Remembering Scott Eastham (1949-2013)

Gerard Hall SM

Note: Scott Eastham’s untimely death on 4th October 2013 was sudden, unexpected and traumatic, occurring during an operation. I wrote the first piece on the following day. The second more considered article was published along with other tributes in a special monograph [CIRPIT Review – details below] to mark the life of Scott, scholar, mentor and friend.

I am writing this without having yet had the chance to really come to terms with news of Scott’s sudden death in New Zealand, yesterday, on the feast day of St Francis of Assisi. Our thoughts are with his wife Mary, their daughters Casey and Alison, as well as son-in-law David, and grandchildren Jordan and Damon.

However, I find myself reflecting on the life of a true scholar, mentor and friend. I first met Scott at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC in 1982. As a Masters student, I enrolled in the “Religion and Culture” Seminar course directed by a then-young lecturer, Dr Scott
Eastham. I soon learnt what a brilliant mind was before me and, before long, who Raimon Panikkar was, what interdisciplinary study entailed, and how the search for intellectual truth, with the right discipline and spirituality, was a pathway to wisdom. Scott was a wonderful lecturer with that all too rare ability to be absolutely excited by the world of ideas and, at the same time, demonstrate their practical, political, ethical and spiritual relevance for our lives.

As a result of the two courses I did with Scott, I resolved that if ever I was to pursue doctoral studies, it would be on the thought of Raimon Panikkar. Only after did I realise I had been privileged to sit at the feet of the best Panikkar scholar in the known universe. After my time at Catholic University, another young student arrived: she was so impressed by Scott, she married him! However, I was not left out of the picture, as I later followed Scott and Mary to Montréal in Canada where Scott was then teaching at Concordia University. I was doing doctoral research on Panikkar at the Intercultural Institute of Montreal and a frequent visitor to Scott and Mary, with their two young daughters Casey and Alison.

In 1989, Scott and I shared a hotel room in Edinburgh for the three weeks of Panikkar’s Gifford Lectures. This was the first time I had met Panikkar in person, attended all his lectures and was gifted to share several meals with two people who inhabited a similar universe, namely Scott and Raimon. The way they interacted, bouncing ideas off one another, “learning through dialogue”, was a privilege for me to witness. Subsequently, Scott, Mary and the girls moved to the Antipodes where Scott gained a position at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. In the mid-90s, with my Mum and Dad, we made a visit and were wonderfully hosted by the Eastham family who later came to Australia to visit me and my parents in Brisbane and Ballina.

Following this, Scott and I were participants in and co-presenters for Panikkar Conferences in Barcelona, Mumbai, Venice, Brisbane and Virginia.
At the Barcelona Conference I remember stating that my paper (the logos) on Panikkar (the mythos) was all due to the power of the communicating symbol, Scott. He felt I was claiming too much, but from my perspective this was and is certainly the reality. Moreover, Panikkar himself told me that nobody truly understood his intercultural and interreligious vision as profoundly as Scott Eastham. This is acknowledged by inference in Panikkar’s final work, *The Rhythm of Being*, which is dedicated to Scott. In fact, it was Scott with his wife Mary and their then-two young children who gave three months living in Tavertet, working on the Gifford Lectures, that enabled this work to finally come to fruition in the eventual publication of the text.

Scott’s amazing record of publications across multiple disciplines—literature, religion, hermeneutics, communications, media studies, film and the arts, philosophy and theology, culture studies and the sciences, ethics and the ecology—set him apart as an original thinker and prophetic voice in the academy and society. For decades, he was editor of the journal *Interculture*. His major works include: *Paradise and Ezra Pound* (1983); *Nucleus: Interconnecting Science and Religion in the Nuclear Age* (1987); *The Medial Matrix* (1990); *The Radix: Revisioning Philosophy* (1992); *The Way of the Maker: Eric Weslow’s ‘Life through Art’* (2002); *American Dreamer: Bucky Fuller and the Sacred Geometry of Nature* (2007); *Biotech Time-Bomb: How Genetic Engineering Could Irreversibly Change Our World* (2009). As well, Scott was major translator, editor and advisor for Panikkar’s English publications. He was also Panikkar’s most outstanding English-speaking spokesperson.

