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# **Cosmotheandric Vision - A Call To Integration: *A Tribute To Raimundo Panikkar***

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**Abstract:** Raimundo Panikkar proposes a cosmotheandric vision of reality which integrates the essential elements of reality, and thus is global, holistic and original. It synthesizes the best in the East and the West. Panikkar provides a new understanding of ecology, proposes a new anthropology, and offers a new understanding of matter, the world, and time, and provides a new outlook on human work.

**Keywords:** cosmotheandric vision, mystery aspect, integration, symbol, holistic perspective, ecosofy, re-visioning, time.

## **Introduction**

Every age is blessed with great personalities. However, it is rarely honoured with great thinkers whose vision makes an influence in the society at large. Raimundo Panikkar was a great visionary and thinker whose ideas have made deep impact on the thinking patterns of contemporary society. The cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar cuts across the barriers of time and distance, caste and creed, science and religion, sacred and secular. Any view that compartmentalizes reality, whether philosophical, theological or scientific, cannot explain reality meaningfully. However, in the cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar, the uniqueness of each dimension of reality, namely Divine, human and cosmic is properly

upheld and meaningfully explained. One dimension is not exalted at the cost of the other, nor is it reduced to the other. Panikkar has articulated well the relation between these dimensions of reality and the “mystery aspect” of their interrelation without confusion. The beauty of the cosmotheandric vision lies in its affirming the uniqueness and the indispensability of the Divine, the human and the cosmic. This triadic notion constitutes reality and makes it real. That means, one dimension cannot be parted from reality without annihilating reality itself. Reality is neither *one* nor *many* but *polarity*. In this holistic vision, all the three dimensions of reality – Divine, human and cosmic – are equally important and in that way, every being is Trinitarian. The nature of reality is polar and each pole is constitutive of the “whole”. This intuition results from a mystical experience in which knower, known and knowledge meet.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I shall analyse the cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar and its relevance to the present life situation.

#### **A. A Call to Integration**

The cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar opens up a new horizon of understanding that extends to all levels of life. It touches every core of reality and enhances a basic confidence in reality. Dynamic with playfulness and filled with great insights, his vision covers a breathtaking range – encompassing many disciplines, the entire globe, and the sweep of history. His writings have subsumed natural science, philosophy, theology, history of religions, hermeneutics and many other allied disciplines. The depth

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, ed. Scott Eastham, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1983, p. 72

of Panikkar's thought is immeasurable. Its internal dimensions are so vast and dizzying and always appear beyond reach. Panikkar is at once a philosopher, a scientist, a theologian, and a mystic. However, even with these terms we cannot capture the heart of Panikkar's vision. Though we approach Panikkar's vision with the available tools of these different disciplines, still it eludes our immediate understanding because of its originality and incomprehensibility. Panikkar's vision is a revelation to all those who view reality with their coloured eyeglasses of partial worldviews.

The crisis we face today is threefold, namely, the ecological predicament, the humanistic crisis and the theological dilemma. The one-sided anthropocentric worldview, which is controlled and carried by reason, made us forget the interconnectedness of reality. We fail to make a synthesis among the different spheres of life because of our lack of patience empowered by reason, and overconfidence that originates from sensory knowledge. What is at stake then is a satisfactory and sufficient account of reality, an integrated understanding of the Divine, the world and the human. We see this division in all areas of life, the body-soul split, the sacred-secular bifurcation, the God-world-human separation, the past-present-future partition, science-faith severance, worship-work segregation, etc. In this situation, Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision urges us to make a complete transformation, which removes the dichotomy and fragmentation and helps us view reality as an 'integrated whole' that accommodates the human, the cosmic and the Divine. *Panikkar's vision attempts to overcome the absolute instrumentalization of the world, fragmentation of the human and the meaninglessness of the Divine.* His

vision seems to stretch beyond the rational and tends towards the intuitive realm that gives us a mystical orientation and insight. His words are evocative in the realm of the spirit.

## **B. Global and Holistic Perspective**

Panikkar's vision opens up new horizons of wholeness and inter-mingling. Humans can no longer live in splendid isolation without having contact and communication with one another. To live in geographical boxes, closeted in the neat compartments, segregated into economical capsules, cultural areas, racial ghettos, separated by the citadels of caste-superiority have become the things of the past.<sup>2</sup> One example may support this: over a century ago, only a very small percentage of people moved more than a hundred miles from their birthplaces. The modern technologies have made travel easier and in a matter of hours, we can travel across the seas, in and around the world. This has made possible not only the intermingling of peoples, but also the coming together of cultures and values.<sup>3</sup> A good number of contemporary western youth are irresistibly attracted to oriental spiritualities, while oriental youth are also fascinated by the western life-style and culture. The

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel-A Meditation on Non-violence" in *Cross Currents*, 29 (Summer 1979), p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, "Indology as a Cross-Cultural Catalyst", *Numen* 18 (December 1971), p. 175. Hereafter, this article will be referred to as "Indology": "Geographical boundaries are rapidly losing their importance as barriers to the spread of cultural values: not only are gadgets diffused all over the globe within a few years of their invention: popularized ideas from all the continents are now travelling at the speed of light to the furthest corners not only of the world but also of the human psyche."

