International Theological Conference: Interfaith Dialogue

Paths to Dialogue in our Age

Monday 26 - Thursday 29 May 2014
Australian Catholic University, Melbourne Campus

T rusting the Other: Raimon Panikkar’s Contribution to the Theory and Praxis of Interfaith Dialogue

Gerard Hall SM
Introduction

Raimon Panikkar (1918-2010) is a recognised pioneer of interfaith dialogue. This presentation investigates the “cosmotheandric vision” at the heart of Panikkar’s interreligious hermeneutics with its emphasis on “trusting the other”. The importance he gives to “dialogical dialogue” – as the meeting of persons rather than minds – sees interfaith dialogue as a religious experience of faith, hope and love aimed at the transformation of persons and religious traditions. While the approach is variously critiqued as too mystical, too optimistic and too trusting of the other, Panikkar’s methodological procedures and dialogical strategies are explored in their own right as paths to authentic dialogue. His emphasis on “diatopical hermeneutics”, as well as the distinction between ‘mythic’, ‘symbolic’ and ‘rational’ forms of discourse, makes an important contribution to the theory and praxis of interfaith dialogue.

Trusting the Other

If there is to be constructive dialogue among adherents of diverse religious traditions, which often enough represent "mutually exclusive and respectively contradictory ultimate systems", Panikkar asks on what basis can such dialogue

---

proceed? If the goal of such dialogue is the comparison and contrast of doctrines, beliefs and practices of different traditions, we are effectively placing our trust in the rational powers of the intellect to analyse and interpret diverse sets of data. This is a legitimate exercise, but it is not strictly speaking interreligious dialogue—or what Panikkar understands interreligious dialogue to be. Rather, he suggests, one is engaged in the phenomenological study of religions which may be pursued by philosophers, theologians or other scholars. In other terminology, Panikkar’s major interest is not in the dialogue of theological exchange, but in the depth-dialogue of religious or spiritual experience, what he calls “dialogical dialogue”.2

For Panikkar, then, this level of interreligious or interfaith dialogue has a different purpose and a distinctive *modus operandi*. It is first and foremost a religious encounter in faith, hope and love.3 Faith: while beliefs, ideologies, doctrines and theologies divide people and traditions, they are nonetheless united by “faith in the ever inexhaustible mystery beyond the reach of objective knowledge”.4 Such faith may or may not be overtly ‘religious’ since, for Panikkar, faith is coterminous with the human person. Hope: this is at once a truly human and a profoundly religious attitude. Hope is also linked to the religious notion of sacrifice: one's eschatological hope for the world enters the heart of the dialogue overriding fear,

---

3 See *Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 69f.
weakness and prejudice. Love: love seeks truth, but it also impels us toward our fellow human beings, leading us to discover in them what is lacking in us. In faith, hope and love, one yearns for the common recognition of truth that does not obliterate the differences or mute the voices of any person or tradition. This type of dialogue is a meeting of persons rather than minds and, as with all interpersonal encounters, can only proceed on the basis of “real mutual trust between those involved in the encounter”.5

Nonetheless, as an interreligious encounter, we do not place our ultimate faith or trust in our human partner, but in reality itself. Panikkar calls this a “human cosmic trust” or “cosmic confidence”.6 The ultimate ground for our engagement in interfaith dialogue is the same ground that tells us, despite all signs to the contrary, reality is intelligible, ordered, trustworthy, true, beautiful and good. According to most traditions, there is an ultimate, divine reality that may go by many names.7 However, this divine reality is also at the centre of the cosmos and the heart of humanity. This leads Panikkar to speak of the ultimate reality in which we trust as the cosmotheandric (cosmos/world; theos/God; aner/human) mystery. Without being confined to the religious traditions, he considers the cosmotheandric intuition to be “the original and

---

5 Intra-Religious Dialogue, 70.
6 See, for example, Raimon Panikkar, Invisible Harmony (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 174-177. Panikkar also refers to this as "cosmotheandric confidence".
7 Panikkar claims that “the Divine mystery is a human invariant” while acknowledging “God … is not a cultural universal”. The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 268.
primordial form of consciousness” and “the emerging religious consciousness of our times”.⁸ It also provides the foundational experience upon which, he believes, religious dialogue and even spiritual communion are possible across the traditions.

