The Unknown Christ of Christianity

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Enrico Beltramini

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Scripture and Theology in Panikkar's Early Writings

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For Leonard Fernando, SJ,
who reminded me that prudence is a virtue.

Table of Contents

Foreword

It is high time for another monograph devoted to Raimon Panikkar, the extremely influential pioneer of interreligious dialogue who inspired a generation of scholars to think interculturally about life and religion.

Panikkar was hard to pin down because he defied the categories we typically utilize in order to contextualize a person. He was neither a Westerner nor an Easterner: he was both. His mother was Spanish Catholic and his father was Hindu. His mother was intensely spiritual and philosophical. His father was more practical, making a small fortune in business. Raimon was an ordained Roman Catholic priest, yet he was completely absorbed in Hinduism. For nearly thirty years was even married.

Even with something as basic as citizenship, Panikkar defied simple categorization. At various times in his life he was Spanish, British, and Indian, yet he spent significant time in Germany and Italy studying in their universities and could speak both Italian and German fluently. He is probably best known for his years spent at Harvard University and the University of California in Santa Barbara in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. He became a star in the United States theological constellation, challenging students—in English—to think interreligiously about theology, philosophy, and the human condition.

His mind was as fascinatingly complex as his life. He earned three doctorates, in theology, chemistry, and philosophy. But the most important turning point in

his life was when he traveled to India for the first time while in his mid-thirties. This changed him. The move to India forced him to come to terms with his father's culture, and with the other half of his own Indian identity. It was in this era that Panikkar was shaped to write his now-classic and best-known work: *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, first published in 1964. This book was a revision of his dissertation researched and written at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

Panikkar lived in Rome in the late 1950s and early 1960s—a period that witnessed the most important event in the modern history of the Roman Catholic Church: the Second Vatican Council. Panikkar knew virtually all of the major players, yet was still drawn to India and eventually relocated there. For many years, Panikkar split his time evenly between Varanasi (Benares) and the West—in the cities of Boston, Santa Barbara, Rome, and Barcelona. His list of publications expanded greatly during this era, but grew exponentially upon his retirement from teaching 1987 to living a life of scholarship in Spain, until his death in 2010.

Enrico Beltramini's book is a vital contribution to the scholarship on Panikkar, partly because of parallels between his own life course and Panikkar's. Beltramini shares with Panikkar a cosmopolitan life, three doctoral degrees, and a commitment to the Roman Catholic Church. He is not a Panikkar scholar, and he does not belong to the inner circle of Panikkar's disciples, thus he remains unhindered by previous literature, and free to pursue unique perspectives into Panikkar's life. In this book, Beltramini sheds much light on Panikkar's work by dipping into the biblical background of his theology in order to extract deeper meaning from his position that Christ is unknown to Hindus and Christians alike.

The reader of this book will learn much about Panikkar the man, theologian, philosopher, and Catholic priest. The wide-ranging knowledge displayed in this book is impressive, particularly in the area of biblical scholarship. Beltramini's investigation of Panikkar explores the fundamental premises that inform *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. The result is a wholly admirable mix of rigorous exegesis, mature theological reflection, and sincere empathy for Panikkar. Beltramini states clearly that his thesis—that Panikkar's early works are inspired by new biblical insights (e.g., into Acts 17)—is speculative.

One thing is certain: this book demonstrates that Panikkar used the unknown god and high priesthood of Melchizedek as key ideas in expressing his thoughts. Beltramini analyzes in detail Panikkar's understanding of Melchizedek, and how that archetypal priest from Genesis chapter 14 may have something to say to those engaged in interreligious dialogue today. It is a tantalizing idea to think that God may reach out to non-Christians through some other person or some other means. Panikkar is convinced that the story of Melchizedek in Genesis—and expounded upon in the New Testament Book of Hebrews—has something important to say

to Christians today. There can be no doubt that Beltramini has made a case that challenges standard interpretations of the origin of Panikkar's theology. Panikkar scholars will ultimately determine whether Beltramini has proven his alternative interpretation, or at least made it probable.

For those who are interested in Christian theologies of other religions, or in Panikkar, or in Christian-Hindu relations, this book should be required reading. And if Beltramini is correct, then Panikkar may have discovered something crucial to the understanding of Christ's interaction with the non-Christian world. It is an idea that is attractive—and bursting with hope—for committed Christians who have opened themselves up to the possibility of the Good Shepherd's soteriological activity in pastures of which we know not.

