kind of total *perichōrēsis*”

In all these cases, instead of a compartmentalized picture of the universe, we find a world where neither “God” nor Man is isolated and where matter is no longer completely impenetrable. Everything is permeated by everything else in a kind of total *perichōrēsis*, in the way the early Church Fathers envisioned the Godhead, and as most traditional cultures understood the entire universe. *In all these cases, Man is ‘more’ than just an individual being, the Divine ‘different’ from a Supreme Lord, and the World ‘other’ than raw material to be plundered for utility or profit.*<sup>47</sup>

The view presented in the last sentence of the quotation above is the fruit of Panikkar’s perichoretic experience. This mode of reflecting apart from being holistic avoids the pitfalls of monotheism on the one hand and dualism on the other. More importantly *there is absolutely no room for*

<sup>46</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 47.

<sup>47</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 174.

*separations* here. Reality refers to the interrelated Whole, where every being is related to every being and so constitutes a continuum. Accordingly where Reality is concerned distinctions are in order but not separations. This attitude is born of a perichoretic vision.

The other point about *perichōrēsis* is that it is a holistic vision of Reality. It is in the context of *perichōrēsis* that we have to locate the symbolic character of the almost ubiquitous “three”. Like the seven colours of the rainbow we speak of three persons, three dimensions, three centres of Reality *because*, first of all, though *Reality is in fact a continuum*, the three persons, three dimensions, three centres, etc., *stand out*. In all these instances the “three” is a heuristic device to refer to the whole of Reality! Like the “seven colours” of the rainbow the three (dimensions, centres, persons, etc.) stand out.

The perichoretic insight ensures that the Trinity is not equated with tritheism. Panikkar’s cosmotheandric intuition is the contemporary, secular expression of the Trinity. But the great difference is that whereas the original Christian Trinity referred to the Divine (Persons) alone, the cosmotheandric intuition embraces the whole of Reality.

Thus *perichōrēsis* is a key insight in the world of the Trinity, this for a number of reasons. The metaphor discreetly hints at an aesthetic nuance in the trinitarian community.<sup>48</sup> The *perichōrēsis* metaphor as the interpenetration of *all of Reality* is in fact the dance of Reality, a sort of Christian version, a homeomorphic equivalent, as it were of Natarāja, Shiva’s dance of creation.<sup>49</sup> As dance it connotes life, creativity, liveliness and joy and with it a sense of belonging and community – a thing that our classroom theology rarely if ever alludes to. Reality is not just a vale of tears and a tragedy. Reality offers us moments of happiness, humour and even rapture. But *perichōrēsis* lays claim to our collaboration; we cannot afford to remain passive. In order to be healed and made whole we have to learn to join more consciously, more deliberately in the dance of Life, the dance of Reality, by following<sup>50</sup> more sensitively the triple dynamics of the Cosmic,

<sup>48</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 363: “Here is the place to mention the important aspect of aesthetics in the description of the divine dimension. The body, the senses, and beauty are essential aspects in this. In our times when a dry ‘theology’ seems to have reserved for itself the right to talk about God, the role of aesthetics in uncovering the divine dimension is paramount. Every artist knows or rather feels it – whereby we should stress that true knowledge is also sensible and authentic sentiment is intelligent.”

<sup>49</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, “Shivas Tanz”, *Indische Mythen und Symbole*. Vishnu, Shiva und das Rad der Wiedergeburten (Diderichs Gelbe Reihe, 2000), 168-195.

<sup>50</sup> “Following” in both the senses of the word: to follow meaning to understand and to

the Human and the Divine. During the duration of the dance something important happens: one forgets one's self and gains respite from the cares and worries of the everyday world. In entering the world of text, Ricoeur says, one becomes "self-less" and comes out with an "enlarged self".<sup>51</sup>

However the dance-aspect is not mere cosmetics like the high sounding titles of the Italian roman catholic clergy. The perichoretic cosmic dance is an integral part of the cosmic aesthetics. The cosmic aesthetics are not mere embellishments. Embellishments are dispensable. *Perichōrēsis* graces Reality; the Real is a graced Whole. Furthermore the beautiful, *pulchrum*, is really part and parcel of Reality. It is neither a distraction in our earthly sojourn nor a sop to those who are tired of life. But to experience this aspect of Reality one has to tread the mystical path.<sup>52</sup>

It is here that Panikkar very insightfully draws out the cosmotheandric implications in the realm of person.

### c) The cosmotheandric experience

The Divine Mystery is the ultimate *am* – of everything. Yet we also experience the *art* and the *is*. This is the cosmotheandric experience: the undivided experience of the three pronouns simultaneously. Without the Divine, we cannot say *I*; without Consciousness we cannot say *Thou*; and without the World, we cannot say *It*. *These 'three' pronouns, however, are not three; they belong together.* They are pro-nouns, or rather pro-noun; they stand for the same (unnameable) noun. The noun 'is' only in the pronouns.<sup>53</sup>

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follow meaning to go after some one, etc.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function", *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and Cambridge University, 1981), 274-296.

<sup>52</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*. Emerging Religious Consciousness, edited by Scott Eastham (Maryknoll: New York, 1993), 132-133.

<sup>53</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 191. In this context see also *The Rhythm of Being*, 241-242: "The organs that open us to reality are, in fact, neither 'three' nor 'organs' – unless we take the word to mean that which 'actualizes' or energizes' us. They are not 'three', for none of them can be isolated from the others and continue to function as an activity of our truly whole being. In any sensation there is a rational perception and something more. In any rational intuition there is a basic sensory perception and a residue, a void that testifies that there is something still more. In any spiritual experience there is also a sensorium and a rational component. There is not a single human act in which the entire human microcosm does not participate. We may feel sometimes that the spiritual aspect is absent when in fact it is only latent or in potency. The three 'powers' are always there together, though the predominance will often go to the one or the other. "Furthermore, this amounts to saying that not only are there not 'three' organs, but that they are not 'organs' at all." My

We observe here the way Panikkar draws out implications of the cosmotheandric experience at the realm of person: *I, You* and *It*. He is not analyzing concepts. Observing experience closely he locates their interrelationship, their *inter-in-dependence* and their *intra-in-dependence*.<sup>54</sup> Here he explicitly rejects the *three* pronouns because they *are not three*, as they belong together. Helpfully he adds: “The noun ‘is’ only in the pronouns.” The ‘is’ here makes it clear that the discussion is about the ontological, not conceptual, level. The realm of person (speaking ontologically) comes before the realm of things.

d) Only one Name in three pro-nouns

One might shake one’s head in passing over the stupendous grammatical incongruity of the Christian liturgy, which begins ‘In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ – not in the ‘Names’ of the three persons or of the Father. Nor does it say ‘in the Name of God.’ It says in the Name of the one noun which is not. There are not three Names. It is only one Name in three pro-nouns. The noun is in its pronouns. Each pronoun is the whole noun in its pronominal way. One could speak here of three dimensions which totally inter- and intra-penetrate each other. This is the *perichōrēsis* repeatedly referred to.<sup>55</sup>

*Perichōrēsis* is a metaphor that suggests wholeness, ontological (not psychological) togetherness, belonging, sharing, etc. Interestingly it also opens up the much neglected and underestimated dimension of the aesthetic that generates a world of music and movement, art, beauty, joy, happiness, wonder, rapture, rhythm, etc. Panikkar says:

If the Divine dwells in the human heart and the heart is a symbol of the whole Man, theological language cannot spurn those aspects of the human being. In point of fact, there may be more genuine theology in literary works and in art in general than in many modern theological manuals. Theological language should be as much as possible poetical language. Theology is not algebra and does not deal with lifeless concepts. The metaphor and especially the parable are theological tools.<sup>56</sup>

The view presented in the last sentence of the quotation above is the fruit of Panikkar’s perichoretic experience. Panikkar challenges today’s widespread assumption that Man is an individual being. This has to do with

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highlighting.

<sup>54</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 53.

<sup>55</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*, 191.

<sup>56</sup> *The Rhythm of Being*. 200.

his conviction that Man is person, “a knot in the network of relations”. The Divine as the depth-dimension of the Real is intimately connected with Man and World. And the World far from being a collection of objects is the Dwelling of the Divine.

This mode of reflecting is holistic; it avoids the pitfalls of monotheism on the one hand and dualism on the other. More importantly *there is absolutely no room for separations* here. Reality refers to the interrelated Whole, where every being is related to every being and so constitutes a *continuum*. Accordingly where the continuum of Reality is concerned distinctions are in order but not separations. This attitude is possible only in a perichoretic vision where the way of separations is a sure way to dualistic disaster.

## Conclusion

Panikkar's trinitarian experience makes room for all beings in an ontonomic dispensation.<sup>57</sup> Every being follows its specific law but in consonance with the specific law of other beings. It is neither totally independent nor totally dependent on other beings. In the trinitarian scheme of things pluralism is not a bad word if it makes space for differences, not separations. Panikkar's almost life-long “obsession” with Trinity is understandable. It not only liberates people from religious fanaticism and irrational beliefs but also makes a life of faith meaningful in today's world, promotes a positive attitude towards the world and its manifold cultures and religions, encourages intercultural and interreligious fecundation, above all, it deepens one's sense of cosmotheandric belonging, reveals the spiritual side of matter and the material side of the Spirit.

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<sup>57</sup> Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man* (New York: Orbis, 1973), 41-42: Ontonomy “stands for the recognition neither of heteronomy, i.e. the regulation of the activity of a particular being by laws proceeding from another higher being, nor of autonomy, i.e. the affirmation that each field is absolutely self-normative and patron of its own destiny. Ontonomy is intended to express the recognition of the inner regularities of each field of activity or sphere of being in the light of the whole. The whole, is, in fact, neither different from nor merely identical with any one field or sphere. Ontonomy rests on the assumption that the universe is a whole, that there is an internal and constitutive relationship between all and every part of reality, that nothing is disconnected that the development and progress of one being is not to be at the expense of another – not because it should or ought not, but for the same reason adduced in the case of cancer, namely that neither promotes the life of the whole organism nor is of any utility for the affected organ.”

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Trinity is the living and unceasing discourse between the I, the You and the It. It is the incessant dance of the Cosmic, the Human and the Divine wherein Time is experienced as Tempiternity and the World as the Ursakrament. It is the Mystery in which we perichoretically live, move and have our being. Another name for the Trinity is *perichōrēsis*.<sup>58</sup> “There is a *perichōrēsis* running through the entire reality.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> I regretfully acknowledge that I overlooked the perichoretic insight in my earlier writings: (a) “The Notion of God”, in: Joseph Prabhu (Ed), *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Orbis Books: New York, 1996), 25-45 and “Der trinitarische Ansatz von Raimon Panikkar”, in: Bernhard Nitsche (Hg.), *Gottesdenken in interreligiöser Perspektive. Raimon Panikkars Trinitätstheologie in der Diskussion* (Frankfurt/M: Lambeck/Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2005), 253-267.

<sup>59</sup> Raimon Panikkar, “Philosophy as Life-Style”, 206. In a revised version of this article published in his book *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), 97 he reformulates this thus: “God, Man and World are forms of the three original attributes of reality and not substances, artificially elevated as such.”



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## Radicalizing the Trinity: a Christian Theological Reflection on Panikkar's Radical Trinity

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### Abstract

In his earliest writings Raimon Panikkar (1918-2010) develops a trinitarian vision of the universe which he later applies to his encounters with world religions and cultures. He calls this the “cosmotheandric” (cosmic-divine-human) insight. In his Gifford Lectures entitled “The Trinity and Atheism: The Dwelling of the Divine in the Contemporary World” (1989), later published as *The Rhythm of Being* (2010), Panikkar speaks of the “radical Trinity” as the mature understanding of the Christian insight and of most human traditions. He specifically defends his thesis according to classical Christian teaching. Here we explore the cogency of Panikkar's position including his understanding of the Trinity as a fundamental challenge to monotheism.

### Panikkar's Trinitarian Vision

In his earliest writings in philosophy, theology and science (1940s and 1950s),<sup>1</sup> Panikkar develops a trinitarian vision of the universe as a way of challenging the western metaphysical mindset which, in his view, privileges the unity of reality and divine transcendence to the detriment of multiplicity and divine immanence. Already in these formative years, he becomes suspicious of the over-identification of *Being* and *God*—and the over-separation of the immanent and economic Trinity. He is already speaking of

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<sup>1</sup> See especially the following early works of Raimon (Raimundo) Panikkar: “Síntesis. Visión de síntesis del universo,” *Arbor* (Madrid), no. 1 (1944): 5-40; *El concepto de naturaleza* (Ph.D. diss., University of Madrid, 1946; Madrid: CSIC, 1951); *F. H. Jacobi y la filosofía del sentimiento* (Buenos Aires: Sapientia, 1948); *Ontonomía de la ciencia* (Ph.D. diss., University of Madrid, 1958; Madrid: Gredos, 1961). *Humanismo y cruz* [anthology of Panikkar's theological writings 1944-1955], (Madrid: Rialp, 1963).

the interrelationship of and harmony among the three poles of reality—God, humanity and cosmos—so that to speak of one without relationship to the other dimensions is to distort reality itself. So, for the early Panikkar, the Trinity is true symbol of all and every reality. It follows that one cannot understand nature, the world or human existence without reference to the divine dimension. Everything is threefold including the cosmos (matter, space, time), humanity (intelligence, will, sentiment) and God (Father, Son, Spirit).

Little wonder, then, that Panikkar's trinitarian consciousness is brought into play in his meeting with religious traditions beyond western, Christian shores. In *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*,<sup>2</sup> described as "one of the best and least read meditations on the Trinity in (the twentieth) century,"<sup>3</sup> Panikkar develops an understanding of three diverse forms of spirituality in the world's religions: the silent, apophatic spirituality represented in the Buddhist experience of *nirvana*; the personalist spirituality of the Word represented in the Abrahamic traditions; and the immanent spirituality of the Spirit represented in cosmic traditions, most notably in the Hindu *advaitic* experience of the non-duality of self and the Absolute. Evidently, these three spiritualities can be related to the Trinitarian God of Christian faith, Father, Son and Spirit. However, Panikkar is equally intent on demonstrating how these three spiritualities can be harmonized in light of the Trinity. He also wants to show that Christians have no monopoly on a trinitarian understanding and that encounter with other spiritualities is the catalyst for deepening our faith in the trinitarian mystery.

By the 1980s, Panikkar extends his trinitarian vision to embrace other traditions and cultures, including those which do not define themselves in religious or theistic terms. Initially, he calls this the "cosmotheandric principle"<sup>4</sup>—the one but intrinsically threefold interrelationship of cosmic matter, human consciousness and divine freedom. In his 1989 Gifford

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<sup>2</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), 167.

<sup>4</sup> For Panikkar's earliest usage of this term, see his "Colligate Fragmenta: For an Integration of Reality," *From Alienation to Atonement*, ed. F. A. Eigo (Villanova University Press, 1977), 19-91. See also this and other essays in Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, ed. Scott Eastham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

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Lectures, later refined in his *The Rhythm of Being*,<sup>5</sup> he speaks of this as the “radical Trinity,” emphasizing the dynamic interplay of matter, mind and spirit. In so doing, Panikkar declares his ambition of presenting the cosmotheandric intuition as “an adequate cross-cultural universal for the majority of cultures of our time”.<sup>6</sup> His argument moves in two directions. On the one hand, he wants to uncover this “almost universal trinitarian insight of humanity”<sup>7</sup> to demonstrate what he terms the “theanthropocosmic invariant” as belonging to human consciousness.<sup>8</sup> On the other, he aims to show that the Christian Trinity is an inspired disclosure of this triadic pattern. He specifically defends this thesis in terms of traditional Christian doctrine. This paper focuses on this second aspect: is Panikkar’s radical Trinity a legitimate expression—even “an enlarging and deepening”<sup>9</sup>—of classical Christian theology?

### **Panikkar’s Methodology**

Panikkar’s work in general, and *The Rhythm of Being* in particular, do not follow the traditional path of Christian theological writings—even though he explicitly states he is presenting a theology.<sup>10</sup> Commenting on this, with particular attention to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Panikkar states:

There are thousands of articles and books trying to make sense of that dogma for our times. They study Christian Scripture and the Greek and Latin Fathers, interpret and correct them, follow the scholastics or depart from them, are inspired by modern thinkers, use process theology, secular methods, or a liberation paradigm, and so on. Such works, of orthodox,

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<sup>5</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010). [The original Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh 1989 were entitled “The Trinity and Atheism: The Dwelling of the Divine in the Contemporary World”].

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 268. Accepting there are no “cultural universals,” Panikkar argues there are nonetheless “limited cross-cultural universals” such as the “cosmotheandric intuition.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>8</sup> “Theanthropocosmic” similarly refers to the divine (*theos*), human (*anthropos*) and cosmic (*cosmos*) dimensions of reality. The “theanthropocosmic invariant” refers specifically to human consciousness of this threefold reality: “Man as Man is aware of the three realms.” *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxii.

catholic, and/or protestant inspiration, perform an invaluable service for the Christian community, and again make credible and effective that central dogma of Christianity. The import of these Gifford Lectures, however, is different.<sup>11</sup>

Panikkar's 'difference' in relation to traditional Christian theology can be explained in the following terms. He is writing from the perspective of his own experience of the Divine Mystery interpreted with one eye on traditional Christian hermeneutics and the other on the hermeneutics of interreligious dialogue. This does not mean he is half Christian and half something else (for example Hindu), just as we would not say a German Christian or Indonesian Hindu is half German/Indonesian and half Christian/Hindu. What this also reminds us is that every religious expression—Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or other—is and can only be experienced and expressed in specific cultural forms.

It is the depth of his engagement with the religious and cultural pluralism of our age that provides Panikkar with his particular approach. He surmises that we live in a time of unprecedented challenge amounting to a 'mutation' in the human experience of reality—and perhaps in reality itself.<sup>12</sup> In order to arrive at a constructive response, we need first to understand and then diagnose the contemporary situation. Relying on the abundance of knowledge and technology at our disposal cannot even begin to address the deeper spiritual crisis confronting humankind. If there is a place which may assist us in our search for wisdom, let us begin with those spiritual and cultural traditions which witness to a 'third dimension' of human experience largely ignored, repressed and certainly privatized in the pan-economic, technocratic global culture enveloping today's world.<sup>13</sup> This is the experience of the Divine Mystery under various guises, names and forms that has been integral to all peoples and cultures—at least until the arrival of the post-Enlightenment world.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>12</sup> In speaking of the current mutation in the human experience of the world, Panikkar asks: "Could it be that reality itself is shifting profoundly, and that we are changing with it?" Ibid., xxvi.

<sup>13</sup> Panikkar often speaks in *Rhythm* of the "third eye" which represents the mystical apprehension of reality. Ibid., 91f., 241ff, et al.

<sup>14</sup> "We may recall that with the main exception of the so-called Enlightenment, most traditional cultures have considered the universe in general and the earth in particular as a temple of the Divine. . . . Modern culture has constructed a civilization in which the Divine is ousted from the actual life of the *civitas*." Ibid., 234.

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Now, if this sounds like a return to a more primitive world and worldview, Panikkar is equally challenging of anachronistic solutions from a number of perspectives. First, existentially, we are incapable of returning to such a world, even if we wished. Second, modern secular consciousness has its own spiritual insights into the ultimate ('sacred') significance of freedom, authenticity, justice and the earth itself which challenge and even purify certain aspects of religious consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Third, in the shift from historical to post-historical (or trans-historical) consciousness, the *de facto* plurality of religious and cultural forms needs to embrace a new openness to this pluralistic challenge of our times.

Before turning to Panikkar's hermeneutics of the radical Trinity, and the question of its compatibility with the Trinity of Christian revelation, we need to identify one further important aspect of his methodology. This is the aspect which most challenges readers trained in the western academies. It has to do with Panikkar's penchant for marrying poetic insight (the realm of symbol) with philosophical reflection (the realm of concept). In regard to this he states:

My *locus philosophicus*... will not be solely in the domain of concepts that form the common currency of our times, but in the realm of symbols that may more appropriately describe the situation of humanity over its entire historical period.<sup>16</sup>

Moving from concept to symbol, Panikkar then introduces a third level discourse he calls myth: "I would like to fathom the underlying myth, as it were, and be able to provide elements of what may be the emerging myth for human life in its post-historical venture."<sup>17</sup> Myth underscores the prominence Panikkar gives to experience over interpretation. The importance of the *logos* is not denied. However, it is the symbol which as an 'ontomythical reality' overcomes the dualistic separation of *mythos* and *logos*, subject and object. He has long defined his hermeneutical task in terms of "restoring symbols to life and eventually of letting new symbols emerge."<sup>18</sup> The emphasis on myth and symbol underscores the pre-reflective experience of the interdependence and interrelationship of all reality. For Panikkar, its most telling symbol is the Trinity.

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<sup>15</sup> Panikkar names this "sacred secularity". See his *Worship and Secular Man* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977) where he initially develops this notion.

<sup>16</sup> *Rhythm*, xxvi.

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

<sup>18</sup> Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 8.

## The Radical Trinity

Panikkar introduces his notion of the radical Trinity with the following provocative statement:

The radical Trinity I am advocating will not blur the distinction between Creator and creature—to use those names—but would as it were extend the privilege of the divine Trinity to the whole of reality. Reality is not only “trinitarian”; it is the true and ultimate Trinity. The Trinity is not the privilege of the Godhead but the character of reality as a whole.<sup>19</sup>

Panikkar’s radical Trinity expressed in cosmotheandric terms arises from his experience and understanding of the trinitarian character of all reality: divine presence, human consciousness, cosmic matter. Thus, the Trinity is not a monopoly of Christianity, nor even of the divinity. It is reality itself that is trinitarian—or, in the language of Vedanta, *advaitic*.<sup>20</sup> Admitting he does not intend to mix up Christian Trinity and the Vedantic *advaita* as theological belief systems—since “each belongs to a distinct universe”<sup>21</sup>—I would say that Panikkar reads the one through the other; and reads both in terms of the Buddhist insight into the ‘radical relativity’ of all (*pratityasamutpada*). For example, *advaita* may be read in monistic terms—God and the world are ‘not two’ since ‘all is Brahman’ and the world of multiplicity mere ‘illusion’.<sup>22</sup> Panikkar’s non-dual or a-dual reading of *advaita* as ‘neither one nor two’ overturns both monism and dualism: there is differentiation and interrelation between God and the world as within the divinity itself reflected in the mutual relations of Father, Son and Spirit.

However, Christian trinitarian belief also benefits through interreligious communication with the Vedantic *advaita* which emphasizes spiritual experience over rational thought. Panikkar even states that “we need mystical experience in order to break into the consciousness that is to be grasped by the *advaitic* nature of reality.”<sup>23</sup> In other language, *advaitic* knowledge belongs to the ‘third eye’ which is in the field of spiritual experience. While Christian theology acknowledges the trinitarian mystery at the heart of God, he complains with other theologians that it seems to

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<sup>19</sup> *Rhythm.*, 260.

<sup>20</sup> “Trinity amounts to *advaita*.” *Ibid.*, 234.

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

<sup>22</sup> Panikkar acknowledges that the monistic interpretation of *advaita* is not uncommon. *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

have had minimal importance for Christian life.<sup>24</sup> This is partly explained in terms of the dominance of western thought which gives such prominence to the *logos* and rational thought. Along with this, we also note the relative neglect of a theology of the Spirit and the spirituality of divine immanence. Consequently, Christian theology tends to isolate the Trinity in the Godhead without much attention to the manner in which the trinitarian mystery is present in human life and throughout creation. The *advaitic* insight challenges this dualistic separation of God and the world as it invites Christians to depth their own trinitarian tradition.

### The Christian Trinity?

Even if Panikkar seeks to be doing little more than “establishing a link” between his radical Trinity and the Christian tradition, we need to enquire as to its claimed validity in Christian terms. Here I need to acknowledge my dependence on Ewert Cousins (d. 2009) who defends what he calls Panikkar’s *advaitic trinitarianism* as a fully orthodox expression of Christian faith.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he accredits Panikkar with developing the universalizing currents in the history of trinitarian theology that links the Trinity to the entire expanse of the universe in creation and history. Nonetheless, Cousins concentrates on Panikkar’s earlier works<sup>26</sup> and did not have access to *The Rhythm of Being*. Consequently, we will adapt Cousin’s analysis to the more radical Trinity of *The Rhythm of Being* including its specific critique of monotheism.

Panikkar develops his dynamic understanding of the Trinity according to his reading of the Pauline trinitarian formula: “God is *above* all, *through* all and *in* all” (Eph. 4:6). Whereas the west has tended to follow Augustine’s psychological model of the Trinity (Father/Being; Son/Intellect; Spirit/Love), the eastern patristic formulation (Father/Source or the *I*; Son/Being or the *Thou*; Spirit/Return to Being or Ocean of Being, the *we*), is closer to Panikkar’s radical Trinity.<sup>27</sup> The Greek fathers in particular saw

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>25</sup> Ewert Cousins: “The Trinity and World Religions,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7/3 (1970): 476-498; and “Panikkar’s Advaitic Trinitarianism,” *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 119-130.

<sup>26</sup> Especially Panikkar’s: *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964); and *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973).

<sup>27</sup> In *The Trinity and Religious Experience* Panikkar refers to Augustine’s formulation “we

creation as a trinitarian act (*from* the Father, *through* the Son and *in* the Spirit) and so emphasized the actions of the persons of the Trinity not only in redemption and sanctification but also throughout all history and creation.<sup>28</sup> This opens the way to viewing the trinitarian action beyond the confines of a particular religious tradition to embrace other cultures, traditions and the cosmos itself.

Especially in *The Rhythm of Being*, Panikkar relies on the eastern patristic notion of *creatio continua* to emphasize that creation is not a single act in the past but an ongoing single-but-differentiated reality in time past, present and future. Evidently, some theologians see this as being in conflict with the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (since God is 'eternal'/outside time). Panikkar resolves this tension with reference to the 'tempiternal' character of Being which reads eternity and time, like Creator and creation, in non-dualistic terms: "The structure of the whole is tempiternal from moment to moment, the continuous creation of the rhythm of the dance of Nataraja, which is an Indic symbol for creation as divine play. Here again, time and eternity are neither two nor one."<sup>29</sup> Panikkar sees resonances here with the Greek Patristic notion of *perichoresis*,<sup>30</sup> the divine dance/indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit, now reflected through *creatio continua* in all dimensions of reality, cosmic, human and divine.