Yet, this is not the time to focus on Scott’s magnificent contribution to the academy in general, or to Panikkar studies in particular. And here I have not even mentioned his more public voice on local radio, in newspapers and social media, which was significant. Now is the time to mourn with Mary and the family for the loss of a uniquely intellectual and
socially conscious human being who developed his immense skills and lived his all-too-short life with enormous passion, profound depth and, until the last, untiring energy. All these were a cloak for love of family, friends and strangers who, with Scott and Raimon, are called to live the “cosmotheandric mystery”.

Finally, I am a little struck that the day of Scott’s death was the feast of St Francis of Assisi who, like Scott, a lover of nature, knew the divine reality is present in all creation. Our prayer is that Scott will come to know that divine mystery in its fullness. But, meanwhile, I and you will still miss him as husband, father, grandfather and friends. And, so, I can do no better than finish with the Prayer of St Francis which captures much of Scott’s own spirit – and concludes with the prayer we all make for Scott, that his dying is a birth to eternal life:

_{Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.}_{
_{Where there is hatred, let me sow love;}_
_{where there is injury, pardon;}_
_{where there is doubt, faith;}_
_{where there is despair, hope;}_
_{where there is darkness, light;}_
_{and where there is sadness, joy.}_

_{O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek}_
_{to be consoled as to console;}_
_{to be understood as to understand;}_
_{to be loved as to love.}_

_{For it is in giving that we receive;}_
_{it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;}_
_{and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen}_

[Gerard Hall SM  5th October 2013]
Scott Eastham, Raimon Panikkar
and the Meeting of Spirits

Pluralisme
The Life and Work of
SCOTT THOMAS EASTHAM
Pluralismo
 다원주의

Gerard Hall SM

Introduction

Let me begin by stating that Scott Eastham was not only or even primarily a commentator on the works of Raimon Panikkar. The fact he has been an outstanding interpreter of and collaborator with Panikkar should not blind us to the reality that Scott was himself a uniquely gifted intellectual with interests and expertise across an amazing range of disciplines including literature, religion, hermeneutics, communications, architecture, science, technology, genetic engineering, media and culture studies, film and the arts, philosophy, theology, ethics, the ecology and the world of nature. This sets him apart as an original thinker and prophetic voice within the academy and society, especially in the way he highlighted the interconnections among these and other fields of enquiry.
A friend and lifelong colleague from their Santa Barbara days, Young-Chan Ro, calls Scott an “alchemist,” noting his literary sensibilities which enabled him to transform abstract philosophical concepts into life through inspiring language of poetic power and aesthetic beauty.\textsuperscript{1} Likewise, we can add that as the alchemist works with various metals, so Scott worked across academic disciplines in his search of life-giving connections between poetry and philosophy,\textsuperscript{2} science and religion,\textsuperscript{3} architecture and nature-studies,\textsuperscript{4} or technology and culture,\textsuperscript{5} to name just a few. Scott described himself as a “lateral thinker” who freely took on insights from whatever academic, cultural, religious or artistic perspective provided – to use an oft’ quoted phrase of his – “light and life”. As the genuine alchemist, others’ ideas and insights are never simply repeated but creatively applied to the new challenges facing our world. This is evident, for example, when he took on the immense topic of genetic engineering and the clash of worldviews.\textsuperscript{6} It is equally evident in the manner that Scott, ever the poetic visionary, immersed himself in the worlds of poetry, art and nature.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{2} For example, Scott Eastham, \textit{Paradise and Ezra Pound} (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983); and \textit{The Radix: Revisioning Philosophy} (Bern: Peter Lang, 1992).
\textsuperscript{3} For example, Scott Eastham, \textit{Nucleus: Interconnecting Science and Religion in the Nuclear Age} (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1987).
\textsuperscript{4} For example, Scott Eastham, \textit{American Dreamer: Bucky Fuller and the Sacred Geometry of Nature} (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2007).
\textsuperscript{7} See, for example, his book of stories and poems entitled \textit{Wisdom of the Fool} (1985); or his edited work on Eric Wesselow’s ‘Life Through Art’ entitled \textit{The Way of the Maker} (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002).
Knowledge and Wisdom

