Nothingness as the Locus of Panikkar's Divine

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In a number of his late writings, Raimon Panikkar alludes in passing to three Japanese philosophers, citing them in each case as collateral support for his own thinking. The three—Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji—formed the core of the Kyoto School, a twentieth-century philosophical movement whose works were translated into European language during the final decades of the century and catapulted Japan for the first time squarely into the philosophical academies of the West.[1] Their rooting in Buddhist thought combined with a broad familiarity with the literature and methods of philosophical and religious thinking in Europe and the United States attracted Panikkar. The vast landscape on which they stood, on the other hand, was too unfamiliar to permit him more than brief comments in his written work. Even though he felt a spontaneous sympathy for the challenge they posed to the unrepentant rationalism, monotheism, and cultural colonialism with which he had quarreled for over half a century, their thought was never part of the scaffolding of Panikkar's sweeping vision of reality. Nevertheless, I always found him full of questions about how those philosophers came to their conclusions and eager to debate their relevance for his own thinking.

Our discussions go back to 1989 when he spent a brief time at our home in Japan. We walked long hours around the parks and gardens of Nagoya jostling over how to define common ground and arguing over the different resonances

1. I have left out Ueda Shizuteru, at whose memorial service in August of 2019 was acknowledged as "the last of the Kyoto School," because Panikkar does not refer to him except to mention his doctoral dissertation on Eckhart in the 1965 revision of his own dissertation, *El concepto de la naturaleza: Análisis histórico y metafísico de un concepto*, (Madrid: *Selecciones Gráficas*, 1972). He met Ueda in 2001 at a lunch held in his honor at Panikkar´s house with a small number of guests.

of a common vocabulary. I believe that part of reason for the intensity of our talk was that he was directing Yusa Michiko's doctoral thesis on Nishida and Maritain at the time but found himself unable to find a foothold in the enigmatic final essay of Nishida's that she had chosen for her work.[2] On a return visit four years later, his questions were better focused and the overlaps more visible. In the meantime—and for many years after, up until a few short weeks before his death—I met with him at his home and took the first of many walks through the mountains from Tavertet to Rupit. Our discussions would often carry on deep into the night over an endless supply of wine and peanuts. Afterwards I would make notes of our conversations which found their way into my teaching and writing without acknowledgement, as I believe my comments did for his. As I look back, I am struck by the fact there was almost no discussion of methodology. I ascribe this to three assumptions that Panikkar shared with the Kyoto School philosophers, at least in the indirect and thinned down form in which I presented it to him. First, after years of slipping on Hindu or Vedantic lenses to look at the Christian heritage with fresh eyes and report back to the tradition in its own language seasoned with neologisms intended to transform the tradition through the adventure, he took naturally to the idea of asking Buddhist questions of Western philosophy and answering them with a Western philosophical vocabulary rehabilitated by Japanese logic. Second, the immediate affinity, unretarded by allegiance to mainstream dogma or creeds, that the Kyoto philosophers felt for the mystical, apocryphal, and esoteric tributaries of Christianity, was a welcome *Anknüpfungspunkt* for Panikkar, whose affections for mystical thought had long overshadowed his reliance on Enlightenment critiques of religion. Finally, the choice to disinherit his understanding of religion from the received separation of theology and philosophy found him receptive to blend of religious philosophy and philosophical religion that animated the thinking of the Kyoto philosophers.

In my experience, when Panikkar had his facts wrong, he accepted correction wholeheartedly. When he changed views, however, he did so organically so as not to explicitly repudiate earlier views as he slid beyond them. In discussion, he loved being more radical than his interlocutors, turning familiar concepts on their head, agreeing with others only to watch their insights fade in the light of a brighter idea. This was more than demagoguery; it was his *Lebensstil*. His written work is full of inconsistencies of the forgivable kind—the kind that shows a mind growing. As a reader, you can accept or reject his total vision. But you

2. Yusa recalls that it was at Panikkar's insistence that she first read an essay on Nishida for presentation at the seminar he was conducting. See her *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), xxii.

cannot see the world through his eyes and not go back to what you were doing without more questions and clearer insight.

In spring of this year I delivered a series of public lectures at Boston College on the theme "Of Gods and Minds."[3] In them I made generous use of the Japanese philosophy of nothingness to seek an understanding of the divine that I found more reasonable and more believable than the Western ontotheology in which I had been raised. Although I did not consult Panikkar's writings in the preparation of those talks, as I reread swatches of his work in the months following, I have been surprised again and again at the coincidence of our conclusions on so many points. It would be silly to fault Panikkar for not venturing further into the study of Japanese philosophy, as I assume it would be to fault me for not becoming more conversant with the Vedic resources lining much of Panikkar's writings. When dialogue is made to submit to such conditions, it is wrenched out of the hands of those who have most to gain from it and turned over to the control of specialists. Nevertheless, I have no doubt there is more to be learned from the co-inspiration of Panikkar's thought and Japanese philosophy than either of us were aware of at the time—far too much to compass, even in broad outline, in a single lecture. What follows makes only one of the many beginnings that might possibly swell into a fresh confluence of traditions for our time.

The Cosmotheandric Assumption

In *The Rhythm of Being*, the magisterial capstone of the complex, labyrinthine sprawl that makes up his thought, Panikkar states it as his aim to show

> that the problem of the divine is centered not in theisms but on the very nature of reality as a whole, and that theocentrism as inadequate as anthropocentrism, or for that matter cosmocentrism.[4]

In the remarks immediately following, Panikkar elaborated that he sees God not as a rational idea but as Existence "erupting into our lives." He would not seek, nor does he think we would be satisfied by a supreme Something or Somebody. He seeks a Totality, the whole of being in all its diversity, a mystery at the ground of all existences that we can call both being and God. And he is convinced that

3. *Of Gods and Minds: In Search of a Theological Commons* (Nagoya: Chisokudō Publications, 2019).

4. Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, NY: 2010), 154. The same point was made in 1990. See *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*, H. J. Cargas, ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 97–8. I have not been able to determine the principle behind Panikkar's irregular habit of capitalizing the substantives being, non-being, nothingness, emptiness, reality, divine, and mystery, and therefore have omitted them.

this search is a response to a fundamental human vocation, not just a personal preference based on a personal history.