African drums are invading western music, and western technology invades Africa and Asia.<sup>4</sup>

Panikkar analyses the present day situation with factual evidences. In his writings, the contemporary situation is pictured very well. Panikkar strongly believes that “the time for one-way traffic in the meeting of cultures and religions is, at least theoretically over.”<sup>5</sup> For him, each culture has a proper place in the globe and has something to offer for the other. In this way, Panikkar’s vision accommodates everything globally and interconnects everything with the thread of non-dualism (*advaita*). *Panikkar’s vision stands as something that overcomes not only the dichotomies spawned by compartmentalisation (including the body-soul split) but also the estrangement of human and nature and the dualism of God and the world.* The Divine, the human and the cosmos become less and less real because of human blindness to see the unity in the mere apparent diversity. This fragmentation of seeing and knowing becomes the fragmentation of reality itself. For example, the myth of space and time: the myth of space with its threefold division of ‘God above’, ‘human in between’ and ‘underworld below’ needs to be re-interpreted. The myth of time with its stringent division of ‘past, present, future’ stands in need of new hermeneutics. In this situation, Panikkar’s vision provides a unified and integrated perception of reality. Underneath the diversity of common experience, Panikkar discovers a rhythm of harmonious oneness which weaves together the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, “Cross-Cultural Studies”, *Monchanin* 50 (June-December 1975), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, London, Paulist Press, 1978, p. 99.

inner vitality of life and reality. Panikkar realizes the beauty of this interrelatedness that brings everything to a concordance.

### C. A Vision of Originality

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision stands as a vision of life, which results from his urge to encompass, become, and to live reality to the fullest.<sup>6</sup> We can trace this interest to get immersed totally in life, right from his early years. His concern was always to have communion with reality and to have a grip of it, not only with the intellect but also with the whole person. This can be seen in his way of treating the ultimate questions of reality with the total participation of his person rather than explaining in a merely theoretical way.<sup>7</sup> We can see that the cosmotheandric vision is the crystallisation of his thinking.<sup>8</sup>

The total involvement of his person is manifested in his writings and ideas. He does not want to separate his "personal life" and "professional occupation." He confesses that he has chosen both the paths of a

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, tran. Annemarie S. Kidder, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993, p. 90: "As long as I can remember, I have felt a great need to encompass reality, or better, to become reality- to live."

<sup>7</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 90: "Thus all my life I have been dealing with ultimate questions-not in a purely theoretical manner but by fully participating in them as person."

<sup>8</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, pp. 4-5: "For well over fifty years I have been thematically concerned with the problem spelled out in this book...my lifelong fondness for synthesis, theandricism, myth and apophatism, all vouch for this attitude which I now formulate as a hypothesis..."

specialized academic and an a-cosmic monk because he sensed the attractive and appealing power of both. For him, a professor is not a businessperson but a “confessor” who makes a confession about his own life. Moreover, in his opinion, a monk is not a loner of *monachos*, but one struggling to be unified within. So, he views his vocation as a struggle to make a synthesis which is all-embracing and wholesome. In this regard, his vision is the reflection of his personal life itself, which originates from his own struggle to understand reality. Therefore, his writings are his “confessions” concerning his internal struggle for unity and synthesis, and the accomplishment of his vocation as a professor and a monk.<sup>9</sup>

His life can be seen as the fulfilment of his words: “In order to be authentic, the experiment must be also an experience; it must originate in the deepest corners of ‘one’s personal’ being.”<sup>10</sup> He himself acknowledges the excruciating tensions he has gone through and the “existential risk,” he has taken to articulate his vision that does justice to reality.<sup>11</sup> He did not want to lose or mislay anything that exists, in this long and tedious process. He mentions that he has passed through different stages and ultimately reaches the stage of a monk who carries with himself the heaviest burden in the existential venture.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p.93. Cf. also p.92: “Personal circumstances (of biological, historical and biographical nature) prompted me to *accept* the venture of a conversion without alienation, of appropriation without repudiation, of synthesis without syncretism, of symbiosis without eclecticism.”

