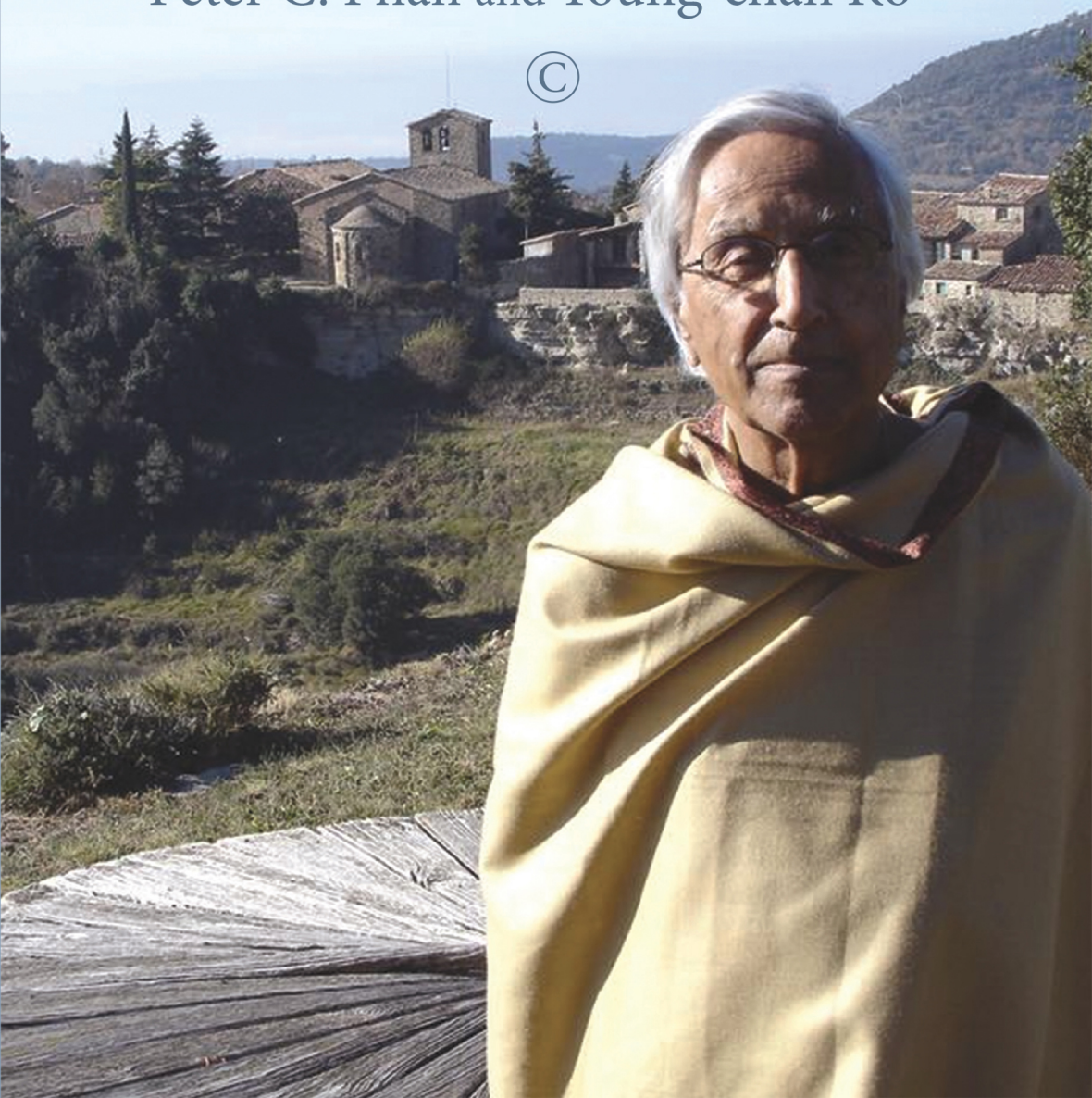


# Raimon Panikkar

A Companion  
to his Life and Thought

*Edited by*

Peter C. Phan and Young-chan Ro



Raimon Panikkar



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Peter C. Phan and Young-chan Ro (editors)

