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Mysticism and Spirituality in Panikkar's Thought[1]

Young-chan Ro

Raimon Panikkar is often considered to be a pioneer, a frontier explorer, a prophet, and even a paradigmatic thinker at the dawn of the Second Axial Age.[2] According to Joseph Prabhu, the significance of Panikkar's thought can be appreciated from three aspects: first, his depth encounter with world religions; second, his cosmotheandric vision of reality as the trinity of cosmic matter, human consciousness, and divine presence in co-constitutive relationality; and third, his understanding of reality as an open-ended process represented by the metaphor of "the rhythm of being."[3] In this chapter, like Prabhu, I would like to examine the significance of Panikkar as a thinker and a scholar. In what sense is Panikkar a pioneer or frontier explorer in the Second Axial Age? As a thinker and a scholar, does Panikkar follow or represent any scholarly tradition in particular? Is he a successor to any prominent thinker? I suggest that Panikkar cannot be thought of in either of these terms, that is, as a representative of a particular school, or a successor to a renowned scholar.

As I recall, when I was his student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, we used to have an "open-ended seminar" at his small yet beautiful house in Santa Barbara, overlooking the Pacific Ocean against the backdrop

1. This essay is a revised and extended version of my previous essay, "Dynamics of Being: A Mystical Approach," in *Raimon Panikkar: Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Joan Vergés Gifra (Girona, Catalonia: Documenta Universitaria, 2017), 17–29.
2. See Joseph Prabhu's "Foreword," in Panikkar, *RB*, iv.
3. See Prabhu, "Foreword," *RB*, xv–xxiii.

of a mountain. This took place at the end of each academic term and all the graduate students who took his seminar would gather at his house to discuss and celebrate the end of the academic term. At one of these seminars in the early 1970s, we discussed which, if any, particular philosophical and theological school might have exerted an influence on Panikkar. When he was asked about which specific scholarly tradition he followed or represented, he simply replied: "I feel like I am writing a new chapter."

At the time, I did not quite understand the significance of his answer. After taking a series of his graduate seminars and attending his undergraduate lectures, I came to realize that Panikkar was indeed doing something new. His lectures shed new light on old and well-known issues and themes. He had the ability to make something new out of the old and the familiar. Indeed, he was writing a *new* chapter, which is now contained in his eighteen-volume Opera Omnia, the fruit of seventy years of his life as a scholar and a thinker.[4]

Newness and Mysticism

The newness of Panikkar's approach is intriguing and at times puzzling. In one of my conversations with him I broached the subject of mysticism and then showed him my paper on mysticism. It was not written for his class but for another. He looked through it quickly and asked me a few questions about mysticism. I gave the common definitions of mysticism provided by the standard textbooks. He then looked at the last page of my paper which contained the bibliography and told me that the books I was reading were the wrong kind. These books, he said, did not adequately address the fundamental issues of mysticism. At the time I was deeply puzzled and even a bit shocked because I thought that I was reading the most representative textbooks on mysticism. Quite simply, I did not quite understand his remark.

After struggling for some time with Panikkar's cryptic remark, I slowly and gradually realized that Panikkar was indeed breaking new ground in his understanding of mysticism and that his approach to it was and is profoundly different from that of the scholars and the books I had read. In a nutshell, my understanding of mysticism then was still very limited and superficial; I thought that mysticism consisted of esoteric religious phenomena and that the study of mysticism consisted in analyzing and interpreting them. I had no idea about the deeper and broader implications of mysticism or mystical awareness.

4. Raimon Panikkar's 18-volume Opera Omnia (the first volume of which is *MS*) is published by Orbis Books.

Even now, when I teach mysticism, most of my students have little idea of what mysticism is all about. They sign up for the course because the term arouses their curiosity about what they take to be mysterious and esoteric. This curiosity helps increase the enrollment but it also makes my teaching more challenging. I have to spend a considerable amount of class time trying to de-mystify mysticism by explaining that the purpose of the course is not to read and interpret strange, esoteric, unusual, even crazy aspects of individuals called "mystics" and their experiences. I have to convince my students that the real value of the course lies in understanding some critical contemporary issues concerning human life.

