

A NEW SOCIETY FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM

R. Panikkar[♦]

The genuine intrareligious dialogue is not an exercise in the clouds or merely a dialogue between experts. Religion has to do with the earth as much as with heaven. The artificial slogan about the "Third Millennium" is a good pretext to reflect on the religious contribution to a just society. The situation of the world at large confirms what we see in India: *We are going in the wrong direction*. What follows are some reflections on that ultimate question. Is this not a religious concern?

The Intrareligious Imperative

In our times, the crisis of religion cannot be overcome from one single religion, and certainly not from one single culture *The task is today urgently cross-cultural*, i.e., *interreligious*, because of the inextricable link between culture and religion.

Paraphrasing Marx I would say that it is not solely question of how to change the world or to go to heaven, but also how to love the world without ceasing to struggle to realize heaven, even on earth – without specifying now the meaning of the symbols of heaven and earth. It is a question of recovering the integral meaning of human life—and thus without severing it from the entire reality.

It is this awareness which makes us very sensitive to the state of the world today and constantly brings our reflections to the vital problems of our contemporary human predicament.¹

A List of Priorities²

There is an emerging consensus that the world needs radical measures to prevent falling into the abyss itself is digging into. But when it comes to a new vision we seem to lack imagination, to say the least, and are afraid of being brand marked as utopians. I am conscious of the

[♦]Raimon Panikkar: Professor of Theology, Barcelona, Spain

¹the author has dealt extensively with most of the problems mentioned, but he is not alone in this endeavour.

²A similar list was published by the author in J. Ogilvy (ed.), *Revisoning Philosophy*, Albany (SUNY) 1992.

utopian character of this charter and I do not elaborate now the intermediary steps or the required strategies to approach the goal. This is a communitarian task. Blueprints are out of place. I only underline that the seriousness of the hour demands the radicality of the points. Many of them overlap each other and some of them are of a more concrete character than others. Some are hierarchically related and all are mutually linked so that the change in one point depends on an effect the change of the others. Aristotle spoke of "political prudence", and I appeal to it for the implementation of the points. This is only a sort of memorandum. Needless to say that each of these points is complex, that all of them are problematic, have been largely studied and should not be oversimplified. But the urgency of the situation requires decisions in one direction without being paralysed because the experts tell us that the issues are difficult and complicated and meanwhile we leave the world to the powers that be. All the following points needs to be relativised and yet cannot be ignored.

1. Demonetizations of Culture

Christians, to begin with, like to quote that revolutionary sentence of Jesus, that we cannot serve god and Mamona. Vedantis are found of saying that the riches of this world are despicable. Buddhist monks should beg their food and be clothed in patched robes. And so many other religions voice similar ideas. But when it comes to practical life we all seem to be less radical. A Franciscan friar should not ride a horse, but he can drive a car, as this is not forbidden in the rule.

Money has an important role to play in human interactions, but it has become a *totalitarian tyrant* in modern westernized culture, east and west. I have penetrated all spheres of human action: food, health, education, well being, art, marriage, all seem to depend on money. As geometry abstracts forms from physical perceptions, elaborates on the pure forms, and eventually applies again the laws of those abstracted forms to physical realities, money abstracts from human activities, 'abstracts' (extracts) money from them, and eventually makes those very activities dependent on money. The *real* world is not made of monetizable commodities like physical entities are not made of geometrical figures fractal notwithstanding. And this is not only the case for spiritual values, but also for material realities. To have to pay for water, food and soon air is a sign of a sick culture.

The monetization of all cultural values is the natural outcome of the quantification of the human outlook. Money allows to stick a quantitative tag to any human activity and makes possible to measure that activity by its monetary coefficient. Nature is written in mathematical figures, we were told by Galileo, although now Modern Science begins to surmise that physical entities may not be measurable, not only because of a factual (heisenbergian) impossibility, but because the theoretical incommensurability of any *real* things—unless we postulate gratuitously that reality is intelligible. In fact, reality is incommensurable to any intellect. Reality is real and not only ideal. Once again intellectualism is lurking from behind the western psyche. The dictatorship of money is an outcome of a narrow 'scientific' worldwide.

