ARE THERE REALLY ANGELS IN OCEANIA?

Forging a new mysticism of place, time and history through dialogue among Oceanic peoples and traditions

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Introduction

Whether in Oceania or elsewhere, practical theology does not tend to focus on angels or mysticism.\(^1\) Nonetheless, all theology, practical or otherwise, needs to acknowledge the importance of the experience of God, the Divine or the Sacred. And, as Terry Veling argues, practical theology needs to embrace both mystical and prophetic imaginations.\(^2\) Such a practical-mystical-prophetic theology is not an otherworldly disengagement from social concerns; nor is it particularly concerned with so-called extraordinary mystical experiences.\(^3\) Rather, the mystical dimension of practical theology is concerned with what Karl Rahner termed the “mysticism of everyday life”\(^4\) and what Johann Metz termed “political mysticism” or “mysticism of open or opened eyes.”\(^5\) The argument of this chapter is that, if practical theology is to play its role in the recovery of an ecclesial sense of place and purpose in Oceania,\(^6\) then it needs to give impetus to an understanding of religious experience, or what is here called a new mysticism of place, time and history.\(^7\)

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\(^1\) Claire Wolfteich explicitly states that practical theology “rarely engages with mystical texts or experience” even as she advocates the need to “traverse this divide between mysticism and practical theology.” See her “Practices of Unsaying,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 12 (2012): 161.

\(^2\) Terry Veling, *Practical Theology: On Earth as it is in Heaven* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 204-211. He builds on the words of German political theologian, Johannes Metz: “the radical nature of following Christ is mystical and political and one and the same time,” 204.


\(^6\) For the purposes of this paper, reference to Oceanic peoples includes all who inhabit our lands and oceans, including Indigenous, European, Asian and others.

\(^7\) For Raimon Panikkar, mysticism “belongs to human nature itself, inviting us to take part consciously—that is to say, humanly—in the adventure of reality.” See his *Mysticism and Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), xxv.
Writing some twenty years ago on theology in a postmodern world, Noel Rowe wrote an incisive article entitled “Are there really angels in Carlton?”8 For the followers of Australian football, Carlton had just won the 1992 Premiership which, along with ANZAC Day, represents perhaps the highest annual secular liturgy on the Australian calendar.9 The purpose of the article was to provoke a new kind of dialogue between Christian theology and a predominantly secular Australian society in which, to use Rowe’s language, neither church nor society is totally aligned with either angels or demons. Specifically, he challenges theology to be genuinely inculturated. For Rowe, ‘inculturation’10 is not simply a matter of interpreting the Word of God for other people, which is more an act of translation, but also involves breaking open the Word in the self-emptying (kenotic) manner of Christ’s own Crucifixion so that the Christian tradition is itself transformed through deep dialogue with cultures. This is what is sometimes termed the process of ‘acculturation’.11

Consequently, if practical theology is to speak of forging a new mysticism of place, time and history, this involves interreligious and intercultural engagement. Specifically, it challenges the hegemony of any single cultural or religious worldview. Likewise, it acknowledges the ambiguous phenomenon of globalisation: positively, a deepened sense of

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9 Both these events – Australian Football Premiership and Anzac Day – while unknown in most parts of the world will be generally recognised for their national importance in Australia, New Zealand and many other places in South-Western Oceania.
10 Inculturation emerged as a theological term in the 1970s referring to the process by which Christian faith is genuinely incarnated in a particular culture, transforming it into a new creation. Gerald Arbuckle, Culture, Inculturation and Theologians (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 167. Inculturation was given prominence in Catholic theology following Paul VI’s Apostolic Letter on Evangelisation (Vatican: Sacred Congregation for Evangelisation, 1975).
11 Acculturation is the other side of the inculturation process noted, for example, in the way that the post-Constantinian Church not only Christianised Europe but, equally, Christianity was Europeanised. For definition of acculturation, see: W. A. Dyrness & V-M. Kärkkäinen (eds.), Global Dictionary of Theology (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 1-2; also Arbuckle, Culture, 167-68.
human interdependence and an extended awareness of religious, cultural and ethnic diversity; negatively, the homogenisation of human traditions or, alternatively, a tribal, even militant, fundamentalism.¹² As part of this globalised world, Oceania is still in the process of unshackling itself from its colonial past. Here, too, our theologising must confront the reality that the Gospel has been largely transmitted in words, rituals and symbols that presumed the superiority of European culture. An Oceanian practical theology will be sensitive to these and similar issues in seeking a mystical and prophetic way forward for our lands, seas and peoples.