As in much of Panikkar's writing, there are any number of threads one could pull out of this tight weave of ideas to examine: his longstanding resistance to the "artificial and lethal" dichotomy between philosophy and theology; the attempt to strike a middle-ground between a personal and an impersonal divinity; the effort to unify the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of experience into a single whole; the commitment to engage reasonably with the mystery of reality without succumbing to rationalism; the rescue of a transcendent divine from an image of God as the center of existence.[5] I realize that once withdrawn from the weave, any one of these threads loses the unique context that Panikkar spent a lifetime designing. This will be all the more so for the strand I choose to hold up to the light, the one he identified as the goal of his final onslaught against monotheism and rationalism: the unbridling of reality from a unique, absolute, and independently divine, human, or cosmic center. This thread is thicker than the others and more evident in his writings than in citations of his writing, but I believe it can provide a new and simpler way to navigate the passage to Japanese philosophy and back.

I make that claim timidly, knowing that many of you in this hall are far more familiar with his published corpus than I, that I have been persuaded by personal impressions gathered in long hours of private discussion, and that I am by and large unrepentant when it comes to adjusting my reading of Panikkar to my own view of the world. Be that as it may, it is clear to me that the pluralistic view of reality on which his worldview rests is not something he came to easily, and so it is not surprising that many of his readers pay it scant attention in the effort to make him palatable to mainstream theology. He was anything but, and on more than one occasion asked me rhetorically why it was that the Vatican had not called him on the carpet when they did so for theologians like Hans Küng, Matthew Fox, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Jacques Dupuis, all of whose writings he considered patently more conservative than his own. Whatever his standing in the Christian world, it is at his most radical that Panikkar is closest to the modes of thought most characteristic of the Kyoto School philosophers.

Some twenty years ago I brought a young Japanese scholar Umezawa Yumiko to visit Panikkar at his home to discuss questions arising from her attempt to translate *The Cosmotheandric Experience*. On the way up the mountain to Tavertet she was overtaken by dizziness and had to rest for a spell once we had arrived. The symptoms, as it happened, were themselves symptomatic of the general vertigo she had been suffering in the attempt to render into Japanese a prose whose

5. See *The Rhythm of Being*, 181, 360–1, 241–2, 116–7.

meaning often pivoted on wordplays and occult allusions to Western sources. She had been hoping for a paraphrasing that I was not equipped to provide, but Panikkar's attempts to respond only made matters worse. After returning home she struggled a few more months with the text until finally abandoning the project altogether. These same problems have hounded other would-be students of his work in Japan, which is unfortunate because of the many points at which studies of his thought in the West might profit from a closer interface with Japanese intellectual history, and in particular with the small but productive cluster of Christian thinkers rethinking their tradition in the light of Kyoto School philosophy. I refer here to the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies whose interreligious dialogues have been published annually since 1982 without engaging Panikkar and his work.[6]

I would also mention an open letter Panikkar address to the Christian author Endō Shūsaku in response to his novel *Silence*. In it Panikkar reminds Endō of the long tradition of viewing God as a silence and "rather non-being than being," and goes on to blame the debate over the protagonist's apostasy on his belief in a "shallow idea of a theistic God" which does not exist and is not real in the sense in which the world is real. Viewed as a renegade by both believers and unbelievers, Panikkar hints, his apostasy may represent the best witness for those today who renounce established Christianity in the name of faith in Christ. The letter was published in English in 1969 and never translated.[7]

From the other side, Panikkar seems to have suffered a similar vertigo in translating the ideas he met in Japanese philosophy into his own terms. In the end, he contented himself with a handful of short phrases uprooted from their native context and presented as generic support for one or the other of his own ideas. I do not mean to suggest that there is anything reprehensible about this. Philosophical writing would come to a standstill without it. I only mean to suggest that the wider context does in fact drive deeper into the heart of his thinking than he himself realized, just as the way in which Panikkar framed his own vision raises more serious questions for the Kyoto School philosophers and their reading of Christianity than current scholarship realizes. I set this second question aside for another day, the better to concentrate on the first.

In broad strokes, Panikkar's "cosmotheandric" vision of reality, as I understand it, has four main traits. First, it is a kind of Kantian transcendental or Jungian archetype, a "primordial form of consciousness," a "cultural invariant" that

6. The actual title of the association in Japanese is "The Society for Religious Exchange East and West" (東西宗教交流学会).

7. "An Open Letter to Mr. Shūsaku Endō," *The Japan Missionary Bulletin*, vol. 23 (1969), 623–4. To the best of my knowledge, it was only when Endō took on the problem of religious pluralism in his 1993 novel *Deep River* that a small number of Japanese theologians referenced Panikkar in connection with Endō.

predisposes the mind to an "undivided vision of the totality" of reality.[8] Second, this disposition is not merely subjective but is grounded ontologically in reality itself. Third, this worldview is normative for the way religions understand themselves and for the fullness of spiritual experience for those belonging to a given religious tradition. Fourth, it is only through "the mystical adventure of seeing truth from within more than one religious tradition"[9] that we can understand the irrevocably pluralistic nature of religious truth that the cosmotheandric vision seeks to enliven.

The whole of this vision is obviously a set of assumptions whose validity it is beyond our capacity to secure with certitude. Let us grant for the moment that the mind is aboriginally disposed to religion and that the expression of this disposition is subject to an invariant, cosmotheandric pattern. How would one go about proving such a claim, or disproving its opposite? If we take it as a heuristic model of discovery, a working hypothesis, then, Panikkar says, a study of "the last ten thousand years of human memory" and of religions east and west confirms that it is "crystallized in the different cultures of the world."[10] Now even if we grant the data supports such a conclusion, how does one go the step further to argue that the cosmotheandric predisposition is not illusory, like the theistic God, but as real as the world is real? And how do we reconcile this with Panikkar's own disclosure that with great difficulty he had in breaking with the universal truth of what he called "one of my most cherished metaphysical insights," namely, the intimate correspondence between thinking and being?[11] At first glance, the logical questions are no different from those that plagued Jung's theory of archetypes, from which Panikkar acknowledges that he has borrowed, including "la noción de que el arquetipo está sumergido en el inconsciente colectivo humano."[12]

The idea that the tenets of faith could step in to clarify the nature of reality when our description of it cannot justify its assumptions would be abhorrent to him. Instead, he grounds the assumption on "intuition," "immediate insight" and ultimately on an ineffable "mystical experience" in which "knower, known, and knowledge meet."[13] He indicated that he would take this up at another occasion, but I do not know that he ever did. In any case, what he does with the assumption is ultimately more interesting than any arguments for affirming the

8. *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll, NY, 1993), 51; "Seed-Thoughts in Cross-Cultural Studies," *Monachanin* 8/50 (1975): 26. It should be noted that the cosmos was left out of his original analysis of Christian trinitarian thought as "theandric" or incarnational. See part 3 of *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon–Person–*Mystery (Maryknoll, NY: 1973).

9. *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 52.

10. *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 3, 16.