Our reflections will focus on two seminal ideas at the heart of Panikkar’s contribution to the theory and praxis of interfaith dialogue, namely, dialogical dialogue and the cosmotheandric vision. Finally, a brief analysis and critique will be offered.

**Dialogical Dialogue**

Dialogical dialogue begins with the assumption that the other is also an original source of human understanding and that, at some level, persons who enter the dialogue have a capacity to communicate their unique experiences and understandings to each other. In Panikkar's terms, "radical otherness" does not eradicate what he terms "radical relativity" or the primordial interconnection of all human traditions.⁹ Dialogical dialogue is necessarily a risk or adventure in which participants seek to establish a common ground or circle of meaning in which this primordial sense of human relatedness will be a catalyst for intersubjective communication. As indicated, it can proceed only on the basis of a certain trust in the "other qua other"—and even a kind of "cosmic confidence" in the unfolding of reality itself. But it should not—indeed cannot—assume a single vantage point or higher view outside the traditions themselves.

---

⁹ See, for example, *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 60.
The ground for understanding needs to be created in the space between the traditions through the praxis of dialogue.10

For Panikkar, the praxis of dialogical dialogue needs to proceed according to what he terms the *imparative* method, "the effort at learning from the other and the attitude of allowing our own convictions to be fecundated by the insights of the other."11 David Krieger suggests that Panikkar’s notions of *mythos, logos* and symbol correspond to three modes or "levels of discourse" which he terms *boundary* (or proclamative), *argumentative* (or logical), and *disclosive* (or symbolic) discourses.12 The imperative method of dialogical dialogue highlights disclosive discourse because it seeks in some way to communicate—and even extend—the power of each tradition’s symbols.

Although Panikkar develops the notion of dialogical dialogue with more particular focus on interreligious encounter, the fundamental principles can be equally applied to intercultural dialogue. I mention this because he conceives dialogical dialogue in terms of seeking a "new revelatory experience"13 which may seem to imply an overtly religious connotation. However, for Panikkar, revelation is the uncovering of any

---

10 Expanding this notion, Panikkar states: "Dialogical dialogue, which differs from the dialectical one, stands on the assumption that nobody has access to the universal horizon of human experience, and that only by not postulating the rules of the encounter from a single side can Man proceed towards a deeper and more universal understanding of himself and thus come closer to his own realization”. *Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 130.


living symbol which discloses the ‘whole’, connecting us to something ‘beyond’, to transcendence or to any ultimate human horizon. As noted, Panikkar understands faith as a universal human activity that expresses itself in particular beliefs. In turn, these may be explicated in religious or cultural terms—with or without explicit reference to sacred or secular realities. The "new revelatory experience" of which Panikkar speaks is the goal of diatopical hermeneutics (interpreting across boundaries). Dialogical dialogue is the suggested method for achieving it. This kind of dialogue is first of all distinguished from the dialectical dialogue of argumentative discourse.

Dialogue seeks truth by trusting the other, just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. Dialectics is the optimism of reason; dialogue is the optimism of the heart. Dialectics believes it can approach truth by relying on the objective consistency of ideas. Dialogue believes it can advance along the way to truth by relying on the subjective consistency of the dialogue partners. Dialogue does not seek primarily to be duo-logue, a duet of two logos, which would still be dialectical;

---

14 Panikkar's notion of revelation is similar to Paul Ricoeur's "areligious notion of revelation" except that Panikkar does not emphasise Ricoeur's distinction between "truths of faith" and "truths of reason" which accounts for a sharper distinction in Ricoeur between "religious" and "areligious" revelation. See Paul Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation (London: SPCK, 1981), 97ff.

15 Panikkar does not see secular and sacred realities in opposition to each other. He proposes the notion of "sacred secularity" as the process by which contemporary 'secular' consciousness sacralizes the world, matter, space and time. Worship and Secular Man (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977).