Finally, I heartily commend Beltramini for a job well done. This is a powerful book that should be required reading for those engaged in Panikkar's great corpus on interreligious theology. May this book add fuel to the fires of a new generation of scholars who grapple with the exciting, eclectic, and profound mind of Raimon Panikkar, one of the most passionate and forward-thinking theologians of the 20th century.

Dyron Daughrity
Malibu, California
13 December 2019

Preface

In this book on the early theology of Raimon Panikkar I intentionally avoid the many ongoing debates among scholars about the various and often conflicting assessments of Panikkar's legacy. I am concerned here with one specific question, which is defined at the end of the Introduction, and with crafting a hypothetical answer to that question which, if well-founded, will deepen the significance of Panikkar's early theology with regard to themes such as the Melchizedek priesthood and the unknown Christ of Hindus and Christians. In order to deal effectively with this problem, I was compelled to provide a proper context for Panikkar's early writings. Once this context is conclusively set, the path to understanding his early theology might be clearer.

Since having first read *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* I have been pondering the possibility that in order to understand the book in a way that coincides with Panikkar's own intentions, one must see the thesis of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*—that Christ is unknown to Hindus—as nothing more than the tip of the iceberg. This is the small, noticeable part of the problem, or the part that a reader sees. Below the surface of the text rests a much greater part of the problem, that is, coming to a distinct understanding of the relationship between Christianity and revelation. Panikkar has summarized this relationship through the cryptic phrase that Christ is unknown to Hindus *and* Christians.

To unveil the meaning of this phrase is not an easy task. Panikkar notoriously developed a curious and personal approach with regards to the sources of his thought, a philosophy that basically covers rather than reveals these sources. Thus, the task to unveil the meaning of Panikkar's phrase 'Christ is unknown to Hindus *and* Christians' requires some degree of creativity as far as adopted methodology and a resolve to take some risk. In writing this book, I decided to take seriously Panikkar's remark about his own life acting as a primary source of his writings; I did the same with regard to Panikkar's biblical references included in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, especially Saint Paul's speech of the unknown god mentioned in the final pages of the book. I adopted Scripture, together with theology, as an approach to building a circumstantial case that would eventually disclose the ultimate meaning of the unknown Christ of Christians. The result, eventually speculative, nevertheless is consistent with Panikkar's theology as a whole.

In this book, therefore, I seek nothing more or less than to make accessible Panikkar's ultimate meaning of the Melchizedek priesthood and the unknown Christ of Christianity by reflecting on Panikkar's life and by investigating the biblical scholarship available to Panikkar in those days. The meaning of the argument at the heart of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* has remained partially veiled as a result of the dominant tendency in scholarship to associate Panikkar's early writings with the problems of theology of religions rather than with a precise biblical view, or, as a result of predominant 'theological' interpretations over 'biblical' interpretations. The same can be said of Panikkar's note on the Melchizedek priesthood. Apart from anything else, the present work is a reminder to scholars and ordinary readers of Panikkar that, at least in his early writings, theology and Scripture are to be read together. In this, I have benefitted from conversations with some scholars and members of the clergy in India, whose familiarity with Panikkar has made them aware of just how necessary it is to consider him not only as a philosopher, theologian, and global thinker, but also as a Roman Catholic priest and a reader of biblical material.

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It goes without saying that scholars today are benefitting from a certain blossoming of Panikkarian studies. Apart for the specialized literature I mention in my manuscript, I want to recognize at least two main projects that have been in progress over the last decade. The first is *Raimon Panikkar Opera Omnia* (The Complete Works), under the editorial direction of Milena Carrara Pavan. The second is the work of Centro Interculturale Raimon Panikkar, which as an institute is dedicated to several themes variously inspired by Panikkar's thought. Both projects aim to propagate the scheme of thought that he inaugurated and to manage publications that will disseminate his vision of life. Both projects are led by scholars and friends

of Panikkar who met him, became academic disciples and followers of him, and, in the case of a few, accepted him as their master (teacher). They look at Panikkar not merely from the intellectual point of view, but also from the experiential and lifestyle approach which he espoused. While I endorse the immense contribution that these two projects have already offered to readers and scholars of Panikkar, and I look with empathy and eventually envy at whomever had the opportunity to know him in person, I must make it clear that I wrote this book from outside the circle of Panikkar's immediate disciples.