Perhaps the work that gives most insight into Scott’s personal life-journey and academic work – for him these were but two intersecting and inseparable realities – is his essay entitled: “How is Wisdom Communicated?”8 Demonstrating masterful command of western metaphysics, epistemology and the (post-)modern critique of knowledge, Scott hones in on the problem of knowledge in post-industrial capitalistic societies where market forces dominate. Rather than liberate the humanum, Scott shows how epistemologies and the technologies they employ are used as instruments of social control. The voices of cultural critics from the 1960s onwards, such as Jacques Ellul, Jürgen Habermas and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, demonstrate once and for all there is no such thing as “pure facts”: knowledge and information are always mediated and, to that extent, biased and open to manipulation. In agreement with Ivan Illich, Scott points to the manner in which institutions invariably subvert the values they were instituted to preserve. From here it is a small step to the critique of the positivistic philosophy undergirding modern science and so brings to an end the presumption of knowledge as scientific objectivity.9

However, this radical critique does not lead a person of Scott’s intelligence and sensibilities to epistemological agnosticism, relativism or despair. The deconstruction of the tenets of western civilisation leads to the important if largely forgotten distinctions between information, knowledge and wisdom. Scott was fond of the words of the poet T. S. Eliot: “Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”10 As an

9 The insights of hermeneutical, deconstructive and analytical philosophers from Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer to Habermas and Richard Rorty are prevalent in this critique.
expert in media studies, notably articulated in his work *The Media Matrix,*\(^{11}\) Scott was aware that our age is one of information overload. To this he asks salient questions: What happens when one piece of information disagrees with another? Or, more poignantly, when whole areas of human experience and concern do not fit into pre-conceived categories of what is considered significant? What happens when misinformation uncritically bombards media outlets or when communication systems corrode traditional values and ways of life? What happens when information overload and complexity, instead of nourishing human life, lead to paralysis?

From here it is a small step in Scott’s intellectual vision to suggest a way through the quagmire that subverts dominant approaches to organising information and interpreting knowledge. Here, Buckminster Fuller’s notion of *synergy,* Heidegger’s reflections on *language,* Panikkar’s insight into *symbol,* Gadamer’s hermeneutics of *interpretation,* as well as poets, artists, cultural critics and other sources provide Scott with a pathway whose goal is less the dissemination of information and knowledge than the achievement of understanding and wisdom. In a primordial way, the issue is epistemological: how do we know what we know, or think we know? Can we be sure we know anything? Here the radical critique is turned on its head with reference to the existential reality of the human being. The Cartesian split between subject and object is not ultimate or finally meaningful as the basis for human life since we are all inserted into a network of relationships.\(^{12}\) Moreover, as Scott ably demonstrates in his work *Nucleus,* science itself now recognises there are limits to analytical


\(^{12}\) This is the ‘knowledge’ of poets, artists and ordinary people; moreover, it is the insight of such philosophers as Martin Heidegger and Ortega y Gassett and the likes of scientist-artists as Buckminster Fuller. See, for example, *The Media Matrix,* 43-46.
thought and scientific knowledge. What is required is a more holistic perspective in which the linear model of understanding (subject-knows-object) is encompassed by a more integral pathway that assumes the meaningful interrelationship of human beings with the entire cosmos (subject-participates-in-the-whole).

Lest this be seen as an invitation to embrace any particular theistic belief—recalling the scriptural injunction that “fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10)–I am reminded of Scott’s one foray into theological hermeneutics where he stated: “I am neither a theologian nor a biblical scholar, nor have I ever been able to sustain much interest in religious institutions as such.” However, to this he adds that his interest is in the “depth dimension of the human being,” or again, “I am a longstanding student of the religious dimension of the human being, and of the symbols through which that ultimate dimension expresses itself in art, literature, myth, history, media and culture generally.” In this regard, Scott’s focus on the ‘religious/depth dimension’ of the human person and the search for wisdom situates him in the classical philosophical tradition (literally love/‘philo’ of wisdom/‘sophia’). However, Scott also realised that today’s search for wisdom necessarily occurs in an evolutionary world of profound flux and disconnections, a universe in which the old cosmologies have collapsed with the new only now in the throes of birth.

In such a world, this leads to the double question of where wisdom is to be found and how it is to be communicated. In his earlier life, as a then-young student in “Cross-Cultural Studies” (directed by Raimon Panikkar at Santa Barbara), Scott resembled many of his generation in the West who reacted against its colonial, military and capitalistic excesses by turning to

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13 The finite and provisional character of human knowledge is explored in reference to the emerging cosmology of relativity and quantum physics, and the principles of complementarity (Niels Bohr) and indeterminacy/uncertainty (Heisenberg). See Nucleus, 79-81.


