



Intercultural Spirituality Necessary? The Goal of the Encounter of Cultures

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Is Intercultural Spirituality Necessary?³¹⁰

The Goal of the Encounter of Cultures

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“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.
We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Teilhard de Chardin

Introduction

We could begin our reflections with Raimon Panikkar's dictum: “Religion gives culture its ultimate content, and culture gives religion its proper language.”³¹¹ If we take culture as that enduring sum-total of influences that shapes and forms people's values and attitudes diachronically and synchronically in a certain region (at least initially) then this is not just a haphazard sum-total of influences. It has to be an organic whole in which its visible aspects do not constitute the core but on closer look will be found to be embodiments of the core reality. Admittedly the core reality is distinct, though not separate from the visible aspects and includes the healthy and the unhealthy aspects as well. Put succinctly, culture is that whole that inundates a people fully, their living, thinking, acting and interacting, dressing, eating, their literature, art, music, dance, their ideals as well as their not-so-ideal behaviour.

Culture is never pure culture including as it does in every case both positive and negative aspects. Besides culture is never an isolated phenomenon but is always and already intercultural that is caught up in a symbiotic-and-osmotic process of give and take. Such an approach focuses on Man's interaction with nature but it also includes the interaction of human beings among themselves.

³¹⁰ A tribute to a fellow Jesuit in admiration for his commitment to a dialogical spirituality.

³¹¹ Panikkar, R., A Self-Critical Dialogue, in: Prabhu, J., ed., The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar, New York 1996, 243.

If our understanding of culture is somewhat realistic (moving away from an elitistic approach which narrows down culture to literature, art, music, dance, etc.) it is because it is on this background that we need to put forward what spirituality could possibly mean today.

It is understandable that the expression spirituality is not everywhere acceptable. Still we need to retain it as it refers to the realm of the spirit. The traditional tripartite distinction of body, soul and spirit is pragmatic and so can serve as a good working-hypothesis. The body is seen to be the realm of matter, the soul the realm of the mind and the spirit the transcendent dimension, the realm of consciousness. Mind and matter interact within the ambience of the spirit, not the other way round. While mind and matter can to some extent be objectified, spirit always serves as the unobjectifiable backdrop. Obviously we are speaking heuristically since neither mind nor matter exist and operate as mind and matter. They are abstractions. They exist and operate in a larger non-material complex.³¹² Here we are speaking heuristically in order to focus on them and so highlight one or another aspect. Thus neglecting the interconnected nature of all transient things we assert that body belongs to the realm of matter. We know that neither matter nor body exist by themselves.

Furthermore we can assert heuristically that the realm of matter is characterized by quantifiability and measurability – we wouldn't have been in a position to do so if we hadn't abstracted matter from its surrounding world.³¹³ Similarly with mind. The strong point of mind is that it is led by the logic of reason. Of course we are aware that reason too is an abstraction. The functioning of reason is undergirded by a gamut of covert and overt processes which consists of previous experiences, cultural paranoia and prejudices, misunderstandings, knee-jerk reactions, – all of which constitute our preunderstanding. The so-called path of reason differs from culture to culture and, what is more, its stature and significance change accordingly.

Life would be impossible without the heuristic path. The danger inherent in this (for all of us) is that in course of time we forget that we

³¹² The differences between the Hindu and the Christian cosmovisions begin to appear on the horizon here. E.g. mind in the Christian cosmovision belongs to the spiritual and in the Hindu cosmovision it is indisputably part of the transcendent world.

³¹³ Different scientific disciplines speak heuristically all the time: water is H₂O, the nuclear world consists of atoms, neutrons, etc. knowing full well that H₂O, atoms, neutrons, etc. as such do not exist. Even water is an abstraction because water as such does not exist!



are walking on a heuristic path and come to believe that this is how reality is!

Today spirit and spirituality do not seem to say much, if at all. And yet they have such importance in our life's sojourn. That is why we need continually to purify our personal system and update our spiritual software and hardware. There is urgent need to understand spirituality in a way that makes sense to those who are seeking meaning in life. These lines are an attempt to move in this direction.