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Raimon Panikkar  
A Companion to his Life and Thought

*Edited by*  
Peter C. Phan and Young-chan Ro

*Foreword by*  
Dr Rowan Williams

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## Abbreviations

- BS* *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype.*  
New York: Seabury, 1982
- CE* *The Cosmotheandric Experience:  
Emerging Religious Consciousness.*  
Edited by Scott Eastham. Maryknoll, NY:  
Orbis Books, 1993.
- CD* *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace.*  
Translated by Robert R. Barr. Louisville, KY:  
Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.
- CP* *A Christophany: The Fullness of Man.*  
Translated by Alfred DiLascia. Maryknoll, NY:  
Orbis Books, 2004.
- DPW* *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom.*  
Translated by Annemarie S. Kidder. Louisville, KY:  
Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.
- EG* *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery.*  
Translated by Joseph Cunneen. Minneapolis, MN:  
Fortress Press, 2006.
- HDI* *Hinduism: The Dharma of India.*  
Opera Omnia Vol. IV.2, 12 vols. Maryknoll, NY:  
Orbis Books, 2014.



## Contributors

**Rowan Williams** studied at Cambridge and completed his Ph.D. on the theology of Vladimir Lossky at Oxford. He was a lecturer in theology at Cambridge and then Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford. He became Bishop of Monmouth in 1991 and also Archbishop of Wales in 1999. In 2002 he was enthroned as the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury. He retired in 2013 and was elected as Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge. He has written extensively mainly on theology and literature.

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**Milena Carrara Pavan** has devoted herself for many years to studying the philosophy of Raimon Panikkar, with whom she worked very closely until the end of his life. She has translated and edited most of his main publications in Italian. In his later years she worked with the author on the compilation of his Opera Omnia, of which she is editor and in charge of its diffusion on a worldwide scale. President of Fundació Vivarium Raimon Panikkar, Tavertet (Barcelona) and heir to all the intellectual property rights of Raimon Panikkar.

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## Foreword

*Dr Rowan Williams*

Odd as it will sound to say this, Raimon Panikkar was not in the least interested in interreligious dialogue – at least, not in any of the senses usually attached to the term. The idea that there were things called religions whose relations needed to be managed or brokered, that there were debates between them that could be reduced to the terms of ordinary binary oppositions, that they offered rival solutions to the same set of independently posed problems – all this was ludicrously distant from what he believed he was doing, both as a thinker and as a person of faith and practice. Famously, he declared his loyalty not to ‘Christianity’ but to ‘Christianness’: he did not give allegiance to a system of thought but to a way of being. And ways of being do not have debates between them in the manner of intellectual disputes. If there are tensions or implicit conflicts, they are not to be resolved by argument. The task Panikkar saw himself as being called to as his long and many-sided life unfolded was first and foremost the challenge of living in the truth, responding to the manifestation of unchanging, infinite, self-bestowing life, and finding the (few) words that would in some measure manifest in turn what had been given. This is why he was in no way averse to speaking of the authoritative significance of ‘Christophany’ at the heart of his thinking and practice, but equally why he would not translate this into a set of triumphant claims to possession of a map of transcendent reality.

This is the sort of thing that makes Panikkar so infuriating for some theologians; even the most sympathetic will be inclined to add a pained ‘Yes, but . . .’ to his meditations. And his immense importance as a thinker

is in precisely his capacity to urge his readers to suspend that ‘Yes, but...’ He wants us to stay with the fundamental challenge; to stand with him in the place or no-place where the call is heard and the gift is given, and to start theorising in the usual way is to let your eyes slip sideways and your ears to be seduced by sounds that come from somewhere other than the Cave of Being. If asked whether he believed the classical doctrines of Catholic faith, he would say, in effect, ‘What does it look like?’ Of course he does; what he will not do is give us or himself the satisfaction of stating this as a possession, a system excluding other systems or a simple description of reality that all should be able to recognise in the same terms.

