



Raimon Panikkar: The Human Person

Gerard Hall

Introduction

Panikkar's understanding of the human person is inevitably connected to his interreligious and cross-cultural interests that came to dominate the second half of his life. However, it is my contention that the foundations and basic contours of his anthropological thinking were already well established prior to his depth-engagement with traditions beyond Christianity and Europe. For this reason, the first half of the chapter explores Panikkar's foundational anthropology in context of his intra-Western dialogue between Christian faith and modern Humanism at this time of "historical crisis". Particular attention is given to his dialectics of modernity, philosophy of knowledge, and the theandric understanding of being human as central features of this theological anthropology.

The focus of the second half of the chapter is on Panikkar's evolving notions of what it means to be human in context of his "multi-religious experience" including depth-encounters with Eastern religions and secular Humanism, as well as expanding knowledge of other traditions. In Panikkar's view, we are now living in a profoundly new situation in which, for the first time, the issue of the "other *qua* other" emerges as a serious human question.¹ For this reason, I label this second-phase anthropology "postmodern", noting David Klemm's rhetorical view that the "postmodern shift in consciousness" moves from "historical crisis" to "confronting otherness".² Panikkar's second-phase anthropology is examined through the rubrics of radical pluralism, epistemology, and the "cosmotheandric

¹ *Invisible Harmony*, 59.

² David Klemm, "Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology: Through Barth and Heidegger" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55/3 (1987): 443-469.

intuition". The question of whether this represents a rift or a refinement and extension of his foundational anthropology is addressed.

FOUNDATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY: ENCOUNTERING MODERNITY

Panikkar's foundational anthropology,³ evident in his Spanish writings of the 1940s and early 1950s, arises as a dialogue between two apparently contradictory visions of the human person: post-Medieval Catholicism and post-Enlightenment Modernity. On the one hand, Panikkar seeks to provide a rationale for the ongoing efficacy of Christian faith in an era of social, political and religious upheaval following the Spanish Civil War and outbreak of World War II. Equally, he is concerned to show how a classical Christian vision of the human person is capable of reformulation within a scientific and evolutionary worldview. For this purpose, he enters into dialogue with academics across a range of disciplines – especially philosophy, theology and science – to discern a pathway for the transformation of human consciousness and culture.

For Panikkar, as with his influential compatriot, José Ortega y Gasset, the post-Enlightenment "turn to the subject" had already changed the way human beings interact with the world and one another.⁴ What Panikkar calls a "mutation of consciousness" is expressed by Ortega y Gasset in terms of changes in "the vital life structure" relating to the fields of human history and psychology. Both authors diagnose the then-current historical experience in terms of psychological sickness, disease, anxiety and restlessness. However, their beliefs in a transformative future went in opposite directions: Ortega y Gasset, convinced of the demise of

³ See especially, *Humanismo, Naturaleza and Jacobi*.

⁴ Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the Masses and Man and Crisis* (New York & London: Norton & Co., 1932 [1930] & 1958 [1932]).

Christianity, searched for a transformed post-Christian culture; Panikkar understood transformation through a reformed Christian culture. Yet, both authors were at one in their affirmation of a dynamic anthropology: human persons and psyches are capable of growth, change and, what Panikkar called, the movement towards a “higher synthesis”.⁵

Panikkar’s attempt to establish such a “higher synthesis” relies on his conviction that classical Christian and modern humanistic notions of the human person, far from being antithetical, are but steps along the way to a more “integral anthropology” that blends insights of both classical and modern thought into a new vision.

From the classical perspective, Panikkar is drawn to the profound sense of cosmic order, the goal of created existence, and the dynamism of being in the tradition of Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics.⁶ He likewise insists on our need to rediscover Plato’s psychological analysis of love as “the universal law of the cosmos”, especially as developed in neo-Platonism (especially Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius) and later Christian mystics (Bernard, John of the Cross and Pascal).⁷ This latter reading, normally absent from the Catholicism of his day, he insists is absolutely necessary for an authentic understanding of Aquinas and Christian realism; equally, it connects with modern emphasis on human experience and the more vitalistic conception of the human person in modern philosophy.

While Panikkar does not advocate any particular modern philosophical school of thought, he energetically engages in debate with major figures from the Renaissance (e.g. Descartes, Newton, Spinoza, Leibniz), the Enlightenment (e.g. Kant, Jacobi, Comte, Fichte) and later

⁵ *Humanismo*, 9-60 [This chapter, “Visión de síntesis del universo”, is a reprint of Panikkar’s first published work (1944)].

⁶ *Naturaleza*, 238-248.

⁷ *Naturaleza*, 249-271.

modernity (e.g. Bergson, Blondel, Jaspers, Heidegger). In broad terms, he is critical of the dualism which haunts modern philosophy and theology, either failing to account for the transcendental dimension of the human person (rationalism) or overplaying the spiritual dimension at the expense of reason (irrationalism). His introduction of classical and modern Christian perspectives via his *theandric* (divine and human) conception of human personhood makes effective use of the then newly emerging *Nouvelle Theologie* represented by Jacques Maritain and Henri de Lubac.

Modernity: Anthropological Disunity

Panikkar characterizes modern human experience according to "three momentous events": *loss of God* at the end of the Middle Ages; *loss of self* in the Enlightenment; and *loss of cosmic rhythm* with the advent of technology.⁸ Consequently, modern experience is perceived as the radical reversal of the experience of relationality – among the human, divine and cosmic dimensions of reality – that characterized classical consciousness. Panikkar describes this modern experience of dislocation as an absence of harmony. Moreover, he suggests this experience of dis-ease and anxiety extends to all conscious and unconscious dimensions of human life. In this situation, modern philosophy's "rational explanation of reality" is critiqued as fundamentally inadequate due to its false assumption that the whole of reality is explicable to the human mind. This is, for Panikkar, the "apparent grandeur and the real tragedy of modern philosophy".⁹

Another cause of modern dislocation, according to Panikkar, is the specialized and fragmentary nature of science which, despite its valid

⁸ *Humanismo*, 9-60.