11. *Invisible Harmony*, 59–60.

12. *Obras completas* (Barcelona, Herder, 2015–), I-2: 243. Hereafter abbreviated as OC.

13. *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 72.

tripartite-patterned and unbroken unity of mind and reality would have been. To begin with, he shifts the weight away from the cosmotheandric archetype branded on the mind as a birthright to the mystery of the reality that does the branding and is therefore reflected in the variety of cultural forms in which the cosmotheandric pattern find its way into language, myth, and symbol. This allows him to distinguish between the religious impulse as a human invariant and religious expression which can never be universal to all cultures.[14] On the one hand, then, we have the relatively stable, uniform constitution of human nature which no cultural differences can alter, and on the other, the transitory, epoch-specific products of culture that may or may not be loyal to the deepest inclinations of our nature but can never claim the same invariability for itself. This distinction carries over directly onto Panikkar's treatment of God: "The question of God (in the theistic sense) is not a cultural universal, while the question of the divine (in the sense of mystery) could fairly be called a human invariant."[15]

In other words, God is a cultural relative of secondary importance to the allure of the *mystery* of reality so deeply ingrained in our natures as to merit the name divine. In this sense, the search for the whole of reality is both wholly natural and wholly divine; it is a transcendence imbedded in the immanence of beings that undercuts the idea of a pure, absolute transcendence.[16] The invariant structure of the cosmotheandric vision does not have to do with particular ideas of the cosmos, God, and human beings but with the single totality of reality-divinity-humanity in which each of the part contains the whole.

The validity of the cosmotheandric assumption, then, rests on the consequences of reasoning on its behalf. Apart from the pragmatic value of affirming the unity of the epistemological and the ontological, the only way to retain it would be to introduce a new philosophical assumption, which Panikkar himself hints at: the mind is reality's way of viewing itself, and its native machinery is therefore every bit as real as the real world. The problem with this assumption is that it is of no practical use for distinguishing seeing clearly from seeing through a glass darkly, a distinction that is crucial to Panikkar's rejection of a "theistic God" viewed as a separate object and his recovery of the divine in the mystery of reality as "the rhythmic life of the Universe."[17]

The Kyoto philosophers handle the shift from apophatic awe before the mystery of reality to cataphatic claims about the structure of reality differently. In large part this is because the distinction between illusion and truth emerges

14. "Religion, Philosophy and Culture," *Interculture*, vol. 31 (1998), 107–8.
15. *Rhythm of Being*, 267.
16. Introduction to the revised edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Maryknoll, NY, 1981), 26.
17. *Rhythm of Being*, 353.

from a quite different set of assumptions. But before we turn to these questions, we must look more closely at Panikkar's attempt to rescue the divine from the absolute God of monotheism.

Reality as Divine

Panikkar understands classical Christian monotheism to rests on the hypothesis of an omniscient consciousness that is identified with being itself. He faults the development of the idea of "consciousness in general" in the Enlightenment not only for the modern hypostasizing of God as an absolute subject[18] but also for the misguided atheism that thinks it has disposed of the idea of the divine by rejecting theism in favor of a reality centered on an idea of the human. For Panikkar, the claim "there is no God" only makes sense if one can also claim that "neither is there humankind." In fact, the growing awareness that "there is no center" holds out the promise of a new stage in the journey of the human race, a "religious atheism" that restores the interdependence of the human, the divine, and the cosmic.[19]

Panikkar's early work in the 1960s clearly defines God as an absolute, a ground and ultimate principle, and as an independent entity with whom one can have a personal relationship and who is "the whole of reality."[20] Our link to God itself cannot be relative, he insisted. There is only one Absolute; only expressions of faith in that Absolute can be plural, like a single beam of light refracted in the prism of our consciousness.[21] I have the impression did not come to reject this position so much by an analysis of modern religious consciousness or a change of philosophical position, but rather by a realization expressed publicly for the first time in 1977 that a commitment to a radically pluralistic view of reality makes an absolute unthinkable.[22] Once he had settled on a radical pluralism, for which it is not only our views of reality but reality itself that is pluralistic,[23] Panikkar referred less and less to the substantive individual *God* and more and more to the general concept of *the divine*.[24] The divine refers to the inexhaustibly intelligible, abyssal

18. "The Dialogical Dialogue: The World's Religious Traditions," in Frank Whaling, ed., *Current Perspectives in Religious Studies: Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984), 204.

19. *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll, NY: 1990), 92–100; *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), in OC 1-1: 441–5.

20. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964, 20, 70–3, 126, 131. Some of these passages were rewritten in the revised edition (see previous note) to omit or soften references to the Absolute; others he let stand.

21. *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 198–9.

22. *Invisible Harmony*, 74–5.

23. *Invisible Harmony*, 101; "The Challenge of the Study of Religion," *The Teilhard Review* 25 (1990): 81.

24. This is not the place to discuss his idea of the historical Jesus and its relationship to the resurrected form in which Jesus is a continuous presence in history, and the relationship of both to Christ.

nature of reality, the mystery of being.[25] Panikkar's goal is not to establish a substance beyond God—or a *Gottheit* distinct from *Gott*—but simply "to 'liberate' the divine from the burden of being 'God.'"[26] Together with human being and the cosmos, which are also divine, *God* is one of the three elemental and interconnected dimensions of reality. In his words, "we are together with other Men, on a common Earth, under the same Sky, and enveloped by the Unknown."[27]

But if the divine is all-encompassing, then we might suppose that each and every being encompassed in reality would also be divine. The living symbol of that fact for Panikkar is Christ,[28] and each manifestation of it constitutes a Christophany. In this sense, there is nothing of the divine in God that is not accessible in us and nothing of the Christ in Jesus that is not also in us and in us to the full, including the ambiguity of being both human like Jesus and cosmic like Christ. The idea of multiple Christs, he realized, has no place in orthodox Christianity, but for himself, he finds a "christomonism" no less unacceptable.[29] Our goal is to become a Christophany: "not to become like God, as the Tempter offered, but God itself."[30]

This brings us to the two interlocking assumptions—for Panikkar in the nature of fundamental beliefs—about the divine character of reality which I wish to relate to Japanese philosophy. First, individuals are not isolated entities but part of everything around them. Each is wrapped in a "radical relativity" in relation to every other and nothing that exists is absolved—*ab-solutum*—of that communion.[31] Second, each thing that exists and, therefore, each "human individual is the center of the whole of reality," but this center itself, "cannot be localized point; it is nowhere or perhaps better, as nearly all traditions attest, everywhere."[32] This multi-centered, interrelated character of reality which marks it as a "totality" is what Panikkar calls the divine.[33] We should dwell a moment

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Panikkar's extended argument on the topic from a hermeneutic point of view nicely sidesteps his obvious refusal to ground faith in the physical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. See his *El mundanal silencio: Una interpretación del tiempo presente* (Barcelona: Ediciones Martínez Roca, 1999), especially 77–80, 83, 86–8, 104–6, 120–3.