The Cosmotheandric Integration of Reality

Earlier we spoke of body, mind and spirit.³¹⁴ In such an expression lurks the danger of a lack of integration between the three, given the human tendency to reify linguistic shortcuts. The distinction between the three is bound sooner or later to be converted into a separation. Since most are unaware of the inherent danger the probability of falling prey to it is real.

In this regard what concerns the integration of reality in Panikkar's theanthropocosmic or cosmotheandric vision is a genuine trailblazer. Both the neologisms express in one word all the three dimensions of reality ("God, World and Man"). Reality is pluralistic, that is why it is experienced differently by different people. But in these differences there is not only a human invariant (theanthropocosmic experience) but (perhaps) also a cross-cultural universal (the cosmotheandric constitution of reality).³¹⁵ The human invariant refers to the fact that it occurs in all human beings. The cross-cultural universal appears in all cultures. Be that as it may, what is important is the thematic

³¹⁴ Here I would like to say something that is disturbing (to me) in many spiritual schools of today. There is no doubt in my mind that there is a tremendous hunger for spiritual food. But, (here I may be mistaken) their spiritualities appear to me to be built on the sand of mind and reason which focus on what one wants to or can attain. I state this because it is mainly concerned with ritual, doing, following prescriptions, reaching some goal, and achieving some skills, be it with regard to asanas or with other yogic exercises like breath-control, or even gaining indulgences by saying prayers and visiting etc. I have nothing against all this. But when the whole focus is set on such goals there is danger of a lack of interiority. This is a step in the wrong direction.

³¹⁵ Panikkar, R., *The Rhythm of Being*. The Gifford Lectures, New York 2010, 299: "Man as Man is aware of the three realms. This is the theanthropocosmic invariant. This study presents the cosmotheandric intuition as an adequate cross-cultural universal for the majority of cultures of our time. It is a cross-cultural interpretation of the invariant. The christian Trinity is considered to be an 'inspired' disclosure of the triadic myths interpreted within a particular context. My conviction is that the 'radical Trinity' of the cosmotheandric intuition belongs to a mature understanding of the christian insight and of most human traditions."

assimilation of the theanthropocosmic invariant in order to turn it into a cross-cultural universal.

What does all this mean? For many if not for most of us awareness is simply terra incognita; it poses neither problems nor opportunities. It is simply not part of our priorities much less of our quest. It hardly plays any role in the fields of our curiosity and interest. Interestingly the same is the case with our understanding of reality - except that we believe we know what reality is! Not surprisingly spirituality tends to be other-worldly.

More than two decades ago Panikkar's book on the cosmotheandric experience saw the light of day.³¹⁶ For Panikkar reality is trinitarian, cosmotheandric. Reality cannot be reduced to the perceptible realm alone. There is also the realm of the perceiver. That is not all. The worlds of the perceptible and of the perceiver are so to say without end, endless. The perceptible remains perceptible without ever reaching an end. So too the perceiver's capacity for perceiving. That is to say, there is a certain endlessness regarding the world of perception.

Reality thus discloses the dimensions of the perceiver, the perceptible and their endlessness. We could also call them the dimensions of the knower, the known and the unknowable. The reason why we [have to] take this pluralistic phenomenon seriously is this: Whatever our stance about reality may be we have to admit that there is an element of mystery at every step. In no instance can reality be "described" as we experience it. The distance between experience and expression can never be adequately covered.

The material and mind dimensions rely heavily on reason. But reason functions only within the ambience of consciousness. Panikkar formulated the following theses that "reason is not the whole of Logos", that "Logos is not the whole of Man," and that "Man is not the whole of Being."³¹⁷ The theses are negatively formulated. But we

³¹⁶ Panikkar, R., *Colligite Fragmenta: For an Integration of Reality*, in: Eigo, F. A./Fittipaldi, S. E., eds., *From Alienation to At-One-ness – Proceedings of the Theology Institute of Villanova University, Villanova 1977*, 19-91. This essay together with other essays along these lines has now appeared in: Eastham, S., ed., *The Cosmotheandric Experience – Emerging Religious Consciousness*, New York 1993.

