

## **The Cosmotheandric Vision of R. Panikkar for the fullness of life**

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The human race is faced with an unparalleled situation. It has to decide whether to continue to live or choose its own self-destruction. The risk comes not from any cosmic threat from human activity itself. For the first time in the process of hominization, human beings have provided themselves with the instruments of their own destruction. The indicators are alarming. They show that there is little time in which to make the changes needed. Optimistic estimates give a last date of the year 2030.<sup>1</sup> From then on, if urgent and effective measures are not taken, the sustainability of the Earth-system cannot be guaranteed.

We are faced with three problematic knots which need to be untied: the knot of the exhaustion of natural resources, the knot of Earth's sustainability and the knot of world-wide social injustice.<sup>2</sup>

Behind the knot of the exhaustion of natural resources lies a reductionist view of the earth. The earth is simply seen as a dead source of reserves to be exploited and not viewed as a super-system subtly articulated into systems and sub-systems with relationships of interdependence and synergy that guarantee the subsistence of each and every part. The earth is not perceived as a super-organism possessing a sacred character. Behind the knot of the earth's sustainability is the aggressive destruction of the earth in terms of the stockpiling of nuclear weapons which could result in a world war, the destruction of the ozone layer, the threat of global warming and so on. This kind of sustained aggression on the earth will eventually result in the earth losing its inner equilibrium and bring about its self-destruction. Behind the knot of social injustice is the pathetic fact that twenty percent of humankind enjoys eighty-three percent of the earth's resources, with the poorest twenty percent having only 1.4 percent. Consequently a billion persons suffer extreme poverty. This social system is the result of a form of economic, political and social organization that privileges some at the expense of the exploitation and destitution of the vast majorities. In the face of these

three knots we ask ourselves: how much violence can Earth still tolerate without breaking as a system? Apart from having been suicidal, homicidal and ethnocidal in the past, we are now beginning to be ecocidal. Shall we end in the not too distant future by being geocidal?

However, there are signs of hope.<sup>3</sup> A new paradigm is taking shape: one which is holistic, systemic, inclusive, pan-relational and spiritual in character. This paradigm understands the universe not as a thing or a juxtaposition of things and objects but rather as a subject in which everything has to do with everything else, at all points, in all circumstances and in all directions, generating an immense cosmic solidarity. Thus every being depends on others, sustains others, shares in the development of others, communing in one same origin, one same adventure, and one same common destiny.

The universe forms a community of subjects, since all its components are characterized by what forms a subject: interactivity, historicity, interiority and intentionality. The universe there is in now viewed as a relational whole, inter-retro-connected with everything and greater than the sum of its parts. Thus the nature of matter is perceived as a dance of energies and relationships going in all directions. This vision furnishes us with the basis for a new hope, for a higher wisdom and for an alternative project of civilization.

The civilization which will emerge will be more in tune with the basic law of the universe, which is pan-relationality, synergy and complementarity. It will be, in a word, a civilization of re-binding everything to everything and of everyone to everyone. This is why it will be a civilization that gives **a central place to re-ligio**, to the body that proposes to re-bind everything together because it sees them umbilically re-bound to the Source of all being. This civilization will be re-ligious or it will be nothing. This emerging religious perspective will seek to promote that radical experience that succeeds in re-binding all things and generating a sense of integration and wholeness. Then the civilization of the planetary age, of the society of Earth, can emerge, the first civilization of humankind as humanity.

This vision is spelt out by Raimon Panikkar whose writings articulate a Christology from a religio-cultural perspective which spans the western philosophical and theological traditions as well as the Eastern religious traditions. **Cosmotheandricism**, i.e. the radical relatedness of reality is the key to understand his writings. The focal point of his thought is the principle of the radical relatedness of the entire reality. Radical relativity conveys the ontological state of the whole reality, which is a web of relationships. Nothing is, nor can be understood and defined without reference to its 'being-in-relation' to the rest of reality.

Hence every being bears in itself the stamp of the divine, the human and the cosmic. He coins this new term to express this fact: 'cosmotheandric'. In his thought, cosmos, theos and aner are not three dimensions of a whole, but all three are present in every single being. This makes the entire reality internally bound together by the 'cosmotheandric principle'. Thus since all beings share in the divine, the human and the cosmic, they are all, in their nature, internally related to each other.