Panikkar takes mysticism as the starting point of his intellectual and spiritual explorations. However, these two sides of his explorations are not separable from each other; rather they are mutually interrelated. In this sense, Panikkar is an "intellectual mystic," a seeming contradiction in terms. It is commonly assumed that a person is a mystic precisely because he or she discards an intellectual approach. "Intellectual" is taken to mean rational and logical and therefore anti-mystic. For Panikkar, however, "mystic" does not mean anti-intellectual, nor does "intellectual" anti-mystic. In other words, for Panikkar, "intellectual" and "mystic" are neither mutually antagonistic nor dualistically opposed. Panikkar is neither a mystic who transcends the intellectual endeavor nor an intellectual who disregards the mystical dimension of life. Rather, for Panikkar, being intellectual in the true sense of the word requires a mystical dimension. While Panikkar distinguishes between "intellectual" and "rational," he never separates them. "Intellectual" must not be understood to be synonymous with "rational": rationality is a form of intellectual activity but is not the totality of intellectuality. Intellectuality cannot be reduced to rationality. Intellectuality is not identical to rationality because the human ability to know and knowing itself are not limited to rationality alone. On the other hand, for Panikkar, being a mystic does not mean renouncing the intellectual side of being human. For Panikkar, "intellect" is more than "rationality," and being a "mystic" can be part of being an "intellectual." In this sense, Panikkar was truly an "intellectual mystic."

Not only does Panikkar introduce a new approach to mysticism but he also takes mysticism as a source of inspiration for his understanding of fundamental issues of life. The critical importance of mysticism for Panikkar is readily testified by the ordering of his Opera Omnia.[5] The first volume of the whole collection is appropriately entitled *Mysticism*

5. Panikkar, *MS*.

and Spirituality. The following remarks illustrate well Panikkar's view on mysticism and spirituality: "Few topics have had a worse reputation in some circles than mysticism, on which, to tell the truth, too much has been written, and badly; if we add the theme of spirituality as well, I fear that the situation is even worse."[6] He goes on to say how mysticism has been badly treated in modern academic circles:

> As children of our time, we have uncritically accepted Descartes' second rule, believing that specialization would bring "clarity and distinction" and thus confusing rational evidence with understanding. Because of this influence, we have reduced mysticism to more or less extraordinary or esoteric phenomena, and spirituality to a training of the "spirit," if not antagonistic to, the body, as if Man[7] were just a soul imprisoned in a body. Christianity, too, once believed this, in complete contradiction of the dogma of the resurrection of the flesh, marginalizing Man in merely temporal eschatology. . . . What I would like to suggest is that without the corrective of mysticism we could reduce Man to a rational, if not rationalist, biped and human life to the supremacy of reason.[8]

Knowledge and Being

Studying mysticism is a way of relating to two fundamental aspects of human existence, namely, knowing and being. Before meeting Panikkar, I must confess, I had no idea that these two fundamental issues are involved in the study of mysticism. Thanks to him, I came to understand the deeper implications of the mystical dimension of human life. For him, mysticism is a key to exploring some of the most fundamental issues concerning being human. For this reason, I would like to bring mysticism to bear on the discussion of Panikkar's theory of knowing (epistemology) and being (ontology), with which he is deeply concerned. His main interest in mysticism is neither a description of various mystical phenomena nor a theoretical analysis of mystical experience. What interests Panikkar in mysticism is human consciousness and experience of knowing and being.

Mysticism is of course a form of human experience of knowing but this knowledge is not obtained through a specific channel such as reason, logic, or rational analysis. Rather, this kind of knowledge is

6. Panikkar, *MS*, xiii.
7. Panikkar uses "Man" to denote men and women by using capital "M" to signify human beings in general.
8. Panikkar, *MS*, xiii.

direct, intuitive, and immediate. For this reason, from a purely scientific point of view, this knowledge cannot be proved and thus is deemed unreliable. Scientific epistemology limits what can be known to the means of acquiring knowledge. Since the beginning of the modern age, philosophical epistemology has identified the *content* of knowledge with the *means* of obtaining knowledge. Mystics, however, are able to obtain the knowledge that is not filtered through the rational medium, beyond the scientific and analytical means and tools; mystics are able to understand reality not by means of scientific tools but from the experience of their own *being*. For mystics, knowing is intrinsically related to being. What is important here is the recognition of the "mystical awareness" or "mystical consciousness" that all human beings are capable of experiencing: "It follows that mysticism is not the privilege of the chosen few, but *the* human characteristic par excellence."[9] Again, Panikkar emphatically states that mysticism is the core of human experience that belongs to the very being of the human:

> Until very recently (and some people still believe this today), mysticism was seen as a particular phenomenon more or less out of the ordinary, something outside the "normal" range of human knowledge, "something" special – pathological, paranormal, or supernatural. The ambition of the present studies *id* (*sic*) to reinstate this mysticism within the very *being* of mankind: within Man as mystical spirit as well as rational animal and corporeal being. In other words, mysticism is not a specialists' field but an anthropological dimension, something that belongs to human beings as such. Every person is a mystic – even if only potentially so. True mysticism, therefore, is not dehumanizing. It shows us that our humanity is something more – not less – than pure rationality.[10]

In this sense, the human being is essentially a mystic. In Panikkar's view, the human being is not only a rational animal but also a mystic animal. For him, being "animal" is profoundly interrelated to *anima*. He uses terms like "spiritual animal" and interprets *anima* by means of the Indo-European etymology of *aniti* (he who breathes) and *anilah* (breath).[11]

9. Panikkar, *MS*, xiv.
10. Panikkar, *MS*, xiv.
11. For more discussion on the relationship between "animal" and "*anima*," see Panikkar, *MS*, xiv.

Rationality and Epistemology

The reason Panikkar takes ontology seriously is that it provides a basis for his critique of the modern epistemology of reason and rationality. The scientific method of rational analysis, which is central to modern epistemology, makes use of reason and rationality as an *a priori* structure or frame of knowledge that is detached from human experience. Panikkar does not object to this use as such. What he rejects is the exclusive use of reason and rationality as the only and absolute criteria of true knowledge. Instead, he points out, human beings have an ability to know and understand reality through channels other than reason and rationality.

One of these channels is mysticism, which provides an immediate, direct, and intuitive knowledge based on experience. What Panikkar attempts to do is to develop an epistemology based on something other than on reason and rationality, and he does so by establishing an epistemology based on ontology. Western philosophical perspective conceives epistemology as a rigorous intellectual discipline with a highly elaborated scheme and structure, as can be seen in Kant and Descartes among others. Panikkar boldly challenges the basic presuppositions of modern epistemology by introducing an ontological element. For him, epistemology cannot exist apart from ontology and cannot determine ontology. That is, the ways of knowing cannot determine the ways of being; on the contrary, ontology is a source of inspiration for developing epistemology, and not the other way round.

From Epistemology to Ontology

An ontology-based mysticism does not mean that the rational mind should be abandoned altogether. Rather the rational mind can be an indicator or a guide to reality. But we should not confuse the indicator of reality with reality itself, just as we should not confuse the finger pointing at the moon with the moon itself, as the celebrated Zen saying goes. Panikkar's point is not to discard epistemology based on rationality and reason as a medium of knowledge. Rather he urges us not to confuse the medium of knowledge with knowledge itself. For him, being is larger than reason and rationality; live and dynamic, being cannot be reduced to logic. Furthermore, being is constituted multi-dimensionally and interactively. No being can exist by itself. All beings are interindependently related to one another, as affirmed in the Buddhist concept of *pratityasamutpada* or "dependent co-origination."

Before delving further into this issue, it would be useful to take a brief look at what has happened in history, especially in Western civilization. The rise of modernity in the West is truly a remarkable event. The modern period began with the rise of the Renaissance, followed by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution. These historical events form part of what we call "modernity" or "modern mentality," which is characterized by such things as individualism, defense of human rights, the anthropocentric worldview, democratic government, the analytical approach, the scientific method, reason and rationality, *etc*. Modernity has changed the way people in the West think, the way they live, their ethical sense, and their worldview in a profound way. The "modern West" is a product of these historical events occurring in the West.[12] Thus, modernity is a uniquely Western product. However, the products of Western modernity have been so powerful that modernity has become a universal concept or a global standard. The term "globalization" has become so widespread and commonplace that we use it without thinking critically of its origin and without realizing that globalization is in fact an imposition of a particular system, worldview, and value system as the universal standard and norm.

One of the outcomes of modernity is that reason, rationality, analytical thinking, and the scientific mindset have become the universal standard for understanding reality and moral judgment. In epistemology, after Descartes and Kant, reason, rationality, and the scientific method have played a critical role in understanding reality or being. They have become the absolute and exclusive standard for determining what is real. In general, the Western modern tradition has made reason and rationality the universal and normative approach to reality, so that if one does not think rationally and scientifically one is judged not to be thinking properly. No intellectual movement other than modernity has had a greater impact on humanity.