****

My reluctance to join scholarly debates hardly means that as an author I owe no debts. To the contrary, I am immensely grateful to the many Panikkar scholars from whose work I have silently drawn. While my debt to others in this project is legion, I would offer special thanks to several people. Dyron Daughrity kindly accepted my invitation to write the Foreword. For this, I owe him immeasurable gratitude. I am greatly indebted to the scholars who have shared with me their ideas on Panikkar; they are, in alphabetic order, Maciej Bielawski, Marianne Delaporte, Leonard Fernando, Ron Highfield, and Varghese Manimala. Professor Highfield reviewed the entire manuscript, offered suggestions, and helped me make the final version stronger. Professor Bielawski reviewed a previous version of the text and provided crucial observations, particularly with reference to the biographical portions of the manuscript. I thank Professor Manimala for helping me seeing the connection between biblical sources and Panikkar's idea of a Second Council of Jerusalem. With that said, responsibility of the final manuscript is all mine. A special thanks to scholar Leonardo Marcado, who provided insightful details, among other things, on Fons Raimon Panikkar at the Universitat de Girona. My acknowledgments would be incomplete without offering gratitude to several audiences in Northern California, both academic and ecclesial, who listened to my lectures and engaged in lively discussion about Panikkar's early works. There is no space to list the scores of students at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, California, who have helped me refine my ideas on Panikkar by taking my course on Catholic Imagination. I owe an especially large debt to Sarah Tyrrell, who has read the manuscript with painstaking and mind-numbing literalism. Not only has she saved me from many factual errors, she has also corrected many misinterpretations, often supplying accurate ones in their stead. I want to thank also the staff of Peter Lang for undertaking the publication of the book and for their patience in waiting several years for me to finish it. My final thanks go to my dear wife, who sees me writing early in the morning and late at night and asks no questions. This book is dedicated to Leonard Fernando, an inspiring scholar, administrator, member of the Society of Jesus, and man of God.

Abbreviations

Book and Article Titles

(For complete citations, see the Bibliography at the end of the volume. Books quoted only occasionally are cited in full in the footnotes.)

Meditation	Meditation on Melchizedek
The Unknown	The Unknown Christ of Hinduism
The Unknown 2	The Unknown Christ of Hinduism. Toward an Ecumenical Christophany
Mountain	The Mountain of the Lord
Ascent	Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–1973)
Letters	Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through his Letters

Introduction

I did not live for the sake of writing, but I wrote to live.

Panikkar[1]

Biography

For an author like Raimon Panikkar, who constantly insisted on the priority of life over thought, a biographic sketch is more than a required step in a scholarly work: it is a precious window into his thought.[2] Panikkar himself linked life and intellectual contribution in his foreword to his *Opera Omnia*: "all the writings it is my privilege and responsibility to present here are not the fruit of mere speculation but rather are autobiographical, i.e. firstly they were inspired by a life and praxis which were only molded into writing later on."[3] This pronouncement is particularly appropriate with regard to this study, as the epigraph at the beginning of this Introduction states: Panikkar recognized an existential causality between life and writing: the former and the latter are inseparable. Thus, his life is a prism through which his writings can be approached, although his writings are not necessarily a window into his life.

Raimundo Santiago Carlos Pániker Alemany (known in the academic world as Raimundo, Raymond, or Raimon Panikkar, by the first names and family name

he adopted later in life) was born on November 2, 1918, to an Indian Hindu father (Ramon Pániker) and a Spanish Roman Catholic mother (Maria del Carmen Alemany). His father was an industrialist who built a chemical products business that reached considerable size and provided economic welfare for the entire family. His mother was a member of the Barcelona bourgeoisie, and until her final days maintained a strong interest in philosophy. His father maintained Indian and British dual citizenship, his mother Spanish citizenship, and Raimon himself had the benefit of a British passport in the first part of his life. In different periods of his life, Raimon held Spanish, British, and/or Indian citizenships.