⁹ *Ontonomía*, 134.

insights, adds to the splintering and atomization of the human being. Likewise religion, now relegated to the private sphere, is no longer capable of enabling humanity to experience cosmic harmony. All this leads to "anthropological disunity". He argues only a "radical solution", a "new innocence", is capable of redressing the balance in a manner which unifies rather than fragments human life.

Given this understanding of the modernity, Panikkar institutes his dialogue between modern humanism and classical Christian consciousness. He contrasts and critiques these two distinctive approaches to human reality. Classical human self-understanding is depicted in terms of a *microcosm* in which all the elements of the universe – matter, spirit and divinity – are reflected in one another.¹⁰ Modernity represents the breaking apart of this symbolic form of awareness. Even the term "human microcosm", he complains, is now understood as an expression of human individualism.

Nonetheless, Panikkar recognizes modern consciousness is unable to return to a situation which exaggerates the mythic unity of life. Furthermore, modern awareness is dissatisfied with the traditional placing of the material in servitude to the spiritual. By contrast, Panikkar critiques humanism for the way it exaggerates the material and the finite. In so doing, it "splits reality" and ignores both the spiritual dimension and the final destiny of humanity (and the cosmos).¹¹

Searching for an appropriate response, Panikkar seeks to avoid the pitfalls of both humanist and classical approaches.¹² He stresses that no purely 'theoretical' solution is adequate. Equally unacceptable is a merely 'natural' understanding of the human being. An integral anthropology is

¹⁰ *Humanismo*, 38f.

¹¹ *Humanismo*, 54-56.

¹² *Humanismo*, 38-40; *Ontonomía*, 7.

necessarily 'transcendental', that is, open to the reality of the supernatural, but without diminishing the reality of time, history and nature. Here, as elsewhere, Panikkar appeals to the Christian Trinity as the most powerful symbol of "unity-in-diversity" evident in the tri-personal ("I-Thou-It") structure of human language.¹³

A major concern, shared with De Lubac and other *Nouvelle Theologie* theologians, is to overcome the cleavage that mainstream Christian thought posits between nature and grace.¹⁴ He suggests that Augustinian preoccupation with sin can lead to this nature-grace dualism. He prefers to stress that the destiny of the human being and all creation in orthodox Christian belief is inseparable from the final victory of God. From the other side of the dialogue comes the modern emphasis on temporal and historical dimensions of life. By integrating these mutual insights with respect to the ultimate significance of grace and nature, Panikkar attempts to transcend the limited perspectives of both traditional and modern forms of awareness.

In this context, he recognizes any integral anthropology must cultivate a knowledge of history as a constitutive human dimension (humanism), and that such knowledge should culminate in a theology of history (Christianity). In this integrated human vision, history becomes salvation history, and anthropology culminates in a Christian understanding of the human person who is both grounded in time and history while also oriented towards transcendence.

Panikkar provides the chemical metaphor of multiple elements transformed into a new compound: all elements, including all the specialized insights of the human sciences, are necessary; but the transformation is into something new and vital. With reference to nature-grace dualism, as to other aspects of the fragmentation of human life,

¹³ *Ontonomía*, 7; *Humanismo*, 9.

¹⁴ *Humanismo*, 56-60.

Panikkar stresses the resolution necessarily transcends natural powers. In order to overcome the schizophrenia of atomized life, it is necessary to rely on the supernatural realm of grace. Consequently, "living faith is the ultimate solution"; without it, authentic human problems cannot be fully recognized, let alone transformed.

The central issue becomes epistemological. How does one define the role of faith in post-enlightenment human understanding? Panikkar recognizes that, to be authentic, modern faith in God cannot be other-worldly. To the contrary, it will be expressed through confidence in things. The challenge is to develop a non-dualistic epistemology in which supernatural faith is expressed in – rather than opposed to – modern human experience. Panikkar's philosophy of sentiment is designed to meet this challenge.

Sentiment: The Integrative Faculty of Knowledge

Panikkar understands the human spirit according to the trilogy of *sentiment*, *intellect* and *will*.¹⁵ Drawing from the classics, he correlates: sentiment with artistic intuition and Beauty; intellect with rationality and Truth; and will with religious idealism and Goodness. Sentiment is not to be confused with mere passion or emotion but, in line with Thomistic understanding, is the unifying power enabling intellect and will to be understood non-dualistically. Panikkar provides a systematic treatment of the role of sentiment in human knowing through his analysis of the concept in F H Jacobi. While affirming Jacobi's retrieval of the central importance of sentiment in human understanding, Panikkar rejects what he sees as an overly subjective, finally irrational, philosophy.

¹⁵ *Humanismo*, 40-58; *Jacobi*, 5.

Panikkar applauds Jacobi's emphasis on the *immediacy of experience* acknowledging its influence on modern existentialist philosophies including Jaspers, Bergson and Heidegger. Such epistemological focus on immediate experience also resembles John Henry Newman's distinction between "notional assent" and "real assent".¹⁶ However, for Newman and Panikkar, 'rationality' and 'intuition' are complementary categories; in Jacobi's philosophy they are opposed.

Panikkar interprets Jacobi's position as a reaction to those epistemologies that absolutize the respective roles of intellect (Cartesian rationalism) or will (Kantian agnosticism).¹⁷ He also supports Jacobi's radical critique of mainstream western philosophy "since Aristotle" which subordinates "immediate to mediated knowledge, . . . the original to the copy, the essence to the word, reason to understanding".¹⁸ Nonetheless, Panikkar disagrees with Jacobi's "epistemological revolution" which emphasizes the "mortal leap of faith" – God exists and the world is an ordered cosmos – as opposed to the voice of 'reason' – God doesn't exist and reality is chaotic.¹⁹ Jacobi only succeeds in reinstating the affective dimension of knowledge by negating intellect, whereas Panikkar wants to retrieve affectivity without denying the importance of intelligibility.

