JESUS, SYMBOL OF CHRIST

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF RAIMON PANIKKAR

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ABSTRACT

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The present study investigates the means by which Raimon Panikkar negotiates between the traditional principles of Catholic theology and Christology and the goals and needs of his conceptions of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. During the last half of the 20th century Raimon Panikkar was a major figure in the field of comparative religion, interreligious dialogue and theology of religions. Based upon his work in those fields, Panikkar came to develop an account of the person and office of Christ. What resulted was a conception of Christ that began with the traditional principles of Catholic Christology and ultimately resulted in an account of Christ that stands in tension with some of those principles.

This study examines the Christology of Raimon Panikkar, as it developed in response to his work in religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue, in light of the Christological principles outlined by the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. As an ecumenical council, Chalcedon established certain principles necessary for any orthodox account of Christ. Also,
this study consults the Christological documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in order to establish how those principles were being maintained and interpreted in current debates over Christological accounts. In particular, the principle of the *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of idioms, certified at Chalcedon, and utilized by the CDF, has played a major role in establishing the boundaries of Christology in contemporary Catholic theology.

As a result of these sources, the conclusion of this study is that while Panikkar faithfully begins with the traditional principles of Catholic Christology, his concerns for religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue lead him to an account of Christ which stands in tension with Catholic Christological principles established by Chalcedon and overseen by the CDF; in particular, the *communicatio idiomatum*. 
Dedicated to my parents

John and Cathy Yankech
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For anyone attempting something akin to a systematization of his theology, Raimon Panikkar does not make the task easy. As someone who rarely seemed to even attempt a theological system, Panikkar’s theological writings are difficult to read in a linear fashion. What is apparent throughout Panikkar’s writings is a unifying thread of inspiration. Much has been made of his statement about being Christian, finding himself as a Hindu, and becoming a Buddhist without ever ceasing to be a Christian. This experience embodies the very same thread that runs throughout his work and writings. In many places he expresses it as being a shift in context; one in which Christians are coming into greater positive and mutually fecund ways of engaging other religious traditions. It is that experience for Christians and Christianity that so greatly sets the course for Panikkar’s work. Much also has been made of his childhood as the son of a Hindu father and Spanish Catholic mother. His life as a Catholic priest, with the multiple layers of discernment that such a decision would entail, foreshadows the great importance that Panikkar would place upon the experience of faith, the notion of religious identity and the multiple layers of identity which form a person. These elements are what clearly shaped the theological work of Panikkar.

It is ultimately my conclusion that Panikkar provides an account of the person and office of Christ that is largely faithful to the traditional sources and principles of
Christological investigation. However, because he is attempting to transfer traditional Christology into what he perceives as the new context for Christians, which is not solely Christian, Panikkar’s Christology does pose a problem for Catholic theology. In particular, his notion of symbol and of Jesus Christ as symbol of the same universal cosmic Christ symbolized in other religious traditions, is the result of reading traditional Christology through his pluralistic and interreligious hermeneutic. The result is a form of symbol Christology which violates the traditional principle of the *communicatio idiomatum*. In context to other theological expansions of Christ to other religions, Panikkar’s symbol Christology poses problems for traditional Catholic Christological parameters.

It is also important at this point to deal with what is likely the more ecclesial concerns about Panikkar’s work. Foremost, Panikkar never appears to see his work as simply Catholic theology. In fact, he might even argue that he is distinctly not doing “Catholic” theology. One might better describe him as a Catholic theologian experiencing Christ through other religions. Thus he might be characterized as doing transreligious theology. In many ways, Panikkar envisions the paradoxical relations between religions in two ways. First, religions are wholly and completely distinct unto themselves. They might have similarities and use similar ideas, but they are ultimately different from one another. They are mutually exclusive. Christianity is not Hinduism is not Buddhism. Second, religions are ultimately the same. They all want the same thing; salvation, moksha, nirvana (though these same things are completely different). They all get where they want to go through the same conduit (though these conduits cannot be equated between themselves). For Panikkar, this means that Christianity and Hinduism are functionally the same (they get their practitioners to some
salvation), but they are not identical (they do so by radically different ways and get them to radically different places).

For Christians (ad intra) traditional theological principles are fine and adequate. Let the Church be the Church. But for what Panikkar wants to do (make Christ and Christianity intelligible, palatable and adoptable to other religions) it is necessary to go beyond and transcend the overly restrictive theological boundaries closing Christianity in and cutting it off from other religions. It is still important for Christian theologians to continue doing Christian theology. For Panikkar, his work stands outside of those debates, while remaining dependent upon them and contextualizing them. Here his notion of texts, contexts and texture from the 1970’s can be helpful. Christianity is the result of a faith response to a particular “text,” Christ as experienced in Scripture. As it continues through time it finds itself responding to different and changing contexts, e.g. Greco-Roman, Latin, Global. Both of these however, the text and context, are all located relative to the “texture” of reality. Further, all other religions are in a similar relation to the same texture of reality, which relativizes all religions. Thus, each religion is unique; and yet, each religion is similar (but not identical) in relation to the singular and eternal texture of reality.

I would argue, though this is never explicitly expressed in his work, that this has much to do with Panikkar’s appropriation of the Vedantic Hindu notion of *advaita* (which he understands as irreducible non-duality). Indeed, it is quite likely that much of Panikkar’s work is the result of the use of *advaita* to provide some useful resolution to the Western intellectual problem of the One and the many, Being and beings. To go even further, I would argue that the Christology that precipitates out of Panikkar’s career is the result of the application of *advaita* to help understand the tension between duality and unity with
Christological reflection upon the Incarnation. In some sense then, Panikkar’s account of pluralism, which is clearly tied to *advaita*, is the result of taking the dualism/unity within the Incarnation very seriously and, filtered through *advaita*, uses it as a fundamental metaphysical principle for reality. Because reality has at its core mystery which the intellect cannot fully investigate (advaita/Incarnation), all explanations or expressions of reality are relative to one another and to that reality. They are not the same and undifferentiated, they simply stand in relation to one another.

All of the above lay the foundation for the following study of Panikkar’s Christology. It is Panikkar’s experience of shifting contexts, leading to his intellectual and existential engagement with other religions (especially Hinduism), that form the basis of what develops into his notion of Jesus Christ as symbol of the cosmotheandric nature of reality and as symbol of a universal cosmic Christ outside of history. It is this last notion which poses the greatest concern to Christian and Catholic Christological principles. Because of his account of Jesus Christ as one of many symbols of a cosmic ahistorical/transhistorical Christ, Panikkar’s one-way identity of Jesus of Nazareth and the Cosmic Christ threatens to violate the limits for Christological discussion established by Chalcedon and continued by the CDF. Because Chalcedon allows for a pre-existent eternal Christ operating in the world prior to the Incarnation of Christ as Jesus of Nazareth, Panikkar’s emphasis on the Cosmic Christ manifested in many ways in many religious traditions is faithful to the tradition. However, it is when this emphasis on the eternal Christ results in the notion of Jesus Christ as symbol of the cosmic Christ, that the disjunction between the historical and the eternal becomes apparent in Panikkar’s Christology.
In particular, his relative underplaying of the historical manifestation of the historical Incarnation in favor of a universal Incarnation throughout history and before and during creation, threatens to divide the eternal, cosmic Christ and the historical manifestation of Christ in Jesus of Nazareth. This violates the traditional principle of the communication of idioms. Within the parameters established by the Council of Chalcedon and the documents of the CDF, this is the greatest concern of Panikkar’s Christology. Though Panikkar does maintain the identification of Jesus Christ with the Logos, this identification remains one-sided. Though Jesus truly is God made flesh, the Logos, Jesus Christ as Christ is a symbol in history of a universal cosmic Christ, which also exists in different manifestations within other religions. Even if one argues that Jesus is the most complete manifestation and incarnation of the universal Christ (which Panikkar seems amenable to) it still remains that the mystery of the universal Christ goes beyond the bounds of any historical manifestation. It is this distinction between Jesus Christ and the universal Mystery Christ that poses the greatest concern for the traditionally transmitted experience of the divinity of Christ and Jesus’ identification as the Christ.

The Christology that arises out of Raimon Panikkar’s career is one that remains attentive to traditional Christian and Catholic confessions of faith, but that reinterprets theological sources through a new context and hermeneutic. The result is that Panikkar’s depiction of Christ, while heavily dependent upon Tradition, threatens to violate certain principles of Catholic theology. His symbol Christology ultimately creates and maintains a distinction between the historical Jesus Christ and the universal mystery Christ of which Jesus Christ is a symbol. This distinction is the necessary result of Panikkar’s attempt to develop an image of Christ that is amenable to other religions. This desire to make Christ
amenable, and Panikkar’s sense that it is possible, is the result of his perception of a shift in Christianity’s understanding of its place in relation to other religions and the truth of metaphysical and religious pluralism. His attention to these concerns results in a vision of Christ that is problematic for traditional Christian Christological principles and investigation.

**A Note On The Theological Process As It Pertains To This Study**

Because Panikkar, the Council Fathers and the CDF have their own distinct approaches to doing theology, it is necessary here to establish the parameters for the following study of Panikkar’s theology. In the first chapter, this study makes use of R. V. Sellers’ treatment of the controversies leading to Chalcedon. This focuses on his use of the dual principles of confession and inquiry. These categories are helpful for our study of Panikkar, because they help to distinguish between different levels of the theological process.

On the one hand, the theologian participates in the initial stages of catechesis/training/initiation by which they come to belief and faith in the doctrines of the Church. On the other, the theologian, after the experience of faith, attempts to draw out the meaning or meanings of particular beliefs or teachings of the Church. Thus, the initial stage moves the individual to accept that Christian dogma and doctrine, e.g. “Jesus Christ is Lord” or “Jesus Christ is human and divine.” Following the stage of faith/belief, one can discern a stage of witness by which the individual expresses their faith in the initial language while not investigating it in a critical and analytic fashion. It is after this first stage and through a more conscious and critical process that the theologian is able to draw out the many variations of what those terms mean; e.g. Liberation theology would likely have something to say about

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1 Though other sources are available for an account of the Christological controversies and councils leading up to Chalcedon, Sellers’ is particularly helpful for this study. This is because of Sellers’ two categories help highlight how agreement on language can lead end in vastly different theological conclusions depending on the interpretive frame of the theologian.
what “Lord” means for the world’s poor and oppressed. This of course does not ignore that catechesis itself is thoroughly informed by earlier critical theology of some sort. Also, one cannot ignore how catechesis shapes the theologian’s critical theology, and how this entire process is reflexive and circular; each level and stage informs and shapes all others. Thus, while all Christians can be seen to participate to some degree in the initial level of catechesis and less critical theology (one might call it “popular theology”), the work of the Council Fathers, the CDF and Raimon Panikkar participate in a form of theological thought that is more critical and which this study will refer to as “theology.”

A second process takes place when a theologian attempts to draw out the various meanings of religious language. Because of the historical Christian concern for orthodoxy, a system exists to determine the parameters for interpretation. This is one of the primary roles of the Christological councils. In summing up the Arian, Nestorian and monophysite controversies, the Council Fathers made a positive statement to affirm the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus Christ joined in one person. At the same time, it laid out a set of descriptors or qualifications, which continue to serve as parameters for how those positive statements might be interpreted. Policing those boundaries, as well as others, is the role of the CDF. However, it is not the intended role of the CDF to make positive statements about doctrine or faith; it does not have the authority of an ecumenical council. Also, because of the very nature of the process, the CDF itself does make use of its own way of doing theology. This means that it is dependent upon the ecumenical councils and other traditional authorities, and interprets them according to its own hermeneutic, even if it works to not have a positive and constructive theological agenda.
Returning to Sellers’ categories of confession and inquiry, one might locate the initial stage of catechesis-faith-witness with confession. Inquiry would then be identified by critical theological interpretation as well as the development and maintenance of parameters for interpretation of the very language and propositions witnessed to in the initial stage of catechesis and faith.\(^2\) Just as Sellers argues that the Christological controversies did not arise from whether Jesus Christ was Lord, but from the ways in which different theologians attempted to account for his humanity and divinity from within their soteriological frameworks, so too does the problem surrounding Raimon Panikkar’s Christology hinge on the ways in which he attempts to draw Christ and Christ’s lordship into what he perceives is a new theological context. Thus, while Panikkar’s Christology might reflect on his confession of the lordship of Christ, it is the way in which he engages the secondary process of a critical theology that is the primary concern of this study. In order to do that, this study will make use of the positive affirmations made and parameters established by the Council of Chalcedon as well as the ways in which the CDF has enforced theological principles and policed theological boundaries in regards to other Christological works. Thus, this study will take Panikkar’s Christology as an academic and critical interpretation of the meaning of Christ’s person and office and locate it within the traditional authority of the Council of Chalcedon and the policing efforts of the CDF.

**Chapter Outline**

The first chapter of this study will extract from the documents of the Council of Chalcedon and those of the CDF a set of parameters for Catholic Christological

\(^2\) While Sellers’ categories will be used from time to time throughout this study, the sub-processes of the experience of faith and the pursuit of critical academic theology within the context of the magisterial office of the traditional authorities within Catholic Church are necessary for highlighting the subtler processes within Panikkar’s Christology.
investigation. Both sources provide a set of parameters for theological and Christological work. However, Chalcedon has the added force of being an ecumenical council which both establishes boundaries but also propagates authoritative and normative teachings for Christology. While the CDF applies the guidelines and principles of the traditional authoritative sources, it does not possess the same characteristic. Most notable will be the principle of the communication of idioms, which is the present in the argumentation for the unity of the divinity and humanity of Jesus and must be clearly asserted for an adequate Christology according to the CDF.

The second chapter will present Panikkar’s account of religious pluralism and the means by which he makes use of Christ as the cosmotheandric symbol. Of particular concern is how Panikkar outlines his notion of pluralism while navigating between self-defeating relativism and exclusivist and monopolistic absolutism. His appeal to the mystery, or “opaque remnant,” within all Creation and creatures, makes it necessary for him to affirm religious and metaphysical pluralism. In order to live in a world in which reality is not reducible to the intelligible or rational, Panikkar draws on the traditional notion of theandrisms, the unity of God and humanity, and what he perceives to be the trinitarian nature of reality (God, human, creation). These two notions form cosmotheandrism, whose nexus is Christ, the Incarnation and conduit for both the act of creation and God’s relationship with Creation. Because Christ Incarnate and the Trinity are ultimately mysteries, whose depths cannot be completely plumbed by the human intellect, and because the Incarnation and the Trinity are the primary metaphysical principles of reality, cosmotheandrism works to both argue for and make sense of religious and metaphysical
pluralism. This pluralism sets the stage for the shape and character of Panikkar’s notion of interreligious dialogue and is a major concern for his Christology.

The third chapter will outline Panikkar’s conception of the nature and role of interreligious dialogue. For Panikkar, the new context in which religious people live out their religiousness is inherently interreligious. For Panikkar, it is now impossible to be religious without some relation to other religions. Thus, dialogue is a fact and is necessary. As a fact and necessity, Pannikar’s interreligious dialogue locates theology within a new context, in which religious people can no longer make exclusive claims on religious truth or deny the value of the other religious traditions. This new setting places greater emphasis on religious pluralism, and locates the theological act within a religiously pluralistic and interreligious context. The result is that theology must attune itself to the new context of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. Thus, the Christian account of Christ must shift to attend to this new reality and new context.

The fourth and final chapter will take a more historical perspective of the development of Panikkar’s Christology over the course of his career. In particular, the chapter will outline how Panikkar begins with a notion of Christ as the mediator of creation and salvation and progresses to integrate a symbol Christology, whose disjunction between the symbol and symbolized violates traditional Christological principles as outlined in the first chapter.
CHAPTER 2
A BRIEF CHRISTOLOGICAL SURVEY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide two things. First, it will investigate two different sources, the Council of Chalcedon (451) and the documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) to determine the parameters of Christological discussion. Both are regarded as possessing and expressing normative, dogmatic Christological teachings for Catholic theology. These two sources will provide a framework for examination and critique of Panikkar’s Christological writings. Second, since Christological thought is often formed on the dual principles of confession and inquiry, this chapter will outline how the priority of Christian confession over inquiry guides and directs theological inquiry in both Christology as well as interreligious dialogue. Since the CDF is the office charged with protecting Christian doctrine and ensuring clear and faithful expression of it, its opinions and determinations provide important guidance for theological inquiry. Thus, this chapter aims to provide an outline for examination and critique of Raimon Panikkar’s theological method and Christology.

Part I. The Council of Chalcedon

The Doctrinal Background of the Council of Chalcedon

In his book, The Council of Chalcedon: A Historical and Doctrinal Survey, R. V. Sellers makes the distinction between the dual principles of confession and inquiry in the teachings
of the competing schools of thought.\(^3\) It is because of this distinction, and his discussion of the Christological controversy more clearly along the lines of the careful balancing act between confusion and duality, that he is the primary source for this presentation of the Council. His narration of the Christological controversies will be particularly helpful in understanding the approach that Panikkar takes in his theological foundations as well as his Christology. According to Sellers, what differentiate the three schools (Alexandrian, Antiochene, and Western/Latin) are not their confessions of faith (e.g. that Jesus Christ is human and divine), but rather the means by which they express that faith through theological inquiry (the various meanings of hypostasis, nature, and person). Sellers argues that each school, in accord with the others, and most importantly in accord with the text of Scripture and Tradition, assert that Jesus Christ is one person, the Lord, the Son of God, the Logos, human and divine. Where the controversy developed was in their attempts to explain how Christ was both human and divine. According to Sellers, the multiplicity that developed out of the single confession of Christ’s humanity and divinity was due to differing soteriologies and corresponding world-views.\(^4\)

For the Alexandrian school, represented by Athanasius, Cyril and Apollinaris, the basic understanding of soteriology lay in humanity’s being deified through faith in Christ.

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\(^3\) As noted previously, Sellers’ principles of confession and inquiry are overly simplistic explanations of the theological process. However, their value is in their ability to help isolate the disagreements between schools of thought in a way that will illuminate the way that Panikkar develops his Christology in response to religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue.

\(^4\) R. V. Sellers, *The Council of Chalcedon: A Historical and Doctrinal Survey*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1961), xi –xvii. As noted above, Sellers’ category of confession to be the initial stage of religious faith and assent to normative doctrine. All parties in the controversies assent to the doctrine that Christ is both human and divine as determined by Nicaea. This assent to the humanity and divinity of Christ is what Sellers identifies as “confession.” The critical and analytical attempt to explain the way in which the humanity and divinity relate, what one thinks of as the process of theology proper, is what Sellers identifies as “inquiry.”
This deification is most clearly represented by the Incarnation.\(^5\) Thus, for the Alexandrians, particular emphasis was placed on determining and outlining the means by which God and man became one. Further, any attempt to divide the two or even place emphasis or priority on that division ran counter to their soteriological expectations. As Sellers notes,

> So it is that, to enforce this cardinal truth of the Gospel [the union and unity of Christ], Apollinarius and Cyril, like their predecessors and successors in this school of thought, maintain that sound belief demands a full use of the principle of the *communicatio idiomatum*...the union being so complete that the flesh, while remaining flesh, shares in the names and properties of the Logos, and the Logos, while remaining Logos and God, shares in those of the flesh.\(^6\)

At the same time, this assertion of the unity of God and man in Christ cannot be used to argue the “confusion” or “mixture” of the two. Rather, “in connection with the intellectual process of enquiring into the mystery of the God made man, these teachers affirm that...one must ‘recognize the difference’ of the natures in their union in the one Person, and thus see each in its ‘natural otherness.’”\(^7\) What becomes clear is that the Alexandrian school of thought placed its greatest emphasis on the singular unity of Christ, in whom God and man are made into one Person. Any assertion or emphasis of division or duality over this unity threatens their soteriology because it breaks down the necessary unity of the Incarnation, which was the Alexandrian school’s primary vision of redemption and salvation.

In some contrast to the Alexandrian school of thought, the Antiochene school placed their theological emphasis on the duality of Christ. Just as the Alexandrians used a soteriology which focused on the Incarnation and the union of God with man, the Antiochenes operated through a soteriology which maintained that prior to the sin of Adam

\(^5\) Ibid., 132.

\(^6\) Ibid., 142.

\(^7\) Ibid., 148.
humanity lived in union with God and the created world. It was at the point of Adam’s sin that humanity was broken from God, and our subsequent, inherited original sin continues that separation. Just as important is the Antiochene “doctrine of the essential difference between God the Creator and man the creature: over against God in his immortality, incorruptibility, and impassibility is set mortal, corruptible and passible man.” Further, “all that exists can be divided into what is uncreated, and what is created. God alone…the one God made known in three hypostases, has an uncreated ousia, while every other form of existence has of necessity a created ousia.” For the Antiochenes, emphasis on the “two natures” of Christ is the clearest means of maintaining that essential difference between God and man. At the same time, “two natures” safeguards any claims of the confusion or mixture of the divinity and humanity of Christ, or worse the denial of either. So to divide the two natures of Christ is the best means of accounting for the impassibility of God while still asserting the divinity and humanity of Christ. However, Sellers’ argument is that this assertion of the division of Christ’s two natures is arrived at not through the principle of confession; they rightly assert the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Their fault is found when they attempt to explain how he is both according to their own soteriological framework and threaten the necessary unity of the humanity and divinity of Christ.