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup> He notes that he has passed through all the different stages as a scientist who experiments with objects, as a philosopher with ideas,

The originality and authenticity of his vision can be traced well from his own words. Panikkar has the personal conviction that his ideas are not mere secretions of the brain but the condensation of his life lived and the experiences suffered.<sup>13</sup> The integrity of Panikkar is more evident as he himself witnesses, “Everything somewhat is autobiographical. I am using in my writing only words whose meaning I myself have grasped.”<sup>14</sup> He acknowledges that his writing is a meditation and medicine to him. It allows him to ponder and contemplate deeply the mystery of reality. He even conceives it as an incarnation process.<sup>15</sup> Here, we see a sage in Panikkar who, meditating on the cells of an organism discovers a network of dynamic interrelatedness, which consolidates and weaves together the inner vitality of reality.

The originality of his vision is very well expressed in

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and a monk with himself.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 1982, p. x: “If one writes a book with one’s life and pays for it with one’s blood, if intellectual activity consists of life lived and experience suffered, rather than being a mere secretion of the brain, then what I have written is part of what I was; and what I was cannot be blotted out.”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 79: “Writing, to me, is meditation-that is medicine-and also moderation, order for this world...writing allows and almost forces me to ponder deeply the mystery of reality. It certainly involves thinking, contemplation. But at the same time, writing means that I have to add form, shape, beauty, expression, revelation to this mystery of reality...Writing presupposes thinking but also shaping and carving our thoughts; cleaning them, clothing them with colours, smells and forms, even strengthening and putting them to action. It is an incarnation process where the “word becomes flesh.”



his idea of re-visioning of reality. In this re-visioning, he urges to have an “anthropological turn” or a “cultural mutation.” This involves a change in human perception of reality. In other words, a complete change of heart (a radical *metanoia*) amounts to a “mutation” in human self-understanding. This radical re-vision certainly calls for a new understanding of space and time. Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision stands on the re-built pillars of space and time. Just as there can stand no building without pillars, so too there exists no reality without these two dimensions of space and time. In this respect, Panikkar appears as an architect and a poet, for “the architect senses the space of his time, while the poet rhymes the times of his space.”<sup>16</sup> As an architect and a poet Panikkar seems to sense and discover (or re-cover) the rhythm of reality in his vision.

#### **D. Synthesis of East and West**

Being a child of two cultures (an Indian Father and a Spanish mother), Panikkar had the privilege to go through both traditions of East and West and compare them in the light of his own life experiences. This life experience helped him understand the goodness of each tradition and synthesise them without losing their uniqueness.

Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision can be seen as a synthesis of East and West. In his writings, Panikkar combines the ideas of the eastern and the western traditions. For example, Panikkar makes use of the non-dualistic idea of *advaita* tradition of India throughout his vision. Also, he vividly uses the Buddhist notion of reality

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<sup>16</sup> R. Panikkar, “There is No Outer without Inner Space,” in *Cross Currents* XXXIV, (Spring 1993), p. 69.

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especially when he speaks of radical relativity, etc. We can see many ideas of the western tradition in his writings that range from Pre-Socratics to post modern thinkers.<sup>17</sup> It is somehow evident that he is most especially influenced by the philosophy of life and existentialism.<sup>18</sup> Panikkar views East and West as two centres of thought, which cannot be seen as geographical locations but as anthropological categories. Interestingly, he states, “Each one of us has an ‘East’ and a ‘West,’ an Orient and an Occident.”<sup>19</sup> He considers them as symbols, which are not the exclusive possession of some groups or religious families.

### **E. A Vision of Accommodative Character**

Panikkar’s attempt to fuse the eastern and the western ideas indicates the accommodative character of his vision which surpasses the “either or” question of reality. He presents a balanced view without extremes, and blends the basic dimensions of reality in an appealing manner. He explains the need for harmonious blending of ideas because his vision itself is a vision of relation. For him, being is essentially a relation. The very structure of reality reveals a relation.<sup>20</sup> The very feeling of our limitedness

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony, Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*, ed. Harry James Cargas, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, p. 59-60; cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 144, footnote 17.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 169. This passage points to this fact.

<sup>19</sup> R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype*, New York, Seabury Press, 1982, p. 17. Also cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 145.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, “Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical

and insufficiency makes us tend towards others and be in relation.