³¹⁷ Panikkar, R., *The Myth of Pluralism*, in: *Cross Currents*, Summer 1979, 214-215. These theses are implicitly critical of the exclusive reliance on reason which ignores the realm of the mythos.

can turn them around thus: Logos is more than reason, Man is more than Logos and Being is more than Man. The champions of reason have to take note of the hierarchy: Reason, Man, Being! With that we come back to the same conclusion. Reason cannot comprehend Being because Being is all-comprehensive. Being and reason are not on the same level.

Thus we cannot really speak “about” Being. Being is neither he nor she nor it. Even language comes under Being. The ancient Taittiriya Upanishad 2.4.1 wisely says, “Whence language and mind return without reaching [Being].” Neither language nor mind can encapsulate Being.

With that we are in medias res regarding the integration of reality. We used to speak of “God, World and Man” – separately. The separate expressions could erroneously lead us to believe that these three are separate. But now with the two expressions theanthropocosmic and cosmotheandric easily available we can speak of them as we experience them, that is, as one theanthropocosmic reality.³¹⁸ And in our cosmotheandric experience none of the three is superior or inferior, none is more important than the others, none is reducible to the other two, but also none can be without the other two. Each of them is unique and uniquely different.

Thus reality is experienced as cosmotheandric. The approach is integral. However this is not a new doctrine; it only implies a fresh understanding of the real. The real consists of a triple dynamic: The dynamic of the cosmic, the dynamic of the human and the dynamic of the divine. This is best illustrated by a simple example. The phenomenon of attraction displays a threefold dynamic: that of *being attractive*, that of *being attracted* and that of the *attraction* itself. These three are real perspectives, each is animated by a clearly different dynamic and none of them is optional. It is one phenomenon with three real dimensions. More importantly, this phenomenon is not possible without the three dimensions which are distinct but not separate. There is no element whatsoever of arbitrariness involved in the threefold dynamic. On the contrary the trinitarian dynamic is the manner in which reality reveals itself to us.

³¹⁸ Cf. footnote 169.

A Cosmotheandric Spirituality

Accordingly the human response to the real has to be threefold, that is to say, it has to be holistic. Spirituality today cannot concentrate only on the Spirit or on “God” alone. It has to respond to the threefold claim of reality on us, the claim, that is, of the cosmic, the human and the divine.

We need to labour the point a bit. We do not have three claims here but a triple claim. This is obvious because of reality’s three integral and integrating dimensions, not three parts or three aspects. Reality does not have parts, it is an integral whole. We cannot describe this integral whole because we are part of this whole. Hence when we do speak of three dimensions it is a way of evoking the whole, not describing the whole! In this integral whole “God”, “Man” and “World” stand out. It is a sort of symbolic expression standing for, making present, the whole. We recall here St Augustine’s warning: Qui coepit numerare coepit errare!³¹⁹

What has the threefold dynamic to do with a cosmotheandric spirituality? The expression threefold dynamic is another way of saying how reality strikes us and how we experience the three dimensions. The triple dynamic of reality is again a symbolic attempt to express (1) the way reality acts and (2) the way we have to respond.

A cosmotheandric spirituality is a response to the triple claim that reality makes on us. We have now to examine wherein each dimension’s uniqueness consists.

1) Beginning with the depth- or divine dimension we can state that it is the unmanipulable, non-graspable, ineffable, non-objectifiable Mystery in which we live, move and have our being and before which we stand helpless and clueless! Our speaking about it does not bring us closer to this Mystery but perhaps our speaking to it might do so. This Mystery is a standing warning not to absolutize anything in life, not even our beliefs, since they are all contextually, culturally and historically conditioned! Meaning derives from these three layers: The context is the first and immediate layer of meaning. It is buttressed by its cultural background which is the second layer of meaning.

³¹⁹ See my “How Trinitarian is Panikkar’s Trinity”, Proceedings, George Mason University, Fairfax, 2011, in: Centro Interculturale dedicato a Raimon Panikkar. Supplement No. 3-October 2012, 1-16.

Connected with this is the historical layer which is the store-house where our past is continuously shaping the present and the future.

The Divine dimension then is not a *deus ex machina* that is to be activated whenever we are in trouble or whenever we need something. Rather it is the centre from which all meaning in life derives. Such meaning is the foundation of one's life. Like a light it illumines one's mind and as an invisible guide it accompanies one, wherever one may find oneself.