Just as the Alexandrians hold to the Gospel proof of Christ’s humanity and divinity, so too do the Antiochenes. What led the Alexandrians to emphasize the unity of the two in one nature is their soteriology as well as their attempts to safeguard against other heresies denying Christ’s humanity or divinity. What led the Antiochenes to argue for two natures are the same two forces. They each assert a Christology resultant from their individual

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8 Ibid., 162.
soteriological filters and attempt to safeguard Christ’s divinity and humanity in a way conducive to their differing worldviews. While the Alexandrians focus upon the Incarnation as their model for soteriology and Christology, emphasizing unity of the divine with humanity, the Antiochenes emphasized the Resurrection as the focus in that it shows how in Christ’s Resurrection the break between humanity, the created world and God has been closed and healed, affecting the joining of the two natures of Christ.

Finally, Sellers claims that the same dynamic that led to the confusion between the Alexandrians and the Antiochenes also operates among the Latins, but with greater balance. In the West, he says, “the Christian religion in the West was being carried more and more into the legal sphere, and the Church had come to be regarded as the ‘institute of salvation.’” For the West, “Sin is a crime against the sovereignty of God which calls for satisfaction. Such words as ‘debt’, ‘guilt’, ‘merit’, and ‘compensation’ appear again and again.” Salvation then comes only “through the coming of One who will take man’s guilt upon himself, and in his perfect obedience offer himself willingly as a sacrifice on man’s behalf.” Such a conception of soteriology necessitates a particular vision of Christ. In the first place, it is necessary that Christ be both God and man. Only God is capable of paying such a debt as man owes, for man’s limited capacity makes it impossible to pay for such a deep debt. At the same time, Christ must be man in order that he might die, for God is immutable, impassible, and immortal. Christ then must be both divine and human. The result is that “the Westerns see the need of the coming of a Mediator between God and man, himself at once God and man.” It is this Mediator that dies for the debt of the sinful, and in his death they are made

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9 Sellers, 182.
10 Ibid., 183.
11 Ibid.
righteous. Thus, where we saw above that the Alexandrians favored the Incarnation, and the Antiochenes the Resurrection, the Westerns, Sellers argues, favored Calvary as the primary image and moment for soteriology. The result is that, after confessing his role of Mediator, one recognizes, through theological reflection, the duality of natures in Christ. Sellers notes,

The two root principles of Christological confession and Christological inquiry, as we are calling them, at once emerge: the Mediator, the God-Man, is one Person, and in him are to be seen, as they are presented to the human mind, the two natures or substances of Godhead and manhood. Unlike the Easterns, the Latins keep these two principles in balance.12

Sellers argues that the Christological confusion and controversy leading up to Chalcedon was largely due to differing soteriologies and world-views influencing each school’s emphasis on “one nature” or “two natures,” but that in all three cases it is clear that they all confess that Christ was one Person who was both God and man. It is only after Christological confession and during the process of Christological inquiry that the differing emphases develop.

The result is Sellers’ claim that each of the three theological traditions “have their meeting place in Chalcedon.”13 Further, “The Council of Chalcedon set its seal to the principal findings of previous orthodox teachers of the Church, irrespective of the particular school of thought to which they belonged.”14 This led to the definitio fidei of the Council of Chalcedon, which according to Sellers exemplifies the Council’s recognition of the need to assert confession over inquiry.15

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12 Sellers, 186.
13 Sellers, xv.
14 Sellers, xvi.
15 Sellers, xvii.
The Council Documents

After ratifying and upholding the Symbols of Nicaea and Constantinople, which will be discussed in more detail below, the Council Fathers of Chalcedon made efforts to extricate the extreme Christological positions. They presented the letters of Cyril, “in agreement [with the two Symbols],” as a force against Nestorius and those “shamelessly pretending that the one born of the holy Mary was an ordinary human being.”16 In doing so, they excised the extreme Antiochene position of a separation of the human and divine natures of Christ. In opposition to the extreme Alexandrian position, typified by the total unity and confusion of Christ’s two natures asserted by Eutyches, the Council Fathers made use of Pope Leo’s letter to Flavian, which asserted the duality of natures in the one Christ. What these movements make clear is that in many ways the Fathers could not fully resolve the problem of the diversity within the unity of Christ, but that they saw that the proper course in dealing with the mystery was to take a more moderate stance and not exclude either aspect of Christ’s personhood. As the Council document says, “For [this synod] sets itself against those who attempt to split up the mystery of the dispensation into a duality of sons…and it opposes those who conceive of a confusion or mixture in the case of the two natures of Christ.” And further, “It anathematizes those who make up the teaching that before the union there are two natures of the Lord, but imagine that after the union there is one.”17 Using Sellers’ principles they are asserting Christological confession over inquiry, inquiry which might deform the articles of faith.

At the core of the Council’s definition is the recognized need to walk the fine line between the numerous ways in which the Incarnation can be understood. Rather than

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17 Ibid.
asserting one side over the other, the Council’s definition maintains a difficult tension between the two main schools. On the one hand, it is necessary to assert that Christ is one person and of a single identity. On the other, they must recognize that Christ, for soteriological reasons, must be both human and divine. Thus, they must maintain the tension between Christ’s unity and duality; or rather, his unity in duality and duality in unity. What the Council Fathers had to do was maintain the tension while condemning the extreme positions. So, while they must assert that there is one Christ who is both human and divine, they cannot allow the confusion or admixture of the duality, nor allow for either the human or the divine to swallow the other. Thus, they must assert the Incarnation through a positive and constructive tension between unity and duality, while at the same time condemning heretical positions, which excludes either extreme end of the spectrum. For this reason the Council Father’s wrote, “We confess one and the same Son,” who “is complete in his deity and complete – the very same – in his humanity.” This Son is the one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only Begotten, acknowledged to be unconfusedly, unalterably, undividedly, inseparably in two natures, since the difference of the natures is not destroyed because of the union, but on the contrary, the character of each nature is preserved and comes together in one person and one hypostasis, not divided or torn into two persons but one and the same Son…18

The Council Fathers saw the deep need to walk the line between the fundamentals of the Christian Christological confession received from the holy fathers and transmitted through the Tradition and the Holy Scriptures. For them, in terms of Sellers’ two principles, priority was given to Christological confession of the humanity and divinity of Christ. It is only after theological inquiry that a concern for the diversity and unity of Christ’s natures becomes

18 Norris, 159.
apparent. That fact, as Sellers makes clear of the different schools of thought, runs throughout the Council’s *definitio fidei*.

It is this tension, necessary because of the mystery of the Incarnation, that makes both the extreme Alexandrian and Antiochene positions possible. This picture will also help to engage Panikkar’s approach to Christology. In much the same way that the schools of Antioch and Alexandria fell into error due to the priority of a theological, in this case soteriological, concern, so too will Panikkar come to present an image of the Incarnation which possesses qualities that violate the normative teachings of the Christological councils. It will be because of his attention to his own theological concerns of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue that he is led to his use of symbol and which results in an erroneous presentation of the Incarnation.

Since Chalcedon can largely be a summation of the Christological investigation in the first half of the first millennium of the Church. As such it retains its role as being normative and definitive for the Christian community. For that reason, it is necessary to treat the content of the Creeds, as supported by the Chalcedonian Fathers. The claims that are particularly important for this study are the following:

1)Jesus Christ is the Son of God the Father, the second Person of the Trinity. Only in context of the Trinity can Jesus Christ be understood. Overemphasis on any one Person and the Christian confession of faith becomes off-balanced. Thus, there is a mutually constitutive relationship between a proper Christology and a proper account of the Trinity. If either is removed or left out the other suffers for it.

2)Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the divine Logos joined to human flesh, fully human and fully divine. Any failure to account adequately for both natures fails to account for the
entirety of Christian confession. As Chalcedon makes clear, it is necessary to take a balanced and moderate approach to the Incarnation, not moving to the extremes and not losing sight of either nature. Through the *communicatio idiomatum*, of which the CDF will make use, what is proper of the historical person of Jesus is extended to the universal Christ, and what is proper to the universal Christ extends to the historical Jesus, without confusion and without division.

3) Jesus Christ, as the second Person of the Trinity, is the mediator of the process of creation. As both Nicaea and Constantinople state, he is the one “through whom all things were made.” This implies further that he is not only mediator of creation, but also the mediator *between* God the Father and creation, between God and Man.

4) Christ is the mediator of salvation. For the Nicaean fathers he is the one “who for us human beings and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and became human.” Further, Constantinople expands upon this and asserts that Christ, “was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and rose on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” It is in and through Christ that salvation occurs. It is not only granted through Christ’s death, but salvation is also located in Christ.

These four fundamental categories of the Christological confession as it is received from the Council of Chalcedon lay the groundwork for our examination of Panikkar’s Christology to be discussed below. What will of greatest concern for the discussion of Panikkar’s conceptions of religious pluralism, interreligious dialogue and the person and role of Christ is the concern of the Councils to identify the historically located person of Jesus Christ with the Second person of the Trinity, the Son, the Logos. In each of the points above, the operating concern is working within the witness of the apostles of their experience of Jesus
Christ as it was and is passed down through tradition/Tradition. It is that context of the historical manifestation of Christ in Jesus, which is proper for the Councils’ understanding of Christological inquiry. As will be shown, it is just that scandal of history that Panikkar’s entire Christology is attempting to sidestep. To that end, Panikkar is led to discuss the relationship between the historical manifestation of Jesus and the universal mediator and second person of the Trinity, Christ, in a way that is problematic for traditional Christological principles in which Jesus of Nazareth is the one and singular, complete manifestation of the Divine Christ in space and time.

**Part II. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**

**Methodology**

According to the CDF document *Donum Veritatis*, “[the theologian’s] role is to pursue in a particular way an ever deepening understanding of the Word of God found in inspired Scriptures and handed on by the living Tradition of the Church…in communion with the Magisterium which has been charged with the responsibility of preserving the deposit of faith.”¹⁹ At the same time, “the theologian must…be committed to offering [the People of God] a teaching which in no way does harm to the doctrine of the faith.”²⁰ In short, the discipline of Catholic theology must maintain the priority of the Christian confession of faith. Investigation into the deposit of faith is important because it is necessary for maintaining the health and coherence of the faith. The result is that for the theologian the “truth revealed in Christ constitutes the ultimate normative principle of theology.

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²⁰ Ibid., #11.
Nothing else may surpass it.”

Donum Veritatis outlines the very principles of theology: “In theology this freedom of inquiry is the hallmark of a rational discipline whose object is given by Revelation, handed on and interpreted in the Church under the authority of the Magisterium, and received by faith. These givens have the force of principles. To eliminate them would mean to cease doing theology.”

The discipline of theology is secondary to the deposit of faith as it is given by Scripture and Tradition and interpreted by the Church with the Magisterium. These principles take priority over and before the discipline of critical theology.

**Christology in the CDF Documents**

Because the CDF is responsible for protecting Christian doctrine in the Catholic Church its primary concern is safeguarding those fundamentals of the faith. This means that it does not endorse a particular method of theology and simply seeks to determine if particular theologians clearly and sufficiently express Christian doctrine according to general principles. In their Notifications of particular theologians and their writings, the CDF indicates what it perceives as the primary concerns facing Christological doctrine in contemporary theology. This section draws largely from four Notifications that deal predominantly with Christology, as well as the document *Dominus Iesus*. The primary concerns within the four Notifications line up with the major concerns of Chalcedon. As such they can be broken into similar categories. What differences occur are results of particularities of theological investigation. The CDF’s documents can be seen as attempts to

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reassert confession over method in cases where method appears to have been given priority. In order to reorient these theologians and their writings, the CDF places its greatest emphasis not on the method of the theologians but primarily on whether and how well they attend to particular aspects of the Christian confession of faith.

First, a major concern is the proper and clear attention to the Christian belief in the Incarnation, most especially that Christ is clearly taught to be both fully human and fully divine. Most especially important for our later treatment of Panikkar’s Christology is the CDF’s critique of Jon Sobrino’s accounting of the *communicatio idiomatum* in *Christ the Liberator*. In the notification, the CDF charges that Sobrino has an “insufficient comprehension of the *communicatio idiomatum*, which he describes in the following way: ‘the limited human is predicated of God, but the unlimited divine is not predicated of Jesus’.”23 Arguing from the precedent of the Council of Ephesus and its position on Mary as *Theotokos*, the document continues, “In reality, the phrase *communicatio idiomatum*, that is, the possibility of referring the properties of divinity to humanity and vice versa, is the immediate consequence of the unity of the person of Christ ‘in two natures’ affirmed by the Council of Chalcedon.” Thus, “It is therefore incorrect to maintain that ‘the unlimited divine’ is not predicated of Jesus,” and “the understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* which the Author presents reveals an erroneous conception of the mystery of the Incarnation and of the unity of the person of Jesus Christ.” Thus, Sobrino’s “qualified predication” between the human and divine in the unity of the Incarnation results in an erroneous presentation of the person and nature of Jesus Christ and the mystery of the Incarnation.24

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24 Ibid., #6
What is most important for our later treatment of Panikkar’s Christology is the CDF’s discernment of the erroneous nature of the Sobrino’s assertion of a “qualified predication” within the *communicatio idiomatum*. The notion that the unity of the human and divine in Christ is one-sided, in that the divine appears to impart more to human than the human does to the divine, also appears in Panikkar’s thought around the 1970’s and continues throughout the rest of his career. Just as Sobrino is said to argue that the limited human is not predicated of the unlimited divine, Panikkar argues that Jesus as historical symbol does not exhaust the universal and eternal Christic principle or Christ. The distinction made between the human/historical/limited and the divine/eternal/unlimited creates in both Sobrino’s and Panikkar’s work an apparent division of natures; human and divine. Since the two natures are not wholly unified in the one person the result is a division or disjunction between the two. This division, argued against by Cyril and condemned by Ephesus, is apparent in an essay which exemplifies a shift in Panikkar’s Christological thought in the 1970’s. Panikkar, because of his particular form of symbol Christology, appears to present a Nestorian position of dual persons, human and divine. What is important to take away from this is that the CDF outlines in its notification on the works of Jon Sobrino an erroneous position very similar to one within the Christological work of Raimon Panikkar in the last forty years of his career.

In much the same way, Roger Haight’s *Jesus Symbol of God* is criticized for “the epistemological choice of the theory of symbol...which undermines the basis of

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26 Panikkar, “The Meaning of Christ’s Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation,” in *Service and Salvation*, Joseph Pathrapankal, CMI, ed, (Bangalore, India: Theological Publications of India, 1973), 247. It is interesting to note that Panikkar follows a Nestorian assertion with an apparent monophysite turn arguing that the human person “did not come into being because the person was subsumed by the divine person of the Logos.”
Quoting Haight’s claim that “the created human being or person Jesus of Nazareth is the concrete symbol expressing the presence in history of God as Logos,” the document argues, Haight fails to adequately assert and affirm that Jesus was and is God. Further, the document claims that Haight’s account of Jesus as “symbolic medium” asserts that Jesus is “a finite human being and creature’…whereas ‘true God’ means that the man Jesus, as concrete symbol, is or mediates the saving presence of God in history.” The necessary separation of the historical Jesus from the eternal God, necessary to draw out Jesus’ role as symbol, breaks down the communicatio idiomatum by failing to affirm the predication of divinity on the human person of Jesus. According to the CDF’s notification, Haight’s attempt to shape theological discussion about the Incarnation in a way that is more conducive to the postmodern situation results in an assertion that “is not in accord with the dogma of Nicaea” and an “interpretation of the divinity of Jesus [that] is contrary to the faith of the Church.” Finally, The CDF notification finds fault with Haight’s assertion that “Jesus is ‘normative’ for Christians, but ‘non-constitutive’ for other religious mediations,” and that “God alone effects salvation and Jesus’ universal mediation is not necessary” thus cutting “the necessity of binding God’s salvation to Jesus of Nazareth alone.” What the CDF’s notification on Haight’s work provides for this study is an example of the problems of tailoring Christology to a particular end. While theology and theologians can’t be totally separated from a particular agenda, the CDF’s document highlights the difficulties of when an agenda becomes too much of a determining factor for a theologian’s investigation.

27 CDF, Notification on the Book "Jesus Symbol of God" by Father Roger Haight S.J., part I.
28 Ibid., part II.
29 Ibid., part III.
30 Ibid., part III.
31 Ibid., part VI.
The CDF’s notification of *Jesus Symbol of God* does two things for our investigation of Panikkar’s Christology. First, it helps further outline the problems of tuning one’s theological work to a particular agenda. The result for Haight is a deformation of Christological doctrine due to his own attempt to make Christ intelligible within a postmodern situation. Attempting to do postmodern theology, Haight misrepresents the Incarnation. In a similar way, Panikkar’s attempt to make Christ palatable to a pluralist and interreligious world will result in a presentation of the Incarnation which violates traditional Christological principles. Second, in the same way that Haight makes use of an account of symbol, which leads to his notification, to attend to the needs of postmodern sensibilities, so too does Panikkar turn to a form of symbol to attend to the needs of pluralism and the new interreligious context, which possesses the same pitfalls present in Haight’s symbol. In both cases, there is an inherent disjunction between the symbol (Jesus for Haight and Jesus of Nazareth for Panikkar) and the symbolized (God for Haight and the Cosmic Christ for Panikkar). In both cases, their accounts of symbol lead to erroneous accounts of Christ.

The operating concerns of the CDF as they play out in these documents is ensuring that theologians clearly maintain an adequate Christological confession prior to theological method. What is necessary is that theologians allow the Christian deposit of faith (from scripture, tradition and normative conciliar documents and sources) to provide boundaries that help to direct their inquiry. In the opinion of the CDF, the theologians, whose texts form the basis of this section, fail to do that, or fail to do so adequately and express the Christian confession clearly. In a way similar to those condemned at the Christological councils earlier in the chapter, these notified theologians maintain the priority of a particular theological perspective and project over traditional authoritative sources. What these
documents express is the deep need for theologians to maintain that the fundamental Christian confession of faith, systematized in the Council documents of the Church and papal teachings, comes prior to theological inquiry, even if theological inquiry can legitimately raise questions about particular expressions of that confession of faith.

The same pattern is evident in the document Dominius Iesus. In the document, the CDF outlines several points that it views as distinct problems in the fields of Theology of Religion and Interreligious Dialogue. In short, the concern is still the need to assert that Jesus Christ is the one, single, and universal mediator of salvation.32 In the same way that Chalcedon and the above CDF documents affirm the role of a clear confession of faith over inquiry, Dominius Iesus does so for theology of religion and interreligious dialogue. This means that any endeavors into interreligious dialogue, or religious pluralism, at least for a Catholic theologian, must presuppose the fundamental Christian confession of faith and must be molded and shaped by that confession. In particular, they must begin with Christ’s role as mediator of salvation.

The CDF and Interreligious Dialogue

According to the CDF, “Interreligious dialogue…is part of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”33 Such evangelization is brought about by a desire to share the goods of one’s own religious tradition. For Christianity the foundational good which must be shared is Christ. To

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33 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration "Dominius Iesus" on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, #2.
lack Christ is to lack “a tremendous benefit in this world.”

For the Christian then, “respect for religious freedom and its promotion ‘must not in any way make us indifferent towards truth and goodness. Indeed, love impels the followers of Christ to proclaim to all the truth which saves.’” Rather than minimizing the differences between Christianity and leaving out what might scandalize their partner in dialogue, the Christian must maintain doctrine as truth. Any process of removing certain beliefs for the purpose of accommodation is ultimately a poor presentation of Christian truth, if not erroneous. Further, it allows other motives to direct one’s Christian witness rather than the truth of the Christian doctrine to direct one’s theological method.