16 Diatopical hermeneutics is Panikkar’s phrase for the art of coming to understanding "across places" (dia-topoi) or traditions which do not share common patterns of understanding and intelligibility. "Cross-Cultural Studies: The Need for a New Science of Interpretation," Monchanin 8:3-5 (1975): 12-15.
but a *dia-logos*, a piercing of the *logos* to attain a truth that transcends it.\(^{17}\)

There are certain ground rules or indispensable prerequisites for dialogical dialogue. These include a deep human honesty, intellectual openness and a willingness to forego prejudice in the search for truth while maintaining "profound loyalty towards one's own tradition".\(^{18}\) In fact, the starting point for dialogical dialogue is the internal or *intra*-personal dialogue by which one consciously and critically appropriates one's own tradition. Without this deep understanding of and commitment to one's own tradition, there are simply no grounds for the dialogical dialogue to proceed. Second, one needs a deep commitment and desire to understand another tradition which means being open to a new experience of truth since "one cannot really understand the views of another if one does not share them".\(^{19}\) This is not to assume an uncritical approach to the other tradition so much as a willingness to set aside premature judgments which arise from prejudice and ignorance, the twin enemies of truth and understanding.

The external or *inter*-personal dialogue will focus on the mutual testimonies of those involved in the dialogue keeping in mind that "what the other bears is not a critique of my ideas but witness to his own experience, which then enters our dialogue,

\(^{17}\) *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 243.


\(^{19}\) Panikkar, "Verstehen als Überzeugstein," in *Neue Anthropologie*, H. G. Gadamer and P. Vogler, eds., *Philosophische Anthropologie*, Vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Thieme, 1975), 137. The practical application of this principle is explained elsewhere by Panikkar with reference to Hindu and Christian understandings of each other: "A Christian will never fully understand Hinduism if he is not, in one way or another, converted to Hinduism. Nor will a Hindu ever fully understand Christianity unless he, in one way or another, becomes a Christian". *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 43.
flows with it and awaits a new fecundation”. These notions of testimony and witness highlight the fact that dialogical dialogue is primarily the meeting of persons; the aim is "convergence of hearts, not just coalescence of minds”. Consequently, it is the experience of existential dialogue itself which is all important. In the encounter, each participant attempts to think in and with the symbols of both traditions so there is symbolic transformation of experiences. Both partners are encouraged to "cross over" to the other tradition and then "cross back again" to their own. In so doing, they mutually integrate their testimonies "within a larger horizon, a new myth”. This is rightly called a conversion experience. Not only does each begin to understand the other according to the other's self-understanding, but there is growth and dynamism in the manner that each tradition understands itself. Dialogical dialogue challenges once and for all the notion that religions or cultures are closed and unchanging systems.

*Inter*-personal encounter is always followed by *intra*-personal dialogue (or soliloquy) in which the participants seek to integrate their new experiences and insights into previously held beliefs. Dialogue with oneself is as important as dialogue with the other. This will also require the search for a language

---

20 *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 244.
21 *Invisible Harmony*, 173f. Panikkar adds that "there is always place for diversity of opinions and multiplicity of mental schemes of intelligibility".
22 *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 244.
23 Growth is a primary category for Panikkar's understanding of religions, cultures and reality itself: "The physical theory of an expanding universe may furnish a fair image of what happens in the ontological realm as well". This translates into the *cosmotheandric* vision: "In a word, there is real growth in Man, in the World and, I would also add, in God, at least inasmuch as neither immutability nor change are categories of the divine*. *Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 98-100.
capable of expressing the "new revelatory experience" while remaining faithful to the truth of each tradition. In fact, Panikkar speaks of the need for allowing a "primordial language" to emerge from the dialogue itself. Such a language is not a "universal language"; nor can it be artificially created.

