Panikkar’s hermeneutics of religious pluralism takes a decisive turn once he makes the move to include contemporary movements and secular ideologies within his explicit understanding of `religiousness'. Without abandoning his own foundations for pluralism in his deepening and expanding experience of the mystery of Christ and the Trinity, he seeks new expressions of the `ultimate' pluralistic mystery which, he hopes, will be as accessible to the contemporary secular mentality as to traditional religious consciousness. Furthermore, he is convinced that "for a truly cross-cultural religious understanding we need a new revelatory experience." ¹

Consequently, Panikkar’s more recent and more radical approach to pluralism is less concerned with reinterpreting religious expressions which emanate from particular historical traditions than with the "venture of discovering and perhaps even creating new forms of human consciousness--and corresponding new forms of religiousness." ² Otherwise stated, the very survival of humanity depends on "a radical metanoia, a complete turning of mind, heart and spirit." ³ For Panikkar, pluralism becomes both the significant challenge and the ultimate foundation for all authentic human life-forms with their multiple `religious' expressions.

In effect, pluralism replaces religion as the foundational myth, or at least contains within itself the seeds of the "new revelatory experience" and the "radical metanoia" for emerging religious consciousness. In this sense, the term "religious pluralism" is almost a tautology: since `pluralism' constitutes the entire mystery of reality, it is already `ultimate' and, as such, a foundational `religious' category. The hermeneutical task becomes one of reflecting on these pluralistic foundations of reality and discerning their implications for the religion--or `religiousness'--of the future.

One of the major difficulties facing the commentator or interpreter of Panikkar is that of uncovering a basic framework in which to situate his ever-widening field of enquiry. This is nowhere more evident than in his later writings on pluralism. Perhaps, though, Panikkar himself provides us with this framework in the distinctions he makes between mythos, logos and symbol. Here, he presents us with foundational categories that effectively operate as three separate yet interrelated modes of discourse. To begin with, he distinguishes the myth from the logos in the following explanation:

A living myth does not allow for interpretation because it needs no intermediary. The hermeneutic of a myth is no longer the myth, but its logos. Myth is precisely the horizon over against which any hermeneutic is possible. Myth is that which we take for granted, that which we do not question; and it is unquestioned because, de facto, it is not seen as questionable. The myth is transparent like the light, and the mythical

4Panikkar provides a succinct account of his notions of mythos, logos and symbol in his introduction to Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics, 2-16. David Kreiger suggests that these are equivalent to three modes or "levels of discourse" which he terms boundary (or proclamative) discourse, argumentative (or logical) discourse and disclosive (or symbolic) discourse. The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 62-68.
story—*mythologumenon*—is only the form, the garment in which the myth happens to be expressed, enwrapped, illumined.5

The myth may be `narrated' in story or `proclaimed' in parable, but the moment we begin to `explain' or `interpret' the myth we have already converted it into an object of the *logos*. Myth precedes this subject-object dichotomization of thought and so highlights the primacy of experience over interpretation. The persuasive power of myth is in its ability to capture the heart rather than the mind, and it is able to do this because it `speaks' or `reveals' itself from the horizon of transcendence or mystery. Little wonder, then, that traditional religions are so reliant upon mythic forms of discourse.

For Panikkar, pluralism also belongs to the mythic realm. He states unequivocally: "pluralism is indeed a myth in the most rigorous sense: an ever-elusive horizon in which we situate things in order to be conscious of them without ever converting the horizon into an object."6 In this view, there is something unquestioning and `ultimate' about pluralism which discloses itself in the contemporary encounter of religions and cultures. As such, pluralism is primarily a revelatory experience whose carrier of truth is not the concept or *logos* but the symbol.

The prime quality of the symbol is its power to communicate between the two worlds of mythic and logical discourse. For Panikkar, the symbol is an

5*Myst, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 4.

6Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel--A Meditation on Non-Violence," *Cross-Currents* 29:2 (Summer 1979), 203; originally presented as a public lecture for the "Panikkar Symposium" at the University of Santa Barbara in 1977; hereafter, "The Myth of Pluralism." Elsewhere, Panikkar states that "pluralism does not stem from the *logos* but from the *mythos*." *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 102.

© Gerard Hall. *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
"ontomythical reality" which keeps open the horizon of transcendent belief (in myths) within the concrete, finite world of immanent knowledge (of objects). The symbol is able to break down the dualistic separation of mythos and logos, or subject and object, precisely because it is pneuma or spirit, encompassing the ‘whole’ (of) reality. Panikkar is fully aware that symbols are born and die. Especially in a crisis-time, they tend to lose their communicative power and, in the process, become mere ‘signs’. At such times, hermeneutics has a restorative or redemptive role to play with regard to symbolic discourse:

Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation, of bringing forth significance, of conveying meaning, of restoring symbols to life and eventually of letting new symbols emerge. Hermeneutics is the method of overcoming the distance between a knowing subject and an object to be known, once the two have become estranged.

Panikkar’s notion of diatopical hermeneutics needs to be understood in this context of aiding symbolic disclosure when awareness of the gap between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ has reached a critical point. New paradigms of life, thought and consciousness need to be created if there is to be any real communication between estranged worlds of understanding. His cosmotheandric proposal is an attempt to explore the symbolic structure of pluralism and to provoke the

---

7"What expresses belief, what carries the dynamism of belief—that conscious passage from mythos to logos—is not the concept but the symbol. Symbol here does not mean an epistemic sign, but an ontomythical reality that is precisely in the symbolizing. . . . The symbol is neither a merely objective entity in the world (the thing ‘over there’), nor is it a purely subjective entity in the mind (in us ‘over here’). There is no symbol that is not in and for a subject, and there is equally no symbol without a specific content claiming objectivity. The symbol encompasses and constitutively links the two poles of the real: the object and the subject." Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics, 6f.

8Ibid., 8 (emphasis added).
emergence of new symbols capable of expressing a truly pluralistic foundation for the meeting of estranged religions, cultures and peoples.

Accordingly, these three modes of discourse—*mythos, logos* and *symbol*—provide us with an appropriate framework in which to situate, present and eventually assess Panikkar's later hermeneutics of religious pluralism. We begin with a discussion of his understanding of pluralism as a foundational myth of the way that reality is. What is important here is precisely the *mythos* or the foundational experience of humanness. Then, with specific application to his concept of religion and his understanding of religious pluralism, we explore his notions of *dialogical dialogue* and *diatopic hermeneutics* that are so central to his project. Here the emphasis is on the *logos* or interpretation which, however, does not dissolve its relationship with the horizontal *mythos* of understanding. On this basis we then move to an exploration of Panikkar's *advaitic* and *cosmotheandric* intuition which we interpret as a revelatory *symbol* of the 'whole' divine-human-cosmic reality.

At the conclusion of this chapter we comment on the question of the fundamental consistency of Panikkar's mature hermeneutics of religious pluralism with respect to the principles, themes and methods of his earlier interreligious writings.

**THE MYTH OF PLURALISM (Mythos)**

Panikkar's understanding of pluralism as a foundational myth emerges from the way he perceives the pluralistic problem. Pluralism, in his view, is a
new problem emerging from the contemporary experience of human otherness. This is not just the classical issue of unity and diversity, but the very practical and existential question of how humanity can confront the situation of radical difference in a constructive and non-violent way.

Consequently, we begin by clarifying Panikkar's specific understanding of the pluralistic challenge in the contemporary context. We also present his exposition and critique of traditional answers to the problem. In the second section, we explore Panikkar's notion of mythos in its relationship to pluralism and the understanding of truth which emerges in the discussion. Although leaving an assessment of Panikkar's position till the next chapter, we follow his own attempts to deal with objections to his thesis. Our purpose here is only to elucidate his understanding of the new problem of pluralism and to provide insight into his resolution of that problem by way of a new (if already emerging) foundational myth.

The Contemporary Challenge

Panikkar confronts the issue of pluralism in the context of the contemporary mutation of consciousness evidenced by the "secular turn." He begins with the assertion that pluralism is essentially a new problem insofar as the "other qua other" has become a serious question for us for the first time. He senses the

---

9 We locate Panikkar's mature hermeneutics of religious pluralism at the conclusion of his retrieval of the religious dimension of secularization, that is, in the second half of the 1970s. See our discussion in the previous chapter and such seminal essays as "The Myth of Pluralism" and "The Religion of the Future." Subsequent works representing Panikkar's developing thought throughout the 1980s will be presented during the course of this chapter.

10 Ibid., 202f. This notion is supported by David Klemm who defines the
collapse of older myths in which the `other' was not an `ultimate' problem: all could be understood, if not explained, with reference to God or the Gods, or to Fate or Destiny or Development. Eventually, in the next world if not in this, final unity and intelligibility would pronounce the end of multiplicity and chaos. In any case, the `other' was usually far enough away, at least psychologically and spiritually, as not to be a serious threat to our personal identity or social cohesion. In brief, pluralism was not a significant issue because it was not considered finally real or truly ultimate.

Now, says Panikkar, in both East and West, there is an emerging consciousness of the `other' which is often coterminous with a loss of nerve, the experience of doubt, the rebellion of youth, or the sense of the immanent collapse of the values upon which our identities and societies are founded.11 Within this experience, the voice of the `other' springs not only from outside--due to the vast array of technological changes and the communications revolution--but also from within, particularly in the growing voices of the marginalized: migrants, women, aboriginal peoples, victims of power politics and sexual abuse, the cry of the earth itself. The fundamental insight is that there

"postmodern predicament" in terms of a fundamental shift in consciousness from a situation of "historical crisis" to a situation of "confronting otherness." As a result, the "crisis metaphor" (represented, for example, by the early Barth and the early Heidegger) is replaced by the "metaphor of otherness." "Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology: Through Barth and Heidegger," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 55:3 (1987): 443-469.

11According to Panikkar, "pluralism begins its course in the world when Man, having lost his innocence, tries desperately to gain a new innocence." He adds, in a Heidegger-sounding phrase, that "authentic human life is facing death constantly." "The Myth of Pluralism," 209.
is a radical turn within human consciousness occasioned by the overwhelming experience of `otherness'.\textsuperscript{12}

Panikkar accepts that this "crisis of otherness" and the "emergence of pluralism" are \textit{the} beguiling and urgent issues confronting contemporary humanity. He explains:

Pluralism is today a human existential problem which raises acute questions about how we are going to live our lives in the midst of so many options. Pluralism is no longer just the schoolbook question about the One and Many; it has become a concrete day-to-day dilemma occasioned by the encounter of mutually incompatible worldviews and philosophies. Today we face pluralism as the very practical question of planetary human coexistence.\textsuperscript{13}

In Panikkar's reading, the problem of pluralism arises when the human experience of `otherness' challenges our perceptions of the way we think about reality. The dilemma arises because we are forced to choose between two or more "mutually exclusive and respectively contradictory ultimate systems."\textsuperscript{14} In other words, pluralism does not imply a choice between more or less equal goods or between complementary sets of values. Pluralism challenges our

\textsuperscript{12}In a similar vein to Panikkar, David Klemm refers to the turn within historical consciousness in which the 'other' becomes a source of fundamental self-doubt and self-questioning. "The challenge for understanding," he says, "is no longer to reconstruct historical meanings or to address the crisis of history but to uncover what is questionable and what is genuine in self and other, while opening self to other and allowing the other to remain other." "Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology," 456.

\textsuperscript{13}Panikkar also speaks of "a shift of meaning in the word 'pluralism' . . . from a sociological and a metaphysical to an existential locus." "The Myth of Pluralism," 201.

foundational myth by confronting us with the choice between "final unbridgeable human attitudes."\textsuperscript{15}

Panikkar is not suggesting that every experience of `otherness' belongs to this ultimate level. He is the first to acknowledge that efforts towards harmony help dispel misunderstandings, overcome inconsistencies, and show the complementary nature of most human perspectives. Nonetheless, he submits, "we are finally left with several well-elaborated, complex, and yet mutually irreconcilable views of reality."\textsuperscript{16} For him, "the question of pluralism belongs to that ultimate level\textsuperscript{17} and so touches upon the pragmatics of our human and global survival.