Early on in the document *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, the CDF outlines a foundational problem in evangelization: “Questions are being raised about the legitimacy of presenting to others – so that they might in turn accept it – that which is held to be true for oneself. Often this is seen as an infringement of the other people’s [religious] freedom.” This problematic perspective is founded in “that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires and under semblance of freedom, becomes a prison for each one.” Further, quoting John Paul II, the document asserts that, “A legitimate plurality of positions yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid… is one of today’s most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth.” It is clear that the primary concern of the CDF and John Paul II is the need to maintain the priority of Christian

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35 Ibid., #10.
doctrine over all other forces, including theological inquiry and interreligious dialogue. As above, giving priority to relativism or an undifferentiated pluralism puts the faith at risk. Any attempt to do so not only makes faith secondary to inquiry and subject to it, but also undermines that very faith by undermining all confidence in that doctrine.36

**Conclusion**

Throughout the rest of this paper the categories that have been discussed will be the guidelines for examining and critiquing Raimon Panikkar’s Christology, his account of religious pluralism and his goals for interreligious dialogue. The first guideline is the tension between confession and inquiry. Just as Chalcedon and the CDF maintain normative Christian doctrine over theological method, this paper will point out the extent to which Panikkar maintains that same tension. Second, Chalcedon’s attention to the inherent tensions within the mystery of the Incarnation, as seen in the *definition fidei*, and the principle of the *communicatio idiomatum*, will help highlight those tensions in Panikkar’s accounting of the Incarnation. Third, Chalcedon and the CDF’s attention to particular propositions of Christology (e.g. the necessity of the Trinity, the full mystery of the Incarnation, the role of Christ as mediator of creation, and most importantly of salvation) will operate as our guidelines for examining how Panikkar discusses the nature and role of Christ. Most especially, the CDF’s attention to Sobrino’s violation of the *communicatio idiomatum* and Haight’s division of the divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ will figure prominently in our examination of Panikkar’s symbol Christology.

36 Ibid., #4.
CHAPTER 3
PLURALISM AND THE COSMOTHEANDRIC EXPERIENCE

Introduction

At the foundation of Raimon Panikkar’s theological method and his Christology is a composition of three elements: metaphysical, theoretical pluralism (contrasted against a practical pluralism you might find in a free and liberal society); his own interpretation of Hindu Vedantic *advaita*, or non-duality; and a trinitarian worldview, which relies heavily on the traditional understanding of the Christian Trinity, but is not simply identifiable with it. Together these three elements find their expression in Panikkar’s cosmotheandric experience. Most importantly they are the categories in which Panikkar organizes his theological thought. His pluralism is the lens through which he views the goals and nature of interreligious dialogue, and the cosmotheandric experience and worldview is the lens through which he understands and discusses the person and office of Jesus Christ as it is received from revelation.

Though it is clear that Panikkar intends his pluralism to be primarily “pre-theological,” it is just as clear that it poses important implications for theology. Though Panikkar goes to great lengths to side-step the charge of relativism (which he says undermines truth in its assertion), his argument for the relativity of truth threatens the universal normativity of Christian revelation for all humanity. Further, though Panikkar’s
pluralism and cosmotheandricism do rely on a proper and clear understanding and expression of fundamental Christian doctrines, his work ultimately makes fundamental Christian doctrine subject to his own method of theological inquiry. The aspects of Panikkar’s thought presented here, which form the foundation for his work on interreligious dialogue and Christology, risk tampering with the guidelines of Catholic theological methodology. Though he never clearly rejects Christian doctrine in a direct sense, he does deny the normativity of the Christian revelation which doctrine is intended to express and transmit.

**Part I. The Argument for Pluralism**

Throughout his writings, Panikkar uses several different ways to talk about his conception of pluralism. One of most his common assertions about his conception is that pluralism is not meant to be a supersystem. He says,

> Pluralism in its ultimate sense is not the tolerance of a diversity of systems under a larger umbrella. It is not a supersystem….

Religious pluralism then is not the means to reduce differences between religious traditions, or to relativize the differing traditions to the point of irrelevance, by appealing to a larger system, but is the result of accepting those differences.

It is in terms of attitudes that Panikkar most clearly talks about the pluralist viewpoint. For Panikkar, pluralism “is not primarily objective. It does not say anything directly about objects. Certainly, it is based upon the perception of plurality, but it includes

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also a subjective attitude.”38 Rather than attempting to provide a universal theory of religions, Panikkar asserts that his account of pluralism is not on the level of a closed, formal system, but is an attitude of interpretation, or a subjective filter by and through which one experiences the world and makes sense of that experience.

Panikkar also talks about pluralism as an experience of our own limitations. He says, “the conviction of pluralism dawns upon the human mind when we discover our own contingency, our own intellectual limitations, and do not compensate our impotence by projecting our frustration onto an infinite Mind which will reassure us that our ignorance is only ours.” Further he says, “What is called into question is the identification of this infinite mind with the entirety of reality. An omniscient mind will know all that is knowable, but all that is knowable does not need to be all that is, unless we gratuitously postulate the total intelligibility of reality.”39 Thus, Panikkar’s pluralism is rooted in what he calls the “discovery” of our limitations and leads beyond to the conviction that not all reality is totally intelligible and that our powers of reason and intellect are powerless to break through that which is unintelligible in reality.

For Panikkar, the clearest argument for pluralism is fundamentally metaphysical, and it is the limits which face us that force an acceptance of the pluralist attitude. In his article, “Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge,” from 1984, He says,

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


39 Ibid., 32 – 33. Italics in original.
allow for perfect reflection. Reality is also spontaneity, and ever new creation, and expanding energy. God’s thought is divine and as such equal to God, but God is not just thought.40

And further,

Truth is pluralistic, we said. This amounts to saying that being itself is pluralistic, that reality is irreducible to a monolithic unity, irreducible to pure transparency, irreducible to intellect or Spirit. There is a nonontological dimension to reality (freedom, nonbeing, silence, and so forth) and also an opaque one (matter, energy, world, and so forth), besides the proper human dimension (consciousness, mind).41

In “Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory or a Cosmic Confidence,” from 1987, he claims,

Each being, not excluding a possible Supreme Being, presents an opaque remnant, as it were, a mysterious aspect that defies transparency. This is precisely the locus of freedom – and the basis for pluralism. Thinking, or the intelligence, covers the totality of Being only from the exterior, so to say. Being has an untapped reservoir, a dynamism, an inner side not illuminated by self-knowledge, reflection, or the like. Spontaneity is located in this corner of each being – its own mystery…The mystery of reality cannot be equated with the nature of consciousness…From all this follows that there is no absolute truth…because reality itself cannot be said to be self-intelligible – unless we a priori totally identify Reality with Consciousness.42

What Panikkar is arguing for in each of these excerpts is that a) reality is not reducible to one principle, b) that all beings possess “an opaque remnant,” the source of freedom, which is mystery, and c) that these premises support that there can be no absolute truth which exhausts all reality, because that mystery denies the total intelligibility of reality and thus its reduction down to any single principle, especially including intelligibility.

In describing this “opaque remnant” Panikkar turns to the Hindu Vedantic principle, advaita, or non-duality. In advaita, the assertion is that reality is not reducible to one principle, monism, or two principles, duality. The principle of advaita, in its original context, deals primarily with concerns regarding the existence of the Brahman, the universal ground of all things, and atman, the individual soul. What advaita is intended to resolve is the

41 Ibid.
recognition that atman is Brahman and Brahman is atman, and yet they both remain distinct from one another. In short it helps deal with the metaphysical problem of the one and the many, diversity and unity. According to Panikkar, “Advaita has sometimes been called the mystery of being, for it is best expressed in terms of ‘being’, but even the notion of being cannot do justice to the advaita experience.” It is this “mystery of being” and “opaque remnant” which cannot be penetrated by the intellect, because as mystery it exists outside of, beyond or deeper than what is intelligible. This mystery of being, perceived in advaita, is at the core of Panikkar’s pluralism.

According to Panikkar, the very nature of reality, irreducible to a single principle, supports the attitude that truth is pluralistic. Pluralism, he says, “amounts to giving up one of the pillars on which many a civilization has built its fundamental ideas for at least twenty-five centuries: the harmonious correlation between thinking and being.” Hence, “In pluralism, thinking ceases to be the controller of being. The different religious traditions become expressions of the creativity of being striking ever new adventures into the real.” For Panikkar, the pluralist attitude is squarely placed in the mysterious core of reality, and refuses to force reality and being into the intelligible principles available to the intellect. He says, “To affirm that Consciousness is Being is a postulate of intelligibility, but not of Being. Truth is the result of some equation between Consciousness and Being. But Being may transcend its equation with Consciousness.” Thus, while consciousness is limited to Being, Being is not limited to what is intelligible to consciousness.

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45 Ibid.
For Panikkar truth is relational. He says, “The Absolute is in the Relative. Something can be absolutely true, but this is not absolute Truth. Truth is always a relationship, and one of the poles of the relationship is the intellect that understands what is the case (intelligible, coherent, and so on).” He also says

Truth is constituted by the total relationship of things, because things are insofar as they are in relation to one another. But this relation is not private relation between a subject and an object…There is no such thing as private truth. On the other hand, truth is not an immutable or absolute quality totally objectifiable in concepts or propositions independently of time, space, culture, and people.46

Truth then is not determined by the identification of Being with Thought, but rather in its relationship with beings. Truth claims then are relative to one another in their being limited or located in “time, space, culture, and people.” At the same time, Panikkar wants to make sure that his relational conception of truth does not turn into a relativistic conception.

Panikkar makes his own distinction between relativism and relativity. He says,

Relativism destroys itself when affirming that all is relative and thus also the very affirmation of relativism. Relativity, on the other hand, asserts that any human affirmation, and thus any truth, is relative to its very own parameters and that there can be no ab-solute truth, for truth is essentially relational. Relativity…is presupposed in the act of denying it.47

In support of this in the religious sphere, Panikkar employs the example of totum per partem. As Judson B. Trapnell recounts it, “To affirm relativity is to acknowledge that each person can see (which does not mean that she or he does see) the whole, but always from a particular perspective (through a specific window).”48 As Panikkar says, “It is a totum for us, but per partem, limited to our vision through the one window. We see the totum, but not totaliter one

may say (because we do not see through other windows).” Epistemologically then, relativity
does not deny the existence of a common total referent but only the human intellect’s
capacity to grasp that referent in its totality.

For Panikkar, the relativity of religions does not pare religious truths to personal
opinion or private truth (As he says, “There is no such thing as private truth”). Rather,
religions are true as they relate to their believers. According to Panikkar, there are two
conditions for determining a true religion:

1) It has to deliver the promised goods to its members; in other words, it needs to be truthful
to its own tenets…. A true religion must serve its purpose for those who believe in it; it must achieve
existential truth, honest consistency.

2) It has to present a view of reality in which the basic experience is expressed in an intelligible
corpus that can sustain intelligent criticism from the outside without falling into substantial
contradictions…. A true religion must achieve essential truth, authentic coherence.

For Panikkar, the ultimate claims of religious traditions operate in a state of relativity.
They are true insofar as they are true for those who believe it and so long as they are
consistent and coherent and stand up to external criticism. This is in line with his position
that, “Pluralism does not affirm that there are many truths – which is contradiction in terms.
Truth itself is pluralistic, not plural; that is, it is related to the context from which it comes
and to the people for whom it is (appears, is revealed as) truth.” It is that relation to a
believer’s lived context that determines the truth of a religion.

In contrast, the CDF makes clear its stance on the nature of truth when it states in
Dominus Iesus that, “In fact, it must be firmly believed that, in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the
Incarnate Son of God, who is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (Jn. 14:6), the full revelation of
divine truth is given.” Later, quoting the Second Vatican Council’s Dei Verbum, they say, “By
this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.” And finally, quoting *Redemptoris missio*, the document states: “In this definitive word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way…[The Church] cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself.” Thus, religious truth is identified with Christian revelation, which in turn is identified with Christ, and then with God. For the Christian, the fullest expression of truth, about God and for humanity’s salvation, is available in the revelation of Jesus Christ. It was not only the teachings of Christ, the apostolic witness following the Ascension, or the traditional expression and transmission which led to the eventual canon of the Christian Scripture. The truth of revelation was not only given by Christ but was embodied in the very Incarnation in the human/divine person of Jesus Christ. Any attempt to marginalize that historical event/person risks breaking apart that identification. As will be shown later, this is just what Panikkar will attempt to do in order to make Christ accessible to other religions.

This directly parallels what John Paul II, who was the intellectual force behind the above statements, claims to be the “unity of truth” in his 1998 encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. There, John Paul claims that the grasp on truth attained by philosophy is not contradictory to the truth revealed by God in Jesus Christ. He says, “On the contrary, the two modes of knowledge lead to truth in all its fullness. The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning, as the principle of non-contradiction makes clear. Revelation renders the unity certain, showing that the God of creation is also the God of salvation.” Thus the God known through reason alone, through philosophy, is the very same God known in

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52 CDF, *Dominus Iesus*, #5.
revelation. Further, “This unity of truth, natural and revealed, is embodied in a living and personal way in Christ, as the Apostle reminds us: ‘Truth is in Jesus’. He is the eternal Word in whom all things were created, and he is the incarnate Word who in his entire person reveals the Father.” For John Paul II and for the CDF, truth is singular and all truth available to the human intellect is unified in the person of Jesus Christ, as eternal and incarnate Word. Thus, because truth is one, and because that unified truth is available to the human intellect through Jesus Christ, eternal and incarnate, all that is necessary for philosophical and non-revealed truth to be completed is the proper context of the experience of faith in Christ. Complete truth then is only available in the experience of Jesus Christ. Truth is one and it is only complete in the experience of faith in Christ who was one; human and divine unified.53

In the documents of the CDF this “unity of truth” continues. Only in Christ’s unity is the unity of truth available. And it is only in Christ as eternal and incarnate, that the proper faith is possible. Because Christ is one truth is one.

Panikkar, on the other hand, begins with a more generalized understanding of truth, notably the correlation of thinking and being, and continues along more epistemological lines to argue for his understanding of pluralism and the relativity of truth. From there religious truth, especially Christian revelation, is understood in the greater context of the totality of truth, which then marginalizes religious truth as a subset of truth. Thus, it is possible to argue the relativity of religious truth to the larger context and still hold, as Panikkar does, that religions and their truth claims need to be understood in relativity to one another and more importantly in their relationship with their believers. While Panikkar does

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not directly undermine the normativity of Revelation in and through Christ for the Christian theologian, he qualifies that normativity in a wider pluralistic context.

Significant for Panikkar is that “God has made himself known in the fullest possible way.” Thus, in the encyclical’s recognition of the difficulty of the complete expression of mystery, it recognizes Panikkar’s own presupposition of reality’s lack of total intelligibility. Mystery, then, opens the way for Panikkar to qualify the universal normativity of Christian truth claims.

The same strain of thought can be brought to bear upon the relationship between reason/intellect and truth. Surely, Panikkar does not deny that “reason by its nature is ordered to the truth in such a way that, illumined by faith, it can penetrate to the meaning of Revelation.” Nor would he deny “human reason’s ability to attain truth…as well as its metaphysical capacity to come to knowledge of God from creation.”54 Rather, Panikkar would argue that the human intellect cannot grasp the totality of reality, and thus the truth attained by reason is relative to the totality of all that is. Since reason cannot penetrate mystery, the totality of all that is surpasses the human capacity to know.

This brings to the forefront the dual principles discussed in the last chapter; confession and inquiry. In particular, Panikkar is expressing the Christian confession through the pluralism of his theological method. Rather than Christian doctrine providing the parameters of his approach to pluralism, his argument for pluralism molds his approach to the Christian doctrine and the level of normativity he grants to it. Further, the assertion of the relativity of truth, while it does not totally undermine truth, could lead to Pope John Paul

54 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Donum Veritatis, #10.
II’s concern about the “lack of confidence in truth.” Thus, while Panikkar has not directly contradicted the fundamental Christian confession in its inner coherence, his pluralist position does undermine the universality and normativity of Christian doctrine in its ability to refer to a fullness of reality by making it subject to his pluralist methodology. It does not deny confidence in truth, but it is based upon the inability of the human intellect to fully grasp that truth in its entirety.

One of the consequences of this line of argument is visible in Panikkar’s Christology. In particular, because truth is pluralistic and present through other religious traditions, so too is Christ present within them. Further, because Christ is present in other religions, the historical manifestation of the eternal Christ in Jesus of Nazareth is unable to fully express the cosmic mystery of Christ. The final result is that Panikkar’s Christology will end in a division between the eternal Christ/Logos and the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Where John Paul II’s and the CDF’s presupposed unity of the eternal and incarnate Jesus Christ results in a unity of truth, Panikkar’s pluralist vision of truth will result in a division of the eternal Logos and the historical Jesus.

Part II. Cosmotheandricism: Making Sense of the Experience of Pluralism

In his article, “Contra Pluralism,” Gerald James Lawson notes that Panikkar’s account of pluralism “is the only sustained, careful and serious presentation of the notion of pluralism in the contemporary literature of religious studies and philosophy, so far as I am aware.” In the end, however, he finds that Panikkar’s theory does violate logical principles,
but not the principle of non-contradiction as Panikkar himself claims.\footnote{Ibid., 76} Rather, “it calls into question the principle of the excluded middle,” but that “simply means that in some situations it may be necessary to go beyond a two-valued logic.”\footnote{Ibid., 85.} For Larson, “It is precisely at this point that…the Panikkarian pluralist position involves an equivocation. It wishes to continue to make assertions, namely that there is a plurality of exclusive ‘truths,’ from the vantage point of a three-valued (or a multi-valued) logic in which assertion is no longer warranted.”\footnote{Ibid., 86.} In Panikkar’s defense, Nalini Devdas argues that Panikkar’s position only appears to have “not been provided with an adequate logic”\footnote{Devdas, “The Theandrism of Raimundo Panikkar and Trinitarian Parallels in Modern Hindu Thought,” in Journal of Ecumenical Studies 17, no. 4, 619.} if one fails to account for his integral worldview. Such a worldview, based upon the advaitic experience, is necessary to make sense of Panikkar’s conception of pluralism. As Devdas further notes, Panikkar’s thought “begins and ends with the affirmation that advaita is the realization of the fundamental oneness of reality without denying the plurality.”\footnote{Devdas, 607.} From advaita Panikkar turns to the trinitarian worldview to further expand the fundamental relativity of reality. These two principles then become the foundation for Panikkar’s cosmotheandricism, which is his attempt to provide a \textit{modus vivendi} and a means of making sense of pluralism. As will be shown later, Panikkar’s conception of cosmotheandricism is foundational for his Christology.

In his book, \textit{The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man}, Panikkar outlines a threefold image of human religiousness. The first form of spirituality is Iconolatry, which
“starts by adoring some object upon which had descended the glory of the Lord, and takes this object as a point of departure for a slow and arduous assent towards God.”

God descends to the person through an object, and then that person is opened up to God. Acts of adoration are the hallmark of this spirituality. The second is personalism, where it is asserted that “it is our personal relationships with God that are important because only they...constitute real religion. Is not religion fundamentally a dialogue between persons?”

The third, Panikkar says, is the spirituality of advaita.

While iconolatry affirms the transcendence of God, and our ability to come to God through his revelation of himself in objects of adoration, personalism affirms our ability to dialogue and engage God as a person. In the first, we see God the Father, in the second, God the Son. Advaita, however, is a “religious attitude that is not founded on faith in a God-Thou [personalism], or a God-will-sovereignty [iconolatry], but in the supra-rational experience of a ‘Reality’ which in some way ‘inhales’ us into himself. The God of the Upanisads...‘inspires’; he is Spirit.”

If the Father is transcendent, and the Son is personal, then this Spirit is immanent. This immanence is no simple interiority as Panikkar says, it is true immanence:

If transcendence is truly transcendence, immanence is not a negative transcendence but a true and irreducible immanence. An immanent God cannot be a God-person, ‘someone’ with whom I could have [a] personal relationship, a God-Other. I cannot speak to an immanent God...I cannot think of God-immanent for, if I try, I make him the object of my thought and project him before me and outside me...To say with St. Augustine that God is intiimior intimo meo (more interior than my inmost being) is still insufficient to express true immanence, for God-immanent cannot be anywhere, beyond or behind, without his immanence vanishing. He is not intiimior; the most one could say is that he is intiimissimum.

63 Ibid., 18.
64 Ibid., 21.
65 Ibid., 29.
66 Panikkar, Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man, 31 – 32.
We are incapable of knowing this God-immanent, because to do so would be to reduce it to a conceptual object of thought, which would render it no longer within us. At the same time, we cannot force this God-immanent out into the open, but can only hope to come to some experience or intuition of it. For Panikkar, advaita is a means of expressing how God as Father, Son and Spirit can be one and yet distinct, as well as how God can be immanent within the world and yet keep the world from being swallowed whole into indistinction. It is also helpful for understanding the tension between unity and duality within Christological investigation.