Panikkar understands the different worldviews as creative and he believes that the different ideas can be accommodated and transformed into creative polarities. As Panikkar's methodology would make it clear, no worldview can claim monopoly because, by its very definition, it is only one particular perspective of the world. No worldview can provide us the real picture of the world. No single outlook can become the norm that evaluates the other views. All are valid and complementary.<sup>21</sup> According to Panikkar this is what the Trinitarian dynamic is all about; it is where everything contains in everything else; each person represents the community and each tradition corrects, complements and challenges the other.<sup>22</sup>

The accommodative attitude of Panikkar is very inspiring. For him, unity implies diversity and harmony of reality implies the presence of dialectically opposite polarities. The world order itself is maintained only by one dimension pulling in one direction and the other in the opposite. This is the "discordant concord" of different voices of human traditions. If all the discordant voices are reduced into one voice, the beauty will be lost.<sup>23</sup>

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Challenge" *Religious Pluralism*, ed. Leory S. Rouner, Norte Dame, University of Norte Dame Press, 1984, p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. F. D'Sa, "Myth, History and Cosmos", *Jeevadhara*, 25 (January 1984), p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 142.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 180. Here Panikkar observes the beauty of pluralism as a symphony – the inexplicable concord out of so many dissenting voices. Pluralism tells us that one should not assume for oneself the role of being a conductor of the cosmic

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Therefore, Panikkar's pluralistic vision allows for polar and 'tensible' coexistence between different human attitudes, cultures and traditions. This is what is meant by creative polarity.<sup>24</sup>

Another motivating element in Panikkar's thinking is that Panikkar adapts himself to diverse worldviews. He is willing to admit that his thinking is no more than one opinion among many.<sup>25</sup> He acknowledges that his opinions, beliefs, philosophy or religion are as limited, vulnerable, debatable and subjected to critique as any other is.<sup>26</sup> He also admits that his vision is not at all a well-articulated or finished vision once and for all.<sup>27</sup> We can

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orchestra.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 13: "We need a horizon in order to see and to understand, but we are aware that other people have other horizons; we aspire to embrace them, but we are aware of the ever-elusive character of any horizon and its constitutive openness." Also cf. R. Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-Style", pp. 202-203. He views the *advaitic* approach as a conjoining substitute. According to Panikkar, *advaita* is the basic intuition that opens up a worldview in which the diversities are neither absolutized (dualism) nor ignored (monism), nor idolized (pantheism), nor reduced to mere shadows (monotheism). Cf. R. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", p. 226: "And this *advaitic* approach has the confidence that what appears to be in conflicts (when viewed dialectically), can be transformed into creative polarities."

<sup>25</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", *The Intercultural Challenge of R. Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 247: "In short, my criticism on universalism is not a universal affirmation [...] it tallies with my defence of pluralism, which is not a pluralistic statement [...] it is simply my opinion, which I am striving to defend in a convincing manner." See also R. Panikkar "A Self-Critical Dialogue", p. 254.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", p. 257.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 17.

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provisionally call it the “unifying myth” that is not yet spelled out; it is not yet logos.<sup>28</sup> It is only a starting point.<sup>29</sup> It is still an emerging vision which represents the emerging religious consciousness of our time.<sup>30</sup> This itself shows the intellectual humility of Panikkar to acknowledge the limitedness and inadequacy of his vision.

### **F. An Integrated Eco Vision**

Modern human being endowed with reason and assisted by a limited anthropocentric vision of reality has insrtumentalized nature for his/her own purposes. Guided by the goddess of reason and the objective thinking of science, human being has the belief that the mastery over nature leads to the height of success. His/her adoration and admiration have gone after the progressive thinking of science. This exploitative mentality is considered as the progressive thinking of the modern world. Human being has looked down upon anything that has to do with the “mystery.” The mystery aspect of reality is perceived as something that is against the spirit of science. Human being’s scientific and technological pride feels threatened and offended at the thought of anything beyond his/her control. “Mystery” has given way to “mastery.” Dazzled and overwhelmed by the astounding accomplishments of science, modern human being thinks that the most efficacious approach to know reality is the experiment. However, through experiment one can never know earth’s wisdom just as by experiment alone, one will never

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, p. 72.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, “Towards a Dialogical Dalogue”, *Interculture*, 20(1987), pp. 14-15.

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discover the mystery aspect of the human body and its real life. This experimenting attitude results not only in the disrespect of the Divine and the human but also the exploitation of nature. In this context, we can see the integrated “eco-vision” of Panikkar.

### G. A New Understanding of Ecology

Panikkar analyses very beautifully the estrangement of humans from nature while he deals with historical consciousness.<sup>31</sup> In this moment of historical consciousness human being seems to be in dialectical opposition to nature and being a civilized human being he/she considers him/herself as a non-natural being. His/her home is no longer the earth but the ideal world. Historical human being tames and subjugates nature. Nature is ‘demythified’; there is no mystery about it. The sacred thread of collegiality that has woven the artistry of nature becomes broken and scattered into pieces.<sup>32</sup> Human beings have not simply taken their sustenance from the earth, but they have further exploited and violated her.<sup>33</sup> The way Panikkar puts forward this idea of further exploitation is remarkable: “But the cosmotheandric circle is broken if we convert *agriculture* which is a sort of love-making with the Earth, into *agribusiness*, which amounts to the violation of Nature, significantly called world “resources,” for the profit of the exploiter.”<sup>34</sup> The “maximum” has replaced the “optimum.” The denuded forests, the polluted atmosphere and the stained seas are

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 105.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 52.