15 The Media Matrix, 36.
Indigenous, Eastern and other traditions with their life-giving stories, exotic rituals and perceived more profound sense of the cosmic mystery.\(^1\) However, this cross-cultural dialogue was not to remain one-way. Students from other cultures questioned Scott about the “sacred sources of meaning” in his own tradition. Admitting a kind of religio-cultural amnesia, Scott says he became aware that, whether he wanted to be or not, he was a westerner and heir to the Christian tradition about which he was largely ignorant!

Moreover, he states, he then began a journey of seeing himself through the eyes of others. It was also the beginning of the realisation that wisdom is not the preserve of any particular religion, culture or civilisation, but integral to the ‘depth dimension’ of human life expressed through each tradition’s sacred symbols. However, as symbols live, so can they die!

Scott does not so much answer the question of how wisdom is communicated as he provides us, through his life and studies, with a template for communicating wisdom through depth engagement with one’s own tradition in context of encounter with the insights of other traditions. As an example, through his interest in Ezra Pound, Scott discovered and was ever fascinated by Chinese poetry which, among other things, he reads in connection with Irish literature (James Joyce), communications studies (Marshall McLuhan) and quantum physics (Heisenberg & Bohr).\(^2\) While it would be difficult to find anyone with such a sustained and coherent critique of the distortions of western culture, Scott’s life was a painstaking effort to unearth that culture’s depth dimensions through interdisciplinary studies, and to find its sources of regeneration in relationship to other traditions.

The subtitle of his work Nucleus, “A Declaration of Interdependence” (in this case between science and religion), is a good point to acknowledge the manner in which Scott and Raimon are related, interdependent, creative spirits.

\(^1\) This is the story that Scott recounts in his “Resurrection of the Word,” 169-171.
\(^2\) The Media Matrix, 40-43.
Scott & Raimon: The Cosmotheandric Experience

In one of his final pieces on Panikkar’s life and writings, Scott suggested that Panikkar can be read with reference to three different worlds or circles of engagement.18 The first, what Scott calls the “Orthodox Panikkar,” looks ‘inward’ at the man and his works, especially the dialogue among religious traditions; the second, “Heterodox Panikkar,” moves ‘outwards’ to extend the dialogue among multiple cultures and traditions; the third, “Unorthodox Panikkar,” is the more radical cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogue which, inspired by the vision of the whole, looks ‘beyond’ including special concern for the wisdom of the earth. While one may associate Scott’s own work mostly through the third circle of engagement, in reality he is one of the few, in my view, to demonstrate expertise in all three Panikkar worlds.

In his Introduction to The Cosmotheandric Experience,19 Scott provides insight into Panikkar’s thought through symbols of dance, music and rhythm. There is always more to the dance than any single dancer or group of dancers, just as there is more to life than any single or number of individual traditions, cultures or religions. Yet, each tradition with its dance, music and rhythms is faced with the reality of “a world wracked by conflict, split by seemingly insurmountable barriers of language, culture and religious tradition, ripped apart by apparent dichotomies of belief, ideology and worldview.”20 It is also a world, says Scott, in which we can “begin to hear the cries of the poor, the persecuted, the women, and all the cultures long trodden underfoot in the global march of Western ‘progress’.”21 Caught between conflicting worldviews and irreconcilable ideologies there is, to use Scott’s metaphor of the evolving dance, an emerging multicultural,

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20 Ibid., v.
21 Ibid., vi.
multireligious experience that neither eschews the music of one’s own tradition nor refrains from the invitation to dance new rhythms to music not heard before.

In this manner, Scott introduces us to Panikkar’s notion of *cosmotheandric* experience as a middle way born of his (Panikkar’s) own life adventure. It is neither a new theory nor an exotic kind of new religion, but the attempt to provide a new horizon of understanding which is able to embrace ideological divisions between theism and atheism, karma and history, science and religion. Moving beyond (without ignoring) the encounter of religious traditions, Scott shows how *The Cosmotheandric Experience* is an interdisciplinary study seeking to provide a path for the “‘Integration of Reality’ at ‘The End of History’.” This is a vision, intuition or mystical kind of experience born of the fruits of intercultural encounter. Here the three worlds – above, below and in-between; God(s), humanity and cosmos; mystical, noetic and aesthetic; body, mind and spirit; divine, human and earthly – are recognised in their interrelationship thereby overturning the evidently unsatisfactory monisms or dualisms that tend to dominate intellectual thought and political praxis.