This relationship of God to the world is evident in our experience of ourselves as distinct despite our intuition of the immanent God. At the same time, we, as intuiting the immanent God within us, are not totally different, totally without the divinity. We are caught then between identity and difference, the one and the many, Being and beings. Panikkar tells us:

The central message of the Upanisads…is neither monism, nor dualism, nor theism…but advaita, i.e. the non-dual character of the Real, the impossibility of adding God to the world or vice versa, the impossibility of putting in dvaita, in a pair, God and the world. For the Upanisads therefore, the Absolute is not only transcendent but both transcendent and immanent all in one.67

It is advaita then that offers a key insight into Panikkar’s concern about the multiplicity of religious experience and the multiplicity of the expressions of God. Advaita is not something arrived at from a rational discourse, nor is it something that can be proven through reason alone. It is an experience, an intuition, in which one experiences the non-duality of God and the world. After asking if there is such a faculty for experiencing advaita, Panikkar says:

Advaita Vedanta (and practically every mystic would agree) says that there is and calls it anubhava, experience, intuition and, at times, grace, faith, gift, revelation. When one has seen, felt, experienced that God is in all, that all is God, that nevertheless God is nothing of that which is…then one is close to realization, to

67 Ibid., 36.
authentic advaita experience which, like all true experience, cannot be communicated or expressed by words, concepts or thoughts.68

Two things are important from this. First, Panikkar presents advaita not only as experience or intuition but also gift, grace, and revelation. It is not simply the individual raising themselves up to knowledge about God or communion with God. Rather, it is an illumination, an unveiling. God-immanent is not something possessed or grasped but is something simply experienced. Second, this experience, or revelation, cannot be communicated or expressed in words. Since such an experience is not held or possessed by a knowing subject, then it is never something grasped by the intellect. Since the experience is the union of the immanent God with the person, for there to be a person to experience it would break down that union, it would make the two an “I” and an “other.” The experience “is ineffable because there does not exist any ego to describe it or witness it.”69 The ego, the one who experiences, ceases to exist in the experience of the immanent God.

As an expression of the relationship of atman to Brahman as distinct but not separate, advaita offers a way of dealing with the problem of the one and the many, of Being and beings. This is the same mystery at the root of Panikkar’s metaphysical argument for pluralism and also corresponds to the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Trinity.

If these three forms of spirituality are valid, as Panikkar argues, then he must give some account of the relationship between God-transcendent and God-immanent. For surely, if both experiences truly relate to God, then both must relate to the same God. At the same time, if these forms are valid, not one of these understandings of God can be the only one.

68 Ibid., 37.
69 Ibid., 39.
Panikkar is left then with a God that is experienced as transcendent, personal, and immanent.

According to Panikkar, the religious experiences of humanity show God to be trinitarian. In the three ways that we experience God, he is shown to be the transcendent Father, the personal Son, and the immanent Spirit. While Panikkar does not render these characterizations in a purely Christian light, his book, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, attempts to show that all religious experiences show spiritualities that serve as evidence that God is experienced outside of Christianity in a way similar to the Christian conception of God. According to Panikkar, the trinitarian worldview is not solely a Christian conception, nor can the Christian Trinity simply be reduced to a view of reality as a threefold union. Since God is experienced in such a threefold union, it is indicative of how humanity experiences and engages reality. Alongside other threefold unions that cross between religions, he does “insist, however, that the experience of reality as trinitarian, though very differently understood, seems to be virtually universal.” This recognition of a threefold unity, neither monism nor duality in keeping with advaita, forms the basis of the trinitarian vision. For Panikkar, the way the Trinity is understood in Christianity offers a way of understanding how a trinitarian worldview operates in all religious traditions.

For Panikkar, the Trinity is best interpreted as pure relation rather than as shared substance. God, as the transcendent “I,” is incapable of relating to the world. For if the transcendent God related directly to the world, that would mean he and the world were of the same substance and all reality would be reduced to monism. To avoid this danger, Panikkar appeals to a notion of dialogue in which God, as an “I,” engages/dialogues with

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himself as a “Thou.” This inner I/Thou relationship establishes a subject in union with God yet distinct. This distinct subject in Christian terminology is Christ, the personal aspect of God. While the clear distinction between God and Christ is critical for mediation, it is just as important that there be a clear unity between them as well. Christ is not lesser, nor God greater; what God is he shares with his Son, and this is in turn reciprocated. Christ, as the “Thou” of God’s self, necessarily participates fully in the divinity of God. The “and” between God and Christ, which forms the “We” of the I/Thou relationship, is the Spirit. The inner relationship of the Trinity is less a distinction between three persons, and more a relationship within God as he regards himself as a subjective “person.” In this way, the Trinity is one in God and yet diverse through the inner relationship of God with God’s self. This inner life of God (ad intra), in which God relates to a subject similar to himself yet distinct, forms the basis for God’s relationship with the world (ad extra). It is Christ that makes it possible for the transcendent God to relate to the world. Christ is the point of mediation between God and the world. Christ resembles the world as “Thou” yet is in union with God. This mediation is made possible through the Spirit. It is only through Christ that the human person can engage the transcendent God as a subject. And, it is only by the Spirit that a relationship is possible at all; “One can only pray in the Spirit, by addressing the Father through the Son.” The Spirit is the context or principle which makes a relationship possible.

For Panikkar, the importance of the trinitarian relationship is that it “epitomizes the radical relativity of all that there is.” At the same time, “It is the Trinity which offers us the

72 Panikkar, Christophany: The Fullness of Man, 73.
73 Panikkar, The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man, 63.
ultimate model of this all-pervading constitution of reality.”74 This model is based upon the advaitic principle in conjunction with the trinitarian vision that there is neither monism nor duality, but trinity, and inner-trinitarian relationality. According to Panikkar such a composition forms the Cosmotheandric experience, intuition, attitude, which is the means by which humanity can best engage the world.

In Panikkar’s view, cosmotheandricism is the result of a series of shifts in humanity’s consciousness of itself and its relationship with the cosmos and God. The first was the Ecumenic moment which roughly relates to “primordial Man.”75 Here humanity had no sense of nature because it was so much a part of it. According to Panikkar, “He [Man, humanity] is thus sacred, for the entire universe is sacred, and he is part of the whole. Communion with reality is coextensive here with the absence of a separating and reflective self-consciousness.”76 Humanity, because it is part of the sacred world of nature, sees itself as similarly sacred in this moment.

The second is the Economic moment. This moment “can be characterized, on the one hand, by the scientific mentality and, on the other, by the humanistic attitude…Man is at the center of everything, and measure at the very core of Man.” Because of this, we can “characterize this second kairological moment as Man above Nature.”77 Of central significance is the capacity of humanity to use its intellect to order reality and truth. Since humanity establishes the laws through its intellectual power, humanity is beyond that which it

74 Ibid., xv.
76 Ibid., 25.
77 Ibid., 32-33.
measures in the intellect and the realm of the intelligible. Humanity’s perception of its relationship with nature is being in a place of dominance and control.

The third moment is the Catholic moment where humanity recognizes the common destiny it shares with the World. All reality is seen by humanity as being ordered to the divine and divinization. This moment redeems the shortfalls and reasserts the strengths of the first two moments. Where the first fails to see diversity between humanity and nature, the second fails to see unity. Where the second emphasizes the separation of humanity from nature, the first reminds humanity of its place in nature. It is this third moment that moves humanity towards the cosmotheandric experience.

Panikkar’s concept of the Cosmotheandric experience is an attempt to present the three moments in a holistic vision. It draws on both the advaitic intuition and the trinitarian vision of reality. In the first case, it is concerned with the problem of unity and diversity. It recognizes a necessary unity in the transcendent origin of reality, God, and yet also sees diversity in the sense of a distinction between God and creatures. In the second case, it adopts the trinitarian threefold union in the constitutive relationship between God, Man, and the World. This perception of reality as being a union of three dimensions or worlds constitutes Panikkar’s trinitarian vision of reality, and forms the holistic Cosmotheandric experience.

The Cosmotheandric experience or intuition is the apprehension of the unity of reality, while recognizing at the same time that the three worlds of reality are distinct and different. For the initial basis of the concept, Panikkar draws on the classical concept of theandrism, which he says, “is the classical and traditional term for that intimate and

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78 Ibid., 46.
79 Panikkar, The Cosmotheandric Experience, 55.
complete unity which is realized paradigmatically in Christ between the divine and human and which is the goal towards which everything here below tends – in Christ and the Spirit.”80 For the Cosmotheandric experience, humanity extends that sense of unity and diversity to the cosmic world.81 It is possible because humanity has begun to recognize that it does not have the total control over nature it once thought it could. Humanity recognizes that it is not the true measure of all things, and that both humanity and the world answer to a power higher than the human intellect.82

In their unity the three worlds share themselves and interpenetrate one another. Nature and humanity are sanctified by God, and in a sense are divinized by him; they share in God’s transcendence and immanence. Nature and God are “within the range of consciousness,” they are thinkable, “and by this very fact tied up with human awareness.”83 Humanity and God are present in nature and are part of it. As Panikkar says, “Every being…stands in the World and shares its secularity.”84 God, to be a real God, must be present to the World.

This cosmotheandric view of reality helps Panikkar make sense of the pluralistic view of reality. In that all dimensions of reality interpenetrate one another, all dimensions are imbued with mystery. The mysterious core deep within each dimension means that none can be reduced to the principles of the others. All reality then is irreducible to any intelligible principle.

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82 Ibid., 51.
84 Ibid., 64.
It is at this point that the concerns of the CDF become relevant in our discussion. Most importantly the CDF’s admonition of “the eclecticism of those who, in theological research, uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological contexts without regard for consistency, systematic connection, or compatibility with Christian truth.” While it seems apparent that Panikkar is not uncritical in his union of advaita and the Christian Trinity, and that he does have a concern about consistency and systematic connection, what is most uncertain is the compatibility of Hindu Vedantic advaita with a Christian Trinitarianism. John Milbank calls Panikkar’s merger an “unwise desire to fuse neo-Vedantic pluralism with Christian Trinitarianism” which is “an impossible union” so long as “[neo-Vedantic pluralism] has not become evidently permeated by Christianity.” If advaita is not permeated by the Christian conception of the Trinity, then no union is possible. However, if such a permeation were to occur and neo-Vedantic pluralism were to be impressed by Christian Trinitarianism, then it would be “none other than the moment of total obliteration of other cultures by Western norms and categories, with their freight of Christian influence.” Of course the opposite is also just as much a concern regarding Panikkar’s theological foundations and Christology. What does it mean for Christology if Christian theology is to be fundamentally based upon a theoretical principle which is located in a cultural tradition which results in the pluralism which assumes an “‘indifferent’ presence of transcendental power in…temporal reality” and is “agonistic” in contrast to Christian pluralism which “is an ethical, peaceful series, which constantly repeats and reinvents a

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85 Dominus Iesus, #4.
87 Milbank, “The End of Dialogue,” 175
nonviolent consensus”? According to Milbank such a theological program will either destroy neo-Vedantic pluralism, or subject Christology to the basic social and political intentions of neo-Vedantic pluralism. For Milbank, the result is the obliteration of the integrity of either religious tradition. Milbank brings to light that very difficult balance and very real risk of subjecting the fundamental Christian confession to religious concepts which are derived from and are intended towards very different social, political, and theological contexts. As the CDF noted above, concern must be given to the “compatibility” of these concepts.

While this study will not comment on the ability of a Catholic theologian to adapt, adopt, and/or incorporate theological-philosophical principles from another worldview or religion (a process repeated throughout the history of Christian theology), Milbank’s concerns point to a major concern about Panikkar’s theology. Panikkar’s use of advaita does indicate a trend within his thought that has important implications. Primarily, it highlights Panikkar’s tendency to favor the concerns of interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism over traditional, theological principles and Christian doctrine. While itself not problematic (especially in light of translation and inculturation), Panikkar’s use of advaita and the way in which it affects his presentation of the Trinity and a “Trinitarian worldview,” exemplify in this case his modus operandi of interpreting and expressing Christian beliefs through an interreligious and pluralistic frame rather than one in keeping with traditional Catholic theological and Christological principles. So, in response to the question about Panikkar’s priorities when it comes to his Christological thought, as will be investigated later, it appears

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88 Ibid., 188 – 189.
at present as though his theological concerns are given primacy over his attention to traditional Christian theological principles and doctrine.
CHAPTER 4
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE WORK OF RAIMON PANIKKAR

Introduction

For Panikkar, dialogue is not primarily about the meeting place of beliefs, but of believers. And for those believers, their existential context is the key for understanding what their beliefs mean not only as a textbook definition, but more importantly, in Panikkar’s view, what it means in the life of the believer. It is this context and the manifestation of beliefs in lived faith that truly manifest Panikkar’s understanding of the fullest truth of a religious tradition. In short, faith lived out by the believer in their existential context is a better conduit for engaging a religion than the beliefs and doctrines assented to in the intellect. Thus, for Panikkar, interreligious dialogue is not the meeting place of doctrines, but the meeting place of believers and their existential contexts.

At the same time, Panikkar’s approach to interreligious dialogue is built upon the qualified claim to truth that he argued for in his conception of pluralism. Since Panikkar’s pluralism has supposedly “leveled the playing field,” no religious tradition can make the claim of a monopolistic possession of truth. Since no religion can make a monopolistic claim on truth, then no religion has any power to bind the dialogue partner to its truth claims and doctrines. The result is that the very nature of interreligious relationships must be dialogue between equals, not between those who possess the truth and those who do not. As
Panikkar sees it, the goal of dialogue for Christians is no longer evangelization understood as proselytization, but evangelization as “mutual fecundation.”

Throughout his discussion of interreligious dialogue, Panikkar continues the trend of never directly violating Christian doctrine. However, he does marginalize what he perceives as certain monopolistic elements of Christianity, which would attribute to Christianity doctrinal and moral superiority over other religious traditions. To do so, Panikkar continues to view Christian religious truth through a pluralist and interreligious lens, and emphasizes what unifies religions rather than what separates them. Though diversity is necessary for dialogue (and metaphysically insurmountable in his pluralistic worldview), Panikkar’s interreligious project attempts to show that deep within their diversity all authentic religions find unity in mystery. What becomes quite clear then is that Panikkar’s marginalization, or transcendence as he sometimes calls it, of monopolistic and polarizing claims to truth is a clear sign that he is filtering the fundamental Christian religious truth through his own theological and interreligious goals and pluralistic worldview. This is especially clear when compared and contrasted with the CDF’s account of interreligious dialogue in which the goal is primarily conversion of the other.

**Part I. The Current Interreligious Context**

According to Panikkar, the new context for contemporary theology is interreligious. For that reason, theology should be done not in a monopolistic, sectarian fashion, but in dialogue with the religious traditions of the world. This is because Panikkar believes that the current sociological situation of the world makes it impossible to remain isolated defenders

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90 Ibid., 3.
of insular truths. In the revised edition of *Intrareligious Dialogue*, Panikkar describes the situation in a third-person version of his own situation,

Instantly, he finds himself confronted by a dilemma: Either he must condemn everything around him as error and sin, or he must throw overboard the exclusivist and monopolistic notions he has been told embody truth – truth that must be simple and unique, revealed once and for all, that speaks through infallible organs, and so on.\(^91\)

For Panikkar, Christianity can no longer see itself alone in the world, and it can no longer see itself as having a monopoly on religious truth. It must begin to see itself as one religious tradition among many, which participates in the possession of religious truth through its own reception of revelation, but which does not have sole possession of the totality of truth. Christianity must begin to recognize itself in a pluralistic world, in which all reality, and truth itself, is in relation with everything else.

In his book *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, Panikkar outlines Christianity’s historical development to this new sociological situation. According to Panikkar, this development follows five epochs: witness, conversion, crusade, mission, and finally, dialogue.\(^92\) Though not necessarily bounded by historical dates, these epochs relate to certain periods in the history of Christianity, and follow a rough historical sequence. Each epoch is bounded by a set of circumstances that greatly influence how Christians understand themselves. According to Panikkar, close proximity to the Jesus-event and the evangelization of the Apostles during a period of isolation and persecution had great influence on the understanding of Christian identity as being a witness to Christ. Growth and the patronage of the Roman Empire produced the need for “true Christians” to separate themselves from “nominal” Christians through a process of conversion. Especially important for the development from mission to dialogue is the role of colonization. Colonization not only made available to Christianity the


possibility of universal conversion of pagans, it also put Christians in such close proximity with these other religions that dialogue became inevitable. According to Panikkar, it is in the epoch of dialogue where Christians have begun to recognize the authenticity of other religions and the desire to share in that authenticity while sharing their own. The pressing need to dialogue with other religions is a symptom or result of this epochal development in Christian self-understanding and the relationship between religious traditions.

This new context is based upon two primary principles: first, with a pluralistic vision of truth, no religion can claim superiority over any others; and second, since no religion is superior, since close proximity has shown each religion’s authenticity, dialogue must be approached as a meeting of equals. Further, Panikkar’s concern about colonization as an unjust imposition of Western values and beliefs upon other cultures and religions reinforces that dialogue cannot be about conversion or proselytization, but rather the sharing of gifts, freely given and freely accepted.

This runs in contrast to the CDF’s concerns that such an approach is a result of “a growing confusion which leads many to leave the missionary command of the Lord unheard and ineffective,” because “it is maintained that any attempt to convince others on religious matters is a limitation of their freedom” and “it would only be legitimate to present one’s own ideas and to invite people to act according to their consciences, without aiming at their conversion to Christ and to the Catholic faith.” According those who are confused, such an attempt to convert “is seen as an infringement of the other people’s freedom.”

To such a concern, however, the CDF responds that

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93 Ibid., 119.

94 CDF, A Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization, #4.
In any case, the truth ‘does not impose itself except by the strength of the truth itself.’ Therefore, to lead a person’s intelligence and freedom in honesty to the encounter with Christ and his Gospel is not an inappropriate encroachment, but rather a legitimate endeavour and a service capable of making human relationships more fruitful.\(^93\)

For the CDF, with its unitary understanding of truth, contrasted against Panikkar’s pluralistic truth, the attempt not only to share the goods of one’s faith but also to convert the other to one’s faith is perfectly legitimate. Since there is truth or falsity, one can rightly argue that conversion to the truth of Christ is a legitimate goal of evangelization and dialogue. Thus, according to the CDF, Panikkar’s assertion that Christians are stuck with the decision to denounce everything around them as error or to throw out monopolistic claims to truth is problematic, if not wrong. Faced with the truth of Christ revealed through Tradition and Scripture, which all Catholics must firmly believe, the CDF argues that there is no decision to be made. Solely attending to the truth of Christ, through the priority of the fundamental Christian confession, the Christian must place the truth received through revelation over the beliefs of their partner in dialogue. This is not an unjust imposition on their partner, but is obedience to the strength of the truth to which the Christian gives assent.

This is, of course, a difference of dueling understandings of truth. While Panikkar argues that truth is pluralistic (as a result of the experience of shared existential religious faith and the mystery at the core of reality), the CDF argues from the words of John Paul II, who says that such an equality is only the result of relativism “which is one of today’s most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth,” and which denies “truth its exclusive character” and assumes “that truth reveals itself equally in different doctrines, even if they contradict one another.”\(^96\) So, Panikkar’s argument for the equality of religions is fundamentally at odds with the CDF’s argument for the Christian’s responsibility to uphold

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\(^93\) Ibid., #5.

\(^96\) Ibid., #4. Quoting: *Fides et Ratio*, #5.
the faith of Christ over the beliefs of other religions. At its root this disagreement about the manner of interreligious dialogue is based upon their divergent notions of truth.

Alongside the sociological changes that have moved Christianity closer to a new context of dialogue, Panikkar argues that there has been a series of shifts in Christian self-consciousness during the course of Christian history. He outlines these periods and their corresponding understanding of Christian self-understanding by associating them with representative rivers in the Christian geography. The first is the religiousness of the Jordan, and is closely tied to witness. It is and was a period when Christianity was more a matter of religiosity than religion, when Christianity still understood itself as fundamentally Jewish and official doctrines were in a process of systematization. The primary identification of a Christian was witnessing to faith in Jesus Christ. Christianity was deeply imbedded in the surrounding society and was part of it despite how certain restrictions set it apart. Membership was a matter of initiation into the teachings of Christ and the unity that Christian faith impressed upon the faithful. In this period, the appeal to faith over institutional membership allows for the possibility of inclusivism. But there is also the danger of exclusivism. It is so closely tied to the historical Jesus event that it can easily fail to see beyond to the universal, cosmic Christ available to theological inquiry.97

Tiber religiousness relates to the periods where Christianity is not only identified as faith in Christ Jesus, but membership in the institutionalized Christian community, where “the ideal was Christendom, the Christian empire, the Christian civilization.” Christianity ceases to only or simply be witnessing to faith in Jesus Christ and becomes “a certain worldview, expressed in a series of confessions of faith,” and which “carries with it a theology, a

well-structured worldview.” Most importantly, this religiousness is associated with a more inclusivist vision of religions. Its well-developed theology and worldview form the basis for moving beyond its historical location and limitations. While it does fixate on Christian identity as membership in Christian civilization and the Christian Church, it does open up to the assertion that the truth of Christianity goes beyond the boundaries of the Christian religion.98

Finally, Panikkar’s Ganges religiousness is typified by a combination of the positive qualities of the first two. In it

Christian identity begins to act less as if it had to defend its own culture, less as if it belonged to an institutionalized religion. Instead it presents itself as life lived through personal religiousness – that is, as a religious attitude forming one dimension of the human being, one factor of the humannum, one aspect of the divine.99

Panikkar’s emphasis on religiousness or “christianness” allows a movement away from a limited institutionalized understanding of religion, and is another move to marginalize elements that separate religions. Ganges religiousness removes the focus from institutionalized communities who assent to the same fixed doctrines and beliefs, and places it on the particular lives of believers who are bound by a common faith. Priority is placed on the existential faith life of the individual rather than on intellectual assent to particular doctrines as truths. For Panikkar, the individual experience of faith, which he calls “a human characteristic that unites all mankind,”100 comes prior to the institutional community. At the same time it possesses a well-developed theology which allows Christians to de-emphasize an identification of Christian identity solely with witness to the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. This theology allows them to go beyond the historical person to the cosmic

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98 Ibid., 125.
99 Ibid., 128.
100 Panikkar, Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics, 190.
Christ. While not totally removing the role of the institutional community, such appeals help Panikkar remove the sole identification of authentic religiousness or faith solely with membership in the Christian community. By breaking down such an identification, Panikkar undermines any attempt to identify Christ or his Church with Christians alone. In doing so, Panikkar can make Christ and faith in Christ available to a much larger group beyond Christians without mandating that non-Christians reject their current religious membership in favor of membership in a Christian Church.