25. *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 74.

26. *Rhythm of Being*, 345.

27. *Rhythm of Being*, 268.

28. This passage has been added to the revised and enlarged edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 27.

29. "Neither Christomonism nor Christodualism," *Jeevadhara*, vol. 24 (1994), 338.

30. *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 123. In the Introduction (14–15) to his 1981 revised edition of *The Unknown Christ of Buddhism*, Panikkar makes it clear that Jesus is not the *only* Christ.

31. "Man and Religion: A Dialogue with Panikkar," *Jeevadhara*, vol. 11 (1981), 12.

32. "Der Mensch, Ein trinitarisches Mysterium," Raimundo Panikkar and Walter Strolz, eds., *Die Verantwortung des Menschen für eine bewohnbare Welt im Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus* (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1985), 169.

33. In an interview, Panikkar asserted that "one of the most beautiful definitions of God" is the saying that "God is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference no-where," citing

on each of these two aspects of the ultimate mystery of reality, which Panikkar joins together but which do not logically entail one another.

In one of those cryptic sayings for which he is famous, Panikkar writes that "beings are nothing but relations."[34] The context would allow the phrase to be read as hyperbole were it not for the fact that already from the 1970s he was referencing the corresponding Buddhist idea of *pratītya-samutpāda* both as a metaphysical principle of the mutual origination of all beings and as a hermeneutic principle for understanding the polyvalent nature of human language.[35] Rather than affirm a linear view of an evolutionary goal to history—whether inherent in nature or manipulated by a transcendent providence[36]—or some philosophical or religious form of cyclical history, Panikkar envisioned being as the ebb and flow of an unknowable and uncontrollable rhythm not bound by the laws of nature, by a transcendent salvation history, or the intervention of divine predestination.[37] Still, he insisted that the fundamental relationship that binds reality takes the "irreducibly threefold" form of humans–God–cosmos enveloped in the mystery of reality, corresponding to the trinitarian relation of Son-Father-Spirit enveloped in the divine.[38] This three-dimensional "universal connectedness" governs not only the *inter*connection of all things—matter and soul, human and nonhuman, past and present—but also the "mystery" of their *intra*connection in a single rhythm of being: everything is a part of everything else in a great and unfinished (in-finite) rhapsody. In its generic form, we speak of people on a common earth under a common sky, but all enveloped by a mysterious, Unknown of another dimension altogether.[39] But of course, this can only be called cosmothe*andric* after the appearance of human consciousness.

As to the second assumption of a decentered notion of the divine, the absence of a unifying, harmonizing center in this web of interconnectedness runs counter to traditional ideas of God and would appear to be disruptive in the extreme. Panikkar's way of preserving God in his vision of reality is to

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the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*; see "Towards a Dialogical Dialogue," *Interculture* 20 (1987), 22; *Rhythm of Being*, 163; OC 1-1, 36, 72–3; *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York, Seabury, 1982), in OC 1-2: 342.

34. *Worship and Secular Man* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1973), 1.

35. *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 60. The notion of the interrelationality of all things, and indeed even the cosmos-consciousness-divinity paradigm, was something he had already learned from his Xavier Zubiri.

36. *Rhythm of Being*, 24, 47. He had long disavowed himself of the notion of an "omega point" as a search for a transcendent center to reality; see, for example, *La pienezza dell'uomo. Una cristofania* (Milano: Jacca, 1999), 195; and OC I-2: 61. Later, however, he took it up again as an expression of the destiny of reality which he describes opaquely as an "emptiness present in being" (*Rhythm of Being*, 104).

37. *Rhythm of Being*, 140; on his rejection of traditional notions of the "history of salvation," see *La pienezza dell'uomo*, 193.

38. *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 2.

39. *Rhythm of Being*, 45, 81, 243, 268, 321, 379; *Invisible Harmony*, 30.

disassociate it from concepts referring to an actual entity and resurrect it as a radically symbolic token of the divine wrapped in culturally relative words and images.[40] Yet even here he maintains his distance from any literal or objective interpretation of symbols of the divine, insisting rather on "a certain nonattachment to the symbol itself lest it become an idea or a concept."[41] Inasmuch as the cosmotheandric pattern is itself not a metaphysical construct but a symbol of perfect unity,[42] it stands to reason that the same will hold true for the other two poles of the triad: "being" is not a definable concept but a "pseudo-concept," a comprehensive symbol for everything that enters our field of awareness of which we may meaningfully say, "it is." It is "the symbol of 'beingness' of everything."[43] As for the "world" or "cosmos," its symbolic character stems from two sources: it belongs within the "living symbols" of the "myth of pluralism"; and as part of to the cosmotheandric triad, the world of matter, energy, space, and time takes on a symbolic sense—a "cosmic" dimension to reality that applies to God as well as to humans—that it does not have in scientific and objective descriptions.[44]

Now it is through the lenses of these two assumptions—the interconnectedness of everything real and the absence of a unifying center to reality—that Panikkar mines eastern notions of emptiness and nothingness for support of his cosmotheandric vision. References to these more or less synonymous ideas are scattered generously throughout his writings, but I am not aware of any extended treatment of the question.[45] The logic by which he adopts nothingness to his own purposes is a kind of reformed *advaita* that rejects both dualism and monism in favor of an ineffable and ultimately plural reality disclosing itself in cosmotheandric patterns.

Metaphysically—that is to say, in terms of the form of the forms of thinking about the world—nothingness is said to occupy a middle ground between the dialectical opposites of being and non-being, allowing him to locate God there without having to affirm a theistic or atheistic position. Once we see that the reason for introducing that claim is not to elaborate an alternative ontology but to stress the symbolic quality of concepts and reaffirm the primacy of contemplative experience, certain ambiguities of expression are excusable.[46] Thus, allu-

40. Man and Religion," 13; *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 63.

41. *Rhythm of Being*, 14, 84; see also *Das Göttliche in Allem: Der Kern spiritueller Erfahrung*, Freiburg, Herder, 1998, 22–3.

42. *Rhythm of Being*, 228.

43. *Rhythm of Being*, 51, 84–5.

44. *Invisible Harmony*, 55; *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 66.

45. See, for example, his Preface to J. W. Heisig, *Filósofos de la nada: Un ensayo sobre la escuela de Kioto* (Barcelona, Herder Editorial, 2002), 12–13.