The way to respond to this Mystery then is to tread the path of awareness of our total dependence on it. This may be a hard saying. But there are no two ways about this. We are far from being self-sufficient beings. Whether one believes in God or not, the fact is that we are dependent beings - dependent in every way. The presence of the Divine in this world is translated and possibly experienced in the world of history as awareness of total dependence. Awareness, acknowledgement and acceptance of our total dependence is the gateway to a genuine spiritual life. Such awareness, apart from protecting us from hubris, makes us realistic; it offers us the parameters of being human: our limitedness, our vulnerability, our historical conditioning. This is only a witness to human inadequacy. Accepting this inadequacy is not only the beginning of wisdom but also the beginning of an authentic spiritual life.

The other way round, these are in fact the foot-prints of the Divine in the world! Limited Man can experience the unlimited Mystery only in a limited way, the way of human beings.³²⁰

2) We move on now to the dynamic of the cosmic dimension. Here the chief characteristics are quantifiability and measurability (two sides of the same coin). The cosmic dimension is the address of reality wherein we find the locus of everything that *is*. The cosmic dimension is as it were the search machine of reality. Our first encounter with reality begins with this dimension. Only gradually we move on to the second dimension and perhaps with the assistance of grace we can make it to the depth- or divine dimension.

The first meaning of *is* communicates itself through the dynamic of the cosmic dimension. Here begins our adventure with reality.

³²⁰ Here one is reminded of the poem "God's Grandeur" by the English Jesuit Poet Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844-1889): "The world is charged with the grandeur of God!"

It is the contact (con-tactus) with what is not me that leads to the realization that what is not me has surprisingly entered that field of awareness which animates me. In course of time we begin to see that the farthest galaxies even if they are billions of light years away from us are gradually entering the same field of awareness - thanks to the latest sophisticated telescopes. The frontiers of our awareness [of being-in-the-world] find themselves in the process of being continuously dismantled. The frontiers of our awareness have reached galaxies which a few decades ago (so to speak) did not exist for us.

Our senses are part of this on-going discovery of new worlds³²¹ – especially in the universe of light years. It is their exigency that does not permit our scientists to rest satisfied with what has been discovered but to gird their loins for further discoveries. Our bodies can neither be reduced to mere matter nor to mere formulae. A greater discovery seems to me to be this: Our bodies are part of a larger world body! Our sense of belonging is also being constantly revised. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. On the negative side Man is no more the crown of creation. On the positive side Man has now to discover the rhythm of the universe if he and his world are to survive.³²²

The cosmic dimension is a great revealer – revealing that Man must make himself at home in this universe if he wishes to enjoy a sense of belonging. He is part not just of the human family but primordially also part of the cosmic family. But forgetting this he lets himself be caught up with possessing the earth, conquering space, going to the moon, etc. Today Man has great expectations of himself and his skills. This is part of his enterprise of possessing the earth. Possessiveness, which in the Asian religions in general and in the Indian religions in particular, is the mother of all that leads to bondage.³²³ Possessiveness objectifies the cosmos and all that is connected with it. Objectification implies blindness to the depth-dimension at work in the universe. The vehicle of possessiveness is expectation.

3) The human dimension is as indispensable as the divine and the cosmic dimensions. A genuine cosmotheandric spirituality

³²¹ Swimme, B./Berry, T., *The Universe Story. From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era. A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, San Francisco 1992.

³²² Panikkar, R., *The Rhythm of Being. The Gifford Lectures*, New York 2010.

³²³ Expectation begets disappointment, disenchantment and frustration.

shows its effectiveness when Man becomes sensitive to the symbolic character of the universe.³²⁴ The symbolic dimension of reality is the dimension of wholeness - this is the opposite of the objectification enterprise. An effective antidote to objectification is the cultivation of sensitivity to the symbolic dimension of reality.³²⁵ To survive Man has to retrieve his gift for symbolization, not creating symbols but discovering living symbols. For this he has to deepen his sensitivity to the world of symbols. This is in fact the core of intercultural spirituality. Every culture has to discover urgently the symbolic dimension of reality. Jesus reveals this in Mt 6.25-34 where the spiritual exercise begins with the cosmic dimension. "*Look (behold,) at the birds of the air...consider the lilies of the field!*"