2. Dismantling the Construction of the Tower of Babel.

One of the most powerful symptoms of our times is the unbridled power of the world-market in the world economy where all gods are monetizable commodities on an abstract world scale. This global homogenization centralizes the control of all goods in fewer and fewer agencies. In short, the centripetal tendency of our times is fruit of a mechanistic and quantitative conception of cultural values; Technocratic civilization kindles again the temptation of a World Empire. Technocentrism is the insidious temptation.

There is a paradox here. The material planet earth may not be the centre of the universe like the astronomic sun may not be the centre of the Milky Way. Ethnocentrism may be obsolete, and anthropocentrism a weak substitute for a lost theocentrism (which contradicts itself the moment it is interpreted by Men). Technocentrism, on the other hand, claims to be neutral (it privileges neither one race nor one culture) and objective (the centre is neither Man nor God). This is not true; but its power lies in the fact that Man needs a centre, a point of reference, a place of convergence. God has become an object of private belief. He has no cosmic role to play and possible alternatives of other worldviews seem to be on the wane or non existing.

The difficulty lies with the geometrical interpretation of the metaphor projected into mechanistic worldview. None of the mentioned things nor a purely transcendent god can be the centre of the universe. And yet, in a more holistic vision the centre of the universe lies in each hand,

every being which constitutes precisely the *uni-versum* as we should know since Anaxagoras, the Upanisad and the Middle Ages. "God is that infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere," said an hermetic wisdom quoted approvingly by many sages of the West. Losing this vision of the centre of reality passing through our self (because the Divine is immanent as much as transcendent) we are condemned, irresistibly than water precipitates "down the torrents of the mountains, to fall into the precipices of fashion, power, profit, and ultimately despair. We are reduced then to atoms striving for survival at the cost of others. If life has a meaning only for the victors, only for those who 'make it', we create an artificial hell for all the others, not an amount of "liberation," "Redemption", or "Reincarnation" can rescue them from it. The meaning of the life for the individual Malini cannot lie in her becoming the head of the Corporation beating the other 300 employees. The meaning of life for the people of Madagascar will not be found panting after the 'model' of a rich and powerful USA—accepting already western material standards.

Cultural pluralism means, among other things, that each culture has its own centre, elusive, mobile and contingent as it may and should be. Without that self-confidence that in every one of us befalls the centre of reality, *homo sapiens* is reduced to *animal imitans* to an aping animal.

We are the centre of the universe, because as a microcosm we reflect the whole, but we are not the circumferences of reality. We can only be a centre when we have no dimension of our own and are open to an ever greater circumference. The centre becomes selfish, isolated and ultimately stifles the moment it draws a circumference upon itself. This is the reason of the paradox that in order to decentralize culture we need more and more centered individuals and self-confident human societies. A self-reliant economy, for instance, means not self-sufficiency, but an equitable inter-independent net of markets. *Inter-independence* is not unilateral or unbalanced dependence. Interdependence without inter-independence is just dependence of the weaker in front of the powerful. The bio-regions, as a relatively complete ecosystem, may offer here an appropriate paradigm.

3. Overcoming the Nation-States Ideology

The alternative is not to fall back into absolute feudalisms of 'primitive' tribalisms. The alternative has to be elaborated by fostering in an organic way the healthy tendency, noticeable everywhere, of increasing

ontonoities and working out a network of multilateral but not necessarily universal relationships which allow for a fruitful coexistence. I am proposing neither a single gigantic Nation-state nor a proliferation of monadic and Lilliputian nation-states. Neither "people" nor "nation" means necessarily "state".

It is not a question of shifting the notion of sovereignty from nation-states to people or even cultures. To overcome state-nationalisms does not mean to transpose the same ideology of self-sovereignty and absolute freedom to bigger units or even to the entire human race. There are no sovereign on earth. The ancients had the belief in a cosmic order, *ordo*, *rta*, *tao*, *dharma*, *kosmos*, or an upholder of it, god. Without an homeomorphic equivalent to these symbols the delicate balance between freedom and cohesion (let alone spontaneity and coercion) is not possible. The problem is not merely political. It is philosophical and theological. Two given societies can be ontonomically related only if there is a third element coordinating them, only if they form part of a whole which is more than its 'parts' but which requires the well-being of the 'parts' in order to be a harmonious whole.

The Empire was a myth with a unifying force. Its demeritation produced the nation states. The Empire could be sovereign because it was allegedly founded on a divine principle superior to it. Not so the nations states, but they retained the title (even against etymology there cannot be many 'supreme'). The ideology of Empire has collapse and so that of absolute sovereignty of partial units. A new myth is required.