Scott’s own love for nature and appreciation of the reality that to be human is to be rooted in a particular place and tradition sees him follow the then-aging Panikkar to the home of his birth, Catalunya. It was here in Tavertet (where Panikkar is now buried) that Scott, ably assisted by Mary with her then two young children, worked with Panikkar for three months in the summer of 1990 on editing the Gifford Lectures—enabling the eventual publication of this work (some twenty years later after much re-editing) as *The Rhythm of Being*.22 Just as Panikkar returned to the earth of his childhood, Scott himself developed more intensely and extensively what Panikkar termed ‘ecosophy’, literally the wisdom of the earth, and the

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22 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010). Panikkar dedicated this, his final major and surely most important publication, to Scott Eastham.
notion that all things are intrinsically interconnected. He associates this with the ‘unorthodox’ or ‘applied’ Panikkar which opens up not only to the wisdom of the earth, but also to the wisdom of Indigenous cultures that understand the earth as sacred. Scott affirms the ecosophic and cosmotheandric insights, even if not called such by name, of many interdisciplinary scholars such as noted anthropologist Gregory Bateson and eco-psychologists Theodore Roszak and Daniel Smith. At both popular and academic levels, Scott continued – and no doubt continues – to inspire ecosophic thinking and action in New Zealand and beyond.

Raimon came from an older, more classical Christian-Spanish world in a time of upheaval, namely Franco’s republic. He was evidently a very ‘religious’ person who was ordained a Catholic priest as a member of Opus Dei. His path to the cosmotheandric experience was first through encounter with Hinduism (the religion of his father) and then Buddhism (initially through his experience in India). Raimon’s life adventure brought him into contact with other traditions, notably the secular-humanist tradition of the West (especially following the late-1960s move to USA). When the young student, Scott Eastham, arrived at his lectures in Santa Barbara in the 1970s, he was looking beyond the West to find the sources of his liberation. Ironically, as indicated above, it was through his encounters with people of other traditions he was forced to see his own with new eyes, as partly through the eyes of Raimon with his notion of ‘sacred secularity’. Thereafter, without reducing his post-modern critique of the distortions of the West, he continued to develop the realisation that only in the encounter of traditions, East and West, North and South, theistic, atheistic and non-theistic, and especially with the traditions of ignored or repressed peoples and the voice of the earth itself, as with the insights of multiple academic disciplines, will the cosmotheandric experience emerge.

23 Scott develops aspects of this in his “The Unorthodox Panikkar,” in Dreaming a New Earth, 32-39.
Conclusion

Scott’s life was one in which his knowledge of multiple fields of enquiry, from religion to science, architecture to ecology, technology to art, philosophy to poetry, media to culture studies and much more, continues to astound me. Moreso, his ability to make vital connections between such multiple and diverse fields is his signature gift. Just as he believed in the absolute necessity of ongoing intercultural and interreligious dialogue, he showed the way in which interdisciplinary studies can be realised. For this, of course, he paid the price in the sense that he, the true intellectual (which Scott always understood the genuine radical), deeply questioned the academic system which, like Western culture itself, is far too single-sighted and narrow-visioned. Consequently, the professor of interdisciplinary studies and the masterful exponent of the cosmotheandric vision, was never adequately acknowledged by the Academy. At one level, this did not concern Scott who was, after all, finally dedicated to the dissemination of knowledge and wisdom. One trusts that the publication of this book, acknowledging his amazing contribution to the getting of wisdom, will see his gifts appreciated not only by Panikkar scholars (his high status is not in question there) but by the wider academic world and beyond.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the meeting of spirits – and Spirit – between Scott and Raimon was due to the powers of the imagination that both possessed in abundance. It is an imagination that both sees through the inadequacies of much contemporary life and yet is inspired to see and provoke a world of other possibilities. Whether we call this imagination cosmotheandric or otherwise, it is finally a poetico-religious vision into the depth dimension of our lives: “music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all.”24 Equally, Scott and Raimon were explorers of the sacred in life startling us with their knowledge of the sciences and human traditions, and

inspiring us to look beyond to the meeting of heaven and earth in the ‘tempiternal’ present where they continue to reside.

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Scott leading a prayer of remembrance for the recently deceased Roger Rapp at the Panikkar and Indigenous Spiritualities Conference, Brisbane Campus, Australian Catholic University, June 2010.