You could say that one way of reading him is as someone who takes the central affirmations of classical Christian doctrine more seriously than most. If the ultimate Giver is indeed, as trinitarian dogma asserts, not an individual over against the world and not ‘a’ being capable of being comprehensively seen from a single perspective, there is no obvious means of capturing that endless self-bestowing in one decisive formula. If the relation between finite and infinite is as it is shown in Christ – ‘without confusion, without separation’ – our own standing before the mystery has to be a moving deeper into a non-duality that is not identity. And if other traditions of speech and practice bring these things to light more immediately than most Christian language, so be it: we are not engaged in some sort of competitive struggle for ideological victory. Christ incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth is a ‘real symbol’ – neither an arbitrary pointer to something other, a human hint at a distant mystery, nor the exhaustive self-identification of the Giver with this phenomenon in the world and this only. Faced with the question of whether he is a pluralist or an inclusivist, in the familiar typology of old-style comparativism, he would probably shrug and smile and turn aside the question as so badly-formed as to make an answer impossible.

The essays in this invaluable guide to his enormous and difficult written corpus are not slavishly uncritical, but they show how his ability to persuade readers to suspend the ‘Yes, but’ impacts on a variety of sophisticated analytical approaches. He is inevitably an outlier in the world of comparative study, even in the vigorous and productive new style of ‘comparative theology’. But accepting Panikkar’s challenge does not commit us to concluding that there is nothing else to say except what he says, or that there are no other ways of saying it. His contribution to Christian (and non-Christian) thought is exceptional in its depth and subtlety, and it is a tragedy that so (relatively) few voices have been raised to celebrate and respond to it in recent decades. The

publication of his collected works in a fine standard English-language edition from Orbis Books has left the Anglophone theological public with no excuse for ignoring him; but readers will benefit from some teasing out of his complex positions and often idiosyncratic and dense vocabulary. These essays provide just such a guide and help, and they will be warmly welcomed. I hope they will be the firstfruits in a rich harvest of grateful and animated re-reading of one of our era's most distinctive and brilliant voices.

Rowan Williams  
Cambridge, September 2018.



# 1

## *Introduction:*

### Who is Raimon Panikkar, Why this Book, and Why Now?

*Peter C. Phan and Young-chan Ro*

## Who is Raimon Panikkar?

The answer to this question is straightforward if what one asks for is just “name, rank, and number,” what Panikkar calls “identification.” Panikkar was born in Spain on 3 November 1918 and died in his homeland, more precisely, in Tavertet, Catalonia, on 26 August 2010. But, for Panikkar, this apparently simple question about who Raimon Panikkar is does not have a simple answer, since for him “identification” is not “identity,” the former having to do with what one is born with, the latter with what one has become in one’s deepest reality, and Panikkar is much more interested in “identity” than in “identification.” But even Panikkar’s “identification” is not simple. First, is his given name Raimon, Raimundo, or Raymond? His earliest English works list Raimundo, whereas the later ones, as well as the twelve-volume *Opera Omnia*, use Raimon. So Raimon it is. In the next chapter Milena Carrara Pavan, the editor of Panikkar’s *Opera Omnia* in Italian and his literary executor, gives us a portrait of her friend, and so it would be superfluous to rehearse the details of Panikkar’s life here. There is, however, one important element in Panikkar’s life and work, symbolized by the pluriformity of his first name, that justifies – and perhaps even necessitates – this book, and that is the complexity of Panikkar’s person and thought.