As an existential challenge rather than a sociological concept or a metaphysical notion, pluralism is seen to be pre-eminently a problem of praxis.

Pluralism begins when the praxis compels us to take a stance in the effective presence of the other, when the praxis makes it impossible to avoid mutual interference, and the conflict cannot be solved by the victory of one part or party. Pluralism emerges when the conflict looms unavoidable.\textsuperscript{18}

In Panikkar's view, the pluralistic question is closely associated with the question of tolerance. "The real problem of tolerance," he insists, "begins with why and how to tolerate the intolerant."\textsuperscript{19} Likewise, the real problem of pluralism begins

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{17}"The Invisible Harmony," 126.

\textsuperscript{18}"The Myth of Pluralism," 201.

\textsuperscript{19}"The Invisible Harmony," 125. Panikkar's Law of Tolerance states: "The

© Gerard Hall. Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
when the religion, philosophy, theology or worldview of the `other' conflicts with my own and forces at least one of us to compromise, change, or undergo a fundamental change-of-attitude. The stakes are high because our most treasured beliefs are brought into question. We have entered a conflict-zone with regard to ultimate issues of goodness and evil, truth and meaning.

The genuine pluralistic situation arises precisely when there is no `middle ground', no room for negotiation, no escape-route. One has to take a stand: either God does or does not exist; either abortion, war or racism are justifiable or they are indefensible; either state Communism, liberal Capitalism or the Islamic state . . . . Pluralism asks the existential and very practical question of how one can maintain a positive acceptance of this `other' with whom we find ourselves in fundamental disagreement.

Evidently, pragmatism as a fundamental human attitude is untenable. Pragmatism and what Panikkar calls plurality--the sheer acceptance of multiplicity and diversity--fail to take human belief-systems and their claims of ultimacy seriously. Here we find ourselves on the slippery soil of relativism and skeptical indifference which, in Panikkar's view, are neither intellectually honest nor morally responsible.20 However, he is equally adamant that "no purely
theoretical solution can ever be adequate to the problem of pluralism.”21 By very
definition of the pluralistic situation, if there is to be a way of negotiating the
unbridgeable differences which separate peoples, cultures, religions and
ideologies, it cannot be a logical construct.22

In this context, Panikkar critiques all "theories of pluralism" which he sees
as a forms of "intellectual colonialism" and as a "continuation of the western
syndrome."23 While recognizing that much of western genius arises from its
desire to understand via universal categories of thought, he points to the
imperialist, messianic and expansionist policies that are also inextricably
connected to the "western universalizing thrust."24 His summation:

The destiny of the West rises and falls with this basic thrust. It is visible
in the Abrahamic religions, without excluding Marxism and liberalism,
as well as in the universal dominion of technology, the modern scientific
cosmology, and the universal economic system.25

He adds, from the viewpoint of the history of religions, that "only the Western
gods (Yahweh, Allah, Mammon, . . .) . . . became the universal God."26 In

_________________________


22”We cannot, by definition, logically overcome a pluralistic situation without
breaking the very principle of noncontradiction and denying our own set of codes:

23Ibid., 120-124.

24Ibid. Also see Panikkar's account of "the historico-political failure" in "The
Myth of Pluralism," 210f.

25”The Invisible Harmony,” 120.

26Ibid.
philosophical parlance, we are talking of monism; a theological expression would be undifferentiated monotheism. The assumption is that truth is (only) one, that reason is (absolutely) universal, and that "one Empire, one Church, one God, one Civilization, one Party, one Technology" is the ideal for all.\(^{27}\) While the monistic attitude is certainly coherent, usually well-intentioned, and possibly politically tolerant of differences, Panikkar judges that it is ultimately and fundamentally opposed to pluralism.

A more nuanced position of this "thirst for universality" is the dialectical, dualistic or democratic compromise.\(^{28}\) Panikkar suggests that this only works as long as `ultimate values' are not at stake, provided that all parties accept the `rules of the game' (whether these be dialectical procedures or majority-rule). Dialectics, for example, might well be a valuable scientific method, but this does not mean that it is the only or best way for dealing with fundamental human and religious problems.\(^{29}\)

Likewise, democracy's attempt to provide a `pluralistic system' might be a noble and, in many ways, (the most) effective way of organizing a (particular) society, but experience shows that it does not deal well with minorities or those who do not want to join--or remain in--the (socio-religious or politico-economic)

\(^{27}\)"The Myth of Pluralism," 206.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., 206-209; here, Panikkar treats monism, dualism and nondualism as the three possible responses to the question of pluralism.

\(^{29}\)Panikkar states: "There is no guarantee whatsoever that all human problems are (should be) theoretically soluble. This is probably not the case, even in mathematics, let alone in the complex existential situations in which contradictory human views are embedded." "The Invisible Harmony," 127.
union. The real pluralistic problem, in Panikkar's sense, arises when someone (or some group) refuses, or is unable, to accept the `system'. Even if monism or dualism are able to `tolerate' ultimate differences for the time-being, they are finally committed to the elimination of the dissenting voices.30

In summary, Panikkar rejects both the pragmatic and theoretical resolutions to the problem of pluralism. Pluralism is not a statement of anarchy, an affirmation of nihilism or a principle of chaos. Equally, it is not reducible to a single theory, a unified system or an a priori hermeneutic. In his view, there is a third option which establishes a much more vital link between praxis and theory without being the prisoner of either.31 This is the non-dualistic or advaitic form of knowledge which emanates from the awareness of transcendence or mystery prior to all practical and theoretical considerations:

Here pluralism appears as an awareness leading to a positive acceptance of diversity--an acceptance which neither forces the different attitudes into an artificial unity, nor alienates them by reductionistic manipulations. Here power does not have the last word, nor is majority rule the decisive factor.32 Accordingly, Panikkar introduces his notion of the pluralistic myth.

30Panikkar states: "Pluralism has a better answer than the already known and defeated answers of monism and dualism. These two latter systems are able to give excellent theoretical justifications, but they fail to discover a way to maintain dissent and still somehow embrace the dissenting party." "Religious Pluralism," 113.

31Panikkar states that there is a real but non-dialectical relation between theoria and praxis which he calls ontonomic. "The Myth of Pluralism," 200.


© Gerard Hall. Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
The Pluralistic Myth

In suggesting that pluralism stems from the realm of the *mythos*, Panikkar comments:

Pluralism is grounded in the belief that no single group embraces the totality of human experience. It is based on trust in the other, even though I may not understand him and from my point of view I will have to say he is quite wrong. Pluralism does not absolutize error because it does not absolutize truth either.  

We need to recall that Panikkar's notion of myth situates pluralism within that "ever-elusive horizon" that precedes thought or consciousness. In this sense, his notion that "pluralism is rooted in the deepest nature of things" is a 'given' of human consciousness rather than a consequence of human thought-processes.

Nonetheless, if, as he maintains, his proposal can be defended against rational attack, he needs to show that he does not hold truth ransom to the whims of non-discriminating voices. Not all myths--or 'givens' of human consciousness--are appropriate responses to the human dilemma or positive means for confronting the 'otherness' of human existence. Panikkar needs to show that his *mythologoumenon* of pluralism enhances both an understanding of mutuality and a pragmatics of peace in a situation of radical difference. As he comes to realize, if pluralism is the foundational myth of the way that reality is, then truth itself must also be pluralistic.

---


He distinguishes three approaches to the question of truth: perspectivism, relativity, and pluralism. Perspectivism is the simple affirmation that truth is always apprehended according to the particular 'perspective' of the enquirer. As such, perspectivism is almost a self-evident aporia. However, it is voiceless when asked to pronounce on areas of fundamental disagreement and incompatibility. Perspectivism does not pretend to offer insight into the nature of truth itself.36

By contrast, relativity—which Panikkar consistently maintains is quite different from relativism—makes the confident assertion that "truth is essentially relational." His understanding of the relational character of truth is founded in: the pratityasamutpada intuition of the buddhist tradition which avers that every reality (and thus every truth) in the universe is interconnected; and the hermeneutic insight of secular consciousness which highlights the existential moment of truth as an event-of-understanding.37 While this relationality of truth does provide a real foundation for appreciating and appropriating the otherness


36Panikkar says that he is prepared to accept that "most of the discrepancies among religions are complementary" but that, nonetheless, there are "a few fundamental human attitudes at the very basis of different human traditions that are mutually irreconcilable." His own notion of homeomorphic equivalents is intended to show both 'similarity' and 'incompatibility' with respect to distinct religious beliefs and symbol systems (for example, the notions of a non-creator 'Brahman' and a creator `God'). "Religious Pluralism," 109; "The Invisible Harmony," 127, 134.

37For Panikkar’s discussion of the buddhist pratityasamutpada, see El silencio del Dios, 94ff; for his discussion of the secular hermeneutic, see "La sécularisation de l'herméneutique," esp. 238ff. These approaches are discussed above in Chapters Three and Four respectively.
of human existence, it may still leave intact the "unexamined presupposition . . . that truth is one rather than pluralistic." Consequently, in his later writings, Panikkar takes the additional step of asserting that truth is radically pluralistic at the ultimate level. Being aware of the challenging nature of this assertion, he reflects on its meaning and implications.

The pluralistic notion of truth emanates from the nondualistic awareness that there is an incommensurable dimension to reality, something irreducibly unique in each being, which cannot be objectified or measured. At the human level, this means that every person (family, tribe, culture or religion) is a "source of self-understanding" that depends on a specific experience, a particular vision of reality or, what is for Panikkar, a foundational myth. As indicated, myth defies rational analysis or objective-type knowledge. Therefore, understanding the 'other' requires something more than intellectual knowledge.

This leads Panikkar to contest the very assumption that reality is--or, for that matter, should be--totally intelligible:

Reality does not need to be totally intelligible in itself. . . . Reality is not reducible to one single principle. The single principle could only be an intelligible principle. But reality is not mind alone, or cit, or consciousness, or spirit. Reality is also sat and ananda, also matter and freedom, joy and being. . . . Reality is not transparent to itself. It does

---

38 Panikkar further comments: "To affirm that truth itself is pluralistic amounts to averring that there is no one all-encompassing or absolute truth." "The Invisible Harmony," 127f.

39 Panikkar is here taking to more radical limits his initial scientific findings into the radical individuality and ultimate indeterminacy of matter. See Ontonomía, 243ff.; and the above discussion in Chapter Two.

40 This is also consistent with Panikkar's early "theandric anthropology" which was discussed in Chapter Two.
not allow for a perfect reflection. Reality is also spontaneity, an ever new creation, an expanding energy.\(^{41}\)

Dressed in theological language: "God's thought is divine and as such equal to God, but God is not just thought."\(^{42}\) The implications are far-reaching. They contest one of the central foundations of western civilization, namely "the harmonious correlation of thinking and being."\(^{43}\) Truth, Reality, Being is mysterious--or, more poignantly, it is Mystery--not just on account of the fallibility of the human mind, but \textit{in itself} and in its disclosure.\(^{44}\) Language and

\(^{41}\) "Religious Pluralism," 111f. In a different formulation of his challenge to the notion of the total intelligibility of reality, Panikkar states:

Pluralism is not concerned with multiplicity or diversity as such, but with the incommensurability of human constructs on homologous issues. The problem of pluralism touches the limits of the intelligible (not just for us but in itself). It poses the greatest challenge to the human spirit. It touches the shores of the ineffable and thus of silence. "What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?" \textit{Interpreting Across Boundaries}, ed. G. J. Larson and E. Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 130.

\(^{42}\) "Religious Pluralism," 111f. As our earlier references to Rahner's essays on "Mystery" and "The Theology of Symbol" indicate, the trinitarian understanding of ultimate reality provides a theological warrant for Panikkar's claim that ultimate reality is pluralistic.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 97. In other formulation: "Ontologically said: thinking does not need to exhaust Being." "The Invisible Harmony," 123. Panikkar further admits to "betraying one of (his) most cherished metaphysical insights . . . , the conviction of the intimate correspondence between thinking and being." "The Myth of Pluralism," 204.