Panikkar's cosmotheandric reading of the Trinity also has links with the vestige doctrine of medieval Augustinianism. In comparison to the Greeks, the western vestige doctrine recognizes reflections or traces of the Trinity in less mystical and more concrete ways. Since the Trinity is intimate to the very structure of creation, its presence can be detected in the physical universe, the human soul, human community and, indeed, in every particle of matter. Even a speck of dust, according to the medievalist Grosseteste, reflects: the power of the Father who created it; the presence of the Son through its intelligible shape and form; and the image of the Spirit

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are, we know, we will (or love)" as 'inspired' and 'valid' but, for all that, "its anthropocentricity is obvious." 68f.

<sup>28</sup> The "profoundly dynamic concept" of the Trinity is noted in the Greek Patristics (Gregory Nazianzan, Basil, Pseudo-Dionysius, John Damascene) and Bonaventure. See Cousins, "The Trinity," esp. 495ff.

<sup>29</sup> *Rhythm*, 226. "Tempiternity" is another Panikkar neologism meaning the non-dual relationship of 'time' and 'eternity.'

<sup>30</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius and John Damascene (8<sup>th</sup> century) are two classical authors who use the term *perichoresis* to highlight the dynamic and vital character of each divine person, as well as the coherence and immanence of each divine person in the other two.

in its useful purpose. As a Franciscan, Bonaventure (13<sup>th</sup> century) develops a more cosmic sense in which he sees the entire universe as a vast mirror manifesting the power, wisdom and goodness of the triune God.<sup>31</sup> Bonaventure also develops Augustine's trinitarian model: the human person/soul/psyche (identified as memory/mind, intelligence/word; will/love) is an 'image' or 'mirror' of the Trinity in the depths of one's personal interiority.

Another expression of the vestige approach can be traced to Richard of St Victor (12<sup>th</sup> century) who saw the Trinity reflected in human interpersonal community viewed through the prism of human love: the lover, the beloved, their mutual love. Rather than focusing on the individual human person, this social model of Trinity, which has become popular among contemporary theologians,<sup>32</sup> sees the interpersonal communion of mind, heart and spirit as a more suitable trinitarian symbol. Panikkar himself *somewhat* reflects this model with reference to the dynamic, interpersonal structure of language: 'Father/I—Son/Thou—Spirit/we.'<sup>33</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that if either trinitarian model is taken over-literally—perhaps, in Panikkar's terms, as concepts rather than symbols—the social model may border on tri-theism, and the psychological model tend towards modalism. On the other hand, we would be foolish to abandon any model or formulation on the basis that it may fall into heterodoxy if pushed to an extreme. In any case, the vestige approach to the Trinity is well established in the Christian tradition in a manner that is fully in accord with Panikkar's conviction that the trinitarian mystery is reflected in all and every reality.

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<sup>31</sup> For Bonaventure, "the creation of the world is like a book in which the creative Trinity shines forth, is represented and is read according to three levels of expression: by way of vestige, image and likeness." Cousins, "The Trinity," 485f.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example: Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000); Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989); Catherine La Cugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Jurgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God* (London: SCM, 1991); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1985).

<sup>33</sup> *Rhythm*, 190ff. In earlier writings, Panikkar refers to this as "The Threefold Linguistic Intra-subjectivity". In suggesting that Panikkar *somewhat* reflects this model, I note his emphasis is not so much on the 'I-thou-we' as on the 'I-thou-It/Is' structure of language: "Without the Divine we cannot say 'I', without the Human or consciousness, we cannot say 'Thou', and without the World or cosmos, we cannot say 'It'." *Ibid.*, 191.

Apart from the vestige doctrine of the medievalists, another trinitarian approach is the appropriation doctrine developed by the scholastics but with roots in the western fathers. Here we understand that even though each divine person possesses all divine attributes, we can rightly attribute or ‘appropriate’ distinct attributes to each divine person in light of the processions. Thus, power is attributed to the Father who is source, wisdom to the Son as Word or image of the Father, and goodness with the Spirit who is the fullness and completion of the Trinity.<sup>34</sup> One advantage of this approach, when linked to the vestige doctrine, is that it opens the way for the revelation and experience of the Trinity of appropriations outside the world of Christian experience and discourse. As we have noted above, Panikkar connects to this approach in his earlier works, such as *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, where he discerns particular appropriations of the Trinity across the panorama of world religions.

In *The Rhythm of Being*, Panikkar does not speak of appropriations, but of “the triadic myth” which he discerns in cultures and traditions, east and west, from Egypt to China, Greece to Rome, India to Arabia.<sup>35</sup> This leads to his affirmation that “a certain trinitarian pattern seems to have occurred spontaneously to human consciousness since the beginnings of historical memory.”<sup>36</sup> Such ‘appropriations’ are not limited to religious traditions; they may well be discerned in other cultures—in much the same way as Bonaventure allowed for Greek philosophers coming to know God through triune appropriations (as distinct from the triune persons of revelation). No doubt extending Bonaventure, but still in the spirit of the appropriation doctrine, Panikkar refers to the myriads of triads—divine, metaphysical, anthropological, psychological, kosmological, chronological, ethical, liturgical, legendary—as suggestive of the trinitarian mystery.<sup>37</sup> His conclusion is that neither religious consciousness nor the Christian Trinity is tied to theisms. In this way, too, modern secular culture may well highlight

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<sup>34</sup> Cousins notes that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century the following ‘appropriations’ were widely accepted in respective reference to Father, Son and Spirit: power, wisdom, goodness; unity, truth, goodness; unity, equality, harmony; eternity, beauty, fruition; omnipotence, omniscience, will; efficient, exemplary and final cause (not unlike *sat, cit, ananda*—being, consciousness bliss—in reference to Brahman in Hindu thought. “The Trinity,” 490f. See also Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 244.

<sup>35</sup> *Rhythm.*, 227-232. An example from the mystical tradition of Islam: “My beloved is Three—Three yet only one; Many things appear as three, Which are no more than one” (Ibn’Arabi). *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 231f.

particular ‘appropriations’ of the trinitarian mystery without explicating these in Christian theistic language. Evidently, this raises the question of the place and importance of theism—in particular, monotheism—for authentic, orthodox Christian faith.

### **Beyond Monotheism?**

If we want to acclaim an essential affinity between Christian trinitarian belief and Panikkar’s radical Trinity, we need to face the question of his sustained critique of monotheism throughout *The Rhythm of Being*.<sup>38</sup> It is true that Panikkar sometimes makes some startling claims, such as: “The Incarnation is incompatible with monotheism. What the Incarnation does is to upset the monotheistic idea of Divinity.”<sup>39</sup> We need first to understand that Panikkar attaches great importance to the manner in which Christian trinitarian doctrine emerged within a particular historical setting marked by clear monotheistic roots in Judaism, strong focus on the *Logos/logos* in Judaism and Greek philosophy and, finally, the imperial monotheistic policy following Constantine. In such a setting, suggests Panikkar, it is remarkable that Christian thinkers developed such a sophisticated trinitarian doctrine, as it is also understandable that they and subsequent theologies downplayed its importance.

Second, Panikkar’s critique of monotheism is both radical and nuanced. He is not even fully satisfied with the movement from “strict and rigid monotheism” (God as Supreme Being) to what he calls “qualified monotheism” (God as Being) because, in his reckoning, this still entraps God and the Divine Mystery into the strictures of being and consciousness.<sup>40</sup> His understanding of the Trinity, he says, is “simple”:

Ultimate reality is neither One (Being, nor anything real) with three modes, nor Three (substances, beings) within a single abstract oneness—*neti, neti*. The Trinity is pure relationship, and here lies the great challenge and the

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<sup>38</sup> See especially, *Rhythm* 120-155; Other recent attempts to construct a “Theology Beyond Monotheism” include: Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (London: Routledge, 2008); and Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> *Rhythm*, 257.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-156. Panikkar is prepared to admit that “qualified monotheism may be one of the least imperfect historical ways to confront ourselves with that real Mystery one of whose names is God.” *Ibid.*, 156.

profound transformation. If the Divine were a substance we would have three Gods; if the Divine is infinite relationship, this relationship also enters all creatures and Man in a special way.<sup>41</sup>

The problem with the God/(Supreme) Being identification, in Panikkar's reading, is that the dualistic separation of Creator-creature, God-world, transcendence-immanence reduce the trinitarian mystery to the "inner life" of God—as many contemporary theologians admit. Those same theologians are attempting to recover the original trinitarian insight into the non-dual relationship between the economic Trinity (*ad extra*) and immanent Trinity (*ad intra*).<sup>42</sup> However, for Panikkar, these theologies do not go far enough on account of their fear of over-identifying God and the world (pantheism). In order to avoid this, he appeals to the doctrine of creation as revealing something more than an oblique trinitarian presence of God in creation.<sup>43</sup>

By stressing the trinitarian nature of all reality, Panikkar provides a new space for reclaiming a trinitarian doctrine of creation. Part of this involves his desire to "degrade both the One and the many as ontological categories."<sup>44</sup> In other language, God, humanity and world are not three separable substances, beings or things—in fact, they are not substances, beings or things at all. No *one* reality exists outside of the dynamic interrelationship (or *perichoresis*) of all three. Nonetheless, relying on the early Patristic formulation of the Trinity, I suggest Panikkar does admit to—or at least allow for—a certain monotheistic understanding provided it stresses the inter- and intra-relatedness of all and every reality including the Divine. He refers to this as "the non-dual-One or One-non-duality" that includes all beings without suffocating them in the "embrace of the One":

The Trinity qualifies this Oneness, telling us that this nondual Oneness embraces the whole of Reality and is completed in itself. It returns

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>42</sup> "The immanent Trinity reveals something about the Trinity *ad extra*, which is the World, but the Trinity *ad extra* also reveals something about the Trinity *ad intra*, which is the Divine." *Rhythm.*, 226. While recognizing this insight is often accredited to Karl Rahner, Panikkar notes that it is also present in the Trinitarian theology of Thomas Aquinas. *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 260. Modern theological critique of western Christianity's neglect of its doctrine of Creation is common-place. For a recent example, see Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> *Rhythm*, 227.

to the Source, gathering in its return all the scattered temporal fragments originating in the primal outburst of the Source.<sup>45</sup>

To my way of thinking, it is this mitigated, non-dual monotheistic strain which provides continuity with classical Christian teaching of unity of/in God; at the same time, it represents a step beyond the normal western conception of what is implied by the term ‘monotheism’—which, as Panikkar admits, all too easily slips into deism and/or atheism. To use another quotation from *The Rhythm of Being* which appears to support this contention, Panikkar states that “Christian orthodoxy consists in avoiding tritheism, on one hand, and *strict* monotheism, on the other.”<sup>46</sup>

The classical term which Panikkar most employs in his reflection on the Divine Mystery is *perichoresis*—or its Latin equivalent *circumincessio* (or the more passive *circuminsessio*).<sup>47</sup> The Cappadocian Fathers use *perichoresis*—being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion—as a trinitarian metaphor to emphasize that the three divine persons are neither blurred nor separated—nor, for that matter, hierarchically constituted. They express both what they are in themselves and at the same time what God is: ecstatic, relational, dynamic, vital. The image of the divine dance highlights an eternal movement of co-equal partners involved in reciprocal giving and receiving. Catherine La Cugna notes how *perichoresis* identifies divine unity neither in the divine substance (Latin) nor exclusively in the person of the Father (Greek) but “locates unity instead in diversity, in a true *communion* of persons.”<sup>48</sup> The metaphor certainly challenges a notion of divinity that thinks of God as Absolute Subject,<sup>49</sup> let alone some kind of solitary or supreme Being—and, in this sense, certainly opposes many monotheistic conceptions, as Panikkar notes. However, it is another step again to suggest that *perichoresis* as developed in the tradition is opposed to a trinitarian monotheism—which affirms both unity and plurality in the Divine Mystery named God.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 226f.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 224. [Emphasis mine].

<sup>47</sup> See La Cugna, *God For Us*, 272.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>49</sup> The notion of God as Absolute Subject who distributes him/itself in three modes is clearly suggestive of the theology of Karl Barth and, somewhat similarly, Karl Rahner. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 1, “The Triune God” (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 295-304; and Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970).

From the Christian perspective, Panikkar's cosmotheandric insight can be read in terms of the radicalization of the *perichoresis* metaphor. While classical Christian teaching reads *perichoresis* as affirming unity, plurality, harmony, communion, mutuality and interdependence in the immanent Trinity, its implications for the economic Trinity (especially in Latin theology) are less well developed. Recent theological moves to bring the immanent and economic Trinities closer together are helpful, but they still tend to downplay the manner in which "the trinitarian structure of Divinity percolates, as it were, throughout all (His) creation."<sup>50</sup> So we are told, for example, that the human community is "supposed to imitate this *perichoresis* in its own configuration."<sup>51</sup> Political, liberation and feminist theologians make productive use of this approach.<sup>52</sup> However, one notes here a certain extrinsicism: we might say that God is perichoretic, so we (the human community) should imitate this. By way of contrast, Panikkar takes the more radical step of reading *perichoresis* as applicable to all reality, divine, human and cosmic. There is no question of mere imitation: all reality participates in the divine dance. Reality itself—including the cosmos as well as humanity—is perichoretic. While such an approach may be understood in non-theistic terms, it does not in itself require the abandonment of theism including, in my view, a *trinitarian* monotheism.

## Conclusion

This order of language is, of course, perpetually slippery. My attempt here is simply to argue that Panikkar's radical Trinity may be interpreted in accordance with classical Christian teaching. I would even like to suggest that his trinitarian hermeneutics has the capacity to enlarge and deepen the mystical dimension of Christian theology. It achieves this through the reclaiming and reformulation of classical metaphors and doctrines such as *creatio continua* and *perichoresis* as well as the vestige and appropriation doctrines. However, the question remains: does this require the overturning of the monotheistic paradigm? Perhaps the answer to this is *neti, neti*. As we have seen, Panikkar certainly challenges those monotheistic conceptions of the Divine as some kind of entity 'out there' separable from other reality.

<sup>50</sup> *Rhythm*, 227.

<sup>51</sup> *God For Us*, 276.

<sup>52</sup> For example: Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Sally McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

Indeed, the Christian mystery of the Incarnation suggests otherwise. Yet, while opposing all monistic interpretations, Panikkar also affirms the non-dual Oneness of the Divine Mystery in its interrelationship with all reality.

This is surely the point of Panikkar's radical Trinity: not the denial of monotheism *per se*, but the denial of a particular metaphysics which, in equating God and Being, effectively removes divinity from the natural and human world. Christian philosopher Merleau-Ponty expresses this succinctly: "To posit God as Being (in the metaphysical sense) is to bring about a negation of the world."<sup>53</sup> Panikkar's trinitarian hermeneutics—perceiving God, humanity and cosmos in terms of *creatio continua* and *perichoresis*—is certainly a deconstruction of such a monotheistic paradigm. However, it may also be read as the reconstruction of a *trinitarian* monotheism in which the sacred reality of the world participates in the divine (and trinitarian) mystery we name God. While this challenges "strict monotheistic belief," it also suggests such a challenge may be necessary in light of contemporary concerns. And it provides a path for the creative re-reading of classical Christian texts and the possible "transformation of Christian self-consciousness."<sup>54</sup>

In brief, while Panikkar's radical Trinity does represent a fundamental challenge to monotheism *as traditionally understood*, its reinterpretation of classical Christian teaching in terms of the *advaitic* Trinity allows for what I call a *trinitarian* monotheism. God and the world are neither two (absolute separation) nor one (annihilation of one by the other). Rather, all reality, including the Godhead, is inter-relational, trinitarian. This insight does not preclude harmony nor unity (even if in eschatological terms); neither does it shy away from the ultimacy of plurality and diversity. While Panikkar goes to great lengths to show this is not a uniquely Christian insight (preferring to show how it is almost universal across the world's traditions), he admits he 'received' his awareness of the truth of the Trinity through his experience of Christ.<sup>55</sup> And that truth, expressed in Christian terms, is that God is both one (monotheism) and three (trinitarian). While the radical Trinity extends well beyond theistic expressions, the burden of this paper has been to show its compatibility with classical, orthodox Christian belief. Despite Panikkar's

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<sup>53</sup> Cit. Kearney, *Anatheism*, 93, Commenting, Kearney adds: "To equate God with a timeless, otherworldly Being that is sovereign cause of itself and has no desire for nature or humanity—as Descartes and the rationalists did—is to reject the sanctity of the flesh ... (and is) a betrayal of the original message of the Incarnation." *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Rhythm.*, 258.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

understandable hesitations with any form of monotheism, the depth of his trinitarian meditations is both timely and important for the future of Christian faith. In relation to God this is surely best expressed in terms of a trinitarian monotheism.

## **The Trinity in the Thought of Raimon Panikkar and Bede Griffiths**

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*OM*

*Tat Savitur varenyam  
Bhargo devasya dhimahi  
Dhiyo yo nah pracodayat*

[Rg Veda iii, 62, 10]

*Om,*

*We meditate upon the glorious splendor  
Of the Vivifier divine  
May he himself illumine our minds*

*Purnam adah purnam idam  
Purnat purnam udacyate  
Purnasya purnam adaya  
Purnam evavasisyate*

[Bhahdaranyaka Upanishad, V, 1. 10]

*That is Fullness, this is Fullness  
From Fullness comes Fullness  
When Fullness is taken from Fullness  
Fullness still remains*

### **Abstract**

Raimon Panikkar and Bede Griffiths were close friends and fellow Christian priests and thinkers attempting to live out their Christian vocations through an Indian contemplative praxis as each understood it. They were nonetheless quite different religious personalities, Panikkar being a *jnana yogi* (“knowledge contemplative”), and Griffiths a

*bhakti yogi* (“devotional contemplative.”). This essay traces their different understandings of the Trinity which both regarded as the central Christian mystery and reality.

## Introduction

Bede Griffiths and Raimon Panikkar came to India at approximately the same time in 1955 and remained close friends until Bede’s death in 1993. They came for roughly the same reasons: to discover and to experience at first hand the spiritual wisdom of India. Panikkar, as the son of an Indian Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother, had up to that point studied some of the Indian philosophical and spiritual classics, but his training had primarily been in Western philosophy, theology, and science. Prior to 1955, when he was already 37 years old, he had not been for any length of time in India. Intuitively, he felt a strong desire to discover the world of his father and to deepen his own identity. Bede, as we know, was around this time getting increasingly restless with his Western Christian heritage. In his well-known words:

I had begun to find that there was something lacking not only in the Western world but in the Western Church. We were living from one half of our soul, from the conscious, rational level and we needed to discover the other half, the unconscious, intuitive dimension. I wanted to experience in my life the marriage of these two dimensions of human existence, the rational and intuitive, the conscious and unconscious, the masculine and feminine. I wanted to find the way to the marriage of East and West<sup>1</sup>.

Although their subsequent paths in life took them in different directions, Panikkar to an academic career in India, the US, and Europe, and Bede to the establishment and sustenance of monastic communities in India, their friendship remained deep. And yet it was the friendship of two quite different temperaments and personalities, a difference perhaps best captured in Indian terms. Panikkar was and is a *jnana yogi*, a visionary, a contemplative, and a thinker, whose entire life has been devoted to elaborating and deepening a vision that he had at a relatively early age. The very first article he published in 1944, at the age of 26, bears the title, “Sintesis: Vision de Sintesis del Universo,” and it is no exaggeration to say that the subsequent years have largely been spent in a broadening and development of that synthesis of the cosmic, the divine, and the human.

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<sup>1</sup> Bede Griffiths (hereafter BG), “The Transcendent Unity of Religions,” *Downside Review*, 1954, cited in Shirley Du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths*, New York: Doubleday, 1998, 102.

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Bede, I would describe, as a *bhakti yogi*, a person whose style and idiom were devotional, experiential, and practical. He too was in the grip of a vision, but a vision that he sought to realize in his person in both senses of the word “realize.” Panikkar was quick to understand this. As he remarked at a memorial service for Bede in 1993, “The importance of Fr. Bede, which we should never forget, for us, was his person... was his being there.”<sup>2</sup>

These differences in style are reflected in their accounts of the Trinity, a doctrine and a mystery that was central to their thought and life. As I will try to show, Panikkar’s key notion of “cosmotheandrisms” is an alternative way of expressing his trinitarian thinking. Bede in an article written in 1986 says:

What Panikkar has said [in his book on the Trinity] represents in principle what I have come to discover over the years. I think I realized the centrality of the Trinity even before coming out to India, but the depths of the intuition only unfolded in the Indian context. Over the past 40 years, there has been a continuous development of my ideas on the Trinity. The way in which I would formulate the trinitarian insight now differs from how I had previously understood it through my Western education. Today I am seeing the Trinity in Oriental terms and in this am reacting against Greek theology<sup>3</sup>.

What I shall do in this paper is to expound on some of Panikkar’s Trinitarian reflections, first in a philosophical and then in a theological key. I will then take up some of Bede’s ideas on the Trinity in order both to show the parallels with those of Panikkar, but also to demonstrate Bede’s more experiential and devotional emphasis.

### **Panikkar’s Cosmotheandrisms**

Panikkar is an epistemological pluralist in the sense that he attempts to fuse three different and irreducible modes of thought, sensibility, and consciousness, what Panikkar calls *mythos*, *logos*, and *pneuma*. Their mutual relation in his thought can be succinctly expressed: *mythos* is the unthought, *logos* is that which is thought, while the *pneuma* is unthinkable. *Mythos* is the unthought because it is the background, the source and origin

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Judson Trapnell, *Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue*, in the “Foreword” by Kenneth Cracknell, State University of New York Press, 2001, xii.

<sup>3</sup> BG, “A Meditation on the Mystery of the Trinity” in *Monastic Studies* 17, 1986, [“On the Trinity”], Benedictine Priory of Montreal, 69-70.

of what is thought, and therefore, cannot itself 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 its “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 a permanent passage, a *pascha*, a pilgrimage; the procession from *mythos* through *logos* to *pneuma* is endless. Precisely this pneumatic dimension guarantees the constant openness into which we may take a step forward.”<sup>4</sup>

As one observes reason in its operation and intentionality, it becomes clear that its creative sources lie beyond itself in myth and the *pneuma*. This, of course, has not been completely denied by the mainstream tradition. The polarity of reason and intuition, philosophy and art, rationality and faith has long been recognized, but the usual tendency to master and contain the tension in the polarity has been to give reason pride of place. Panikkar expresses this well:

The challenge consists in doing justice to this polarity – that is, in overcoming dualism without falling prey to monism. This is the proper function of *advaita* or non-dualistic approach, which is the hermeneutical key for everything I am going to say. *Advaita* overcomes the strictures of the *logos* integrating the spirit in our approach to Reality, or as a western classic... says: “reflectens ardor” (rebounding love) belongs to the ultimate nature of the Whole. In fact, the attempt to master the just mentioned polarity by the *reason* alone is at the origin of the dialectical method: *sic et non*. *Advaita* amounts to the overcoming of dualistic dialectics by means of introducing love at the ultimate level of reality. In other words, the holistic attempt tries to ‘reach’ the Whole not by a dialectical synthesis, but by means of an immediate contact with the Whole, defying the dualistic subject/object epistemology<sup>5</sup>.

At the other end of the scale from the rationalist tradition of philosophy are those thinkers like Sankara, who espouse non-dualism by claiming that Brahman or the Absolute and the world are not two, because Brahman alone truly is, the world being a mere appearance (*maya*).

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<sup>4</sup> *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics* (hereafter MFH), Paulist Press, New York, 1979, 347.

<sup>5</sup> *Rhythm of Being: The Unbroken Trinity* (unpublished draft of Panikkar’s Gifford Lectures) 34.

Alternatively, if one takes the manifestations of the world as a starting point, one can conceive Brahman as the ground of such manifestation and therefore in its essence beyond all multiplicity and differentiation – the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja. In both these versions reason is seen as intrinsically dualistic because of the duality of the knower and the known. The unity of knower, known, and knowledge must be sought in a mode of consciousness that transcends reason altogether – a mode variously called “intuition,” “mystic awareness,” “pure consciousness,” and the like.

Panikkar’s *advaita* in a sense is a *via media* between the rationalistic dialectic of a Spinoza or Hegel tending to 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 reason 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 spiritual. 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, wanting to transcend reason completely. Furthermore unlike Sankara, Panikkar does not see the world as mere appearance. The world is taken with full seriousness and reason is seen as an essential “moment” of consciousness, which provides us with a rational awareness of the world and invites the full scope of dialectical complexity. And yet this is not the whole story - - there is something both “prior to” and “beyond” reason with which it stands in creative tension.

Panikkar’s epistemological pluralism is, as one would expect, closely connected with his ontology and specifically with his cosmotheandricism. Just as there is a procession from *mythos* through *logos* to the *pneuma*, there is likewise a *perichoresis* of the Divine, the Human, and the Cosmic, the three irreducible dimensions of reality.

There is a kind of *perichoresis*, ‘dwelling within one another,’ of these three dimensions of Reality, the Divine, the Human, and the Cosmic.<sup>6</sup>

And then again:

There is no matter without spirit and no spirit without matter, now world without Man, no God without the Universe, etc. God, Man, and World

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<sup>6</sup> “The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel - - A Meditation on Nonviolence” i *Cross Currents*, 29:2, 1979, 17.

are three artificially substantivized forms of the three primordial adjectives when describe Reality<sup>7</sup>.

Panikkar's use of the theological term *perichoresis* taken from the discussions about the Trinity by the Greek Fathers and paralleling, although not exactly, the three moments of the eternal dance of Siva Nataraja - - creation, destruction, and preservation... is deliberate and is designed to grasp three closely related aspects of reality: a) its "trinitarian" structure, b) its differentiated unity, and c) the open-ended character of reality, and its essentially rhythmic quality. Let me say a few words about each.

### The "Trinitarian" Structure

The main thesis that Panikkar wants to proffer here 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 independent entities. Not only are they dependent on each other but this dependence is not just external, but rather internal, i.e. constitutive of their very being.