Raimon Panikkar-Alemaný – the full name of the subject of our study, according to Spanish naming customs. His first name Raimon is Catalan, Raimondo its Castilian, and Raymond its English equivalent;

Panikkar is his father's family name, and Alemany his mother's. Perhaps no one, by family heritage, linguistic competence, intellectual formation, and religious belonging, is more equipped than Panikkar to build what he terms the "*visión de síntesis del universo*."<sup>1</sup>

Born in Barcelona of a Catalan mother and an Indian father, Panikkar embodies not only a mixture of ethnicities but also a symbiosis of widely divergent cultures. Fluent in a dozen languages, classical as well as modern, Asian as well as European, he is not shy to use throughout his voluminous writings one tongue rather than another when precision and subtlety of thought demands it, and to coin new terms, or to give a twist to old ones, that have become the shibboleths of his thought. Armed with three doctorates – philosophy, chemistry, and theology – Panikkar effortlessly crisscrosses widely disparate academic fields and synthesizes their findings into a kaleidoscope of surprising and mutually enriching insights. His oft-quoted autobiographical confession, "I left Europe as a Christian and found myself a Hindu, and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian," not only reveals the heritage of his mother's Christian faith and his father's Hinduism, but also expresses in a nutshell his religious and spiritual development, and his ability to hold together, in what he calls an "intra-religious dialogue," at first sight mutually incompatible religious traditions. To this list of religions one may add Judaism, Islam, Chinese religious traditions, modernity, and postmodernity, religious and nonreligious worlds in which he dwells simultaneously. Personally, Panikkar combines priestly monkhood and marriage in a way that is canonically anomalous in the Roman Catholic Church. Panikkar is thus essentially cross-ethnic, cross-cultural, and cross-religious, all at once.

Who then is Raimon Panikkar? Two words seem to best describe his "identity": complexity and harmony. Complexity, because of the many strands – and we have "identified" only a few of them above – that have conspired to make him the person he is. He has been called philosopher, scientist, historian of religions, comparativist of religion, theologian, and mystic. Most of us mere mortals can at best be "identified" by one, or at most two, of these monikers. Panikkar's vast and multifarious erudition and his immense literary productions in all these fields rightly earn him all these appellations.

The last of these titles, "mystic," is often applied to people who hold that the divine or the absolute is beyond the grasp of rational thought, or reason, and who attempt to achieve union with this transcendent

1. Raimon Panikkar, "Síntesis: Visión de Síntesis del Universo," *Arbor* 1 (1944): 5-40.

reality through prayer, contemplation, and self-surrendering love. With no pretension to canonize Panikkar, it is reasonable to say that he fully matches this description of a mystic, and that it is precisely this mystical dimension of his life and thought that conveys harmony to his complexity.<sup>2</sup> Panikkar himself confesses his early desire to embark upon the monastic life, albeit in an unconventional way: “Since my early youth I have seen myself as a monk, but one without a monastery, or at least without walls other than those of the entire planet. . . . By monk, *monachos*, I understand that person who aspires to reach the ultimate goal of life with all his being by renouncing all that is not necessary to it.”<sup>3</sup>

Epistemologically, this mystical union is achieved by the exercise of a holistic imagination which integrates a scientifically rigorous investigation of the material world with a sense of the cosmos as sacred, producing what Panikkar calls “scientific secularity.” Hermeneutically, Panikkar calls his own method of interpretation “diatopical,” the way of understanding (at least) two cultures cross-culturally, without presupposing a common tradition or mutual influence between them. Philosophically, Panikkar advocates and practices philosophy not simply as an academic discipline governed by logic and discursive reason but also as a way of life, philosophy being both love of wisdom and wisdom of love. Theologically, Panikkar expresses this mystical union as the “cosmotheandric consciousness,” that is, the existential – and not merely rational – awareness of the fundamental unity of the trinity of God, humankind, and the world, all three realities existing not independently of each other but in symbiotic dependence as the “Rhythm of Being.” This is Panikkar’s “vision of synthesis of the world,” which he already expounded in his very first publication, in 1949, as mentioned above.