<sup>34</sup> R. Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue” p. 288. Italics mine.

the best example of this exploitation.

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision has an inspirational analysis of nature. He elevates nature to the level of a person. For Panikkar, the earth is our mother. She is our very self.<sup>35</sup> To destroy our relationship with nature is to destroy our very selves. In this sense, human survival is inextricably linked with the survival of nature. The elevation of nature from objective level to a personal realm further implies the need of experience to understand the earth rather than to experiment. In this experiential level, we allow nature to penetrate us. Here, we are not only "seeing" but "hearing" too. That means, this process of experience is both active and passive at the same time. By allowing her to speak, we discover the earth's wisdom.

Panikkar flavours his ecological vision further with the traditional idea of *anima mundi*. By this concept, Panikkar states that life is not the privilege of humans alone but human person shares in the life of the universe.<sup>36</sup> In other words, human being as a microcosm is sharing the life of the earth, which is the macrocosm. Panikkar makes a remarkable comparison in order to show the dignity of the earth. He makes use of the ideas from the Indian philosophy and the western traditions.<sup>37</sup> In this

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, "A New Society for a New Millennium", *Journal of Dharma*, vo.27, no.1, (January-March 2002), p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> Panikkar shows the dual dimensionality of the Earth using the Indian traditional terms: *bhoomi* and *prithvi*. The term *bhoomi* implies that which exists here before us and that which natures all creatures. *Prithvi* means that which stretches out before us in an ever-expanding horizon and that which receives all steps we make, all the growth that may occur in us. The Christian scholastics considered the world to be the primary source of knowledge. In addition, he mentions about the

comparative analysis, we can see the mind of a hermit who gives obvious preferentiality to the philosophy of nature and eschews the modern scientific approach. Panikkar's view seems to be very similar to the Hermetic philosophy of nature.<sup>38</sup> Also, it shows the traits of Jaina philosophy.<sup>39</sup>

Another notable thing in Panikkar's ecological vision is his use of "ecosofy" instead of ecology. Panikkar justifies this shift because "ecosofy" adopts a dialogical attitude towards the earth seeing it as "Thou." He is of the opinion that mere ecology is not adequate to convey the meaningfulness of our view regarding nature. Also, Panikkar opines that we have to hold a dialogue with the earth. This idea of dialogue runs parallel with his fundamental view that human task is to participate in reality and its cosmic rhythms.<sup>39</sup> This participation also implies the cultivation of friendship with her. Aside from the reason Panikkar presented above, I think, there are three other reasons for this shift. Firstly, Panikkar avoids the terms, which have too much affinity with reason or modern scientific thinking; the term "ecology" is pregnant with rational connotations. Secondly, Panikkar prefers to coin his own terms instead of using the traditional ones in order to picture reality more effectively.<sup>40</sup> The name he has given to his vision itself stands as an evidence to this. Thirdly, Panikkar understands the new vision about the

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empiricist philosophy and the German philosophy (*Grund, Urgrund* etc.).

<sup>38</sup> Hermetic philosophy is a philosophical view which has a religious approach to the cosmos involving a regenerative experience.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", pp. 288-289.

<sup>40</sup> Panikkar has coined many terms like *cosmothenadric*, *tempiternity*, etc.



earth as the new wisdom. This is precisely the new innocence, about which he speaks of constantly.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, in my opinion, he avoids the traditional term “ecology” and replaces it with “ecosofy” in order to convey this new vision or wisdom.<sup>42</sup>

## **H. A New Understanding of Matter and World**

In Panikkar’s writings, we see a positive appreciation and admiration of matter and the world. For Panikkar, every being stands in the world and shares its secularity. Our every day experience discloses that there is nothing that enters human consciousness without at once entering in relation with the world.<sup>43</sup> This implies that we cannot even think of God and human beings who may fail to partake in secularity. If there is nothing, it amounts to absolute nothingness. The final foundation for the belief for the existence of something is that the world exists.

The way, in which Panikkar shows the significance of matter and the world is interesting. Panikkar elevates

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ewert Cousins, “Raimundo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future”, *Cross Currents* (Summer 1979), p. 152. Here, Cousins compares Panikkar with Francis of Assisi.