Raimon Panikkar and Depth-Dialogue Among Traditions

In the visionary thought of intercultural and interreligious scholar, Raimon Panikkar, the call for depth-dialogue among traditions has become the existential imperative of our times.¹³ Panikkar (1918-2010), a Catholic priest of Catalan and Indian descent, is known as an apostle and pioneer of interreligious dialogue especially among Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Secular Humanists. In later life, he became increasingly convinced of the urgency of dialogue with Indigenous traditions.¹⁴ The goal of such dialogue is the creation of a “new innocence,” “new myth,” “new praxis” and/or a “new mystical way” of thinking, acting and being which celebrates one’s identity in relationship with, rather than in opposition to, other

¹² For insightful discussion on the ambiguity of globalization, note the dedicated issue on “Theology and Globalization,” Theological Studies 69/2 (2008).
¹³ He states for example: “No single human or religious tradition is today self-sufficient and capable of rescuing humanity from its present predicament.” Raimon Panikkar, Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 175.
traditions.\footnote{This is what Panikkar calls “The Catholic Moment.” Raimon Panikkar, \textit{The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 46-53.} While always being aware of the dangers of relativism (a particular concern of Pope Benedict XVI),\footnote{For Pope Benedict’s critiques of relativism, see G. Jankunas, \textit{The Dictatorship of Relativism: Pope Benedict XVI’s Response} (Staten Island, NY: St Pauls Book Center, 2011).} Panikkar is nonetheless adamant that only indepth “intra-religious dialogue”\footnote{Raimon Panikkar, \textit{The Intra-Religious Dialogue}, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).} among the traditions will enable us to confront the moral, spiritual, social and political quagmire of our times.

With specific reference to the Australian situation, and as far as I am aware the final public statement of Panikkar prior to his death, were these following remarks to a gathering of Indigenous peoples and interreligious scholars at the 2010 Brisbane “Indigenous Theology Symposium”:\footnote{Proceedings published by G. Hall & J. Hendriks (eds.), \textit{Dreaming a New Earth: Raimon Panikkar and Indigenous Spiritualities} (Preston, VIC: Mosaic Press, 2012).}

\begin{quote}
I am deeply convinced that the situation of the inhabitants of Australia today, after two centuries of suffering and tension, can now give birth to a new culture and civilization as it happened some four thousand years ago when the Arians met with the ancient Indigenous population in India and the Vedic experience arose. But in order to have a fruitful fecundation, love is essential: only through love can I know my neighbour and be enriched.

In Australia the Western approach to reality, which is more masculine and based on the intellect power, meets with a more feminine approach to life open to the voice of the Spirit who inspires dreams and sacred stories and makes humans recognize the sacredness of nature. Humankind’s life on earth is at a serious risk: the survival of humanity is possible only through a real fecundation of these two approaches and Australia has this important opportunity.\footnote{Panikkar, cited in \textit{Dreaming a New Earth}, iii.}
\end{quote}
What this brings to light, and was celebrated at the Brisbane symposium, is the utmost importance of dialogue with and learning from the cosmic, earth-centred spiritualities of Indigenous traditions. Moreover, such dialogue needs to be highlighted in our approach to practical theology noting, as Panikkar states, Australia/Oceania is in a privileged situation to be a catalyst to “give birth to a new culture and civilization.” Panikkar also provides us with a possible vision and language which may aid our endeavours for the kind of depth-dialogue between Indigenous and other voices that he believes is required for the “very survival of humanity.” In particular, he asks if there is an emerging global myth capable of providing a ground for dialogue among diverse cultures and traditions?20

An Emerging Global Myth? Cosmotheandric Experience and Transhistorical Consciousness

When Panikkar speaks of myth or mythos, he is speaking of the ever-elusive horizon of understanding that precedes its articulation in rational thought or logos.21 This is not to decry the use of reason, but to admit that in meetings of persons, cultures and religions, which often enough espouse “mutually irreconcilable worldviews or ultimate systems of thought,”22 there is need for a fundamental trust in ‘reality’ itself. Now, for Panikkar—and for human traditions generally—reality is cosmic (cosmos), divine (theos) and human (andros), hence his word cosmo-the-andric.23 So one

20 Panikkar explicitly states: “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.” Raimon Panikkar, The Rhythm of Being (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), xxvi.