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 is in fact 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, 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," 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

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<sup>7</sup> "Philosophy as Lifestyle" in *Philosophers on Their Own Work*, Peter Lang, Bern, Frankfurt, 1978, 199-201.

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 towards the primal reality of the source<sup>8</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 is it that it invites further deepening and development, by participating in it and realizing its ever fresh and new manifestations. 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>9</sup>. Of course, as already pointed out, Panikkar’s is a quite different philosophical style than Hegel’s, but the aim in both cases is the same – to “expand” and articulate Christian doctrine as a model of Reality.

### **Its Differentiated Unity**

Pluralism, as Panikkar construes it, mediates between sheer plurality and multiplicity on the one hand and the monism of the One on the other. Reality is neither one nor many but rather non-dual. What from one perspective looks plural is from another perspective a unity expressing the interdependence and the interrelatedness of all things and the co-arising of all processes. This marks a significant shift from the way pluralism is metaphysically thematized in the western philosophical tradition, as the problem of the “One and the Many” (*hen kai polla*), and the attendant difficulties of construing the “and.” Is the One above the Many (Plato)? In the Many (Hegel)? The source of the Many (Plotinus)? The real ground of the Many (Spinoza)? Beyond the Many (Kant)? Panikkar, who inclines to the Buddhist ontology of relations and processes rather than of substance,

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<sup>8</sup> Rowan Williams, “Trinity and Pluralism” in Gavin D’Costa (ed.) *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1990, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Jorg Splett, *Die Trinitaetslehre GWF Hegels*, Herder, Freiburg, 1965.

sees the One as emerging in and through differences and being radically relational.

Again, Rowan Williams captures the particular cast of Panikkar's thinking well:

The heart of this ontology could be summarized by saying that *differences matter*. The variety of the world's forms as experienced by human minds does not conceal an absolute oneness to which perceptible difference is completely irrelevant. If there is a unifying structure, it does not exist and cannot be seen independently of the actual movement and development of differentiation, the story of life-forms growing and changing.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Open-Ended and Rhythmic Character of Reality**

Like Whitehead Panikkar stresses the unfinished, continually developing and ever new character of reality:

I am not only saying that everything is directly or indirectly related to everything else: the radical relativity or *pratityasamutpada* of the Buddhist tradition. I am also stressing that this relationship is not only constitutive of the whole, but that it flashes forth ever new and vital in every spark of the real.<sup>11</sup>

Panikkar's thoughts here evoke the famous hymn to the freshness of life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary critic, Walter Pater:

The service of philosophy, of speculative culture towards the human spirit is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in land or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood or passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us - - for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end... How should we pass most swiftly from point to point and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest

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<sup>10</sup> Williams, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, ed. Scott Eastham, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1993, 60.

energy? To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.<sup>12</sup>

This is the recognizable anthem of an aesthete. While endorsing this aesthetic attitude, Panikkar provides a philosophical ground to it by his idea of *creatio continua*, the radical newness of each moment and phase of reality as it unfolds in unpredictable ways.

Panikkar's 1989 Gifford Lectures soon to be published are entitled "The Rhythm of Being: The Unbroken Trinity." He develops the theme of rhythm at great length there, but perhaps I may be permitted to quote a small passage which gives a taste of his thinking:

Life is a dance... This choral dance is a combination of harmony and rhythm, Plato says. It reminds us of the trinitarian *perichoresis*, the cosmic and divine dance. Siva is Nataraja, the dancing god. The dance is his creation. Dance is practically for all popular religions the most genuine human sharing in the miracle of creation... We all participate in rhythm because rhythm is another name for Being and Being is Trinity.<sup>13</sup>

Given this brief sketch of Panikkar's ontology, it is clear why he needs a matching epistemological pluralism. The movements of Reality are too complex and subtle to be captured only by reason. The epistemological attitude that best corresponds to myth and the lure of *pneuma* is faith. The fact is that we are forever called by *pneuma* to an "existential openness," that far transcends (though it does not necessarily negate, *a la* Tertullian) reason. This existential openness is what Panikkar calls faith and it operates at two levels, first as a constitutive human dimension that serves to render a person receptive to the intimations of spirit and second, the act of believing in which this receptivity is actuated. Both of these are to be distinguished from belief as such, which is the concrete expression of the act of faith. Thus, Panikkar writes:

Myth, faith, and hermeneutics then might represent the three-fold – cosmotheandric – unity of the universe, that unity which neither destroys diversity nor forgets that the world is inhabited, that God is not alone, and that knowledge is based on love.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Pater, "Conclusion" in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Oxford, New York, 1919, 194.

<sup>13</sup> R. Panikkar, "The Rhythm of Being" (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>14</sup> MFH, 10.

### **Theological Implications of Panikkar's Advaitic Trinitarianism**

In his book, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Panikkar asserts:

The Trinity . . . may be considered as a junction where the authentic spiritual dimensions of all religions meet. The Trinity is God's self-revelation in the fullness of time, the consummation both of all that God has already "said" of himself to man and of all that man has been able to attain and know of God in his thought and mystical experience. In the Trinity a true encounter of religions takes place, which results, not in a vague fusion or mutual dilution, but in an authentic enhancement of all the religious and even cultural elements that are contained in each<sup>15</sup>.

There are at least two assertions being made here: first, about a possible interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity as such, and second, the fact that as an ontological structure it allows "the authentic spiritual dimensions of all religions" to meet, and therefore enables and facilitates a true inter-religious encounter. Before I expound on these claims, a word of explanation about the title of this section may be in order. Why do I call Panikkar's trinitarianism "advaitic," even though, as I've indicated above, his idea of "advaita" deviates in important respects from some classical Indian accounts of the doctrine? I do this for two reasons. First, there are in fact in the Indian philosophical tradition not just one but several different versions of "advaita." Panikkar's interpretation of nondualism is closer to some (like Ramanuja's qualified nondualism) than others. What is important for Panikkar is that while there are essential distinctions within the divinity, and between the divinity and the world, these distinctions by no means imply separations or dualisms. Rather, reality is radically relational and organically interconnected. What is more important still is that while the unity underlying these distinctions may be conceptually explained, the unity itself requires a nonconceptual "intuition" to go beyond the subject-object dualism of thought. Panikkar here draws on the rich meditative experience of Hinduism and Buddhism, which have significantly, but by no means exclusively, explored the experience of total silence and radical apophatism.

With that preliminary explanation, let me cite a central passage in Panikkar's book on the Trinity:

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

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<sup>15</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, New York: Orbia Books, 1973, 42.

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. In other, equally inappropriate words: the Father can “go on” begetting the Son, because he “receives back” the very Divinity which he has given up to the Son. It is the immolation or the mystery of the Cross in the Trinity. It is what Christian theologians used to call the *perichoresis* or *circumincessio*, the dynamic inner circularity of the Trinity<sup>16</sup>.

Panikkar, like the Greek Fathers, links the substratum of the divinity with the Father: “the Nicene Creed, as also the Greek Fathers and even Tertullian, affirms that the ‘substratum’ of the divinity resides in the Father.”<sup>17</sup> This might give the appearance of subordinationism, but that is not the case. The “non-being” of the Father acquires form in and through expression in the Son. The Son may therefore be conceived as the divinity as expressed by the Father:

We may say: the Absolute, the Father, *is not*. He has no *ex-istence*, not even that of being. In the generation of the Son he has, so to speak, given everything. In the Father the apophatism (the *kenosis* or emptying) of Being is real and total. Nothing can be said of the Father “in himself,” of the “self” of the Father.

Here Panikkar makes a connection with Buddhist insight:

Is it not here, truly speaking, in this essential apophatism of the “person” of the Father, in the *kenosis* of Being at its very source, that the Buddhist experience of *nirvana* and *sunyata* (emptiness) should be situated? One is led onwards towards the “absolute goal” and at the end one finds nothing because there is nothing, not even Being. “God created out of nothing” (*ex nihilo*), certainly, i.e., out of himself (*a Deo*)—a Buddhist would say<sup>18</sup>.

The Father is best approached through a radical silence, for “any attempt to *speak* about the Father involves a contradiction in terms, for every word about the Father can only refer to the one of whom the Father is Father, that is, to the Word, to the Son.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 48.

Panikkar turns next to the Son, who alone of the three “persons” is strictly speaking a person:

Only the Son is Person, if we use the word in its eminent sense and analogically to human persons: neither the Father nor the spirit is a person. Relating this to the spirituality of personalism, he says: “Correctly speaking, then, it is only with the Son that man can have a personal relationship. The God of theism, thus, is the Son, the God with whom one can speak, establish a dialogue, enter into communication, is the divine Person who is in-relation-with, or rather, is the relationship with man and one of the poles of total existence”<sup>20</sup>.

The property of silence which characterizes the Father stands in dialectical complementarity to the Son as speech, just as the non-being of the Father is complemented by the determinate form of the Son, which serves as the ontological ground of his personhood.

In the spirituality of the Spirit, Panikkar sees a correlation with *advaita*, the non-dualistic insight proffered by a part of the Indian tradition:

If the Father and the Son are not *two*, they are not one either: the Spirit both unites and distinguishes them. He is the bond of unity: the *we* in between, or rather within . . . There is no doubt that hindu thought is especially well prepared to contribute to the elaboration of a deeper theology of the Spirit . . . Indeed what is the Spirit but the *atman* of the Upanishads, which is said to be identical with *brahman*, although this identity can only be existentially recognized and affirmed once ‘realization’ has been attained<sup>21</sup>.

This realization of the unity of one’s deepest spirit with the Divine is sometimes expressed imagistically in the literature of *advaita*: we are the waves of the divine ocean and have no reality apart from it.

Having articulated some theological dimensions of Panikkar’s account of the Trinity, let me finally come to Bede’s interpretation of it.

### Griffiths’ Trinity of Love

Judson Trapnell has suggested that Bede’s spiritual journey can be organized around three phases, which he describes as God in nature, God in Christ and the church, and a Christian *advaita*. In accordance with the theme

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 62-64.

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of this paper, exploring the connections between Panikkar and Griffiths, I shall focus on Bede's third phase and his reflections on the Trinity within it. In order to get at some of the affinities and differences between Panikkar and Griffiths, it might be worth quoting at length from Bede's most sustained account of the Trinity, written in 1986 and published in *Monastic Studies*:

Here in this life, we are already involved in the Trinity. The whole creation arises eternally in God . . . each one of us exists eternally in God in the eternal idea that He has of us . . . Tauler actually says that every creature in God *is* God. Of course, this statement has to be understood mystically and not ontologically as pure identity, as is sometimes said in Hindu *advaita*. So there we have this coming forth of the Word from the Father, and the Word comes forth as distinct from the Father. All the distinctions in creation are found in principle in the Word. This is important because in the Hindu view you often hear that all differences disappear in the final state. We would say that those differences are eternally in the Word<sup>22</sup>.

It is significant that in this passage Bede distinguishes between the "mystical" and the "ontological" in a way in which the *advaitic* view does not. If *atman* is identified with *brahman*, and we are waves of the divine ocean, we are in our deepest selfhood divine. The mystical awareness is only the progressive realization of it. As Panikkar says, "Faith in the Spirit cannot be clothed in personalist structure. It does not consist in the discovery of Someone, and even less in dialogue with him. It consists rather in the 'consciousness' that one is not found outside reality."<sup>23</sup> In other words, the discovery of divine "personhood" occurs as an internal moment of consciousness and not as something external to consciousness. Furthermore, Bede seems to make the *advaitic* view a monistic one, when he claims that "in the Hindu view . . . all differences disappear in the final state." They do not disappear, but rather are held together in unity. That's exactly the difference between monism and non-dualism.

Next, when Bede comes to the explication of the three persons or moments of the Trinity, he says:

Now, as the Son emerges from the Father eternally and differentiates Himself, and distinguishes the world or creation from the Father, so He returns to the Father in the Spirit. The Spirit is the Love that unites Father and Son. The entire creation comes forth in all its differentiation in the word, and it returns in the Spirit to the One. The Spirit is the energy in God,

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<sup>22</sup> See note 3 above, 70-71.

<sup>23</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Trinity*, op. cit., 64.

the *sakti* or power in Hindu terms, that is the uncreated Energy of Gregory of Palamas. The Word or Son as the *Logos* is the exemplary Form of all creation, the principle of all forms in nature, while the spirit is the *sakti*, the energy in creation, what makes it to be and to operate<sup>24</sup>.

Here, there is substantial agreement between Griffiths and Panikkar. The Trinity is not primarily some recondite doctrine about the life of God set apart from our own spiritual life. Rather, it is the ground of our spiritual being and the three moments or persons express different aspects of that ground and therefore of our being: the silence of the Father, the determinate form and speech of the Son, and the indwelling energy of the Spirit. In the traditional Greek view, a distinction is made between the so-called “immanent” and “economic” trinities, the former referring to the inner life of the Divine and the latter to the incursion into time and history of the Divine, and the doctrines of the Fall, Redemption, and Final Judgment. Both Panikkar and Griffiths maintain that distinction but considerably soften it, insofar as time is not dualistically separated from eternity but seen a la Plato as its “moving image.” The inner life of the Godhead is not only one that we all participate in, but that life would in some sense be incomplete without our participation. As Meister Eckhart provocatively put it, “The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me. If God were not, I would not be. If I were not, God would not be.”

Bede, however, differs from Panikkar in the *personal* dynamism that he makes central to the Trinity:

It is essential for us all to know that the Trinity is not some sort of mathematical problem of how the Three and the One are united, but that it is a mystery that is personally involved with us and in us. Instead of the abstract scholastic theology, in this understanding we have something concrete, a definitely personal connection . . . Furthermore this reveals that God’s being is essentially interpersonal relationship. That is what the Trinity signifies . . . that the ultimate reality of the Godhead is interpersonal relationship, is personal communion in love, I think is a distinctly Christian insight, and reveals the inner depth of the whole mystery<sup>25</sup>.

As we have seen before, Panikkar confines the personal aspect of the Trinity, strictly considered, to the second moment, the Son. Neither the Father nor the Spirit are best conceptualized according to him in personal terms. He too speaks often of “love” as the defining quality of the Trinity,

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<sup>24</sup> Griffiths, op. cit., 72.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 73.

but it is love seen as much in impersonal as in personal terms. As Panikkar explains:

*Jnana-marga*, the way of knowledge, of pure contemplation, of ontological *theoria*, is the way *par excellence* of *advaita*. For the *advaitin* it is not a matter of transforming the world or even himself, as it is with the *Karma-yogin*. Nor for him is it a matter of worshipping God by loving him to the utmost, after the manner of *bhakta*. It is sheerly a matter of forgetting himself, of yielding totally to God, thus even of renouncing loving him—renunciation of love which does not proceed from a lack of love but is, on the contrary, most profoundly the sign of a love that is purer and ‘carried further’, a love which, having disappeared into the Beloved, has no longer any memory of itself<sup>26</sup>.

Love, in other words, demands its own renunciation. The conditions of the possibility of mutual love are separation and distance, which in turn ground the distinctness of persons. On the other hand, however, it is love that pushes toward a complete identification in the process destroying the separateness and reciprocity which are its structural conditions. This is the existential paradox of love, or the inner tension within love between respect on the one hand which honors distinctness and union on the other which annuls it.

The differences between a *jnana-yogi* like Panikkar and a *bhakti-yogi* like Griffiths are, I think, vividly expressed here, at least in conceptual terms. I think Bede saw clearly the logic of the *advaita* position of union in contrast to communion, but drew back from its final consequences. To that extent, he saw the tensions involved in the very notion of a “Christian *advaita*.” As early as in his 1954 autobiography, *The Golden String*, he writes:

The divine mystery is ultimately a mystery of love, and it reveals itself to love alone. It is only if we are prepared to give ourselves totally in love that Love will give itself totally to us<sup>27</sup>.

And in *Return to the Center*, published in 1976, he continues:

In this [Christian] revelation the mystery of being reveals itself as a mystery of love, of an eternal love ever rising from the depths of being in the Godhead and manifesting itself in the total self-giving of Jesus on the cross and in the communication of that love to men in the Spirit. The organization of the Church, with its doctrine of Trinity and Incarnation and

<sup>26</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Trinity*, op. cit., 38-39.

<sup>27</sup> Griffiths, *The Golden String: An Autobiography*, Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1954, 187.

its Eucharistic ritual, has no other purpose than to communicate this love, to create a community of love, to unite all men in the eternal Ground of being, which is present in the heart of every man<sup>28</sup>.

His experience of Indian *advaita* and of other religions and philosophies deepened and broadened the mystery of love, but love in its different modalities remained for him the key to encountering both unity and plurality.

There is wisdom in the *Bhagavad Gita*'s (one of Griffiths' favorite scriptures) distinction between and delineation of three different *yogas*—*bhatki*, *jnana*, and *karma*. While these are by no means exclusive *yogas* and while there is considerable overlap between them, they nonetheless point to different types of spirituality and spiritual temperaments. The suggestion that I made at the beginning of this essay is that Bede Griffiths was essentially a *bhatki yogi*, while Panikkar was, and is, essentially a *jnana yogi*. I hope I have gone some way towards supporting that suggestion.

We can be immensely grateful to Bede not only for having shown the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity in Christian life, but even more for having realized (again in both senses) in his life the Trinitarian mystery. Panikkar was quite aware of this and in a moving farewell tribute to Bede says

Bede's extraordinary gift (and I know how much it cost him) was one of tolerance. This was his special gift that pervaded Shantivanam during the years of his tenure. He did not judge anybody or anything. Everyone felt immediately loved...he knew that a new world is coming, that profound adjustments will have to be made, and he made his contribution toward opening the way for that new world. His spirit, therefore, is a spirit of self-transcendence, a spirit that would go beyond itself, that would do new things<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Griffiths, *Return to the Center*, Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1976, 116.

<sup>29</sup> R. Panikkar, "A Tribute," in *The Other Half of my Soul*, Ed. Beatrice Bruteau, Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1996, 32-33.

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## The Metaphor of Man and the Rhythm of Being

Maria Roberta Cappellini  
*CIRPIT President*

*Soltanto la conoscenza che ama o l'amore che conosce, (questo è  
l'advaita), scopre l'armonia.<sup>1</sup>*

*Ch'invero il grande amore nasce dalla gran cognizione della cosa che  
si ama: e se tu non la conoscerai, poco o nulla la potrai amare.<sup>2</sup>*

### Abstract (English)

How can the metaphor of the Rhythm of Being be applied to Man? One of Panikkar's suggestions is: "We need art, we need inspiration and this means freedom". Following his indication, the artistic image of the Vitruvian Man by Leonardo da Vinci(1490), proposed in this short reflection, can lead us through an "under-standing" of Panikkar's "cosmotheandric" vision and through a "secular-sacred experience". Leonardo represented the Artist of the three-dimensionality and a Master of the Supreme Art of seeing (Intuition). Analogically Panikkar represents the philosopher of "a-duality" (sscr. *advaita*) and of the "cosmotheandric experience", in which, as he affirms, "what counts is Man (re)discovered in his infinite dignity and brought back to his real home." Likewise in Leonardo's drawing, man fits perfectly, standing with legs and arms outstretched, in the perfect geometric shapes of a circle and a square, according to a double centrality which can be related to the panikkarian "ontonomic a-dual vision". The common denominator of the two artistic and philosophical experiences, is symbolized by the human body. The body is rhythmic, showing a sacred hierarchy of functions and faculties. The body is silent, because it operates in silence. The body is free, because it acts spontaneously. The body consciousness overcomes individuality as it carries in itself the awareness of the divine dimension. For this reason we can learn from this living symbol of the whole reality, from its wisdom, by discovering the *totum in parte*, like a microcosm, at the same time connecting ourselves to the macrocosm, to what exceeds us. "Kosmos is the body of God", Panikkar metaphorically says; "The body is the Temple of the spirit" the Gospels affirm. In

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<sup>1</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *Pluralismo e Interculturalità*, Opera Omnia, VolVI/1 Jaca Book, Milano, 2009, 226.

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della pittura*, fol.77.

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this sense the Vitruvian symbol can be analogically related to Panikkar's "Rhythm of Being" and to his natural Kosmovision, neither monistic, nor dualistic, innate in man and based on a holistic network of inter(in)dependent relationships, referring to a process of continuous renewal (*creatio continua*). Furthermore, the Vitruvian image reveals an artistic conception regarding an eventual "poietic philosophy" based on the architectural principle and on an experience of "pure vision", which can be related to Panikkar's cosmotheandric mystics and philosophy of praxis.

### Abstract (italiano)

Cosa intende Panikkar con la metafora del 'Ritmo dell'Essere'? E come può tale metafora essere applicata all'uomo? Uno dei suggerimenti del filosofo recita: '*Noi abbiamo bisogno d'arte e di ispirazione e questo significa libertà*'. Seguendo tale traccia, abbiamo scelto per questa breve riflessione, un'immagine che possa condurci, attraverso una comprensione della visione "cosmoteandrica" di Panikkar, ad 'una esperienza simbolica di sacra secolarità'. L'immagine si riferisce all'Uomo Vitruviano di Leonardo (1490). Leonardo rappresenta l'Artista della tridimensionalità ed il Maestro della suprema Arte della Visione (Intuizione). Analogamente Panikkar rappresenta il filosofo dell'a-dualità e dell'esperienza mistica cosmoteandrica, in cui come egli afferma 'ciò che conta è l'uomo riscoperto nella sua infinita dignità e ricondotto nella sua autentica dimora'. Parimenti nel disegno leonardesco la figura umana è perfettamente inscritta in piedi, con le gambe e le braccia allargate, nelle forme geometriche del cerchio e del quadrato (due classici simboli tradizionali indicativi della Terra e del Cielo), secondo una doppia centralità che può essere collegata alla visione cosmica panikkariana di tipo 'ontonomico a-duale'. Il comune denominatore delle due esperienze, artistica e filosofica, è rappresentato dal simbolo del corpo umano. Il corpo è ritmico e rappresenta una sacra gerarchia di funzioni e facoltà. Il corpo è silenzioso perché opera in silenzio. Il corpo è libero perché agisce spontaneamente. La coscienza del corpo supera quella individuale poiché porta in sé la consapevolezza della dimensione divina. Per queste ragioni il corpo rappresenta una vera e propria esperienza di apprendimento, essendo per antonomasia il simbolo vivente dell'intera realtà. Possiamo imparare dalla sua saggezza, rinvenendo in tale microcosmo il *totum in parte*, scoprendoci al contempo collegati al macrocosmo, cioè a ciò che ci supera, a ciò che è oltre di noi. Afferma metaforicamente il filosofo: "Il Kosmo è il corpo di Dio". Affermano i Vangeli: "Il corpo è il Tempio dello Spirito". Il *Theos* cioè è contemporaneamente trascendente ed immanente: le due dimensioni sono distinte ma inseparabili. In questo senso il simbolo vitruviano può essere analogicamente correlato al 'Ritmo dell'Essere' di Panikkar ed alla sua Kosmovisione naturale olistica ("Ontonomìa"), cioè né monistica, né dualistica, in quanto basata su una rete di relazioni di inter-in-dipendenza, riferibili ad un processo in continuo divenire e costante rinnovamento, collegabile alla nozione teologica di *creatio continua*. In secondo luogo l'immagine vitruviana rivela una visione artistica riferibile ad una eventuale "filosofia poietica", basata sul principio architettonico e su una esperienza di

“vision pura”, avvicinabili all’attuale mistica cosmoteandrica e filosofia della prassi panikkariana.

### **Preliminary Remarks: The Rhythm of Being**

In this special day dedicated to our mentor Raimon Panikkar, the first Conference after his death, I’d like to celebrate his memory together with you, through this peculiar text, his *philosophicis compendium*, offered here today for our attention: *The Rhythm of Being*. Attention of mind and heart, as he taught us, according to an active-passive involvement in Being.<sup>3</sup> In this sense the intensive contemplative way of reading, which Panikkar’s texts implicitly invite us to, becomes itself “rhythm of being,” demanding the union of mind and heart, reason and intuition, knowledge and love, in a process in progress, according to an open synthesis, which can be such only when, as he used to say, “Being overcomes Thinking”, in this way nourishing and regenerating it constantly.

First of all what is Rhythm? What does this metaphor mean?<sup>4</sup> It is not a concept but a symbol: the rhythm of Being, as Panikkar underlines, is more than a metaphor, as there can be nothing out of Being and its “rhythm” can only express what Being itself is. In other words, Being appears to us disguised as an apparent complexity we can call rhythm. Furthermore, as Being is in the beings and rhythm is one of its aspects, this latter constitutes for man the potential revelation of Being itself, not considered in relation to human intelligibility or will, but to the Wholeness, including temporality, historicity and spirituality, i.e. the human, cosmic, divine levels of Reality.<sup>5</sup> A cosmotheandric triad: ‘the Rhythm of Being’.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being, The Gifford Lectures*, Maryknoll, Orbis, N.Y., 2010, 105.

<sup>4</sup>We assume the Greek etymology of “*metaphora*”, according to Panikkar, as “what takes us beyond the apparent meaning, into unknown lands where perhaps it is also possible to get lost”.

<sup>5</sup> As Panikkar reminds us, the Whole is neither name nor concept nor thing: it isn’t the sum of its parts, but a horizon of intelligibility and doesn’t give rise to a system, but to an attitude.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 38, ff.

To begin with I'll use some quotations as guidelines of my reflection based on a visual approach to the text.<sup>7</sup> In particular I've chosen a traditional symbolic image here represented by Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, (just one example drawn from the Italian Renaissance context), to focus on its symbol, trying to turn it into what Panikkar calls a "symbolic experience" and to enter his holistic vision, not only conceptually but intuitively as well.<sup>8</sup> Intuition, here is referred to "the immediate experience of the Whole", implying the symbolic knowledge and the overcoming (not the denial) of rationality, corresponding to the inner cognitive opening of the human being (his/her natural aspiration) to the mystery of reality.<sup>9</sup>

### **The anthropomorphic metaphor**

But why choose an "anthropomorphic" image to talk about this metaphor? The reason concerns some basic considerations. In the first place, after the overthrow of the theological vision into the modern anthropology, operated by the "masters of suspicion" of the XIXth century (Marx, Freud and Nietzsche), Panikkar re-thinks this science under a critical approach starting from our modern philosophy and its "lethal" separation of body and mind, which gave rise to the "specialized" disciplines of study, losing the vision of the whole and the sense of the human. Panikkar, inspired by the ancient "Philo-sophy" and by the Vedic tradition, re-opens the horizons of the philosophical and theological thought according to a holistic, cosmotheandric approach to reality. In particular in his vision, the human being (in his/her male/female aspects, represented by the symbol of the androgyne) constitutes the meeting point of the whole reality and in this sense is "an icon of God" (*Atman-Brahman*).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As regards to the affinity between art and religion, let's mention Meister Eckhart and his "knowledge through images" up to his "aniconic sacredness". (M. Eckhart, *Una mistica della ragione*, Messaggero, Padova, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 322.