\(^{44}\) We may say that Panikkar aligns himself with Heidegger’s critique of western metaphysics and its "forgetfulness of Being." Both explore possibilities for the "recovery of Being" in its truthfulness and mystery via a different kind of knowledge which Heidegger calls `primordial' or `essential' thinking. They both advocate a meditative stance which opens itself to new possibilities for Being's self-disclosure prior to the subject-object dichotomization of knowledge. Heidegger's notion of \textit{Dasein} should be read in this context. For both, ultimate truth is manifestation rather than verification. For Heidegger, see his \textit{An Introduction to Metaphysics}, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1959/1973), esp. "Being and Thinking," 115-196. This is further discussed in the final chapter.
thought break down because "reality is that mystery which transcends not only our thinking but thinking as such."  

To say this in another way, there is an opaque or apophatic dimension of reality that is both unknown and unknowable. This means that Being is not totally identifiable with Consciousness, and that Truth is intrinsically pluralistic because there is no single, disincarnated, absolute truth. For example, says Panikkar, there is also Goodness whose relationship with Truth is one of `intimacy' rather than `identity'. But does not this open the door to irrationality? Panikkar says no, that is not "unless we a priori totally identify Reality with Consciousness." The nondualistic way of knowledge transcends rationality and consciousness without falling into irrationality and chaos. Moreover, the

---

45 "Religious Pluralism," 114f.

46 Truth alone in this sense is not enough--that is, does not fulfill the function that truth is supposed to perform. It also explicitly requires goodness. Truth is pluralistic; hence, truth, truth alone, disincarnate truth, cannot be an absolute, and ultimately is not true. It needs other elements, at the same level of truth, as it were. . . . Truth is not goodness and yet truth without goodness is maimed, is not truth." "The Invisible Harmony," 131.

In this regard, Keats' poetic utterance is significant: "Beauty is Truth; Truth Beauty. That is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know." The relationship between Truth and Beauty is `intrinsic' and `ontonomic' rather than one of `absolute' identification.

47 "In this scheme," says Panikkar, "to know is to become the known . . . amounts to gratuitously affirming that All is intelligible, that Being is intelligible--in other words, that Being is Consciousness . . . . Thinking and Being form the ultimate paradigm." This, of course, is the monistic position that he is contesting: "Being may transcend its equation with Consciousness." "The Invisible Harmony," 130.

48 See Panikkar's "The Unknown Knower: Five Crosscultural Theses on Consciousness," Concepts of Human Freedom, ed. H. von Majar Svilar (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 133-158; hereafter, "The Unknown Knower." Here, he describes his "middle way" as neither absolutizing consciousness (the problem with all idealist philosophies that inevitably `reduce' reality to consciousness and rationality) nor
approach is confirmed by the central insights of the mystical traditions. Evidently, Panikkar is advocating a way of knowledge that is experiential rather than investigative, inductive rather than deductive. He is highlighting the feminine rather than the masculine approach to reality. In so doing, he redefines the human quest for truth according to nondualism rather than the scientific or dialectical `method'. Truth, in its primordial and mystical sense, is something we \textit{stand} under (it is always `relative', that is `related' to, `where' we stand), and something \textit{under} which we stand (we `under-stand' this truth to the extent we `stand-under' its `spell'). The relationship between subject and object is of a different order. Here, there is no room for the \textit{ego} or self-reflection because it is not consciousness `of' anything, not even of `itself'.

\begin{quote}
\textit{relativizing consciousness} (the problem with materialist and nihilist philosophies that `collapse' into irrationality and dehumanization). The mystical or apophatic way recognizes that "Being is inseparable from, but not necessarily identical with Consciousness." Still, "Consciousness is the bodyguard of Being. It defends Being from any attack of irrationality."
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
  \item Panikkar's symbols of `harmony', `music' and `concord', by emphasizing the `ear' as the primary (Indic) metaphor of revelation, awaken notions of "feminine receptivity", `sympathy' and `pathos'. He chooses these symbols deliberately in order to confront a predominantly (Western) "masculine culture" with an awareness of the mystery of suffering and the realities of transcendence and interiority. "The Invisible Harmony," 145-147.
  \item Panikkar calls this the difference between \textit{over-standing} and \textit{under-standing}, the former being the approach of the natural sciences (and legitimate in its context), the latter approach being the existential path to knowledge as wisdom which means "to identify ourselves with the thing known." "The Pluralism of Truth," \textit{Insight} 26 (October 1990), 8. See also "The Existential Phenomenology of Truth" and our discussion in Chapter Three which shows that Panikkar's later notion of "pluralistic truth" is substantially present in his earlier writings.
  \item Panikkar calls this \textit{pure consciousness} or \textit{thou-consciousness} which, he says, is synonymous with the \textit{supreme experience}. See "The Supreme Experience: The Ways of East and West," \textit{Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics}, 291-317; originally published as "The Ultimate Experience," \textit{Indian Ecclesiastical Studies} (Bangalore),
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

© Gerard Hall. \textit{Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism}. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
Using metaphors from both East and West, Panikkar refers to "'Beyond', 'Abyss', 'Unground', 'sunyata', (about which) there can be no talk." When all is 'said' and 'thought', there is (only) 'Nothing', 'Unthought', 'Non-Being', 'Silence', the (divine) 'remainder'. This is not to advocate nihilism or irrationalism, but to create a space for freedom that does not bind Reality to Consciousness--or Being to Thinking--in any closed system. Thinking is bound to Being in the sense of what is--and what has been--but not to what is not nor, for that matter, to what will be. Thinking 'follows' Being, but it should not 'think' it can always forecast Being's next move:

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. And to hear 'being' is more than to think it. . . . The ultimate religious intuitions are jumps in the being of 'being'. Deductive thinking is of no avail here. We are dealing with spontaneity, with a 'being' that is still being and has not simply been.

Panikkar admits that one cannot rationally 'prove' that truth is pluralistic. It is more a question of experience, discovery, revelation. This is why pluralism is a myth, and why those who 'understand' it best are the mystics, and very often the simple folk, who refuse to close off reality to the mind alone. "This is not

---

52Ibid., 154.

irrationalism," says Panikkar, "it is intellectual humility or common sense."54 The myth of pluralism can defend itself against intellectual attack, but finally one has to trust in reality, to believe in the pluralistic myth, to stand under its spell. In other language, authentic pluralism implies a radical awakening to the `whole' of the real.55

* * * * *

Panikkar's pluralistic reconstruction of reality proceeds according to a number of steps which we can present in the following manner. He perceives that contemporary consciousness is for the first time confronted with the radical experience of human otherness.56 This leads him to define the pluralistic problem in terms of this radical confrontation of `self' and `other', or the clashing of fundamentally different perceptions of reality.

He further holds that traditional answers to this problem fail: the theoretical resolution amounts to the intellectual imperialism of one particular system; whereas the pragmatic response is incoherent and irrational.57 Accordingly, a


55 This does not imply a `universal' view of reality, but an awareness that one sees the whole `panorama' even though it is through one's particular `window'. Panikkar refers to both the pars pro toto and the totum per partem effects. "The Invisible Harmony," 139f.


57 In one formulation, Panikkar asks: "Can we avoid the Scylla of mere relativism, giving up our deepest convictions, and the Charybdis of exclusivism, which harbors subdued fanaticisms ready to explode when the occasion arises?"
different approach is called for in which the experience of radical difference is able to be incorporated into a wider horizon of understanding. Panikkar submits that we need a new *mythos* which affirms the pluralistic nature of `ultimate' reality. As *mythos*, it is both unquestioning and unquestionable. However, it does not deny the function of the *logos* and so needs to be able to defend itself from accusations of irrationalism.

The key to Panikkar's `defence' of the pluralistic myth is his nondualistic or *advaitic* approach to truth that looks beyond both unity and plurality to the unique, opaque and non-objectifiable dimension within all and every reality. This, he submits, is the path to authentic pluralism because it releases Being from the strictures of thinking and thus provides a space for transcendence, mystery and freedom in the ongoing cosmic-human-divine adventure. Radical difference need not be a threat to personal identity or planetary human coexistence because `otherness' is the very soul of reality and a dimension of who we are (and of what we are called to be). The myth of pluralism evokes an attitude of trust in `otherness' that transcends, without denying, the radical differences which estrange us.

In a word, the myth of pluralism creates a space for real freedom by delivering existence from the confines of thought, thereby opening our hearts as well as our minds to grace, surprise and the movement of the Spirit.\(^58\) This

\(^58\) In other words, there is always place for Freedom, Spontaneity, Creativity, a New Innocence -- room for poets and artists, for beauty, the unexpected, the surprise, *ananda.* "The Unknown Knower," 159. In a somewhat earlier and different formulation, Panikkar stated: "the Word without the Spirit is certainly powerful but barren, and the Spirit without the Word is certainly insightful but impotent." "The

© Gerard Hall. *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism.* Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
makes possible those ultimate human intuitions and authentic religious manifestations that are "jumps in the being of `being'." Reality, being pluralistic at this ultimate level, is not given once and for all;\(^{59}\) it is ever growing, changing, expanding, becoming something `other'. In order to `know' this reality, we must `participate' in its movement. In this sense, pluralism is a call to forego rigid or dogmatic stances regarding the nature of truth in order that we may freely (that is, divinely) participate in the "rhythm of Being." To live under this myth is to live out what Panikkar perceives to be the contemporary vocation.

Nonetheless, Panikkar's articulation of the mythic foundations of pluralism invites us to consider the role of the *logos* and, in particular, his foundational hermeneutic of *religious* pluralism.

**HERMENEUSIS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM (Logos)**

Evidently, Panikkar's insight into the pluralistic nature of reality is fundamentally a *religious* intuition.\(^{60}\) We now further investigate its religious

---

\(^{59}\)See, for example, "The Jordan, The Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness," 91.

\(^{60}\)Panikkar defines metaphysics as "that discipline which accepts both a human capacity for thinking the supraempirical and the reality of the supraempirical itself. It is also ontology or the power of thinking `being'." "Religious Pluralism," 101. However, as we have seen, Panikkar contests the Enlightenment's metaphysical assumption of the harmonious correlation between `thinking' and `being'. This is primarily a `religious' insight insofar as it articulates his own response to the nature of `ultimate' reality.

© Gerard Hall. *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism.* Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
implications, not least because "religions are the natural place for ultimate issues."\textsuperscript{61} We begin by examining Panikkar's refined views on the nature of religion and religious experience. This exposes the problem of religious pluralism as an intellectual challenge that does not admit to a purely intellectual solution. In this context, we survey various approaches to religious pluralism that Panikkar expounds and critiques on the basis of the pluralism of truth and the \textit{dialogical character} of being.

We then proceed to explore his notion of \textit{diatopical hermeneutics} as a \textit{nondualistic} response to the challenge of religious pluralism and as a practical hermeneutics for interpreting across religious boundaries. In particular, we reflect on the understanding of language and the role of interpretation or judgment within Panikkar's diatopical programme. Our excursus shows that this foundational hermeneutic of religious pluralism does not rely on the \textit{logos} alone, but in the interaction between \textit{logos} and \textit{mythos} which, in turn, provokes new modes of \textit{symbolic} disclosure.

\textbf{Religion and Pluralism}

Panikkar defines religion as "the set of symbols, myths and practices people believe gives ultimate meaning to their lives."\textsuperscript{62} The emphasis here is on the 'believing' factor or the personal dimension of religious experience. He further

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 97.

\textsuperscript{62}"Religion," he says, "is always personal and necessarily includes the belief of the person. . . . Religion is never just an objective set of values." Ibid., 98f.