Panikkar spent the first part of his life in Europe, studying in Barcelona, Madrid, and at the University of Bonn in Germany during the Spanish Civil War, where he learned German. When World War II started in 1939, Panikkar returned to Spain and completed the first of three doctorates, this one in philosophy, at the University of Madrid (1946). In 1940 he entered Opus Dei in Barcelona, and in 1946 he was ordained a Roman Catholic (henceforth simply 'Catholic') priest. In that period (1942–1945), he worked in the family business. As a religious priest, he was incardinated into the Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, meaning the prelate of Opus Dei became his bishop. Between 1946 and 1953 he lived in Madrid, Molinoviejo, and Saragossa, mostly engaged in pastoral and editorial offices on behalf of Opus Dei and in teaching duties at several institutions, including the University of Madrid, the Institute of Religious Sciences Leo XIII, and the Institute of Philosophy Luis Vives, all three located in Madrid. In 1953 he moved to Rome to study theology at the Pontifical Lateran University. In 1954 his father, Ramon, died.

In late 1954, when he was already 36, Panikkar visited India, the land of his father, for the first time. He spent three and half years there. He studied Indian philosophy at Maharaja's College, University of Mysore, and at College of Indology, Benares Hindu University. He delivered conference presentations and participated in the life of the local Indian Church. He built important relationships and enduring friendships with Catholic missionaries such as Jules Monchanin (1895-1957), Henri le Saux, also known as Swami Abhishiktānanda (1910–1973), and Bede Griffiths, the English Benedictine monk (1906–1993). Then Panikkar moved back to Europe (1958). In Madrid, he defended his dissertation and received his second doctorate, this one in chemistry (1958). Finally, he settled in Rome, and in 1961 earned a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Lateran University. His dissertation, titled "Religion and Religious on the Meeting of Hinduism and Christianity," was published in 1964 as *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*.

In Rome, Panikkar was primarily a chaplain of the International University Residence, the first Opus Dei college in Italy, a retreat director, and a lecturer

in the department of Philosophy at La Sapienza University. He was in Rome when John XXIII was elected pontiff (1958) as well as during the preparatory period (November 1960–July 1962) and the first session of the Council Vatican II (October 11, 1962–December 8, 1962). In those years, he helped Italian philosopher Enrico Castelli (1900–1977) organize the Enrico Castelli Meetings, a series of regular meetings that Castelli initiated in Rome in the 1950s and often dealing with religious themes. The meetings always occurred in January and offered Panikkar the opportunity to meet theologians such as Jean Daniélou (1905–1974), Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), Karl Rahner (1904–1984), and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988); to build a reputation as philosopher and theologian; and to extend his network of acquaintances inside and outside the Catholic intellectual circles in Rome. On October 23, 1962, at the Collegio Germanico, a debate took place between Karl Rahner and Raimundo Panikkar, moderated by Castelli. During the discussion on a theological and historical theme, Panikkar at a one point affirmed that the Christian of tomorrow would either be a mystic or he won't even exist. This sentence, which originally comes from Panikkar, would later be attributed to Rahner. As a matter of fact, it would become one of Rahner's most famous sentences: "the Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all." By mysticism, Rahner means "a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence."[4] In the last years of his life, Panikkar reclaimed ownership of that sentence.

Panikkar was in Rome when John XXIII died and Paul VI was elected (1963) but probably missed the second session of the Council Vatican II (September 29, 1963–December 4, 1963). In fact, Panikkar spent the last part of 1963 and the beginning of 1964 in Milan, then he moved back to India (1964). While there, he received the offer from La Sapienza University to become an adjunct professor ('libera docenza'); he accepted but never taught there. He applied to become a full professor at Benares Hindu University, but he was not selected. He did not receive specific pastoral or missionary guidelines in India from Opus Dei and was free to focus on academic publications (mostly in Spanish and German, but also in Italian and English) and on pilgrimages. With le Saux—Abhishiktānanda—he reached Gangotri in June 1964, and then Arunachala in January 1965. In January 1966, he flew back to Rome to attend the Castelli Meetings. And while there he met Pope Paul VI, to whom he asked whether to be a conscientious Christian, a Christian needed to be spiritually Semitic and intellectually Hellenic.[5] Then he returned to Varanasi. A few months later, Panikkar flew back to Europe to attend a meeting in Zurich and then another in Rome. In Rome he was summoned by the Opus Dei founder and director, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1902–1975). After that meeting, Panikkar was discharged by Opus Dei (June 18–21, 1966) after 27 years

of membership.[6] Now a secular priest, Panikkar returned to Varanasi, where he received incardination in the Apostolic Prefecture of Gorakhpur-Benares (Varanasi).