Panikkar was deeply concerned about modernity. He wrote a delightful essay entitled, "The Contemplative Spirit: A Challenge to Modernity,"[13] in which he challenged modernity in terms of the way we live, the way we think, and the way we value. Because of modernity, in

12. It is interesting to note that the East in general did not have the same historical experience. In fact, the concept of modernity did not arise in Asia until the twentieth century and most Asian countries have been rushing to catch up with Western modernity in the last fifty years.
13. Raimon Panikkar, *MS*, 31–42. The original form of this article was published as Panikkar, "The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity," *Cross Currents* 31, no. 3 (1981): 261–72.

spite of all its brilliant achievements, Panikkar points out, we have lost some fundamental insights into the universe, the divine, and the human, namely, the "cosmotheandric vision."

Furthermore, as noted above, Panikkar challenges the modern epistemology, developed after Descartes and Kant, which makes reason, rationality, and scientific thinking the absolute standard and the final criterion of knowing and understanding. Panikkar is especially critical of the dualistic division between epistemology and ontology that privileges the former over the latter, as implied in Descartes' famous dictum, "*cogito ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am). This is, according to Panikkar, a clear case of elevating epistemology over ontology, rational thinking over being, whereby thinking is reduced to and identified with reasoning.

In an attempt to overcome this dualistic tendency, Panikkar takes a non-dualistic or advaitic approach. This non-dualistic approach is deeply rooted in his mystical awareness that the way of being shapes the way of thinking, and not vice versa. His epistemology is not based on pure rationality as the only tool to obtain knowledge. Rather it is ontologically oriented in that it takes being as a source of inspiration for knowledge. It is not thinking and reasoning that define being or reality. Since Descartes, Western philosophy has tried to understand reality from the perspective of rational thinking and critical analysis by which knowledge of reality is thought to be obtained, acquired, or gained.

As a result, we tend to identify the way of knowing reality with reality itself, that is, epistemology with ontology. In so doing, we inevitably reduce reality to the process of how we obtain the knowledge of reality. According to Panikkar, the modern Western philosophical and intellectual tradition has been shaped by this kind of epistemology, with the dominion of epistemology over ontology. In this philosophical tradition, reason, rationality, language, and concept are used as weapons to capture reality and to gain knowledge of it. Panikkar calls this epistemology "the epistemology of the hunter." [14] It is an active, aggressive and readymade strategy to capture knowledge. Its tool are reason and rationality. Reason is not only the tool but also the judge to determine truth and reality.

Mysticism and Postmodern Perspective

Although Panikkar did not explicitly refer to postmodernism or postmodernity nor identify himself as a postmodern thinker, his thought is arguably close to what is termed "postmodernism." This is particularly

14. Panikkar, *EG*, 56.

true of his ground-breaking understanding of the relationship between epistemology and ontology, between thinking and being. For Panikkar, however, "ontology" is not an appropriate term to describe the nature of being. In fact, he never wrote a treatise on "ontology" as such. For him, the term "ontology" (*on+logos*) is totally improper because *on* (being) does not belong to the realm of *logos*.

"Ontology" is by and large a modern coinage to express everything in terms of *logos*, term, and concept, that is, in terms of the product of reason and rationality. Being was placed under the dominance of *logos*. In his understanding of being (or beings) Panikkar makes a radical turn by thinking the other way round. For him, being and reality are interchangeable and must not be conceptualized. Instead of "ontology," Panikkar proposes *ontonomy* as the proper term to describe the nature of being. For him, from the mystical perspective, being is not to be understood as a form of *logos*. Being is not governed by *logos*; it is neither fixed nor fixable by means of a rational and logical framework. Being is a mystery, not an *object* to be comprehended or apprehended according to the rules of reason; rather it is a living and dynamic *subject* that can only be appreciated in the unfolding of its movement. For this reason, Panikkar coins the term "*ontonomy*" to indicate that being has its own way of moving and of unfolding its own "autonomy," without being subjected to the human logos. This is the mystical dimension of being which Panikkar describes as "rhythm." Furthermore, for Panikkar, being is intrinsically related to beings and vice versa. The whole and the parts are not divisible but move together *spontaneously*. This spontaneity, for Panikkar, is *ontonomy*. As he puts it:

> If Being is rhythmic, the whole is not divisible into parts, and therefore the sum of the parts does not constitute the whole; each member is an image of the Whole and the Whole is reflected in its members. Each being is unique and indispensable because the Whole is reflected in that being in order to be whole. Reality has inter-in-dependent order. This is the sphere of *ontonomy*. If Being is rhythmic, each entity will enjoy a real freedom according to its nature in relation to the Whole. The way to relate to one another is similar to a rhythmic dance in which I spontaneously create my role in the dance listening to the overall music (which I may also contribute to making). The order is *ontonomous* order in which every being (*on*) discovers its proper *nomos* within the Whole: *ontonomous* within the Whole: *ontonomy*.[15]

15. Panikkar, *RB*, 53.

Conceptualized being is no longer real being. Being is be-ing and not to be objectified. Conceptualization inevitably uses reason and rationality as a powerful intellectual instrument and in the process reduces being to a certain framework of thought. As a result, being loses its dynamic vitality. Being is not an individual entity to be comprehended as an object of our thinking. As Lao Tzu states, "The *Dao* that can be spoken of is no longer the real or constant *Dao*" (*Dao De Jing* 1) and: "Those who speak do not know, those who know do not speak" (*Dao De Jing* 56).[16] Once conceptualized in and through language, being loses its essence. We only capture the objects that our net can catch. Here we see what is profoundly wrong in modern epistemology. Furthermore, this epistemology eventually "individualizes" what we perceive because the net, the tool, the instrument we use to catch or obtain an object eventually reduces it to an individual and unrelated being. With this kind of net we cannot catch the whole, the totality of being.

For the same reason, Panikkar does not think of the human being as an individual entity but as part of a community.[17] In this sense, he is not a "modern" thinker. In fact, he tries to show us that we have lost the pre-modern vision of the totality of being, human beings included. On the other hand, he never advocates going back to the Medieval Age or the pre-modern mentality. We cannot return to the past or turn back the clock. What Panikkar is trying to retrieve is the vision of reality that was lost in the last three or four centuries in Western civilization under the name of modernity. Hence, I would call him a postmodern thinker who thinks of the nature of being beyond the domain of reason and rationality and even beyond "thinking."

Panikkar conceives of being, including the human being, beyond individuality. For him, being is not a separate individual but is a being in *relation* to and *solidarity* with others.[18] Being has to be taken as a "totality," not as an individual or a part. For Panikkar, totality is not the sum of different parts. Each part is already totality, *totum in parte*. Not only the part stands for the whole, but also the whole is in the part. Consequently, when Panikkar discusses being, he also broaches the relation between the part and the whole. For him, being without relation to the totality is not be-ing or becoming.

Thus, Panikkar's idea of being is implicated in that of the divine: being is inevitably connected with the divine. He does not separate "ontology" (discussion of being) from "theology" (discussion of the

16. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin Books, 1963).
17. Panikkar, *RB*, 58.
18. Panikkar, *RB*, 11.

divine). The divine is not separated from the universe and the human; it is part of the destiny of being. We cannot exclude the divine from sharing in the destiny of being.[19] The divine, while immanent in the cosmos and in humans, surpasses all categories as the transcendental point of reference. Panikkar characterizes the fundamental nature of this relationship not in terms of causality or a sheer mechanism but as a universal correlation, *perichoresis*. As he puts it, "the relation of all with all is one of inter-in-dependence."[20] Although Panikkar acknowledges that a being has an individual dimension, which he terms *ontonomy*, he holds that in general beings stand in total solidarity with one another in "being." There is a certain common destiny among all beings, which Panikkar designates with such terms as solidarity, *karma*, *dharma-kaya*, *Buddha-kaya*, ecclesia, *gahal,* and *umma*.[21] Thereby he does not however mean that the fate of one is the fate of all but that reality is a living organism, a traditional idea in both East and West. Indeed, the idea of *anima mundi* is common in all traditions. This is the mystery of being.

"Destiny of Being"

As we have noted above, what Panikkar most strongly objects to in modern epistemology is its mistaking concept for being.[22] The complexity, subtlety, and mystery of the solidarity of being cannot and must not be identified with the concept of being, as such, nor constructed as a form of epistemology. Conceptual epistemology cannot grasp what Panikkar calls the "destiny of being." We can neither construct nor intellectually manufacture reality in the name of epistemology based on reason and rationality alone. Being is greater than logos, the rational principle or reasoning process. The destiny of being is larger than what epistemology can grasp.