<sup>9</sup> R. Panikkar, *La Dimora della Sagggezza*, Mondadori, Milano, 2005, 100. "In the immediate experience of the whole, (...) man is surrounded by everything and is at the same time everything" (translation into English by the author).

<sup>10</sup> Consequently Leonardo's figure of the Vitruvian Man will be considered here as a symbol of the humankind in both its male/female aspects (androgyne).

(...) we should speak of how to open us up to that very Whole that permeates us, and not just a part, but to an image, an icon that reflects the Whole.<sup>11</sup>

Panikkar urges a “centration” of man, not in the sense of a central position in the universe, but in the sense of the con-centration in the “person” (corresponding to the human deep identity), consisting of the three dimensions (human, cosmic, divine) of Reality.<sup>12</sup> In this sense it is not a question of anthropocentrism, or theocentrism, nor of cosmocentrism, but of “radical relationality”, since there’s no Absolute in itself.<sup>13</sup> The three dimensions are interrelated in a dynamic process of inter-in-dependency. According to it “the center” is *ubiquitous* (every human being is “the center” if all reality is concentrated in him/her) and at the same time is *nulliquo*, as there isn’t any lowest common denominator to which the three dimensions can be reduced. The process constitutes a dynamic movement of mutual interpenetration where the dimension of consciousness pervades everything, as our Vitruvian image suggests us.

As Panikkar outlines, the main fundamental question concerns the human being : “Who am I?”, so “Who is Man?” The human being is the primary image that makes us aware of the reality we’re immediately given, at the same time overcoming us.

Our assumption here is that Man has a unique position in the whole of reality. Man is not a thing, is not just a product of the blind forces of cosmic evolution, but rather is the author of the very problematic we are talking about (...) spectator, actor, co-author in the rhythm of the real.<sup>14</sup>

In particular, in Panikkar’s vision the current reductive anthropocentric conception based on individuality and individualism, is reversed in favor of the “anthropophanic” rediscovery of the “personal”

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>12</sup> The ternary or trinitarian dimension is to be interpreted in a symbolic sense, as it is neither one nor three (neither one nor many) but it rather consists in a dynamic of mutual interpenetration, in an a-dual relation: in that sense it is ternary. “However just as Trinity is not a christian monopoly, so advaita is not an exclusively indic insight” (R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm*, 224).

<sup>13</sup> A. Rossi, *Pluralismo ed Armonia*, La Cittadella, Assisi, 2011, 284-88. The “radical relationship” represents the essential idea of “person”, which Panikkar defines as “a node consisting of a network of relations” (therefore disclaiming all pronouns).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 106. Furthermore: “what counts is Man (re)discovered in his infinite dignity and brought back to his real home.” (Ibid.,43).

form in its a-dual (ternary) original structure, according to the relational sense of the three elements: human, cosmic, divine.<sup>15</sup> The words anthropocentric and anthropophanic correspond in fact to two different world views: one individualistic, monadic or atomistic, the second microcosmic, a-dual, holistic. So in his opinion it would be necessary to move from the restricted anthropology of our technological times, to a larger and more open perspective that draws upon the wisdom of the great traditions of humanity.

The metaphorical image here proposed will not be therefore considered in the anthropological-anthropocentric sense, but rather in a symbolic, anthropophanic one, as suggested by the words of the philosopher himself:

We need the experience of our infinity, the confidence in ourselves, the discovery that we are not simple particles in the universe (...) but a mirror of all that exists (to use an old metaphor) A very special mirror. And what already in ancient times was called the microcosm. But inside it's all over the macrocosm. Both are inherently linked. There are two worlds, they are concentric, when we're con (with-)centered.<sup>16</sup>

How can the metaphor of *the Rhythm of Being* be applied to Man? One of Panikkar's indications regards Art. "We need art, we need inspiration and this means freedom".<sup>17</sup>

In this context I'm adopting the artistic form in its deepest "religious" meaning (according to the etymology of the Latin *re-ligare*, to connect), to transfer his metaphor into the Vitruvian image of Man, leading to my reflections. Furthermore I'm interpreting it as the androgynous symbol of the full human being. Leonardo created this figure in 1490, by drawing from the third book of *De Architectura*, by the famous Roman architect Vitruvius, regarding the human proportions.

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<sup>15</sup> The Vedic term *Advaita*, A-duality, is by Panikkar related to the term "trinity" and to what it theologically represents in religions (according to the respective homeomorphic correspondences), and is more generally linked to the ternary primordial intuition (Earth, Heaven, Man), found in almost all traditions, which the author calls "the metaphor-of-roots". (*The Rhythm.*, 224,ff. And *Trinitarian Vision*, 158) A cognitive *Advaita* spiritual knowledge does not need rational evidence, but the rational integration of knowledge and love (*The Rhythm.*, 216).

<sup>16</sup> R. Panikkar, *La dimora della saggezza*, 83.

<sup>17</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm.*, 43.

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In particular the Vitruvian image can be assumed here to have a metaphorical a-dual meaning. In Leonardo's figure we can see Man under the anthropological perspective of the logos as well as under the anthropophanic vision of the symbol.<sup>18</sup> Anthropophany refers to the appearing of the symbol (Man) as a "re-velation" of its visible/invisible reality. According to this appearing dimension of the symbolic image as a primary, unconditioned and irreducible phenomenon, (through which man can "see" himself) let us be led by the metaphor-icon, by its harmony and beauty, by the evocative power of its artistic –religious form towards a symbolic, intuitive experience (Gr. *peirao*, to cross).

Starting from Panikkar's example in *R.B* we'd like to take into consideration three levels of the symbol-metaphor:<sup>19</sup>

- 1) the intuitive image
- 2) the logical concept
- 3) the artistic experience

Consequently I'll focus on three factors:

- 1) Leonardo as the Artist of the three-dimensionality and as a Master of the Supreme Art of seeing.
- 2) The holistic dimension represented in the Vitruvian Man.
- 3) The architectural Principle at the basis of Leonardo's inspiration and of an eventual poietic philosophy.

Three points which I'll try to develop and connect to Panikkar's "enlightening" *advaita* (a-dual) philosophical experience.

In Leonardo's drawing the man figure fits perfectly, standing with legs and arms outstretched, inside two geometric shapes, a circle and a square, two classical symbolic forms traditionally indicated as Earth and Heaven, renewing the ancient Greek metaphor of "the squaring of the circle". In particular the harmonic human proportions of the anthropomorphic figure, and its double couples of legs and arms are inscribed into the two geometric shapes, showing the man in a fixed and at the same time moving position. According to Vitruvius' text, in ancient representations, the two centers of the geometric forms coincided with the umbilical centre of the man depicted, so as to symbolize the perfect union of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>19</sup> Image is intended here as symbolic appearance, embodiment of the invisible. It presents a symbolic difference which can be recognized by an a-dual knowledge.

the human and divine aspects. Leonardo instead, revisiting this image, brought an essential distinction through a series of mathematical and geometrical calculations. In fact the square, still but not totally inscribed in the circle, presents a “detachment” in relation to it. Consequently the man figure, inscribed inside them, appears having two centers referring respectively: to the genital parts, (center of the square) and to the navel, (center of the circle). So in this case there’s no coincidence of the two centers, but a difference, a sort of free space between them, corresponding to an empty space above the man’s head, between the perimeters of the two geometrical figures. The possible coincidence or non coincidence of the two centers can then be referred to an a-dual conception, in which immanence (the square) and transcendence (the circle) are both present and interrelated but yet distinct. We could symbolically interpret the divine dimension here represented as potential in man and only likely to be eventually realized according to his freedom. The *coniunctio* of the two centers would depend on man’s work and responsibility.

In this sense, the Vitruvian figure can assume a triadic significance or a cosmotheandric metaphoric value, being referred to the relationship: Heaven-Man-Earth, according to a double centrality which can be related to Panikkar’s a-dual holistic vision (*advaita*).

## The Body Experience

The very process of under-standing is a rhythmic process due to the three dimensions of reality.<sup>20</sup>

According to the philosopher the chance to discover the life’s threefold dimension (human-cosmic-divine), is directly connected to our body, whose meaning and beauty are essential aspects related to the cognitive-intuitive level. The role of aesthetics is therefore crucial because, as any artist knows and feels, true knowledge is sensitive as well as intelligent.

Let’s now consider the body and its vital states (physical, mental and spiritual) to “under-stand” this symbol and its perichoretic rhythm (movement of interpenetration). First, the body reveals a hierarchy of functions relating to its multiple organs, inner faculties and states of being. Let’s think for instance to the Hindu *chakras* or to the Vedic four states: waking, dreaming, deep sleeping and silence. The body represents their

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<sup>20</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm.*, xxix.

reference and connection, according to a hierarchical order (Greek *Ieròs arché*, sacred principle). A sacred, dynamic, rhythmic order. Etymologically corresponding to the Indo-European roots *RTA e AR* (hence rhythm and ritual,) this body law is based on a rhythmic relational web of interconnections, where the inter-dependence and interpenetration of the parties (the sacred hierarchy), cooperates to the life of the whole body, each one depending on its own particular function for the benefit of the entire structure revealing a harmonious, i.e. non-competitive order. Indeed the organs of our body do not compete, as they are in a functional relation of cooperation and solidarity. No organ, no part of the body is oriented to itself, but to the vital harmony of the whole. When one part does not function it is compensated by the others, because they are in comm-union and together aim to the life of the whole. The dynamism of the body, its rhythm, is represented by its breath, by its heartbeat, by the movement of its organs and by the circulation of its elements, according to an open relationship which lets the diversity of the parties be, at the same time unifying them harmonically. The whole is complex, it is open and moving and continually changing, according to an unstable balance tending to harmony/health (to the Rhythm of Being).

We must start from our body experience to enter its symbolic dimension, because our body constitutes our identity and our being, which is not reducible neither to a subject, nor to an object, being the symbol of the Whole. But there's a fundamental distinction Panikkar underlines, between the concept of identity intended in the psychological sense referred to the individual and the deep identity of the Self referred to the personal spiritual realization. A passage to accomplish: from the individual to the person, overcoming our ego-identifications:

We live in and through our body the boundaries of which are not always conscious nor limited to our individuality<sup>21</sup>.

The body-consciousness is broader than our egoic mental level; that's why it can lead to the experience of spiritual divine dimensions (*Atman* in Hindu tradition, or "the Temple of the Spirit" / "the Mystic Body" in Christian tradition) The body cannot be separated from soul, nor from spirit, which constitute its vital breath and life principle. Its multiple, different senses, faculties and states (physical, mental, spiritual), are interconnected and form one unit, moving with a tension to harmony, as regards to one another and to the universe to which they're linked. At the individual level this opens to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 326.

the possibility of a shift of conscience: from the individual (ego dimension) to the person (cosmotheandric dimension).

The body is not only matter. The Sanskrit root *KRP* (hence body) means form, beauty. Beauty is an attribute of reality as a Whole, i.e. originally not yet divided, hence cosmotheandric. This form-beauty represents the contemplative/aesthetic way to discover the invisible in the visible (in the ordinary things around us). The invisible “comes to be”, becoming visible in the continuous dynamic process of life, because the form (Sscr. *rūpa*) is also the original form (Sscr. *pratirupa*, essence). In *de facto* reality the two dimensions, material and divine, are distinct but not separated. Consequently there is no body/matter without “God”, nor “God” without body/matter. This is recalled by the Vitruvian icon, emblematic of Panikkar’s mystic vision, inviting the observer to an intuitive, contemplative approach to the Wholeness.

Man reaches his complete identity when he discovers himself as an icon of the whole reality, an image of the entire humanity, a microcosm and a microtheos... This is self-knowledge, knowledge of the Self (not self-identity)... to know oneself is to know God (and all things), is to realize *tat tvam asi* (that thou art).<sup>22</sup>

In its deepest sense our body is “wise” as it bears inside itself the remembrance (Gr. *anamnesis*) of these ties, of its roots, of its origin. This is the reason why we can learn from the wisdom and sacredness of this living symbol. In particular we can learn from its silence, its spontaneity, its harmonic rhythm, because as Panikkar observes, the body loves to function spontaneously, in silence and to move rhythmically and harmonically. The body is silent, the body is free. To be in silence, meditating, means “let Being be in its activity and inside ourselves, letting it cross our body and even earth, so as to experience freedom, which is Grace” (what man listens to in silence and receives free, through no act of will).<sup>23</sup> So from the symbol of the body we can learn this empty, vacuous dimension which leads into the awareness of the divine, as God is silence; we can perceive the sense of spontaneity, as at the deep level, real reality has no why, being free, analogically to the whole, continuous process of creation. We should newly learn all this from our own body, by the dynamics of its symbol, discovering the *totum in parte*, recognizing it as a microcosm and by analogy relating it to the macrocosm, to the order of the universe (Gr. *kosmos*, order, beauty)

<sup>22</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, 334. “Microcosm and macrocosm aren’t two separated worlds, as they are concentric when we are concentrated” (*La dimora.*, 83).

<sup>23</sup> R. Panikkar, *La dimora*, 59.

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“Kosmos is the body of God,” says Panikkar. The body is the “Temple of the Spirit”, add the Gospels.

### **The analogical Kosmivision of the Metaphor**

The intelligible transition from the particular to the universal, from the vision of the part to the vision of the Whole, occurs through analogy, that a-dual, symbolic perspective which is neither identity, nor difference, but similarity. Analogy teaches us to connect, as we’ve seen, such as the human body to the world, so man and the world to the Kosmos. According to this “law” of affinity or correspondence, as the hermetical principle reminds us, every organ and faculty in the body, such as every being in the world and every part in the kosmos, find their proper “place” (nomos / law / order / sound / vibration / vocation) in the infinite web of inter- relationships, according to their particular nature (Sscr. *Svadharmā*) and to the indefinite order/Law of the Universe (Sscr. *Dharma*), striving for life. So everything is potentially oriented to the Whole, within those limits and boundaries that define the beings’ functions and freedom, aiming to the vital balance.

In this metaphoric sense the Vitruvian symbol can be homeomorphically related to Panikkar’s “Ontonomy” or “natural Kosmivision”, revealed by the rhythm of Being. This latter is a different and alternative world view if compared to our historical Western cosmologies (monistic and dualistic). Ontonomy in fact, is based on this network of inter(in)dependent relationships between the degrees of Knowledge and Being. In this dimension all the elements cooperate to the life and consciousness of the Whole. They’re mutually independent in their differences, but at the same time linked together and connected to the Wholeness. Consequently each being is unique and indispensable according to a “radical relativity” (to its peculiar value within its particular context) and to a dynamic, unstable balance, never equal to itself.

This link of everything with everything, this reality that Panikkar calls “ontonomic”, is analogically showed in the image of the universe as a single human body, depicted in the Vitruvian Man within the two geometric shapes to indicate the physical state and the subtle, mystical, spiritual dimensions of the human being, as well as of the universe. But it is a symbol, and as such, while symbolizing it preserves at the same time its undefined, invisible aspect it can only hint to or suggest. Analogically the a-dual (Sscr. *advaita*) “ontonomic” Panikkarian vision corresponds to an inherent, innate, unfixed, indefinable order, and to an ordered rhythmic movement, neither linear nor circular, nor spiral, being qualitative and

therefore not conceptually definable. This order/Law (Sscr. *Dharma*) preserves the uniqueness of each moment of inter-and intra-connection, because all lives in all, according to a continuous process of inter-penetration and transformation (*creatio continua*: a mutual emerging of things one from the other) constantly renewing the “uni-pluri-verse”. All dances together: matter, man, God, according to this rhythm, as Panikkar states, like in the Greek *perichoresis* or in the Latin *circumincessio*, or in the Vedic homeomorphical equivalent *anyonyayonita*, where everything moves distinctly together in a functional, global, sense. We could say Rhythm is the heartbeat of life, the breath of the universe. In this sense “that old metaphor”, showing microcosm and macrocosm as two concentric worlds constitutively and specularly joined together, invites us to intuitively turn reality into an experience of the Infinite.

### The Artist’s Sacred Secularity

On this background, as Panikkar underlines, in front of the “dry theology” of our times, the role of aesthetics and the function of the image can be paramount for our spiritual dimension.<sup>24</sup>

This can be shown in the example offered by the “religious” drawing by the lay Leonardo da Vinci, regarding Man’s “symbolic Temple”, (according to the traditional “human-divine image”) which can lead us to contemplate /embody the rhythm /ritual of the body /Temple, entering the rhythm of Being, that is the sacredness and rituality of everyday Life.

The mystic discovers the third dimension of reality in the human activities themselves, “This is the sacred secularity”, according to Panikkar. “As in heaven so on earth” according to the lay Jesus.

Religion in its primordial meaning of religiousness, is what unites us (Lat. *religare*) to Reality in all its human aspects : body / soul / neighbour / world / spirit, meeting and combining our own uniquenesses. Leonardo’s figure, as symbolic vision, representing this experience through a straightforward and intuitive image, can be considered artistic as well as religious, as it symbolically evokes the sacred and therefore opens to the Infinite. In this case the lay artist becomes operator of sacredness (*Artifex*). The sacred is oxymoron of the one mystery in its double aspect : *fascinans-tremendus*, revealing a glimpse of somewhat immense that touches us deeply, but remains unknown to our reason. The artist is able to intuit it and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 363

hand it on in his/her artistic works. It's this intuition -evocation that makes art.

The artist in fact, looks what everyone looks and sees what nobody sees, because his inspiring pathos reverses the cognitive direction, clearing the field of vision from the opacity of the individual ego, being awakened to reality by what enlightens "the object" of this inspiration. What he "sees" is the subtle, hidden dimension of the links of Reality. This "inner secret" (Lat. *secernere*, separate, stand aside), that he can perceive ("Leonardo's secret", according to Paul Valery), relates to the real experience of knowledge and love: the feeling of interrelationship and comm-union with the Whole, to which the artist leads us to, as his figure can show. A real cognitive-affective participation to the radical experience of life. On this basis true Man is not an egocentric individual, but a cosmotheandric person who can remember (lat. *re-cordare*, *cor-cordis*, heart) that "Being is inside and outside ourselves because Being is in human beings". In this sense every "rhythmic" activity is contemplative, being an *anamnesis* (reminescence).<sup>25</sup>

We can now return to the beginning, to our first question, that we can now reverse, asking:

How can we apply the man metaphor to the Rhythm of Being?

Perhaps now we could say: by opening ourselves to a more human dimension which is also spiritual and, *vice versa*, opening ourselves to the spiritual dimension to "re-humanize" ourselves. Never forgetting our "radical relativity," our incompleteness, whereby we can only be *homini viatores*, whose essential meaning is going, i.e "be-coming", or better, "coming-to-be", according to the rhythm of Being (*creatio continua*), that is "ritually". It's an everlasting "trans-formation", through which we can renew our simple daily life, participating consciously to it, according to our own uniqueness, talent, or nature. This means getting into the cosmotheandric rhythm, letting ourselves be transformed by life, without opposing too egoic, willful resistances and adapting ourselves to the universal interrelational dimension. In other words, trying to harmonize our personal nature (sscr. *Swadharma*) with the universal order (Sscr. *Dharma*), which implies a lifetime "*Gnothi Seauthon*" (the socratic "Know thyself"). This is indicated in the image of centrality or axiality proposed by Leonardo, depicting the human being in the center of the universe, implying

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Valery, *Scritti su Leonardo*, Electa Edizioni, Milano, 1984. "The secret of Leonardo, "according to Valery," can only be in the relationships, found by him, in ordinary things, of which the law of continuity cannot be drawn, being represented by that "third term", as Leonardo had guessed, revealed to be the First Absolute: Love.

Being in the center of Man: the two centers may coincide, while remaining distinct (*advaita*), as showed by the figure.<sup>26</sup>

Applying this archetype to daily life should be the easiest thing in the world because it is innate. And in this case the image can “recall” us to it. The only complex problem is represented by our cultural overtones, our social systems and narrow-mindedness, of which we should become aware. To deconstruct them means to acquire a “new innocence” (Lat. *in-nocére*, no harm), that “purity of heart”, able to release the contemplative tension of the artist, which is dwelling in all of us, to reconstruct our visions of the world in favor of Life.

### The Architectural Principle and the Poietic Philosophy

There’s another sentence by Leonardo I may take here as ideal comment to Panikkar’s philosophical call to praxis, which can constitute the conclusion of my reflection.

Then painting is philosophy (...) because it regards the motion of bodies in the immediacy of their actions and philosophy too extends in motion.<sup>27</sup>

Philosophy and action are here connected together, according to that deep affinity with the order (or Panikkarian interrelationship). To this regard the Vitruvian image can give us another suggestion to reflect about, clearly showing the architectural principle of Leonardo’s *ars construendi*.<sup>28</sup> Conceived by the perception of this natural, interrelational affinity of all beings, this creative, transformative principle is similarly referable to material as well as spiritual dimensions. It can be applied to all arts and as such regards a different philosophy which demands to be verified through experience, rather than the only conceptual representation. We should say a “poietic philosophy” (gr. *poièdō*, make, create ect.) including the cognitive, contemplative and creative aspects, under the principle of pure vision (intuition). It emphasizes the vital dynamism of existence and knowledge, allowing the meeting of the opposites which, mutually modifying and

<sup>26</sup> From this point of view this centrality or axiality which the Vitruvian Man reminds us of, is comparable to another great symbol of tradition: the three-dimensional cross, inclusive of the four horizontal directions of space, and of the two vertical ones: zenith and nadir.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Valery, *Scritti*.

<sup>28</sup> Vitruvius defines architecture as an activity that “*ex-factory nascitur et ratiocinatione*”, ie the ability to make joint to the theoretical awareness.

influencing each other, can acquire a new harmonic identity through a cross-fertilization.

We can find this analogical process in Panikkar's cosmotheandric mystics and a-dual (*advaita*) philosophy as well, in particular in his holistic metaphor of the rhythm of being, showing the ever-changing existence and dynamic balance of Life. When referred to human realization it represents wisdom, the art of transforming the destructive tensions of life in creative polarities, through "inter-fecundation".

In this case the artist-architect, (as per its Greek etymology: *arché*, principle and *tektón*, author, from the Indo-European root *TAKSH*, to make), would be he/she who makes or creates ritually, i.e. according to the "Principle of Being", (to its Rhythm ). Ritual action can be defined by two elements. The first, rite, is the symbol carried out, related to the contemplative creativity of the man-artist who expresses him/herself in everyday activities, according to his/her nature (Sscr. *svadharma*) and to harmony (Sscr. *Dharma*), in comm-union with the "cosmotheandric" Reality. The second, the poietic aspect (the creative act of the Spirit) is the essential element of the architectural work in its imaginative-symbolic dimension, combining the cognitive, aesthetic and praxic aspects. It consists in learning while making, creating while intuiting or acting while thinking and vice versa, in simultaneity of thought and action, beyond any mental inductive / deductive / syllogistic process. The poietic act is "making and at the same time knowing how to make"<sup>29</sup> It is an a-dual experience, in which image, idea and action (ideation/idea-action) involving hands, mind and heart, converge in a specular way. This basic sensory experience which is receptive- intuitive, rehabilitates the synaesthetic perception against the primacy of the reductive conceptual knowledge. It shows that knowledge and experience are inseparable, being precisely realized in this simultaneity.

It follows that the architectural method is a concurrent creative act of love, thought and action, praxis and theory, contemplation of body and soul. It is a free and spontaneous activity, totally rehabilitating the body dimension, which in this way becomes noetic condition, contemplative openness to the world.<sup>30</sup> The result is the beauty-form, intended as the essence (idea) of the work expressed in matter, disguised as word, sound, image, or thing, in its peculiar uniqueness, accomplished but at the same

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Valery, *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> According to Panikkar true knowledge is never separated from love and action. He refers to it with the French term "con-naissance": etymologically meaning: born together (with the thing known), *La dimora della saggezza*, 63.

time open to its becoming, being a symbol and together an icon. The human being creates him/herself by means of symbolic images, which in-form his longing and opens his/her being to freedom. In doing so he/she participates to the creative, spiritual power of life as a “viewer, actor, and co-creator” at the same time, i.e. as an artist.

In this sense we can agree with Panikkar, when he observes that in our lives we need art and inspiration, an “*ars vitae*”, a sophianic-mystical experience, to find our “innocence” and with it our freedom.

Real Love is born with the great knowledge of the thing loved: if you don't know it you won't be able to love it. (Leonardo, *Liber Picturae*, fol.77)

Only the knowledge that loves or love that knows, this is the advaita, discovers harmony.  
(Raimon Panikkar)

## An Advaitic Matter: Pebbles Speak

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*Real matter is already intellectual and spiritual.  
Real mind is both material and spiritual.  
Real spirit is never devoid of matter and consciousness.*

Raimon Panikkar<sup>1</sup>

### Precise

In the early years of our graduate student days at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Panikkar offered a series of seminars on the “Symbol.” Symbolic awareness is a holistic awareness, and it keeps the mythos alive, which in turn nurtures the logos. I first got to study with Panikkar while I was an undergraduate study abroad student from Japan. He was instrumental in my pursuing Japanese philosophy, while I also engage in the study of Western and other traditions. Forty years later, I offer this present essay on the “pebbles as a symbol,” in tribute to our dear mentor and friend Raimon Panikkar who passed on just about two years ago in August.

