Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism

A DISSERTATION
Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of Religion and Religious Education School of Religious Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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I dedicate this study to my parents
Mary and Joe Hall
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The words *Panikkar* and *pluralism* go hand in hand. Raimon Panikkar was born into a cross-cultural and interreligious family in Barcelona, Spain, 1918, of Spanish, Roman Catholic (mother) and Indian Hindu (father) parents. Currently living in Tavertet, Barcelona, his interim years have seen him study and teach in Spain, Germany, Italy, India, as well as North and South America.

Panikkar’s multidisciplinary, academic background is evident from his three earned doctoral degrees in philosophy (Madrid University 1946), science (Madrid University 1958) and theology (Lateran University 1961). Some of his graduate studies were undertaken at the Universities of Barcelona (Spain), Bonn (Germany), Mysore and Varanasi (India).

His academic positions have been no less varied, including: membership of the Spanish Council of Scientific Research (CSIC); Secretary General to the International Congress of Philosophy; research fellowship at the University of Mysore and Varanasi; professorships at the Universities of Madrid (Philosophy of History and Religious Sociology), Rome (Religious Sociology), Harvard (Comparative Religion) and California (Comparative Philosophy of Religion and History of Religions). He has been visiting professor and guest lecturer at more than one hundred universities throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas.

In 1946 Panikkar was ordained a Roman Catholic priest. In 1954 he left Europe for India where he undertook his studies in Indian philosophy and religion. During his time in India, he was incardinated as a priest in the diocese of Varanasi. Between 1960 and 1963 he studied and taught in Rome. From 1964 until 1971 he divided his time between Varanasi, Rome and Boston (Harvard University). For the next fifteen years, 1971-1986, he was tenured professor at
the University of California, Santa Barbara, while maintaining frequent contact with Europe and India.

Panikkar’s published works include more than thirty books and over three hundred academic articles in a variety of fields from the Philosophy of Science to Metaphysics, Theology, Hermeneutics, and Interreligious and Cross-cultural Studies. Panikkar writes in Spanish, German, French, Italian and English; subsequently, many of these works have been translated into the other languages. However, his early Spanish writings (1940's and 1950's) have not been available to the English reader. One of the aims of this dissertation is to provide some access to this foundational work. My argument is that Panikkar's later writings on interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism emanate from his multidisciplinary foundations.

Some words on Panikkar's publishing history are in order. Earlier articles are often redacted in later publications. The situation becomes further complicated with translations which, often enough, amount to expansions and revisions. Especially in the early chapters of the dissertation, my intention has been to trace back to the chronological beginnings of his significant thought-processes. Limited information on this chronology is provided in the footnotes. In this way, I attempt to locate as accurately as possible the various shifts and turns that are evident in Panikkar's narrative.

These shifts and turns are also evident with respect to Panikkar's choice of name. Most of his publications bear his Spanish name Raimundo; some English works take the Anglicized version Raymond; more recent writings witness to Panikkar’s Catalan-identity in the name Raimon. This knowledge is important for those seeking bibliographical information: library cataloguing does not always indicate that all three names belong to the same person.
The title of this dissertation—*Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*—suggests an interest in methodology and process. The disparate nature of Panikkar's writings, his penchant for creating his own vocabulary, the vastness of his fields of enquiry, and his ever-changing perspectives tend to reduce the accessibility of his work. Even his understanding of the nature of "intellectual activity" sounds strange to western ears. Moreover, his "multireligious experience" has the ring of the exotic leaving many a scholar to dismiss his significance for both christian self-understanding and western academia.

Consequently, my hope is to uncover what is essential in Panikkar's writings without distilling the *texts* of what he says from the different *contexts* of where and why he says it. The major part of this dissertation (chapters two to five) follows a basic chronology or, better expressed, an unfolding of contexts. These contexts are best understood as encounters or dialogues among disciplines, religions and cultures. Each *dialogue* assumes a fundamental continuity with Panikkar's prior experience (or traditions) as well as a freedom and openness to make 'human', 'religious' and 'christian' sense of each new encounter. This dialectic of continuity and discontinuity--or what Panikkar prefers to call *growth* or *rhythm*--forms the fabric of his quest for truth and meaning.

The final chapter of this dissertation reveals my own concern to demonstrate the relevancy of Panikkar's hermeneutics of religious pluralism for western truth and christian meaning. Without reducing the import of his work to western cultural and religious categories, I provide an assessment according to the principles of western dialectics, hermeneutics and rhetoric. In this way, I hope to continue the kinds of dialogues which emanate from Panikkar's own
processes and modes of discourse. I also aim to show that he can be--and needs to be--recognized as an important postmodern theological voice in his articulation of the Christian mystery.

The research and writing of this dissertation has taken place over a period of three years in three different countries, the United States, Canada and Australia. It is written according to United States spelling and word-usage--at least insofar as I have been successful in crossing-over from Australian English. It is also written in inclusive language although, in the case of direct quotations, I have omitted the customary sic. With regard to the capitalization of words such as Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Secularist, Enlightenment, East, West, I have generally opted for lower casing except when the word is being introduced in a chapter or major section, or when the context of its use demands otherwise. In the case of direct quotations, words are left in the casing in which they were originally written.

I express my gratitude to the many people who have assisted me in the writing of this dissertation. Three people are particularly significant: Dr Scott Eastham, Panikkar’s English editor, who introduced me to Panikkar’s thought and continues to nurture my understanding; Fr Robert Vachon, of the Intercultural Institute of Montréal, Canada, who readily gave me access to his extensive collection of Panikkar’s works; Dr Stephen Happel, of the Catholic University of America, who directed my writing, challenged my thinking and proved to be an invaluable guide. I am also indebted to my two readers at Catholic University, Dr Peter Phan and Dr William Cenkner OP.

I was also fortunate in being able to attend Dr Raimon Panikkar’s Gifford Memorial Lectures in Edinburgh, Scotland, April-May 1989. On that occasion, and subsequently in Washington DC, Dr Panikkar was most generous in giving
me his time and the benefit of discussion with him. Naturally, I take full responsibility for the interpretation of his works which appears in the following pages. Nonetheless, it is my hope that Dr Panikkar will "find himself" within this interpretation.

There are others whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged: the faculty of the Department of Religion and Religious Education, Catholic University of America; members of the Australian Province of the Society of Mary, especially Fr Garry Reynolds SM and Fr Anthony McCosker SM (congregational leaders during the time of my doctoral work); Fr James Murphy SM and Dr Mary Eastham (proof-reading); Fr Gerard Moore SM, Mr Ken Johnson SM, Mr Fred Pugarelli and Mr John Toohey (word-processing and printing); Dr Francis Devoy and Dr Francis Lopez SM (dissertation writing-skills); my colleagues and students at the Catholic Theological Union, Sydney, Australia, notably Dr Patrick Fahey OSA, Mr Damien Casey and Ms Anne Tuohy. My thanks to these and other people, at home and abroad, who in various ways provided me with the resources, encouragement and impetus to complete this dissertation. After all, any genuine human enterprise is a pluralistic endeavor and, as readers will hopefully discover, a cosmotheandric activity.

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