The cosmos is the embodiment of hope, not expectation. The all-encompassing Mystery is the source of hope that gives meaning and purpose to our lives! Faith is not the source for information but is the ground of our hope.³²⁶ Hope is the breath of spiritual life. What breath is to life, hope is to spiritual life. But hope is not the same as expectation. Hope has to do with the Unseen, not with the future. (Rom 8.24-25) The ground of hope is the unceasing presence of the Divine in the here and now. In Matthew's passage where Jesus enjoins his audience not to worry, his examples are the unceasing presence and working of his Father in the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. (Mt 6.25-34) On the fertile soil of hope worry does not stand a chance. Worry grows wild where there is no hope.

The real enemy of hope is not hopelessness but expectation. Expectation is concerned with things that pass away. It springs from possessiveness which in the Indian religions leads to the world of bondage (Samsāra).³²⁷ Possessiveness objectifies the cosmos

³²⁴ Cf. Rahner, K., *Zur Theologie des Symbols*, in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. 4 Einsiedeln 1962, 275-311 [English translation: "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, Baltimore, London 1966.] Panikkar has a similar understanding of symbol but his approach is phenomenological. However he has not thematized his thoughts in one place but see passim his *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics*, Bangalore 1983).

³²⁵ See my: *Re-Searching the Divine. The World of Symbol and the Language of Metaphor*, in: Kozhamthadam. J., Ed., *Interrelations and Interpretation. Philosophical Reflections on Science, Religion and Hermeneutics in Honour of Richard De Smet, S.J. and Jean de Marneffe, S.J.*, New Delhi 1997, 141-173.

³²⁶ Hope, as Vaclav Havell famously suggested, is not the certainty that all will be well but the conviction that everything has meaning!

³²⁷ Expectation begets disappointment, disenchantment and frustration.

and all that is connected with it. Objectification is blindness to the depth-dimension at work in the universe. But sensitivity to the depth-dimension makes Panikkar speak of ecosophy, not ecology.³²⁸ Ecosophy refers to the wisdom of dwelling (subjective genitive). Our cosmic dwelling has a wisdom of its own which makes a claim on us. We need to listen to it.³²⁹ We need to listen to and observe “nature” as, for instance, the bush-people of the Kalahari desert did.³³⁰ Their oneness with nature and their sense of belonging to the earth, far from being romantic, was a witness to their unique talent for adaptation/inculturation in the arid desert of the Kalahari. Illiterates in today’s superficial sense they were highly literate with what concerned the reading and interpretation of nature (*liber naturae*). In comparison Man is a total *ignoramus vis a vis nature*. In objectifying nature he has killed its soul and in the process has lost an important dimension of his own life. No amount of romantic “ecology” will be able to make up for it. Panikkar’s critique of ecology replaces it with ecosophy, listening to the wisdom of Man’s Dwelling.³³¹

Cosmotheandric spirituality while drawing attention to today’s objectifying processes also highlights Man’s search for wholeness practically in all areas of life: religion, prayer, meditation, theology, philosophy, medicine, arts, food, drink, clothing, life-style, wild-life, agriculture, horticulture, etc., etc.

Basically cosmotheandric spirituality takes seriously the three major centres of reality, on the one hand and the wholeness of reality, on the other. The two are closely related – more than one imagines. The three dimensions of reality are so to say the three pillars on which our relationship to reality rests; they are also the connecting poles through which reality connects with us. This kind of interaction between us and reality is not optional. It is of the essence because it constitutes all of reality as cosmotheandric. What is meant is that reality is always and already cosmotheandric. The cosmotheandric constitution is neither a derivative event nor an after-thought. Whatever *is*, is cosmotheandric. This is the ultimate basis of any kind of cosmotheandric spirituality.

³²⁸ Panikkar, R., *Ökosophie, oder: der kosmotheandrische Umgang mit der Natur*, in: Kessler, H., *Ökologisches Weltethos im Dialog der Kulturen und Religionen*, Darmstadt 1996, 58-66.

³²⁹ Cf. Panikkar, R., *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, Westminster 1993.