レイモン・パニカーが宗教学の教授としてカリフォルニア大学サンタ・バーバラ校に赴任して来たばかりの頃、「シンボル」に関してのセミナーを行っていた。「象徴的意識」は、認識論における主客の「対立」を主客共存の関係に呼び戻す。パニカーの世界観は仏教でいう縁起起生に近く、しかも、相互依存的である個々が同時に絶対独立的であると見なす。キリスト教の三位一体を世界観として大きくとらえ、独自の存在論・認識論・倫理観を展開した。彼の思想は、今日の技

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<sup>1</sup> All the citations, otherwise specified, are from R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 242. Hereafter, it is cited as RB, followed by the page number(s).

術的、自然科学的世界観のなかで、ともすれば忘れられがちな実在の「語り」がもともと生まれてくる「神話・ミトス」的次元を大切にすることによって、「理・ロゴス」的次元をも健全に深め、我々人間の活動に生命力と活力を与えようとする。彼の思想は存在の豊かさや奥深い神秘を物語る。私がパニカーに初めて師事したのは、もう四十年も昔の事になる。私をして西田哲学や鈴木禅学の思想に向かわしめたのも、パニカーのなせる業であった。師への恩は語り尽くせない。大学院生生活の様々な思い出が去来するままに、パニカー教授を褒め称えるべく、地中海に面する美しいコスタ・ブラバで出会った幾つかの小石を「シンボル」として、このエッセーを草した。

## Preamble

*The Rhythm of Being* comes as yet another “wake up call” to us, postmodern dwellers on the planet earth, reminding us that the “inertia of the mind,” the “laziness of our heart,” and the “fear”<sup>2</sup> debilitate the “freedom of Being,” in which our human and cosmic dignity is grounded.<sup>3</sup> By “human and cosmic dignity,” a *cosmo-the-anthropic* venture is implied—the awareness that “the divine (*theos*), the human (*anthropos*), and the earthly or cosmic (*cosmos*) are the three irreducible dimensions which constitutes the real,” that “everything that exists, any real being, presents this triune constitution expressed in three dimensions,”<sup>4</sup> and that “envisioning all of reality in terms of three worlds is an invariant of human culture.”<sup>5</sup> May I submit that this cosmotheanthropic awareness is today most clearly embodied in the attitude of “ecosophy”?<sup>6</sup> The role of symbolic

<sup>2</sup> RB, 6.

<sup>3</sup> RB, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, ed. with intro. by Scott Eastham, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 60. Raimon considered another formulation, “theanthropocosmic” but he settled on the “more euphonic” “cosmotheandric.” *Ibid.*, 54-55. I prefer “cosmotheanthropic” to “cosmotheandric,” because “*aner*” in Ancient Greek may have meant not just “young man,” but it still carries the residue of male-centrism, from which Raimon tried so hard to get away.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>6</sup> See my essay, “Ecosophy, Raimon Panikkar, and Basho’s Nature-Aesthetics,” for *CIRPIT REVIEW, Rivista Internazionale On-Line* no. 2 (March 2011), 110-121. My tentative conclusion of that essay was: “Consciousness that permeates the world and nature (*cosmos*) is larger than human consciousness; it cuts through the matter and bridges sentient and non-sentient beings, as well as the past and the present. This was perhaps at the core of the

thinking (or symbolic awareness) is essential in this venture of re(dis)covering Being, and indeed it needs be integrated into the very method of philosophical inquiry (Step 8).<sup>7</sup> As such, Panikkar's philosophical activities, fully conscious of the need for philosophy to be meaningful in our lives, distinguished themselves from somewhat moribund academic exercise of philosophy. Panikkar urged each of his students to take up the burden of responsibility to be a concerned public (and global) intellectual.

### On Humor

“What’s the matter?” “Never mind.” This well-known philosophical joke rests on the assumption of the dichotomy of the matter and the spirit. Here below I shall demonstrate, however, that this joke should in fact be reformulated as: “What’s the matter?” “Mind.” This is a good place to talk about the role of “humor” in a philosophical inquiry. Panikkar has a whole section on this topic in *The Rhythm of Being*. “Authentic humor is a symptom of mental health,”<sup>8</sup> he declared. Again,

The deepest sense of humor is based on the awareness that, beyond us and all that we stand for, there is a mystery that transcends us all, precisely because it is hidden in our immanence. . . . True humor may well be the outcome of a mystical experience, which perceives that the abyss between any word and its referent is more than ambiguity or ambivalence, but lies in the mysteriousness of the so-called referent itself.<sup>9</sup>

And further:

Humor is the art of playing with the freedom of the Infinite by means of words. . . . humor makes us aware of the relativity of all statements, which

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‘cosmotheanthropic’ vision that Raimon Panikkar savored and lived. A similar intuition kindled the poet Matsuo Bashō and energized his creativity in so different a century and in so distant a culture—and yet, perhaps, not so different or distant, after all, ‘*sub specie ecosophiae*.’”

<sup>7</sup> “Step” refers to each of the twenty-four points that Panikkar takes on his way to the “discovery of Being.” RB, 83-84.

<sup>8</sup> RB, 13.

<sup>9</sup> RB, 13-14.

are meaningful in different ways, according to the diverse backgrounds to which they relate. Humor is at home in metaphor.<sup>10</sup>

He concluded his musing on humor with these words: “Humor belongs to the philosophical method. . . . A sense of humor will allow me to express my convictions boldly, without fear.”<sup>11</sup> Humor gives us wings to be free. Raimon so well embodied this light-hearted joyous spirit, which shall guide me throughout this essay.

### “An Advaitic Matter”

“Matter” or “materiality” is porous, and consciousness “cuts through even diamonds”—this is a familiar insight coming from Mahayana Buddhism. Panikkar not only wanted me to study the thoughts of Japanese philosophers, but he insisted on it, lest I become someone “more Yankee than the Americans.” His insistence was based on his personal observations that many of his fellow Indians immigrated to Britain became “more British than the Brits.” He was steadfast in his demand that I be cross-cultural, but in order that I be truly cross-cultural, I had to know my own tradition. Therefore, my engagement with the philosophical thoughts of Nishida Kitarō and Daisetz T. Suzuki—both Japanese thinkers who developed and formulated their thinking while drawing insights from their experiences of Zen Buddhism—pleased Raimon, and it has been a familiar sight to my friends. It is therefore not surprising for you that I find in Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being* statements and insights that resonate with the philosophical view nurtured by Nishida and Suzuki. Nishida’s observation of reality in terms of the radical interpenetration of the contradictory aspects (“*zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu*” or “absolutely contradictory self-identity”) and Suzuki’s insistence on the primordial unity of the spirit and the body find their echo in Panikkar’s trinitarian cosmothentropic insight.

Suzuki spoke of the “arbitrary separation of the matter and the spirit” as the cause of malaise that has been plaguing modern societies. His contention was that out of the separation the matter (or flesh) and the spirit (or soul), the matter became subordinated to the spirit—based again on the arbitrary human evaluation. Mental illnesses and social and physical maladies were all outcome of the “bodily instinct” struggling to rebel against the dominance of the mind. Look how human beings could behave so cruelly at the time of war, when the suppressed biological instincts erupt

<sup>10</sup> RB, 14-15.

<sup>11</sup> RB, 15.

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under extreme pressure, and civility, a “newly acquired” surface cortex of our brain, gives away to more primitive brute instincts. Suzuki used to say that if we cut down a tree, several thousand people would go insane as a result. There is some profound truth to it. Raimon, too, used to speak about “modern illnesses” as having the spiritual cause.

If the separation of the matter and the spirit is an artificial making of our mind, mending this split and rehabilitating their original unity should alleviate (or at least lessen) the postmodern social physical and psychological illnesses, including extreme materialism that is sapping the spiritual fountainhead. If we succeed in this venture, we may embrace Being.

As we look closer, our body is not sheer matter but is animated and spirited. Likewise, language in its acoustic sound is material, but as the conveyer of meanings and emotions it is spiritual. In this regard, I was especially happy to come upon Raimon’s meditation on a stone in *The Rhythm of Being*. He stated: “‘A stone’ is a ‘thing’; ‘stone’ is a concept; and ‘the stone’ is a symbol.”<sup>12</sup> This is an intriguing statement for someone like me who comes from a linguistic background in which there is no definite or indefinite article. And yet, I *understand* what he means, because his statement is carried by the power of *logos*, and contains an epistemological universal.

I must pause here for a moment. Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Servo-Croatian, and Latin all do not have the definite and indefinite articles. I wonder if their emergence in the Latin-based languages (e.g., Italian, Spanish, French, etc.) correlated with the progression of human ability to “conceptualize.” This is a question I just pose but cannot address any further, myself being neither a specialist of the history of romance languages nor a scholar of historical linguistics.

Another interesting point is that Latin has a class of “*commune*”—nouns that can go both masculine and feminine—such as “*homo*” (man or woman) and “*diēs*” (day or date). Nouns in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean (and English for that matter) have no grammatical gender. For instance, a noun “*hito*” in Japanese (pronounced “*ren*” in Chinese) may mean “a human being,” or “human beings,” male or female. One and the same noun can be both singular and plural! That is, a high degree of conceptual abstraction is already contained in a noun, or perhaps the perception of the “multiplicity” and the “singularity” is understood to be so interpenetrating that if plurality

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<sup>12</sup> RB, 85.

needs be specified, it can be done by adding numerical adverbs before the noun—such as “one (unit of) person,” “two (units of) person,” and so forth.

In terms of word as a “symbol,” orthographical practice of employing alphabets or ideographs is something so fundamental. The ideograph for “human” is 人, which came from a picture of a standing person viewed from the side, or one may imagine a person taking a step forward 人 . Each ideograph has a story to tell in terms of its formation.<sup>13</sup> In Japanese orthography, moreover, unlike Chinese, sentences are written in the mixture of ideographs (called “*kanji*”) and phonetic syllabaries (“*kana*”). In this orthographic environment, ideographs stand out on their own, often revealing the meaning of the entire paragraph at a glance. Also in Japanese and Chinese, there is no “upper case” and “lower case.” That is, in written Japanese and Chinese, there is no “capital” letters. Capitalized alphabet letters confers unique identity to the noun, and also they have impacts on the eyes (and the brains), turning capitalized words into quasi-ideographs. The German language especially takes advantage of this. Take, for instance, a singular neuter abstract noun, “Das Schöne,” meaning “beauty.” The alphabetic word capitalized has a similar impact on the eye as seeing the ideograph for beauty 美, embedded in a Japanese sentence. So much for the musing on the languages. At least this brief sketch of a few features of different languages reveals that language has both material and spiritual aspects, even in the orthographical arena (*écriture*).

### A Pebble Talk

Let us turn to Panikkar’s meditation on the stone and the “discovery of Being.”<sup>14</sup> He proceeded on his “path of thinking” by following twenty-four steps or points, starting out with a classical western epistemological tradition: A thing appeals to the human “faculties”—the senses and the mind or reason. His contribution is to add the third “faculty,” the symbolic awareness, to this epistemological foundation, which are all functions of consciousness. Now, let us take up a pebble, or rather, pebbles—I have brought here three pebbles. By following Raimon’s analysis, I say that their existence speaks to our senses—“they are,” i.e., they exist “outside” me. They are hard, smooth or rough, light or heavy, and inedible (which is the essential knowledge every baby must acquire for its survival); they have different shades of colors—here, this one has some translucent specks, and

<sup>13</sup> See M. Soga & M. Yusa, *Basic Kanji*, (Tokyo: Taishūkan, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> RB, 80-94, *et passim*.

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this one has more reddish color than the others; each has a different shape, size, and texture, and so on and so forth.

Their nature (what they are, *quiddity*) is comprehended by our mind as belonging to a group of similar things, a genus of “stone,” and this mental capacity enables us to use our language more generally, abstractly, and hence efficiently. So, I could simply say, “these are stones,” and they are thus acknowledged by you as such. But you may ask: “So what? Has she gone mad?”

These pebbles are nothing more than silly pieces of small rocks, I agree. But what if, I say they originally came from the beach of Costa Brava? Yes, the pebbles now get your attention. Each comes to us in this kind of shape after millions (?) of years of being shaken, smoothed out, and shaped into a pebble by all sorts of geological mutations and (sometimes violent, sometimes gentle) natural forces. Its mineral content may reveal something more interesting. Look at its shape, or color—it contains inexhaustible adjectives. And how about the circumstances under which these pebbles caught my eyes and thus were brought back home with me to Bellingham, and are present in front of you today? The night of the full moon, in the clear water of the warm Mediterranean Sea, these pebbles were shining at the shallow bottom of the sea, reflecting the gentle moonlight. Up on the nearby silent hills, the rosemary bushes were wafting fragrant smell. These pebbles belong to that environment. Memories and circumstances of the *samgama*—the gathering of a small group of Raimon’s friends from all over the world for several days of meditation, prayer, and discussions with Raimon; the thought-provoking, spirit-rejuvenating moments of togetherness with Raimon, in the summer of 2004 at Rosas. Raimon, having considerably recovered from his bypass operation of 2002, was frail but was able to walk, his arm being supported by others. Before going to Rosas some of us were in Barcelona with our friend Roger Rapp, attending the 2004 Parliament of World Religions. Roger was invited to join the “*samgama*” because someone had dropped out at the last minute, but he told us, “Not this time; I will have plenty of other opportunities.” And yet, he never had that “plenty,” nor Raimon, for that matter. These pebbles, containing “stories” or a different story to each of us, *are* symbols.

Symbolic awareness freely reveals the interconnectedness of everything. These pebbles come alive, and they are now more than detached, objective, self-claiming “things” out there. They ceased to be silly pebbles, or a concept “stone.” They are alive and present, speaking to those for whom they carry some meaning and memory—pebbles contain the

whole. “All hangs together,”<sup>15</sup> and “all is implied in all.”<sup>16</sup> “Energy” permeates the entire physical universe.<sup>17</sup> So does “Being” animate the whole cosmotheanthropic world.

Raimon noted that “Strictly speaking, the ‘stone’ of symbolic awareness is not just an entity but (a) Being. It is Being in the form of ‘stone’; it is a symbol of the entire universe, a symbol of Being” (Step 10).<sup>18</sup>

### A Hike with Raimon on his Path of Thinking

I could stop here, but I would like to take a walk with Raimon into his “backyard,” into the Santa Ynez mountain range, which we used to climb in Santa Barbara. It afforded a half-a-day rigorous outing into beautiful but sometimes rather steep hills. Raimon used to jump from rock to rock with such agility and ease. This is why I think he was so chagrined in his last years when he was confined to a wheelchair. His spirit always longed to be uplifting and mobile.

Let us return to Raimon’s meditation. A thing has certain “transcendent” existence, i.e., it exists outside us. It is not a mental phantom, but a “fact,” a given (Step 1).<sup>19</sup> The mind (consciousness) encompasses “materiality.” That is why a stone can bring to the mind rich memories and countless diverse messages. Being has many meanings, Being is polyvalent (Step 2).<sup>20</sup> To meditate on what Being is is to venture into how consciousness works. Consciousness is the “field where all ‘things’ meet” (Step 2).<sup>21</sup>

In our observation of a cluster of similar things, we apply the conceptual category of “stone” to them. Our mind confers certain unity on things (Step 3).<sup>22</sup> Things are thus both *sensible* (*qua* embodied things) and

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<sup>15</sup> Raimon Panikkar, Gifford Lectures, audiotape, Lecture 1, April 25, 1989. The audio recording of Panikkar’s 1989 Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh was made available by Scott Eastham. The Gifford Lectures form the substance of *The Rhythm of Being*.

<sup>16</sup> Gifford Lectures, audiotape, Lecture 6, May 4, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Gifford Lectures, audiotape, Lecture 4, May 1, 1989.

<sup>18</sup> RB, 85.

<sup>19</sup> RB, 81.

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

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

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

*conceptual entities* (*qua* mental category) (Step 4).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the operation of the mind that universalizes and “elevates things” to the conceptual “height” paves the way to a symbolic thinking (Step 5).<sup>24</sup> This is a crucial point, which situates symbolic thinking epistemologically, along with the formation of the concepts. The symbolic awareness, too, is the “product” of the mind’s ability to “conceptualize” or “imagine.”<sup>25</sup> But it moves beyond the realm of concepts and the mental images, and moves into the fabric of our own very being.

For me a poignant example of a stone as a symbol coming from Panikkar is the episode of St. Francis, who, having heard God’s command, “Francis, repair my church,” “Be a reformer of the church,” went to San Damiano and began to repair the church with masons. He picked up the brick (i.e., stone) one at a time and tried to mend the dilapidated church.<sup>26</sup> Symbolic awareness as embodied by Francis cuts through the artificial separation of the material and the spiritual, and in its “naiveté,” it touches us and moves us. For Francis, a church made of stone was something vital (*a being*) and not just a thing (*an entity*) (Step 7).<sup>27</sup>

Raimon observed that there is certain ambiguity between “*to on*, τὸ ὄν” and “*ousia*, οὐσία” in Greek—although both are words standing for “being” (Latin, *esse*). Besides, categorizing into “being” (“*to on*,” “*ousia*,” “*esse*”) and “entity” (or “entities,” “*ta onta*, τὰ ὄντα,” “*physis*, φύσις” in Greek, “*ens*” and its plural “*entia*” in Latin) of “*ens*” is open to two different interpretations. This seems to speak for the “resistance” of Being to be ultimately sorted into ossified rigid categories. In any case, the proposition by Thomas Aquinas “Being is the first that enters into the intellect” (*primum quod in intellectu cadit est ens*) (*De Potentia* IX 7, ad 15) can be interpreted in two different ways, depending on how the word “*ens*” is understood. If “*ens*” is taken to mean *an entity*, we understand by this sentence: “Knowledge comes from the very power of the thing that impresses upon our senses, and from there it reaches to our reason, and from there to our

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

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

<sup>25</sup> The example of “a temple made of stone” to illustrate the “symbolic” perception in RB seems to be premature in terms of the order of 24 steps, and it would be better to reserve it until later. Be that as it may, Panikkar observed: “A stone as a stone is what the senses perceive; stone as ‘stone’ is what the mind discovers, the ‘stone’ as a temple is what the spirit (intellect) sees” (Step 6). RB, 82.

<sup>26</sup> *The New Innocence (De Nieuwe Onschuld, DVD)*, (IKON, 1997), 47:30 ff.

<sup>27</sup> RB, 82.

intellect.” This interpretation stands for the modern scientific thinking,<sup>28</sup> which upholds that “Nothing is in the intellect which was not first in the sense” (“*nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*”).<sup>29</sup>

If on the other hand, “*ens*” is understood to mean *Being*, the same statement reads: “Our intellect is not only open to Being as reality, but also its relationship is inverted: the human intellect is open and attuned to receiving the illumination from Being.” Panikkar is reminded here of the scholastic expression “*capāx dei*” (“God-given capacity”),<sup>30</sup> which speaks of the same intuition (Step 12).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, if the first thing that “falls into the mind” is Being, its negation follows in the human intellect in the next moment. “Being is the first that enters into the intellect, but second is the negation of being” (*primum quod in intellectu cadit est ens, secundum vero est negatio entis*) (Step 13).<sup>32</sup>

(Within a theistic context, this is how “atheism” is understood to arise out of this human capacity to negate.<sup>33</sup> Saying “no” to God results in “atheism.” But when Being is not identified with the notion of God, as in the non-theistic traditions, to say “no” to the theistic notion of God is not the same as saying “no” to Being. This is how Raimon rescues Being and also faith. He pointed out that the Christian equation of Being and God to have arisen out of a specific “metaphysical interpretation of a historical text” [Step 11].<sup>34</sup> Authentic understanding of Being points to the mystery beyond “God” clad in a theistic garb. I see Raimon’s enterprise was to liberate the “divine” from the traditional “theistic” or “monotheistic” yoke. This was a necessary step for him, for in the identification of God and Being, when God was pronounced dead, Being suffered a similar fate. Profound sense of nihilism and existential Angst doggedly followed this Nietzschean pronouncement, and the traditional western value system began to falter. It is essential to distinguish the “mail delivery person” from the “sender of a daily love letter,” lest we fall in love with a wrong person!<sup>35</sup>)

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<sup>28</sup> RB, 86.

<sup>29</sup> RB, 86, note 78.

<sup>30</sup> “*capāx dei*” signifies the “[mental] spaciousness coming from God,” “capaciousness of God,” “God-given mental capacity,” “God’s ability.”

<sup>31</sup> RB, 86

<sup>32</sup> RB, 87, note 80: Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia* IX, 7 ad 15.

<sup>33</sup> RB, 87

<sup>34</sup> RB, 85

<sup>35</sup> Raimon’s fond “little story” goes as follows: “Here is a young man with a letter in his

Let us return to the “negation” that takes place in the intellect, mentioned earlier. Here Raimon grapples with the Mahayana Buddhist insight of utter emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which was philosophically formulated by the Kyoto School philosophers, especially by Nishida Kitarō and his disciple Nishitani Keiji. The distinction these thinkers made between “relative nothingness” (*sōtai mu* 相對無) on the one hand and “absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu* 絕對無) or “emptiness” (*kū, śūnyatā* 空) on the other hand came to Panikkar as profoundly helpful in clarifying the nature of “negation.”<sup>36</sup> According to Nishida, “absolute nothingness,” by virtue of its utter emptiness, is actually “absolute being” (*zettai u* 絕對有), out of which everything arises. The thirteenth-century Japanese Zen Master Dōgen talked about a similar insight by presenting a dialogue that took place between the Chinese Master Yaoshan Weiyuan (Yakusan Igen in Japanese) and a monk. It goes:

When the master was sitting in meditation, a certain monk asked him:  
“What are you thinking about when you are seated in such concentration?”

The master said: “I’m thinking about non-thinking.”

The monk asked: “How do you think about non-thinking?”

The master said: “Qua that which is beyond thinking.”<sup>37</sup>

The depth of thinking is something that defies thinking and is beyond thinking or any thoughts (*hishiryō* 非思量), which nonetheless can be intuited by exercising non-thinking (*mushiryō* 無思量), in one’s cognitive activities (*shiryō* 思量). Here, “non-thinking” corresponds to Nishida’s “relative nothingness,” while “beyond thoughts” to “absolute nothingness.” In the field of “absolute nothingness,” a stone is fully a stone without any distortion. “Absolute nothingness” (or *śūnyatā*) is the field in which all things emerge. “Absolutely nothingness” enables beings to be. Panikkar

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hand, with tears in his eyes, and complaining with desperation: ‘For the last two years, I have been writing a letter to my girl friend, a daily letter, and *now* she answers that she is going to marry . . . the post man.’ Gifford Lectures, audiotope, Lecture 5, May 2, 1989, 55:28-56:56.

<sup>36</sup> RB, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō*, fascicle 12, “Zazenshin” 坐禪箴, “The Significance of Zazen.” This dialogue is also mentioned in fascicle 62, “Soshi seirai-i” 祖師西來意, “The Meaning of Bodhidharma Coming to the West.”

concluded that *sūnyatā* is “correlative” of Being (Step 18),<sup>38</sup> and proposed that in the “field of *sūnyatā*,” “*logos*” and “*pneuma*” turn out to be two powerful western traditional symbols (Step 19).<sup>39</sup>

Non-being, or the idea of negation, enters into the field of consciousness, because ultimately, “Being embraces non-being” (Step 14).<sup>40</sup> Here, the Kyoto School thinker would say Being emerges out of “absolute Nothingness-qua-absolute Being.” It would also make a better sense if we consider silence (*turīya*) as the “abode” of *logos*, and as such it “neither contradicts nor non-contradicts any logic” (Step 14).<sup>41</sup> His meditation into the reality of silence directed Raimon in the “advaitic” way of solving the dichotomies of “being” and “non-being,” and the problem of negation. Going ahead of Raimon, we may point out here that the symbolic thinking is sustained by the “advaitic” perception, the mind-set that can see “as well as,” overcoming the dichotomy of “either or.” Panikkar observed that “between monism and dualism there is a middle way that is neither the one nor the other—the wisdom of advaita” (Step 21).<sup>42</sup>

Symbol pebbles overcome the duality of the physical and the spiritual. “Things” are never strictly “material” entity but are something more: they carry meanings and values to each of us in different ways. When we think of the film scenes from Sotheby’s Auction House dealing with antique furniture, musical instruments, and classical and modern paintings, we understand this right away. Things *qua* symbol are intimately connected to our lives, they can tell tales that may have been long obscured under the dust accumulated with the passage of time.

In silence human artificial chattering and busy mind activities cease, and human egos dissolve. Silence is not that of silencing the oppressed, the needy, the suffering. Nor is it the same thing as keeping willful silence by refusing to speak. Rather, silence is the moment of mindful breathing in and out. Panikkar found that in silence we come closer to the mystery of Being. Silence lets Being be. It is the birthplace of words. In silence, we reach down, as it were, to the *fons origos* of our speech and thinking. I remember my last visit with Raimon in Tavertet on June 6, 2010. With the kind help of Ignasi Boada, who drove up the narrow hilly path, we went up to Raimon’s

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<sup>38</sup> RB, 90.

<sup>39</sup> RB, 91.

<sup>40</sup> RB, 87.

<sup>41</sup> RB, 88.

<sup>42</sup> RB, 92.

house—for the first time since my last visit in 1986, when I had the pleasure of spending a few days with Achille Rossi, who was also visiting Raimon and working on his thesis. This time, I was warned ahead of time that Raimon had been very frail and that he was receiving visitors in bed. I was prepared for any situation, even the possibility of not being able to see him. When we arrived at his house, he was waiting for us, seated at his desk upstairs in his study, and welcomed us as if nothing had changed. (Despite his gallant effort, however, it was so apparent that he tired very quickly.) He wanted to begin our reunion properly by going into silence for some minutes. We communed in that moment, three of us together in the timeless precious space.