Consequently, he exposes the fundamental weaknesses of Jacobi's epistemology by asking what occurs in a situation of conflicting sentiments: either appeal to reason as the final arbitrator (negating Jacobi); or settle for pure relativism (negating truth). Panikkar reveals the paradox in the respective epistemologies of Jacobi and Descartes. Although representing opposing extremes, both are 'anthropocentric' in the reductionist sense of

¹⁶ *Jacobi*, 53, 4, 20.

¹⁷ *Jacobi*, 12.

¹⁸ *Jacobi*, 14f.

¹⁹ *Jacobi*, 17-26.

placing ultimate confidence in the human being: Descartes absolutizes thought; Jacobi absolutizes intuition.²⁰

Moreover, according to Jacobi's own definition, faith is a 'mortal' leap, a merely 'natural' act. By contrast, Panikkar stresses that: philosophy's final object is "ultimate reality"; and any integral philosophical method requires contact with the 'immortal'. This translates into the need for 'supernatural' experience which has no place in Jacobi's philosophy of religion.²¹ So, while Jacobi is correct in highlighting participative forms of knowledge such as 'empathy' and 'love', and correctly points to the limits of reason, he does not succeed in negating Cartesian dualism. He simply inverts the equation by replacing mind and reason with intuition and affectivity.²² As distinct from Jacobi, Panikkar does not view sentiment as a separable faculty from human reason and willing, but as their source of unity.

In his own definition of sentiments as "elements of the affective life of the human being", Panikkar stresses they should not be interpreted as a 'third', separable faculty of knowledge.²³ Since the "human being is one", it is inadmissible to split human knowledge in this way. The *intellect* possesses intuition as well as reason; the *will* is appetite and love as well as decision; *sentiment* is the 'crystallization' of affectivity, knowledge and sensibility:

Sentiment is an irreducible anthropological element ... forming an indestructible anthropological unity which, in the human being, is anterior to thought and will Sentiment is not ultimate or infallible ... (but) represents a superior perfection which is more similar to God than the autonomous

²⁰ Jacobi, 31f.

²¹ Jacobi, 34-36.

²² Jacobi, 50-60.

²³ Jacobi, 38-40, 53.

*and disconnected activity of our intelligence ... and of our will.*²⁴

Sentiment, then, is not an inferior knowledge, but the synthesizing faculty of knowledge. Admitting that sentiment inevitably reflects human imperfection and fallibility, Panikkar insists this does not destroy its more noble mission of fusing love and knowledge as well as relating the human person transcendently with God.

Consequently, while rejecting Jacobi's philosophy, Panikkar acknowledges the attempt to integrate the affective life into epistemology displays a mystical and religious aspiration akin to such thinkers as Augustine, Anselm, Bernard, Pascal, Newman and Blondel.²⁵ According to this too neglected tradition, human life without faith in the supernatural is unintelligible. But a supernatural faith does not bypass reason; it is *suprarational* (surpassing the limits of reason) without being irrational (opposed to reason). Sentiments may appear to be the complicating factor of human existence but, says Panikkar, they are the transcendental link between earth and heaven. Embedded in the soul, sentiments orient humans to supernatural faith and divine life.

Panikkar warns: an anthropology that ignores sentiment falls into rationalism; a philosophy of sentiment that ignores the supernatural is irrational. An integral anthropology ignores neither sentiment nor reason, but situates them both according to the *theandric* (divine-human) structure of the human being whose life, goal and destiny is the divine mystery. Panikkar's notions of "confidence" and "Christian theandrist" present themselves as important expressions for understanding his overall program for an integral anthropology compatible with both the Christian tradition and post-enlightenment consciousness.

²⁴ *Patriotismo*, 30f.

²⁵ *Jacobi*, 58-61.

Beyond Humanism: Theandric Confidence

If sentiment is the unifying power of Panikkar's philosophical anthropology, *confidence* is its primary and graced manifestation.²⁶ It is not confidence in the self or the ego, but a "fully human", self-transcending confidence in reality, an act of self-transcending faith, a human trust in the 'other'. Confidence is a primordial human orientation which 'knows', prior to external reflection, that one's true identity is 'beyond' oneself. Such a transcendental anthropology is metaphysically grounded in the "communion of all beings" signifying Panikkar's understanding of the human person as social, relational and cosmic. He cites two modern aphorisms in support of his self-transcending anthropology: "The human is more than human" (Lenhart); "The human is the shepherd of Being" (Heidegger).²⁷ On this basis, he claims faith in God can be expressed as confidence in the earth and in all beings – and, as he later develops it, in multiple cultures and religions.

Panikkar does not base his anthropological foundations in metaphysical 'proofs' but in his own faith-experience through which he interprets both the Christian tradition and modern culture. Moreover, he asserts any philosophy is based in some form of 'belief' in the transcendence of truth.²⁸ Consequently, his notion of confidence in the 'other' – the earth, all beings, ultimate reality – is fundamental in both anthropological and epistemological terms.

Drawing from the history of theology, Panikkar retrieves the notion of *theandricism*, referring to divine-human unity in Christ, which he then

²⁶ Panikkar, "La Confidencia: Análisis de un sentimiento" in *Revista Española de Filosofía* (Madrid) CSIC (1963): 43-62 [Originally written 1946 (43 n.1)].

²⁷ *Humanismo*, 200, 190.

²⁸ *Jacobi*, 27f.

uses as an expression of the “anthropological unity” of divinity and humanity in the human person. Specifically, he refers to confidence or trust in reality as a “theandric act”.²⁹ He understands “Christian theandricism” as the primordial sentiment expressing multiple levels of harmony: internal unity of the human being (beyond head-heart dualism); human relatedness to creation (beyond self-other dualism); human participation in the ultimate divine reality (beyond immanent-transcendent dualism). While this theandric truth has an intellectual dimension, it can only be known through praxis, love, testimony, witness and participation in the mystery of life. Panikkar argues that such an integral, human, theandric anthropology is evident in thinkers such as St Bernard and Aquinas.