³³⁰ Post, L. van der, *Die verlorene Welt der Kalahari*, Zürich 1994.

³³¹ Panikkar, R., in: *Ökosophie, oder: der kosmotheandrische Umgang mit der Natur*, 58-66.

The inherent triple dynamic of Spirituality leads towards wholeness and integration. By its very nature Spirit abhors partiality; wherever there is one-sidedness the Spirit moves in and brings about wholeness. One-sidedness emerges wherever one of the three dimensions is overstressed or overlooked and neglected. In the cosmotheandric vision wholeness refers to the integration of the three dimensions, more specifically, the integration of the threefold dynamic.

Hindu-Christian Intercultural Encounter

From these reflections it should be clear that intercultural spirituality and cosmotheandric spirituality are one and the same thing. The former evokes the intercultural aspect and the latter the three dimensions of reality. Similarly both are what they are in as much as they promote wholeness-and-integration.

A discussion like this might give the impression that ultimately every culture has the same intercultural spirituality in that it promotes wholeness-and-integration. The objection is well taken. It is here at the final stage of our reflections that the specificity of a culture's spirituality has to be highlighted and stressed. Every culture has to work out its specific version of a cosmotheandric spirituality. Today no spirituality can be relevant if it is not cosmotheandric, that is, it has to respond to the challenges of the threefold dynamic of reality. Secondly, a spirituality must respond also to the specific challenges of a culture and its times. At one level there is the cosmotheandric task and at another is the reading of the signs of the times. Every culture faces such a dual task. On the one side, the challenge of the triple dynamic of reality and on the other, the challenges of the times. In every culture however the integrated response will always be unique.

Can we be more specific? The cosmotheandric concerns of a specific christian spirituality in India are the following:

- (1) Possessiveness leads to objectification of the cosmic dimension and with it there is the loss of the *sacra-mentality* of Man.
- (2) Objectification leads to a loss of the sacramentality of our World.
- (3) The World's loss of sacramentality is tied to the inability of Man to perceive the *sacrum*, the depth-dimension, in Man and World - a condition that leads to meaninglessness in life.

Reality is symbolic. The world of perception is the *symbol*, the depth- or divine dimension is the *symbolized reality* (= the *sacrum*) and Man is the *symbolizer*, the discoverer (not the creator) of the world of symbols.

A cosmotheandric approach implies the *sacramentality* of all things, events and persons, makes Man aware of his calling to retrieve his originary *sacra-mentality*, a mentality that opens his heart to the depth-dimension, the *sacrum* in reality. This *sacrum* is shrouded in silence beyond all reasoning and calculation. It is only in silence that one encounters this silent Mystery. The silence of the heart is freedom from the deafening noises of likes and dislikes. Familiarity with such a silence of the heart is the need of the hour to change gears from have-attitudes to be-attitudes, from a possessive attitude to a perceiving attitude.

Next I concretize aspects of developing steps towards an intercultural spirituality by means of a reflection on a (not *the*) possible future intercultural spirituality in India.

Not less than 83% of Indians confess their allegiance in some form or the other to the Hindu fold. This is the context in which I have lived and which has shaped and formed my intercultural approach. Any relevant spirituality in such a context will have to take cognizance of (a) a karmic approach to history and (b) an understanding of truth that is not bound to history. Expressed briefly, a basic aspect of a karmic cosmovision implies that everything is really connected to everything. Reality is a network of interrelationships. In an understanding of history like this there are no events but only happenings. Every single happening, whether known or unknown, is important because it is part of the cosmic web. In such a cosmovision there is no place for salvific events like the suffering and death of Jesus.

On the other hand, the cosmic totality of happenings is a transient phenomenon and as such *ultimately* not real and not true. For a believing Hindu only that is ultimately real and true which is somehow connected to the Absolute, the Absolute Truth. A world built on likes and dislikes is a world of ontological blindness without any ontological foundation. Truth that is supported only by historical facts is suspect because it is irrelevant for definitive release from the world of birth-and-rebirth. The goal of Hindu spirituality is total and definitive freedom (Moksha). It resonates with any spirituality that is

based on renunciation (of all forms of possessiveness) and leads to inner freedom. It douses the fires of the lust of the flesh and the lust for power. Such a mentality understands very well the spirit of renunciation, self-emptying, *kenosis*.