Furthermore, Panikkar sees the relationship among various religions as a relationship among various 'myths'. In this perspective consequently a truly universal dialogue needs to take place among the various religious traditions and their experiences. This dialogue enables one to enter into the 'myth' of the other. Since each religion represents a different culture and world-view, we would need a 'cross-cultural hermeneutics' approach.

This dialogue between equals, will not undermine the unique contribution of each religious tradition, but result in a process of mutual fecundation as well as mutual correction. Consequently, interreligious Dialogue will take the form of testimony and witness. In time interreligious dialogue will lead to intra-religious dialogue wherein the religious tradition itself is influenced and transformed.

It is against this background of the **unity of all reality**, religious pluralism and the dialogue among religions, that Panikkar interprets the mystery of Christ. In fact, he states that all discussions and disputes that led to the Chalcedonian Christological doctrine, and the Christological reflections have attempted to capture the mystery of Christ by making it a problem which humans can objectify,

analyze and reflect upon.<sup>4</sup> However legitimate and laudable these attempts had been to develop a meaningful Christology, they were done within the ecclesial tradition without any dialogue with the religious traditions as if they did not matter. While in the initial stages of the development of Christology, the fathers of the Church sought to get an insight in the meaning of the mystery of Christ, as they entered into dialogue with religious traditions and world views of the Greco-Roman world; with Christianity becoming the religion of the Roman empire, Christology became an inner-ecclesial affair irrelevant to those who did not share the Judeo-Christian world view. Consequently, in order to liberate Christology from a narrow and limited understanding of the person of Christ and to open up the possibility for people of all cultures and religious traditions to encounter the mystery of Christ, Panikkar holds that Christology must further develop into **Christophany**. He thus takes the valuable insights of traditional Christology, goes further to develop a christophany without supplanting it and provides Christology with new vistas and new possibilities to challenge one and all for a transforming vision of Christ.

It is this vision which thus leads him to distinguish Christology from Christophany. Whereas Christology is concerned about the mystery of Christ as it formed part of 2000 years of interpretation within the Jewish, Greek and the European milieu. Christophany will mark the beginning of a new phase. It is an approach to the mystery of Christ from a wide variety of cultures, experiences, religious traditions and backgrounds. Thus Panikkar succeeds in converting a tribal Christology into a non-sectarian Christophany, as he approaches the mystery of Christ from a wide variety of cultures, experiences, religious traditions and backgrounds.

Now, since the **mystery of Christ is universal**, the articulation of the mystery of Christ by Christians within the Christian tradition does not exhaust the riches of the great mystery of Christ. In fact, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the 'Unknown Christ of Hinduism'<sup>5</sup>, he declared that Christ is present in all cultures, religions, including Hinduism, and transcends them as well.

According to Panikkar, therefore, Christ is to be seen not only in the limited Abrahamistic or Semitic tradition but also in the cosmic tradition of mankind and

in all authentic religious traditions.<sup>6</sup> The whole Christ is pre-existent, historical and trans-historical. He is the most perfect expression of the complete harmony between everything that is Divine, Human and Cosmic or the Cosmotheandric reality. This person who makes the human, the divine and the cosmic communion possible cannot be thought of only in spatio-temporal categories. It is true that it is in Jesus of Nazareth that a Christian encounters Christ. But the Christ of the Christian believer transcends the historical limitations of Jesus of Nazareth. However, this insight of Panikkar should be not construed as his attempt to separate Jesus of Nazareth from Christhood as some of his critics accuse him of separating the two. Indeed, the Christ of Panikkar's Christology is not an a-personal principle: 'The Christ that sits at the right hand of the Father is the first-born of the universe, born of Mary; he is the Bread as well as the hungry, naked or imprisoned. This Christ is the second Person of the Trinity, the pre-existent Christ who reveals himself in the Jesus of Nazareth'. He, indeed, is the living One who can be encountered in the sacraments, in all human beings and especially in the deprived and the depraved. Panikkar's attempt is therefore to overcome the tendency of Jesuology which makes Jesus an idol without transcending himself, which precisely is what happened at the resurrection.