46. Sometimes "nothingness" simply means "non-being," as when he says "we are suspended between being and nothingness"; and sometimes the reverse is true, as when refers to the kenosis as

sions to nothingness have to be seen as part of a general apophatic strategy with regard to talk of God to stress the limits of language in the face of the unthinkable that one encounters—or, as he says, "brushes up against"—in the not-thinking of mystical experience or in selfless abandon to artistic performance.[47] If something is disclosed there and is not mere illusion, it can no more be non-being than it can be a "super-ser, un sub-ser o un Ser primordial."[48] This is why he can speak of John of the Cross as having "penetrated to the depths of divinity 'dove non c'è più nulla'" without losing the positive meaning of the nothing that is encountered.[49] In all cases, however, the starting point is the same as the ending point: "one can only remain silent before a nothingness that may be 'beyond' being."[50]

At times, emptiness (or in Sanskrit, *śūnyatā*) is used as an exact synonym for nothingness. At other times, especially in his late writings, when he wishes to avoid the negative connections of "nothingness" he speaks of "emptiness" or "empty thought" to evoke silence before the transcendence of an "unnameable" divine.[51] At other times, he does so to solicit Buddhist nuances in connection with the kenotic, self-emptying God.[52] And finally, he cites the Buddhist notion of *śūnyatā* straightforwardly to speak of the ontological ground that conditions the world of becoming without attempting to relate it to his more common uses of the term.[53] Because of this, there is a noticeable ambiguity of terms when he touches on metaphysics: nothingness is used as a function of our questioning of being, not as a primary reality but as dialectically related to being and therefore indistinct from what he calls non-being.[54]

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the act by which the Son takes on being (*on*) by the Father becoming a nothing (*me on*). At face value, neither of these of these are consistent with speaking of God as a symbol of the divine that transcends being and non-being in nothingness. See, for example, *La pienezza dell'uomo*, 191, 162; *Das Göttliche in Allem*, 11.

47. *La pienezza dell'uomo*, 123–4 *et passim*. Panikkar even insists that one cannot even speak apophatically of God except from inner experience recovered in silence and purity of heart (*Das Göttliche in Allem*, 17–18).

48. *La nueva inocencia*, OC 1-1: 51; *La gioia pasquale, La presenza di Dio y Maria* (Milano, Jaca Books, 2007), in OC 1-2: 138–9.

49. *La pienezza dell'uomo*, 177. OC 1: 110.

50. *El mundanal silencio*, 92

51. See, for example, OC 1-2: 56, 107; *Blessed Simplicity*, OC 1-2, 303; *La pienezza dell'uomo*, 203; *Rhythm of* Being, 66; letter of 1994 to Rita and Carlo Brutti, cited in Maciej Bielawski, *Panikkar. Un uomo e il suo pensiero* (Roma, Fazi Editore, 2013), 226; *Das Göttliche in Allem*, 154; *Rhythm of Being*, 90–1.

52. Already in his very early work, when speaking of the ineffable by simply saying that it "is not," he goes on to associate it with the Buddhist notion of emptiness. See *The Trinity and World Religions: Icon-Person-mystery* (Bangalore, CISRS, 1970), 44, 46.

53. *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 124. Though he does not identify it as such, his reference to the immobile void at center of a wheel is a Buddhist metaphor of this conditioning function of emptiness. See "Some Words instead of a Response," *Cross Currents*, vol. 29 (1977), 194.

54. *Rhythm of Being*, 87–8.

In a word, the emptiness or nothingness that Panikkar attributes to reality is a way of pointing meaningfully to the unintelligible, enigmatic, unspeakable and Whole of reality.[55] It does not function in his cosmotheandric vision as something that can be called itself real and transcendent in the sense in which the divine is real and transcendent. It is rather a quality of the divine whose meaning relies entirely on its host. And with that we arrive at the watershed where the direction of his thinking branches off from that of the Kyoto School philosophers.

A Japanese Skepsis on Panikkar's Divine

The three Japanese philosophers whom Panikkar cites by name—Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji—are pillars of the Kyoto School of which, as I remarked earlier, he came to know of only late in life when his own thought was already firmly established and well elaborated. It seems pointless to speculate what direction his thought would have taken had the encounter taken place during his formative years. But for those who have been shaped by his ideas and have contacted the urge to emulate the courage of his adventure rather than simply apply his patterns to wider patches of the Christian tradition, the writings of these Japanese philosophers are a seedbed of suggestiveness. All the points of convergence that attracted Panikkar to these philosophers, as he gave me to understand, are relative to our discussion here. I shall lay them out *seriatim* without any pretense to "comparative philosophy" or a full examination of the consequences of the convergence. Rather, I shall content myself if I am able to pry open the kaleidoscopes to pick a few similar stones, knowing that it is only in the arrangement of these insights that a philosophy takes on its special character.

Nishida is rightly called "Japan's first philosopher" precisely because he did not turn to the study of western philosophy, as so many others caught up the whirlwinds of modernization had done, in order to catch up with the outside world that Japan had closed itself off from for over two hundred years or to touch-up the descriptions of its own intellectual traditions for foreign consumption. He introduced a question to western philosophy that he found missing there and he sought from it, in turn, a new language and a logic to frame an answer more reasonable and comprehensive than what he had found in Japanese thought. The question was about the nature of the self-awareness that occurs in what we are accustomed to call "enlightenment." He had been gripped by the question during years of sitting in Zen meditation, so much so that it led him

55. *Rhythm of Being*, 30.

to abandon meditation for a more rational path. Until his very late writings, he avoided referencing Buddhist ideas or terminology. Instead, he disciplined himself to a tradition with no roots in his native soil, drawing out what he found helpful, criticizing what he reckoned misguided, and crafting new patterns of thought modes of expression to clarify the original question and locate it within a general worldview not constrained by distinctions between philosophical and religious reason or between western and eastern philosophy. As with Panikkar, the allegiance to the primacy of experience, in its purest form, as the source of clear thinking was never far from mind. Not bound by any allegiance to the notion of personal salvation, the eternal soul, or eschatological resurrection, Nishida and his circle unhinged the notion of self from the individual mind and hitched it to the spontaneous, natural dynamics of reality itself. In other words, the very symbols of Christianity which Panikkar was coy about disowning except obliquely and by inference, never hindered the Kyoto School philosophers and led them to conclusions that I believe Panikkar was attracted to but not able to reason his own way to.