21 For example, Panikkar states that “pluralism does not stem from the logos, but from the mythos.” Raimon Panikkar, Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 102; see also his “The Myth of Pluralism,” in Raimon Panikkar, Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 52-91.

22 Invisible Harmony, 153.

23 Panikkar states that “envisioning all of reality in terms of three worlds is an invariant of human culture, whether this vision is expressed, spatially, temporally, cosmologically or metaphysically.” Cosmotheandric Experience, 55. See also,
does not trust in oneself alone, even less in one’s ideas, but in reality. Consequently, such human cosmic trust does not proceed on the basis of an agreed set of propositions, a universal theory, or any other set of doctrines or beliefs; it is an act of faith that Panikkar also calls “cosmotheandric confidence” and may be expressed in vastly diverse belief systems.\(^{24}\) Importantly, this cosmic trust is first and foremost expressed through symbol rather than thought, since symbols are carriers of meaning linking subject to object, mythos to logos, darkness to light, understanding to interpretation, and faith to belief. Neither symbol nor myth can be artificially conceived, but must be allowed to emerge from the life-world of human experience—noting that, for Panikkar, human experience is also three-fold (body, mind and spirit).

Panikkar presents his cosmotheandric vision or intuition as belonging to the order of myth\(^ {25}\) which, he proposes, is capable of providing an horizon of meaning under which people of diverse cultural and religious systems may effectively communicate. Given that the human person is effectively a “triad of senses, reason, and spirit in correlation with matter, thought, and freedom,”\(^ {26}\) an authentic approach to reality needs to encompass body (cosmic-dimension), mind (consciousness-dimension) and spirit (depth-dimension). Clearly, what Panikkar calls “the Western approach to reality” – and the predominant Christian one – privileges the logos, rationality and intellectual knowledge. But as he elsewhere reminds us: "Reality is not mind alone, or cit, or consciousness, or spirit. Reality is also sat and ananda, also matter and freedom, joy and being."\(^ {27}\) Moreover,
human knowledge is not reducible to the intellect, but needs to include body/sense perception and mystical experience.\textsuperscript{28} Integral to this cosmotheandric experience is the need to awaken to “the voice of the Spirit who inspires dreams and sacred stories” and reconnects us to “the sacredness of nature.”\textsuperscript{29}

Little wonder, then, that Panikkar turns to Indigenous traditions that have so much to teach in regard to a more holistic experience of life in which \textit{logos}, matter and spirit – or human, cosmic and divine – are seen and experienced more integrally. In particular, Indigenous traditions exhibit in diverse and concrete ways what has been called a \textit{biocosmic} spirituality or foundational religious experience in which the cosmos itself is experienced as something ultimate and sacred—“‘something’ in which everything participates.”\textsuperscript{30} Panikkar calls such consciousness ‘non-historical,’ by which he means that time is measured by the rhythms of nature and the seasons as distinct from the clock and advanced technologies.\textsuperscript{31} For non-historical consciousness, “the divine permeates the \textit{cosmos}” and the world is “full of gods.”\textsuperscript{32}

Panikkar is not advocating a return to pre-historical consciousness admitting that, even if desirable, such a venture is no longer possible for those who have encumbered the “myth of history” identified as western, scientific, rational, technological consciousness.\textsuperscript{33} Rather, with the advent of historical consciousness and the ensuing “crisis of history,”\textsuperscript{34} Panikkar

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, Panikkar’s essay entitled “The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity” in \textit{Invisible Harmony}, 1-19; and Panikkar, \textit{The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006). The insight of course is recognised by the mystics of all traditions.

\textsuperscript{29} Panikkar’s words cited above, \textit{Dreaming a New Earth}, iii; note also the inclusion of Pope Francis in this discussion below.


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Cosmotheandric Experience}, 93-99.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Cosmotheandric Experience}, 95-96.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Cosmotheandric Experience}, 100-107.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Cosmotheandric Experience}, 108-119.
speaks of the emergence of a new kind of consciousness – “trans-historical” – capable of gathering together “all the fragments of the scattered cultures and religions . . . for an ever better shaping of reality.” While the cosmotheandric experience is more specifically identified with transhistorical consciousness, its roots are deeply embedded in the biocosmic spiritualities of Indigenous traditions especially in their appreciation of the sacredness of the earth, their sense of the interrelationship of all realities, and their openness to the world of symbols.