Panikkar's is definitely an astounding "Christology," since it is one that "envisions a truly universal encompassing the spirit of the Christ as the completion of humanity, outside the dogmas and orthodoxies, denominations and traditions of history and sect, to embrace all people of all religions. In fact, it is a Christology that Atheist, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, Animinist and Pagan could embrace without abandoning the distinctive mythos of their own tradition".<sup>7</sup>

Jesus Christ is thus perceived as that central symbol which embodies the entire reality. He is the living symbol of divinity, humanity and the cosmos. In Jesus Christ, the infinite and the finite meet. In him the human and the divine are united. In him the matter and the spirit, the masculine and the feminine are one. And so when we say Christ is the symbol of all reality, we say that 'in Christ are enclosed not only all treasures of the divinity, but also hidden all the mysteries of humanity and all the density of the universe.' Therefore Christ is not the symbol for reality, but the symbol

OF reality. The whole of reality is a ‘Christophany’, a manifestation of Christ. Indeed, every creature is a *christophany*.<sup>8</sup>

It follows thus while bridging cultural and religious languages Panikkar also finds deep and wide intentions and meanings of Jesus behind New Testament texts that include the social, political, and economic situations of oppressed people. What liberation theology began for Latin American people, Panikkar addresses to the *dalits* of India who are part of the wide world consciousness of Christophany that is opposed to structures of oppression and violence.

Furthermore, following the Christology of Chalcedon, Panikkar says that Christ is man but not one man, a single individual, he is the divine person, incarnated and is in hypostatic union with human nature.<sup>9</sup> ...According to Panikkar the important issue is encountering him as true God and true man. The encounter is possible only when identity can be said to be real and thus true if we enter into a personal relationship with him. Only then may one discover the living Christ of faith who lives in the interior of oneself. In this experience one realizes that Jesus is one who does not fall into the category of singularity or individuality and his character is ‘not singleness but communion, and not incommunicability, but relations’.....Therefore, according to Panikkar: ‘The word Jesus has basically two different meanings: one as historical category and another as personal category. The former is reached by means of historical identification, which permits us to speak about Jesus and about the beliefs Christians have in and through him. The latter is reached by means of personal identity and allows us to discover him a ‘part’ or rather pole of our personal being, as one of the many traits that make our person.’<sup>10</sup>

Christ is indeed the real symbol of divinization—that is, of the Fullness of Man. ‘Man’ is more than a “human” nature. Here Panikkar insists that ‘Man’ is rooted in *manas*, mind, consciousness and is not gender exclusive. The subtitle, “the fullness of Man” thus refers not to a gender bias but to each human being and to the goal for all humanity.<sup>11</sup> In Panikkar’s view Christ opens each human person to the challenging presence and power of the Trinitarian mystery.

Thus the humanistic goal of Christophany is not simply an already present divinization, but the challenge, task, and summons to respond to our deepest potential,

capability, and power to discover the deepest resources of divine action within us. To tune into the Christophanic experience within requires an interiority or deep sensitivity that allows absorption of the words of scripture addressed to us as faithful, attentive hearers and practicing disciples who enjoy the opening of a beautiful, living gift. Phenomeno-logically “every being is a Christophany,” a divine manifestation to humans. Our soul-selves are not the product of an ideological, bioneurological evolution, but are the “aspiration for the infinite” that desires to “enter into communion...with divine nature.... It is becoming another Christ. This is what Panikkar means by *“the fullness of man.”* All along he is telling us that “if the mystery of Christ is not our very own...it might as well be a museum piece.” Christophany, for Panikkar, must come from the most interior part of us. In that deep place the finite and the infinite meet.

**Christophany also highlights the need for a ‘social Gospel’.** In the context of alarming human crises, where 70% of humanity live in sub-human conditions, 1000’s of children die daily because of man-made injustices, wars kill 1200 persons daily, religious communalism and ecological crises, what does contemporary Christology have to say all of this?

A Christology deaf to the cries of man he says would be incapable of uttering any word of God. Panikkar consequently calls from the Christian side a second Council of Jerusalem, which would include other religions.<sup>12</sup> They would together articulate a response to the common responsibility they feel for the planet.