Finding a pivotal place for God in his vision of reality was, of course, never a question for Panikkar. Things are otherwise with the Japanese philosophers, for whom subscription to religious monotheism, to the God of the Christian creed, or to any of the variety of philosophical ideas of God in western intellectual history is altogether foreign to their thinking. Foreign, but not necessarily superfluous. No idea as central as God could be glossed over without finding an equivalent or otherwise accounting for its rational functions. Simply to "symbolize" the ontological God of theism as Panikkar does would have been to answer a question it seemed to them superfluous to ask. Like Feuerbach, they read all theology as anthropology, but not with the aim of disproving the claims of theology. Instead, they saw talk about God as point at which their quest for wisdom brings them up against the unknown, uncontrollable, unspeakable, and yet elementally creative nature of reality. They knew that the way to the heart of western philosophy would be closed unless they could uncover the impulse that gave rise to language of a divine being without compromising their conviction that such language had no literal reference to anything in reality. For Nishida, God was the symbol of a consummate self-awakening in which there is no self that awakens or is awakened to. It is the asymptotic ideal of unconditional love and understanding towards which our nature incline us. For Tanabe, talk of an omnipotent and omnipresent divinity bore particular witness to the ultimate truth of the universal intermediation of all beings. For Nishitani, God was emblematic of the act of seeing through the empty vanities and senseless tribulations of life and allowing them, just as they are, to become the locus of the self-disclosure of nothingness. The Christian symbol of one who abandons the ordinary standpoint of the rational self for the standpoint of emptiness

is the self-emptying kenosis of God who becomes nothing in Christ. Even from a thoroughly unchristian metaphysics, Nishitani was persuaded that the renunciation of this God as an outdated hypothesis exacts a human price that reaches far beyond mere apostasy from the faith.

In a word, for each in a different way, the God of western thinking was a cipher of the inexhaustible intelligibility of the self-awakening of reality itself which is reflected in the self-awakening of the individual minds. That Panikkar cites Nishitani on the question of God is hardly surprising, attracted as he was to the standpoint of emptiness as a reflection of his own emphasis of contemplation, silence, and self-abandon before the divine. The consequences of Nishitani's position, however, go much further than apophasis and the renunciation of reason in the face of the ultimate mystery of reality.

Like Tanabe and Nishida, Nishitani's allusions to God stimulate positive claims about the nature of reality that cut closer to the heart of the cosmotheandric metaphysic. Unlike Panikkar, he sees the loss of God as an "absolute center" as a symptom of a radical nihility that has left the Christian West adrift in unfamiliar waters. His solution is not to aid in restoring the faith that has been lost but to see the nihility through to the end, where it is transformed into a radical affirmation of the nothingness of reality itself. The problem of God is a symptom of a fundamentally human problem that includes but is not restricted to faith in one or the other form of divine transcendence. Panikkar, for his part, accepts the Christian idea that all reality is concentrated in the reality of God, even if he does not see the need for divinity to be localized in an absolute entity that occupies the center of reality. He has no difficulty speaking of the divine as a nothingness or emptiness beyond the world of existing beings and yet within that world insofar as it divinizes each part of reality as a reflection of the whole of being and the mystery that enwraps it. Leaving aside broad agreement on the ultimate mystery of reality that forever recedes from our grasp, the ontological differences are crucial for both sides.

Insofar as the Kyoto philosophers had no reason to name the nothingness beyond being and non-being divine, they took over Hegel's habit of calling it "absolute" in order to be sure that it replaced the absolute of God they encountered in western philosophy. The step was, I believe, an unnecessary one, and that for the very reasons that Panikkar gives for replacing a radically plural and relative God with the notion of divinity. In fact, his reasons are altogether consistent with the way the idea of nothingness functions in the thinking of the Kyoto philosophers themselves.[56] Simply put, what they mean by absolute is nothing like Christianity's or Hegel's God, but rather an interrelatedness of all things from

56. I have argued the point on the grounds of internal consistency alone in "An Apology for Philosophical Transgressions," *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy* 2: 43–68.

which nothing real is exempt. If the meaning of the absolute can be absorbed without remainder into the radical relativity of being, and thus be denied ontological reality in any form, we may as well set it aside as Panikkar does.

From the other side, If Panikkar lends philosophical support for the Japanese philosophers to dispense with the idea of an absolute, might their thinking not in turn suggest reasons for Panikkar to dispense with the idea of divinity as superfluous?[57] Absent the Christian symbol of God and the tradition of faith and rational reflection that surrounds it, there seems no reason to compromise the ineffability of the mystery of reality with the claim of its divinity. Logically, the movement from an idea of a personal, absolute, all-knowing God to the idea of an all-embracing divinity as the ultimate mystery of reality, for which ideas of God are culturally determined symbols is not only reasonable, but it has deep roots across western philosophy. Without that rooting, the claim of a divine quality to reality itself can only be seen as a symbol that is not culturally viable across the whole of humanity. There is where the Kyoto philosophers cut deeply into the Panikkar's cosmotheandric archetype and force the re-separation of philosophy and theology that he had worked so hard to undo.

Leaving aside a skepsis on Panikkar's claim that the trinitarian archetype is grounded ontologically, the accompanying claim that it holds across a variety of religious traditions can only be sustained if the "theos" of the cosmotheandric model can be relieved of its associations with God or divinity. This is something on which I find him ambivalent. Symbolically, he has no difficulty admitting a broad and religiously plural spectrum of descriptions of God, including the natural symbols of sky and sun.[58] Ontologically, he is willing to identify "divinity" or "the divine" with emptiness or nothingness, but only as a partial description, not as a substitute and certainly not as a more comprehensive name. The basic logic by which he first argued the equality of religions rested on a shared belief in a divinity[59] survived his later refinements. His reasoning drove him to the brink of admitting that the mystery of reality was divine only from a prior commitment to his Christian tradition, and that "the divine" was only a partial description, a synecdoche of the nature of reality as nothingness.

In other words—and here again, I rely on discussions of Japanese philosophy in which I brought the matter up—I have the impression that he somehow knew that the archetypal nature of "the divine" in the cosmotheandric model did not hold up religiously or ontologically but could not bring himself to admit it. This

57. I would note here that Panikkar himself acknowledges Nishida's formulation of reality as the "self-identity of absolute contradictories" as consistent with the very advaitic logic he calls on to disavow the notion of an absolute; *De la mística: Experiencia plena de la* Vida, OC 1-1, 304; see also *Rhythm of Being*, 314.

58. *Das Göttliche in Allem*, 16; OC 1-2: 134.

59. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 23–4.

may in part have been what accounted for the stress he as under to complete his Gifford Lectures as a definitive version of his thought. I doubt it was a matter of what his "faith" did or did not allow him to think. I think it was a question of the limits of his drive to be reasonable without losing his Christian bearings in the vast sea of the mystery of reality. He knew that being should be defined by nothingness and not the other way around, but rather than work out what this means, he called again and again on an encounter with the mysteriousness of reality as a rhetorical device to parry the question and even to end up nearly reducing talk of nothingness to doubts about being.[60] He knew that philosophers like Nishitani saw the primacy of nothingness as a starting point and not as a final resignation of reason, just as he knew that nothingness was a positive term that involved a more serious critique of western ontology than he had previously undertaken. Meantime, he took refuge in silence, contemplative experience, and the apophatic logic of the mystics, but not without leaving hints scattered everywhere that there was more to be said on the matter.[61]

Nothingness as the Locus of Divinity

In light of the above, it may seem that with the parameters of Panikkar's writings, the notion of "the divine" is not compatible with the notion of nothingness in the Kyoto School philosophers. If one associates the divine with reality, the nothingness loses its ultimacy; if one associates nothingness with reality, the need for the divine is eliminated. I would like to suggest a way around the dilemma by trimming the horns on which the question is impaled. At this point I forego any claims of fidelity to the texts that led me to this point in order to lay out as succinctly as I can a rearrangement of the elements I find more useful for promoting traffic back and forth across the bridge on which we have been standing.

To begin with, if we dispense with the idea of a transcendent being or a reality from which the entirety of the world is excluded, I believe Panikkar and the Japanese philosophers would agree that there are two proper frames of reference for talk of transcendence: the first, to affirm the distance between the whole of reality on the one hand, and human minds and language on the other; the second, to speak of overcoming the self by denying it or discovering its hidden

60. *Rhythm of Being*, 66, 314. At times, he even seems to ignore the positive meaning of nothingness and equate it with "meaninglessness" or a "total abyss." See, for example, *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 66; *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 12, 47, 132.

61. For example, *El mundanal silencio*, 166, n. 166.

depths.[62] As a metaphysical category, however, it either says too much or too little, and is there best left as a metaphorical device.

Next, I do not believe the cosmotheandric archetype qualifies as an *a priori* of thought that reaches diachronically across cultural and intellectual traditions as long as the *theos* is understood as a generic name for "the divine." Again, it either gives too much metaphysical ground to symbols of God or it dilutes the meaning of divinity to accommodate traditions that are not constructed around such symbols. In a word, if we take away the symbolic language of God, the full force of which is a cultural construct, it is unclear from his writing what it is that make the divine "divine."

That said, the fact that human minds, for as long as we know, have felt the presence of dark forces in the world that hold unpredictable yet powerful sway over the natural world and human beings within it seems beyond dispute. Panikkar is correct in claiming that the study of the history of religions attests to these feelings and that they remain very much a part of human life. The Kyoto philosophers are not unaware of this. When Nishitani speaks of a nothingness that can open up underfoot of everyday experience, he does not hesitate to reference its association with what Christians feel as "the presence of God." When Tanabe speaks of being overwhelmed by nothingness as a force that breaks into life from without the self and prompts one to radical self-negation, he adopts the Pure Land Buddhist vocabulary of "other-power." Although Nishida was generally less concerned with the way nothingness is experienced than with how it could provide a ground for reality, when he spoke of the full self-awareness of nothingness, he spoke of unconditional surrender to God as a fitting symbol for the highest state of interiority a human can achieve. None of them understood nothingness as something to be worshiped, prayed to, or counted on for a blissful afterlife; but all of them understood that the sentiments behind these beliefs and practices were somehow a function of awareness of nothingness. They were not interested in supporting any particular set of symbols or spiritual practices, but only unveiling an underlying metaphysic into which they might be translated. Things are altogether different with Panikkar, whose interests begin and end with protecting the symbols and practices by which religions actually live and not only contemplate themselves.

It would seem at this point that as a name for the mystery of reality that inspires our deepest religious sentiment, *nothingness* is no better than *being*—both of them equally bloodless abstractions. In addition, *nothingness* has the disadvantage of having a negative grammatical form that is easily associated with meaninglessness or despair or skepticism. For this reason, it would seem that,

62. Panikkar thus refers to the "mystery that transcends us all, precisely because it is hidden in our immanence" (*Rhythm of Being*, 13).

unless we bind nothingness in the abstract to some kind of symbolic expression like "the divine," philosophical insight has no hope of opening up to the religious imagination that restores those abstractions to their origins in experience. The question is how to tie that bond.

Here it is important to reject the equating of being with either reality or nothingness. For the Kyoto philosophers, nothingness is not a substitute for being or a mere *privatio alicuius esse*. On the contrary, the world of being and becoming is the locus on which nothingness manifests itself. All being and indeed all of beings belong to the form of reality in which we experience nothingness, the ultimately real. Panikkar is not always consistent about keeping being distinct from nothingness or emptiness, though he does at one point admit that it is more accurate "to use *reality* instead of being as a word encompassing being and non-being."[63] As a result, talk of a universal "mystery of being" that is the alpha and omega of human thought should be understood strictly speaking as the mystery of reality as it is disclosed in being.[64]

Now if emptiness is the ground of being, as Panikkar agrees with Nishitani in affirming,[65] then it is logical to speak of being as a disclosure of the mystery of nothingness as well. And if this is so, since this "mystery" is none other than the all-pervasive "divine" that seeps into everything that exists, then the primary locus for what Panikkar calls "the divine" is not to be sought in the entities and symbols that occupy the world of being and becoming, but in what the Japanese philosophers call nothingness. Nothingness, from such a standpoint, would enfold the whole of our world and all its Gods in a way that being—either as the totality of things that exist or as the pure fact of their existence—could not.

I seem to have descended into toying with words, like the book-making machine that Gulliver witnessed on the floating island of Laputa. Let us return to the point at which we began—namely, Panikkar's aim to unhitch reality from a unique, absolute, and independently divine, human, or cosmic center[66]—and the question to which it drove us—namely, the question of what meaning is left for "the divine" in a decentered, relative, pluralistic, interdependent world. As we saw, the decentered reality Panikkar sought is consistent with the "nothingness" of the Kyoto School thinkers, but the divinizing of reality itself is not. As Nishida alluded to in his final essay, the notion of nothingness lies too far out of

63. *Rhythm of Being*, 50.

64. In *Rhythm of Being*, there is no direct mention of the mystery of being but only of reality. Compare, for example, his earlier use of the term in *Cosmotheandric Experience*, 74, 16; *Cultural Disarmament*, 91.

65. *Rhythm of Being*, 90–1.