The primordial language is hidden in our respective languages not as a language, of course, but as language. In the effort of communicating with one another—at the beginning without proper understanding, then slowly by dispelling false imaginations and misconceptions—we forge a common language, we reach a mutual comprehension, we cross boundaries.24

Of course, new understandings and interpretations, let alone a new language, will need to be tested with respect to both traditions. Intra-personal dialogue again becomes inter-personal encounter. The process is cyclical, ongoing, dynamic. Even where agreement is reached, it is important to be conscious of the finite and limited reality of all interpretations which remain open and provisional especially in relation to further insights which will emerge from ongoing dialogical dialogue.25

**Cosmotheandric Vision**

---

24 "What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?" 132. Panikkar says that he derives his notion of "primordial language" from the *apauruseya* insight of the Vedas. The claim here is that there is no (human) authorship. The language of the Vedas is, in this understanding, an "ultimate language". There is no need for authors or other interpreters. Elsewhere, and on a more practical level, Panikkar says that "each encounter creates a new language". *Invisible Harmony*, 172.

25 "Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion," 373-375; "What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?" 127-129.
Panikkar distills his cosmotheandric vision through reflection on the Christian Trinity, Vedantic non-dualism (advaita), and Buddhist radical interdependence (pratityasamutpāda). He claims, nonetheless, that the threefold pattern—“the triadic myth” or “the theanthropocosmic invariant”\textsuperscript{26}—is “the almost universal trinitarian insight of humanity”.\textsuperscript{27} In classical language, the divine, human and earthly realities, though distinct, are interrelated and inter-independent. This cosmotheandric intuition of the “threefold structure” and “triadic oneness” of reality, according to Panikkar, is manifest at “all levels of consciousness and reality”.\textsuperscript{28} One formulation of the cosmotheandric intuition, vision or experience is the following:

The cosmotheandric principle could be stated by saying that the divine, the human and the earthly--however we may prefer to call them--are the three irreducible dimensions which constitute the real, i.e., any reality inasmuch as it is real... What this intuition emphasizes is that the three dimensions of reality are neither three modes of a monolithic undifferentiated reality, nor are they three elements of a pluralistic system. There is rather one, though intrinsically threefold, relation which expresses the ultimate constitution of reality. Everything that exists, any real being, presents this triune constitution expressed in three dimensions. I am not only

\textsuperscript{26} See chapters by these titles in \textit{Rhythm of Being}, 212-318.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Rhythm of Being}, 212. Panikkar gives multiple examples from classical cultures including Egypt, Greece, India, China and Sufism (Ibn ‘Arabi: “My beloved is three, three yet only one”), 227-232 (cit. 230).
\textsuperscript{28} Raimon Panikkar, \textit{The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man} (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), ix. In \textit{Rhythm of Being}, he argues that “reality is trinitarian because the structure of the mind is trinitarian”, 213.
saying that everything is directly or indirectly related to everything else: the radical relativity or *pratityasamutpāda* of the Buddhist tradition. I am also stressing that this relationship is not only constitutive of the whole, but that it flashes forth, ever new and vital, in every spark of the real.\(^2\)

In particular, Panikkar's formulation of reality as cosmotheandric contests the assumption that reality is reducible to Being: there is also Non-Being, the abyss, silence and mystery. Nor can consciousness be totally identified with reality: there is also matter and spirit. As Panikkar expresses it: "reality is not mind alone, or *cit*, or consciousness, or spirit. Reality is also *sat* and *ananda*, also matter and freedom, joy and being".\(^3\) In fact, this is for Panikkar the fundamental religious experience: "Being or reality transcends thinking. It can expand, jump, surprise itself. Freedom is the divine aspect of being. Being speaks to us; this is a fundamental religious experience consecrated by many a tradition".\(^4\)

Three assumptions lay behind Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision. The first is that reality is ultimately harmonious. It is neither a monolithic unity nor sheer diversity and multiplicity. Second, reality is radically relational and inter-independent so that every reality is constitutively connected to everything that is: 'every being is nothing but relatedness'; every 'part' of reality 'participates' in and 'mirrors' the whole. This

\(^2\) *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 74.