Speech, understood as emerging out of silence, overcomes the binary *forma mentis*—the habit of mind—that sets up “being” and “non-being,” “is” and “is not,” in opposition (Step 15).<sup>43</sup> We read in *The Rhythm of Being*:

In fact there is a speech as a primal manifestation of Being which oversteps the realm of thinking. . . . The speaking field of Being is wider than its thinking field. Thinking reveals Being as at least potentially intelligible. *Speech is the revelation of Being as Silence.*<sup>44</sup>

“Love,” the principle *par excellence* of interpersonal relationship, is fully at work at this stage. “If knowledge is a total human activity and not just a disincarnated mind, it is an assimilation of the being known, a personal embrace in which love is as necessary as cognition” (Step 17).<sup>45</sup> Raimon equated love with the “fourth” act, over and beyond the sensual, the mental, and the spiritual—that of the “experiential.” Fresh wind and the setting sun on that summer evening in the village of Tavertet lingered on, long after we bid farewell to Raimon, and Ignasi and I set on a terrace of a restaurant sipping coffee. Those are the moments when “we experience the stone in the horizon of emptiness or *sūnyatā*” (Step 17).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> RB, 88-89.

<sup>44</sup> Step 15, RB, 89, emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> RB, 89-90.

<sup>46</sup> RB, 90.

## Pebbles as a Gift

We shall now begin to conclude our outing with Raimon for the day. Let us listen to him:

The symbol stone is not exclusively an objective thing or a formal reality. Since the symbol discovered in symbolical awareness has as much objective reality as subjective participation, it overcomes the subjective-objective split. A symbol is only symbol for those who ‘see’ it as a symbol. . . . To say that Being is a symbol is to affirm that Being is neither merely objective nor purely subjective. (Step 20)<sup>47</sup>

Symbolic or advaitic intuition, in contrast to the Aristotelian epistemology that “offers the basis for the empirical and rational knowledge,” indicates another way for us to experience and savor the world, but it requires “an illumination from a superior source of knowledge” (Step 22).<sup>48</sup> This brings to my mind the famous saying of Dōgen, somewhat freely translated: “To engage in Buddha’s path is to engage myself. To engage myself is to forget myself. By forgetting myself, I’m illumined by all things.” Or again, “To try to understand all things by one’s measure is delusion (*mayoi*). It is enlightenment (*satori*) when all things come to the self and illumine it.”<sup>49</sup>

Our *itinerarium* is almost over, as Raimon concluded his own *itinerarium mentis ad esse* with these words:

I started with a pebble on my hand and I have taken all those steps trying to discover if the stone could be a Revelation of Reality. The intermediary steps have led us to Being and even to Non-being and Emptiness. In other words: *Being is the metaphysical interpretation of reality. Non-being is the dialectical way of handling Reality; and Emptiness, mystically.* (Step. 24)<sup>50</sup>

We are now ready to return home to rest and enjoy perhaps a cup of hot tea, or better a glass of wine. But before bidding goodbye, I am not yet completely finished.

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<sup>47</sup> RB, 91.

<sup>48</sup> RB, 92.

<sup>49</sup> Both quotations are from Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō*, fascicle 1, “*Genjōkōan*” 現成公案, “The Enlightenment Intuition.”

<sup>50</sup> RB, 93, emphasis added. Notice how Raimon is using the capital letters to make a “symbolic” use of the English language.

Raimon's reflection on a stone and the discovery of Being started out with the idea: "A thing is a given. A gift to us. Everything that comes to us is a gift" (Step 1).<sup>51</sup> Here, I cannot help but notice the natural progression of the mental association from a "given" to a "gift." A statement, "*Petra dona est*" can be interpreted as "The/A rock is given" (*dona* being the past participle, feminine singular nominative, of the verb *dono*, "to give"), or "The/A rock is a gift" (*dona* being the neuter nominative plural noun of *donum*, "gift"). Indeed, Panikkar noted that a "thing" is "a gift of Being" (Step 9).<sup>52</sup> A gift implies a "giver" and a "receiver," and its usual association is one of delight and grateful appreciation. A thing as a "gift" puts this "thing," in an intimately interpersonal relationship of generosity, making "Being" so much more accessible to us. This personalized way of locution adds a layer of beauty and something of "catholic" quality to Raimon's thinking, because the same association would not occur in Japanese--or at least *prima facie*. Nishida would say, "Whatever there is is already given" (有るものはすべて与えられたものである), and the transition from the "given" to the "gift" is not built in the Japanese language. "Gift" ("*okuri mono*," 贈り物 or 送り物) is made up of a verb "*okuru*" ("to send," "to dispatch") and a noun "*mono*" ("a thing"). In classical Japanese, however, "*okuru*" was written interchangeably in either ideograph, "to send" (送る) or "to bestow" (贈る). "Whatever there is is already something bestowed upon us," is a possible interpretation of "Whatever there is is already what is given"—that is, all things in the universe. D. T. Suzuki wrote about a group of deeply religious followers of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan, known collectively as "*myōkōnin*" 妙好人. For them everything is a gift from Amida Buddha who incessantly exercises his inexhaustible compassion. "*Namu Amida-butsu*, how thankful I am, *Namu Amida-butsu*." Clearly, "whatever there is is a gift of Amida Buddha" for those gentle folks. So, it turns out that in Japanese, too, a thing is a gift ("*okurimono*"), sent from the source that enables our existence and the world to Be. Come to think about it, "nature's gift" or "the blessings of nature" (*shizen no megumi* 自然の恵み) is a common parlance in everyday Japanese.

### Rest in *Chirimiri*

In the Gifford Lectures, Raimon referred to an imagery of a mist-like rain "*chirimiri*" that falls in northern Spain. He said, verbatim: "Like the small rain [that] falls in a fine way, you cannot see the rain, but the roof is

<sup>51</sup> RB, 81.

<sup>52</sup> RB, 84.

wet and tree leaves are wet. That is like the [presence of the] divine.”<sup>53</sup> This is to be taken within the context of “the locus” of the divine, which is “neither in heaven (transcendence) nor in the hearts of men (immanence),” and that “the divine mystery is necessary for the fullness of our identity and of human life.”<sup>54</sup> Roofs, tree leaves, and pebbles, too, are all caressed by the fine rain.

Something like this fine rainfall *chirimiri* is celebrated in a traditional folk song (*min'yō*) of the region where I grew up. It is called “*Sansa shigure*” (“Passing Fine Rain”); “*sansa*” is possibly a dialectical variation of “*sasa*,” which means “bamboo leaves” as well as a designation for a “small quantity.” This has been the song to start a party at joyous occasions, as it is originally a song sang at weddings; the lyrics are associated with the felicity of conjugal union. I give the lyrics here:

<p>“<i>Sansa shigure ka kaya no ame ka,</i>  <i>oto mo sede kite, nurekaku,</i>  <i>shōgana,</i>  <i>ā medetai medetai.</i>  “<i>Kono yazashiki wa medetai zashiki,</i>  <i>tsuru to kame to ga, maiasobu,</i>  <i>shōgina,</i>  <i>ā medetai medetai</i>  “<i>Kiji no mendori komatsu no shita de</i>  <i>tsuma o yobu koe chiyo chiyo to,</i>  <i>shōgina,</i>  <i>ā medetai medetai”</i></p>	<p><i>“Is this the passing fine rain or the rain  falling on the sedge plant? It comes silently  and falls,  leaving everything wet.  What a beautiful sight  How auspicious!  “This house, this zashiki is a happy zashiki.  Crane and Turtle cavort.”<sup>55</sup>  What a beautiful sight!  How auspicious!  “Under a small pine tree a female pheasant  calls for its mate, crying ‘chi-yo, chi-yo.’  What a beautiful sight!  How auspicious!”<sup>56</sup></i></p>
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These pebbles led us to *chirimiri*, and finally to the song “*Sansa-shigure*” that is sung at happy occasions. As we saw above, Raimon noted that “Being is that symbol that embraces the whole of reality in all the

<sup>53</sup> Gifford Lectures, audiotape, Lecture 8, May 9, 1989.

<sup>54</sup> Gifford Lectures, audiotape, Lecture 5, May 2, 1989.

<sup>55</sup> Cranes and turtles are both traditional symbols for longevity.

<sup>56</sup> “*Chiyo*” means one thousand years or one thousand generations.

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possible aspects we are able to detect, and in whose Destiny we are involved as co-spectators, actors, and co-authors.”<sup>57</sup> He has cleared a path, through which we may enter as “poet-philosophers and intellectual mystics.”<sup>58</sup> We are called to take an ever-new step forward, carrying with us the lessons of the last century that had begun with the proclamation “God is dead.” The cross-cultural wealth of human experiences comes to our aid in this venture. We listen and hold these pebbles in our palms.

Knowledge is part of reality,  
matter is part of us,  
divinity is part of what we are.<sup>59</sup>

A personal note: I originally composed this essay in the wake of the terrible earthquakes and tsunami that devastated the coastal area of my hometown of Sendai on March 11, 2011. The first version of this paper was presented on April 9, 2011, at the “International Conference on Raimon Panikkar, Homage to Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being*,” organized by Young-chan Ro at George Mason University. I made a pilgrim to those tsunami-stricken areas on March 11, 2012, on the day of the anniversary. The present essay contains reflections of these experiences.

On the Day Commemorating the End of the Pacific War (*Shūsen kinenbi*)

August 15, 2012, Bellingham, Washington, U.S.A.

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<sup>57</sup> See above. RB, 94.

<sup>58</sup> RB, 84.

<sup>59</sup> RB, 242.



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## The Tempiternal Tragedy: The Rhythm of Being and a Planet in Crisis

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### Abstract

I use the word *tragedy* here in the sense that Parker Palmer speaks of humanity as living in the “tragic gap” between *what is* and what *could be*. This might risk putting the emphasis too much on the “tempi” side of Panikkar’s *tempiternity*, for he insists often upon the necessity of “opening the third eye,” of awakening to an *advaitic* experience of reality -- which is not obsessed with “the future.” And yet it is also true that in virtually all of his writings Panikkar explicitly states that his work is situated within the “the crisis of our times” – a phrase that belongs, after all, to the “tempi” dimension of Being/Becoming (without denying the “...eternity” dimension).

Panikkar goes well beyond most environmental or political analyses of our “crisis”, in recognizing that (as he writes in page 100f of *The Rhythm of Being*), “...the conflict of worldviews is one of the main causes of the crisis of our times, but the dominant present-day worldview is itself in crisis.”

Panikkar often frames his acknowledgment of crisis under the heading of “sociological interlude” within his philosophical explorations, but in doing so he emphasizes that philosophy is not an extrawordly or escapist pursuit, but a vital component of the possibility of responding to crisis in the depth that is demanded – depth that goes to the very level of *mythos*, where changes to fundamental human Being/Becoming will occur or fail to occur.

The paper focuses on Panikkar’s work and thought within the context of the crisis he identifies – which is still very much *our* crisis, as persons alive in this particular tempiternal and kairological “moment.” The paper also considers other contemporary responses to the crisis, and proposes that Panikkar’s legacy – especially his *advaitic insight*, the *theanthropocosmic vision* and the *dialogical* dialogue – offers a crucial contribution to that conversation.

Unless otherwise noted, all page-references are to *The Rhythm of Being*.

## Unpacking the Title. A Planet in Crisis

The locus of discussion in this paper is the planetary crisis to which Raimon Panikkar repeatedly, eloquently, urgently and prophetically bore witness:

It may be that now, for the first time, humanity envisages an ultimate metaphysical catastrophe, such a total annihilation that not even the “evil God” will win. Everything is wiped out. By whom? By nobody in particular; by a universal Unbecoming... [In classical eschatologies,] something, somebody, even the whole world, reaches the end, the *eschaton*, because there is a meta-eschatological Entity to receive the pilgrim at the end of the journey. Today, however, we are envisaging the possibility not just of the curtain coming down at the end of the drama, but the end of the actors themselves, and the collapse of the stage. (377)

Many people are afraid of a Third World War and a major atomic catastrophe. [...]Those who feel such panic are generally the well-to-do denizens of the First and Second Worlds. But for two-thirds of the people of the world, that cataclysm has *already* come. [...] *The Third World War has already come*, and the atomic phase of it will be only the predictable outcome and final act of a drama which is now not only Myrdal’s ‘Asian Drama’ but a world tragedy of massive proportions and devastating implications. (Cosmotheandric Experience, 117)

## Tragedy

We live on, live in, a planet in crisis. Or better: we perceive, within the theanthropocosmic vision, that we *are* a planet in crisis. We are tragic figures the threads of whose being are woven into a tragic fabric. Panikkar states: “Cosmotheandric spirituality sheds light on one of the most tragic dramas of our times, the political situation.” (355) ... “‘Tragic’ may [sound] like an overstatement, yet such a strong adjective seems appropriate to me.” (357)

Parker Palmer’s phrase “the tragic gap” is useful here: the human condition is to live in “the tragic gap” between *what is* and *what could be*.

Because you lie about that which is, you do not catch the thirst for that which should be. (Nietzsche, quoted by Panikkar on page 4 of *The Rhythm of Being*)

The very fact that we are, somehow, capable of having a sense of *what should be* – that very fact, that very gift, that very burden, comprises, *advaitically*, an existential responsibility to *be/become* what we can perhaps only glimpse. The march, or slide, toward catastrophe is our own doing and, indeed, our own undoing, and we are not allowed to go gentle into that bad night. We are not allowed to do so because reality is theanthropocosmic, and our willful failure to meet our responsibility would result in damage not only to “us,” not only to the *anthropic* dimension of reality, but to reality-as-such. Panikkar:

We are conscious that a task has been entrusted to us, that we are also responsible for this very existence and, consequently, that we may fail to play our role. (344)

If we destroy matter, we may well be destroying the soul in ways we cannot even surmise. This universal connectedness, however, is not only between matter and soul but also between past and present, and entails a tempiternal dimension. (379)

## Tempiternal

The planetary crisis is tempiternal precisely because even though we can poignantly sense the *what could be* – even though the open Third Eye that Panikkar so often extols might reveal to us that every perfection that *could be* in some sense already “is” (in eternity) – even given all of that, it is still and also the case that we live (in/as) the *temporal* dimension of tempiternity as well as in the eternal. In the temporal dimension we are embedded in, and constitutive of, the *what is*. And the *what is* is in crisis.

The sense of absolute responsibility that grows out of these realizations dawns in consciousness as a core ethical component of a new spirituality. Not surprisingly, Panikkar has a name for this new spirituality:

The word “ecosophy,” he says succinctly in *The Rhythm of Being*, means “...the ‘wisdom of the earth.’ The word emphasizes the subjective genitive over the objective. It is the earth’s wisdom...” (354)

The integration of the Earth into our spirituality is what I have called *ecosophy* [...] It requires a new lifestyle and a new notion of civilization.[...] We are earth, part of the Earth, working together with the Earth to create ‘new heavens and a new earth’. Matter is not just a simple object for Man. Ecosophical consciousness implies anthropological change. (Pilgrimage, 74)

This paper will be a meditation (on/in) this new spirituality. In an attempt to discern a way toward an adequate human response to our planetary crisis – a response that will demand and allow for anthropological change – we will highlight and celebrate several aspects of Panikkar’s work and vision, and also suggest the importance of his contributions in the context of a broader exploration and conversation currently under way, whose participants may or may not be directly aware of the name Raimon Panikkar.

I am not at all suggesting that Panikkar’s “only” contribution is in the context of response to the planetary crisis. His contributions to philosophy, theology, anthropology, hermeneutics, and more are immense, and are properly the focus of ongoing deep research, analysis, explication and integration into the world’s total contemporary intellectual and spiritual life. He himself often used phrases like “sociological interlude” when addressing himself specifically to the planetary crisis. He did, though, insist that philosophy and theology, and so forth, are not isolated from life and emphatically are not irrelevant to our conscious response to that crisis. Every aspect of Panikkar’s rich legacy should be explored to its fullest.

### **Crisis and Spirituality**

In a broadcast series of conversations entitled “Beyond Awakening,” which as of this writing has been running almost two years and has featured dozens of guests, the series host Terry Patten poses this challenge: Some of us have been seriously cultivating our own spiritual growth for years now, or even decades. But in light of the crises facing our world (Patten asks), the question is: *So what?*

That is, what difference does our personal “spiritual growth” make, outside of our own inner enhancement? Is enlightenment, spiritual fulfillment, of value only in personal terms? Will we watch the world collapse into catastrophe, as we stand by/sit by in personal bliss?

If we focused *only* on Eternity (which Panikkar does not), we might be tempted to accept a “yes” response to that question. But awareness of tempiternity and the theanthropocosmic vision are living seeds of a *proper* response to the question, especially when thrown onto the soil of personal and interpersonal *incarnation* of the tempiternal tragedy, an incarnation that fully involves not only the dimension of time but also of *space*. Space – awareness of “the world around us,” including the presence, to us and in us, of The Other. And here another of Panikkar’s contributions will show itself to be vital: that of “*dialogical dialogue*.”

Let us for a moment look more deeply into time and temporality, to return “in due time” to space and dialogue.

### **The Myth of Progress and the Myth of History**

Panikkar’s comments about “ecosophical consciousness” (above) harmonize with a strong chorus of voices including those of Thomas Berry, Wendell Berry, and others, who reject the formulation that we are “in the world, but not of it,” a formulation that reduces the Earth to an inanimate field. No, these voices recognize and affirm: we *are* the Earth.

Ecosophical consciousness also reverberates in very recent statements like this one:

As the fog of fixity lifts, we are finding ourselves much more than observers and witnesses to life’s grand unfolding drama. We are influential actors, newly aware of the immense tides that are shaping the world within and without, just becoming cognizant of our own freedom - and immense responsibility. (Phipps, 30)

One dimension that quotation points to, moreso than is sometimes explicitly the case in Panikkar’s own reflections on ecosophy, tempiternity, etc., is embedded in the words, “As the fog of fixity lifts...” This dimension is that of *time-in-motion*, or *motion-in-time*.

In *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, Panikkar identifies three “moments” of human time-consciousness: ahistorical, historical, and transhistorical. (Cosmotheandric Experience, 79ff) And he correlates them with three ways, or “periods,” of human-being in the universe: *Mythos*, *History*, and *Mystical*.

- For ahistorical consciousness (roughly, human consciousness as it existed before the invention of writing), “...Man could not project all his creations into the future; the past had the most powerful grip on him. Tradition was paramount. Time comes from a Beginning. *Mythos*.”
- For historical consciousness, “...Progress is a sacred word. Time marches forward. The future belongs to God and God to the future. *History*.”
- For transhistorical consciousness, “...the past is broken, and the future collapses. The present is the only time left. And it is this experience that opens the door to the predominance of the *Mystical*.” (ibid., 82)

The opening of the door to the *Mystical* is also what Panikkar (and others) have called the opening of “the Third Eye.”

Panikkar situates *transhistorical* as the consciousness that is emerging in the wake of the splitting of the atom and the consequent realization of the *vulnerability* of everything that had previously seemed “indestructible.” The dawning realization of existential vulnerability has led, Panikkar observes, to the end of the myth of progress, the end of history: “I am also not speaking about the end of time, but about the end of history. I am precisely disentangling these two issues by questioning the assumption that Man is exclusively an historical being. [...]The myth of progress has practically collapsed. The *historical* situation of the world today is nothing less than desperate.” (ibid, 109) [...] “History has become not a dream but a nightmare. Man, said to be an historical being, discovers that he cannot make history.” (ibid, 119)

The dawning of transhistorical consciousness, while perhaps emerging from the collapse of the myth of history, does not affect only, does not belong only, to those parts of humanity that had embraced (and been embraced by) the myth of history:

I have elaborated these more sociological aspects of the contemporary world so as to emphasize the urgency of the question, its importance and the existential background for a transhistorical consciousness. This latter is no longer the privilege of an aristocracy but begins to be the common lot of the people and peoples of the Earth in their search for survival amidst the internal and external strains of modern life. (ibid, 118)

But as Panikkar also recognized, transhistorical does not, cannot, mean “nontemporal.” If our time is indeed characterized by the emergence of a transhistorical consciousness and the collapse of the myth of progress, it is nevertheless the case that *we cannot stand still*. Our “moment” of crisis is *crisis* specifically because we have already set into motion an interlocking set of processes, interlocking on local and global scales, whose trajectory is leading to the end of sustainable human life. That trajectory will inexorably continue to its/our end, if we become “purely” transhistorical and do not act *in time*.

The world cries out for radical change that cannot be merely theoretical, without a grounding in *praxis*. Contrariwise, a shift in external structures only, besides lacking the theoretical fulcrum, would also be a sham and a delusion. ...We also require a *ta mystika*, not by itself, but fully engaged and integral with the senses and the mind. [But] If the ultimate ideals of man, which are what we call religious questions, are not incarnated

in the spatio-temporal structures of social and political life, then both remain sterile. (358)

Thus even as the Third Eye becomes open and we breathe in eternity and we break free from the myopic myth of progress, our survival (in “time”) demands that we have *some sense* of temporality, movement and progress. Because at this moment, *praxis* is crucial, and praxis occurs in time and must be motivated by trust in its efficacy and the possibility of its desirable outcome.

Panikkar’s own characterization of temporality varied, depending largely upon the context in which he was addressing the topic. When considering *the myth of progress*, of which he was definitely a critic, he tended toward a suspicion of temporality, at least insofar as it was taken to be a kind of line along which everything moved toward some “future,” at the expense of the Present. In such contexts he emphasized the *transhistorical* consciousness, and the Mystical vision. For example: “The *eschaton* is the Ultimate, the Finality but not necessarily the final point of a lineal time.” (276)

In other contexts he explicitly affirms temporality:

It is this Rhythm of Being that interconnects all with all in ways that we do not foresee. The discourse about Being is not just intemporal metaphysics; it has also physical and human aspects.(54)

What then does it mean, [...] that the historical period is coming to an end? It does not mean that we cease to take an interest in human praxis. It does not mean that we jump altogether outside time and space. Historicity should not be confounded with temporality. (Cosmotheandric Experience, 85)

In *The Rhythm of Being*, Panikkar observes that “The challenge to the human intellect is how to keep the unity of Being and the diversity of beings without ‘injuring’ either.” (288)

In the same way, an equally deep challenge to the human intellect is the relationship between *Eternity* and *temporality*. In fact, those “two” relationships: Being and beings, Eternity and temporality -- are the *Same* relationship. They can be distinguished, but not separated.

A theanthropocosmic spirituality properly includes both relationships. “Contemplation of Being,” Panikkar says, “includes the act of merging with, or rather becoming Being – a Being that is itself Becoming, pure Act.” (276)

Exactly the same insight applies to Time – contemplation of Time includes the act of merging with, or rather becoming Time. Becoming the multibillion-year trajectory of cosmic evolution, and becoming the indeterminate future.

### In Praise of Temporality

We must take Panikkar to heart when he raises alarms about the Myth of Progress (capital letters here to emphasize it as a unified myth), especially as that Myth has served as justification of “developed” countries in subjugating and overwhelming “developing” countries and destroying their cultures. In any way that a fixation on temporality supports that Myth, that understanding of temporality needs to be rejected.

While recognizing the perniciousness of that face of temporality, however, it is also necessary to avoid a vision in which “time slips away,” so to speak. I want to emphasize Panikkar’s recognition of temporality as constitutively involved in *tempiternity*, and as a necessary component of human *praxis* in the face of planetary crisis.

Early in *The Rhythm of Being*, Panikkar almost off-handedly makes this powerful observation:

*Being is an act that, seen from the perspective of a temporal observer, is a constant coming to be. Being is be-ing, a verb, an activity, an act, a Zeitwort... a temporal act that does not run along an external time because it is timeful in itself.*(94f)

“*Being is an act that, seen from the perspective of a temporal observer, is a constant coming to be.*” Should we take that statement as a description of a flaw, a shortcoming, a fault? Surely not. It is a statement of the human condition – it is the very *anthropos* dimension of the trinitarian *theanthropocosmic* reality. Without the perspective of a temporal observer, the trinitarian reality would not be trinitarian. In Christian language, the temporal observer is the only possible locus of the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. Without the temporal observer there would be no *perichoresis* within the *theanthropocosmic* reality; there would be only the divine and the cosmic, and “they” would not “know” themselves. Within the trinitarian reality, the temporal observer – the human - is constitutive of the cosmic and the divine, just as the cosmic and the divine are constitutive of the human.

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## System, Vision, and Mythos

I first became aware of the name Raimundo Panikkar (as he was then known) when I was deeply involved in the “Teilhard movement,” that international wave of excitement over the works of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that lasted for several years in the 1960s and early 70s. I belonged to a nonprofit called *The Phenomenon of Man Project*, named for Teilhard’s masterwork. The group had created a six-hour audio-visual presentation based on Teilhard’s works to convey in an accessible way the sweep and magnificence of geo-bio-spiritual evolution as Teilhard envisioned it. For a few years, on weekends (because we all had “day jobs”), we traveled to many a city to present that program at colleges and churches.

One of the other “Teilhard groups” at the time was the American Teilhard Association, an organization with international scope. One of the members of its advisory council was Raimundo Panikkar. That’s where I first became aware of his name. At UC Santa Barbara I was a member of a Sociology of Religion seminar headed by Professor Thomas O’Dea. Early in the seminar year, O’Dea became very ill and was unable to continue with the seminar, and Panikkar stepped in. Already familiar with his name, I was delighted at the opportunity to meet him. That delight matured into a profound respect over the next five years as I had the honor of working on my PhD, focused on the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, under Panikkar’s mentorship.

I describe that background not only to “situate myself” in the universe of Panikkar’s influence, but also to incorporate another influence and theme into this paper – evolutionary time (the “myth of evolution,” if you prefer) and its place, or not, in the emerging *mythos* to which Panikkar bears witness. It constitutes, perhaps, an emerging fourth mode of time-consciousness in addition to the three that Panikkar identified.

## The Third Eye and Deep-Time Eyes

Because my dissertation was on the work of Teilhard de Chardin, I had a number of conversations with Panikkar on that subject. I especially remember one conversation in which he observed that Teilhard’s work presents a fully worked-out *system*, which was both its strength and its fundamental weakness. It is indeed the same weakness that Panikkar notes more broadly in connection with any “conceptual theology” – once such an approach sets forth a set of fundamental concepts, it is, as Panikkar says, “...extremely difficult to criticize one of them without preventing the entire conceptual system from collapsing.” (194)

I believe he was completely correct in rejecting Teilhard's "system" – but the real contribution of Teilhard de Chardin lies much deeper than his system. The "Teilhard movement" as a popular phenomenon (and it *was* a very popular phenomenon for a few years) dissipated many years ago. And yet his real influence has only grown stronger over the years, at least among thinkers and (I dare say) visionaries who are coming to be known, collectively, as "Evolutionaries." (Phipps, 2012) whose focus today is situating and celebrating the place, role and responsibilities of humanity within the ongoing process of cosmic, emergent evolution. When asked about their primary influences, virtually every one of these explorers includes the name of Teilhard de Chardin. (There is much serious work going on in this area, despite the fact that quite a bit of "New Age silliness" is also being produced about ostensibly the same subject.)

