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# Book Review: "The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures"

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East/West dichotomy that still persists in religious studies, and partly to rehabilitate Otto, who had succumbed to that very dichotomy. Alas, restrictions of space prevent addressing this section.

Of course, a book as novel and stimulating as Nicholson's will leave many readers' questions unanswered. Here, I would like to pose one question for clarification.

My question regards Nicholson's assertion that the first moment of relational identity formation, the exclusive moment, is inevitable and therefore not a fruitful area for theological discussion. I agree that all theological positions are exclusive—non-comparativists do not present at the Comparative Theology group of the AAR. Yet I also believe that the form of exclusion liberals advocate must be supported by argument over against the form of exclusion that fundamentalists advocate. Comparativists and fundamentalists exclude each other, this is true. But then to simply label both as

exclusivists and move on disregards the extraordinary ethical and practical implications of their varying positions. These implications must be addressed, and if addressing them contributes to the identity formation of the comparative community, then so be it. My concern is that Nicholson has neglected the first moment of identity formation and skipped too readily to the second. In order to mature as a discipline, I believe that comparative theology must reflect rigorously on both moments.

This question is relatively minor given the enormous research and perceptive analysis that Nicholson presents. His book is a pioneering contribution to the nascent field of fundamental comparative theology. In the years to come, it will help comparative theology to proceed with greater awareness, confidence, and charity.

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***The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*** by Raimon Panikkar. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2010, 550 pp.

**THIS** book consists of an edited version of the Gifford Lectures of 1989 which Panikkar continued to elaborate in the years following. It brings forth additional work incorporating material from *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (2004) and the *Experience of God: Icons of Mystery* (2006). This book is his final testament. A great strength of the book is an inclusion of footnotes from Latin, Greek, German, French, Italian and Castilian in addition to Sanskrit. Much of Panikkar's thought revolves around the meaning of metaphysical terms in various linguistic registers," homeomorphic equivalents," as he calls them. His search for concepts ranges widely over Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Plotinus, Heraclitus, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger as well as Shankara, Ramanuja, Abinavagupta, and others, not to mention

Catholic theologians who are alluded to occasionally such as Rahner, Marechal, Maritain, and an assortment of Christian mystics.

In many instances, Panikkar makes passing reference to the history of western philosophy which reflects an impressive grasp of many deep and long standing questions such as the meaning of *esse*, of time, of becoming, of cosmos, of motion, of matter, of consciousness, not only in a Western key but also in an Eastern key, with constant reference to the Upanishads.

These lectures do not engage traditional problems such as the way that Christology ties to Trinity, as in the classic problem of the hypostatic union, since Panikkar's focus is on the cosmic Christ as a principle. His Trinitarian focus is not so much on the immanent Trinity as on the cosmotheandric

reality that ties together all that is. He does not directly attach the problem of original sin or of the difference between nature and the supernatural, made famous by authors such as de Lubac in *Surnaturel*, but is aware of it (301). The careful reader will in fact see many problems that Panikkar references but strategically chooses not to pursue; engagement with Schelling would be another example of this (159), or the brief reference to participation in Thomistic metaphysics (160). There is not much engagement with recent versions of process theism such as the work of Catherine Keller, for example, or with more scientifically oriented but still theistic cosmologies. Panikkar uses the spelling “cosmotheandric kosmologies” rather than “cosmologies” to separate out his own distinctive view which I will not try to elaborate here, nor will I discuss his interesting response to Thomas Berry. There are no references to Jean Luc Nancy or to Giorgio Agamben, both of which would be relevant to the idea of shared life, bare life, and so on; but few authors can imitate the range of thinking that Panikkar shows. There is no reference to another very prominent version of the Whole, such as the work of Gilles Deleuze, which would form a non-theist counterpoint, or to very recent work such as that of the Speculative Materialist group of Ray Brassier, Quentin Meillassoux and others who are anti-theistic in their philosophies of the real.

The style of thinking is at times more associative than argumentative. He brings patterns into our view rather than arguing in detail for positions as philosophers normally do. In one place he says that he is like a contemporary hunter-gatherer “recollecting life” from the tremendous field of human experience. Life here means inspirations, visions, insights and aphorisms of the kind that will help us see with a “third eye”.