\(^4\) "Religious Pluralism", 114.
corresponds to the ancient intuition that every reality is a microcosm of the universe; a contemporary version is the Gaia principle. Third, reality is symbolic, both pointing to and participating in something beyond itself. We do not have a God separate from the world, a world that is purely material, nor humans who are reducible to their own thought-processes and cultural expressions. While it is important to recognise the "symbolic difference" between God and the world, as between one religion and another, for Panikkar, all cultures, religions and traditions are relationally and symbolically entwined with each other, with the world in which we live, and with an ultimate divine reality. The three ‘dimensions’ of the cosmotheandric vision can be summarised as follows:

**COSMOS / KOSMOS**

This world of matter, energy, space and time is, for better or worse, our home. These realities are ultimate and irreducible. There is no thought, prayer or action that is not radically cosmic in its foundations, expressions and effects. The earth is sacred, as many traditions proclaim. More than this, there is no sacredness without the secularity of the world (literally saeculum). Panikkar speaks of "sacred secularity" as the particular way in which the divine and conscious dimensions of reality are rooted in the world and its cosmic processes.

---

He insists, for example, there is something more than pure materiality in a simple stone. Through its existence in space and time, the stone is connected to the entire universe with which it shares its destiny. Notions of inert matter, amorphous space and neutral time are superseded with reference to the ancient wisdom of *anima mundi*: the universe is a living organism constitutive of the Whole. Moreover, science itself is on the way to recovering something of this lost insight through its recognition of the indeterminacy of matter, the open-endedness of space, and the indefinability of time. In Panikkar's terms, there are "no disembodied souls or disincarnated gods, just as there is no matter, no energy, no spatio-temporal world without divine and conscious dimensions". Every concrete reality is cosmotheandric, that is, a symbol of the `whole'. It is not only God who reveals; poets, philosophers and mystics have much to teach; the earth has its own revelations as Indigenous cultures have always known and modern cultures ignore at their peril.

Matter, space, time and energy are then co-extensive with both human consciousness and the divine mystery. There is something unknowable, unthinkable, uncanny or inexhaustible which belongs to the world as world. This means that the final unknowability of things is not only an epistemological problem (due to the limits of the intellect) but also an ontological reality

---

34 See Panikkar's reflection on stones and the cosmos. *Rhythm of Being*, 278f.  
35 *Rhythm of Being*, 269f. On the theme of *Anima Mundi—Vita Hominis—Spiritus Dei*, see *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 135-152.  
36 *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 79.  
37 *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 79.
(integral to the very structure of beings). Other traditions will call this dimension nothingness, emptiness or even Non-being insofar as it is that which enables beings to be, to grow, to change—and even to cease-to-be.  

ANTHROPOS

Consciousness, for Panikkar, is the human dimension of reality. However, consciousness is not reducible to humanity: "Consciousness permeates every being. Everything that is, is cit". In other words, consciousness relates not only to humans who 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". 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.

Panikkar presents human experience as a threefold reality: aesthetic, intellectual and mystical. The three eyes of sense, reason and spirit (the ‘third eye’) are all necessary forms of human knowing. He critiques technocratic culture for

---

38 *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 75.
40 *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 63.
41 *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 62.
42 Panikkar is critical of the dualist anthropological vision which recognises the epistemological importance of only ‘senses’ and ‘reason’ versus the threefold vision of the tripartite anthropology of ‘body’, ‘soul/mind’ and ‘spirit’: “Man is a triad of senses, reason, and spirit in correlation with matter, thought, and freedom”. *Rhythm of Being*, 234-244.
reducing human life to two levels (the sensible and the rational), forgetting if not despising the ‘third’ realm (the mystical). This ‘third’ realm is not a rarefied psychological state nor an independently acquired knowledge. It is the mystical or depth-dimension within all human awareness which comes to the fore in the realisation that a particular experience is unique, ineffable, non-repeatable.