<sup>42</sup> The title of one of the Italian books of Panikkar itself is *Ecosofia: la nuova saggezza-per una spiritualità della terra* published from Assisi in 1993. For a detailed discussion of this theme, cf. D’Sa Francis, “*Sacramentum mundi*: Preface to a Cross-Cultural Re-Vision of Sacraments,” *The World as Sacrament: Interdisciplinary Bridge-Building of the Sacred and Secular*, eds., Francis X. D’Sa, Isaac Padinjarekuttu and Jacob Parapally, Pune, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, I, 1998, pp. 263-264.

<sup>43</sup> Panikkar argues that even the extra-mundane things have their reference necessary to the world (*saeculum*) though these might also be somehow negative. For more, see R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 64.

matter to a higher realm by saying that “every material thing that is, is God’s, or more precisely, God’s thing, God’s own World.”<sup>44</sup> Likewise, Panikkar explains human relationship with the world too. Human beings cannot survive without the cosmos. Moreover, our needs are dependent on the cosmos.<sup>45</sup> To become human, one has to be cosmic. However, there is no question of “has to” because human being is always cosmic and he/she has no existence other than here in the world.

The idea of the world as a symbol is another notable contribution of Panikkar. In his cosmotheandric vision, the world is the symbol of the Divine. His idea of symbol is noteworthy: symbol has a revelatory function and it reveals the symbolized reality in a symbolic way. The relation between the symbol and the symbolized is ontological.<sup>46</sup> The symbolised exists in and through the symbol.<sup>47</sup> Reality is not exhausted in the symbol, but there is no reality out of or independent from the symbol. Here, Panikkar brings forward the example of human body: my body is a symbol of my person. “I” exist in my body and my person reveals itself through my body. However, my body does not exhaust my whole personality. I am more than my body. Nevertheless, without my body, my personality cannot exist.<sup>48</sup> In this way, Panikkar gives a

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<sup>44</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 66.

<sup>45</sup> The human, for example, cannot survive without breathing, food, etc.

<sup>46</sup> Panikkar shared with me this idea during my meeting with him in Barcelona on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2005.

<sup>47</sup> R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, New York, Paulist Press, 1979, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> This idea is shared by Panikkar during my meeting with him, with a

very positive value to the world and matter and raises them to the symbol, which symbolizes the Divine. Therefore, the world and matter are indispensable in the understanding of reality.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, this view contributes to a better understanding of the *sacramentality* of the world. Panikkar seems to be bold enough to affirm, “the *saeculum* (world) is not in jest or passing, provisional, unreal or a shadow or what we would like to call it in order to attenuate the impact of an unjust and violent status quo.”<sup>50</sup> Here, we see the voice of a prophet who is very much concerned about the contemporary situation of the society. He urges us to take the world seriously. By this, he asserts that the material world is real and insuperable though not exclusive or complete. The real cannot be disassociated from the bodily and it cannot exist without matter, though it does not consist of matter only.<sup>51</sup> Life is not only about the material world. Life means the incorporation of the Divine in the human and its impregnation of all the structures of the material world.<sup>52</sup> The world is no longer that which is fleeting but it is the very clothing of the

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caution that every example is misleading.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 83: “It (contemporary monkhood) cannot renounce the secular world because *it does not believe it to be secondary*; it cannot renounce activity in the world because it believes this to be *indispensable*.” Bracket and italics are mine.

<sup>50</sup> R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 84.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, p. 90. Here, Panikkar acknowledges that the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body has become a symbol to him.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 84.

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permanent, the eternal and the immutable.<sup>53</sup> This is precisely what we mean by *sacramentality* of the world.

## **I. Towards a New Anthropology**

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision has high esteem for human beings. For Panikkar, "To be Man is not just to be a small piece of intelligent matter crawling in the universe, or a great individual walking on earth. Man is a conscious agent in the very destiny of the universe."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, it is very clear that human beings have a great role to play in the universe. Human dignity lies in his/her being commissioned to bring the universe to perfection.<sup>55</sup> For Panikkar, human being is the microcosm that mirrors and transforms the macrocosm, the world.<sup>56</sup> They influence mutually.

Panikkar's anthropology provides us a new insight that extends to the realm of the cosmic and the Divine dimensions. Panikkar even uses the notion of humans as a reflection, an image of the whole reality.<sup>57</sup> Does it mean only a passive reflection? No, it is an active partaking. "Man participates in the cosmic rhythm not only as a "spectator" or an "actor," but even as a "co-author" and a "priest" by whose active participation, the cosmic rhythms are transformed."<sup>58</sup> The overall development of human beings goes hand in hand with the transformation of

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity*, p. 85.