The Introduction to the volume by

Joseph Prabhu is skillful and points to the key idea of inter-independence which is expressed in many different ways in the lectures. Inter-independence can be experienced, not just conceptualized, and the experiential argument is important. Prabhu rightly points to the complex view of time which is woven into Panikkar’s reflections. Time is not linear. It is not all there now. “Realized eschatology” would be the closest that Christian thought comes to this. For Panikkar the key term is “tempeternity”. Each of us is an image of the whole but the whole is movement and organism. An image that he does not use is that we are all more like organelles of a cell, mitochondria interacting with and not separate from the influences of the cytoplasm surrounding us. Another parallel image would be the discovery that environment influences genetic expression and not just the reverse. Biological systems or biochemical systems or quantum systems may be better images than Newtonian physics for what the whole is, but Panikkar does not use them to any extent. The whole appears only within the corresponding mythos (p.32) about the real in which we happen to believe. Panikkar seems to be speaking of his life’s work when he says “creative thinking is a contribution to cosmogony” if thinking is a wisdom that becomes “saving knowledge” (36).

In an important passage, Panikkar again speaks of “gathering the fragments of human experience... to participate in the myth emerging as the next step in reality ...the aim of liberation for an audience seeking life in an evolving mythology ... this whole complex is participating in the rhythm which is being which is the cosmotheandric Trinity”. This gathering activity in its kaleidoscopic motion can sometimes frustrate the reader who is looking for a conclusion or summation at some points and sometimes has to backtrack in search of one.

An important part of rhythm is that it is

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improvisational, unpredictable, much like skilled jazz musicians responding to each other as the performance unfolds. The spontaneity of the interactions is important. It is one of a kind, not scripted. This is not an Aristotelian model where each nature has a *telos*.

Evil, intriguingly, is interference from outside the particular field where each being has its place. There can be violent rhythms. The question of evil seems to haunt the lectures. I am not sure that Panikkar addresses it in a satisfactory way although he constantly refers to a God who does not stop genocides. It is clear that there is a loss of some beings due to wars, CIA drone attacks, Twin Towers attacks and subway attacks which damage the Whole.

Helpfully, Panikkar says a rhythm has no natural ending because it carries time away with it, "all spatial metaphors break down"(46). In a clarification of rhythm, he notes that others can be stimulated or disturbed by my melody. The recent Gulf war will still "be felt a century from now (54, 351)." It too is part of the rhythm of Being, but it would be helpful if Panikkar could have unpacked what this "feeling" of past wars means for us. It might be possible to talk about the long-range impact of hateful ideologies here or about trauma and grief at the social and cultural level.

We memorialize and monumentalize and mediatize wars into a vast cultural imaginary. Troops are always "brave"; they always "sacrifice", and so on. Deep metaphors like the sacrifice of the "body" (324) for the "nation" might be a productive

contrast to Panikkar's favored metaphor of inter-independence. What does something like the cosmotheandric body at war mean? Is this killing just a blip in one part of the cosmos? Panikkar is aware that vast cosmic perspectives can tend to distort axiologies (303). If we link this to the position that there is not a homogeneous time linking all universes (287), it is hard to see how a theodicy of some kind would come together. Mystically, Panikkar will state in another place that "there is an infinite value in satisfying someone's thirst" (300). Perhaps the being of the gesture itself is a Christophany. It seems that the gesture is part of the creative rhythm of the being and is itself salvation. It is hard to see how brave gestures balance horrific sufferings in the cosmic scheme.

Prabhu indicates that Panikkar wanted to address political connections in more depth but was unable to complete an analysis. As it stands, there are only passing references to things like anti-globalization movements and other protest movements but it is clear that they weigh in his scales as they keep surfacing.

Panikkar's scholarly voyage might have been the dramatic evocation of a reality that his followers still cannot see as well as he. He would say that evil does not triumph, but instead the ultimate melody is one of hope and humor and life. It is a magnificent orchestration, and so was he.

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***Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India.*** Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marianus Kujur, editors. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010, viii + 299 pp.

***MARGINS*** of Faith is a welcome addition to a

growing research bibliography on Dalit and