**The Natural Mysticism of Indigenous Spiritualities**

It may seem strange that when Panikkar speaks of the “three eyes” of knowledge – senses, reason and spirit – he does not equate the “third eye” (realm of the spirit) with mysticism. Rather, he describes mysticism as “the experiential awareness of the whole” which is beyond the field of consciousness. If we are to equate mysticism with a form of knowledge, Karl Rahner’s notion of “unthematic knowledge” of God provides a helpful clue since such ‘knowledge’ is not ‘consciousness of’ an object beyond ourselves, but the “unobjective grasp” or “participative knowledge” of the divine mystery. In similar fashion, we may imagine or employ metaphor

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35 *Invisible Harmony*, 175. See also *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 120-133; and “The Emerging Mythos,” in *Rhythm of Being*, 368-404.

36 As Francis D’Sa notes, “the cosmotheandric world is a world of symbols.” See his “The call to get in touch with our origins,” in *Dreaming a New Earth*, 12.

37 *Rhythm of Being*, 247.

38 *The Rhythm of Being*, 244. He adds that “the locos of the mystical is not knowledge, not even knowledge of Being, but the realm of śūnyatā, of emptiness,” *Rhythm of Being*, 248.

39 See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 51-71. Rahner’s “unobjective grasp” or “participative knowledge” is equivalent to Bernard Lonergan’s notion of “authentic subjectivity” as noted by Anthony Maher; information to the author.
to speak of Indigenous spiritualities exhibiting a type of cosmic or natural mysticism.40

The natural or cosmic mysticism of Indigenous traditions is not to be confused with the “nature mysticism” of 19th century Romanticism which is the personal, ecstatic experience of unity with nature accompanied by intense, *sui generis* visionary moments. Rather, Indigenous peoples’ experience of nature is more cosmic, more communal, more natural.41 It is not the ecstatic, unrepeatable experience of a chosen individual, but the ordinary, every-day abiding experience of the sacred and the unity of all beings with the earth, cosmos and ultimate reality. One is not separate from this reality since there is no one – nor for that matter no Other – separable from creation and the natural world.42 The importance that Indigenous peoples give to symbol, ritual and ceremony through dance, movement and song highlights a bodily way of knowing that mediates an entire cosmology “beyond the reach of explicit consciousness and thought.”43 Such knowledge is sensory, affective, aesthetic, practical and exhibits its own kind of life-celebrating intelligence evidenced, for example, in the Aboriginal Corroboree which connects the participants to ancestral myths and laws of the Dreaming.44 In so doing, the Corroboree celebrates


42 Panikkar notes: “The experience of the divine in nature is not reducible to an earthly numinous feeling regarding a *mysterium fascinans et tremens*. The relationship is a great deal more intimate: . . . ‘Creation’ is inseparable from the ‘Creator.’” *Experience of God*, 128.

43 This is connected to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* which recognizes a particular form of embodied intelligence beyond the realm of discursive knowledge. Mark Wynn, "Knowledge of God, Knowledge of Place, and the Aesthetic Dimension of Religious Understanding," *Australian Ejournal of Theology* 11/1 (2008).

the cosmic reality of the human community and the sacred reality of the cosmos.  

A more poetic and existential expression of this “natural mysticism” is presented by Ngangikurungkurr woman (Australian Northern Territory) Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann. In the language of her people, she tells us of the importance of Dadirri. She calls it “our most unique gift ... perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians.” Emphasising the more feminine approach to life, of which Panikkar spoke, she describes dadirri as deep inner listening and quiet still awareness; or as a form of contemplation which is turned outward to the land and things about us as well as being deeply aware of the living springs within. There is a sense of the whole that includes the sacred reality of land or country and the realisation that human community is itself dependent on one’s shared connection to place and cosmos. While the emphasis of dadirri is on listening, it also includes story-telling, corroborees, smoking ceremonies, sounds of the didgeridoo and clapsticks. Dadirri “makes us feel whole again,” part of tribe and country, and connects us to Mother Earth, Sacred Spirit or whatever words we use to describe the ultimate mystery of all life.