By "destiny" Panikkar does not mean the fate of each individual being. Rather, destiny is fundamentally relational; it is the connectedness of beings and being. Panikkar uses "Being" to designate God. For him, being is an all-encompassing reality. Being and all beings are intrinsically related to one another. This intrinsic relatedness is not a substance but constitutes a real, non-dualistic (*advaita*) relation. For Panikkar, this relatedness is the destiny of beings and being. Awareness of this

19. Panikkar, *RB*, 59.
20. Panikkar, *RB*, 59.
21. Panikkar, *RB*, 60.
22. Panikkar, *RB*, 60.

ontological relatedness is the key to understanding his epistemology. The process of knowing includes the knower and the known which are related to each other in a non-dualistic way.

Western epistemology is based on a dualism that splits subject and object, the knower and the known. In this theory of knowledge there is a clear separation between the knower and the known. Moreover, the knower's epistemology determines the known. It is not based on relation but on dichotomy. For this reason, Panikkar aptly characterizes modern Western epistemology, as mentioned above, with the metaphor of "hunter's epistemology." By contrast, I suggest that Panikkar's epistemology may be described as "farmer's epistemology." This expression is mine, and not Panikkar's. What I would like to do with it is to explore the basic direction of the epistemology that Panikkar develops. Panikkar himself does not elaborate an epistemology *per se*; for him it is impossible to develop an epistemology independently of ontology, cosmology, and anthropology, apart from what he calls "cosmotheandrism" or the "theanthropocosmic vision."

Before going further, I would like to say a bit more about the "farmer's epistemology." As Panikkar uses the image of "hunter" to describe the knower in the act of trying to catch the object to be known, I am using that of "farmer" to explicate the process of knowing. According to Panikkar, the real question of epistemology is: "How can we know the known?" The question itself has an ontological implication. Panikkar's answer to this question is no longer in the realm of epistemology but delves into ontology: "The answer obviously transcends the epistemological plane. If we were to succeed in knowing the knower, the knower would become the known, and no longer be the knower, unless both coalesce and there is identity between to know and to be. Epistemology becomes ontology and perfect onto-logy arrives at the identification between the ὄν and the λόγος, being and thought."[23]

Here we see that Panikkar gives an ontological answer to the epistemological question. The hunter's epistemology has no ontological concerns because the hunter only catches what he wants. This epistemology separates the subject from the object, and the subject controls and conditions the object. It is an aggressive and invasive epistemology. As seen above, Panikkar's epistemology requires ontology. This means that the process of obtaining knowledge is not simply an active process but involves a passive "receiving" and "becoming."

To express this aspect of knowing I propose to replace the image of "hunter" with that of "farmer." Unlike the hunter, the farmer prepares himself to produce the fruits of the earth by toiling the land and fertilizing

23. Panikkar, *RB*, 64.

the soil. This agricultural metaphor implies that the knower must be rooted in the earth to embrace external objects. The act of knowing is a profoundly ontological process. Panikkar's epistemology highlights the "cosmotheandric" or "theocosmoanthropic" character of the process of knowing, which includes the trinity of the cosmos, the human, and the divine. Real knowledge must be intrinsically relational. In this sense, the ontological dimension is vital in the process of knowing. The knowing process is not targeting and catching the object to be known.

Panikkar goes one step further and turns the whole question of epistemology of the knower and the known into a more profound issue concerning the divine. For him, the question of knowledge is a deeply theological issue. When we ask an ultimate question, we turn it into a question about the ultimate, and its answer comes from the experience of being identified with being. On Panikkar's basic assumption that to know is to become the known, when God knows the world, God becomes the world and is identified with it.[24] Thus, Panikkar's "ontological epistemology" or "farmer's epistemology" has a deep implication for understanding God: "The question about God becomes almost by definition the ultimate question."[25] True knowledge is possible only when it is related to becoming and be-ing.