## Why This Book?

The paragraph above is intentionally peppered with Panikkarian neologisms that will no doubt baffle those new to his philosophy. But, even for professional philosophers and theologians, Panikkar remains an elusive thinker, not only because of his many linguistic innovations, but also because his thought presupposes extensive background knowledge in several disciplines that is uncommon today. There have, of course, been many dissertations and secondary studies on Panikkar, and no

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2. See Panikkar, *IH*.

3. Panikkar, *BS*.

doubt there will be many more as his life and work become better known. But the genre of these learned disquisitions often compounds the problem with obscurities of their own.

One exception is a *Festschrift* for Panikkar, published in 1996, and entitled *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*.<sup>4</sup> It is a collection of thirteen essays, in addition to the editor's Introduction and a long response by Panikkar to them. (Of these authors, two, namely, Joseph Prabhu and Francis D'Sa, have written for this present volume.) The essays are of excellent quality but they are addressed to fellow scholars – especially undergraduate and graduate students – and not to the average reader. Also, twenty-two years have elapsed since its publication and an updating of the scholarship is called for.

Given the potentially enormous impact of Panikkar's thought – on this, more below – and given its elusiveness, which may prove forbidding to non-specialists, we seek in this volume to provide an accessible and reliable guide to or a companion for Panikkar. It is not of course meant to be a replacement for a patient and intensive wrestling with Panikkar's writings themselves, perhaps eventually with his magnum opus and *summa theologiae*, that is, *The Rhythm of Being: The Unbroken Trinity*. Part I provides a life and a portrait of Panikkar as a thinker engaged in what he calls "intra-religious dialogue" and "dialogical dialogue," as he lives out Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism fully and simultaneously.

Even though Panikkar does not write as a "systematic" theologian – he is for "synthesis" and against "system" – Part II introduces his hermeneutical method and organizes his thought along the *loci theologici* familiar to students of theology. Thus, readers will gain clear insights into Panikkar's theology of spirituality, wisdom, the Trinity, Christology, anthropology, gender and sexuality, social justice, and eschatology. The final chapter by a comparative theologian, who shares with Panikkar expertise in and love for Hinduism, looks back at the essays and gives a prospective glance at what theology would look like "After Panikkar." The book is appended with a glossary and a brief English-language bibliography to help further research. Without dumbing down Panikkar's highly complex ideas and categories we hope that the book will serve as a helpful guide to and a constructive critique of Panikkar and will stimulate a fruitful discussion in and outside the classroom.

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4. Joseph Prabhu, ed., *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

## Why this Book Now?

Publishers and authors tend to highlight (and not rarely exaggerate) the opportuneness of the book that is being published in hopes of huge sales. Fortunately, there is no need to do so with this volume, and this brings us to the last point of this Introduction. Panikkar has been blessed with rare longevity – almost ninety-two years. In fact, he spanned the length and breadth of the twentieth century and was able to witness the devastation of the two World Wars, colonialism, and struggles for national independence in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the collapse of communism, and the hegemony of neo-capitalism, life-saving drugs and medical technologies, human cloning and voluntary euthanasia, the Apollo moon landing and space exploration, international peacemaking and nuclear proliferation, the rise of Islam as a global religion, religious fundamentalism, stateless terrorism, the Internet and social media, globalization and the dominance of the West, the legalization of abortion and same-sex marriage, and the threat of ecological annihilation, to cite a few of the things unimaginable to people living in the nineteenth century.