In his dialogue between Christian theandricism and modern humanism, Panikkar specifically addresses the issue of the supernatural.³⁰ Opposing Maritain, Panikkar argues that humanism does not reject the supernatural as such. He nonetheless critiques “restrictive anthropocentric humanism” for limiting transcendence. In this, he aligns himself with de Lubac who states that “exclusive humanism is inhuman humanism” because it absolutizes human perfection without reference to human destiny in the divine mystery. Further, Panikkar suggests, a Christian acceptance of a reductive humanism results in a *deistic* rather than a *theistic* God, and a reductionistic conception of grace. In terms of Christian anthropology, modern humanism exhibits an exaggerated confidence in human reason. The power of symbol is lost along with the more profound sense of the mystery of grace and sin. The challenge, however, is not to destroy humanism, but to transform it through Christian revelation.

²⁹ *Humanismo*, 178-253.

³⁰ *Humanismo*, 191-233.

Seeking a transformed humanism,³¹ Panikkar suggests there have been three humanisms – ‘classical’, ‘renaissance’ and ‘modern’ – each seeking to liberate humans in the evolution of human consciousness. The most recent, modern humanism, is also the most advanced in focusing on the significance of human subjectivity; its downfall is the exaggeration of human autonomy. Panikkar’s “theandric humanism” (not his phrase) is presented as “Christian humanism” (de Lubac’s phrase) in which human history, subjectivity and freedom are interpreted in light of Christian revelation, transcendence and the interdependence – neither heteronomy nor autonomy, but *ontonomy* – of all beings.

Panikkar’s theandric vision is explicitly Christian focusing on the “Law of the Cross”³² which requires the “immolation of culture” and points to the “radical relativity” of all human values. While theandricism is committed to building the world on Christian values, its eyes are set on the “eruption of a new order” when all things will pass away – and there will be “a new heaven and a new earth”. Panikkar perceives humanism as predominantly masculine in its rational approach to life. By comparison, Christian-theandricism is pre-eminently feminine in its openness to affective, intuitive and bodily forms of knowledge.

Panikkar analyses the link between humanism and the rise of patriotism in the modern nation-state.³³ Both are historically conscious and, from his theandric perspective, correctly interpret space and time as intrinsic elements of the human being. The particularity of earthly existence in a specific community and place reflects the incarnational aspect of human lives. However, he warns, historical consciousness needs to be complemented by transcendental awareness that connects the human

³¹ *Humanismo*, 234-251.

³² *Humanismo*, 291-352.

³³ *Patriotismo*.

person to the whole human community, the entire earth, and the cosmic mystery of the universe. It follows that theandric confidence cannot be placed in artificially-constructed nation-states, but only in the *earth*, in each *other*, and in *God*. Theandric patriotism, then, transcends the destructive expressions of patriotism so common to the world of modern times. As a theological anthropology, our true Christian "*patria*" must include both the particularity of our earthly existence and the realization of our divine destiny.

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Panikkar's foundational anthropology is unquestionably transcendental in the manner it situates the human being in a graced universe, oriented towards the divine mystery. However, human experience of the sacred has been shattered by modernity's loss of connection with God, self and the elemental rhythm of the universe. Added to this is the modern shift of consciousness from a static to an evolutionary worldview. Panikkar believes, nonetheless, that Christian realism can be expressed in a manner that makes sense to existentialist and evolutionary thought; he also shows humanism's inadequacy in articulating belief in transcendence without discourse with Christian teaching. He therefore advocates a new visionary synthesis on the basis of dialogue between modern and classical sources. Such dialogue affirms the ultimate significance of history, matter, time, space and freedom (modernity) as well as the divine destiny and transcendental reality of humanity and the cosmos (classical).

However, following Kant, a major question for any transcendental anthropology is that of the mediation of transcendental knowledge. In this regard, Panikkar perceives a major fault in modern philosophy and

theology with their dualistic splits between faith and reason, nature and grace, history and transcendence. Panikkar's formulation of sentiment as a supra-rational faith and integrative faculty of knowledge enables him to posit a non-dualistic epistemology which is neither purely rational (humans are not reducible to their intellects) nor irrational (human life without faith is irrational). To be human is to live by faith, sentiment, trust or confidence in that which transcends the individual person. Emphasis on primordial connectedness with the other – persons, creation and God – distinguishes the theandric conception of the human being.

In these foundational writings, Panikkar's search for an integral anthropology is an intra-western conversation. Moreover, the spiritual, transcendental and religious dimensions of the human person are enunciated in specifically Christian theological language noting, as he does, the fundamental paradigm for understanding any reality is the Christian Trinity. His future writings expand these more limited horizons through dialogue with eastern traditions, notably Hinduism and Buddhism, and through his deepening encounter with Secular Humanism. Inevitably this results in a transformed understanding of the human person. Nonetheless, Panikkar's abiding concern to establish a non-dualistic, transcendental anthropology capable of learning from multiple sources, ancient and modern, is central to both his foundational and emergent writings.

COSMOTHEANDRIC ANTHROPOLOGY: ENCOUNTERING POSTMODERNITY

There is no intention of following Panikkar's step-by-step trajectory of his major encounters with Hinduism, Buddhism and Secular Humanism, nor to provide a chronological account of his evolving understanding of human personhood. Suffice it to say, as I argued in my doctoral

dissertation,³⁴ from the mid-1960s onwards there is significant change in Panikkar's language, thematic concerns and methodology as he comes to terms with the radicality of human otherness through the emerging experience of the sheer diversity of human traditions. He also expands his notion of religiousness to include all traditions, theistic, non-theistic and atheistic. He understands human personhood as essentially "*homo religiosus*".³⁵

I would further argue this process is most evident in his writings between the first and second editions of *Unknown Christ* (1964 and 1981) represented by his major publications in cross-cultural and interreligious studies: *Silence of God* (Spanish edition 1970); *Trinity* (1977); *Vedic Experience* (1977); *Worship* (1977); *Intra-Religious Dialogue* (1978); *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (1979). There is of course development, extension and refinement over Panikkar's next thirty years in such notable works as *Cosmotheandric Experience* (1993), *Dwelling Place* (1993), *Invisible Harmony* (1995), *Cultural Disarmament* (1995), *Christophany* (2004) as well as his 1989 Gifford Lectures published in the year of his death as *Rhythm of Being* (2010). However, the fundamental aspects of his "cosmotheandric" anthropology, introduced in the early 1970s, are well established by the 1980s.