Hence, although Pannikar insists that Christians explore the depths of mystical awareness, he holds that this cannot be done at the expense of the social Gospel.

Nor says Panikkar is mysticism to be used merely as a tool of evangelism or missionary efforts, as a way to “sell” Jesus to people in non-Christian traditions. Pannikar opposes a universalizing impulse which would merely attempt to create a universal Christian theology or culture applicable to all times, places, and peoples. Mysticism, in fact, will enable Christians to experience the depths of their own identity in God, with no overt or covert goal of seeking to convert the whole world to Christianity!

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3. Cousins, E., 'Uniting Human, Cosmic and Divine', in *America* (January 1, 2007), in [www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article\\_id=5218](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=5218)
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5. Lounibos J. (Review of '*Christophany, the Fullness of Man*', by R. Panikkar; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004, pp. 214), in [catholicbooksreview.org/2005/panikkar.htm](http://catholicbooksreview.org/2005/panikkar.htm)
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### Endnotes

- 1 Cf R. R. Reuther, *Gaia and God: An Eco-Feminist Theology of Earth's Healing*, San Francisco and London, 1992, p. 86
- 2 Cf. L. Boff, 'The Globalizing Evil of Our Actual World,' in *Concilium*, 1990/5, pp. 1-5
- 3 Cf. L. Boff, 'The Globalizing.....', pp. 7-10
- 4 Cf. Parapally, J., Christophany: R. Panikkar's Insights into the Mystery of Christ, in *Jeevadhara* Vol XXXV, 2005, pp. pp. 254-255
- 5 Cf. Panikkar, R., *The Unknown Christ Of Hinduism: Towards An Ecumenical Christophany*. Maryknoll, Orbis Books, New York, 1981, p. 81
- 6 Cf. Parapally, J., 'Christophany: Panikkar's Insights into the Mystery of Christ', *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXXV, No. 205, p. 259
- 7 DiLascia, A., (Foreword by Alfred DiLascia) to *Christophany the fullness of Man*, by Raimon Panikkar, (Faith Meets Faith Series: Orbis Books), in [www.wordtrade.com/religion/christianity/panikkarR.htm](http://www.wordtrade.com/religion/christianity/panikkarR.htm)
- 8 In fact, Panikkar in the same perspective states, in *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, John Knox Press, Westminster, 1993, pp. 152-153, that with 'such a view of Christ I am not avoiding the *skandalon* of the Incarnation and the process of salvation. I am not ignoring these facts. The point is simply that I am not worshiping history as if it were God, and I am not limiting reality to history – not even to human history – and not to the history of abrahamic lineage. Just as traditional theology speaks of a *creatio continua*, we might imagine, analogously, a continued incarnation, not simply in the body but also in the actions and events of all creatures. Every creature is a *christophany*.'
- 9 Cf. Parapally, J., 'Christophany: Panikkar's Insights into the Mystery of Christ', pp. 257-258
- 10 Panikkar, R., 'Action and Contemplation as Categories of Religious Understanding', in [www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/25-1\\_017.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/25-1_017.pdf) . Panikkar points out that the 'the contemplative approach' to the mystery of Christ will stress another starting point: not the *identification* of *what* Jesus did or is, but the *identity* of *who* he is. Now the *who* of Jesus mayor may not be separable from his what, but it is certainly not identifiable with it. The *who* of Jesus is only disclosed in the personal encounter of faith, in the interpersonal relationship of finding a *thou* answering to the call (prayer) of the I; it will be found when the

*metanoia*, the change of perspective and roles, takes place so that Jesus becomes the I and the seeker the thou, so that the Master's 'I am' becomes something more than a metaphysical or psychological statement. Then the Christian will utter: 'I live no more but Christ lives in me'

- 11 Lounibos, J., (Review of '*Christophany, the Fullness of Man*', by R. Panikkar; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004, pp. 214), in [catholicbooksreview.org/2005/panikkar.htm](http://catholicbooksreview.org/2005/panikkar.htm)
- 12 Panikkar, R., *Christophany, the Fullness of Man*, p. 5