4. Reducing Modern Science to its Proper Limits

The very grandeur of Modern Science is accountable for its unbounded success well over its proper boundaries. It has modified modern ways of thinking in areas far distant from the domain of the scientific disciplines. It has influenced ways of living in almost all corners of the world.

This reduction to its proper limits cannot be imposed from outside. The modern scientific ideology is too wide-spread so as to make ineffective any kind of heteronymous impositions of morality. It is no by legislation and artificial boundaries, for instance, how he can bridle the intrinsic expansionist force of genetic engineering. It has to be by a

discovery of the very *ontomic* order of reality. This discovery has to be fruit of an insight into the meaning of human life and the nature of reality.

The limits of Modern Science are both epistemological and ontological, besides being objective and subjective. In spite of the sacred name of *scientia* Modern Science is not identifiable with it. It is not gnosis, *jnana*, nor *hochma chi*, *sapientia*. It has not intrinsic saving power. Not all epistemology is 'scientific' not all cognition is measurable. Not all knowledge is covered by 'Science'. Modern Science cannot be equated with knowledge about the world or insight into the nature of reality. Not all ontology is 'scientific'. Not even all being is necessarily reducible to the *logos*. Not all is object, so science, and certainly the scientist as subject cannot be included in it.

5. Correcting Technocracy by Art

The direct result of modern techno-science is the technocratic complex of modern society. The old theocracies, monarchies, oligarchies, aristocracies, anarchies, and even democracies have given way today to modern technocracy. The *kratos*, the power, is not invested on god, on a special group of people, or left it apparently vacant, but on modern technology. Modern technology, like Modern Science, has borrowed a traditional word and invested it with a new meaning. 'Science' is not *scientia*, *jnana*, we said, not is modern technology synonymous with *techne* traditional techniques, namely, arts, crafts, machines of first degree, arrangements of material artifacts without artificially induced accelerations. There is the spirit—as inspiration—behind every *techne*. The indic *silpsastra* offers here a model, and not only for India. The craftsman has to be inspired. Modern technology has substituted the *pneuma* by the *logos* in the sense of *ratio*. The 'scientist' needs information and "know-how", the artist needs inspiration and "know-what".

Today the *kratos*, power, does not lie on the politicians. They have to obey the megamachined of the technocratic System. The power does not even lie with the experts. They need capital and political blessings they can only work in an unilateral direction; increase of power, profit, acceleration, minuterization, efficiency, etc.

Unless we play demagogically with words the demos, the people, cannot have *kratos*, power, unless it is not only entitled, but also able, to

exert it. Technocracy makes it impossible for the people to steer their own destiny. The megamachine commands and its experts of long and highly specialized years of training can just manipulate it, impotent also to direct it to other directions and uses other than those allowed by the inner mechanisms of the technocratic system. Arammentism, inflation, growth of megalopolis, agriculture converted into agribusiness, etc., are all fatal laws of the System, to put just some examples.

The people can only recover its power if it can have dominion over its own destiny. Technocracy does not allow it. It would require a highly specialized know-how which is impossible for the people to master. Technocracy makes children out of adults. The people cannot even know and thus decide what is good for them. "The Computer surely knows"! "We have only to obey". Some feel that capitalism is incompatible with democracy. Technocracy is certainly contradictory to democracy. Protagoras had already seen it. While for all the other arts and crafts we can rely on qualified experts, the political art, the politike *techne*, cannot be delegated to other competent experts. (Platon, *Protagoras*, 322 b sq.). It concerns and belongs to all of us. A new anthropology is here required.

The word art needs an explanation; so much we are accustomed to take this word for entertainment, folklore, and a somewhat marginal activity. Art is that which art-iculates life and brings it all together by the 'artistic' creation of the person. The meaning of life is to make a work of art of each of us. For this artistic creation we need the collaboration of the entire universe, from the Divine to Matter, and to our fellow-beings. Each one of us should be able to express oneself, to create oneself in positive symbiosis with the rest of reality. Beauty and love are paramount in most human traditions: the first attribute of god, the First of the God...as so many religions affirm

6. Overcoming Democracy by Experiencing a New Kosmology

The demos can have *kratos*, power only if people is more than the sun-total of more or less isolated individuals. Man is a person, a knot in a new of relationships... and not an autonomous individual. Man is an *ontonomous* being. We need a new anthropology. But a new anthropology requires a new notion of tile cosmos. Concept is an inadequate word. for this reason I spell the word with *k*, literally transliterating from the original *kosmos*, which has the stupendous connotations of world, order, and

ornament. Cosmology then connotes not new 'scientific' concept of the universe (cosmology), but the experience of how the cosmos manifests itself to us, our sense of the cosmos, our perceptions of reality.