Panikkar's own shift in consciousness, I will argue, represents what he calls the "law of growth" in which principles of "continuity" and "transformation" co-exist.³⁶ He specifically applies this to his analysis of contemporary religious experience which, he believes, is in search of a new manifestation of the divine through dialogue among the world's multiple

³⁴ Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism* (PhD diss., Catholic University of America / Ann Arbor: UMI, 1994).

³⁵ *Rhythm of Being*, 235.

³⁶ *Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 69-73; *Rhythm of Being*, 96.

traditions. Since we are now witnessing the end of the modern age – and/or “historical consciousness” – due to profound changes in almost every sphere of life, a new attitude is required in our “common search for truth” since “the *kairos* of our present age ... represents a turning point in the adventure of reality”.³⁷

The transformative aspect of Panikkar’s anthropology is evident through the expansion of his dialogue with religions beyond Christianity and philosophies beyond Europe. This naturally involves an array of anthropological ideas not present in his theandric understanding of the human person. He insists, for example, there can be no encounter of cultures or religions without a new “cross-cultural religious anthropology”.³⁸ Nonetheless, he never abandons his transcendental, non-dualistic and trinitarian insights: he would claim, rather, to expand their significance precisely through dialogue with other traditions. I will also argue that his foundational epistemology, which highlights supernatural faith as the integrative faculty of knowledge, continues as an abiding presence in his expanded cosmotheandric vision of the human person.

Postmodernity: Radical Pluralism

By the mid-1970s, Panikkar was extending his anthropological notions with reference to the radicality of pluralism among classical religions and more recent traditions including secularisation. This is what I call Panikkar’s “postmodern turn” in which the pivotal challenge for human consciousness becomes the overwhelming experience of ‘otherness’ which he expresses as the “concrete day-to-day dilemma occasioned by the encounter of

³⁷ *Rhythm of Being*, 212.

³⁸ *Invisible Harmony*, 71.

mutually incompatible worldviews and philosophies”.³⁹ While admitting many areas of complementarity and convergence among disparate human traditions, Panikkar submits the postmodern dilemma arises from our recognition of – and our call to choose among – “mutually irreconcilable views of reality” and “final unbridgeable human attitudes”.⁴⁰ In other words, pluralism arises when the situation appears non-negotiable and beyond the power of reason to resolve.

Panikkar argues against traditional responses to pluralism: the pragmatic answer is incoherent and irrational; theoretical resolutions amount to the imperialism of one particular system. However, if pluralism is not to amount to anarchy, nihilism or chaos, we need to acknowledge another pathway for human understanding. In this context, Panikkar says we need to locate pluralism at the level of *mythos* which highlights the primacy of experience prior to its interpretation by reason or *logos*. He states that “pluralism is indeed a myth in the most rigorous sense” because it discloses something ultimate and unquestioning in the postmodern crisis of otherness.⁴¹ As such, pluralism represents the “new revelatory experience” whose truth-power is not the concept, but the *symbol* which mediates between *mythos* and *logos* provoking new possibilities for human communication and understanding.

In his search for symbols for a new anthropology that is open to the pluralism of truth as the emerging myth for our times, Panikkar finds valuable resources in the religious traditions.⁴² Noting the Christian Trinity is a pluralistic symbol of the ultimate mystery, he is now also drawn to the *advaitic*/non-dualistic truth in Vedanta Hinduism that sees beyond unity

³⁹ *Invisible Harmony*, 56.

⁴⁰ *Invisible Harmony*, 125f.

⁴¹ *Invisible Harmony*, 59.

⁴² *Rhythm of Being*, 216-227.

and plurality to the unique, opaque, non-objective dimensions of reality. He also highlights *pratīyasamutpāda* in the Buddhist tradition which recognizes the profound interconnectedness of all reality and the “radical relativity” of truth. In all this, Panikkar is attempting to show there is an incommensurable dimension to reality, something irreducibly unique in each being, which cannot be objectified, measured or totally knowable by the human mind.⁴³

Anthropologically, every person, family, tribe, culture or religion is a “source of self-understanding” that depends on a specific experience and vision of reality that is communicable only through symbols. The task of confronting pluralism becomes one of “restoring symbols to life and eventually of letting new symbols emerge”⁴⁴ through depth encounter – also called “intra-religious dialogue” and “dialogical dialogue” – with other traditions. It is a process aimed at “discovering and perhaps even creating new forms of human consciousness – and corresponding new forms of religiousness”.⁴⁵ Such a venture recognizes no single person or tradition “has access to the total range of human experience” such that the anthropological question in the face of radical pluralism is neither the objective “What is Man?”, nor the subjective “Who am I?”, but the approach that combines both under the focus of a third question: “Who are you?”⁴⁶

Such a question is not rhetorical if we take the issue of pluralism seriously. Moreover, the question may be addressed to the postmodern “crisis of otherness” which Panikkar captures in his notion of the “end of history”. The phrase is not intended as an apocalyptic pronouncement, but

⁴³ Panikkar, “Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge.” *Religious Pluralism*, collective work. South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, 114f.

⁴⁴ *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 8.

⁴⁵ *Unknown Christ*, 10.