In 1966, Panikkar received an invitation from Harvard University, so he flew to Boston in January 1967 and spent three months in Cambridge as a visiting professor. He maintained the same role and the same schedule for five years (1967–1971). He usually moved to Boston in winter, taught in spring, and then returned to Varanasi for the rest of the year (where he lived above a Siva temple by the Ganges), although regularly visiting his family in Barcelona and his friends in Rome. In February 1967, Panikkar's mother, Maria del Carmen Alemany, died. The consequent distribution of family wealth among Raimundo, his sister Mercedes (1920–2012), and his brother Salvador (1927–2017) partially solved Panikkar's financial needs after his exit from Opus Dei. In 1972, he became a professor of compared philosophy of religions at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). During his tenure at UCSB, he created a pool of graduate students who became both the disciples and the first exegetics of his thought. For many years (1972–1987) he taught at UCSB in the spring and spent the rest of the year doing research in India and visiting family and friends in Europe. He never missed the Castelli Meetings during the period 1960 to 1977, with one single exception (1971). In India, he managed a 12-year-long (1964–1976) translation project, compiling an anthology of a thousand pages of texts from the Vedas (*The Vedic Experience: Mantramañjari: An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man*, 1977). He also led innumerable retreats around the world and took part in numerous international conferences as well as consultations for UNESCO and many other academic institutions, and he delivered lectures in dozens of universities. This period is likely one of the more productive of Panikkar's career: several seminal books were published during these years (or at least the original version of these books came into being, where in some instances the title of the book changed), including *The Silence of God. The Answer of the Buddha* (1970), *Worship and Secular Man* (1973), *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (1973), *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross Cultural Studies* (1979), and a revised version of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (1981). In 1973 and 1977, respectively, his friends Abhishiktānanda and Enrico Castelli passed away. In 1975, his master Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer died.

In the early 1980s, when he was still dividing his time between India and the United States, Panikkar decided to return to Spain. He bought a property in Tavertet (about 1983), a small town located in The Guilleries, a mountainous zone next to Barcelona, a peaceful place with a splendid landscape, although it is difficult to access. On December 6, 1984, he contracted a civil marriage with

academic Dr. María Josefa González-Haba (1930–2011). He gradually relocated to Catalonia. Finally, in 1987, upon retiring from UCSB (although maintaining the title of 'Emeritus'), Panikkar took up residency in Tavertet, where he created Vivarium, Centre of Intercultural Studies (today the Vivarium Raimon Panikkar Foundation). In the 23 years to follow, he produced hundreds of academic articles and 34 books (some are revised edition of books published previously), including *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (1993), *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility* (1995), *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace* (1995), *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (1999), *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (2004), and *The Rhythm of Being. The Gifford Lectures* (2009). In early 1990s, José María Guix Ferreres, bishop of Vic and ordinary of the town of Tavertet, heard about Panikkar's marriage and suspended his priestly faculties (suspension *ad divinis*) in his diocese. Bishop Patrick D'Souza (Diocese of Varanasi) satisfactorily settled in Rome the matter of Panikkar's marriage in 2008. Panikkar died on August 26, 2010, at 5:30 p.m., fully reconciled with the Church.

Legacy

Panikkar earned three doctorates, taught at Harvard University (1966–1971) and UC Santa Barbara (1971–1987), and received prestigious awards such as the "Premio spagnolo di letteratura." (1961), Creu de Sant Jordi de la Generalitat de Catalunya (1999), an appointment as "Chevalier des Art set des Lettres" from the French government (2000), Medaglia della Presidenza della Repubblica Italiana (2001), and Premio Nonino 2001 'A un maestro del nostro tempo.' More importantly, in 1989, he delivered his Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh.

He published more than 40 books (sometime in multiple editions and translations) and contributed to major translations of the Vedas, a body of Hindu Scripture. His books include: *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery (2006), Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (2004); *Intrareligious Dialogue* (1999); *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation* (1995); *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (1993); *Pluralism and Oppression: Theology in World Perspective (1991); Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (1989); *Vedic Experience* (1977); and *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (1973). He also published 500-plus academic articles in which he showed his unique ability for multi-dimensional analysis, approaching topics and events simultaneously as a philosopher, a theologian, and a linguistic scholar. His acquaintance with the worlds of learning and religious and philosophical reflection are available across more than a dozen

languages made his writings fascinating and compelling at the same time. His intellectual contribution in the fields of philosophy of religion and theology of religions is paramount and indisputable.