Though not a public intellectual in the sense of an authoritative commentator on the cultural and social issues of the day, from his vantage point of a near-centenarian and from his deep and prolonged meditations on the resources of almost all world religions, especially *The Vedic Experience*, Panikkar, as scientist, philosopher, theologian, and mystic, offers us insights from the perennial yet ever-timely wisdom of both East and West on how to meet the challenges posed by the phenomena listed above.<sup>5</sup> Of course, he cannot be expected to devise concrete technical plans to remove these threats to the survival of humanity. This task cannot be done by anyone alone, Donald Trump's bombastic boast that he alone can "fix" them, notwithstanding, which claim is precisely the problem and not the solution! Rather, Panikkar can and does indicate in detail the ways in which humanity can be lifted out of its current moral and spiritual morass. He does this by reminding us of his "*visión de síntesis del universo*," *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, in which we humans (*anthropos*) are ontologically related to the divine (*theos*) and the world (*kosmos*). Without this "cosmotheandric," or "theanthropocosmic," or "anthropotheocosmic," or "theocosmoanthropic" consciousness – the order in which this trinity of realities is listed is unimportant since one component cannot exist without the other two – to guide our living together, all technical solutions are mere temporary bandages for a deadly disease.

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5. In what follows the titles of Panikkar's main works are woven into the text, indicated by italics. For their bibliographical details, consult Bibliography.

Take, for instance, the most urgent global threat of our time, namely, ecological destruction. Panikkar's central insight on the ontological divine-human-cosmic unity moves us to think of these three realities together, as indissolubly one-yet-distinct, such that the survival of one component is the condition of possibility of the survival of the other two. Thus, the ecological problem is not just a cosmological problem; it is indissolubly theological and anthropological. The cosmos cannot survive without the survival of God and humanity; God cannot survive without the survival of humanity and the cosmos; and humanity cannot survive without the survival of the cosmos and God. Thus, to rely only on technological means to "save" the Earth is short-sighted and ineffective, because it will be only empty and a void – the *tohu wa-bohu* of Genesis 1:2 – and not the "home" of God and humanity and *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*. On the other hand, to "save" God, that is, defending God's existence and presence in the world – the perennial preoccupation of believers – without saving Earth and humanity at the same time turns God into a remote despot. To "save" humanity, that is, making humans the center or the summit of the universe – the overriding concern of modernity – condemns humans to eternal loneliness, without a garden in Eden (Genesis 2:8) to cultivate and live in, and without God as a partner "walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze" (Genesis 3:8).

Similarly, the way to peace is not simply conflict resolution and international peacekeeping, albeit necessary and helpful, but *Cultural Disarmament*. Again, the way to combat religious fundamentalism and violence is not only inter-religious dialogue but, first of all, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*. This intra-religious dialogue, assisted by a method of understanding diverse religious traditions that combines *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*, leads us to see *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, and the *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*. What ultimately matters is not knowledge but love, which brings us to *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery* and finds fulfillment in *The Silence of God: The Answer to the Buddha*.

Sometime in December 2009, sensing that the end of his life was near, Panikkar sent a letter to his friends asking them not to contact him because he wanted to prepare for his final encounter with the Absolute Mystery in total silence. The silence, it turned out, lasted almost eight months, only to be interrupted by the announcement that his last book, *The Rhythm of Being: The Unbroken Trinity*, had seen the light of day after a twenty-year gestation. Ironically, this good news, which must have gladdened Panikkar's heart, did not interrupt but rather deepened

his spiritual silence. His final book, as will be mentioned later, was, by Panikkar's own decision, published without Chapter Nine, titled "The Survival of Being." In this sense, like Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, Panikkar's *The Rhythm of Being* is unfinished. But is not uncompleted. Like Aquinas, who allegedly said that all his writings were nothing but "straw" after his mystical experience, Panikkar confessed that the "ultimate questions" about which he had written in the last chapter "cannot have final answers" and that "I have touched the limits of my understanding and must stop here."<sup>6</sup> But Panikkar's silence is not a fruit of despair but a sign of hope, not a period putting an end to a life-long intellectual quest, or a question mark doubting the necessity of it, but an exclamation point, one of joy and hope, because the Absolute Reality has indeed broken silence and uttered words that must be heard (*śruti*) and remembered (*smṛiti*). This book is a humble attempt to make what Panikkar has heard and remembered continue to ring through generations to come.