The cosmos we live in is not necessarily the astronomic, or the geological, or even the geographic, or historiographic universe. Each culture has another sense of the cosmos and lives in another cosmos. The main cause of our present-day crisis is to be found in the latent conflict of cosmologies in and around us, *in* us, because our contemporary experience of reality is ill at ease in the cosmos of a scientific vision of the world. *Around* us because the mixing of people of different worldviews cannot be peacefully handled if we compare only different texts and ignore the underlying (kosmological) contexts.

There are many voices today singing new tunes and mixing with the old, but we do not have (yet) a new sense of the real. We bother about miracles, feelings, and extrasensory perceptions (to put some examples), because they are foreign and uncomfortable phenomenon in the overall prevalent 'scientific' cosmology, but we lack, even within each culture convincing vision of reality. Our myths are collapsing and we do not have new ones.

We know, further, enough sociology, psychology and political science to ignore that democracy offers an effective political technique, but not a strong theory. We know not only that people are manipulable, we know also that the demos as the highest instance only works within a given and accepted mythos, which makes possible certain beliefs to a particular people. The true demos, like the ancient polis, all need their temples, their gods, their opening to a super-democratic power. We can only avoid tyranny if a new cosmology emerges. The political situation of Africa and Latin America should be sufficient examples.

7. Recovering Animism

Without quarreling about words, I understand by animism the experience of life coextensive with nature. Every natural being is a living cell, part of whole, and mirroring the whole at the same time. "Not only animals and plants are alive, also mountains and water are alive, since they give life to the creatures born from them?", Marsilio Ficino wrote in 1476 echoing an almost universal tradition (*De emore*, VI, 3).

Life is the time of being, the ancients said (*zoê chronos toû einai*). Any thing temporal is alive by the very fact of *being* temporal. Time is not only, and not even mainly a quantitative or 'scientific' parameter, it is the very life of the universe. Individual existence is such because it stands in symbiosis with the Tree of life, with the Being of beings.

The meaning of human life is therefore, to share as fully as possible the Life of the Universe. Christ came, John the Evangelists says, reporting Jesus' words, so that we may have Life and Life abundantly. Not all life is the same, to be sure, nor are our nations the same: the modern Gaia hypothesis is not the *anima mundi* of the neoplatonics the *jivatman* jaina, Tylor's African animism, or Mach's philosophical vitalism.

Two features should be here mentioned. Animism here stands for an overcoming of all mechanistic and rationalistic worldviews. There is a principle of freedom, of life in everything—as contemporary scientists seem to begin to surmise.

Animism stands, further, for the relatedness of all reality according to an order or harmony which is itself relatedness. To say all is alive is not to affirm that all is of one stuff or all alike. It affirms the moving, free, precisely living relationship of every brim of reality. It connotes, further, that death is a real possibility—for the individual.

8. Peace with the Earth

No ecological renewal of the world will ever succeed until and unless we redeem 'ecology' from being either a 'hard' science or a sentimental movement. The word *ecosophy* stands for this change. Ecosophy considers the Earth as belonging to our Body, and the body as belonging to our self. This would be an aberration if the 'belonging' were to be understood as private and individual property. Neither the Earth nor the Body nor the Self belongs to my (psychological) *ego*. We are sharers in the Word, as the Vedas say and the Gospel echos—equating the Word with Divine Life, identifying Life with Light, and Light with god. The ecosophical problem is strictly theological—and vice versa, theology cannot ignore the Earth. The name of Ramaanuja could be an inspirational figure for the cosmos as the Body of God.

The Jewish tradition reports about the Covenant of Noah. A covenant with the Earth is one of our most *urgent* and important tasks. The ecosophical movement is not technological new way of exploiting the

earth more rationally and more lastingly. It entails a relationship with the Earth altogether. The earth is not an object neither of knowledge nor of desire. The Earth is part of ourselves—of our Self.