66. *Rhythm of Being*, 303, 403. Lest there by any confusion, in his writings on contemplation Panikkar often speaks of the need to "con-centrar" or recover one's "interior center" as a common goal of spiritualities East and West. See, for example, oc 1-2, 161–2; *Blessed Simplicity*, oc 2-1: 231–2.

reach of our moral, spiritual, or intellectual assessment to be called either divine or demonic, either teleological or aimless. It is precisely because it *simply is not affected* by such qualifications that it can allow for anything at all to *just be what it is*. Panikkar was not prepared to endorse any of the eschatological expectations of religious doctrine but neither was be about to deprive our human hopes for the future of a possible ground in the greater destiny of reality itself. In the Epilogue to his Gifford Lectures, he throws up his hands in defeat before the question "How can human thinking grasp the destiny of life itself, when we are not its owners?"[67] Nevertheless, his commitment to the divine nature of reality was undiminished by the admission of failure.

I do not wish to slide into a hermeneutical exercise of turning a competition between "mythic horizons" into a rational critique of the limits of each, but only to ask what difference it makes if we call reality divine or not.[68] Instead, I would like to propose a view of reality as nothingness that does not shirk the concrete reality of beings or withsay the abstractness of conceptualizations like being, reality, and Totality, and yet remains fundamentally consistent with both Panikkar and his Japanese counterparts.

Earlier we made mention of Panikkar's appeal to the mystery of a "universal connectedness" by which everything is a part of everything else. In the end, this is thought to belong to the fullest symbols of God we can fashion and to disallow symbols that contradict it. Something similar takes place, though it escaped Panikkar's notice, in Tanabe's explanation of nothingness as "absolute mediation." What began as a logical device to introduce Hegelian dialectics into a philosophy of nothingness evolved into an ontological principle to describe the concrete, temporal-historical nature of existence that precedes and conditions all workings of mind. For both Panikkar and Tanabe, to call interconnectedness universal or absolute is more than ontological assumption about reality grounded in our observations of the natural and human world. It is also more than a heuristic device to locate and reject essentialist or substantialist views of the particular items that make up the world and the particular willful, emotional, or intellectual activities of human beings within it. There is another, more crucial aspect of this coincidence that speaks directly to the matter at hand.

Tanabe raised absolute mediation beyond its logical status as a metaphysical principle to the status of religious experience. In doing so, he reaffirmed the goal of self-awareness not only as an overcoming of the illusion of an independent acting self, but also as confirmation of no-self in care for one's fellow sentient beings. In addition to Buddhist symbols of enlightened compassion, he

67. *Rhythm of Being*, 405. From the very beginning of the work (p. 3), the question of destiny is brought up again and again as an important and unavoidable question.

68. *Rhythm of Being*, 114.

also draws on the Christian symbolism of unconditional love flowing from the kenotic self-emptying of God. To speak abstractly of reality as nothingness is not to deny it meaning but to point to the highest vocation of being: to manifest personally, culturally, and historically—both rationally and ethically—the fundamental and inescapable fact of the interconnectedness of all things.

Resonance of these ideas with Panikkar's thought should be obvious from the foregoing account. Most importantly, it is in the loving care of an aboriginally interconnected world, both in its human manifestations and in the manifestations of nature, that the nature of reality is disclosed as the divine or as nothingness. But we must take care with our wording here. It is not that the divine or nothingness are a projection of our love on reality, but that our love is a disclosure of the nature of reality as an interconnectedness so ineffable and all-encompassing that we can borrow a name from Christian mythology and call it "divine" or from Buddhist mythology and call it nothingness. In fact, Panikkar and Tanabe need both names and only differ in assuming which is an analogue of the other.

To repeat, interconnectedness does not exist any more than reality or love or the divine can be said to "exist." It has no nervous system, neither is there any need for a puppet master behind the scenes to insure that the strings do not get tangled. It exists only in things interconnected in existence. So, too, reality only exists in being and becoming; love only exists in the concrete connection between a lover and a beloved. Hence, we can only say that the divine manifests itself in the selfless care for those things that define us because that care is the most perfect expression of what reality already is. Reality *is* interconnectedness precisely because it itself *is not*. And everything of which it can be said that it "is," is most fully *real* whenever it illumines the dark, empty nothingness of the ultimate mystery of connectedness, the realization in human consciousness of which is what we call love.

The locus of Panikkar's divine in thought and language is not the same as the locus of the nothingness of the Japanese philosophers. The cultural landscapes against which they echo are too different. Still, as I have been at pains to suggest, they are not incompatible contradictories but point and counterpoint of a melody the religious imagination has not finished composing.

Seen in these terms, as alien as Panikkar's symbolic frame of reference for defending cosmotheandric metaphysic is to the Kyoto philosophers, the same is not true for the basic assumptions behind it. With more time—and perhaps a bigger talent—I would like to trace those assumptions to an unfinished, and as yet institutionally unacceptable, reformation of the Christian myth. I am referring to a movement, equally intellectual and spiritual, that began in the latter half of the nineteenth century and only came to be taken seriously by theologians a century later, thanks in part to the writings of visionaries like Raimon

Panikkar. For now, I content myself with stitching together a few phrases from a late essay by the Australian philosopher Samuel Alexander that one might mistake for Panikkar's own:

> On the one hand, science… has begun to think that matter and spirit may not be so far removed from each other as was supposed and has grown tolerant of the claims of religion to stand for something real in the world. On the other hand, religion has begun to abandon some of its stricter pretensions and modifying some articles of its beliefs…. One of the elements of religious feeling is the sense of mystery, of something which may terrify us or may support us in our helplessness, but at any rate which is other than anything we know by our senses or our reflection…. The mere outgrowth of life from matter and mind from life… suggests a further quality of existence beyond mind…. That quality I call deity…, and we are led to the notion that the world is a world striving or tending to deity, and that it has in this sense a divine character.… If you ask me what God is, I can only answer that he is… not actual as an existent but as an ideal, and only existent insofar as the tendency towards his distinctive character is existent in the actual world.… The God who is the object of religious feeling is not a fancy embodied under some mood of excitement but has its basis in solid fact and in the general nature of things.… The mystics are right: we worship or love in God not his goodness but his godship or deity.… Some simplification of our religious notions, which may be a fresh creation or may be only a renascence… is needed in our day. Even it will have its mythology in order to be humanly accessible, but its mythology will be credible to the men of today.[69]

For those of us who have accepted such hopes for Christianity as our own inheritance, time spent pondering the treasury of ideas that Panikkar has left us is, as he himself liked to say, not mere *chronos* but a true *kairos*.

69. Chapter X of *Science and Religion: A Symposium* (New York, C. Scribner, 1931), 131–41.