Panikkar uses a similar distinction between Christendom, Christianity, and christianness. The first relates to social organization, the second to an organized and institutional religion, and the third to a personal spirituality guided by a belief system. All are necessary and cannot be completely removed from the others. According to Panikkar, emphasis should be put on the last, because this is the true place of faith, which is the foundation for the first two. This does not mean a privatization of religious identity, but recognition that to be Christian is more than a simple institutional or social conception of religious identity and is located in the individual Christian’s religious life. For Panikkar’s Ganges religiousness, to be Christian is primarily to have faith in Christ, which includes but transcends institutional membership or doctrinal assent.

By making faith prior to institutional membership, and even doctrinal assent, Panikkar is able to appeal to faith as a universal and a “constitutive human dimension.” Appealing to this “human characteristic that unites all mankind,” Panikkar continues to marginalize those elements which differentiate and separate religions. However, as the CDF

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101 Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, 134.
102 Ibid., 138.
points out there is a major difference between how Panikkar talks about faith and what Christians mean by the theological virtue of faith.

In *Dominus Iesus*, the CDF notes,

> If faith is the acceptance of the grace of revealed truth, which ‘makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently’, then belief, in other religions, is that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute.104

And further the document notes,

> Thus, theological faith (the acceptance of the truth revealed by the One and Triune God) is often identified with belief in other religions, which is religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself. This is one of the reasons why the differences between Christianity and the other religions tend to be reduced at times to the point of disappearance.105

What the CDF attempts to show then is that because of the reception of revelation by Christianity and individual Christians there is a wide gulf between the faith of Christians and the religious experiences of other religions not yet fulfilled by assent to the truth of God revealed in and through Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Panikkar’s universalization of faith as a means of widening genuine religiousness and authenticity to other religions outside of Christianity, and as a means of marginalization of exclusive truth claims, runs into problems regarding the role of institutional membership as a hallmark of participation in the truth of Christ. For the CDF, it is understood that full acceptance of Christ and Christ’s truth constitutes membership in the institutional body of the Church of Christ. In *Dominus Iesus*, the Church’s universal mission includes the profession of faith, which itself includes, quoting the Constantinopolitan Symbol, “I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.”106 The CDF also lists among its concerns a result of the “growing confusion” in which it is asserted

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104 CDF, *Dominus Iesus*, #7.
105 Ibid., #7.
106 Ibid., #1.
that “Christ should not be proclaimed to those who do not know him, nor should joining the Church be promoted, since it would also be possible to be saved without explicit knowledge of Christ and without formal incorporation in the Church.”

In response, Dominus Iesus argues that “the fullness of Christ’s salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord,” and “in connection with the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, the unicity of the Church founded by him must be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith.” So, where Panikkar emphasizes universal faith in order to marginalize institutional membership, the CDF maintains that faith as an assent to the truth revealed in and through Christ, is directly connected to membership in the Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church. Thus, according to the CDF’s argument, Panikkar’s effort to universalize faith runs against the traditional Catholic Christian understanding of the theological virtue and removes the necessary link between Christian faith and membership in the Church of Christ.

Panikkar’s emphasis on that which unifies over that which differentiates expands his understanding of faith to include other religions. His focus on what is similar side-steps the very real difference between Christian theological faith and the religious experience of other religions. Though he does not attempt to remove difference (because religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue rely upon it), his marginalization of differences indicates a trend in Panikkar’s work which emphasizes what unifies religions, which marginalizes what differentiates them, and which results in a deterioration of the normativity of Christian. Though he never directly rejects the normative Christian doctrine, he contextualizes it according to his understanding of Christianity’s “new” interreligious context.

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107 CDF, Some Aspects of Evangelization, #3.
108 CDF, Dominus Iesus, #16.
Part II. Dialogical Dialogue

For Panikkar interreligious dialogue is, or ought to be, based on the presupposition that, “I cannot really know – and thus compare – another ultimate system of beliefs unless somehow I share those beliefs, and I cannot do this until I know the holder of those beliefs, the you – not as other (i.e. non-ego), but as a you.”\(^{109}\) Only in this way can you fully appreciate what particular doctrines mean in the fullest sense within that tradition. No true dialogue can occur before partners “have encountered not just the concepts but their living contexts which include different ways of looking at reality: they have to encounter each other before any meeting of doctrines.”\(^{110}\) Such a meeting of dialogue partners necessitates a method by which partners can share their own life and engage the lives of the other. For that reason, interreligious dialogue requires a particular understanding of dialogue.

Panikkar’s conception of interreligious dialogue is based upon what he calls “dialogical dialogue,” and is best understood in its complimentarity to dialectical dialogue.

In dialectical dialogue,

\begin{quote}
We present our respective points of view to the Tribunal of Reason, in spite of the variety of interpretations that we may hold even of the nature of reason. The dialectical dialogue trusts Reason and in a way the reasonableness of the other – or of the whole historical process.\(^{111}\)
\end{quote}

Dialogical dialogue, on the other hand, “is a dialogue among subjects aiming at being a dialogue about subjects,” or, “not so much about opinions…as about those who have such opinions and not about you, but about me to you.”\(^{112}\) Rather than having a method of dialogue that deals purely with the rationality of the partners’ opinions, interreligious dialogue needs a method by which members can encounter the lives of their partners (here


\(^{110}\) Ibid., 206.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 208.

\(^{112}\) Ibid., 209.
one can see Panikkar’s counter to Milbank’s concerns about intellectual colonialism discussed above). Limited to the realm of the rational and logical, dialectical dialogue cannot operate in the way necessary for interreligious dialogue. It seeks a judgment of the objective expressions of religions, and cannot reach into the very lives of those who hold those beliefs and adhere to those objective systems of religious expression.

Panikkar holds that, “dialogical dialogue is not a modification of the dialectical method or a substitution for it. It is a method which both limits the field of dialectics and complements it.”\textsuperscript{113} For any dialogue to occur there must be some level of dialectics. Without dialectics dialogue would be reduced to absurdity as no one could understand their partners. However, for Panikkar it is not enough to remain solely within the realm of rationality. Interreligious dialogue must go beyond, into the lives of the faithful. Panikkar says, “Dialogical here would stand for piercing, going through the logical and overcoming – not denying – it.”\textsuperscript{114} Dialogical dialogue relies upon logic and reason in order to make sense of the dialogue itself, but is not limited by or to it. It recognizes that dialogue must be rational, but that religious truth and faith, through Panikkar’s appeal to mystery and reality’s “opaque remnant,” cannot be bound to the purely rational. By going beyond the dialectical, dialogical dialogue allows dialogue partners to share their own subjectivity, which itself is beyond the realm of the rational or logical.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 207.
With such an understanding of dialogue, Panikkar outlines two requisites for full and complete dialogue. The first is that we understand each other.115 This means that it is necessary for there be a means for dialogue; a means of communication. The second requisite is that we understand the other’s position. He says that, “at once a tremendous difficulty arises. I can never understand his position as he does – and this is the only real understanding between people – unless I share his view.”116 For Panikkar, the means of sharing my partner’s view is by “understanding him as he understands himself, which can be done only if I rise above the subject-object dichotomy, cease to know him as an object and come to know him as myself.”117 If one approaches their partner as an object, or a sum total of their beliefs, one can never fully grasp the existential reality in which those beliefs live and operate within their partner’s life. According to Panikkar, one must come to know that person as they know themselves in order to understand what those beliefs mean and how they operate within that person’s life. Thus, in knowing them, by sharing their subjectivity and their existential location and situation, one is better able to grasp the life of their religion beyond the textbook definitions of its beliefs. What results however is a particular form of dialogue, which Panikkar calls “intrareligious dialogue.”

Intrareligious dialogue “begins when two views meet head-on inside oneself, when dialogue prompts genuine religious pondering, and interpersonal dialogue turns into intrapersonal soliloquy.”118 For Panikkar, it is in the individual where religious traditions truly

116 Ibid., 9.
117 Ibid., 11.
118 Ibid., 10.
As one begins dialogue with a partner, the two share themselves. In this sharing and receiving of existential contexts, one takes up the beliefs and faith of the other and attempts to experience them as the partner does. As Panikkar says, “To know what a religion says, we must understand what it says, but for this we must somehow believe in what it says.” In Panikkar’s dialogue it is necessary to take up the partner’s beliefs, which, understood through their particular existential situation, brings me to share in their faith. This is what Panikkar calls an “existential incarnation” of oneself in another tradition. The result then is an “intrapersonal soliloquy” where dialogue ceases to be between two people and comes to take place within the individual who participates in dialogue. By experiencing the other’s faith as they do, or as close as is possible, the individual is now able to see the dialogue taking place not only between the individual and their partner but within themself.

In Panikkar’s form of dialogue, one ceases to simply be Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or Jewish. By being in dialogue one takes on the beliefs and faith of the Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Jew. This is what he means by the interpersonal dialogue becoming intrapersonal soliloquy. It is not enough to know one religious belonging when engaged in dialogue, one must be able to experience the religious belonging of multiple traditions. This sharing of faith by both members holding their partner’s faith within themselves is fundamental for interreligious dialogue. The lived experience of multiple religious belonging makes it possible for all members of dialogue to truly understand and know both their partners and the religious traditions from which their partners enter dialogue.

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119 Ibid., 41.
120 Ibid., 67.
121 Ibid., 12.
Assuming such an exchange is possible, Panikkar’s interreligious dialogue poses risks. For Panikkar, the greatest risk is change. First, I open myself to change as others critique and present my faith life back to me. As my dialogue partner reflects my faith back to me, I am forced to judge it against those paradigms which are considered authentic; by myself and my religious tradition. If what I see is not in keeping with those paradigms, it can be a cause to change my faith life to better attend to them. Second, as I and my partner share our faith lives with one another, the insights of their faith can impress themselves upon my own faith. While I might not assume the entirety of their particular perspective, it might illuminate aspects of my own. Finally, in sharing faiths, the partners risk a conversion to their partner’s faith. These three changes are the risks one encounters when participating in interreligious dialogue.

**Part IV. The Form and Results of Interreligious Dialogue**

Because Panikkar’s conception of interreligious dialogue is based on the sharing of each partner’s subjective and existential experience of faith, it first relies on the honesty of each partner and their trust in one another. In the revised edition of *The Unknown Christ if Hinduism*, Panikkar says,

> There are three indispensable prerequisites for such an encounter: a deep human honesty in searching for the truth wherever it can be found; a great intellectual openness in this search, without conscious preconceptions or willingly entertained prejudices; and finally a profound loyalty towards one’s own religious tradition.122

And finally, in discussing why he trusts his partner Panikkar states:

> I trust the other...because I have discovered (experienced) the ‘thou’ as the counterpart of the I, as belonging to the I (and not as not-I). I trust the partner’s understanding and self-understanding because I do not start out by putting my ego as the foundation of everything...I find that in his actual presence something irreducible to my ego and yet not belonging to a nonego: I discover the thou as part of a Self that is as much mine as his – or to be more precise, that is as little my property as his.123

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It is in recognizing the personhood of one’s partner that trust is not only necessary for dialogue but a by-product of it as well. By dialoging with them, there is an experience of one’s partner as not being totally separated from oneself, but joined together by that shared element that makes each a subject, and not an object. Further, in sharing existential contexts we better understand our partner. Without this trust, dialogue on the level and of the type necessary for interreligious engagement is simply not possible, because there would be no complete and full sharing between mutual subjects.

Because he emphasizes a particular understanding of dialogue, and the existential experience of faith over rationally limited doctrines, Panikkar’s “rules” for interreligious dialogue marginalizes those approaches to dialogue which emphasize the elements which divide religions. Panikkar’s “Rules of the Game” include:

(1) **Dialogue must be free of apologetics, both particular and general.** While these practices are extremely important for the lives of religious traditions and have their place, that place is not within interreligious dialogue.

(2) **One must face conversion.** All members of dialogue must remain open to the truth and faith of the traditions of their partners. In doing this, each member must be willing to risk their faith if they wish to truly live it.

(3) **The historical dimension is necessary but not sufficient.** Traditions and historical changes must be included because they shape the faith lives of those who have faith, but one’s faith life also goes beyond them.

(4) **It is not just a congress of philosophy.** Religious dialogue is not intended to “discuss intellectual problems.” Dialogue is a meeting point between and within religious traditions.
It is not only a theological symposium. “It is not just an effort to make the outsider understand my point,” or “explaining given data.” Theology makes it possible to have the dialogue, but the dialogue is not limited to theology.

It is not merely an ecclesiastical endeavor. While encounters between religious leaders are important and necessary, religious dialogue is about the encounter of religions. This means that not only leaders but also the followers must and ought to participate.

It is a religious encounter in faith, hope, and love. Dialogue must transcend “the simple data and dogmatic formulations.” It must also go beyond all obstacles into the heart of dialogue. It must long for the “recognition of truth, without blotting out the differences or muting the various melodies in the single polyphonic symphony.”

These rules are focused on the basic point that the encounter between religious traditions is primarily the meeting of the lives of the faithful. These lives are dependent on apologetics, religious philosophies, traditions, theologies, religious leaders, but they are also more than them. Only by moving beyond them is full interreligious dialogue possible.

For Panikkar, an important result of interreligious dialogue is the recognition of various points of unity and intersection between different religions. These vertices continue to uphold Panikkar’s tendency to emphasize similarity and unity over difference and diversity. As they result from different religions they remain distinct, and are themselves ultimately incommensurable. However, in that they do the same “work” in these religions they are unified by a “functional equivalence.” Though they remain different, Panikkar argues that their functional equivalence points to their unity as distinct manifestations of the

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same principle of religion or reality. In various ways, Panikkar calls this type of equivalence a “homologous relationship,” and later, a “homeomorphism.”

Panikkar’s most notable example, presented in The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, is the functional equivalence between Christ and Isvara. According to Panikkar, both figures fulfill the same role within their particular religious tradition. Both Christ and Isvara are the personal aspects of God; that figure who allows personal communication and engagement with a transcendent God. Each acts as a mediator between God and mankind. Similarly, each acts as the means of creation and salvation. All that exists in creation came and still comes into existence through the mediation of Christ/Isvara. Panikkar does not say that there is a complete identity between the two, but that there is a functional identity. They fulfill the same role within the two different religious traditions because they are different experiences of the same principle. This is the primary thesis of The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Christ already exists within Hinduism, unknown and undiscovered, as Hinduism’s experience of the Christic principle, Isvara, which Christians experience and know as Christ Jesus.

This notion of homologous or homeomorphic equivalence is important for Panikkar’s process of dialogue and links it back to his pluralistic worldview. While it does not provide the means for total religious unity of all religious traditions, and does not point to the coming of a single composite world religion, it does provide a precedent for religious traditions to engage one another from the inside and find unity within their diversity.

Panikkar’s homologous relationship between Christ and Isvara provides the possibility of

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126 Panikkar, The Intrareligious Dialogue, 34.
127 Panikkar, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany, 4.
unity between Christianity and Hinduism without removing or leveling off the difference between the two. Christ as the mystery that pervades all reality, and as the mystery which Christians know as Christ, pervades all religions. Such a point of intersection or unity has special importance for Panikkar in the context of his pluralist worldview which emphasizes truth as limited expressions of a single reality grounded in mystery. Christ and Isvara, as well as any other homologous equivalences Panikkar might argue for, represent different manifestations of the same reality in the experiences and expressions of different people within different historical and cultural locations. According to Panikkar, Jesus Christ truly is the Christ, but the Christ that Christians know does not and can not exhaust the Christ of mystery which grounds reality and makes it pluralistic. In the same way, Isvara is a limited expression and manifestation of this same “christic principle” within the Hindu historical, cultural and religions context. It is part of Christianity’s role, as receivers of the full revelation in and through Jesus Christ, to aid Hinduism in fully realizing this Christic principle present within itself.

The consequent concern is the adequacy of homologous equivalences. While one might be able to argue for that there are similarities and parallels between Christ and Isvara, it is certainly necessary to determine if such a link is a valid and authentic presentation of Hindu beliefs or if it is a distortion of them. Is this truly a Hindu understanding of Isvara, or is it a Christian interpretation as Isvara is pressed in to a Christic mold? Such a question cannot be answered in this study but it does recall John Milbank’s critique in the last chapter, which would call such a distortion of Isvara the destruction of Hindu culture. Further, it points to the very real difficulty of a “clean” interreligious dialogue, in which one does not press the faith of one’s partner in the mold of one’s own faith, contaminating it in some way.
Such a concern calls to question whether dialogue as Panikkar describes it is even possible. Finally, it recalls Panikkar’s own problem of distorting the Christian confession as he has tended to subject it to the filter of his own theological goals. These homologous equivalences represent and point back to many of the difficulties that this study has investigated in Panikkar’s work.

Because of Panikkar’s account of interreligious dialogue, there develops a certain, new understanding of the relationships between religious traditions. For Panikkar, evangelism in interreligious dialogue becomes a process of “mutual fecundation.” This mutual fecundation is made up of two types. The first is that dialogue provides the environment for enriching one’s own faith through constructive criticism as well as by illumination by the faith of one’s partner. In dialogue my inadequacies are made visible to me as they are reflected by my partner. Here I can vet my inadequacies and draw upon my “strengths.” The Westerner, who envies the mysticism of the East and laments its absence in the West, does not need Eastern mysticism, because dialogue with the Easterner can lead the Westerner to their own mystical tradition. Also, I might find that certain assumptions I hold are only partially realized in my faith life. Through dialogue with my partner, these shortfalls become apparent and I am able to correct them. Dialogue with another moves me to greater faith and appreciation of my own tradition. Or, it might move me to find greater faith in a new tradition and belief system. Either way, what results is the flourishing of faith for the person in dialogue.

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Another, and for Panikkar more important, form of mutual fecundation is more of a “resurrection” of the religions in dialogue. Visible in the example of the homologous equivalence of Jesus Christ and Isvara, Panikkar says,

Christianity loves Hinduism because it discovers Christ in it, but this same love kills Hinduism as being a separate body and accepts it as a risen-Christian body. Only the Christian belief in the tremendous mystery of death and resurrection can justify the Christian position...The Christian...is born a ‘pagan’ and must first be converted – he must die and rise again in order to become a son of God...He does not want for Hinduism anything more than what he wants for himself.\(^{130}\)

For Panikkar, finding Christ in Hinduism “does not mean...a changing ‘over’ to another culture, another tradition or even ‘another’ religion, but a changing ‘in’, a changing into a new life, a new existence, a new creation, which is precisely the old one – and not another – but transformed, lifted up, risen again.”\(^{131}\) For Panikkar then, the event of finding Christ within the other religious tradition means a transformation for that tradition, a resurrection. It is a conversion without the Hindu ever ceasing to be something other than a Hindu.

While this appears within the boundaries of interreligious dialogue as a form of evangelization as was emphasized by the CDF, and noted above, it takes a different nuance and a different intention. As was mentioned before, rather than attempting to move one’s partner to accepting Christ and Christianity in something more like proselytization or socialization, Panikkar’s mutual fecundation through interreligious dialogue attempts to find Christ already within another tradition, allowing that religion to find, see, and accept Christ without ever having to abandon their religious belonging, affiliation, or membership.

In Panikkar’s new, dialogical, interreligious, and pluralistic worldview such a resurrection is the new evangelization, the new way of spreading the Good News, the new way of seeing Christ’s presence in all things. Of course, the converse is possible, Christians

\(^{130}\) Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 18.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 18.
might begin to see the homologous equivalences of Hindu advaita, Buddhist impermanence, Muslim submission, or Jewish election within Christianity and be converted without ever abandoning Christ. For Panikkar, this mutual fecundation is the goal of interreligious dialogue and is built upon his pluralistic worldview.