None of these Evolutionaries is advocating (or even alluding to) Teilhard's complete "system," but Teilhard clearly touched on something much deeper and more important than a system. Just as Raimon Panikkar's living legacy is deeply influential in helping to "open the Third Eye" of the *theanthropocosmic vision*, there is a *homeomorphic equivalent* in Teilhard's still-deepening influence in the opening of what some are calling "Deep-Time Eyes" or "deep-time awareness."

It is evident that the "Third Eye" and "Deep-Time Eyes" open onto the same field of vision.

I feel certain that Panikkar would concur: "The task of transforming the cosmos is not achieved by merely a passive attitude nor by sheer activism. It is brought about by being co-operators with the Divine. ...the world does not "go" independently from us. We are also active factors in the destiny of the cosmos." (350)

## Evolution and Metanoia

Teilhard de Chardin, prophet of deep-time consciousness, traced the arc of cosmic and terrestrial evolution as a rising curve of what he called "complexity-consciousness," with the inner (and divine) impetus of evolution being an impulse toward greater and greater consciousness, and with consciousness "as such" (not *self*-consciousness) being a component of evolution on all levels. On this curve he identified several major "thresholds," at each of which "consciousness takes a great leap forward." These thresholds are:

- the emergence of *Life*, from the cradle of inorganic matter

- the emergence of *Reflective Consciousness*, at the crossing of the evolutionary threshold at which awareness becomes conscious-of-itself. With the migration and distribution of reflective beings (humans) all over the planet, there is the gradual creation of the *Noosphere*, the (still inchoate) “layer of reflective thought” encircling the planet just as do the earlier-emerging *hydrosphere* and *biosphere*.

- “*Point Omega*,” the threshold, still to come, when the Noosphere becomes *conscious of itself*.

Here, from Panikkar, is a lovely thumbnail sketch of the same evolutionary process that Teilhard describes: “The history of science is the Story of Holy Matter expanding and expanding, getting cooler and cooler, evolving, differentiating, and growing, and at least in one corner of that immensity, appearing in the form of an observer capable of measuring such magnitudes.” (389)

Panikkar was quite familiar with Teilhard’s work, and specifically criticized it for putting ultimate emphasis on a transcendent Future, at the expense of the Present:

Once we introduce time into Being, as it has been reintroduced in western metaphysics since Hegel, and this time is considered to proceed forward – as progress, or perhaps only as “process” – we are bound to project the meaning of everything into the future. Christian theology, both catholic and protestant, has to catapult God into a future Omega Point a la Teilhard. All is postponed; “eternal life” runs the danger of being situated in the future. (46f)

And again: “If this transcendence is not rooted in our immanence, ...if transcendence (future eternity or Deity) is not linked with our contingent existence, we open the door to anxieties and alienations of all sorts. We would live then, as it were, thrown forward, always running ahead, trying to get higher, further, to get more, to go beyond, and the like. This is the cause of anxiety, fear, and discontent.” (289).

[My] reflections, – Panikkar says, – deal with a cosmotheandric vision of Man and do not touch upon the scientific hypothesis of evolution. ...*How* an entity came to be following a linear temporal sequence does not disclose *what* that entity is. (293)

And similarly:

The Origins do not lie back in the past of a linear time, but spring forth as the emergence of any original experience. (264)

Indeed.

And yet, we must add that the “*is*” of an entity *advaitically and tempiternally* includes its “*coming to be.*”

Faith, – says Panikkar, – is an awareness that we are still on the way, incomplete, unfulfilled, not yet totally realized, divinized, liberated, human... (306)

Although the following statement comes from a 2012 book by Carter Phipps (an Evolutionary), one can easily imagine it as having come from Panikkar:

How we think about evolution is foundational to the kinds of visions that we hold for our collective future. It shapes our understanding of who we are today, how we got here, and what our role is in creating the world of tomorrow. Confronted by the unprecedented challenges of a globalizing, environmentally threatened, culturally dissonant world, nothing could be more critical. Paradoxically, the debate about our origins is also a cultural referendum on our future. (Phipps, xvi)

It is admittedly the case that today’s Evolutionaries are still groping for a way to “link transcendence (future eternity or Deity)... with our contingent existence”; to *ground* the Deep-Time vision firmly in the Present; They are, in fact, explicitly groping for a way toward something of whose necessity Panikkar was acutely aware:

For human survival we need another mutation in the destiny of reality, compared to which the shift from pre-history to history seems like child’s play. I am not naively optimistic; I am simply saying that the alternative is the end of human life. (352)

(In his Santa Barbara seminar, when discussing the planetary predicament, Panikkar more than once said, not really jokingly, “I am holding out for a mutation.”)

### **Omega: What’s the Point?**

We are out of time. That is a tempiternal statement, and it works both ways.

(1) Seen from the point of view of temporality: We are deeply into the processes we have unleashed that are bringing about “the end

of human life” – and obviously not in the teleological sense of the word “end.”

(2) Seen from the point of view of eternity: We are *out(side) of time*. We are participants in *Being*, which is “...a temporal act that does not run along an external time because it is timeful in itself.” The crisis in our temporal situation is rooted in the fact that we, humanity, are not anywhere nearly enough aware – consciously – of our being in/as eternity.

Earlier, we posed (or echoed) these questions: What difference does our personal “spiritual growth” make, outside of our own inner enhancement? Is enlightenment, spiritual fulfillment, of value only in personal terms? Will we watch the world collapse into catastrophe, as we stand by/sit by in personal bliss?

A ‘better world’ – says Panikkar, – is neither the dream of an earthly paradise nor the inner self alone; it is a world with less hatred and more love, with less violence and more justice. ...with our body we commune with matter, not excluding celestial matter; with our soul we embrace all of humanity, **not excluding past and future** [my emphasis]; with our spirit we cooperate with angels and other spiritual powers, not excluding the Godhead. (351)

If the limitation of the unaided mystical Third Eye is that time and change tend to disappear from the picture, then the limitation of unaided Deep-Time Eyes is that what tends to disappear from the picture is “human space” and the layers of complexity that exist *contemporaneously* in any given “moment.” The two kinds of vision need one another, because they are not “two.”

Deep-Time Eyes reveal to us that *we are* a world in motion, a cosmos in cosmogenesis. But Deep-Time Eyes, while able to focus clearly on *time and eternity*, tend toward a kind of blurry myopia when the challenge is also to perceive *space*. Graphical illustrations of the process of evolution often depict it as a rising curve (a la Teilhard), rising from lower complexity to higher. On such a curve, “evolutionary moments” tend to appear as *points*: “points in time” at which one or another evolutionary change emerges in the process. But in fact, at no “time” is the theanthropocosmic reality a “point.” Within temporality, reality is (at the very least) a *wavefront*, no single position on which can unilaterally define the nature of the whole.

The nature of our kairological moment, and our planetary crisis, is this:

(1) Evolution (not just “cosmic evolution” and not just “human evolution” but *theanthropocosmic evolution*) has, over the course of many billions of years, “led to” “us” – humanity – endowed with the capacity not only for awareness but *self-awareness* and thus, because reality is *theanthropocosmic*, *endowing the “process” itself with self-awareness*. (This is “the consciousness of tempiternity,” as subjective genitive.)

(2) Awareness of our deep-time past inculcates a deep need for a *future*. On the “sociological” level, we recognize that there is no option of standing still. We might be tempted to try to settle into the Present and call it the Eternal Now – but the Present is so full of injustices, imbalances and lethal conflicts, not to mention ecological dead-ends, that standing-still would be to continue a headlong descent into catastrophe.

(3) We could characterize those first two observations as belonging to the axis of *time*, depicting that axis, if we want, as the rising curve of temporal evolution. BUT: We are not – the Present is not – a *point* on that curve. The Present is a *wavefront* intersecting the curve of time. And because that wavefront is so deeply riven with crippling human conflicts, *there can be no evolutionary movement “forward” – no human future – unless the wavefront becomes “conscious of itself.”*

(4) Our only resource for empowering the wavefront to become conscious of itself is *each other*. We are not yet very good at all at using this resource, but it is here that Panikkar’s “dialogical vision” can be a spark for such an awakening.

(5) Our evolutionary moment is in a “supersaturated state.” This is an image that both Panikkar and Teilhard de Chardin use in discussing a moment in which everything is ripe for transformation, awaiting only the right catalyst.

Here is Panikkar:

Is there any way out of this tragic situation? After all, our present political system is threatening to destroy the world outright. ...I adduce a double simile from the physical world: the catalyst and the crystallization of supersaturated solutions. (374)

The new mythos will certainly contain elements from all the strata of humanity, but it will need a glue, so to speak, a leading thread, a dynamic force that will meld old and new into something we cannot yet properly

foresee. I believe that the cosmotheandric insight may have sufficient traditional elements, and just enough of a revolutionary character, to serve as that catalyst for hope. (404)

To my mind, a crucial part of the “revolutionary character” of Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision is the *dialogical dialogue*, which arises within a person as the “intrareligious dialogical dialogue” and overflows outward from there to be a dialogue *between* persons and (please God) between peoples.

### **Dialogical Dialogue – Rediscovering Fire**

A primary objection Panikkar raises to the myth of evolution is the danger and temptation of reading evolution as leading inexorably up to “us” – a very specific and localized “us” that indulges itself in a blindly self-justifying sense of superiority, colonialism and cosmic entitlement. However, such an attitude is not an awareness of *evolution*, but a distorted *evolutionism*. This is similar to the distinction that Panikkar has drawn between *relativity and relativism*.

The works of Teilhard de Chardin – especially in his overall “*system*” -- admittedly contain a notable taint of that very strain of evolutionism. (The focus of my [unpublished] dissertation was a critique of Teilhard’s notion of a “privileged axis” to evolution.) But Teilhard’s most important contribution, as I said earlier, is not in his “system” but in the mythic (in Panikkar’s sense) vistas of spacetime to which he bears witness.

Teilhard himself was very aware that his “Point Omega” – the next threshold in terrestrialhuman evolution – requires a *coming together* of humanity. He said this in a number of ways:

The salvation of the spirit of the earth (which is the only thing that really matters to us) is seen to depend upon the developments – now recognized as possible – of a close affective relationship, cosmic in dimensions. (Teilhard, *Future of Man*, 48)

The same thought, expressed in more poetic language, is perhaps Teilhard’s most widely quoted statement:

The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire. (Teilhard, *Toward the Future*, 86f)

Teilhard also makes the “coming together” point in an especially emphatic and explicit way:

The outcome of the world, the gates of the future, the entry into the super-human - these are not thrown open to a few of the privileged nor to one chosen people to the exclusion of all others. They will open only to an advance of all together, in a direction in which all together can join and find completion in a spiritual renovation of the earth,... (Teilhard, Phenomenon of Man, Kindle edition, Book Four, Chapter 1)

However... a kind of “impairment of vision” in Teilhard – a cultural myopia – leads him to suggest that while evolution advances through repeating cycles of *convergence and breakthrough*, the overall process has a definite “privileged axis.” In this scenario, lines of evolutionary development rise toward a particular threshold, at which “point” a “privileged” line *crosses* the threshold, into the New. And after that point, the forward movement of all the “other” lines – if indeed they are to advance any further at all – consists basically of falling into line behind the leadership of the privileged line that made the breakthrough.

This unilinear understanding of “convergent evolution” is not biologically accurate, and its implications become especially critical when we try to understand what Teilhard proposes is our “next” evolutionary threshold: the Omega Point: the “outcome of the world, the gates of the future, the entry into the super-human”. When Teilhard envisions “a direction in which all together can join,” the picture he paints tends to depict “all” joining together and “finding completion” by falling into line behind a privileged group.

This is not truly a solution to our kairological dilemma of being an evolutionary *wavefront*, rather than a “point on a curve.” As we stated earlier, that wavefront is so deeply riven with crippling human conflicts that *there can be no evolutionary movement “forward” – no human future – unless the wavefront becomes “conscious of itself.”* To use Teilhardian language, our wavefront must “catch fire.” The only way we will achieve that is if we can “burst into flame” – burst into consciousness – which is extremely unlikely to happen by one human group subsuming all the others. Attempts along that path would likely have us bursting into flame in a very different sense. In fact, such attempts at monocultural domination are already having that effect.

It is precisely at this “point” that Raimon Panikkar’s legacy becomes overridingly important. Going under more than one name in Panikkar’s work – *diatopical hermeneutics*, *Intrareligious Dialogical Dialogue*, etc. –

this dimension of his work and vision offers an identifiable way toward survival.

Those of us who have worked with Panikkar's writings know full well that they are not going to be accessible to a "general audience." But the insights, the realizations, the sparks of vision, the "divine glimpses" in his works can point the way out of the human evolutionary logjam that is caused by our deep inability to *see and understand* one another. Panikkar has done his work, and it is now for others to make visible, tangible, inspirational, provocative, motivational – even, yes, *accessible* – the riches that he has left to us.

We need a new *mythos*, a deeper horizon from which the *mythologoumenon*, the Story for our age, may emerge, but myths are not created or manipulated at will. We may narrate the *mythologoumenon* only when the underlying myth makes the story credible and speakable; at present we are not ready to hear it, although poets have already borne witness to its emergence. [...] We do not yet know the New Story, but its *dramatis personae* – *kosmos, anthropos, theos* – have already been introduced. (374f)

...we must assume that the role of the philosopher is to search for a truth (something that has saving power)[...] and that intellectuals ought to be incarnated in their own times and have an exemplary function. This further implies that the task may not be merely rational, and that the elaboration of an overall vision of reality is relevant for human life because we are more than rational animals and we are certainly more than machines. (4)

Our work should be done in as many arenas as possible. It should include philosophical, theological and hermeneutical reflection, and should be embodied in specific, concrete situations of dialogue – and should also include activities on the level of popular (not "pop") culture and personal spirituality. Reality is theanthropocosmic and it is also *kaleidoscopic*: transformation in any area contributes to transformation in the pattern of the whole.

And finally, reality is *fractal*: "self-similar" across multiple levels. "As above, so below." Or in Christian language: On Earth as it is in Heaven. And vice-versa. In the present context, what this means is: the nature of a relationship on an individual basis (dialectical, erotic, dialogical) is "self-similar" to relationships on the levels of groups, peoples, etc. Thus dialogical transformation of relationship on any one level can contribute to transformation at all levels, until the overall state of being becomes truly supersaturated and one more spark ignites an evolutionary mutation into self-understanding: which is, as Panikkar says, "not only my understanding

of myself, but is also the understandings that our fellow beings have of themselves.” (372)

### A Parable

We conclude with a parable.

We – humankind – have arrived at a place we’ve never been before. Each of our separate tribes has arrived here by following a Grand Plan imprinted on maps, maps that have grown brittle with age and are crumbling in our hands. For years – for centuries and millenia – we’ve been pushing along through a dense forest, eyes glued to the maps that have been handed down to us, believing ourselves to be on our way to salvation, whether conceived as heaven or transcendence or as an earthly life full of prosperity and plenty.

Along with all the members of my tribe, I check our map. According to that map, there should be, just ahead in the forest, a clearing where all our age-old hopes and dreams will be realized.

And indeed, we come to the clearing in the middle of the forest. But instead of discovering there all that we expected -- instead we find *you*, and *your tribe*, emerging into the same clearing from another direction, guided by a different map and a different set of expectations. And over there – *yet another tribe*, whose yet different map has also brought them to this place, and over there yet another, and another, and another.

And we all look at one another in bewilderment and dismay. I check my map – you’re not supposed to be here! You shouldn’t be here, if you’re not a member of my tribe, and if you haven’t followed my map.

Maybe I should kill you, or at least enslave you.

That impulse to kill or conquer is certainly rampant in our world, in our fear-filled moment, as we come face to face with one another in unprecedented ways.

*This* isn’t where we expected to be. Not any of us.

But here we are. All of us.

In the life of our planet, this is the first time that the actual depth of the phrase “*all of us*” is beginning to dawn on us. It’s now so very tangible that it’s incomprehensible: We’re all here, face to face, in a space we never expected to be sharing.

In the world the way it used to be, when we lived in our isolated, primitive groups, each group used to think that its particular map told the whole story. Each group, in our isolation and hubris, thought we were in possession of *The Map of the World*.

But none of our maps shows, accurately, the place where we find ourselves now.

I believed that the map of my tribe, my people, my culture, was guiding us toward something wonderful. But what is this -- some kind of terrible joke or trick? How can I take the next step toward where I thought I was going, if *you* are in my face, and standing in my way?

And you, of course, put the same question to me.

Consulting the cherished map that was handed down to me, I might claim to know the answer to that question: "All we have to do is, all the rest of you just change direction and follow me, and everything will be fine."

But you consult *your* old map, and you object, "No – that's not what it says here."

And you would resist, with all your might, any attempt I might make to force "all of us" to go in the direction defined by the map of my particular group. And I, of course, will resist any attempt you might make to force me to fall into line behind you to follow *your* map.

So here we all are, at the limits of our maps, and it's a terrible realization even to discover that our maps *had* limits. We stand at the limits of the world that was known to the mapmakers, and where some of the old mapmakers wrote the inscription, "Here be Dragons," a touching indication of their fear of the unknown, and indeed their fear of *not knowing*.

Our mutual fear is simultaneously paralyzing and explosive.

But what if, in this moment of sorrow and confusion, I reach out to you – to try, at least, to offer some little bit of comfort, and to say: *I'm here, too*. And what if, even more difficult, I look in your eyes and admit, *I'm lost, too*.

If you and I can make that wild leap of faith, that terrifying leap of vulnerability – then there is the possibility of transformative discovery. If we can become quiet together, if we can cease our incessant shouting for a little while, we may discover that beneath the fear, beneath the grief and the confusion – *something wonderful* still calls us onward, each of us and all of us.

We have achieved common ground. But we have achieved it only in this sense: we are all standing on the same ground, in the same place. But we don't know where we are. Or, worse, we have a swarm of conflicting definitions and explanations of where we are. We are nowhere near the attainment of common ground in the sense of *agreeing* about where (or even *what*) we are. But we are all *here*, and there is no way any of us can leave.

In his series of seminars in Cross-Cultural Religious Anthropology at UC Santa Barbara, Raimon Panikkar often insisted that "We are, all of us, the legitimate heirs of the sum total of human wisdom."

In the placetime in which we now find ourselves, we desperately need "the sum total of human wisdom" if we are to survive. Our existential dilemma and crisis is that in the placetime in which we now find ourselves, we have not in fact "found ourselves" at all.

Where are we? What is this place? Look around, and if you'll tell me honestly what you see, I'll do the same for you, and then we'll both see a little more than either of us saw alone. It may be painful, it may even be terrifying, but I'll listen to you, if you'll listen to me.

Tell me your story, and the story of your people, and I'll tell you mine, and we'll both understand, a little bit better, how we got to this strange place.

*Then* we may be prepared to venture our first step beyond this place, in response to a stirring that touches the deepest places in our hearts – a gentle call of limitless love from somewhere ahead. Then we might find the courage to *become* the first step on a path yet to be marked, on a map that has not yet been drawn.

With our Third Eye and our Deep-Time Eyes open, we may also discover that "somewhere ahead" is also *right here and right now*. And yet, paradoxically, we must "get there."

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## **Panikkar's Universe: Beyond the "Scientific" View of the Cosmos**

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### **Abstract**

In this chapter, I am trying to explore one of the most unique ideas of Raimon Panikkar, "cosmotheandric experience," in relationship with his vision of the universe, especially his "kosmology." As a trained scientist, he was fully aware of the power and the limits of the science. Panikkar does not oppose or negate the importance of science nor ignores its contributions. His main concern was how science has played its role in shaping the way of thinking in modern West, and how it has become the global and universal norm in permeating in every sphere of human life. In this sense, the scientific way of thinking has replaced all other ways of thinking, making it the absolute criteria. The power of the scientific way of thinking and the scientific worldview have made us believe that the scientific way of thinking is the only way of thinking and the scientific worldview is the only worldview replacing all other previous ones. Panikkar's last book, his Gifford Lectures, *The Rhythm of Being*, especially in Chapter VIII, "The Emerging Mythos", tackles an ambitious task to challenge the modern scientific view of the universe. The main thrust of this chapter is to explore Raimon Panikkar's thought regarding "cosmotheandric experience" or "cosmotheandric vision" that challenges the modern scientific worldview and cosmology. His unique insight, "cosmotheandric experience, entails a fundamental unity of the universe, the divine, and the human. One of Panikkar's main concerns in this respect was the problem of the modern scientific cosmology. In his view, modern cosmology has lost a unitary vision of all beings including the universe, the divine, and the human. To counter this issue, Panikkar introduces his own idea of the reality based on "kosmology." His idea of "kosmology" is an open and accumulative process of understanding reality in encompassing the universe, the divine, and the human, instead of absolutizing a particular worldview as the absolute reality and truth as found in the modern scientific view of the universe, cosmology. His "kosmology," however, is neither an ideology nor a doctrine, but a "myth" which goes beyond a rational thinking, scientific theory or a metaphysical system, a "logos." In this connection, Panikkar relates his "cosmotheandric experience" to the Christian idea of the Trinity and the Hindu notion of

*advaita* in order to flash out the nature of the intrinsic unity contained in his “cosmotheandric experience” and his vision of reality.

### 파니카의 宇宙: 科學의 宇宙觀을 止揚해서

#### 노영찬

#### 조지메이슨 대학교

라이몬 파니카 (1918-2010)는 과학자였다. 그가 받은 박사학위(Ph.D.) 세계 가운데 하나는 화학분야 였다. 물론 파니카는 철학자, 신학자, 종교철학자, 비교종교학의 대가로 널리 알려진 세계적 학자였지만 그는 자기가 거친 과학의 과정을 잊지 않았다. 그는 자기 일생을 통해서 과학과 다른분야의 지식 즉 신학, 철학, 종교과 깊게 연결시키려고 노력 했었다. 그는 과학자로서 과학의 힘과 한계를 충분히 알고 있었다. 파니카는 과학그 자체보다도 “ 과학적 사고” 혹은 “ 과학적 방법” 의 문제점을 잘 알고 있었다. 서구 근대화를 가져온 이성, 합리, 과학 그리고 분석적 사고에 대해서 깊은 우려를 하고 있었다. 과학을 부정하려는 것이 아니라 과학적 사고를 절대화 하는데 대한 우려이다. 서구를 근대화 시킨 이성, 합리, 과학적 사고가 이제는 세계적, 보편적인 표준이 되어 버렸다. 뿐 아니라 과학적 사고가 다른 모든 생각의 방법을 대체해 버리고 과학적 사고가 절대적이고, 과학적 사고만이 유일한 사고방법으로 간주하게 되었다는 것이다. 마치 우리의 선조들이 신화를 그대로 믿고 신화를 당연하게 받아 들였듯이 지금은 과학을 자장 옳고 당연한 것으로 받아드린다. 파니카는 종종 농담삼아 오늘의 신화는 바로 과학이라고 말하곤 했다. 파니카는 그의 마지막 저작이며 동시에 그의 길포트 강연인 그의 책 “ 존재의 리듬” 의 마지막 장에서 과학적 우주관에 대한 성찰을 하고 있다. 이 마지막 장에서 파니카는 과학적 방법론, 과학적 사고를 절대화 시키는 현대문명에 도전을 하고 있다. 여기서 그는 특히 과학적 우주관을 절대화하고 유일시 하는 과학절대주의를 넘어서서 새로운 지평을 열고 있다. 우주라는 것은 단순히 우리인간과 동 떨어져 객관적으로 관찰하고 연구하는 대상이 아니라 우리과 같이 숨을 쉬고 우리와 관계를 맺고 우리 인간의 존재와 우주의 존재가 연결되는 유기적 생명체 라는 것이다. 이런 의미에서 우주는 인간의 삶속에 깊이 관여하는 주관적 존재라는 것이다. 여기서 파니카는 순전히 과학적 추구의 대상을 보는 우주관을 영어의 “cosmology”로 표현한다. 그러나 우주가 단순히 객관적 관찰의 대상이 아니라 우리 인간의 삶과 연결되고, 우리의 삶 속에 깊이 들어와서 우리 인간의 존재와 연결되어서 같이 움직이는 살아 있는 주체로서 보는 우주관을 “kosmology” 로 표현 한다. 파니카는 과학적 우주관 (cosmology)를 결코 부정하지 않는다. 다만 이러한 과학적 사고가 를 절대화 하는 것을 막자는 것이다. 그리고 파니카 말하는 우주관 (kosmology)은 우주를 인간의 삶과 떨어진 존재로 보는 것이 아니라 우리인간의 삶 속에 깊이 포함되어 있는 우주다. 다시 말해서 인간은 우주를 개관적으로 관찰하고 분석만 할 것이 아니라 우리가 우주를 품고 살아야 한다는 것이다. 파니카는 우주 뿐 아니라 신도 인간의 삶속에 같이 품고 사는 삶의 경험을 강조 한다. 이것이 바로 파니카가 말하는 우주. 신. 인간의 통전적 경험 (cosmotheandric experience)이다.

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## Introduction

Raimon Panikkar was a scientist; one of his three Ph.D. degrees was in Chemistry. Panikkar, although he was a philosopher, theologian, and a scholar of comparative religion and philosophy of religion, he never forgot about his earlier training in science. Throughout his entire life, Panikkar tried to integrate his scientific knowledge with other fields of knowledge including philosophy, theology, and religion. As a scientist, he was fully aware of the power and limits of science. Panikkar's concern about science was not simply about science itself but more importantly about the "scientific way of thinking" or the "scientific approach," especially the scientific model in the modern Western world. Western modernity is characterized in terms of reason, science, and analytic thinking. Panikkar does not oppose or negate the importance of science nor ignores its contributions. His main concern was how science has played its role in shaping the way of thinking in modern West, and how it has become the global and universal norm in permeating in every sphere of human life. In this sense, the scientific way of thinking has replaced all other ways of thinking, making it the absolute criteria. The power of the scientific way of thinking and the scientific worldview have made us believe that the scientific way of thinking is the only way of thinking and the scientific worldview is the only worldview replacing all other previous ones. In this sense, Panikkar used to quip that "science" has become a modern "myth." Indeed, we take the "scientific approach" for granted as our ancient ancestors did for "myth." We may call it the "power of myth."