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6. Panikkar, *RB*.

Part I

The Many Faces of Raimon Panikkar

## 2

# Raimon Panikkar: Life and Work

*Milena Carrara Pavan*

Raimon Panikkar frequently emphasizes the difference between *identification* and *identity* which, though inseparable, are not the same thing. The former is *what* an individual is, including all the physical and factual information given, for example, in a government document; the latter is *who* a person is in his or her deepest reality. “Identification” is constituted by the biographical data that can be found in a biography or on a passport, and nowadays, by simply searching the Internet, whereas to discover a person’s “identity” one must look at who that person has become in freedom and love throughout his or her entire life.

I shall, first, briefly sum up the most salient events of Panikkar’s life (his “identification”) and then focus on his human and spiritual “identity” – the core of his true being – based on my first-hand knowledge of him, his biographical notes, his writings as well as his diaries, which he has so trustingly placed in my care. Lastly, I will give an outline of Panikkar’s Opera Omnia, which include all those works the author himself selected as representing his thought most faithfully.

## Identification

Raimon Panikkar was born into a middle-class family in Barcelona, Spain, on 3 November 1918. As his father was an Indian of Hindu faith and his mother a Catalan Roman Catholic, he learned from early childhood to adopt, cultivate, and speak of both religious traditions, in which he always felt perfectly at home. For high school he was educated by the Jesuits and graduated with highest honours in 1935.

In 1936, he began his studies in science and philosophy in Spain. As a result of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the impending danger to his family, he was forced to flee with his sister Mercé and two brothers, Josep Maria and Salvator, to Germany, where he spent three years. In the summer of 1939, Panikkar made a long and adventurous journey on bicycle through Switzerland and Italy, with the intention of returning to Germany to complete his studies. However, the outbreak of World War II forced him to change his plans and return to Spain.

Shortly afterwards, in 1940, he joined an association of young people, which later took the name Opus Dei, who aspired to live a Christian life to the full in their professional work within Spanish society which had been devastated by the Civil War and was then lying in ruins. For the next twenty years Panikkar remained an official member of Opus Dei.

In 1941, Panikkar graduated with a degree in science from the University of Barcelona and, a year later, in literature from the University of Madrid. He then continued his studies in Barcelona, while working in the family business. In 1946, he received a doctorate in philosophy and literature from the University of Madrid; in the same year, he was ordained a priest. In 1958, he obtained a doctorate in chemistry, again from the University of Madrid, and, in 1961, a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

At the end of 1954, Panikkar left Europe for India on an apostolic mission, and there, having left Opus Dei, he was incardinated into the diocese of Varanasi and remained a priest of that diocese until the end of his life. He returned several times to Europe and traveled to many other countries. From 1954 to 1967, except for many trips to Italy and other countries, he lived in utmost simplicity in two small rooms above a Śiva temple in Hanumanghat on the bank of the Ganges.

In 1966, Panikkar was called to Harvard University as a Visiting Professor, and, from 1971 to 1987, he taught Comparative Philosophy of Religion at the University of California at Santa Barbara, spending a semester teaching in the US and the rest of the year in India. In 1987, at the end of his university career, he returned to Catalonia and took up residence in Tavertet (Osona), a small town in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Here he founded the center Vivarium, where he regularly held courses, seminars, and meetings on philosophical, religious, and cultural themes, and undertook in-depth studies of different religious traditions. Having been educated in both East and West, Panikkar was able to bring out in his work a constant dialogue among different traditions, ideologies, and beliefs.