One can see very similar parallels in the treatment of interreligious dialogue in *Dominus Iesus*, which states:

> Such dialogue certainly does not replace, but rather accompanies the *mission ad gentes*, directed toward that “mystery of unity”, from which “it follows that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit”. Inter-religious dialogue, which is part of the Church’s evangelizing mission, requires an attitude of understanding and a relationship of mutual knowledge and reciprocal enrichment, in obedience to the truth and respect for freedom.132

Here *Dominus Iesus* maintains some of the same principles of Panikkar’s mutual fecundation. The document supports the need for “an attitude of understanding,” “mutual knowledge and reciprocal enrichment.” Further, its *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, the CDF states that, “to evangelize does not mean simply to teach a doctrine, but to proclaim Jesus Christ by one’s words and action, that is, to make oneself an instrument of his presence and action in the world.” Such a calling, “sums up the Church’s entire mission.”133

And elsewhere, the same document says that evangelization also offers, “an enrichment for the one who does the evangelizing, as well as for the Church,” and “beyond its intrinsic anthropological value, every encounter with another person or culture is capable of revealing potentialities of the Gospel dimension of the ecumenical commitment.”134 In each of these parallels the CDF agrees with Panikkar’s goals of dialogue as a sharing of lives beyond the doctrines and teachings and as mutual enrichment.

132 CDF, *Dominus Iesus*, #2.
133 CDF, *Some Aspects of Evangelization*, #2
134 Ibid., #6.
However, the two are separated by their differing visions of truth, in which the CDF must argue for the primacy of Christian truth within the fundamental Christian confession over the beliefs of other religions, and Panikkar argues for the equality of religions and emphasizes homologous equivalences over differentiating teachings. For the CDF, dialogue is understood as “not only an exchange of ideas, but also of gifts, in order that the fullness of the means of salvation can be offered to one’s partners in dialogue. In this way, they are led to an ever deeper conversion to Christ.” For the CDF, the ultimate goal of dialogue is the conversion of the other to Christianity and membership in the Church of Christ. For Panikkar this is a clear violation of his denial of monopolistic claims to truth and the metaphysical equality of religions, based in the mystery of reality.

Conclusion.

What becomes clear through the course of this section are two consequences of Panikkar’s pluralistic worldview. First, one can see how his pluralism undermines the Christian’s ability to claim the truth revealed in and through Christ as the singular religious truth. Though his pluralism can’t be identified with the relativism which the CDF and Pope John Paul II regard as the root problem, his pluralism does seek to “throw overboard the exclusivist and monopolistic notions of truth” for which, and from which, the CDF argues. For the CDF such “monopolistic” notions of truth are at the core of the Christian understanding of truth, and by undermining them Panikkar has undermined the stable foundation for the assertion of Christian truth as truth. Second, such a rejection of Christian exclusivistic truth claims similarly undermines the Christian mission of evangelization as it has been understood throughout Christianity’s history. In Panikkar’s pluralistic world, since

135 CDF, Some Aspects of Evangelization, #12.
Christianity can no longer make an exclusive claim to truth, it can no longer by the strength of its truth call other religions to convert not only in their beliefs but in their institutional membership. Panikkar’s form of interreligious dialogue not only undermines the Christian claim to truth, but further re-imagines its mission of evangelization in a way which opposes that called for by magisterial authorities and which has been maintained throughout Christian history. Thus, Panikkar’s interreligious dialogue exemplifies his tendency to subject Christian doctrine and Catholic magisterial teachings to the filter of his theological and interreligious goals.
CHAPTER 5

PANIKKAR’S CHRIST: FROM COSMIC MEDIATOR TO SYMBOL OF CHRIST

Introduction

In his book, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion?*, Jyri Komulainen argues that the development of Panikkar’s Christology shifts on the development of cosmotheandris. Understanding Panikkar’s cosmotheandris to be the result of “a fusion between the theandric vision of Christianity and the theocosmic vision of Hindu religion [sic],”136 Komulainen argues that Panikkar “remains rather loyal to the heritage of Classical Christology in his earlier work.”137 However, with the inclusion of Hindu thought, Panikkar’s “framing of the Christological question takes shape against the background of Hindu speculation.”138 Thus, the development which takes place over time is the result of Panikkar’s attention to two forces working within his thought. First, and foremost, is Panikkar’s attention to Classical Christology, which forms the foundation of his Christological thought. The second is religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue, initially through Hindu thought, most especially in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, and later as it develops a more systematic theory of pluralism.

137 Ibid, 126.
138 Ibid.
What results is a shift in his thought that begins to take place in the early 1970’s and which becomes solidified through the course of the rest of his career. As Cheriyan Menacherry says, “In the context of the cosmotheandrisism that took shape in the 1970’s, Christology may look like an ‘old skin’ that needs modification for the ‘new wine,’ that is the new cosmotheandric metaphysics could be expressed.”139 As Panikkar develops his theories of cosmotheandrisism and religious pluralism, both of which expand Christian elements beyond their Christian boundaries, so too does he adapt classical Christology through his incorporation of a theory of symbols. It is with this inclusion of a “symbol Christology” that Panikkar begins to most explicitly show his desires to reconcile Christian theology with the new pluralist and interreligious situation. By developing a theory of Jesus Nazareth as a symbol of a cosmic Christ, Panikkar draws on a division between symbol and symbolized which presents a distinct problem for traditional Christology, and which is more attentive to the needs of religious pluralism, interreligious dialogue and Christianity’s location within the new global context.

**Part I. Christ as Mediator**

Komulainen characterizes the Christology of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* as one which emphasizes “that Christ is primarily an ontological ‘link’ between the relative and the absolute.” This he calls, “Link Christology.”140 This first section will present two primary ways in which Panikkar develops his “Link Christology” by arguing that in both *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* and *The Trinity and World Religions*, later published as *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Christ is largely understood 1) as the mediator of creation by which God imparts Being to all beings, and 2) as the mediator in human spirituality by

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139 Ibid.

140 Ibid., 127.
which humanity is able to know God in a personal relationship. Thus, Panikkar’s early Christology remains conceptually loyal to traditional Christology.

Towards the end of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Panikkar outlines his overall Christological project. He asserts that, “Most philosophical misunderstandings about Christ and the Incarnation from the side of Indian Philosophy would disappear if, first of all, Christian Theology would try to speak of Christ in a way that might make sense to the partner in dialogue.”\(^{141}\) Such attempts to speak in a way that makes sense to the Indian partner in dialogue means for Panikkar that we not start with the historicity of Christ “because the Christian conception of history is an a posteriori to the Incarnation. To admit the Christian idea of history... presupposes or implies already the Christian idea of Christ.”\(^{142}\) In support of his expulsion of the historicity of Christ, Panikkar argues that “Further, the primary Christian philosophical explanation does not begin with the ‘Flesh’, but with the ‘Logos’ that became ‘Flesh’.”\(^{143}\) In each case, Panikkar is attempting to appeal to a Christ prior to the Incarnation and Christianity. This allows him to remove Christ from Christian possession and the solely historical location of the Incarnation, and gift Christ to all other religions, esp. Hinduism. For Panikkar then, the appeal to the universal Christ prior to history is the only means of making Christ and Christianity intelligible to Indian thinkers. This emphasis on the cosmic Christ over his historical manifestation and incarnation in Christ Jesus begins in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* by drawing on Christ as a universal mediator of creation and salvation. Later in the course of his theological work, Panikkar

\(^{141}\) Ibid., 133 – 4.
\(^{142}\) Ibid., 133.
\(^{143}\) Ibid., 133.
promotes a theory of symbol to make sense of the relationship to the cosmic Christ and the many manifestations of Christ in other religious traditions.

During the course of the text, Panikkar focuses on drawing parallels between the Christian Jesus Christ and the Hindu Isvara. According to Panikkar’s presentation of Hindu Vedanta, Brahman is “That from which the origin etcetera of the Universe proceeds.” Brahman is the source of creation; the unoriginated origin of Being and beings. Such a conception of Brahman however is the result of philosophical and theological argument. Brahman is not a God one can worship, because he is not a God with whom one can have a personal relationship. As Panikkar says,

Brahman stands at the end of a philosophical-theological speculation, it stands at the limit of the intellect, just beyond it. God, on the other hand, stands at the end, at the goal of human worship...The God of worship cannot be an abstract and common ground of being, a mere condition of existence. It must be a person, an ‘I’ in some other way.

For this, Panikkar claims that Hindu thought turns to Isvara. Isvara is both the mediator of creation (that conduit which facilitates creation, the movement from origin to originated), and is the mediator between the origin and humanity (facilitating the return to Brahman, and thus salvation). Isvara is “the re-velation of Brahman, the first out-coming as were of the unfathomable womb of Brahman. He is properly God.” Further, “Isvara is the personal aspect of Brahman.” He is “that ‘aspect’ of Brahman responsible, so to speak, for the creation of the world.” He is responsible “for the calling back of the world to its origin and its (Brahman) reality.” Isvara “is, certainly, Brahman, and knows that it is Brahman.” Since Brahman is unrelated to the world in its transcendence, “It is Isvara that manifests, appears, descends in the form of avatar of the most different kinds.” And finally, Isvara is distinct

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144 Ibid., 82.
145 Ibid., 106.
from and yet identical with Brahman.\textsuperscript{146} Such is the role and function of Isvara in the Hindu Vedantic philo-theological tradition.

It is this understanding of Isvara that leads Panikkar to argue for some sense of functional equivalence between Isvara and Christ. Towards the end of \textit{The Unknown Christ of Hinduism}, he says,

\textit{That from which all things proceed and to which all things return and by which all things are (sustained in their own being) that ‘that’ is God, but \textit{primo et per se} not a silent Godhead, not a kind of inaccessible Brahman, not God the Father and source of the whole divinity, but the true Isvara, God the Son, the Logos, the Christ.}\textsuperscript{147}

Isvara is both of the world and of the divine, Isvara is the revelation of Brahman, Isvara is the personal face of Brahman, Isvara is the source of creation and the source and conduit of salvation/redemption/release. For Panikkar, the parallels between Christ and Isvara are clear.

What Panikkar sees in Isvara is manifestation of the cosmic Christ prior to Christianity within Hinduism. And, while he makes it clear that such functional equivalence is not to be taken as identification, he does argue that a manifestation of the cosmic Christ within Hinduism and Christianity puts greater emphasis on the mystery of the cosmic Christ, which then necessarily relativizes the individual historical manifestations of Christ within individual religions. He says, “It is incontrovertible fact that the living Christ in whom Christians believe cannot be totally equated to the Isvara of Vedanta.”\textsuperscript{148} It is the functional equivalence between Isvara and Christ that is most important. Isvara, Panikkar says, “points towards what we would like to call the Mystery of Christ…He is more than a mediator, he is, in a sense, as the ‘whole Christ’, the whole reality of the world as far as it is real…forming

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 122 – 124.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 126.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 132.
one Mystical Body with him.”149 Thus, “The place in Vedanta for Isvara…which the philosophical mind finds necessary in order to explain and connect God and the world…this place is filled by Christ in Christian thought.”150 However, there is a sense in which the two can be identified. At the close of The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, Panikkar remarks,

We should now develop theologically a thesis which flows immediately from the christological faith, namely the unity of Christ. Whatever God 'does' ad extra there is Christ at work. The presence of God in other religions amounts to proclaiming the action of Christ in those fields. We wanted only to show how in a particular instance this Christian belief can be substantiated – for in him all things are possible.151

Because both Isvara and Jesus Christ do the same work with their respective religions they make God relatable to humanity and mediate the process of creation. It necessarily follows for Panikkar that Isvara and Jesus Christ both participate in the work of God the Son, the Logos. Each is an expression or manifestation (later Panikkar will use symbol) of this cosmic Christ; the Christ that is God working “ad extra.” Thus, Panikkar is arguing for the expansion of Christ beyond Christianity.

In 1970 Panikkar first published The Trinity and the World Religions in India. Three years later he published it in London as The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man.152 The primary goal of the text is to outline how human spirituality can be characterized through three primary approaches, which relate to God in a way associated with each of the three persons of the Trinity. These three approaches to spirituality can further be synthesized in his conception of theandrom, which draws on the Incarnation to highlight the unification of the human and the divine. This unification is then understood as the goal of human spirituality and corresponds to the Christian conception of deification. Though Panikkar

149 Ibid., 129.
150 Ibid., 133.
151 Ibid., 138.
uses the Christian names and Christian understanding of the roles of each person of the Trinity, he aims to release the Trinity from a purely or exclusively Christian possession. The ways in which Christians conceive of the persons of the Trinity are analogous to the ways in which all humanity comes to know and experience the divine. Though he uses the Christian understanding of the Trinity, his intent is to show that all religious people approach God in three main ways each related to the three persons of the Trinity.

Reminiscent of his treatment of Isvara, Panikkar understands the spirituality of the Son to be one of having a personal relationship with the personal face of God. In contrast, the spirituality of the Father emphasizes God’s transcendence and the spirituality of the Spirit emphasizes God’s immanence. This leads Pannikar to assert, “It is not true that God is three persons….Once the revelation of the living Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is received, it is already an abstraction to speak of ‘God’.”\textsuperscript{153} Further, “it is only with the Son that man can have a personal relationship….The God with whom one can speak, establish dialogue, enter into communication, is the divine Person who is in-relation-with.”\textsuperscript{154} Thus, it is necessary to locate Christ between the transcendent God the Father and the immanent Spirit. As a person, and as personal, Christ the Son makes God one with whom humanity can have a personal relationship. By being both a person and personalistic, Christ is other because he is not the one with whom he has a relationship, and is similar because he is a person. Christ then is neither wholly other (transcendent) or wholly similar (immanent), but a way of navigating between. More importantly, Christ is the solely personal face and manifestation of God in the world. God, as Father and Spirit, is only known because the person of Christ the Son makes that available to us. Christ’s place then in religious

\textsuperscript{153} Panikkar, \textit{The Trinity and The Religious Experience of Man}, 51 - 52.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 52.
experience is as the one who makes God, as Trinity, known to humanity. This God who is
Trinity, as transcendent, immanent, and personal, is only known through Christ who points
and refers to the others, and by pointing to them, makes them fully knowable. Thus, Christ
is deeply necessary for humanity to come to a personal relationship with God.

While The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man, emphasizes the spiritual role of
Christ as mediator between God and humanity, Panikkar also makes note of the
cosmological and ontological role that Christ plays. He says, “the Son is the mediator, the
summus pontifex (High Priest) of creation and also of the redemption and glorification, or
transformation, of the world.” Further, “Beings are in so far as they participate in the Son,
are from, with and through him. Every being is a christophany a showing forth of Christ.”
Thus, Panikkar’s Christological thought revolves around Christ’s role as mediator between God
and the world, God and humanity.

The implications are twofold: First, Christ is the only means of knowing God (Here
one might note also, “The only means of salvation.”); Second, if and when God is known,
there is Christ making him known. Here again one can see Panikkar’s argument for the
presence of Christ when God acts “ad extra.” By continuing to identify Christ as mediator
and as the personal aspect of God, Panikkar is able to present Christ in a way which both
makes him the necessary personal mediator of knowledge of God as well as a salvation. With
this understanding of Christ’s role as mediator of salvation available to all Panikkar intends
to argue that other religious traditions can come to know God as God through the universal
mediation of Christ. However, this is not Christ as solely manifested in Jesus Christ, but a
cosmic Christ manifested within different traditions through different manifestations. It is

155 Ibid., 54.
through the Christian manifestation in Jesus Christ that makes it possible to see the presence of the cosmic Christ within all other religions. In each case, however, each manifestation of Christ fulfills the function of mediating between God, the world, and humanity.

The move from *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* to *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* becomes clearer. In the first case, Panikkar makes a strong case for recognizing Christ’s presence and mediation within Vedantic Hindu theology and philosophy. In the second, by emphasizing Christ as referent to and mediator between God-as-Trinity and humanity, Panikkar is able to expand the presence and meaning of the Trinity beyond strictly Christian boundaries to a universal perspective. Thus, what is most particular to Christianity, Christ as Son, and the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is not truly particular to Christianity. Indeed, what is particular to Christianity is one, thought possibly the most complete, manifestation of a universal principle which is manifested in different ways within all human religious traditions.

For Panikkar, the role of interreligious dialogue is available here. With his view of the Trinity and the trinitarian nature of human spirituality, Panikkar is not arguing that all religions have the Trinity. Rather, the Christian understanding of the Trinity as the fullest expression of the trinitarian view of the divine helps to illuminate the threefold nature of religions throughout the world. What Christian’s possess in the Trinity is the fullest expression of the trinitarian reality in which humanity dwells. Through dialogue, the Christian is able to share this truth and help other religions see it within themselves. Similarly, since Christianity has the fullest expression or most complete symbol of Christ, by sharing Christ the Christian is helping their dialogue partner in discerning the presence of Christ already within. It is not so much a colonialist imposition of Christ in another religion,
but is the attempt to help others see Christ through their own parameters. This is the entire purpose of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. Its goal is not to show the Christian Christ, or Christ as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, but to show (using Christ revealed in Jesus of Nazareth) how Hinduism already possesses within itself this goodness and truth which Christians possess more or most explicitly. This goodness and truth, though is present within the Hindu theological and spiritual framework and is attuned to Hindu religious paradigms. Thus, by showing Christ already within Hinduism, and by helping Hindus to recognize this themselves, Panikkar can make the claim of a “resurrection” taking place within Hinduism through the process of interreligious dialogue.

If both Isvara and Christ are manifestations of the cosmic Christ, then it becomes necessary to determine what the relationship is between Jesus as Christ, Isvara as Christ, and the cosmic Christ which they both manifest. In order to draw this relationship out, Panikkar develops a theory of symbol. What follows is a treatment of what Panikkar comes to understand and express his theory of symbol.

**Part II. The Symbolic Shift**

Three years after he originally published *The Trinity and World Religions*, the same year that he published *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Panikkar published an article titled, “The Meaning of Christ’s Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation.”156 In this article, the beginning of a shift is apparent. In the article, Panikkar begins to develop the methodological implications of his presentation of Christ in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. The result is that there are two primary trajectories present. The first is the development of a Christology which relativises the historical manifestation of Christ as Jesus of Nazareth. The

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second is the incorporation of a theory of symbol to account for the multiple manifestations of the cosmic Christ in multiple religious traditions while asserting the legitimacy of each as individual and authentic manifestations. To do this he incorporates a “Symbol Christology.”

Symbol Christology works in two ways within Panikkar’s thought. The first, and least problematic, is the sense in which Christ is the symbol of the cosmotheandric nature of reality. This means that Christ is that which makes real and known to humanity that all reality is made up of the non-reductive, trinitarian relationship between God, the world, and humanity. The second, and more problematic use of Symbol Christology, is Panikkar’s use of symbol to express the relationship between the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ, and further the relationship between other manifestations of Christ in the world’s religions. This second understanding will be the focus of this section since it most clearly relates to the previous section and because Christ as cosmotheandric symbol develops after Panikkar incorporates symbol to make sense of the relationship between Jesus and Christ. However, both uses of symbol will continue throughout the development of Panikkar’s Christology.

Panikkar continues to appeal to the universal, cosmic Christ over the historical manifestation in space and time in Jesus Christ. He makes note that, “If Christ were only that, i.e. a mere reality of the temporal and spatial order, which existed at a certain time and had a certain place in geography, the whole of Christian faith would collapse.”157 Here he rightly asserts that Christ is more than a merely spatio-temporal reality. If it were not for Christ’s mediation between the spatio-temporal and eternal, Christian faith would struggle to intelligibly explain the Incarnation. He says, “No Christian will say that the living Christ of his faith is only a being of the past and no Christian will affirm either, on the other hand,

157 Ibid., 242.
that when he receives Christ in the Eucharist…that he is eating the proteins of Jesus of Nazareth who was walking in Palestine twenty centuries ago.”\textsuperscript{158} This is too true, Christ as he is known in and through the Eucharist is more than a simple physical presence. Further, the substantial unity between Christ’s body as it was offered up on the Cross, and that received in Eucharist are not understood as being based on a shared genetic code and protein composition. The substantial unity which makes up the doctrine of transubstantiation is not a similarity of such accidental properties.

While drawing on an important distinction for understanding the presence of Christ in liturgy and especially the Eucharist, Panikkar’s further use of that distinction is problematic for Christology. What is most important is that while he rightly argues that Christ’s presence is more than proteins or DNA, his own account tends toward the opposite extreme. For Panikkar, the need to make Christ more amenable to Hindus, by stepping away from historical location, tends to create too great a division between the cosmic/divine person of Christ and the historical human/divine Jesus Christ. Christian soteriology, as seen in the early Christological councils and the documents of the CDF, requires a necessary identification between that which Panikkar tends to divide. For Christians, and the understanding of the role of Christ in human salvation, any attempt to side-step this identification, even to argue for Christ’s universal presence in other religions, fails to account for the necessary aspect of the historical passion, death, resurrection, and salvation which constitute the Christian understanding of salvation. Thus, in order to make Christ more amenable, Panikkar tends to emphasize a divide or distinction which is highly problematic for Christian soteriology. What this indicates for the purpose of this study is the continual

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 242.
trend in which Panikkar tends to favor the needs of interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism over the principles of traditional Christology.