\textcopyright Gerard Hall. \textit{Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism}. Ch. 5 "Panikkar's Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism"
refines his notion of `belief' according to mythic, symbolic and intellectual modes of discourse. This enables him to distinguish between a religion's basic experience, its symbolic expressions, and its intellectual content or the interpretation given to the experience and its expressions.63

The notion of basic experience (Grunderfahrung) is the significant category for locating the uniqueness of each religion, the roots of religious conflict and the ground of religious pluralism. A basic experience is a foundational myth or a primordial apprehension associated with the revelatory moment of a religion's origins. It conditions believers' ultimate convictions concerning the nature of reality. Otherwise stated, the basic experience is the `depth' dimension `behind' any religion; it is mostly spontaneous, often uncritical and largely unselfconscious. In a pluralistic situation of cross-cultural and interreligious encounter, the uniqueness of any religion's basic experience will become apparent:

Religions offer the locus of ultimate truth and point the way to it. They do not speak about it directly, but a certain primordial apprehension of reality stands at the basis of each religion. When these fundamental insights are spelled out in a universe of discourse, we discover divergent conceptions of reality. . . . Delete the effective presence of the ancestors and many American and African religions collapse. Suppress historical consciousness and Christianity loses its bearings. Destroy karma and many an Asian religion is crippled.64

63Elsewhere, Panikkar distinguishes between the `experience', its `expression' and its `interpretation' which correspond to the `mystical', the `sensory' and the `intellectual' stages of consciousness that, nonetheless, have an `underlying unity'. "The Supreme Experience," 300-302.

64"Religious Pluralism," 97f.

© Gerard Hall. Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
On the basis of this insight, we may add that to negate the importance of the material world, to suppress the significance of lineal time, or to destroy the ultimacy of human dignity, freedom and justice, would be tantamount to eradicating secular `religious' consciousness. These fundamentally divergent and disparate conceptions of the universe, although inseparable from their expressions in symbol and language, are ontologically prior to both. Accordingly, Panikkar's notions of religion and religious experience give priority to the *mythos* or the *sui generis* experiences underlying the religions.

Consequently, the ground of religious pluralism is situated in the uniqueness of each tradition's foundational experience insofar as it continues to impact on the faith, lives and world-views of those who `belong to' and `believe in' its mythic power. However, as long as these primordial apprehensions remain primordial and non-conceptual, religious pluralism is not (yet) a problem. It is when these apprehensions are brought to consciousness in language and thought, combined with the realization that there are multiple religious forms, that we are confronted with the question of religious truth and the challenge of religious pluralism:

It is the diversity and discrepancy of those primordial apprehensions, rendered visible through the intellectual expressions of them, that pose the problem of religious pluralism. . . . Religious pluralism would not present a major difficulty were it not for the intellectual dimension of religion. Symbols, myths and practices do not have any claim to universality.

Evidently, Panikkar recognizes that religious pluralism is an intellectual problem: “the question of truth is primarily a question of the intellect and for the

---

65Ibid., 99 & 101.

© Gerard Hall. *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*. Ch. 5 “Panikkar's Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
intellect." Nonetheless, he insists that religions cannot be validly reduced to their intellectual expressions. The ambiguity of the challenge of religious pluralism rests here: "it has to take a stance among allegedly contradictory religious intellectual affirmations" while simultaneously recognizing the intrinsic limitations of rational enquiry and logical discourse. The problem thus stated, Panikkar proposes and assesses six possible options.

The first position states that only one religion, or group of religions, is true. Although rational and coherent, it cannot explain why the criteria for judging truth belong to one group but not another; and it implies a denial of the non-rational dimension within human and religious experience.

The second axiom claims that all religions are ultimately true which, apart from being indefensible on rational grounds, treats religious paths as unimportant, falling thereby into relativism.

The contrary axiom—all religions are equally false—is already a religious statement and so contradicts itself. Insofar as this axiom points to the inadequacy of religions and the dark side of religious history, it recognizes only what most religions accept within themselves as a call to purification.

The fourth position defends a subjectivist stance: religion is a private affair. Panikkar says that such a statement is irrational because it lacks any criteria for

---

66Ibid., 99. Here, he defines truth as "that quality or property of reality which allows things to enter into a sui generis relation with the human mind and which finds its main expression in human language."

67Ibid., 100f.

68For Panikkar's presentation and critique of the first five positions, see ibid., 101-107.
making judgments. It also errs by confusing the 'personal' dimension of religion (which Panikkar accepts) with socio-historical and metaphysical 'privacy' (which Panikkar denies).

The fifth answer states that religions are historical constructs which, Panikkar says, can be accepted in what it affirms but must be rejected in what it denies "ultimately because humankind is more than history." By definition, religions are historical and cultural products claiming to deal with ultimate or sacred reality. Therefore, to reduce transcendence to history, or to equate the divine call with a merely human urge, is to beg the very question of the distinctive reality of 'religious' truth.

In turn, Panikkar finds these five positions with regard to religious pluralism one-sidedly dogmatic, relativist, irrational, subjectivist and historicist. His critiques of these usual ways of handling religious pluralism reveal the inadequacy of all universalist approaches. Furthermore, they all defy "the golden rule of hermeneutics" which states that the interpreted (religion) must be able to recognize itself in the interpretation.69

Clearly, any attempt to explain religious pluralism according to a universal theory of religion(s) will result in the imposition of one particular framework or mental scheme on the religious 'other' without reference to the other's self-interpretation: fundamental religious differences will be substantially ignored; and religious experience will be interpreted according to preconceived, inappropriate and even unrecognizable categories. Panikkar perceives the need

---

for a totally different approach if one is to make an authentic response to the challenge of religious pluralism. This approach will need to be grounded in the pluralistic mythos of the way that ultimate reality is. It will therefore need to proceed according to the nondualistic or advaitic path of knowledge.

The nondualistic proposal begins with the affirmation of each religion's fundamental uniqueness and incommensurable insights. The notion of incommensurability means that "the religious truth of a particular tradition can be only properly understood within the very tradition that has elaborated it." Panikkar is neither assuming nor artificially creating an "objectifiable common ground" that would attempt to unite religions at the level of theory. We recall that, for Panikkar, reality neither is nor needs to be totally intelligible:

The ideal is not seen in a universal theory, but in an ever emerging and ever elusive myth that makes communication, and thus mutual fecundation, possible without reducing everything to a single source of intelligibility or to mere intelligibility. The very theory is dialogical. In a word, the dialogical character of being is a constitutive trait of reality.

This dialogical character of being neither assumes nor requires rational consistency as its foundation. To the contrary, says Panikkar, "religious pluralism recognizes the authenticity, validity and truth of different religions

---


71"The Pluralism of Truth," 15. This eradicates, for example, any possibility of a 'neutral' stance or the epoché method of phenomenology. See his "Epoché in the Religious Encounter," The Intrareligious Dialogue, 39-52.


73"The Invisible Harmony," 142.
once their mutual incompatibility has been established on solid rational grounds."  

Accordingly, he proposes, religious pluralism does not emanate from an intellectual supersystem which takes a stance somewhere outside or beyond the religions themselves. Implied here is a critique of his earlier position in Religion y religiones and The Unknown Christ of Hinduism which seemed to suggest that all religions are heading towards the same eventual goal.  

He now suggests that even the eschatological consolation is a subtle form of monism and, thereby, "a sin against human dignity."  

Since truth is pluralistic and reality dialogical at the ultimate level, we must move beyond all such idealizations and simply accept that "the other is also a source of understanding."  

For Panikkar, this signals a radical awakening in human and religious consciousness. It also presents us with the major hermeneutical challenge of religious pluralism.

**Diatopical Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutical theory has identified the phenomenon of the *hermeneutic circle* which recognizes that all growth in human understanding already presumes an at least initial pre-understanding of the particular phenomenon that is to be understood. As Panikkar suggests, "we understand because we are

---


75Panikkar’s notion of the historical and eschatological convergence of religions is discussed in Chapter Three.

76"Religious Pluralism," 109f.

77Ibid., 109-111.
within a hermeneutic circle."\textsuperscript{78} Now, once we accept that truth is pluralistic, and that other religions live under "a different mythos or horizon of intelligibility," we are forced to ask a poignant question: "how can we understand something that does not belong to our circle?"\textsuperscript{79} Or, again, how can we meet the challenge of interpreting across religious and cultural boundaries where common patterns of intelligibility cannot be presumed?

In order to meet these challenges, Panikkar introduces his notion of \textit{diatopical hermeneutics}.\textsuperscript{80} He explains:

We do not assume here any hermeneutic circle. We create that circle through the existential encounter. We do not start a dialectical dialogue, which accepts \textit{a priori} some rules before the dialogue takes place. The theory here cannot be severed from the praxis... It is only in doing, the praxis, that diatopical hermeneutics functions.\textsuperscript{81}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{78}"What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?" 130.

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80}Panikkar distinguishes between \textit{morphological hermeneutics} (the study of different 'forms' within a single tradition), \textit{diachronical hermeneutics} (the study of a single tradition at different historical 'times') and \textit{diatopical hermeneutics} (the study of 'other' cultures and traditions). Etymologically, this amounts to the recognition that the human spaces (\textit{topoi}) are different, not only human time (\textit{chronos}) or forms (\textit{morphoi}). "Cross-Cultural Studies: The Need for a New Science of Interpretation," \textit{Monchanin} 8:3-5 (1975): 12-15.

In the following chapter we turn to a \textit{rhetorical} discussion of Panikkar's hermeneutics. We note here that the \textit{topoi}, the human spaces, are precisely the common places of rhetoric through which Panikkar aims to address and convince his audience.

\textsuperscript{81}"What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?" 132-134. Panikkar's notion of \textit{radically different} hermeneutic circles is in marked contrast to the normal western assumption of an \textit{a priori} hermeneutical and historical relationship among different religions, cultures and peoples. In this sense, Panikkar's later hermeneutics reflect the postmodern critiques of \textit{grandes histoires}.

We return to this discussion in the concluding chapter, but note here that Panikkar's emphases on `difference' and `absence' do \textit{not} correlate with the...
Diatopical hermeneutics begins with the recognition that the pain of estrangement between two people, religions or cultures cannot be overcome through the imposition of one's particular thought-categories on the other. Nor is one to engage in the "deadly game of domination by comparison" that uncritically assumes that there is some "higher viewpoint" by which all religions can be judged or compared.

As distinct from the comparative method, diatopical hermeneutics uses 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." Here, dialectical procedures are inoperative and normal grounds for argumentative discourse are yet to be established. Accordingly, Panikkar speaks of the need for dialogical dialogue whose primary task is to establish an horizon of encounter in which mutual understanding can take place.

---

82"To cross the boundaries of one's own culture without realizing that another culture may have a radically different approach to reality is today no longer admissible. If still consciously done, it would be philosophically naive, politically outrageous and religiously sinful." Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics, 9.


85"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
foundational *praxis* or *communicative action* cannot base itself on prior rules of interpretation which would be to assume an already-existing hermeneutic circle. Consequently, diatopical hermeneutics cannot be universal. Its interpretative procedures must emerge from the dialogue itself.86

Nonetheless, in order for diatopical hermeneutics to function, Panikkar nominates certain "indispensable prerequisites." These are:

- a deep human honesty in searching for the truth wherever it can be found;
- a great intellectual openness in this search without conscious preconceptions or willingly entertained prejudices;
- and finally a profound loyalty towards one's own tradition.87

On this basis, he believes that it is possible to enter a *dialogical dialogue* which aims at "convergence of hearts, not just coalescence of minds."88 He further describes the dialogical experience in terms of:

- piercing the *logos* in order to reach that dialogical, translogical realm of the heart (according to most traditions), allowing for the emergence of a myth in which we may commune, and which will ultimately allow understanding (standing under the same horizon of intelligibility).89

Within this newly-formed horizon, interreligious understanding takes on the character of a *founding religious event*.90 Here, one understands precisely because one believes in the truth of the experience. As Panikkar says, quoting thus come closer to his own realization." *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 91.

86"What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?" 133.


88"The Invisible Harmony," 142. Panikkar adds that "there is always place for diversity of opinions and multiplicity of mental schemes of intelligibility."