<sup>54</sup> R. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", p. 276.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, p. 62.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 131.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 131.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, p. 62.

reality because of the intrinsic ontological connection between human beings and reality. Therefore, the enhancing of human beings also entails the enhancing of reality.<sup>59</sup> This view is certainly a guideline and incentive to all those who work for the betterment of the human society. For Panikkar, a human being is not just one of the many rings in a lifeless chain of entities but is unique and irreplaceable because of the infinite value namely the Divine.<sup>60</sup>

### **J. Re-visioning of Time**

One of the prominent features of Panikkar's vision is his idea of time. For him, time originally connoted a predominantly qualitative intuition in the sense that each being has its own time.<sup>61</sup> It is tantamount to saying that time is the peculiar way in which each being can exist. Therefore, time and being are co-extensive. There is time as long as being exists and being exists so long as it has time to exist. This shows that time is not exterior to being. Instead, it is part and parcel of the constitution of being. It is interior to being. Temporality is an essential dimension of reality though reality is not exhausted by it.

Panikkar makes a very good blend of the ancient Greek and the Indian traditions in order to express the original meaning of time. In the Greek tradition, time originally implies the "life" of being. This shows the intrinsic

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 65.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, "Mysticism of Jesus the Christ", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer, New Delhi, D.K. Printworld, 1997, pp. 128-130.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, "Toward a Typology of Time and Temporality", *Philosophy East and West*, XXIV, (April 1974), pp. 161-164.

connection between time and reality in the deepest level. In the Indian tradition, time is the “life-breath” of reality (*prāṇa*).<sup>62</sup> Life matures beings and encompasses being. Further, it is time again that makes change in being. He nicely puts together all these traditional insights in his cosmotheandric vision to show the dynamic character of reality.

Another interesting feature in the idea of time is the significance of the “present.” Panikkar observes that the modern human being has no time to live in the “present” as he/she idolizes the future. The consequence is that he/she becomes a machine losing his/her uniqueness.<sup>63</sup> Human being, like a machine, works and lives almost in an automatic manner. This implies that human values like love, friendship, beauty, inner joy, etc. hardly have a place in this world of acceleration and repetition. Human beings hardly get time for nurturing human values and fellowship. This has created a sense of estrangement from the Divine, other human beings and nature. Eternity becomes a real problem and a threat. In this dialectical opposition between temporality and eternity, Panikkar locates his inspiring notion of *tempiternity* as a solution to this problem. What he proposes is that human being does not need to look for eternity in the future. It is something already present “here and now” in the present moment itself.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, he urges to live “life in its fullness” in

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 142. Another term for time in the Vedic tradition is *āyus*, which means the vital force of being, the existential span or duration of every being.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, “The Law of *Karman* and the Historical Dimension of Man,” *Philosophy East and West*, XXII, no.1 (January 1972), p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> It seems to be similar to the Christian theology which says, “already, but not yet”

the “present”.<sup>65</sup> The implication of this view is tremendous in the modern scenario of work, which we will deal in the coming section.

### **K. New Outlook on Human Work**

Panikkar’s understanding of work is very much connected with his understanding of time. He proposes a contemplative attitude to both, time and work. The manner, in which he mingles these ideas, is noteworthy. His idea of *tempiterntiy* has a great influence in his concept of work. The cosmotheandric intuition, according to Panikkar, is the emergence of new consciousness that is an invitation towards a contemplative mood. This mood is closely connected with Panikkar’s understanding of the third moment of consciousness, namely the *trans-historical consciousness*; indeed, contemplation is the trans-temporal mode in which one lives fully in the present moment.<sup>66</sup>

Panikkar combines work and *tempiternity*. Work enables us to live in the “present” and it is through working within time and space that we are able to transcend our historical predicament and thereby

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, “The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity,” *Cross Currents*, XXXIV (Fall 1981), p. 265. Panikkar’s view encourages us to live reality in its fullness without desperation. Panikkar’s view corresponds to the modern slogans like: “The best day is today,” “The best moment is the present moment” etc. There is nothing to come better tomorrow. Do not expect something better tomorrow. Tomorrow is already present now. The best thing is to live the present in its totality and fullness. Then tomorrow would be automatically better for us.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 18.

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transform time itself.<sup>67</sup> It is in work where *time* and *timefulness* meet and enable the worker to enjoy the present and to consecrate his/her life authentically and fruitfully. Work becomes a contemplation and worship that helps a human being to be fully him/herself; in fact, an act of worship is an act which allows and enables us to realize our being, to realize in the cosmos what they really are.<sup>68</sup>

This does not mean that any work becomes automatically contemplation or worship. Panikkar sets one condition for this: it must be a desireless action. He compares the unmotivated action of the contemplative with the understanding of the *Bhagavadgita* that the highest action is desireless action doing for the act itself. Therefore, the result of the action is renounced by the contemplative. An act is done simply for the sake of itself without asking a “why.” The primacy is to the act itself so that work will have to yield its own meaning.<sup>69</sup> In this manner, “kiss will be a kiss; the dance a dance; the poem a poem.”<sup>70</sup>

The contemplative act is creative, a new beginning not

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, “Time and Sacrifice: The Sacrifice of Time and the Ritual of Modernity,” *The Study of Time III: Proceedings of the Third Conference of the International Society for the Study of Time, Alpbach-Austria*, J.T. Fraser ed. New York, Springer-Verlag, 1978, p. 702.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, p. 48.