Movements are under way to swear a human Covenant with the Earth. It is a covenant of fidelity towards ourselves. It is a question of sensitivity. It is this, which has led me to describe the split of the atom for whatever good intentions as a cosmic abortion. We kill, and extract from the very womb of matter the extra energy units which our greed needs, because we have disrupted the rhythms of Nature. We do not only torture animals and Men, if we include politics. We torture Matter as well.

Peace does not mean an idyllic or idealistic view of total passivity or the static idea Life, as if positive and negative metabolisms were not required. The animal does not 'kill' but eats and exceptionally fights. Man does not exploit the Earth when following Nature. The chain of being or the wheel of existence is a living thing. There is exchange, there is karma, there is death. But there is also resurrection.

Peace with the Earth excludes victory over the Earth submission or exploitation of the Earth to *our* exclusive needs. It requires collaboration, *synergy*, a new awareness.

9. Uncovering the Divine Dimension

Atheism, I submit, is another form of theism, although a negative one (antitheism). Polytheism, as well as monotheisms and deisms belong already to a decaying cosmology. The old controversies about reason and faith, believers and unbelievers are rapidly becoming obsolete. The divine Mystery is not pigeonholed in neat rational categories. Pure transcendence is a contradiction in terms. It destroys itself the moment it is not only formulated but simply thought. Thought becomes then the bridge to transcendence, and by this very fact transcendence is transcended-negated. Pure immanence on the other hand, becomes unnecessary. If the divine were purely immanent it would be identical with ourselves, and thus redundant—or pure monism.

To introduce the talk of the Divine implies to accept a 'factor' irreducible and yet related to ourselves; a 'factor' 'above' all our faculties (of loving, willing, knowing), and at the same time 'in' all of them. All too often 'God' has been envisaged as an *x* somewhat beyond the actual grasp of our faculties. This *x* recedes in the same measure then our knowledge

advances, or our feelings deepen, or our will increases. This god is 'strategically receding each time 'Science' advances. No wonder that most perceptive thinkers see this battle lost in advance. To cover our ignorance we do not need the Divine any longer. Pure potentiality would do.

The divine dimension is more than a plus in the aesthetical or intelligible *status quo*. It is 'more' than transcendence or immanence. The way to experience the divine can be a path of the plus or of the *minus* (transcending or descending) fullness or emptiness, but in both cases the way is not the goal and yet the goal is no-where behind or beyond the way, the divine dimension is a third dimension irreducible to but not independent from the other two and thus not an 'object' of the sense or the intellect, i.e., matter and consciousness. And yet the divine is utter meaningless without both. There is a third dimension of freedom infinitude which impregnates both matter and spirit, the sense and the intellect, the *aesthesis and the noesis*—open to what the Greek tradition called *ta mystika*. We would call it also the 'space' (akasa) in which we move and sense and think, in which we live and are.

Anthropomorphism is inadequate, and so is cosmomorphism when speaking about the Divine. And yet it is that plus and/or *minus* concerning both the experience of Man and Cosmos that opens up the very experience not of 'something Else' but of the other third dimension of the Trinitarian Whole. Reality is of cosmotheandric nature. The relation between the three dimension is non-dualistic, advaitic, Trinitarian.

It is here, at this level, where we should situate the most upsetting and terrifying problem which no charter should eschew; the problem of evil.

There is disorder, suffering, hatred in this world and on all levels. Blindness towards it or pure passivity would not do. A fight against it on the same level or with the same weapons only doubles the evil. Evil is—by definition—inexplicable. If we would explain it would explain it away. It is certainly a 'privation' but also a privation of intelligibility. Evil obliges us to experience our contingency, our incapacity of having a neat and coherent picture of reality. It opens us to the abyss of the Divine from the other side, as it were. It cures us from any superficiality and sense of self-sufficiency. It spurns us into our personal jump in Life and does not cover the risk. It is part of the Mystery.

As for the *how*, we already said that there is no blueprint, no model to imitate, no projected *telos*, to realize. If freedom is more (not less) than just the power of choice, it is the setting forth the *creatio continua* (of the Christian scholastics), the sharing in the momentariness (*ksanikatva*) of the real (of the Buddhists), the being with *Brahman* (of the vedantism). This is our dignity and our responsibility.