90For elaboration on this theme, see Krieger, *The New Universalism*, 49.
Aquinas, "to believe is to understand" or, in other terminology, "to understand is to be convinced." A revelatory event or religious experience does not require an independent and outside arbiter to validate its truth-claims: only those who 'believe' this kind of truth 'know' its transcendent source.

Nonetheless, when it comes to the interpretation of the dialogical encounter, one is now confronted with the finitude that characterizes any hermeneutic. For diatopical interpretations, Panikkar says that the following features apply: they are open and provisional; they are critically aware of the contingency of their own assumptions; they recognize the presence of limited and unexamined presuppositions; they are constitutively ready to question their most basic foundations; they make the search for a primordial common ground their first thematic concern; they systematically attempt to take into account the universal range of human experience; and they are constitutively open to the insights of ongoing dialogical dialogue.

What distinguishes diatopical hermeneutics from other hermeneutical approaches is that the shift in horizontal understanding, or what amounts to the experience of 'conversion', becomes an explicit thematic concern. This accounts for the importance of intra-religious dialogue that Panikkar perceives

---


92"Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion," 373-375; "What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?" 127-129.

93See Krieger, 51f.
as the *sine qua non* of inter-religious encounter.94 Without a deep understanding of--even 'conversion' to--one's own tradition there is simply no possibility of encountering another at a *religious* level.95 Second, the attempt to understand the religious `other' requires a further conversion or horizontal shift that includes the other's self-understanding. This `second' conversion is the *sine qua non* of grasping "what the other thinks about himself."96 It is also the crux of the "hermeneutical problem," as Panikkar explains:

We could sum up the hermeneutical problem with the following affirmation: the correct interpretation of another religion demands that interpreters be convinced of the truth of that religion (from which the believer lives) and, therefore, that they undergo a certain conversion.97

Consequently, the emergence of the *new horizon* of meaning within the dialogical encounter requires both the movement `inwards' and the crossing `over'. This, in turn, leads to a `third' integrating moment, or what Panikkar calls the *intrareligious soliloquy*.98 The third moment is the focal point of diatopical

---

94Panikkar describes the intrareligious dialogue as "an inner dialogue within myself, an encounter in the depth of my personal religiousness, having met another religious experience on that very intimate level." *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 40. Elsewhere he states: "We should begin by living, knowing and experiencing our own tradition, or particular sub-tradition, as intensively and deeply as possible." "The Invisible Harmony," 138.

95Panikkar has always maintained that the interreligious encounter must be truly a *religious* one, See, for example, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 26.

96"Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion," 372.


98He says that "my *intrareligious soliloquy* will have to blend my earlier beliefs with those acquired later, according to my lights and conscience." *The Intrareligious*
hermeneutics. Here dialogic partners seek to interpret the conversion experience that accompanies the formation of the new horizon. In the interreligious context, conversion is understood as the process of self-realization and self-transcendence through the integration of the other's religious experience into one's own `world' of religiously-mediated meaning.99

Presupposed here is the possibility of the radical transformation of `world' or `horizon' incorporating the three levels of intellectual, sensory and mystical consciousness. However, diatopical hermeneutics does not privilege intellectual conversion (the realm of `belief' or logos). It focusses, rather, on the affective dimension of conversion (the realm of `faith' or mythos) and its realization through the power of both `word' and `symbol'.100 In this way, diatopical

99At this point, one could contrast Panikkar's emphasis on `integration' and `dialogue' with Lonergan's emphasis on `distinction' and `dialectic'. Nonetheless, in direct reference to Panikkar, Lonergan admits the importance of moving beyond `dialectic' to `dialogue', from the procedure "that is concerned with human subjects as objects" to one in which "human subjects are concerned with themselves and with one another." See Lonergan, A Third Collection, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York & London: Paulist Press & Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 68-70 & 159.

100For Panikkar, "experience is to be considered ultimate because experience means immediate contact with the real." Furthermore, "any experience--sensory, intellectual or spiritual--in fact functions as a myth." However, it is the symbol that carries the responsibility for mediating between the mythos of faith and the logos of belief. "The Supreme Experience," 298, 296, 301.

Krieger takes this discussion further in suggesting that the `object' of diatopical hermeneutics is actually the symbol itself. I prefer to say that the `object' is the total (interreligious) experience including its symbolic and linguistic expressions. Otherwise there is the danger of dissecting the "underlying unity of the three stages of consciousness and the three modes of realization." For Panikkar, ibid., 301; for Krieger, The New Universalism, 64.

Again, Panikkar's emphasis on the affective and symbolic dimensions of conversion makes for an interesting contrast to Lonergan who gives priority to the

© Gerard Hall. Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
hermeneutics seeks to make intelligible the possibility of genuine communication between radically different worldviews or religions without having to resort to rationalist and imperialist methods.

Two further questions emerge from this discussion: the first has to do with the role of language in interreligious encounter; the second with the place of judgment in diatopical interpretations.

Language

We begin with the role of language, noting how modern hermeneutical theory stresses its intimate relationship with understanding. In terms of the specific tasks of interreligious dialogue, Panikkar recognizes the need for a "common language" if there is to be "common ground" for mutual understanding. The enemy to be avoided is "linguistic imperialism." The ritual advocated is that of allowing a new language to emerge from each dialectical and intellectual foundations of conversion. For Panikkar, ibid., 291-317; for Lonergan, Method in Theology, 237-266.

101 Panikkar places himself in the tradition of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. See, for example, "Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion," 369 & 382. The interrelationship between Being, Understanding and Language is summarily presented by Gadamer: "Being that can be understood is language." Truth and Method, 432. Panikkar also shows his reliance on the work of Ortega y Gasset who, "almost half a century earlier (than Gadamer) said that language is precisely 'that into which being is translated.'" See his "The Texture of a Text: In Response to Paul Ricoeur" in Point of Contact 2:1 (1978), 55.

102 "Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion," 368f.

103 Linguistic imperialism is described as "the belief that monolingualism is a sufficient point of departure from which to understand the human phenomenon." "Neither Hindu nor Christian," 484.
particular encounter, all the while recognizing that no authentic language can be the result of an artificial creation.\textsuperscript{104}

In contradistinction to the idea of a "universal language," which is imposed from the outside, Panikkar speaks of a "primordial language" which arises naturally and spontaneously from the praxis of dialogical dialogue:

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.\textsuperscript{105}

This "primordial language" is also the primordial myth or "ultimate human horizon" of transcendence or mystery. Its symbol is the word which, unlike the term, cannot be artificially invented or manipulated.\textsuperscript{106} Nor does the word disclose its mystery once and for all, but only as a particular insight or a moment


\textsuperscript{105}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.

In the concluding chapter, we show that there is marked similarity between Panikkar's and Gadamer's eschatological hopefulness in the trustworthiness of language. For both Panikkar and Gadamer, language is ultimately self-correcting.

of truth. Yet, its power is unmistakable which is why the advent of the word must be preceded and followed by silence, and why its communication-appropriation is a fully religious act, an epiphany, a revelation.

Panikkar's notion of a primordial language recognizes that living words and concepts are subject to processes of transformation, growth and osmosis in the changing world of human and religious life-forms. This is pre-eminently the case in a pluralistic world where there is the continuous intermingling of languages, cultures and traditions. The challenge is not to inhibit the flow of language or of life, but to participate in their movement in such a way as to overcome the mortal split between spirit and word.

Panikkar holds that the dialogical dialogue is the privileged or sacred place for the realization of this task—providing that the dialogic partners are mutually committed to the imparative method of listening to the `other' and to `otherness'.

Panikkar's ultimate trust in reality translates into an ultimate confidence in the transformative and expressive power of language within the intersubjective, intersignificative context of the human and religious universe. More generally, Panikkar states that "history witnesses a migration of symbols in the life of civilizations and also within a single religious tradition." "Rtatattva: A Preface to a Hindu-Christian Theology," Jeevadharana 9: 49 (Jan.-Feb. 1979): 6-63; citation, 33.

Rahner's theology of human existence places a similar stress on this fundamental human task of refusing to say `no' to grace or to God (understood as "the transcendental horizon of our freedom"). Ultimately, for both Rahner and Panikkar, existence itself is the "symbolic presencing" of God's Word. See, for example, Rahner's discussion on human guilt, Foundations of Christian Faith, 90-115.

---

107 Panikkar gives the example of the word grace which, he says, has changed in the modern Roman Catholic understanding so that, today, it expresses "an at least analogous concept found in some Asian religions." "Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religion," 369.


108 Rahner's theology of human existence places a similar stress on this fundamental human task of refusing to say `no' to grace or to God (understood as "the transcendental horizon of our freedom"). Ultimately, for both Rahner and Panikkar, existence itself is the "symbolic presencing" of God's Word. See, for example, Rahner's discussion on human guilt, Foundations of Christian Faith, 90-115.

© Gerard Hall. Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism. Ch. 5 “Panikkar's Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
interreligious experience.\textsuperscript{109} Quite evidently, the "common universe of discourse" is specific to each interreligious dialogue; it neither wishes nor pretends to be a "generally human," "purely rational" or "universally valid" religious discourse.\textsuperscript{110} The emphasis on a "primordial language" reflects Panikkar's emphasis on participatory knowledge and truth as manifestation.

\textit{Judgment}

Nonetheless, we have also seen that diatopical hermeneutics is concerned with both \textit{understanding} and \textit{interpretation}.\textsuperscript{111} This raises the question of any final criteria for human judgment in diatopical interpretations. If there is no outside fulcrum, "universal language" or "absolute truth" for resolving interreligious disagreements, what is the ultimate basis of verification?

\textsuperscript{109}Panikkar's trust in the revelatory power of language is closely aligned to Heidegger's notion of \textit{Dasein} and Gadamer's belief in the communicative and linguistic power of the tradition. See Panikkar, "The Threefold Linguistic Intrasubjectivity," 593-606. This issue will be taken up in the final chapter.

\textsuperscript{110}These terms are created by Swidler in his attempt to describe his "Ecumenical Esperanto." See his "Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue," \textit{A Universal Theology of Religion}, 20.

\textsuperscript{111}Panikkar says that "any authentic religious dialogue dispels misunderstandings from both sides and calls for rectifications and new interpretations." "The Invisible Harmony," 139.

His distinction between \textit{understanding} and \textit{interpretation} is the distinction between the fully human act of knowing--"to stand under the proper context of a text, so that the text becomes intelligible without need for translation"--and the critical act of reflection on the act of knowledge--"to interpret . . . is to bridge, at least reflectively, the distance between the text and the context of the interpreter." In the context of interreligious dialogue, the 'text' becomes the dialogic partner. See "\textit{Rtatattva}: A Preface to a Hindu-Christian Theology," 10. See, also, Paul Ricoeur's \textit{Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning} (Fort Worth, Texas: Christian University Press, 1976), esp. 71-88, for a similar emphasis on the need for both \textit{verstehen} and \textit{erklären}. We extend this discussion in the concluding chapter.
Panikkar perceives the key to this dilemma in his notion of the "radical relativity" of truth:

Truth is constituted by the total relationship of things, because things are insofar as they are in relation to one another. But this relationship is not a private relationship between a subject and an object. It is a universal relationship so that no private individual or closed group can exhaust the relationship. . . . There is no such thing as private truth. . . . Truth is not an immutable or absolute quality totally objectifiable in concepts or propositions independent of time, space, culture and people.112

Apart from accepting the insight of secular hermeneutics into the contingency and finitude of all human judgments, the radical relativity of truth becomes its own criterion. Panikkar explains this by saying that "when this constitutive relativity of truth is hampered by isolating it from this total relationship we fall into error."113 This means, for example, that the sect-mentality, by refusing to engage in relationship with others, condemns itself.

We may summarize Panikkar's truth-principle by saying that openness to dialogue is the measure of the truthfulness of any religion or worldview. According to this principle, one absolutizes neither truth nor error since human judgments are always relative. Moreover, the relationality of truth means that truthfulness cannot be contained in any particular human comprehension of its meaning. Nor are goodness and evil totally within our intellectual grasp, though both are real and need to be humanly negotiated. Panikkar remarks that "it is the very pluralism of the real that gives evil all its tragic consequences."114

---

113Ibid.
114Ibid.