Panikkar's intention is to show that genuine human experience involves the triad of senses, intellect and mystical awareness in correlation with matter, thought and freedom. Each human act is an enactment of the cosmotheandric mystery:

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.43

This cosmotheandric insight stresses human identity with the worldly character and temporal nature of the cosmos; it also manifests a human openness towards the infinite mystery that ipso facto transcends human thought. The basis of such affirmations is human experience itself which somehow refuses to sever itself from the totality of Being: we experience ourselves to be something ‘more’ than mere pawns of nature in

43 Rhythm of Being, 243.
the evolution of matter, passing egos in the flow of time, or temporary insertions in the expansion of space. This too, he maintains, has been the fundamental insight of every religious tradition.

**THEOS**

For Panikkar, the divine dimension of reality is not an 'object' of human knowledge, but the depth-dimension to everything that is. The mistake of western thought in identifying God as a separate if Supreme Being which resulted in that God being turned into a human projection. Panikkar therefore also speaks of the divine mystery in non-theistic terms as emptiness, freedom, infinitude. This essentially trinitarian inspiration takes as its cue the notion that "the Trinity is not the privilege of the Godhead, but the character of reality as a whole". As he states, he wants "to liberate the divine from the burden of being God".

Panikkar's concern is not to overthrow the central insights and experiences of the theistic traditions but to acknowledge that "true religiousness is not bound to theisms", not even in the West. He is especially sensitive to the modern secular critique of traditional religions in their generation of various forms of

---

44 See especially, *Rhythm of Being*, 304-318.
45 Panikkar defines the situation in the West today as floating somewhere between "qualified monotheism and practical atheism". In this regard, he explains his own effort as establishing that "there is a further possibility, a madhyama or a tertium". *Rhythm of Being*, 308.
46 See, for example, *Rhythm of Being*, 318.
47 *Rhythm of Being*, 260.
48 *Rhythm of Being*, 345.
49 *Rhythm of Being*, 322.
alienation, pathology and disbelief. The suggestion is that we need to replace the monotheistic attitude with a new paradigm or a new *kosmology* precisely in order to ‘rescue’ the divine from an increasingly isolated, alienated and irrelevant existence. Sardonically expressed, the divine is not a "*Deus ex machina* with whom we maintain formal relations". Rather, the mystery of the divine is the mystery of the inherent inexhaustibility of all things, at once infinitely transcendent, utterly immanent, totally irreducible, absolutely ineffable.

Of course, this divine dimension is discernible within the depths of the human person. Humanity is not a closed system and, despite whatever forms of manipulation and control are exercised, the aspect of (divine) freedom remains. Nor is the world without its own dimension of mystery since it too is a living organism with endless possibility as the astro-physicists, among others, show us. Moreover, as indicated, the earth has its own truth and wisdom even if this has largely been ignored in recent centuries by too many cultures and religions.

**Panikkar’s Contribution to the Theory and Praxis of Interfaith Dialogue**

---

50 Panikkar suggests that the divine would have more affinity with the "dancing God" of Nietzsche. Spoken at “The Gifford Lectures”, Edinburgh, 1989. *Trinity and Atheism: The Housing of the Divine in the Contemporary World*.

51 These four insights regarding the nature of the divine—transcendence, immanence, irreducibility, ineffability—are evident in the respective attitudes of monotheism, pantheism, polytheism and atheism. Panikkar states "these four traits are mutually incompatible only within the framework of theism. (Hence) we need to understand them under a more appropriate horizon". See *Rhythm of Being*, 121-170.
Trusting the other seems to be a good starting point if we are to engage in interfaith dialogue. Nonetheless, we are right to ask if Panikkar’s approach to the theory and praxis of interfaith dialogue may be more appealing to the mystics than the theologians. It is also an approach that is apt to be misunderstood if it assumed he is presenting some new theory of religions and religious pluralism. Panikkar, himself, always understood his contribution to be one of communicating an experience which he understood to be emerging in many traditions. He understood this not to be a theory, but a myth. The cosmotheandric vision holds that the encounter of traditions through dialogical dialogue is crucial in the new situation of radical pluralism that confronts our world since, in his assessment, no single religion, culture or tradition holds a universal solution for either our theoretical or practical human problems.