Upon this foundation Panikkar builds an explanation of what Christ is and what Christ means that is not limited to Christ’s historical manifestation in space and time. He argues for this in several ways. By arguing against the ascription of individuality to Christ, Panikkar asserts that Christ is not an individual but a person with whom one can have a relationship. The result is that “Christ is not a single individual in the sense in which historical personages are said to be such. Christ has a human nature indeed, he is Man, but he is not a human person. He is a divine person, the second person of the Trinity having assumed human nature.”159 He says, “What we are driving at is the fact that Christ as Christian faith sees him, namely as someone living, who is present in the sacrament and in others, who transcends time and, with whom you can enter into an intimate relationship…does not fall into the category of individual.”160 Further, he says, “We are here only concerned with the main thrust of the traditional solution, namely that the living Christ is the risen Christ and that as such he has no single individuality.”161 Thus, Christ as experienced in faith is the universal, cosmic, resurrected Christ. What results from this emphasis on Christ as universal and cosmic mediator is that Panikkar has largely “dispensed with Christian commitment to the historical figure of Jesus and eschews history.”162 From the orthodox foundation of the cosmic Christ, Panikkar argues for an image of Christ which relativizes the Christ of history.

159 Panikkar, “The Meaning of Christ’s Name,” 247
160 Ibid., 249.
161 Ibid., 248.
Continuing his emphasis of the cosmic, divine person of Christ over the singular historical Jesus, Panikkar says,

The problem, however, remains still lurking, for though, following Chalcedon, it could be argued that Christ assumed human nature as a whole, he did it by assuming a human nature, the human nature of the man Jesus whose human person did not even come into being because that person was subsumed by the divine person of the Logos. In this context Christ is man, but not one man, a single individual; he is a divine person incarnated, a divine person in hypostatic union with human nature. The Logos is revealed in Christ, and through Christ man comes in contact with the Logos, but Christ’s presence for the believer hic et nunc is the divine presence.163

For Panikkar, the divine person of the cosmic Christ is not the singular individuality of the historical Jesus. The individuality of Jesus, which is a result of his being lodged within space and time is marginalized in order to emphasize Christ’s presence through the divine person.

As Komulainen says,

Panikkar is attempting to find a category in the framework of which Christology could operate regarding Jesus of Nazareth. By proving deficient a Christological method that concentrates on the historical Jesus, he is able to establish a new methodology that takes account of a more universal horizon. By locating Christ’s significance in the field of personal identity, he constructs a theoretical model that bestows in Jesus of Nazareth as a historical personality only marginal significance.164

Thus, the forces of interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism shaping Panikkar’s Christology in his early work has begun to develop into a necessary disjunction between the cosmic Christ and the historical Jesus.

From a more critical position, Panikkar’s use of the term “person” here poses great problems for traditional Christology. And, while it isn’t appropriate to throw around heresies, one is tempted to see a certain degree of Nestorianism-turned-monophysitism in Panikkar’s statement. Even taking for granted that Panikkar is intending “person” to mean one with whom an individual is in relation, the argument for a divine person and human person, incarnated in a way in which the human person never comes into being, is a

164 Komulainen, 141.
problematic interpretation of Chalcedonian language and the meaning of person in
discussion of the Incarnation. Considering the discussion surrounding the Council, especially
Cyril of Alexandria and Pope Leo, the term “person” intends the individual instantiation of
Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957).} Thus, one could talk about a divine person before the historical Incarnation, a
divine/human person after the Incarnation, and a divine/resurrected human person after the
Resurrection and Ascension. However, to argue that Christ remains a solely divine person
before, during and after the Incarnation, especially to deny the humanity, is highly
problematic for Chalcedonian Christology.

What this indicates for this study is Panikkar’s continuous tendency to favor the
needs to interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism over against the demands of
traditional Christological principles. Even accounting for the rarity of such comments, that
such a clearly problematic statement comes about only the one time, and that Panikkar
intends something other than arguing for a dual-personhood in the Incarnation, it highlights
where Panikkar lies upon the traditionalist-pluralist spectrum. In order to make Christ
amenable to other religions, Panikkar is moved to express the Incarnation in a way that
maintains some division between the historical manifestation of Christ in Jesus and the
eternal cosmic Christ.

What results from Panikkar’s disjunction of the divine person of the cosmic Christ
and the singular individuality of the historical Jesus is a relationship between the two which
is reminiscent of the same concerns arising out of the functional equivalence of Christ and
Isvara. He must find some way of accounting for how Christ cannot be equated with the
historical Jesus, but at the same time ensure that Jesus is a true manifestation of Christ. He says, “Christ the Lord and Saviour is, for the Christian, that mystery which is unveiled in or through Jesus in [the Christian’s] act of faith, which extends far beyond an act of historical memory trusting in the testimonies of [the Christian’s] elders.”\(^{166}\) For Panikkar, the Christian comes to a personal relationship with the mystery of the divine person of Christ who is unveiled in and through the historical person of Jesus. However, the particular manifestation of Christ in Jesus is normative only for the Christian who finds the cosmic Christ through Christ Jesus. Isvara makes the cosmic Christ available to the Hindu. Each is a symbol of the mystery, and neither can fully manifest that mystery despite its full and complete participation in the mystery of Christ. Each is a manifestation of the cosmic Christ.

It falls on his theory of symbol to bridge the disjunction discussed above between the cosmic Christ and the historical Jesus as spatio-temporal manifestation of Christ. Because of the deep significance that it plays in his Christology as it follows from here and because of the pedigree of the use of symbol in theology, e.g. from Tillich and Rahner to John Haight, it is important to give Panikkar’s theory of symbol adequate treatment.

According to Panikkar, the name of Christ is not a sign or signifier. This is because “No sign can save. A sign can be, at most, an intermediary, not a mediator.”\(^{167}\) The name of a thing then does not simply point out that thing, but is the very thing itself. Just as it points to it as referent, it similarly encompasses all that that thing is. Thus, one’s name is more than that by which one is isolated and separated from all other individuals. One’s name is indeed what one is in the world. The name of Christ then must be understood as a symbol, “i.e. the very ‘thing’ as it appears and is, in the world of our experience. The symbol stands for the

\(^{166}\) Panikkar, “The Meaning of Christ’s Name,” 260.

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 238.
‘thing,’ it is the thing as it appears, but this appearance is its proper manifestation, so that the symbol reveals what there is by the same fact that it clothes and expresses it.”168 Christ, as known to Christians first as direct experience, then as oral testimony, and finally as textually composed in Scripture and through the spiritual experience of faith, is that very individual through which Christians come to God. Thus, Christ’s name, that which makes Christ known and which points further on to God the Father, is an “epiphany of the [thing] so named.”169 As an epiphany a name is both a referent and a manifestation, it points to and makes a thing real.170 Thus, the name of Christ is both a referent and a manifestation of the universal mystery of Christ.

What is most important is that there is an implicit disconnect between the name and the named itself as Panikkar applies “symbol” in his work. Most especially as it is applied to Christ, the name or the symbol of the thing is both connected and disconnected from the thing itself. In context of his understanding of homologues, his pluralistic understanding of truth, and his conception of “person,” the relationship between the symbol and symbolized is ultimately one-way. The symbol in its entirety is a manifestation of the thing symbolized. Thus, the name of Christ is completely and totally assumed into the reality of Christ. However, the thing symbolized is not exhausted in the symbol. As a manifestation and epiphany of the thing symbolized, the symbol cannot exhaust the symbolized. The symbolized is ultimately more than the symbol. Thus, there is an inherent disconnect between symbol and symbolized. There is no direct and complete identification of the two. The symbolized will always be more than the symbol. As was seen before in Panikkar’s

168 Ibid., 238
169 Ibid., 238
170 Menacherry, Christ: The Mystery in History, 137.
interpretation of Chalcedonian language, symbol has important consequences for Panikkar’s Christology.

Both Komulainen and Menacherry correctly characterize what symbol does for Panikkar in discerning the relationship between Christ as revealed in and through Jesus and the universal cosmic Christ. According to Komulainen, “the resurrected Christ is more than Jesus of Nazareth.” Menacherry provides something more complete:

The relation between Jesus and CHRIST is that of the symbol and the symbolized, the manifestation and the mystery. Jesus of Nazareth alone is not CHRIST. A symbolic approach will save us from the tendency to constrict the ultimate reality to its historically manifested form from the tendency towards historicizing reality. Jesus is the symbol of CHRIST. At the same time, outside this proper symbol a Christian cannot meet CHRIST, as this symbol Jesus manifests to the Christian consciousness the Mystery, CHRIST.

What both Komulainen and Menacherry indicate is the presence of the disjunction between Jesus and Christ. By applying the category of symbol to Jesus and symbolized to the mystery of Christ, Panikkar highlights the problematic nature of symbol theology. Later this position will be exemplified when Panikkar claims that “It is in and through Jesus that Christians come to believe in the reality that they call Christ, but this Christ is the decisive,” and “Jesus is the symbol of Christ...Jesus is Christ, but Christ cannot be identified completely with Jesus of Nazareth.” In each case, it is clear that both Komulainen and Menacherry correctly characterize the way in which Panikkar comes to understand the relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and the cosmic Christ. The disjunction that Panikkar maintains between Jesus and Christ is rooted in his conceptualization of “symbol.” What follows will help point out what becomes so difficult about Panikkar’s account of symbol.

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171 Komulainen, 146.
172 Menacherry, 143.
Particularly helpful is Robert Masson’s “The Clash of Christological Symbols: A Case for Metaphoric Realism.” In the article, Masson draws a distinction between the symbolic theologies of Tillich and Rahner, and the appropriation of their work by Roger Haight. On the one hand, Tillich’s dialectical theory, and Masson argues Haight’s as well, emphasizes the mediation of the symbolized in and through the symbol, which results in the de-identification of Jesus and God. Rahner, on the other hand, uses symbol in an “even more dialectical” way in which beings themselves are symbolic in their unity in plurality. Each thing “is” and “is not” identical with its expressions. Such a distinction is important for our critique of Panikkar’s use of symbol.175

As presented above, Panikkar’s account of symbol most clearly resembles that used by Tillich and Haight. In each case, the emphasis on what Masson calls the “phenomenological account of the relation between the symbol and symbolized,” in which Tillich and Haight “chart” the “phenomenological traces of [that relation’s] mediation” leads to a necessary disjunction between the symbol and symbolized. Symbol then designates “‘mediation’ of the divine but always with a qualification, in Tillich’s language, of the ‘absolute break’ and ‘infinite jump’ between symbol and what it symbolizes.”176 As Panikkar, continues to use “symbol” throughout his career, this same use becomes more and more apparent. While Panikkar maintains the unity of the symbol and symbolized in manner of manifestation, he also makes use of the disjunction between the two. And it is that disjunction that is problematic for traditional Christology, as the CDF’s concerns about Haight’s use of symbol indicates. For the same reason that Haight’s Jesus, Symbol of God is

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176 Masson, 67.
problematic according to the CDF because it disjoins Jesus-symbol and Christ-symbolized, Panikkar’s use of symbol is problematic. This is not to equate their two accounts, but it is to highlight how both possess the same symbolic disjunction which the CDF criticizes in Haight’s work.

By arguing for a necessary disjunction between Jesus and Christ, Panikkar undermines the identification of Jesus as historical manifestation and symbol and the cosmic Christ manifested and symbolized. Komulainen correctly characterizes the problem as exemplified in the sentence “the Christ is Jesus.” Such a sentence cannot be used to argue that “Christ is only Jesus.” Panikkar “does not consider ‘is’ sentences to imply exclusiveness.”177 Where Christian theologians need to maintain a one-to-one identification between the human and the divine, Panikkar’s use of symbol maintains a one-sided identification in which Jesus can be wholly identified with the Christ, but Christ cannot be wholly identified with Jesus. This is reminiscent of the CDF’s critique of Sobrino’s erroneous presentation of the *communicatio idiomatum*. By expanding the theory of symbol outside of the Christian context and using it to describe the relationship between the human and divine in Jesus Christ, Panikkar undermines the communication of idioms between the divine cosmic Christ and the historical human Christ. Thus, as with Sobrino, Panikkar presents an image of the Incarnation which violates the *communicatio idiomatum*. Further, this conception comes about because of Panikkar’s concerns for religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue.

In context of what was developed above such an appeal to Christ’s name as symbol fits into Panikkar’s overall project. On the one hand it enables the identification of Jesus as a

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177 Komulainen, 142.
historically located person in space and time with Christ the universal and cosmic mediator. Jesus, as he was known to the apostles and is revealed in Scripture, was the real and proper manifestation of Christ the cosmic mediator; Panikkar might even argue the fullest. On the other hand, this use of symbol also allows for Panikkar to implicate a break between the Jesus and the universal, cosmic mediator. More it permits the possibility of multiple proper and real manifestations of that which is revealed in and through Jesus. So, just as Jesus was a real and proper manifestation of the cosmic mediator, and maybe even the most complete manifestation of that mediator, it is just as possible that Isvara, as he is known in Hinduism, might also be a real and proper manifestation of the same mediator. Thus, by appealing to a symbolic identification of Jesus and the cosmic mediator, Panikkar can claim that Jesus was/is the Christ, while at the same time argue that Jesus as known through Scripture cannot be the claimed as the only and exhaustive epiphany of the cosmic mediator. Symbol then allows Panikkar to identify Christ and Jesus in a way more conducive with religious pluralism. More importantly, as Panikkar’s thought develops the use of symbol, as a singularity in which a cosmic principle is revealed and made manifest, if only incompletely, becomes more central alongside his development of cosmotheandris. In short, Christ as cosmotheandric symbol comes to be the most complete vision of Christ which Panikkar develops.

**Part III. Jesus, Symbol of Christ**

In “Colligite Fragmenta,” as discussed previously, Panikkar works towards a sense of human awareness which recognizes the inherent unity of the three worlds of reality. All reality, the cosmos, the divine and the human are joined together. For Panikkar, this is most clearly visible in the person of Christ. Christ as God incarnate and as mediator of creation is
the union of the divine, the human, and the cosmic spheres of reality. Further, as the firstborn of the resurrected, he also represents the final goal of all humanity. In our saved and resurrected state all humanity will be united with the other spheres of reality.

Within Panikkar’s overall project the concept of cosmotheandridm further supports the efforts of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. First, it supports the relationality and irreducibility of reality. Each of the three spheres exist separate from the others, though unified in Christ, they remain ultimately distinct from one another. This is at the heart of the mystery of reality. Through the cosmotheandric worldview, all reality is part of these three spheres, and reality is the unity of these three spheres. Though unified to make up reality, each remains distinct. This mystery mirrors the same mysteries which form the cores of the Incarnation and the Trinity. In each case, the problem remains of how the many can make up the one. How can Christ be both human and divine? How can the Trinity be both three and one? Similarly, reality is three and one. Each exists in some sense because of the other two. Humanity and the cosmos exist because God created them; humanity exists because it exists within the world; God is God in the way that God is because of God’s relationship with humanity and the cosmos. Thus, each of the three are unified and yet distinct. It is their relationality that they are most fully realized as their distinct spheres. Yet, at the same time, none of the three can be reduced to any of the others. Humanity cannot be reduced to the divine nor to the cosmic. The cosmic cannot be reduced to the divine or the human. Thus, all reality consists in an irreducible relationality. Even the relationality is not a thing or principal itself. Thus, cosmotheandridism, as it applies the conceptual foundations of Panikkar’s religious pluralism, becomes the means by which he is able to retain a solid foundation for reality and human experience and yet assert a radical religious pluralism. This
religious pluralism, which he develops more explicitly later, is based on the relationality and irreducibility of the three spheres which make up the cosmotheandric vision of the world.

The second way that the cosmotheandric experience and worldview facilitates Panikkar’s religious pluralism is that since reality is not reducible to the human intellect and is inherently relational, not relative, it cannot be fully grasped by the human intellect. There is a dark mysterious core into which the human intellect cannot penetrate. Thus, no human or group of humans can lay exclusive claim to an exhaust vision of reality. Further, that reality which is made known to humans through Christ will forever be greater than humanity can grasp through Christian revelation and Scripture. No matter how well Christ revealed himself to humanity, Christ’s reality, as cosmotheandric symbol, will forever be greater than human thought can encompass. Thus, by emphasizing the priority of human religious epistemology, Panikkar can highlight humanity’s incomplete ability to fully grasp reality, thus Christ and all truth relating to God.

In his Introduction to the revised edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Panikkar asserts that his goal is primarily to clarify language and update his text, rather than completely revising the text to what he believed at the time of the revision. As such, there is a genealogical link between Christ as Panikkar originally conceived of him. It is Christ as primarily conceived as mediator which allows Panikkar to develop Christ as cosmotheandric symbol. For Panikkar, this begins with the understanding of Christ as symbol as discussed above. He says, “Christ has been and still is one of the most powerful symbols of humankind, though ambivalent and much-discussed….That the historical name of Christ
should not be confined to the thus-named historical Jesus hardly needs mentioning here.”

Panikkar continues to use his conception of symbol, and it is his notion of symbol which draws a distinction between the cosmic Christ and the historical Jesus. Jesus is identified with Christ, but Christ is not wholly confined to Jesus. The one-way relation between symbol and symbolized remains.

At the same time, his conception of the cosmotheandric integration of reality is just as important. Panikkar says, “Any Christ who is less than Cosmic, Human and Divine Manifestation will not do,” and “Christ is still a living symbol for the totality of reality: human, divine, and cosmic.” For Panikkar, the cosmotheandric nature of reality is the becoming more integrated into his conception of Christ. The result is that “the symbol Christ [is] that symbol which ‘recapitulates’ in itself the Real in its totality, created and uncreated….Christ is not only the sacrament of the Church, but also the sacrament of the World and of God. Any other conception of the symbol Christ falls short of what Christian tradition has overwhelmingly understood this symbol to be.” Thus, Panikkar’s theory of symbol is intended to draw out and emphasize the universal character of Christ’s mediation. Since Christ is the conduit through which all reality has its being, then all reality is shaped by that conduit. Thus, all reality is stamped with Christ and, as noted before, becomes a manifestation of Christ (which he will later call Christophany). Christ, as cosmic mediator of creation and being, is that which symbolizes all of reality and to which all reality refers. Further, because all reality participates in the cosmic Christ all reality makes Christ visible. However, no aspect of reality is able to give an adequate presentation of the deep mystery

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179 Ibid., 27.
180 Ibid., 28 – 29.
that is the cosmic Christ. Thus, while reality participates in Christ, it cannot fully express the
mystery of Christ. The full mystery of Christ, because it is a mystery, cannot be exhausted by
reality.

Alongside the inability of reality to adequately express the full mystery of Christ so
too must Christians realize the limitations of Jesus to reveal the Mystery called Christ. He
says about the Mystery that “Christians have called it Christ, and rightly so. My suggestion is
that they should not give it up too lightly and he satisfied simply with Jesus – however
divinized. It is in and through Jesus that Christians come to believe in the reality that they
call Christ, but this Christ is the decisive reality.”181 Since Jesus is not fully identifiable with
Christ and since Christ is far more than Jesus, Panikkar can argue for a far broader
conception of how Christ works as mediator and savior. Further, as a result of his advaitic
and Incarnational metaphysics, reality and truth are pluralistic. Thus, Panikkar can claim, “It
is not that this reality [Christ] has many names as if it were a reality outside the name. This
reality is many names and each name is a new aspect, a new manifestation and revelation of
it. Yet each name teaches and expresses, as it were, the undivided Mystery.”182 Thus, that
which is symbolized by and in Christ as known through Jesus is greater than humanity can
grasp. More, what is known of that reality through Jesus Christ is only a limited view, though
it reveals it entirely. The symbol then works to both reveal and to obscure the reality which it
symbolizes. The result is that there can be only one Christ, but humanity “will have to
recognize the unknown dimensions of Christ.”183 Since the mystery of Christ goes beyond
any one symbol or name, no religion can lay exclusive claim, not even Christians. Further,

181 Ibid., 29.
182 Ibid., 29.
183 Ibid., 30.
Christians must accept that their own view of Christ is too limited to encompass the entirety of the mystery. Thus, all religious traditions can lay claim to the salvation offered through Christ as mediator.

Since Christ mediates all of humanity’s strivings for salvation and liberation, and goes beyond the conception of Christians as Christ was made manifest in space and time, Panikkar is able to render all religions incomplete. For Panikkar, since all have a vision of the cosmotheandric Christ, and since all have incomplete and relative visions of Christ, then all religions must assent to pluralism as Panikkar conceives it and to engage in dialogue as Panikkar outlines it. Thus, Panikkar’s conception of Christ and his accounts of interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism work hand-in-hand. By presenting such an image of Christ, Panikkar can further argue for the need for religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue.