⁴⁶ *Invisible Harmony*, 70f.; *Rhythm of Being*, 297.

to describe the mutation of 'one-dimensional' western consciousness wherein time, space and nature are conquered by "historical Man" marching into the future, exploiting the earth, and ignoring or discarding the Gods of the religions. However, says Panikkar, the historical myth of endless progress and the anthropocentric myth of the infinite power of human reason, have practically collapsed:

Once upon a time there 'was' a Man. This Man had lived consciously for millennia. He had outlived his history and had all the data and riches of the world at his disposal, but he seemed to have no hope.... Though he was educated and well-fed, millions were starving, victims of injustice. The Man felt troubled, uncertain – a future for him seemed unlikely to be bearable, his present he found quite uninhabitable, and his past he knew to be lost to him irretrievably.... He had constructed an entire worldview, which some call ideology. He had thought about everything: he thought all unthinkable things and found the impotence of reason along with his need for it. He could demonstrate the existence of God and could equally invalidate every proof; he could think of life as meaningful, but he could equally find arguments in favor of its meaninglessness. He could imagine technology solving all his problems, and he could by the same token show technology to be the greatest blight ever to affect human existence. He began to surmise that what are called freedom and democracy are nothing but the expressions of the human despair of truth. His head grew tired and his thinking aimless. He began to fear that one thing might do as well as another, provided he never examined the extreme consequences of anything. Then, exhausted, he began to look for an icon, to sing, to dance, to gesticulate, and even something like an inarticulate prayer went up from his body. Soon enough he went to sleep, or died, or was annihilated by forces beyond his control. Nobody remarked his passing. And yet something had happened.⁴⁷

Panikkar's fable identifies the postmodern challenge as the collapse of historical consciousness. Nonetheless, it also provokes the possibility of a

⁴⁷ Panikkar, "Man as a Ritual Being," *Chicago Studies* 15:1 (1977): 5f.

"new innocence" born from insights of all traditions – since no fundamental human attitude can be ignored.⁴⁸ In this way, he hopes to provide foundations for the "myth of pluralism", noting the mythical story may play an intermediary or symbolic role in bringing mythic truth to life. Nonetheless, the mythical story is not the myth which "is transparent like the light", but "only the form, the garment in which the myth happens to be expressed, enwrapped, illumined".⁴⁹

In any case, Panikkar's anthropology is often expressed in rhetorical language and mythic stories such as the fable of the death of "historical Man". Moreover, he situates this story within the larger mythic framework of the dynamics of human consciousness: non-historical, historical and trans-historical. He calls these "three *kairological* moments" in order to emphasize their qualitative character and to acknowledge aspects of each type of human awareness may well co-exist in the unfolding lives of persons and cultures.⁵⁰ Non-historical consciousness is *cosmocentric*:⁵¹ to live is to be in communion with nature in a hierarchical universe prior to the separation of Gods, mortals and nature; memory of the past through knowledge of tradition and veneration of the ancestors is sacred; harmony is the supreme principle. The decisive break with non-historical awareness is the invention and spread of writing which reduces the need for memory and empowers human knowledge. A new stage of consciousness arrives.

Historical consciousness is *anthropocentric*:⁵² to live is to be self-aware in a multiverse of desacralized objects; creating destiny through the power of the human intellect is paramount; time replaces space, and the

⁴⁸"*Colligite Fragmenta*", 39.

⁴⁹ *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 5.

⁵⁰ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 106.

⁵¹ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 103-99.

⁵² *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 100-107.

future the past, as sacred; justice is the supreme principle. Initially, historical consciousness is a period of wonderment and discovery as humans "under the spell of the future and the guidance of reason"⁵³ forge a better destiny for the universe. The divine, if recognized at all, now becomes a Supreme Being who plays an increasingly subsidiary role in human affairs. The cosmos is real but is reduced to the status of inanimate matter, an object of human enquiry and exploitation. This splintering of reality under the guise of scientific and reflective thinking brings us to the "end of history" with its acute sense of alienation – along with the realization there are limits to thought and consciousness. The advances of technology have finally brought us to "the splitting of the *atomos* (which) has also exploded historical consciousness".⁵⁴ The third type of human consciousness beckons.

Trans-historical consciousness is *cosmotheandric*:⁵⁵ to live is to experience the irreducible character of the divine, human and cosmic realities that are differentiated but interconnected; in western terms it represents the passage from monotheism to trinity; in eastern parlance, overcoming dualism by *advaita*; in secular terms, the experience of the sacredness of the secular. Rather than focusing on past or future, its concern is with realization in the present; love is the supreme principle. The cosmotheandric vision of trans-historical consciousness is also Panikkar's way of evoking pluralism as the "ultimate structure of reality"⁵⁶ and therefore beyond any single pattern of human intelligibility. It is his answer to both the modern crisis of history and the postmodern crisis of otherness.

⁵³ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 104.

⁵⁴ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 106.

⁵⁵ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 120-133.

⁵⁶ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 121

In his foundational period, Panikkar spoke of the unfolding of western consciousness in terms of three distinct human attitudes – heteronomy, autonomy and ontonomy – which correlate with his notions of cosmocentric, anthropocentric and cosmotheandric consciousness, but now applied universally. The remainder of this chapter will explore further dimensions of Panikkar’s cosmotheandric epistemology and anthropology, indicating elements of continuity and discontinuity with his foundational work. Finally, an overall assessment of his anthropological project will be proffered.

Three Eyes of Knowledge: Cosmotheandric Epistemology

Panikkar’s foundational epistemology focused on the respective roles of intellect, will and sentiment through which he established the importance of supernatural faith in human knowing. Relying now not only on western and Christian categories, but also on insights of Vedanta *advaita* (non-dualism) and the Buddhist *śūnyatā* (emptiness) as well as mystics, East and West, he introduces the notion of “the three eyes”: senses, reason and spirit.⁵⁷ The shift is indicative of the increased importance he gives to human experience “embracing all forms of immediate or ultimate knowledge” across the world’s multiple traditions.⁵⁸

Panikkar cites the medieval theologian, Richard of St Victor: “We have a threefold way of knowing things: some by experience; some by reasoning; and we are certain of others by believing”.⁵⁹ Commenting, Panikkar observes: each way of knowing apprehends the whole (of) reality

⁵⁷ *Rhythm of Being*, 236-241.