Moreover, Panikkar's approach is appealing in the manner it develops a critical stance towards all imperialistic and monistic modes of thinking and acting. No more will one religion, culture or tradition impose itself on peoples of diverse if less powerful traditions. The cosmotheandric vision tells us that a new wholistic experience of reality is emerging in which every tradition, religious or otherwise, can play its part in the unfolding of a new experience (revelation) where all will live in harmony and peace.
As a foundational human reality, faith (as distinct from belief) provides the basis upon which dialogical dialogue among the various traditions can aid the purification of religions and cultures. Panikkar's solution is, of course, a mystical one. The age-old dilemma between the one and the many is transcended through the Christian experience of the Trinity, the Hindu concept of Advaita and the Buddhist notion of "radical relativity". Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision also includes the insights of the primal and humanistic traditions, respectively emphasising the sacredness of the earth and the value and autonomy of the world. However, we need to ask to what extent his trinitarian inspiration is compatible with other traditions? We may also ask to what extent it is compatible with the traditions from which it claims its inspiration?

The primordial category for Panikkar is evidently the cosmotheandric experience through which he interprets all religions and traditions which may, or may not, share his enthusiasm for some form of "new revelation". Apart from theological issues, we note that Panikkar's model for interfaith dialogue is grounded in a *mythos* which gives explicit trust in the creative power of traditions to be self-correcting. It may be argued that Panikkar gives insufficient attention to the irrational, pathological and evil forces hidden within people's languages, myths and symbols. Moreover, such forces will distort communication and impact negatively on understanding. For all the emphasis on the radical difference between self and
other, not all traditions will concur with Panikkar's confidence in the universal connectedness of human history. At the very least, these critiques suggest the need to further develop dialogical strategies that will aid the unmasking of forces that distort communication, freedom and rationality.\footnote{Panikkar's hermeneutical procedures are most closely aligned with the "existential phenomenological hermeneutics" of Heidegger and Gadamer. Also called a "hermeneutics of retrieval", it requires the complementarity of Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" with its extra attention to method and critique.}

However, it is a mistake to assume that Panikkar's cosmotheandric proposal is opposed to the demands of reason—which he states holds the "veto power"—or to any method that will assist mutual critique and overturn misunderstanding.\footnote{In this context, it is worth noting that emancipative projects from Freudian psycho-analysis to Habermas' ideal speech communication require communicative praxis with attention to the dysfunctional and liberative power of symbols and belief systems. Such strategies are quite in keeping with the demands of dialogical dialogue and in accord with Panikkar's diatopical hermeneutics.} Panikkar's discourse is directed towards another level of meaning without which human traditions are certainly caught in the endless cycle of power relationships, ideological discord and inevitable misunderstandings. This is the level of meaning that reason alone cannot provide—certainly not if we accept there is a radical differentiation of human experience and intelligibility across cultures and religions. His emphasis on the experience and praxis of dialogical dialogue is important because it emphasizes the communicative possibilities of symbols. Without some kind of trust in the other and some form of optimism in the human spirit (or in God, Being, Truth, Non-being, Transcendence or
Life itself), the other must forever remain the unknown stranger.

Nonetheless, the subtlety of Panikkar's thought should not be underestimated. This is evident, for example, in his notions of diatopical hermeneutics, dialogical dialogue, the imperative method and his distilling of various levels of discourse (according to mythos, logos, and symbol). He is surely correct in stressing that it is only in the actual praxis of dialogue among the traditions that similarities and differences can be explored at the deepest level. The danger, which he highlights, is to assume the supremacy of the logos without first entering into symbolic and mythic engagement—and without commitment to personal transformation. The invitation to dialogical dialogue represents a radical departure from the narrower focus of dialectical dialogue which too readily assumes there is such a thing as pure truth located in the human intellect.

Panikkar's dialogical dialogue and cosmotheandric vision do provide an original if provocative solution to the postmodern challenge of uncovering "what is questionable and what is genuine in self and other, while opening self to other and allowing other to remain other".54 People and human traditions, whether religious or secular, are capable of growth and change—especially through their mutual sharing with, receiving

---

from and critiquing of themselves and the other in dialogue. This remains Panikkar's primary insight and lasting legacy.