Panikkar published some seventy books, mostly in Italian, Catalan, Castilian, and English, many of which have been translated into various other languages, as well as over a thousand articles. He supervised some twenty theses from around the world, especially during his stay in the United States. Around seventy dissertations have been written on his thought; these are now kept in the library of the University of Girona, to which Panikkar donated his vast library. In 1998, the first of his Opera Omnia began to be published in Italian, followed by Catalan, French, Castilian, and English editions.

Panikkar held courses in universities all over the world. He also delivered prestigious lectures, such as the Warner Lectures and the Gifford Lectures, which were later developed into the book *The Rhythm of Being*. He contributed to the Classics of Western Spirituality project, serving as editor of its last three volumes.

In addition to his intense and varied academic activities, Panikkar was President of the Pipal Tree Association (Bangalore), founder and director of the Center for Cross-Cultural Religious Studies (Santa Barbara, California), and Vivarium, Centre d'Estudis Interculturals de Barcelona (Tavertet, Catalonia). In 1960, he was one of the founders of Pax Romana, an NGO with consultative status at the United Nations, whose aim is to protect the rights and dignity of all people worldwide. He has also taken part in numerous international consultations for UNESCO and many other academic institutions. On two occasions he was a special envoy for the Indian government on cultural missions to South America.

Panikkar's long life ended on 26 August 2010 at the age of ninety-one. Some of his ashes were buried in the small cemetery in Tavertet, according to Christian tradition, and some were scattered over the sacred waters of the Ganges, in keeping with Hindu tradition.

## Identity

To know the identity, that is, the deepest reality of a person, love and trust are needed, without which we cannot reach beyond the level of superficial or merely intellectual knowledge. Having had the privilege of being close to Panikkar during the last twenty years of his life, working with him on the publication of his Opera Omnia, and translating and editing many of his books, I would like now to attempt to trace as best as I can his true identity.

Without doubt, Panikkar is one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. He was a philosopher, a theologian, an expert in three religions (Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism), a

pioneer of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, and so on. Those who were closely acquainted with him, however, know that more than anything he was a mystic who concealed his spirituality under an intellectual mantle. As he himself wrote for the Feast of Corpus Christi:

Let my identity grow so I may be able to identify with my body and with all the earth and at the same time to distance myself from everything and not absolutize anything. I must begin from the experience of my own body, including headaches or something far more serious, which should not, however, bring me to despair. I will then discover that I am what I experience, but not only that, because what I am is “my” own being, and this being is my identity; “to be” is a verb and is not, therefore, reducible to either a subject or an object. If we let “our” being go through our body and also the “earth,” then we will feel freedom within us. To live my identity, our identity, is an indescribable, amazing experience. It is the Advaita.<sup>1</sup>

Panikkar dedicated his entire life, including his youth, to deciphering the mystery of existence, and tried always to be ready to offer help to those who were troubled by the ultimate questions of being. As he said: “Human life on a spatiotemporal plane is certainly a game, *līlā*, a game of human interaction, whose centre is temporal and mystical or completely mysterious, but in the guise of a social game. We must play the game honestly, but without allowing it to overwhelm or suffocate us.”<sup>2</sup>

Panikkar’s writings are autobiographical. They do not deal simply with a problem of the mind, but with a concern of his heart and, indeed, of his entire existence, and which he strove constantly to clarify and analyze by studying in depth the problems of human life. None of his articles or books were written for the mere purpose of self-expression or to satisfy an urge to write. He never planned a piece of writing; everything he wrote was prompted by circumstances, urged by friends, requested by groups of people, or elicited in seminars.

If anything made Panikkar suffer, it was the pain of having to distill his insights into words; he had the excruciating conviction that everything he wrote had to be authenticated by the entire human experience. In writing he struggled to express his thought as a practically universal consensus. The lengthy notes that accompanied his writings show how carefully he sought to keep alive his whole philosophy whose insights

1. From his diaries, 28 May 1964.

2. Panikkar, unpublished notes, 17 February 1976. Translated from Spanish by Carlota Ros Tusquets.