If we were to describe this natural, cosmic mysticism in terms of the divine mystery or the God of nature, we need to understand this in the manner that Panikkar describes:

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45 Panikkar states: “Although humans become so in community, the human community is not limited to its fellow human creatures. The human community is also cosmic since the human is an integral, even, constitutive part of the cosmos.” Experience of God, 127.
46 “Dadirri: A Reflection by Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann,” in Dreaming a New Earth, 4-8.
47 Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, paraphrased by Rod Cameron, Alcheringa: The Australian Experience of the Sacred (Homebush, NSW: St Paul’s, 1992), 24.
48 As with all things Aboriginal, there is a plurality of names for this Sacred Spirit: Baiame is the great Spirit of the south-eastern areas; Nooralie dwells in the heart of the Murray River region; in the West, we hear of the call of Wandjina. Information from Aunty Joan Hendriks.
The experience of God in nature is not primarily the experience of the one who makes it, whether creator or artist. Nor is it the experience of another force that sustains or gives existence to what is called the natural order. It is not what our aesthetic sense or calculation discovers, what the microscope, the telescope, or even rational thought may reveal. It is not a question of raising ourselves to the level of nature’s author or penetrating the mysterious depths of the cosmos. It is primarily an experience more simple and more profound, not an experience of immanence or transcendence, nor an experience of an Other, but the experience of a Presence, of the most real presence of the actual thing in itself, from which we are not absent. To repeat, the experience of God is the total experience of the human being, in which nature is not absent.⁴⁹

This cosmic “experience of a Presence” is both within time and beyond time, or where the eternal touches time, or what Panikkar also calls “tempiternity.”⁵⁰ For Rod Cameron, this is what “Aborigines called Alcheringa … Sacred Dreaming … Eternal Now.”⁵¹ Other Indigenous traditions will have their own sui generis experiences, modes of consciousness and ways of expressing their interrelatedness with the ‘whole’. What is being emphasised is that this “experiential awareness of the whole” is a spiritually heightened, “total experience of the human being” which, in theological terms, is a genuinely mystical experience of the divine mystery within the cosmos.⁵²

⁴⁹ Experience of God, 128-9.
⁵⁰ Cosmotheandric Experience, 124-5.
⁵¹ Alcheringa, 77. See also anthropologist Tony Swain who speaks of “Abiding events” and “rhythmic events” in Aboriginal life which are designed to transcend time. Cited in Dreaming a New Earth, 48.
⁵² Panikkar notes that “true religiousness is not bound to theisms” and that the “divine dimension’ should not be identified with a monotheistic God.” Rhythm of Being, 322. The question of whether or not, or to what extent, we can interpret biocosmic spiritual traditions in ‘theistic’ terms is discussed by Philip Gibbs with reference to Melanesian spirituality in Dreaming a New Earth, 54-56.
So, are there really angels in Oceania?
Implications for Practical Theology

The issue of Oceania’s future cannot be the sole responsibility of any single people, culture, religion or tribe. We need first of all to call upon the angels of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Clearly, this has not been a strength of our colonial past. There are still many prejudices against the worthwhileness or even possibility of genuine dialogue between peoples of such vastly diverse experiences and worldviews. However, if we accept the reality of what Panikkar calls the “crisis of history” and the increasingly recognised “ecological crisis” facing our planet, it becomes clearer we need to draw on insights of all our various traditions. It is the task of practical theology not only to promote such dialogue, but to see its own discipline as an intercultural and interreligious activity.

Second, we need to listen to angels that speak to us of the earth’s wisdom. This is not merely a matter of reducing carbon emissions and being more generally ecologically aware. While this may be a positive start, it amounts to a continuation of the same ‘colonising’ approach to the earth. What is required, Panikkar insists, is radical transformation if we are to effectively respond to the cries of the earth and the poor. Such a call for a fundamental change of attitude is evident in Pope Francis’ recent encyclical on the environment which proposes an “ecological conversion.” In a manner reminiscent of Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision, Francis reminds us that “everything in the world is connected” and that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships:

53 There is also the danger of appropriating the other according to one’s own experience, rather than authentically meeting the ‘other’ as ‘other’ in dialogue. This is a concern Panikkar shares with others, notably Jewish-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas.
54 This is what Panikkar calls the “ecological interlude” which “will do no more than delay some of the damage, and rationalise some of the exploitation.” Rhythm of Being, 353; see also Cosmotheandric Experience, 38-46.
55 Cosmotheandric Experience, 46.
with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.” Specifically, Francis tells us Indigenous peoples should be our “primary dialogue partners” because, for them, “land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors.”