© Gerard Hall. Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
intellectual beings, we have to make judgments but "we do not absolutize our opinions, or identify our being with our 'thoughts'." Diatopical hermeneutics situates human judgments and interpretations within the wider horizon of knowledge and understanding that surpasses all thought.

This does not mean that Panikkar rejects categories other than "radical relativity" for establishing the relative adequacy of human judgments of what is true, beautiful and good. However, by emphasizing the 'relative' side of the 'adequacy', he reminds us of the historical, temporal and cultural presuppositions that enter into all human judgments. Such a reminder is all the more important when dealing with people’s 'ultimate' religious or ideological convictions, as the testimony of history shows. Moreover, in providing an eschatological horizon under which all human judgments need to be situated, Panikkar challenges the assumptions of liberal philosophies of progress that perceive present-day values as inevitably more inspired--and, therefore, more true--than those of our human and religious ancestors.

* * * * *

Essentially, Panikkar's hermeneutic of religious pluralism is a regional and finite activity. It does not seek to be an overarching interpretation of all religions, but a diatopical method of communicative action that enables different religious worldviews and incompatible systems of thought to meet at the dialogical table. Here, "the meeting ground itself may have to be created," and this is possible

---

115 The Invisible Harmony," 147.
116 Metatheology as Fundamental Theology," 331.
because of the religious intuition—or mythos—that affirms an order higher than the intellect. Accordingly, diatopical hermeneutics fully acknowledges the intellectual difficulties associated with the meeting of religions. Because it takes these difficulties seriously, it searches for another way in which religions can meet. This can only be the way of praxis that implies an act of trust, a leap of faith, and a willingness to undergo a certain conversion.

The dialogical dialogue is primarily a meeting at the level of shared religious experience (through mythos and symbol) that is subsequently brought to the level of interpretation and critical reflection (through the logos). The process is akin to a revelatory experience or even a founding religious event: divine truth is here manifested as the "discordant concord" or "mysterious harmony" that interrupts all prior claims regarding the nature of ultimate reality. This "interruption" provokes new experience, understanding and interpretation of transcendence and immanence, thought and life. The distinguishing feature of diatopical hermeneutics is the thematization of this process in which new horizons of understanding and new possibilities for reality are brought to consciousness.

117 Panikkar says that there is an "almost universal conviction that reality is ordered—in other words, is good, beautiful, and true." He adds that, according to most human traditions, this is recognized as a "divine Reality." In this, he also wishes to contest the cartesian assumption of the convertibility of "the true and the one." "The Invisible Harmony," 144.

118 Panikkar remarks that "confidence in truth is already a fundamental religious category." "Metatheology as Fundamental Theology," 331.

This is called a foundational hermeneutic of religious pluralism because it reflects on the mythic, symbolic and logical foundations that are required for genuine communication among the religious traditions. The burden of the communication rests on the symbol which mediates between the two other worlds of mythos and logos. This is why Panikkar perceives the hermeneutic task in terms of aiding new forms of symbolic disclosure. Accordingly, we now turn our attention to the cosmotheandric symbol which is the primary manifestation of authentic religious pluralism in Panikkar's later writings.

THE COSMOTHEANDRIC SYMBOL \textit{(Pneuma)}

Almost two decades ago, Panikkar first presented his "cosmotheandric vision of reality . . . (as) a wholistic and integral insight into the nature of all that there is." At the outset of this study, he explains:

The mystery of the Transfiguration could stand as the symbol of this study. Nothing is despised, nothing left over. Everything is integrated, assumed, transfigured. Nothing is postponed into the future: the whole presence is here. Nothing is put aside as non-redeemable: the entire body as well as past history is integrated. Transfiguration is not an hallucination of some nicer reality or an escapism into a higher plane. It is the total integrated vision of the seamless garment of the total reality: the cosmotheandric vision.


\bibliographynote{Ibid., 19.}
Although he does not refer explicitly to the cosmotheandric vision as symbol, our contention is that it becomes his primary mode of symbolic communication through which the pluralistic mythos (the way that reality is experienced) is translated into the logos of speech (the way that reality is talked about).\footnote{In this context, Susanne Langer states that “speech is, in fact, the readiest active termination of that basic process in the human brain which may be called symbolic transformation of experiences.” She adds: “In the fundamental notion of symbolization . . . lies a new conception of `mentality’, that may illumine questions of life and consciousness, instead of obscuring them as traditional `scientific methods’ have done. . . . Symbolization is the essential act of mind; and mind takes in more than what is commonly called thought. . . . Symbolization is pre-rationative, but not pre-rational. It is the starting point of all intellection in the human sense.” Philosophy in a New Key, 3d. ed. (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1957), 44, 25, 41f.}

Consequently, we begin with some preliminary remarks on the function of symbol insofar as this is pertinent to Panikkar’s cosmotheandric reading of reality. Then, under the twin headings of "The End of History" and "The Creation Story," we situate Panikkar’s cosmotheandric symbol as an appropriate response to historical and biblical accounts of the way that reality discloses its meaning for humanity today. In part two, under the heading of "The Radical Trinity," we examine the cosmic, human and divine dimensions of the cosmotheandric symbol. Here, Panikkar establishes a trinitarian reading of the universe that emanates from the religious traditions and yet extends their truth and meaning towards new horizons of understanding. In this context, we show that the cosmotheandric symbol represents both continuity with, and radicalization of, Panikkar's earlier notions of a trinitarian and pluralistic universe.
Symbol and Reality

As symbol, the cosmotheandric vision cannot be totally objectified in the manner of a logical assertion or a theoretical proposition. One has to `enter' the symbol in order to understand its meaning. The cosmotheandric `symbol' arises from the dialogical experience of cross-cultural and interreligious encounter and cannot be communicated or appropriated without that experience. Otherwise, it is converted into some kind of universal theory, or perhaps an ineffectual sign, but is certainly not what Panikkar intends, namely, a revelatory insight into the `whole' divine-human-cosmic reality.

Moreover, the symbol is not reducible to the ineffable world of transcendence or mystery: its ontomythical character means that it also has roots in the concreteness of one's life-world. The symbol is related to the `whole' without losing its tangible connections with one's `particular' reality. In this sense, the cosmotheandric vision is Panikkar's symbol of the `whole' which emanates from his own `particular' experience. We know already that it will not `speak' to those who live within a fundamentalist horizon--in its multifaceted forms--nor, indeed, to those who search for monistic or dualistic answers to the pluralistic problem. Here, we present Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision as a symbolic disclosure of truth or a `breakthrough' in human consciousness that

---

123See Ricoeur's notion of symbol in which this dimension of rootedness in the concreteness of one's life-world distinguishes the symbol from the metaphor. "Symbol and Metaphor" in Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, 45-69.


© Gerard Hall. Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism. Ch. 5 “Panikkar's Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
`speaks' from the often-hidden heart of all human and religious traditions. From Panikkar's perspective, this vision also responds to the new challenge of `otherness' that pervades the world of our times.

If symbolic disclosure is capable of moving hearts and minds, this will be in response to some implicit or explicit felt-need. Specifically, new symbols arise in response to new needs. Panikkar interprets the contemporary crisis of identity and meaning in terms of a "crisis of symbols."\(^{125}\) Accordingly, new symbols are required in order to mediate this crisis-point or transformational moment in human existence.

Moreover, Panikkar says that such transformation is both subjective and objective: it represents a change within human experience and awareness; and it indicates change within reality itself. For example, Panikkar speaks of "a real mutation in the overall dynamism of reality."\(^{126}\) Little wonder, then, that traditional religious symbols fail to `speak' to many contemporaries. However, for Panikkar, a crisis-point is literally a kairos-point, providing new opportunities in the ongoing "adventure of Being".

Our interpretation suggests that Panikkar is not presenting the cosmotheandric vision as the only valid symbol of emerging reality. Such a position would fail to perceive that all symbols are temporally bounded, contingent, finite. In our view, Panikkar is equally concerned to lay `open' the space from which other integral and wholistic symbols of reality may emerge.

\(^{125}\) Man as a Ritual Being," 6.

\(^{126}\) He states explicitly that "a change in consciousness also implies a change in reality." "Colligite Fragmenta," 33.
We also note that his *presentation* of the cosmotheandric principle functions as a didactic instrument for challenging worn-out interpretations of traditional myths and symbols. The focus of our presentation is on the power of the cosmotheandric symbol to disclose new religious meaning in the context of the contemporary challenge of pluralism.

*The End of History*¹²⁷

Panikkar offers a phenomenological analysis of the contemporary situation in terms of the experience of personal dislocation, spiritual impotence, psychological alienation, cultural disorientation, social disintegration, religious crisis and estrangement from nature. Many people, for example, have become aware of the possibility of planetary and even cosmic destruction.¹²⁸ However this world-shattering `reality' is expressed, there is an increasing conviction that,

---


¹²⁸ Panikkar discusses the possibility of the annihilation of Being in the context of the relationship of Being and Time. His discussion leads him to the conclusion that, while humanity may well indeed cause the `disappearance' of Being, there would always remain `time-past' when Being `was'. Consequently, Being can never be `annihilated'. See his discussion of "The Survival of Being" in "The Rhythm of Being," originally presented as "The Trinity and Atheism: The Dwelling of the Divine in the Contemporary World," *The Gifford Memorial Lectures University of Edinburgh April-May 1989*, edited for forthcoming publication by Scott Eastham [computer discs], chap. 9.
by themselves, the religious and cultural traditions are incapable of providing a constructive and coherent response to the current world-situation.\textsuperscript{129}

This signals what Panikkar terms "the end of history." As used by him, such a phrase is not intended as an apocalyptic pronouncement of impending disaster. Rather, it describes the mutation of the type of linear consciousness that has dominated western civilization. This consciousness is essentially one-dimensional: time, space and nature are 'there' to be conquered as "historical Man" marches into the future, exploits the earth, and discards (or at least largely ignores) 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. Few today remain convinced that historical consciousness provides a meaningful ethos or a comprehensible worldview.\textsuperscript{130} Consequently, for Panikkar it is not history, but historical consciousness, that is coming to an end.

The experience of the "end of history" is also an experience of the loss of "former innocence." Its radical impact on human consciousness is captured by Panikkar in the following fable:

Once upon a time there 'was' a Man. This Man had lived consciously for millenia. 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

\textsuperscript{129}Panikkar himself expresses this by stating that "no single human or religious tradition is today self-sufficient and capable of rescuing humanity from its present predicament." "The Invisible Harmony," 143.

\textsuperscript{130}For a more specific understanding of ethos and worldview as applied to religious meaning, see Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-126.
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.131

Panikkar's fable speaks not only of the collapse of historical consciousness. It also provokes the possibility of a "new innocence."132 However, this does not-and cannot--imply a return to an earlier mode of consciousness. Panikkar knows that any programme for the remythicization and resymbolization of reality must "use today's living myths as reference points and as our horizon of intelligibility."133 Nonetheless, he is not content to narrate "the modern scientific story" as if the scientific world-view gave a privileged perspective.134 To the

131 Man as a Ritual Being," 5f.

132 Also see Paul Ricoeur who speaks of the possibility of a "second naiveté" which "aims to be the post-critical equivalent of the pre-critical hierophany." The Symbolism of Evil, trans. E. Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 352.


134 While generally positive in his assessment of the work of Thomas Berry, Panikkar suggests that his attempt to formulate a new myth on the basis of the scientific mythos is insufficiently radical. "The Emerging Mythos" in "The Rhythm of Being," chap. 8.
contrary, Panikkar perceives the emerging myth as one which "breaks out of all previous cosmologies" through gathering and integrating insights from all traditions.¹³⁵ In his view, no fundamental human attitude, including pre-modern or pre-scientific ones, can be ignored.