Panikkar's last book, his Gifford Lectures, *The Rhythm of Being*, has eight chapters, although he intended to write another chapter, he was unable to do so. Chapter VIII, "The Emerging Mythos", thus, had to become the last chapter of the book. In this last chapter, VIII, Panikkar tackles an ambitious task to challenge the modern scientific view of the universe. His challenge to the modern scientific view of the universe did not intend to negate the scientific view of the universe, and go back to the pre-modern view of the cosmos, nor did he appeal to the religious fundamentalist fanatical view of the universe. Rather, Panikkar attempted to shake the ground, the basic assumption, of the "scientific way of thinking" or "scientific approach" as for the absolute and the only way of understanding the universe. In order to make this challenge, Panikkar explored a deeper and broader implication of the cosmos. For him, the cosmos was not a mere object for humans to watch or observe, but a subject, a dynamic and living organ, that has its own life. The universe does not exist simply just for humans. We have to accept the universe as a subject to be related and connected, not an object to be investigated and utilized for our own benefits.

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In Panikkar's vision, God, the cosmos, and the human are inter-related. This relationship is not external but internal in the sense that the cosmos and the divine are to become part of human experience. For this, the cosmos is no longer an external entity but a constitutive part of human experience. This is what Panikkar calls "cosmotheandric experience" which he advocated for the last few decades. Panikkar developed a comprehensive view of the universe in which we can feel, experience, and being related to, what he calls "kosmology," against the modern scientific view of the universe, cosmology. Panikkar's universe was the universe, which we experience, in which we exist and participate fully. The scientific view of the cosmos, cosmology, as an objective observation of the universe, does not serve the purpose of Panikkar's vision of "cosmotheandric experience," kosmology. For this reason, Panikkar envisions more comprehensive and better-integrated vision of the cosmos, kosmology, than the scientific view of the cosmos, cosmology, can offer. The universe for Panikkar was a lived experience consisting of human self-awareness, self-understanding, and being a human in the fullest sense of the word.

The main thrust of this paper is to explore Raimon Panikkar's thought regarding "cosmotheandric experience" or "cosmotheandric vision" that challenges the modern scientific worldview and cosmology. His unique insight, "cosmotheandric experience, entails a fundamental unity of the universe, the divine, and the human. One of Panikkar's main concerns in this respect was the problem of the modern scientific cosmology. In his view, modern cosmology has lost a unitary vision of all beings including the universe, the divine, and the human. To counter this issue, Panikkar introduces his own idea of the reality based on "kosmology." His idea of "kosmology" is an open and accumulative process of understanding reality in encompassing the universe, the divine, and the human, instead of absolutizing a particular worldview as the absolute reality and truth as found in the modern scientific view of the universe, cosmology. His "kosmology," however, is neither an ideology nor a doctrine, but a "myth" which goes beyond a rational thinking, scientific theory or a metaphysical system, a "logos." In this connection, Panikkar relates his "cosmotheandric experience" to the Christian idea of the Trinity and the Hindu notion of *advaita* in order to flash out the nature of the intrinsic unity contained in his "cosmotheandric experience" and his vision of reality.

Now, let us explore Raimon Panikkar's thought, especially his idea of cosmology. Why was cosmology an issue for Panikkar? One of the most outstanding and remarkable contributions that Raimon Panikkar has made to 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual discussion and spiritual reflection was his idea of "cosmotheandric experience" or "cosmotheandric vision," the

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comprehensive, unitary, and interactive vision of the mutual interpenetration of the universe, the human, and the divine. This vision has challenged the modern contemporary worldview and thought system based on the Western scientific framework of thinking that compartmentalizes and divides the realms of the universe, the divine, and the human. Rather Panikkar's insight and vision of cosmotheandric experience entails a fundamental unity of the universe, the divine, and the human. Western scientific cosmology simply has no room for Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision, for it does not allow us to contemplate the universe in relationship with the human and the divine. For this reason, Panikkar developed a comprehensive and interactive view of the universe, the divine, and the human. Panikkar saw that there were some fundamental problems contained in the modern scientific cosmology. Furthermore, Panikkar traces the basic assumption of the modern scientific cosmology, which is based on modern mentality, characterizing, rational thinking, logical process, analytical approach, individualistic values and anthropocentric worldview, thus, re-examining the foundation of modernity. Here Panikkar is especially concerned about the way modernity absolutizes "reason," "rationality," "scientific approach," etc. For him, the modern cosmology is a result of modernity reflecting the modern mentality and way of thinking and it is only one specific form of cosmology among many other possible cosmologies and thus not to be absolutized.

Panikkar's cosmotheandric experience or vision requires a fundamentally different view of the universe, the human, and the divine from the way how the Western scientific worldview has portrayed them. In this paper, I will limit my discussion to his cosmology in relation to his cosmotheandric vision. In this sense, it is essential to understand Panikkar's view of the universe or his cosmology for understanding his way of thinking.

I also would like to touch upon Panikkar's idea of the Christian Trinity and the Hindu idea of *advaita* in relation to his cosmotheandric vision. In order to understand his cosmology, it is necessary to examine his idea of the Trinity and *advaita*. Trinity is one of the major topics of Panikkar's research and meditation. Although the purpose of this paper is not Panikkar's idea of Trinity *per se*, it is necessary to understand the gist of his idea of Trinity for his basic assumption of reality. His idea of reality is profoundly triadic in thinking that every being is triadically constituted. His cosmology also must be understood in this triadic structure, and thus his cosmotheandric vision is basically Trinitarian.

The nature of the Trinitarian relationship, however, is non-dualistic or *advaitic*. Panikkar uses both the idea of the Christian Trinity and the Hindu idea of *advaita* for understanding the nature of reality. While the Christian

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idea of the Trinity for Panikkar provides the basic structure of reality and of every being, the Hindu idea of *advaita* explores the intrinsic unity of the Trinity. In other words, the nature of the Trinity can better be understood in the idea of the non-duality or *advaita*. It is essential for Panikkar to understand the Trinity in relationship with *advaita* for fuller understanding of the true nature of the intrinsic unity and interaction of the Trinitarian structure of reality.

Modern cosmology, however, has lost the dynamic vitality of the Trinitarian structure and become a merely scientific observation of the universe. For this reason, Panikkar tried to examine the basic assumption of modernity to flash out the implication of the Western scientific worldview and its consequences. Panikkar, in this respect, critically reflected and developed a “postmodern” vision of the universe and reality.

### **Problem of Modernity**

What I attempt to do in this paper is to explore the implication and significance of Panikkar’s way of thinking and the uniqueness of his thought in relation to the 21<sup>st</sup> century “postmodern” approach. Panikkar, almost a half century ago, started this “postmodern” project in developing a new approach to some fundamental traditional philosophical and spiritual issues for modern time.

One of the pressing concerns that Panikkar felt “urgent” was the problem of “modernity.” In general, we think of modernity, in comparison with the pre-modern period, “as advancement,” “progress,” and “improvement” in terms of knowledge, scientific discovery, and way of life. So why is “modernity” a problem? What is wrong with “modernity”? From the historical perspective, modernity has brought remarkable achievements especially in the areas of science and technology. Many remarkable events including the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment have contributed in bringing “modernity” in emphasizing individuality, humanistic and anthropocentric values and worldviews, reason and rationality, analytical thinking, and scientific method in demystifying the universe and nature. In fact, the term “modernity” or “modernization” has become synonymous with “better,” “progress,” “rational,” and “Western” among others. Since modernity is a Western phenomenon, modernization has meant “Westernization” for the non-Western world. While modernity, no doubt, has brought us a lot of convenience to humanity, it has also brought us certain aspects that we must critically reflect on. The “success” of modernity, however, has a hidden failure or a potential danger.

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Panikkar as a prophetic thinker and a mystical visionary was deeply concerned about how the modern West has become in terms of its worldview, value system, and especially its way of understanding “reality” and measuring the “truth,” and the ways of knowing. For Panikkar, the whole problem of knowing was not only an epistemological issue but also, even more importantly, an ontological problem. The split between epistemology and ontology is one of the outcomes of the modern scientific way of thinking in dividing “knowledge” and “being,” as though what we *are* and what we *think* are not related. This dichotomy is one of the results of modernity in dichotomizing, compartmentalizing, and categorizing the knowledge of reality.

In addition, the modern mentality in the West has elevated “reason,” “rationality,” “logical process,” “scientific analysis,” and “analytical mind” as the highest norms for knowing the truth and reality. As an outcome of this method and approach, human beings have become not only the center of the universe and but also the measure of all beings.<sup>1</sup> Panikkar, exactly thirty years ago, made a bold attempt to challenge modernity, “The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity.”<sup>2</sup> In this insightful and delightful essay, he delineated the fundamental problems of the present time, modernity, and the root causes for these problems. Panikkar delineated in this essay that a dualistic thinking that creates dichotomy is found in all aspects of our modern life: the heavens above (the here vs. the elsewhere), the history ahead (the now vs. the later), the labor pathos (the act vs. the product), the power of big (intimacy vs. exteriority), the ambition of success (contentment vs. triumph).

Modernity is characterized in terms of “rationality,” “reason,” “scientific approach,” and “analytical mind.” Furthermore, “reason” has become the absolute criterion and scientific world view is the only true and correct way of seeing the universe, the world, and human beings. Making “reason” and “science” the absolute judge in any form of knowledge or process of “knowing” is the symptom of modernity. Panikkar believed that the crucial element lacking in modernity is the “contemplative mood.” In other words, Panikkar asserts that the problem of modernity is in absolutizing a rational and scientific analysis while neglecting

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<sup>1</sup> Protagoras (480-411BCE) said, “Man is the measure of all things,” in exemplifying “anthropocentrism” in the Western philosophical tradition.

<sup>2</sup> First published in *Cross Current* 31 (Fall 1981): 261-72 and its revised version was appeared with the same title in *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility* (Edited by Harry James Cargas), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 3-19.

contemplative awareness. The “contemplative mood” that Panikkar is exploring is in fact a “mystical” approach.

Here the term “mystic” or “mystical” may cause some confusion and thus needs clarification. There are many ways to define “mysticism” or being “mystical,” but what I am trying to do here is simply to show the mystical dimension in Panikkar’s approach.

Panikkar, in his critique of modernity, uses the idea of “contemplative study” or “contemplative mood”<sup>3</sup> as a mode of being that allows a different intelligibility or ways of knowing and understanding “reality.” In this sense, mystical awareness is an essential foundation in understanding Panikkar’s mode of being and ways of thinking. In short, we may say, contemplation or mystical awareness for Panikkar is a way of reaching human intelligibility beyond “reason,” “rationality,” and “scientific analysis.” Thus, the key to understand Panikkar’s “being” and “thoughts” is this mystical awareness or *being* in “contemplative mood.” We may recall a mystic from another tradition showing a similar experience, “if you want to obtain a certain thing, you must be first a certain man, obtaining that certain thing won’t be a concern of yours any more” (Dōgen). According to Dōgen, achieving or obtaining an enlightenment is not a mere epistemological process but more profoundly an ontological process. In other words, the state of knowledge is shaped by the way of *being*.

### Trinity and Advaita

I have, often, characterized Panikkar as an “intellectual mystic” or a “mystical intellectual,” a contradiction in terms from the rational and logical point of view. Panikkar, however, as a non-dualistic thinker, was neither an intellectual who worships “rational” and “analytical” approach while dismissing mystical awareness, nor a mystic who negates intellectual and rational approaches in favor of a “mystical leaf.” Panikkar’s use of both the Hindu *advaita* and the Christian Trinity, based on a non-dualistic way of thinking, reflects the mystical awareness of his mind.

The very nature of the Trinity or *advaita* is mystical; it requires a mystical mind to comprehend either the Trinity or *advaita*. The modern scientific analysis and a rational mind set will not be able to comprehend the

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<sup>3</sup> Panikkar proposes to introduce “contemplative studies” or the study of contemplation to the modern university curriculum, it may, though be a bit risky. See *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility* (Edited by Harry James Cargas), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 3.

mystery of either the Trinity or *advaita*. In this sense, Panikkar is a mystic. In fact, according to Panikkar, reality is Trinitarian or triadic because the structure of the mind is Trinitarian.<sup>4</sup> This Trinitarian mind set or way of thinking manifests the inner structure of human mind, but it is also the external structure of being, all beings are constructed based on the Trinitarian structure. I may venture to say that *while the Trinitarian structure is “mythic,” the awareness of this mythic structure is “mystic.”* What Panikkar was trying to do was to discover or uncover the *Mystery* of reality or the Divine.<sup>5</sup> Mystery requires “mythos” (a non-rational, a non-dual, and direct manifestation or a “mythic” dimension of reality) to reveal itself. In order to comprehend this “mythic” dimension of reality, a mystical mind is required. For Panikkar, the nature of reality is mythically constituted, thus, it requires a mystic mind to comprehend it. The mystery of reality cannot be reduced into a mere form of theory or a framework of rational explanation and, by the same token, this mystery cannot be understood by the intellectual mind alone. A “mystic awareness” with a keen sensitivity will be able to appreciate the significance of the myth, not the logic, of reality and of being.

Panikkar, an intellectual mystic, was able to explore the mystery of reality with a “mythic eye” and “mystic mind.” In this respect, Raimon Panikkar is a mystic who not only comprehended but also appreciated the “mystery” of *advaita* and the Trinity. The mystery of the Trinity or *advaita* is neither logically constructed nor rationally explainable but mythically manifested. In order to comprehend this mystery, mystic mind is required. With this in mind, Panikkar states: “Indeed, the cosmotheandric trinity is not an ideology, but a myth.”<sup>6</sup> Here, Panikkar expresses his vision of the cosmotheandric trinity neither in a rational theory nor in a dogmatic ideology constructed on a dualistic way of thinking. For Panikkar, a dualistically constructed mind or way of thinking cannot comprehend the profound mystery either of the Trinity or of *advaita* because the nature of the Trinity or *advaita* is not logically structured but *mythically* constituted. In other words, the nature of the Trinity or *advaita* is not an object for an intellectual investigation and rational analysis but for an intuitive and experiential understanding.

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<sup>4</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 2010, 213.

<sup>5</sup> Panikkar used the term “Mystery” as a symbolic expression of the ultimate reality or God. See *Ibid.* 171.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

Panikkar broke a new ground for understanding “myth” which was well expounded in his earlier works including, *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*<sup>7</sup>. In this paper, however, I will limit my discussion to Panikkar’s idea of myth, his specific way of using the word “myth.” He uses the word “myth” in contrast to “logos” as found in his famous formula, “mythos and logos.” “Mythos” has a unique quality in providing rich resources for understanding what “logos” alone cannot provide. For Panikkar neither the Trinity nor *advaita* is a doctrine. The Christian tradition, for example, has tried to formulate the Trinity in a form of doctrine, a theological formula, and a form of “logos.” For Panikkar, however, the Christian “doctrine of the Trinity” is an intellectual reduction of the mythic nature (“mythos”) of the Trinity. In short, the Trinity and *advaita* are not to be comprehended in the language of “logos” but to be understood through the power of “mythos.” On the other hand, however, since “mythos” is not logically constructed, it requires a “mystic” mind to discern, to receive, to respond, or even to interpret. Here, the mystic mind is the mind of open heart or “pure heart” liberated from a rational dichotomy and a logical duality. Through this mystic mind, Panikkar tried to see the universe. The cosmos or the universe for Panikkar is not an object for scientific investigation but a subject for contemplation in relating the divine and the human to form the cosmotheandric trinity. The modern scientific cosmology, however, does not allow any room for the contemplation of the cosmotheandric trinity:

We cannot ignore the important discoveries of the modern scientific cosmology..... Modern science, when aware of its specific method and of its limit does not pretend to furnish a complete worldview. It is only a description of quantifiable parameters of the world. Yet because of its spectacular achievements and the poverty of the old views, a great part of our contemporaries, not excluding many in the scientific community, tends to identify the modern scientific cosmology with a fairly complete picture of the real world. In short, the cosmology of Copernicus is incomparably more correct than that of Ptolemy concerning the movement of lifeless bodies, but the latter may indeed be richer in contents.<sup>8</sup>

What Panikkar mostly concerned about the modern cosmology is its purely scientific and rational structure. As a non-dualistic thinker who understood the Trinity and *advaita* from the perspective of non-rational, non-logical, and non-“scientific” point of view, Panikkar tackles the

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<sup>7</sup> R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979

<sup>8</sup> *Rhythm.*, 369.

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problem of modern cosmology. Modern cosmology as an outcome of modernity, which is based entirely on the modern scientific worldview, has no room for Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision. Panikkar, on the other hand, has no intention to go back to the pre-modern cosmology. What he is interested in doing is to develop a cosmology not bound to a particular approach making it an absolute norm. Rather his cosmology would be an open and accumulative one with sense of continuity from the past and working toward the future.

### **Cosmology and Kosmology**

Cosmological issues are no longer considered metaphysical issues or speculative ideas, but are urgent practical issues we are facing now. The devastating earthquake in Japan (March 11, 2011) is a powerful reminder of this urgency. The crisis that we are facing is not just an ecological but fundamentally a cosmological and ontological problem. Putting it differently, ecological issues are now having become cosmological and ontological issues since ecology is based on cosmology and ontology. The concern what we have is not simply how to take care of the world or the globe from the perspective of human rationality and scientific worldview; ecology, but how to *think and study of the universe*; cosmology, and *how to be* in the universe; ontology.

Panikkar challenges the modern scientific cosmology and introduces his idea of "kosmology." Panikkar spoke of this urgent issue a few decades ago. He was deeply concerned about the way we understand the world from the modern scientific point of view. While he fully recognized the merit of the modern scientific worldview, he saw a fundamental problem regarding the modern scientific view of the universe. The modern scientific worldview is based on "logos" or a logos oriented way of thinking. It means that we, human beings, comprehend the world and the universe from the perspective of scientific and rational point of view. Thus, we perceive the world and the universe in terms of specific scientific formula and rational structure:

Cosmology ... is the result of scientific *ratio* applied to the cosmos, which is open to the rational "logos." Cosmology is expressed in the current "cosmological" doctrines derived by means of modern scientific methods. Cosmology is mainly understood as an objective genitive: our *logos* about *cosmos*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Rhythm.*, 370.

For Panikkar “cosmology” represents a specific view of the universe especially from the perspective of the “modern scientific framework of thinking.” In this respect, cosmology is a particular theory of seeing and understanding the universe in terms of a specific “time” i.e. the modern, and a specific “space” i.e. the West. In this respect, for Panikkar, cosmology is a specific view of the universe shaped by a specific cultural context, the Western scientific worldview, and a specific moment of time, namely, the modern period.

On the other hand, “Kosmology,” for Panikkar, is a comprehensive, accumulative tradition of organic and dynamic process of understanding the universe:

By kosmology I understand the science (in its classical meaning of *scientia*, *gnosis*, *jñāna*...) about the holistic sense of the *kosmos*, the logos and about the kosmos, the “word of the cosmos.” Kosmology is a kosmos-legain, a “reading” of the kosmos, the disclosure of the world to our human conscious-ness by means of all forms of knowledge we may possess. Kosmology is mainly understood here in the sense of the subjective genitive: the *logos*, the word of the kosmos that Man<sup>10</sup> should try to hear and to understand by attuning himself to the music of this world, to the mysteries of the kosmos. We are aware that the kosmos speaks differently to different cultures and that Man hears and interprets this logos in many way. Similarly as the person who knows only one religion has the danger of fanaticism, those who know only the modern cosmology have the danger of absolutizing that cosmos just as those who know only one of kosmologies did, of course.<sup>11</sup>

Panikkar’s idea of cosmology is consisted of three main characteristics: 1. Holistic, dynamic and organic idea of growth and continuity, not a static concept. It is an open process of the making, unfolding, and disclosing. It is not one fixed story but emerging stories. 2. “Kosmology deals with how Man envisions the universe, with how the kosmos displays itself to Man, and with the experience that Man has of the universe of which we happen to form part and that lead us to discover the real universe in which we live.”<sup>12</sup> In this sense, the cosmos is not an object but a subject, and kosmology is to be understood as a subjective genitive. In this regard, listening or attuning to the music and mystery of the universe is

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<sup>10</sup> Panikkar uses “Man” for both male and female. He does not believe that male alone has an exclusive right to use Man but it should include female also.

<sup>11</sup> *Rhythm.*, 369.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 369.

a crucial element. Panikkar once proposed the term “eco-sophia” instead of “ecology” because ecology is human subjective way of dealing with nature. i.e. a “logos oriented” approach and male chauvinistic attitude. “Eco-sophia,” on the other hand, is an open attitude toward nature, not to try to drill in or imposing on nature with our own human “logos,” but to be receptive toward nature, a feminine principle.<sup>13</sup> In a similar manner, Panikkar proposed the term “kosmo-sophia” in order to overcome the reductionism of “reducing” the structure of the cosmos to what the modern scientific picture of the universe tell us.<sup>14</sup> 3. One universe, many kosmologies: the cosmos speaks different languages to different people. Unlike modern cosmology, which believes that the scientific and rational understanding of the universe is the only right and valid way or approach and thus makes the modern scientific way the absolute, Panikkar’s kosmology allows diversity in understanding the universe. The modern scientific cosmology rejects all previous cosmologies as unscientific and thus not true, except the modern cosmology, and thus it makes modernity the absolute criterion. This is an historical arrogance in making a particular historical period absolute. It also shows a cultural arrogance in making the Western model absolute. Panikkar fully understand the danger of diverse kosmologies that will eventually create conflict: “The world crises of our times stems from a conflict of cosmologies..... The struggle is between different cosmologies, and the victory of the one over the other will never lead to peace --- as it has never done. Here we meet again the political importance of interculturality.”<sup>15</sup> Here what Panikkar sees is not only conflict or clash of civilizations as Samuel Huntington did<sup>16</sup>, but also, even more importantly, the conflict of cosmologies. This is a serious issue. Unlike in the case of the conflict of civilizations, the conflict of kosmology can and does happen even within the same civilization or culture. This can easily be discernible in the context of different generations within the same culture or civilization. The seriousness of this issue is due to the fact that we human beings are part of our own self-understanding. This self-understanding includes our understanding of the universe: “The kosmos is not a mere object of epistemology. Kosmos and Man belong together, and

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<sup>13</sup> For more discussion “ecosophy,” see Raimon Panikkar, “Ecosophy,” *The New Gaia: The World as Sanctuary* (Gregory, Miss.: Eco-Philosophy Center) 4, no. 1 (winter 1995): 2-7.

<sup>14</sup> *Rhythm.*, 369.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 373.

<sup>16</sup> See Samuel Huntington’s *The Clashes of Civilizations and the Remaking of Word Order*, Simon & Shuster, 1996.

human self-understanding cannot be severed from the world in which Man lives.”<sup>17</sup>

For Panikkar, anthropology and kosmology are not separable but are part of each other. The way we understand, the way we are. The same idea is applicable to God in the sense that the way we think of God is part of our self-understanding. Panikkar’s cosmotheandric experience is to talk about the universe, the divine, and Man not in separation but in unity to affirm the intrinsic relationship of the universe, God, and Man. Here we see Panikkar’s Trinitarian view of reality. The relationship between the universe, God, and Man is not an *extrinsic construction* but an *intrinsic constitution*. The relationship between the universe, God, and Man is not based on an external link or connection in binding three different individualities. Rather, the relationship between the universe, God, and Man is an internal constitution, an inner constitutive element enabling each of three, the universe, God, and Man to exist. In other words, the universe, God, and Man are in existence in *depending* on others. One cannot exist without the others. Each of these three beings requires others as intrinsic constitutive elements. For being God, for example, necessitates, the human, and the universe, *vice versa*. This is not only a logical consequence but, more importantly, an ontological necessity.

There is *perichōresis*<sup>18</sup> between the three; “The Divine contains, and is everything, but so are Man and the world as well. Each is the whole and not just in a particular mode. The three are not merely modalities of the real.... Yet reality is neither one nor three.”<sup>19</sup>

The *perichōresis*, the intrinsic unity between the three (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or the universe, the Divine, and the human), is not logically constructed but mystically constituted. This *perichōresis* requires a mystical awareness. The mystic consciousness or awareness is not a mere an epistemological process but more profoundly, an ontological process, though, these two are not separable. This is a certain state of being that enables us to be conscious of. For Panikkar, nonetheless, ontology preceded epistemology: not that consciousness determine being, but being embraces consciousness.

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<sup>17</sup> *Rhythm.*, 372.

<sup>18</sup> The Greek *perichōresis* (or circuminession in Latin) is used in describing the unique nature of the intrinsic unity and relationship of the Christian Trinity in emphasizing mutual inter-penetration and indwelling within the threefold nature of the Trinity, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

Panikkar's epilogue to his last masterpiece is eloquently illuminating:

I must admit that all ultimate questions cannot have final answers, but that we can at least be aware of the problem 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?<sup>20</sup>

This is a confession only a mystic can make.

Panikkar, as a mystic intellectual, was agonized by the conflict between what he is *being* conscious of and what he can *say* about it intellectually, a typical dilemma of a mystic. He, nonetheless, affirms that only by *being* in *perichōresis* (a mystic union), can each individual being be unique without losing the unity with others. In other words, by *being* in relationship with others, we will become *conscious* of being an individual. In other words, for Panikkar, "being" is the foundation of our awareness or consciousness. A mode of *being* determines a form of consciousness. In this sense, mysticism or contemplation is profoundly an ontological process, not an epistemological reduction. For Panikkar "being" is prior to "consciousness." Consciousness is always "*being* consciousness." Consciousness, thus, is in the category of "being," and not that consciousness determines "being." Thus, he challenged, the modern philosopher Descartes' dictum, "*cogito ergo sum*." For Panikkar it is not that "I think therefore I am", but "I am therefore I think."

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<sup>20</sup> *Rhythm*, 405.