⁵⁸ *Rhythm of Being*, 238.

⁵⁹ *Rhythm of Being*, 237.

under a particular perspective; the three organs complement each other in putting us in contact with reality; and they form an “indivisible triad” involved, in different degrees, in any human experience.

For this epistemology, sensual experience includes sensation, sentiment, sensibility and all other bodily knowing opened to us through the senses. Such testimony of the senses is “fundamental human knowledge” preceding both rational and spiritual knowledge while also counterbalancing dis-incarnated knowledge of extreme rationalism or other-worldly supernaturalism. Humans are bodily creatures who share with other animals a corporeal way of knowing. The locus of rational experience is the intellect which, Panikkar is quick to suggest, includes not only reasoned, logical evidence but also “intuition, understanding and simple apprehension” such as captured by the Greek *noēsis*.⁶⁰ Whereas sensual-bodily experience opens us to knowledge of the multiplicity of reality, rational-intellectual experience directs us to its underlying unity. The question becomes: is there is an epistemological resolution to this impasse?

This is where the role of spiritual experience – the witness of the “third eye” (attributed to Hugh of St Victor) – presents itself for consideration in relation to the tripartite anthropological model of body, mind *and* spirit.⁶¹ Effectively, Panikkar searches for a renewed expression of an integrative faculty of knowledge that he had earlier associated with sentiment and supernatural faith. He now calls this the experience of our forgotten dimension whether it is named intellectual enlightenment, spiritual realization or mystical insight.⁶² Here we need to go beyond sensual knowledge expressed in signs, and reason which uses concepts, to

⁶⁰ *Rhythm of Being*, 239.

⁶¹ *Rhythm of Being*, 368, 234.

⁶² *Rhythm of Being*, 240f.

spiritual knowledge conveyed through symbols. Importantly, though, spiritual knowledge, which cannot be rationally proven, does not put us in touch with a third separable reality, but opens us to experience the third, divine or transcendent, dimension of the one and same world we know through sense and reason.

The “threefold experience” of sense-reason-spirit corresponds to the triads of body-mind-soul and beauty-truth-goodness.⁶³ While each path of experiential knowledge is irreducible to the other two, Panikkar insists on their interconnectedness: “Only a mutual and harmonious interplay among the ‘members’ of the triad will yield a satisfying experience of reality”.⁶⁴ For example, while artistic experience clearly emphasizes the role of the sensual eye, it also involves a dimension of rational awareness and “something more” – perhaps “sentiment of beauty” or “ecstatic experience” – that belongs to the “third eye”. Commenting on the inseparability of these three distinct organs of knowledge, Panikkar states:

*We cannot sense, think, experience, without matter, logos, and spirit. Thought and mystical awareness are not possible without matter, indeed, without the body. All our thoughts, words, states of consciousness and the like are also material, or have a material basis. But our intellect as well would not have life, initiative, freedom and indefinite scope (all metaphors) without the spirit lurking as it were, behind or above, and matter hiding underneath.*⁶⁵

In summary, Panikkar’s threefold epistemology of sense, reason and spirit correlates with cosmic matter, human consciousness and divine freedom as an expression of cosmotheandric insight.

⁶³ *Rhythm of Being*, 241-244.

⁶⁴ *Rhythm of Being*, 242.

⁶⁵ *Rhythm of Being*, 243.

However, the question of Panikkar's understanding of the role of mystical awareness within this epistemological schema needs addressing. To this reader, there is some ambivalence in the manner he uses the term 'mystical'. Sometimes it seems to be associated with the third eye of spiritual experience. However he is also adamant that the mystical as such is beyond any eye of knowledge or field of consciousness. He states unequivocally the locus of the mystical is not knowledge but silence, emptiness and nothingness which disclose to us "all cannot be reduced to consciousness".⁶⁶ By definition, the mystical experience is unique, ineffable, non-repeatable and non-translatable, as it is fragile. As such, its epistemological value is precisely in showing the limits of knowledge and consciousness.

While Panikkar uses different language and categories to elaborate his cosmotheandric epistemology compared to his foundational approach, there is underlying continuity. Both are concerned to articulate a non-dualistic, threefold, trinitarian epistemology able to rehabilitate faith, experience, intuition, affectivity and transcendence as integral components of knowledge. There is of course evident discontinuity in the employment of categories or "eyes of knowing": intellect, will and sentiment are replaced by sense, reason and spirit, which are not simply transferable. Panikkar's earlier concern to make sentiment the integrative faculty of knowledge is now replaced with emphasis on the "third eye" of spiritual experience mediating "something more" co-present in all knowing acts. He also continues to insist on the interconnectedness of all three ways of knowing articulated according to the "radical relativity" of all reality. To this he adds insight into the mystical to highlight the significance of non-

⁶⁶ *Rhythm of Being* 249.

mediated experience, thereby disclosing the limitations of human consciousness.

Anthropos & Rhythm of Being: Cosmotheandric Confidence

Panikkar consistently speaks of the *kairos* of our present human situation as a “turning point in the adventure of reality” calling humanity to undergo “a radical *metanoia*, a complete turning of mind, heart and spirit”.⁶⁷ In his foundational writings, he had already established a transcendental-trinitarian vision of the human person which, from a western-Christian perspective, provided a pathway for the transformation of human consciousness and culture. He now extends and deepens those insights in light of his cross-cultural and interreligious experience with reference to the cosmotheandric intuition and the dynamic rhythm of Being. Philosophically, he calls this the “triple inter-independence” of the divine, human and cosmic dimensions of reality so that one cannot speak of one dimension without awareness of its inter-relationship with the other two. Claiming this represents an adequate “cross-cultural universal” for the majority of cultures of our time, he acknowledges the particular inspiration of the Christian trinitarian *perichōrēsis*, Buddhist *pratīyasamutpāda* and Hindu cosmic *karma*.⁶⁸

This means that whatever else *anthropos* is, anthropology as the study of this particular species, with its distinctive modes of behavior and belief, will be a failed project if it is not aware of the limitations of a subject/object epistemology.⁶⁹ Panikkar has long spoken of the distinction

⁶⁷ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 46; *Rhythm of Being*, 212.