In fact, Panikkar identifies the scientific moment as but a single phase in the life of reality. His major critique of the scientific myth is that it ignores the central experience of the great majority of humankind. Being a product of historical consciousness, the scientific worldview is also one-dimensional. As such, scientific stories tend to relegate both the divine and human realities to a position of ultimate insignificance.¹³⁶

Panikkar prefers to tell the story of reality as the "dynamic unfolding of Being" according to the "three kairological moments of human consciousness."¹³⁷ These are identified, respectively, as pre-historical, historical and trans-historical modes of consciousness.¹³⁸ In this "story-telling,

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶In fact, Panikkar states, the major weakness of the scientific myth is is not its denial of God, but its apportioning humanity with such little significance. Ibid.

¹³⁷Panikkar claims that he bases this presentation on the "diachronical and diatopical experience of cultures and peoples." He states, further, that these "three kairological moments of human consciousness . . . should not be interpreted chronologically. . . . They are qualitatively different, and yet intertwined, aspects of human awareness which certainly co-exist in the unfolding of individual and especially collective life." "Is History the Measure of Man?" 39.

¹³⁸Readers will soon recognize that these three kairological moments of human time-consciousness correspond to the three approaches to ritual behavior--heteronomic, autonomous and ontonomic--of Panikkar's earlier writings. These are discussed at some length in the previous chapter under the heading of "Ritual and Transcendence."
cosmotheandric awareness emerges as the trans-historical resolution to the collapse of historical consciousness. Rather than rely on shifting theories of science, Panikkar prefers to use age-old biblical accounts of creation as a way of evoking transformative symbols for our time.

*The Creation Story*

By turning to the story of the Creation—"one of the most universal myths of all times, East or West"—Panikkar aims to establish redemptive possibilities in the collapse of historical consciousness. Since no single mode of human consciousness can ever be all-encompassing, its passing does not spell inevitable disaster. To the contrary, it may well indicate new and creative possibilities. Panikkar tells the creation story as a way of inviting us to appropriate the cosmotheandric symbol.

Corresponding to the *primordial moment* of "the Abyss, the Beginning, the God, the Void, the Non-being," is the *ecstatic moment of pre-historical consciousness* which is essentially undifferentiating, pre-reflective knowledge. The vision of reality is *cosmocentric* since everything real is located in space (reality is spatial rather than temporal). Gods, mortals and

---


140 In *Colligite Fragmenta,* 35.

141 See "The End of History," 35-64.
nature live together in a hierarchical universe, but they are not yet divided into separate worlds.

This latter task belongs to the *enstatic moment of historical consciousness* corresponding to the *creative act* when "the One becomes the hidden source and produces multiplicity."\(^{142}\) In anthropological terms, the prior sense of the unity of things gives way to the process of discriminating, individualizing, subject-object knowledge. Human intelligence and scientific procedures are highly rated in the *anthropocentric* vision of reality.

Initially, it is a period of wonderment, excitement and discovery as humanity, "under the spell of the future and the guidance of reason,"\(^{143}\) takes over the controls in order to 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 certainly real but is now reduced to the status of inanimate matter, an `object' of human enquiry and exploitation. This splintering of reality under the guise of analytic, scientific and reflective thinking brings us to the end of the modern age with its acute sense of alienation and the realization that there are limits to thought and consciousness.

Also evident today is a new awareness of the limits of nature symbolized in "the splitting of the *atomos* (which) has also exploded historical consciousness."\(^{144}\) In the mythic terms of the creation story, this is the third

\(^{142}\) *Colligite Fragmenta,*" 35.

\(^{143}\) *Is History the Measure of Man?*" 40.

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 42. In this regard, note the remark of Albert Einstein who stated in 1954 that "the unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe." Cited by Scott

© Gerard Hall. *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism.* Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
movement--the experience of *the Fall*. Panikkar interprets the Fall as the human, cosmic and divine urge for reintegration, fulfillment, salvation or redemption. However, this can only be achieved through the crucible of purification which demands the ritual of sacrifice. Panikkar interprets ritual-sacrifice in terms of the continuation of the original creative act.\(^{145}\) Consequently, far from being a negative blight, burdening humanity with guilt and passivity in the face of sin and evil, the Fall is an invitation to sacrificial, redemptive and creative action. This is the venture of a *new innocence, transhistorical consciousness, tempiternal life, the cosmotheandric experience*.

In his latest writings, Panikkar speaks of the "*Radical Trinity*", providing us with fitting categories for situating and detailing significant elements of his cosmotheandric symbol.

**The Radical Trinity**

At an initial level, the cosmotheandric insight acknowledges its assumption: reality exhibits a triadic or trinitarian structure.\(^{146}\) Panikkar holds this to be an

---


\(^{146}\)This has been a consistent theme of Panikkar's evident in his earliest philosophical and theological writings. See above discussion in Chapter Two.

© Gerard Hall. *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
invariant of human culture.\footnote{We note here that Panikkar extends the significance of the "cosmotheandric insight" to include all human cultures as well as religions.} His insight into the "radical trinity" is the central feature of his cosmotheandric vision of the universe:

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. . . . 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.

By way of emphasis, Panikkar adds:

I am not only saying that everything is directly or indirectly related to everything else: the radical relativity or \textit{pratityasamutpada} of the Buddhist tradition. I am also stressing that this relationship . . . flashes forth, ever new and vital, in every spark of the real.\footnote{\textit{Colligite Fragmenta," 74.}}

In another formulation, Panikkar speaks of freedom, consciousness and matter which penetrate into--and radiate out from--the very heart of everything that is.\footnote{\textit{Religious Pluralism," 112.}}

In essence, this cosmotheandric vision transcends all conceptions of a universe that is divisible according to three separate worlds or realms (the mathematical-tripartite model). The relationship is much more intimate, vital, . . .

\footnote{\textit{There is a non-ontological dimension of reality (freedom, nonbeing, silence . . .) and also an opaque one (matter, energy, world . . .), besides the proper human dimension (consciousness, mind)."}}

In using such language, Panikkar does not mean that matter is totally identified as opaqueness, humanity as consciousness, or divinity as freedom. As we shall see, he rejects this mathematical-tripartite model and insists that every created form or manifestation is \textit{intrinsically threefold}, possessing matter, consciousness and spirit. In this manner, he hopes to overturn neo-platonic and dualistic thought-processes.
symbolic, sacramental. The three dimensions of reality, however they are defined according to different cultural and religious traditions, are held to be present within every being because they are constitutive of (all and every) reality. We now examine each of these dimensions while recognizing that, for Panikkar, they exist only in interrelationship with each other.

**Cosmic Matter**

Panikkar insists that there is something `more' than pure materiality to the `life' of a simple stone.\textsuperscript{150} Through its existence in space and time, the stone is connected to the entire universe (not just the earth) 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.\textsuperscript{151} Moreover, science itself is on the way to recovering something of this `lost' insight through its recognition of


\textsuperscript{151}Ibid. Panikkar claims to use the symbol of *anima mundi* according to "the traditional insight (that) sees the entire universe, and not the Earth alone, as a living organism which constitutes a Whole--(and) of which the human being is the root metaphor." He alludes to examples from the Rig Veda, St Paul (the Mystical Body), Chinese, Buddhist, African and Native American traditions. Use of such litanies or historical *exempla* for persuading the reader of the veracity of the "cosmotheandric symbol" provides grounds for a rhetorical reading of his works such as we attempt in the final chapter.

the indeterminacy of matter, the open-endedness of space, and the indefinability of time. Panikkar's cosmotheandric claim is more daring still. If "every individual being is theanthropocosmic . . . (then) each 'member' of Reality 're-members' and reflects the Whole" according to its trinitarian nature. Consequently, 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'.

To return to our example: the stone is a physical, empirical, spatio-temporal, contingent entity. Its evident materiality is there for anyone to see and touch. Now, our observation that the stone is 'there' already introduces a further and non-material dimension of the stone which Panikkar calls consciousness.

---


Stephen Happel's rhetorical reading argues that Hawking's metaphors lead toward a deconstruction of time, whereas Davies' metaphorizes narrativity. Happel, "Metaphors and Time Asymmetry: Cosmology in Physics and Christian Meanings" (Private Manuscript, Catholic University of America, 1991). In our reading, Panikkar's 'metaphors' of temporality and tempiternity are more closely aligned to Davies' narrative and teleological understanding of time.


Obviously, he is not saying that the stone is conscious or aware in the way that humans are; but its uniqueness or identity as stone already includes an ability to be known, to be thinkable, to be brought into consciousness. By virtue of this power-of-connection with human awareness, matter is said to display a conscious dimension.

More surprising, perhaps, is the affirmation that "matter is co-extensive with the divine."\textsuperscript{156} Here, Panikkar is recognizing the dimension of mystery or freedom which, he says, is constitutive of any real being. This is the discovery that there is something unknowable, unthinkable, uncanny or inexhaustible which, in our example, 'belongs' to the stone \textit{qua} stone. 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 (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.\textsuperscript{157}

In Panikkar's terms, matter is said to be \textit{tempiternal}, both temporal and co-eternal, at once contingent and yet inseparable from the divine (or unnameable) mystery.\textsuperscript{158} Evidently, different cosmologies and theologies will explain the connection between \textit{cosmos} and \textit{theos} in different ways: but they are not

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{157} See, for example, "Colligite Fragmenta," 75.

\textsuperscript{158} While mainly reliant on the hindu notion of "eternal recurrence," Panikkar also alludes to christian notions of "\textit{creatio ab aeterno}" and "new creation" to provide insight into the \textit{tempiternity} of material/cosmic reality. See "The Cosmotheandric Invariant" in "The Rhythm of Being," chap. 6.
separate entities; one is not without the other. And there is neither without *anthropos*.

**Human Consciousness**

In similar fashion, Panikkar reads the three organs of human experience--aesthetic, intellectual and mystical--as corresponding to the three dimensions of the cosmotheandric reality. He perceives that technocratic culture reduces human life to two levels (the sensible and the rational), forgetting if not despising the `third' realm (the mystical). The `third' realm is not a rarefied psychological state (a "mystical vision"), but a `further' dimension within all human awareness insofar as the experience is truly human. At times--and, he stresses, in "ordinary experiences"--the mystical dimension will come to the fore as a moment of realization that a certain 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 act enacts the theanthropocosmic 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

---

159 Panikkar’s earlier attempt to formulate an "integral anthropology" according to the intellect-will-senses triad is superceded here on account of the need to show the theanthropocosmic correspondence. This represents a development--or a spiralling--in his thought. See Chapter Two above.
The anthropological implications are significant because they provide a more comprehensive platform from which to critique the reductionist definition of the human being as a (merely) rational animal. The cosmotheandric insight stresses human identity with the worldly character and temporal nature of the cosmos; it also manifests a human openness towards the divine, supra-rational and infinite mystery that *ipso facto* transcends human thought.

Importantly, the basis of these 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 the evolution of matter, passing egos in the flow of time, or temporary insertions in the expansion of space. While the experience itself does not (scientifically) ‘prove’ the existence of a transcendent other, let alone the validity of any particular religious or mystical tradition, no authentic understanding of the human being can afford to ignore this mystical dimension of human experience with its (perhaps non-thematized) transcendent claim residing at the heart of every non-rationalist, human tradition. With reference to human subjects, these traditions affirm that consciousness and matter are not all that there is.

*Divine Freedom*

Language emerges as an acute problem when it comes to speaking of this third dimension. Strictly speaking, says Panikkar, the divine is not an object of

---

our human knowledge. This is the mistake of western thought which begins by identifying God as the Supreme Being (monotheism) and ends by turning God into a human projection (atheism). Consequently, in his latest writings, Panikkar moves beyond God-talk to speak of the divine mystery now identified in non-theistic terms according to the three `features' of infinitude, freedom and nothingness. This essentially trinitarian inspiration takes as its cue the notion that "the Trinity is not the privilege of the Godhead, but the character of the entire reality." In this way, he seeks to overcome the theocentric monopolization of the divine or, in his own words, 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 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

---

161 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." See "The Cosmotheandric Invariant" and "The Divine Dimension" in "The Rhythm of Being," chaps. 6 & 7.