Dynamics of the Destiny of Being

For Panikkar, being is be-ing and becoming and coming to be. His ontology is dynamic and organic. The best term to describe it is "rhythm." It is not a *logos* but a movement – to be precise, a movement with rhythm. For Panikkar "beings" and "being" are not fundamentally separated or divided. He uses "being" to designate the "ultimate reality," and "beings" to refer to particular beings. However, being is in beings and not separated from them. The question of the whole is the question of being and vice versa. The question of God or the divine is fundamentally the question of the whole because God has to be the whole. However, the whole is not just the sum of all its parts nor an abstract metaphysical notion or concept. The whole may go beyond the parts, but it is not separated from the parts. This is the dynamism of being. The whole as being, as discussed above, is in the concrete, *totum in parte* and the concrete represents the whole, *pars pro toto*. In this sense, being is, to borrow Heidegger's terminology, both "ontic" and "ontological."

24. Panikkar, *RB*, 64.
25. Panikkar, *RB*, 65.

Panikkar takes the word "destiny" seriously to describe being or the divine, not in the sense of pre-determined fate but free destination. The whole has its own intrinsic destiny. Being is our common destiny and God is destiny. For Panikkar, "destiny" is an open process, with no readymade path or pre-ordained way; it is neither a pre-determined fate nor a blind process totally detached from particular realities. Why then does he use the word "destiny," which may be open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation, to refer to this open process? Panikkar uses it to stress both freedom and obligation. We are free to pursue our own destiny but we cannot escape the complexity and mystery of the fundamental relatedness of being. God is not only in relation but is relation.

Being Human and Being Mystical

Panikkar makes it clear that mysticism belongs to all human beings who must not be reduced to pure rationality. He perceives mysticism as a way of being human that is irreducible to rationality. As he used to say, "being is larger than the human and the human is more than rationality." Panikkar's conception of mysticism serves to demonstrate the limitations of rationality that has shaped modern epistemology and to rediscover the profundity of being. Mysticism is the human capacity to know (epistemology) beyond rationality by discovering the mystery of being and reality (ontology).

As a fundamental dimension of being human, mysticism can lead us to a new self-understanding; it shows that human beings participate in Being (God or divinity) in the sense that our beings and Being are not separated from each other but mutually participate in each other. Each being participates in Being and is participated by Being. Being is the totality of all beings and the source of beings. In this sense, for Panikkar, "Being" can be a symbol for God as the ultimate reality, whereas "Reality" is a concept rather than a dynamic being and does not imply the vitality of a being.

Every being has its own life and participates in "Life." Each being has its own life by sharing in life with other beings. Life with the capital L refers to the life of the totality of all beings in the universe. Just as a being is not separable from Being, life is not independent of Life. Hence, being is life because every being participates in Being and every life comes from Life. Furthermore, life is not just for human beings and their lives. Life is more than an individual being and a personal life. Life encompasses all beings, including matter. According to Panikkar, life does not exclude dimensions beyond the physiological and psychological aspects: "There

also exists a spiritual life, a Life of Being, and thus, paradoxically, a Life of matter."[26] Life transcends the duality of spirit and matter or birth and death. Conventionally life is taken to mean something living in an individual. But life is also beyond an individual life, encompassing the whole cycle of birth and death. Panikkar's concept of Life is similar to Lao Tzu's concept of *Dao*. It is also similar to the Chinese and East Asian concept of cosmic "vital energy" (*qi*, 氣). In this view, the living or the non-living, birth and death, are different forms of the vital energy.

With his insight on mysticism Panikkar introduces the idea of Life as the all-encompassing vitality of the universe or the cosmic process. For him, mysticism is this integral experience of life. He also uses terms such as "reality" and "being" to convey the same idea. However, the concept of life is more vital, dynamic, and closer to experience. Life is something we experience directly: for Panikkar, mysticism was the experience of life. One of the most powerful characteristics of mysticism is immediate experience. Experience is an immediate, first-hand, direct cognitive event, without going through a medium such as concept, logic, and rationality. Once the experience is conceptualized, it is no longer authentic experience. For this reason, mystics fondly make use of words such as "unspeakable" and "ineffable" to stress the immediacy of experience. Although Panikkar uses the term "reality" for the purpose of conceptualizing life, life is immediate, authentic, and undistorted. It is a dynamic process of being as all beings participate in life. Being and life are intrinsically experienced. As experienced, being and life are one and inseparable. While "reality" represents the conceptual side of this union of being and life, experience shows the mystical dimension of the inseparable unity of life and being. In other words, the experience of Life is our participation in Being.