<sup>69</sup> It seems that Panikkar also advocates for actions that will be useful for others instead of personal gain. For more, see Panikkar, “Samdhya, The Vedic Prayer” *Indian Theological Studies*, 14, no.1 (March 1977), pp. 27-28.

<sup>70</sup> R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 12.



a conclusion.<sup>71</sup> Here, Panikkar presents with much enthusiasm a very risky and adventurous way of living without looking into the future. The examples he gives for contemplative life, seem to be evocative and provocative at the same time: “If you are a contemplative, you may become a Samaritan on the way and come late to the meeting, or just remain playing with some trifle which happened to catch your fancy. Ultimately, you have no way to go, no place to reach.”<sup>72</sup> After all, the meaning of life does not rest in its achievement. The authenticity of these words becomes clear when we compare these words with Panikkar’s personal confession: “I remember having spontaneously avoided situations where I could have acquired honours and power. I have never regretted avoiding these, but I must admit that I thought about them in weak moments.”<sup>73</sup> These words seem to be genuine and exemplary; indeed, they point towards a desireless life.<sup>74</sup>

The contemplative expects nothing from the future, and for him/her, happiness is now, not in the future or in

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. R. Panikkar, “The Contemplative Mood”, p. 264.

<sup>72</sup> R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> R. Panikkar, “Philosophy as Life-Style”, p. 93. The authenticity of Panikkar is revealed more in the following sentences: “The idea of becoming a political figure, a bishop, a general director, or something like that is not always unpleasant. It took years before I could even mention this. And I still suppress here a page of my original manuscript.” Also, he observes that he has passed through the three stages: of a scientist who experiments with objects, of a philosopher who experiments with ideas and of a monk who experiments with himself. The third stage carries with it the heaviest burden of existential venture. Here the experiment becomes experience.

<sup>74</sup> Panikkar points out that in order to be authentic, it must originate from the deepest corners of “one’s personal being.” For more see R. Panikkar, “Philosophy as Life-Style”, p. 93.

achieving anything.<sup>75</sup> For Panikkar, how long we live doesn't matter, because nothing is there to be achieved in the future. The contemplative has achieved it today itself: "Your life will not be unfulfilled even if you do not reach your golden age but meet with an accident along the road."<sup>76</sup> Though these words appear to be a kind of "indifference" or "disinterest" to life, they have something remarkable to convey to all who become desperate or disappointed even with small failures in life. When a worker attains this contemplative mood, according to Panikkar, his/her work becomes worship; after all, human realization takes place not in the future, but in every moment of life, and the final achievement is present from the beginning until the end.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article, I was trying to tread through the narrow forest trails of the cosmotheandric vision which is yet to be better interpreted or meaningfully explored (or re-discovered). As we know well, no understanding of reality can explain fully the totality of reality because of the inability of human reason to explain exhaustively the totality of human experience. Each understanding of reality is a genuine attempt to comprehend reality in its own way. Therefore, each metaphysical vision of reality can be seen as a paradigm, which throws light onto reality partially, but in its own uniqueness. This uniqueness

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<sup>75</sup> In this way, time has been redeemed, overcome or denied.

<sup>76</sup> R. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> R. Panikkar, "The Contemplative Mood", p. 267. As we have seen earlier, the idea of Panikkar has great affinity with existentialism and the philosophy of life.

makes a particular vision attractive and impressive. In outlining reality in its own way, each paradigm of reality gets confronted and complemented by other models of reality, and this leads to a synthesis of different visions. Each model has its own merits and demerits, which can be compared and confronted with other models. This process is continuously taking place, and in turn, it may lead to a better understanding of reality and to the attainment of progress in the whole cosmos. Panikkar's rhythmic understanding of time and the contemplative attitude for an integration of life make his vision appealing and inspiring. His vision challenges us to build a better world, which gives dignity to human values, enhances respect for nature, and entails an ever more emphasized notion of God who is vigilant over His creation. It promotes harmony with the cosmos, communion among all humans and confidence in the Divine. Therefore, a spirituality based on the cosmotheandric vision would be a deeper awareness of the sacredness of creation that would lead us to live a life of harmony, respect and love.

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