162 Ibid., "The Radical Trinity," chap. 5.


164 Ibid.
irrelevant existence. Sardonically expressed, the divine is not a "Deus ex
machina with whom we maintain formal relations."\textsuperscript{165} 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.\textsuperscript{166}

In this way, Panikkar proposes the cosmotheandric insight as a catalyst for
the "new kosmology" insofar as it moves the debate beyond questions of
monotheism-versus-atheism or theocentrism-versus-anthropocentrism.\textsuperscript{167} The
cosmotheandric or trinitarian symbol provokes the possibility of a non-dualistic
and non-theistic response to the "very rhythm of the whole" that neither
segregates nor ignores the divine.

Clearly, Panikkar's "radical trinity," with its emphasis on the dynamic
interplay of matter, mind and spirit, goes well beyond his earlier use of the
trinitarian symbol for the meeting of religions.\textsuperscript{168} There, he speaks of particular
religions as manifestations of each of the three poles of the divine mystery. In

---

\textsuperscript{165}Panikkar suggests that the divine would have more affinity with the "dancing
God" of Nietzsche. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{166}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 suggests that "these
four traits are mutually incompatible only within the framework of theism. (Hence)
we need to understand them under a more appropriate horizon." Ibid., "Unsatisfactory Theisms," chap. 3.

\textsuperscript{167}For example, with regard to monotheism, Panikkar states that "it is not a
question of saying that monotheism is wrong. I am claiming only that it is an

\textsuperscript{168}See our discussion in Chapter Three.
Paul Knitter's terms, he embraces the theocentric model in which there are "many ways to the (divine) center."\(^{169}\) Such a model welcomes religious diversity and canonizes a place for interreligious dialogue by recognizing some type of "transcendent unity of religions".\(^{170}\)

In significant contrast, Panikkar's radicalized cosmotheandric symbol neither defends some vision of a higher unity nor acknowledges the notion of a center, divine or otherwise: "the cosmotheandric vision does not gravitate around a single point, neither God nor Man nor Cosmos, and in this sense it has no center."\(^{171}\) There are no fixed points because, no less than human life and cosmic destiny, the divine mystery is involved in the ongoing adventure of reality and, as such, is undergoing a profound transformation.

Panikkar acknowledges that this requires a radical rethinking of fundamental categories through which we come to place our trust and confidence neither in a God `above' (theocentrism), the human `within' (anthropocentrism) nor the world `below' (cosmocentrism).\(^{172}\) Rather, "cosmotheandric confidence" is placed in the entire, interrelated, pluralistic

\(^{169}\)Paul Knitter classifies Panikkar's approach as `theocentric' in "The Theocentric Model: Many Ways to the Center," No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 145-157. While this is a fair classification of Panikkar's earlier writings, it does not adequately indicate his "post-secular turn" and his more radical exposition of the "cosmotheandric vision."

\(^{170}\)Panikkar specifically denies that he is defending such a "transcendent unity of religions" in "The Rhythm of Being," chap. 7. Again, he has radicalized his vision in the light of his developing experience and notions of pluralism.

\(^{171}\)Colligite Fragmenta," 91.

reality. In turn, this leads to a sense of "cosmotheandric solidarity," the realization that we are all united in the ongoing adventure--or rhythm--of Being. In this venture, the divine reality is truly free and cannot be manipulated by any specific tradition or ideology.

*     *     *     *     *

We have seen that Panikkar provides a place for rational critique and argumentative discourse (*logos*), but that he is equally insistent on the need for other modes of dialogue and encounter (*mythos* and *symbol*): 173

The cosmotheandric trinity is not an ideology but a myth and therefore does not claim, nor could it claim, to form only one creed, a single religion, an homogenous set of beliefs, a unified world culture, or anything of the sort. A myth allows for communication, for discussion, even for quarrels, and for overcoming misunderstandings. It provides a language, but it does not automatically create unanimity or consensus. A myth is by its own nature polysemic, and therefore not incompatible with pluralism. 174

Such a myth not only allows for, but actually demands, a new experience of reality and new forms of symbolic disclosure through which human existence is opened up to the cosmic and divine dimensions of experience. In Panikkar's view, this requires authentic and creative dialogue among the world's most varied traditions.

173 Again, we may fruitfully point to David Kreiger's notion of three levels of discourse which he attributes in the following manner: argumentative (Habermas); proclamative (Heidegger, Gadamer); and disclosive (Panikkar). *The New Universalism*, 150f.


© Gerard Hall. *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*. Ch. 5 “Panikkar's Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
Cosmotheandric consciousness recognizes and experiences that "we are part of a cosmic venture, a human history and a divine destiny" without privileging any particular dimension of this entire reality. Nor does it privilege any particular tradition. For the christian, this implies not the abandonment of christian consciousness but a deepening of its powerful trinitarian inspiration through the discovery of the forgotten `otherness' of the christian tradition. According to Panikkar, such otherness is only revealed through authentic dialogue with the non-christian other, including its post-christian, secularist and atheistic expressions.

The central cosmotheandric insight is that any tradition must enter into dialogue with its until now often-hidden `other' if it is to be true to its own destiny and to play its part in the full venture of existence. Far from being an "absolutely universal vision," cosmotheandric awareness underscores the fact that there are only `particular'--christian, hindu, buddhist, secularist, . . .--visions of the `whole'. Ultimately, there is no prior solution or preconceived pattern apart from the rhythm of being which flares up and makes its claim upon us in unexpected and ever-surprising ways:

At the crossroads of the present moment we might perhaps realize that the entire enterprise takes a new turn--and here the word is meant to suggest the very rhythm which seems to lie at the core of Reality itself. It is not such a novelty that it represents a total and unthinkable rupture with the past. But it is not merely a continuation either.

175The Rhythm of Being," chap. 7. Panikkar does not preclude the sense of hierarchical order among "ontological priorities," but since every reality is cosmotheandric, no pole of that reality can be isolated (and in that sense privileged). See "Colligite Fragmenta," 97.

There is evident continuity between Panikkar's earlier metaphor of *growth* and his current metaphor of *rhythm*. They both suggest dynamism, movement and harmony among the different dimensions of reality and its pluralistic expressions.

**Summary of Chapter Five**

The major findings of our enquiry into Panikkar's mature writings on religious pluralism are now summarily presented. We then indicate how these writings are essentially continuous with the principles, themes and methods of his earlier interreligious studies.

Pluralism represents a fundamentally new horizon of knowing insofar as the `other' has become a serious question for contemporary humanity. Not only do traditional monistic and dualistic answers fail, but theory cannot replace the need for a new foundational--and pluralistic--*myth* of the way that reality is currently manifesting itself. What is required is a fundamental trust in reality--or a "cosmotheandric confidence." In epistemological terms, this amounts to espousing the nondualistic or *advaitic* method of "participative knowledge" which does not identify being with thought or consciousness. Radically different insights into the nature of ultimate reality are accepted for what they are because truth itself is pluralistic.

Religions are manifestations of this pluralism of truth insofar as they are grounded in primordial experiences that are utterly unique and finally incommensurable with the experiences of other traditions. Consequently, religions meet not in some overarching theory but in the *praxis* of encountering
the religious `other' through "dialogical dialogue." The first concern of "diatopical hermeneutics" is to create the conditions in which that dialogue can take place. First, one must be `converted' to one's own tradition. Second, one seeks to `understand' the other according to the other's self-understanding. Third, on the basis of the new understanding of the `self'--which now includes something of the self-understanding of the `other'--there is need for `interpretation' of this conversion-experience which is akin to a "founding religious event."

Diatopical encounters are founded on attentive listening to the "primordial language" that is `hidden' within every language and `arises' within interreligious dialogue. This is the language of the word that discloses itself as mystery, epiphany, revelation. Here, truth is manifested as a new event of being and understanding. The interpretation of the word is self-consciously finite, contingent and open to further insights. In this sense, judgments of truth and error are never `absolute'. Panikkar emphasizes the "radical relativity" of truth by which he means that truth is inherently relational, processive and responsive to the ongoing movement of Being. This does not oppose the notion of the "relative adequacy" of truth-claims provided that the criteria for judgment are themselves open to further questioning and new revelation of the divine mystery.

The cosmotheandric symbol is Panikkar's most significant attempt to provide new insight into the contemporary meeting of religions and cultures. Underlying this insight is the belief that both human consciousness and reality itself are involved in a process of change, mutation, growth. Consequently, the human experience of being at the "end of history" is an invitation for human and
religious traditions to be open to new manifestations of Being that arise out of the encounter among those traditions. This *cosmotheandric, tempiternal* or *transhistorical experience* `confirms' the pluralistic and trinitarian insight at the heart of all traditions. It also `radicalizes' every tradition as Panikkar's recent metaphors of the "radical trinity" and the "rhythm of being" portray.

Despite significant expansion of his interreligious principles, themes and methods, Panikkar's post-secular (or postmodern) hermeneutics of religious pluralism is essentially continuous with his earlier writings. His *hermeneutical procedures* are now more complex and detailed; they rely on the appropriation of contemporary hermeneutical theory; and they specifically include the insight of secular hermeneutics into the temporality of all interpretations. Nonetheless, the central hermeneutical concern remains: that the 'interpretation' of other traditions requires "dialogical dialogue" as its foundation. Moreover, this becomes, for Panikkar, the overriding religious, human and moral imperative of our times.

The *ontonomic principle* is sharpened and extended through Panikkar's development of the buddhist insight into the "radical relativity" of truth and reality. The "pluralistic myth" emphasizes both the real divergence among traditions and their existential or ontological interrelatedness. We recall that the notion of the "pluralism of truth" emanates from his earlier hermeneutics of classical texts in both east and west. Contemporary dialogue among traditions `recovers' the pertinence of this understanding for humanity today.

Panikkar's insistence on the need for a *nondualistic methodology* shows his continued dependence on the eastern traditions, especially the vedantic *advaita*.

© Gerard Hall. *Raimon Panikkar’s Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*. Ch. 5 “Panikkar’s Mature Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism”
His critiques of monism and dualism are now more pointed. For example, they allow him to 'enter' the postmodern secular world, to accept its historical and temporal insights, and yet to remain critical of the scientific worldview insofar as it denies central validity to the experiences of the great majority of humanity. As with any specific tradition, Panikkar perceives the scientific story as but one among the multiplicity of human stories that have an equal place in any conversation about reality and the destiny of the universe.

The eschatological vision is now expressed in terms of "invisible harmony," "discordant concord," "radical trinity," "rhythm of being". We have described it in terms of "cosmotheandric solidarity". Evidently, Panikkar's initial cosmological, anthropological and theological studies have advanced a long way from his studies of the 1940s and 1950s. Moreover, we have seen that prior to his encounters with the secular traditions, he overturns an earlier notion of the historical convergence of religions into a unified historical expression. The eschatological vision now radicalizes and gives 'ultimate' status to the uniqueness of every human and religious tradition. However, uniqueness does not imply isolation or segregation, let alone stagnation. This leads Panikkar to more radical expressions of the divine mystery that challenge theistic religions to more relational, trinitarian or cosmotheandric expressions.

Evidently, Panikkar's dynamic conception of reality now moves beyond the notion that human consciousness of the divine undergoes transformation. There is significant 'development' in these later writings when we find him asserting that all reality--including ultimate reality--is itself changing. This, of course, is a notion that certain philosophical and theological schools of thought will find
difficult to entertain. We return to a consideration of this issue, along with other `controversial' aspects of Panikkar's mature writing, in our concluding chapter.

In this chapter, our aim has been more limited: to establish an essential coherence in Panikkar's mature hermeneutics of religious pluralism; and to indicate that this hermeneutics is fundamentally consistent with his initial interreligious writings. This provides the foundation for our final chapter which is a dialectical, hermeneutical and rhetorical investigation of Panikkar's dialogical project.