When Panikkar talks about Life, however, he does not refer to his own personal life or any other individual life. Rather he is speaking about the life which is in me or in you. An individual life is not a mere fragmentation of Life but a reflection of the totality of Life. In this sense, Life is infinite, divine, and immortal. Mysticism is the key to understand the mystery of Life and the dynamics of Being. The relation between life and Life, and between being and Being is intrinsic and inseparable. Not only does each life participate in Life, it also represents the totality of Life, just as much as each being is in Being. Here Panikkar's mystical approach in understanding the relationship between the part and the whole is evident. To exemplify this point, he often quotes William Blake's poetic vision:

26. Panikkar, *RB*, xvi.

> To see the world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
> And eternity in an hour.[27]

Panikkar derives the concept of the Whole as such from his understanding of the advaitic intuition or the vision of the third eye: "We do not see the *totum* as such, nor do we mistake the *pars pro toto* (the part for the whole), but we are aware of the *totum in parte*, of the Whole in the concrete, because we discover the *pars in toto* in the nondualistic intuition."[28] As a non-dualistic mystic, Panikkar does not separate the part from the whole, being from Being, and life from Life. On the basis of his experience of being or Being, he does not separate being from life because we experience being by living life. In other words, his intellectual search for being inevitably leads him to ontology as the foundation for understanding reality, rather than to epistemology.

Mysticism, Ontology, and Pluralism

How do we relate Panikkar's profound insight on mysticism to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue? What does his ontology have to do with his pluralism that opens a vision for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue? Why do we need to overcome the modern epistemology in order to engage in a multicultural and inter-religious dialogue? These are very complex questions and they are dealt with elsewhere in this book. Here I can only offer a few suggestions. Panikkar's ontology can provide a rich resource for understanding the nature of being in its affirmation that no single being can exist on its own power. Pluralism is intrinsic to all beings because the way of being is in and of itself pluralistic. Pluralism is neither an undifferentiated embrace of each and every difference nor a splitting-up of all beings into diverse and unrelated things. Rather, pluralism asserts that each of us needs others to be oneself because others are an integral part of oneself. Pluralism is not a desirable option but a necessity enabling each of us to become oneself. Panikkar's pluralism is based on his relational ontology that opens a new horizon enabling us to recognize the other as part of our own being. The Buddhist notion of *pratityasamutpada* (dependent co-origination) or Panikkar's idea of "cosmotheandric" (cosmos, divine, human) experience embodies this insight. Panikkar also uses the term "inter-in-dependence" to express his relational ontology.[29] His pluralism and his relational ontology neither

27. Quoted in Panikkar, *RB*, 31.
28. Panikkar, *RB*, 31.
29. Panikkar, *RB*, 53.

dissolves our unique individual being into one totality nor maintains our individuality in separation. Panikkar's concept of "inter-in-dependence" recognizes that our beings depend on each other without losing the unique "independence" of our own individuality.

For Panikkar, one of the most serious hurdles for pluralism is modern epistemology, which assumes that all human beings, in spite of their different cultures and diverse religions, share common if not identical elements based on reason and rationality. It is thought that this common epistemology can be the basis for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and reach a universal consensus in inter-religious dialogue, comparative religion, and comparative religious ethics. This kind of epistemological approach inevitably leads to a form of reductionism by eliminating things that do not fit in this universality and commonality governed by "*logos*," and discarding the "*mythos*" that is unique to each individual society, culture, and religion. By contrast, the mystical approach appreciates and preserves the "*mythos*" of each society, culture, and religion that is irreducible to any epistemological medium created by "*logos*." In this sense, we may say that the mystic's epistemology is "*mythos*," whereas the rationalist's epistemology is "*logos*." While "*mythos*" is an immediate, direct, intuitive, and spontaneous unfolding of truth or reality based on being, "*logos*" is a highly structured and artificial articulation based on rational epistemology. Mystics listen to the rhythm of being and move with the dynamics of being, recognizing that being is pluralistically constituted, whereas rationalists make use of reason to gain possession of and dominion over being. Panikkar's mystical approach and his cosmotheandric vision pave the way for genuine pluralism. His critique of modern rationalist epistemology, his grounding of the way of knowing (epistemology) in the way of being (ontology), his advaitic conception of Being and beings, and his mystical understanding of the Destiny of Being and Life – all these insights serve as useful pointers to a new and even revolutionary understanding of the cosmos-humanity-God reality. Panikkar in a revolutionary way turned around this kind of epistemology by expounding the ontological foundation of epistemology (not in terms of surrendering our being to epistemology or ways of knowing).