In Panikkar’s terminology, the call for an “ecological conversion” represents a change of focus from ‘ecology’ (the science of the earth) to what he terms ‘ecosophy’ (the wisdom of the earth). In different language, Francis proposes an “integral ecology” which is respectful of human, social, cultural and economic concerns as well as environmental ones. Both Panikkar and Francis are critical of the “dominant technocratic paradigm” which they hold responsible for the crises besetting humanity and the environment. However, neither is naively suggesting a return to a pre-modern worldview; rather they seek an integration of the positive aspects of science and technology with the spiritual, cultural and religious insights of humanity. Both call for a “more integral and integrating vision” capable of responding to “every aspect of the global crisis.” In turn, this requires more extensive engagement with Indigenous spiritualities in order to develop a more practical-mystical-prophetic theology of creation, the environment and the natural world.

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57 *Laudato Si*, nn. 16 & 66.
59 Ecosophy is nowhere better expressed than in the feminine spirit of *dadirri* which is responsive to cosmic life and open to the voice of the Spirit within creation. Note Panikkar’s reflections on *Anima Mundi* in *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 137-139.
60 *Laudato Si*, ch. 4.
61 *Laudato Si*, ch. 3; *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 108-118.
62 *Laudato Si*, ch. 4; citations nn. 141 & 137 respectively. For Panikkar, this is the “cosmotheandric vision” whose centre is neither the heavens above (theocentrism), nor the earth below (cosmocentrism), nor the human ego (anthropocentrism), but on the whole divine-human-cosmic reality. Panikkar also speaks of “three kairological moments of consciousness”: (1) Ecumenic Moment (Man of Nature); (2) Economic Moment (Man above Nature); (3) Catholic Moment (Man with Nature). These can be equated with what he terms prehistorical, historical and transhistorical consciousnesses. See his *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 20-53.
Conclusion

If we are to forge this new mysticism of place, time and history in Oceania this clearly requires our engagement with all Oceanian peoples, cultures and traditions. This includes being open to angels of secular humanism who inspire political commitment for justice, peace and freedom. Nor should we ignore other modern angels of science, technology and human reason which have an indisputable role to play. Equally, this emerging mysticism has much to learn from the world’s classical theistic traditions with their insistence on a transcendent reality without which there would be neither world nor humanity. However, the until now much neglected angels of our Indigenous traditions are speaking to us of a more integral experience of life in which place, time and history are not merely fields for scientific and technical enquiry, but earth-bound and earth-transcending realities pointing us to a more mystical-prophetic vision of a “new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1).

Certainly, in Oceania as elsewhere, there are many demons and other negative forces which threaten humanity, our planet and life itself. In Panikkar’s words, “nothing short of a radical metanoia, a complete turning of mind, heart and spirit will meet today’s needs.” Practical theology today needs to encourage such transformation at all levels, personal and communal, mystical and political, cultural and religious. Naturally, such a task requires our attendance to the experience and understanding of the divine mystery at work in the Christian tradition. Particularly in Oceania, this also requires us to engage with Indigenous traditions that, despite the often negative experience of colonisation, have engaged with European ways of being and acting in the world. However, we need to acknowledge that, in the hermeneutic task of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, it is the Indigenous peoples who have done most of the accommodating to

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63 Cosmotheandric Experience, 46.
the non-Indigenous other.\textsuperscript{64} If for no other reason than the crisis of our times, practical theology is called upon to engage in a genuinely mutual dialogue in which the experience of Indigenous peoples, especially their appreciation of the sacredness of the earth and the interdependence of all realities, inspire mystical consciousness and prophetic praxis.

\textbf{Note:} This chapter arose from an earlier presentation at a Conference for the Association of Practical Theology in Oceania and is published under this same title in Anthony Maher (Ed.), \textit{Explorations in Practical Theology: Bridging the Divide Between Faith, Theology and Life} (Hindmarsh, SA: ATF Press, 2015), Ch. 12, pp. 181-194. See also \textit{Forum for Theology in the World} 2/2 (2015). Author copyright.

\textsuperscript{64} Tony Swain acknowledges there can be no place for a “naïve assimilation” of the other’s experience and worldview but insists, nonetheless, in the language of Hans-Georg Gadamer, there is need for a “fusion of horizons”. Cited in \textit{Dreaming a New Earth}, 46.