Briefly Hindu schools of spirituality will resonate with any spirituality that is animated by the spirit of *kenosis*. Indeed the kenotic Christ would be welcome in any Hindu home.

Such an inculturated version of Indian Christian spirituality cannot afford to go along with Paul in the Indian context when he asserts: "[...] we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks [...]" (1 Cor 1:22-24) And "For I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor 2:2) The crucified Christ is unintelligible to the Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, etc. in their respective cosmovisions.³³²

The cultural rhetoric about the crucified Christ is subordinate to the significance of the Christ to all peoples and cultures. For the Hindu traditions the kenotic Christ can become a really meaningful bridge.³³³ What renunciation is for the Hindu, *kenosis* is for the Christian.³³⁴ But such a homeomorphic equivalence is the beginning of a bridge between the two spirituality traditions. This way the Christ becomes meaningful in the Hindu world. This is an instance of intercultural spirituality. Not hinduising Christianity, and not christianising Hinduism but connecting their respective belief-worlds meaningfully. In the process the Hindu gets a taste of *kenosis* and the Christian of renunciation. Both realize that their ways are distinct but not separate.

Conclusion

Intercultural spirituality is neither a syncretistic enterprise nor a path of irenic compromises. It is about spreading and deepening awareness that no culture is an island, that other cultures too exist and that they too have a unique way of being and believing that

³³² For a detailed discussion see my: Continuity and Change. The Task of Contextualizing Theology in India Today, in: Jnanadeepa. Pune Journal of Religious Studies 12 (2009) 1 & 2, 8-29.

³³³ Panikkar, R., Religion, Philosophy and Culture, in: polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy 1 (2000), 21-22. Also in: Nandan, K. L. ed., The Earth has no Corner. Felicitation Volume on the 70th Birthday of Dr. Karan Singh, Delhi 2001, 195-204.

³³⁴ This does not reduce renunciation to *kenosis* nor *kenosis* to renunciation.

is specific to them. Besides whether we like it or not osmotic and symbiotic processes are ceaselessly at work in all cultures irrespective of human intentionality.

What we see happening all over the globe is the fruit of cultural ignorance and arrogance. Like in other areas here too it is the strongest, the rudest and the ruthless who rule the roost. The weak, the helpless and the poor have little or no chance of survival. A genuine inter-cultural spirituality cannot afford to overlook this. Interculturality brings with it intercultural duties and challenges. Look at the way important movements like Greenpeace and Amnesty International and Human Rights Movements are fully engaged in networking so that our world becomes a little more humane and humans a little more committed to the world.

On the other hand a culture can become aware of some of its characteristics only through intercultural exchange. Only then can it decide for or against their preservation and cultivation. Indeed it is by means of such intercultural dialogue that the self-understanding of cultures can be critiqued, corrected and complemented. From within a culture it is not easy to do this. In view of this, intercultural spirituality is not only possible, not only desirable but absolutely necessary for our growth and survival.³³⁵

One must admit however that the encounter of cultures poses an enormous problem. Cultural chauvinism is far more widespread than one is willing to admit. Not surprisingly then there is not much interest in intercultural encounters. Besides there are hardly any precedents regarding approach, method, goal and the how of learning ways of successful encounters. However difficult all these may be such encounters are the only way for the survival of our cultures.³³⁶

In the last analysis that is why intercultural exchange is indispensable for world-peace – an item sadly neglected by traditional spiritualities which tend to cater to individuals rather than societies and cultures.³³⁷

³³⁵ Panikkar, R., *Cultural Disarmament. The Way to Peace*, Louisville/Ky 1995, 102: "Dialogical dialogue is not dialogue for reaching a solution but is dialogue for being, since I am not without the other. 'Esse est co-esse.'"

³³⁶ Panikkar, R., *Begegnung der Religionen: Das unvermeidliche Gespräch*, in: *Dialog der Religionen* Nr.1 (1991), 9-39.

³³⁷ Panikkar, R., *Cultural Disarmament. The Way to Peace*, Louisville/Ky 1995, 13-28.