What is visible here is that Panikkar’s conception of Christ is not radically different as it develops from the first to the revised edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. What changes are visible are results of incorporating Panikkar’s concepts of symbol and cosmotheandricism. In many ways, the use of symbol and cosmotheandricism aid Panikkar’s discussion in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. By using such terms, he is able to side-step the conceptual limitations of traditional Christological vocabulary. Universal mediator of salvation and creation does not work as well with the conceptualization that Panikkar wants to present in the text. In contrast, cosmotheandric symbol is very effective in characterizing how Panikkar conceives of the role of Christ as mediator of salvation and creation. By using such terms, Panikkar is able to discuss traditional Christological principles in a way more amenable with his own theological concerns. They facilitate his expression of the
fundamental intuition and insight he has regarding the relationship between Christ, interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism.

Such a movement into a pluralistic worldview is the concern of an essay Panikkar wrote in 1987 titled, “The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments in Christic Self-Consciousness.”184 Years later Panikkar expanded the essay for inclusion as a chapter in his book *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom* (1993).185 In this essay, as was noted in the previous chapter, Panikkar is attempting to provide a perspective on what he believes is the inaugurated and developing worldview, most especially for Christians but also other religious traditions as well. According to Panikkar, as humanity moves closer to a cosmotheandric view of reality and religion, Christianity as a religion and christianness as a means of expressing religious belonging will become altered. With the coming of christianness and the emphasis on the personal act of faith, the exclusivism which arises from religion being conceived of as participation in a particular religious group, will be replaced by the widespread inclusivity of the recognition of the universal experience of faith. Christianness, the act of having faith in Christ, then will replace Christianity and Christendom, the social, institutional, and political bodies which determine Christian identity outside of the experience of faith. Thus, no longer will a Christian be identified as belonging to a particular confession, denomination, or ecclesial community. Christianness will be defined and located as those who first and foremost have faith in God the Father as revealed through Christ. This does not mean that particular Christian communities will become extinct, but only that

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their membership is understood as circumscribed by a wider criteria of membership in
christianness.

Christianness is dependent on a conception of Christ as independent of Christianity
and the claims that Christianity places on Christian Scripture and Tradition can be
understood as the “christic principle.” This Panikkar explains is the “mystical core” of
christianness. It is properly Christ as experienced by the Christian in their act of faith.
However, it cannot be identified “with christianity as a religion - and much less with
christendom as a civilization.” What Christians then must do is begin to recognize that
Christ is at the core of christianness while at the same time far beyond such a limitation.
Christ cannot be limited to the Christian religion, nor to Christian culture. He says, “There is
no single way of viewing Christ, no matter how broad it may be. No single view can embrace
the reality of Christ.” Rather, “Christians may discover in this christic principle the key to
unity, to understanding and love for all humankind, and to the whole of the cosmos, so they
can behold in this concreteness the most radical human, cosmic, and divine communion
with reality.” Once again Panikkar continues to draw on cosmotheandricism to characterize
Christ, the Christic principle, as the unity and key for understanding the trinitarian threefold
constitution of reality. Thus, Christ as the Christic principle is beyond any single view.186

Towards the end of the essay, Panikkar says, “I shall try to indicate my interpretation
of Christ from a theanthropocosmic [or cosmotheandric] viewpoint. I believe that this
interpretation follows the methodological principles in this chapter; yet I should not
recommend in any way considering it as normative or necessarily representative of christian
theology.” Panikkar recognizes that this understanding of Christ is in conflict with traditional

186 Ibid., 150 – 151.
Christology for the very fact that it favors Christ the cosmic mediator to the point of marginalizing Christ as historically manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. As was seen previously, Panikkar’s privileging of Christ the universal savior over Christ located in space and time requires a devaluation of the historical Jesus. Thus, the emphasis that Christianity has placed on its Messiah having been in time and space must be marginalized and even left behind. Most importantly the deemphasizing of Christ’s coming in space and time means that Christianity’s understanding of history must be re-evaluated. For Panikkar, this means that history can no longer have the place it continues to retain. He argues,

> With such a view of Christ I am not avoiding the *skandalon* of the Incarnation and the process of salvation….The point is simply that I am not worshiping history as if it were God, and I am not limiting reality to history – not even to human history – and not to the history of abrahamic lineage. Just as traditional theology speaks of *creatio continua*, we might imagine, analogously, a continued incarnation, not simply in the body but also in the actions and events of all creatures. Every creature is a *christophany*.187

What Panikkar is arguing for then is a shift in the perception of Christ as a result of the religious pluralism which characterizes contemporary religiousness. It is being religious in such a way which demands that Christianity re-think its own means of self-identification and the claims it has made regarding Christ and religious truth. In short, Panikkar’s understanding of religious pluralism is privileged in the way in which he conceives of Christ. He begins with what he sees as the inaugurated and coming way of religious characterized by religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue.188

For Panikkar, the result is that though a Christian must attain faith in Christ through the particular beliefs, doctrines and dogmas of the Christian religion, in the end, Christ as cosmotheandric symbol is not limited to those beliefs, doctrines and dogmas. Since

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187 Ibid., 153.
188 Ibid., 152 – 153.
Christianity’s conception of Christ is centered on the mystery of the Incarnation, and since the Incarnation can be understood as Christ as the cosmotheandric symbol of all reality, Christianity can lay no exclusive claim on Christ. Christ is independent of those particular ways in which Christians have understood and discussed him since the time of the Apostles. Christians cannot grasp or embrace the entire mystery of Christ, even as it is revealed through Christ Jesus. Thus, Christ is independent of Christianity, Christians, and Christ’s revelation in space and time. Since humanity cannot know the full mystery of Christ as Jesus Christ revealed it, then that revelation is incomplete or insufficient. By privileging the role of humanity in its ascent to God through human religiousness rather than God’s condescension into space and time, Panikkar has devalued the strength of God’s self-revelation and the priority of God’s action through the Incarnation. The way in which Panikkar conceives of the Incarnation then becomes subject to the way in which he conceives of the contemporary interreligious and religiously pluralistic world and vision. Christ and the way in which we are to conceive of him are not simply revised according to new ways of thinking. Panikkar does not simply use a new vocabulary instead of hypostasis and nature. He does not simply re-evaluate older ways of conceptualizing the Incarnation. Panikkar, by privileging the experience of faith over the means of attaining that faith makes the Christian confession of faith subject to his own theological methods. Thus, as noted above, his conceptualization is in line with his “methodological principles,” but is not to be considered “normative or necessarily representative of christian theology.”

The last source this study will discuss is Panikkar’s 2004 book, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*. Panikkar’s goal for the book is to draw out the same impulse which lies within his treatment above of a “continued incarnation” and the assertion that “Every
creature is a christophany.” For Panikkar, the goal is to promote an understanding of Christ, in which all reality is a manifestation of Christ and that it is possible for humanity to attain its fullness in divinization. What is most significant for this study is the means by which Panikkar characterizes the relationship between traditional Christology and what his goals are for the book.

In most cases in *Christophany*, Panikkar presents a picture of Christ which is amenable to traditional Christology. This is partly because Panikkar’s conception Christ as cosmotheandric symbol is dependent upon its origins in the traditional accounts of the Incarnation and theandrisim. Such a conception of the Incarnation is similarly dependent on the Logos theology which constituted much of the theoretical content of the early Christological councils. The argument that Christ is the unifying factor of all reality, in which the divine, the human, and the cosmic are brought together in a threefold unity, originates in the language of those early councils. In most places Christ as cosmotheandric symbol appears little different than the Christ depicted by the ecumenical councils. However, Panikkar’s cosmotheandric symbol, though not in deep contrast to the Christology promulgated by the early councils, is an attempt to expand Christ as Logos beyond the boundaries in which it was and is conceived of in traditional Christology.

At the core of Panikkar’s Christological thought in Christophany is the belief that,

The contemporary intercultural challenge...has shown itself more profound than previously imagined. There is no doubt that classical christology does not have at its disposal categories adequate to confront these problems. Today’s Christology is neither catholic – that is, universal – nor is it necessary that it be so. Its content cannot be separated from the parameters of intelligibility that belong to a powerful yet single current of human culture.... The fact is that Christology has been developed only within the framework of the Western world. Despite its trinitarian soul, Christology has not really freed itself from the monotheism it inherited from the abrahamic tradition.189

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Panikkar’s challenge is that it has become necessary to develop a new way of thinking and talking about Christology. This new way must be attentive to “problems” of “the contemporary intercultural challenge” as exemplified by his accounts of pluralism, interreligious dialogue and christianness. In short, Christology must contend with the new way in which humanity is coming to deal with one another, with the world, and with God. For Panikkar, this means that Christology must be made intelligible to an intellectual framework outside and beyond the Western world. Classical Christology, not truly universal since it is/was fundamentally located in the Western framework, cannot attend to these new realities. However, the reader is given a hint about where to start in developing a new, pluralistic Christology, capable of addressing the challenges of the intercultural world. It is in christology’s “trinitarian soul” that a properly interreligious and pluralistic Christology can begin. This then recalls the reader back to Panikkar’s conception of Christ as cosmotheandric principle. By breaking away from abrahamic monotheism, and truly asserting the radical relationality of the trinity, Christology can account for Christ in a fashion which deals with the new ways of seeing the world and reality. However, such a new Christology is not completely separated from classical Christology. This new Christology represents an evolutionary development from classical and traditional Christology to the new pluralistic and interreligiously aware Christology. At the same time, Christophany also represents a revolution of sorts against the limitations of traditional Christology.

For Panikkar’s conceptualization of Christ, the “point of departure lies in traditional Christology.” From this starting point, Panikkar proposes that, “Despite the novelty of the name, Christophany traces itself to those profound intuitions of traditional Christology which

190 Ibid., 5.
it does not replace but, on the contrary, prolongs deepens in fields hitherto unexplored and proposes new perspectives.”191 The spatial metaphors are important here and yet one cannot make too much out of them. The implication of identifying traditional Christology as the “point of departure” is that it is a starting point which determines the direction of movement but does not determine the destination. In the same way, traditional Christology does not determine where Panikkar will end up but does affect how he gets there. One leaves such a point maybe to return, maybe not. For Panikkar, there remains a link between traditional Christology and his conceptualization of christophany. Christophany draws Christology into new fields and proposes new perspectives. Though it is clear that Panikkar’s christophany is not intended to replace traditional Christology for Christians, it is also clear that he understands christophany to be something different. Thus he says, “Let it be clear, however, that it is not a question of either supplanting traditional christology or of forgetting the tradition from which Christianity was born. What we need to do is to revisit the experience of the mystery of Christ in the light of our times…” By drawing tradition into the “light of our times,” Panikkar’s christophany is a clear development upon traditional Christology which does imply a “departure” from tradition. Thus, Panikkar’s christophany is not simply a replacement of traditional Christology for Christians, but does represent enough of a change in the fundamentals of traditional Christology (in order to appeal to the new context) as to indicate a break from it.

The notion of Christophany represents a greater openness to the demands of the contemporary religious environment. It is an open term whereas Christology is more closed within the particular Christian context. Christophany represents a conception of Christ

191 Ibid., 10.
which is more amicable and more intelligible to other religious traditions, where Christology is based on “Christian premises.” Christophany is the result of a greater consciousness of the limitations of an exclusive attention to purely Christian assumptions. It implies the necessary input of and engagement with other religions and cultures. This is because “Christology has been, in general, a reflection pursued by Christians who…have virtually ignored the world’s other traditions. Christophany, on the other hand, is open to a dialogue with other traditions.” Where Christology is something theological, meaning that it is the proper domain of the committed and initiated, “Christophany simply intends to offer an image of Christ that all people are capable of believing in.” Rather than limiting the discussion of Christ to the exclusive domains of Christianity, Christophany is open to the greater and wider perspective of humanity.

Christophany means a new methodology for conceiving of Christ and a new set of parameters for discussing who and what Christ is. Panikkar says, “christophany…suggests that the meeting with Christ is irreducible to a simple doctrine or intellectual (not only rational) approach that is proper to Christology.” Panikkar’s Christophany argues that those propositions are secondary to the experience of Christ. It is not that they should be ignored, but that their place is re-evaluated upon the believer’s experience of Christ. Those doctrines are necessary for the meeting, but the meeting itself is more than those beliefs. Here Panikkar’s meeting with Christ is more than knowing facts, but is being in relation to a person. Further, that meeting is with Christ as symbolized in Christianity through and in Christ Jesus. Christophany opens the door for arguing that Christ and Christianity are larger than the doctrines and beliefs of Christians. For Panikkar this “does not mean that we are

192 Ibid., 6.
193 Ibid., 9.
forgetting the *logos*; on the contrary, we are suggesting the transcending of a purely rational approach.”194 As noted in the section about religious pluralism, according to Panikkar, truth is pluralistic and relational. This pluralism is built upon the fact that all reality is irreducible to intelligibility. Thus intelligibility can no longer be understood as the parameters of truth. To understand Christ, the symbol of the unity of the threefold spheres of reality, Panikkar argues that such unity is not reducible to the principles of the human intellect, but is something experienced in personal relation. As mystery, Christ as cosmotheandric symbol is not bordered and delineated by rationality and intelligibility.

One can see in these three instances the relationship between Panikkar’s conception of Christophany and traditional Christology. In the first, Christophany represents the movement beyond traditional Christology. Though Panikkar does not want to forget or replace traditional Christology, Christophany indicates a movement away from the Christian priorities upon which traditional Christology is based. Traditional or classical Christology is perfectly appropriate when used within the Christian context, but it needs to be recognized as limited and located within that context. An expanded intercultural, and pluralistic context requires an expanded Christology. By attempting to develop a vision of Christ which attends to the new landscapes of the contemporary religious situation, Panikkar radically reorients the way in which Christ is conceived. For Panikkar, Christophany represents an openness to other religions. To do this it must go beyond the limitations of Christianity.

The resulting image of Christ is similar to that outlined several times above. Most especially of concern is the symbolic disconnect between the symbol and symbolized. Panikkar says, “Jesus is the symbol of Christ.” In support he argues, “the eucharistic

194 Ibid., 10.
example [should] suffice. The eucharist is the real presence of Christ, of the resurrected Christ (but does not contain the protein of Jesus of Nazareth).” Further, he says, “I underscore the in and through of this sutra in order to avoid possible misunderstanding: Jesus is Christ, but Christ cannot be identified completely with Jesus of Nazareth.” The reader is once again faced with a breaking apart of the principle of the communicatio idiomatum. If what the principle of communicatio idiomatum requires is a two-sided identification by which one can say that what is predicated of the divine can be predicated of the human and vice versa, then by using the concept of symbol in the way that he does, Panikkar breaks apart the identification of Christ and Jesus.195

Elsewhere, Panikkar continues to argue for the image of Christ as cosmotheandric symbol. Panikkar refers to Christ as “the icon of the whole of reality.”196 He also says, “This is the mystery of Christ: the interpenetration, the perichoresis (circumincessio in Latin), as the church fathers would say, between the divine and the human, without forgetting that within the human there also exists the cosmic.”197 Later he says, Christ is “the cosmotheandric symbol par excellence….As the symbol of the whole divinization of the universe, Christ is the theosis of the Greek fathers….Some speak of the cosmic Christ, others of the Christus totus. I would prefer to call him the cosmotheandric Christ, or simply the Christ.”198 Finally, he concludes that “Christophany is the symbol of the mysterium coniunctionis of divine, human and cosmic reality.”199 Throughout the text, Panikkar’s presentation of Christ as cosmotheandric symbol remains faithful to traditional Christology. The very conception of

195 Ibid., 150 – 151.
196 Ibid., 72.
197 Ibid., 22.
198 Ibid., 147.
199 Ibid., 180.
Christ as cosmotheandric, as was seen before is its own origins in traditional Christological discussions of the Incarnation. Panikkar’s inclusion of the cosmos as a distinct sphere or world and its conjunction with the divine and the human appears as a minor stretch of traditional theandrisim. However, as noted several times above, the development of the concept indicates a process in Panikkar’s thought which is a departure from traditional Christology. Christ as cosmotheandric symbol indicates an expansion of Christ beyond the borders of the principles of Christological discussion. By locating Christ’s primacy and priority in cosmotheandricism rather than in the manner by which Christ is revealed and made known to humanity, Panikkar develops his Christological thought along the lines of his own priorities rather than the principles which regulate Christian theological speculation.
CHAPTER 6
GENERAL CONCLUSION

In a short summary, this study has indicated how Raimon Panikkar’s Christology is the result of his expression of traditional Catholic Christology through what he perceives as the new interreligious and pluralistic context of the world’s religions. Returning to Sellers’ dual principles of confession and inquiry, which might be contemporized as assent or witness to doctrine and critical theology, this study has shown that just like the Christological conflicts in the 4th and 5th centuries, the differences between the Christological concerns of the CDF and John Paul II and Raimon Panikkar is a result of theological method. The CDF, placing its emphasis and priority on the unity of truth and completeness of religious truth as revealed by God through Jesus Christ, argues that truth as singular is capable of being grasped to the necessary extent for human salvation through reason and the theological virtue of faith. The result is that the person of Jesus as unified human and divine is the single and sole conduit for the necessary truth required by God for the purpose of human salvation.

Panikkar, in contrast, beginning with pluralism (not relativism even by John Paul II’s definition), concludes with the inability of humanity to fully grasp all reality. While much of reality is intelligible, Panikkar argues that at the core of reality is an “opaque remnant.” Thus, reality is only intelligible in part, and the human intellect can only grasp the totality of reality
through windows or “symbols.” However, even these symbols do not exhaust the entirety of reality but are only manifestations through which humans are able to only grasp a portion of the mystery of reality. The result of this pluralism is that when applied to Jesus Christ, Panikkar’s symbol Christology entails a necessary disjunction between the symbol, the historical Jesus, and the symbolized, the eternal cosmic Christ/christic principle. Thus, Panikkar’s pluralism ends with the division of Jesus Christ into a historical symbol which incompletely manifests the eternal symbolized. Though Panikkar goes to great lengths to maintain the parameters of orthodox Christology and even theological method, this final disjunction between symbol and symbolized is problematic for Christian theology as it has been passed through tradition.

This is not to claim that Panikkar’s career has been without value. Indeed, his accounts of interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism take seriously the issues of similarities and differences between religions. His conception of homologues is distinctly helpful in indicating how it is possible for religions in dialogue to both attest to similarity and difference. Further, his notion of dialogue as the sharing of existential situations and lived religious experience legitimates the value of dialogue in regards to the concerns discussed earlier by John Milbank. By understanding how advaita operates within the Hindu religious life the Christian is able to see the place it might occupy within the Christian framework. For Panikkar, that place is in helping to understand the immanence of the Holy Spirit and even possibly within the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Trinity.

From that point one can move to the value that Panikkar’s metaphysical pluralism might have. Echoing Lawson, Panikkar’s account of pluralism has value for the very fact that his pluralism navigates between the straits of exclusive absolutism and undifferentiated
relativism. By drawing on the role of the knowing subject, while at the same time attesting to the existence of a single mystery-referent, Panikkar is able to argue for a metaphysical pluralism that takes seriously the mystery at the core of the Christian religious experiences of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Those mysteries, though intelligible, cannot be exhausted by the human intellect. They will always remain “free” from the constraints of human reason. If these mysteries are taken as metaphysical principles, which Panikkar hints at in “Religious Pluralism: the Metaphysical Challenge,” then the natural result for Panikkar is that Being and Reality are ultimately couched or sourced in mystery. Thus, Reality and Being are not framed or englobed by reason. Coupling advaita with the Incarnation, Panikkar has a vision of the world in which metaphysics is sourced in mystery, and not an easy mystery. In this way, Panikkar’s pluralism has value in that it takes the mystery of the Incarnation seriously as a metaphysical principle.

What requires further treatment is a determination of the extent of Panikkar’s reliance on “symbol” as a category for his discussion of Christ and the relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal Logos. The pre-existence of the Logos, and the presence of the Holy Spirit of Christ in the prophets indicate some means of approaching the dynamic that Panikkar wants to make use of with symbol. As conduit for creation and principle for Creation, the eternal Logos has the potentiality for doing some of the work that Panikkar wants symbol to do. Also, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the prophets opens up a place for the revelation of God distinct from the historical manifestation of the Logos in Christ Jesus. These locations seem to open up some space that indicates the possibility of Panikkar’s project, but these do not rely upon symbol and do not seem to do all the work that Panikkar wants Jesus as symbol of Christ to do in support of multiple manifestations of
Christ in other religions, which possess functional equivalence with Jesus Christ. For this reason, further investigation would need to determine whether more traditional sources are capable of doing the work Panikkar wants symbol to do and how dependent Panikkar’s pluralist and interreligious Christology is upon his particular account of symbol.

Thus, despite his problematic symbol Christology, Panikkar’s interreligious dialogue, religious pluralism, and metaphysical pluralism all possess value for contemporary Christian theology in a globalized and globalizing world. And it is the place of further investigation to determine whether other traditional and acceptable sources can do the work Panikkar wants to symbol to do or whether Panikkar’s Christology is to reliant upon his particular notion of symbol.
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