⁶⁸ *Rhythm of Being*, 276-289.

⁶⁹ *Rhythm of Being*, 293.

between the western principle of non-contradiction and the eastern principle of identity:⁷⁰ the first approach analyses differentiating features of a particular reality, in this case the human being, as an object of enquiry; the second seeks to establish the “humane identity” of the person, a co-subject who shares many features with other subjects. The first analytical approach stresses the human as that which is not divine; the second synthetic approach is open to the disclosure of other aspects of humanity, such as corporeality and divinity which, although not *specifically* human, are nonetheless integral aspects of being human.

So, instead of stating what the human being is, Panikkar prefers to speak of the human dimension of reality, namely, consciousness. However, consciousness is not reducible to humanity: “Consciousness permeates every being. Everything that is, is *cit*”.⁷¹ In other words, consciousness relates not only to humans who know – and are aware they know – but to everything else that is actually or potentially known, including a far galaxy on the other side of the universe. In this sense, “the waters of human consciousness wash all the shores of the real”.⁷² From the other perspective, the human person is never reducible to consciousness. Humans participate in the evolving cosmos of which they are a part; they also participate in the divine mystery of freedom.

Evidently, Panikkar’s anthropology calls on humans, in Heidegger’s phrase, to be “shepherds of Being” while realizing they are not the center of the universe. The cosmotheandric insight “eliminates the center altogether” and proposes instead an anthropology that places humanity “at the crossroads” as a meeting point of the three dimensions – spiritual, intellectual and material – which “we discover above, within and below

⁷⁰ *Rhythm of Being*, 295-298.

⁷¹ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 63.

⁷² *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 62.

us".⁷³ Cosmotheandric confidence is not born of human optimism, let alone the ego, but of a fundamental trust in reality itself expressed through self-transcending faith, regardless of specific beliefs. It is this faith which enables Panikkar to view the human person as "*homo religiosus*" and who is, thereby, open to spiritual and mystical experience. There is always more to reality than what the body feels and the mind knows. For Panikkar, this is precisely the "Rhythm of Being".

* * * * *

If modernity represents a mutation of consciousness, postmodernity's confrontation with otherness represents a further mutation which experiences radical pluralism as the existential challenge of our times. Panikkar interprets pluralism in mythic-religious terms as a new disclosure of the ultimate trinitarian/non-dualistic structure of reality and the radical relativity of truth. As such, pluralism invites us to a new "cross-cultural religious anthropology" that is open to the experience and insights of all human traditions. Panikkar's rhetorical announcement of the death of "historical Man" is equally the call for humanity to embrace cosmotheandric consciousness which is trans-historical and pluralistic.

Panikkar's cosmotheandric epistemology is likewise dependent on a pluralistic approach to the mediation of knowledge through the "three eyes" of sense, reason and spirit. While each eye has its distinctive way of mediating knowledge – through signs, concepts and symbols respectively – integral human knowing involves all three eyes. The third eye mediates transcendental awareness, the "something more" in every human experience. This "threefold experience" reflects the classical tripartite

⁷³ *Rhythm of Being*, 303f.

anthropology of body, mind and spirit which, in turn, mirrors the cosmic-human-divine *perichōrēsis* of the cosmotheandric insight.

Anthropos thus stands at the crossroads of the material, intellectual and spiritual worlds that are neither three nor one (or both three and one). This amounts to the invitation to play an active role in the dynamic life of Being (action) while simultaneously placing trust, faith or cosmotheandric confidence in the infinite, trinitarian mystery of which we are integral players (contemplation). Panikkar's anthropology might be summarized as "*homo religiosus*" and "*homo dialogus*": self-transcending persons called to form communion through dialogue with other human traditions – as well as attentive listening to the divine and cosmic voices that speak to us.

CONCLUSION

By designating Panikkar's anthropology according to rubrics of modernity and postmodernity, we recognize the vastly different contexts of his endeavors. However, also evident is his consistency in articulating a transcendental, trinitarian, non-dualistic understanding of the human person. The major shift, related to his "multi-religious experience", is towards a pathway for human self-understanding that makes room for the totality of human experience across all traditions. How then is this cosmotheandric anthropology to be assessed?

There will be many who find the adventurous enterprise of constructing a new cross-cultural, religious anthropology inherently doomed. Given postmodern awareness of the sheer multiplicity of human traditions, and what is now sometimes called the post-pluralistic perspective, any single approach will be seen as breaking Panikkar's own

commitment to radical pluralism.⁷⁴ In theological terms, Panikkar will be adjudged as either weakening his theistic and Christian foundations or imposing an approach that, while acceptable to some traditions, cannot possibly make human, let alone religious, sense to others.

However, this cosmotheandric anthropology cannot be finally judged on purely rational grounds. Panikkar is the first to admit that reason has the veto power; but he is also insistent that humans experience more to reality than what senses touch and mind knows. In this regard, his epistemology of the "threefold experience" deserves significant attention by philosophers and theologians. However, the major challenge of Panikkar is precisely that he is not offering a new anthropological theory. On this he is very clear: he is not proposing a system, but offering a synthetic vision open to differing interpretations. Moreover, as intuition, he states it ultimately results from mystical experience.⁷⁵ While this does not validate its truth-claim, there is something in the telling that 'rings true' and alerts one to the challenge and possibility of a transformed, pluralistic, human future.

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⁷⁴ Among others, this is the objection raised by Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2005), 197-207.

⁷⁵ *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 15, 72.

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