His enormous body of work centers on the idea of a redefinition of Christ and Christianity's relationship with Him. More precisely, it centers on a form of Christianity no longer anchored to the historical Jesus. The universal mystery who is outside all history, at the origin of everything, cannot be limited. Every attempt of this kind reduces Jesus himself to an historical event. Panikkar addressed two sub-themes: (1) a form of Christianity based on an integral (i.e., cosmotheantric) vision of reality and (2) a Catholic Church no longer anchored to a Mediterranean mindset. Panikkar announced this new form of Christianity with sentences like this:

> To the third Christian millennium is reserved the task of overcoming a tribal Christology by a Christophany which allows Christians to see the work of Christ everywhere, without assuming that they have a better grasp or a monopoly of that Mystery, which has been revealed to them in a unique way.[7]

Panikkar described this Catholic world no longer imprisoned in its original Greek-Semitic synthesis in dozens of books and hundreds of articles, sometimes with intersections, sometimes in isolation. In his word

> It is possible to start from a concept of being different from the Hellenic and Western, and then the setting would obviously be different … There is a Hindu metaphysics that allows a formulation of the Christian dogma starting from other initial metaphysical postulates that (*i.e., the formulation—editor's note*) does not exclude those occidental, but it does not even coincide with them.[8]

It seems that, according to Panikkar, the third Christian millennium implies a breaking away from Christian institutions in general, and from the Catholic Church in particular, in favor of post-institutional mysticism and charismatic impulse, which are the agents of evolution within the Church as well as the vital principles of a Christianity beyond the confines of creeds and dogmas. Panikkar envisions a new post-Pentecostal future—a post-Pentecostal era that is not a return to the original one—dominated by a genuine quest for an integrated spirituality, a spirituality that crosses cultural, mythical, and religious boundaries in order to realize the fullness of human destiny.[9] These theological ideas provide the basis of his reputation as a cutting-edge theologian, a scholar who creates the intellectual infrastructure for a genuine world Christianity, a thinker who is projecting the future of Catholicism beyond the narrowness of what he called 'microdoxy.' With that terms he means, "the desire to enclose orthodoxy in small truths, narrow concepts, refusing to open oneself to deeper interpretations."[10] He

has been considered by some the initiator of a form of thought or at least of a kind of reflection which is very congenial to the third millennium. Ewert Cousins, editor of the 25-volume World-Spirituality series, called Panikkar a 'mutation' man. This expression, in scholar Clemens Mendonca's words, "means that the next step in the Human's future has already begun in Panikkar. How human beings will think in the coming future has already been illustrated in the person of Panikkar."[11]

The assimilation of the monumental work of Raymond Panikkar has only just begun, and the final result is still unknown. Will Panikkar really become one of the foundational thinkers of this post-Christendom and even post-Christian era, despite a life intentionally lived in the *limes*, on the frontier of the Catholic Church? Or will his complex and at times controversial personal journey ultimately undermine the integration within orthodoxy of his otherwise powerful intellectual contribution to Catholicism? This book does not answer this question, although it keeps an eye open to it. A study on Panikkar—this is my belief—is worthy only if Panikkar is an acceptable guide and a reliable source for all, including Catholics. In Panikkar, for sure, the dual inherent combination of the secular priest (the priest who embraces secular patterns) and the priestly secular (the secular who embodies sacerdotal worldviews) complicates a serene and total assessment of this important figure of contemporary Catholicism. More on this, soon.

A priest in the Roman Catholic Church, Panikkar took religious vows in the form of the three evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty, and chastity. For most of his adult life, he was left free to pursue his intellectual interests and conduct the kind of life he preferred. For twenty years, Panikkar was a religious, not a diocesan, priest; in fact, he belonged to Opus Dei and received duty assignments from his superiors in his religious order. He received duty assignments before his first trip to India (1954) and during his period in Europe between the first and the second trips to India (1958–1964). However, he was allowed to go to India, the first time in 1954 and the second in 1964, to pursue vague interests in the name of Opus Dei, practically free to follow his intellectual interests. He still needed, however, approval from the Opus Dei curia in Rome for any trip outside Asia. With the gradual blurring of his connection with Opus Dei, starting with his second trip to India, he disengaged from the pastoral duties he observed in that religious order. After he left Opus Dei, he was not assigned diocesan duties.

During his life, Panikkar faced minimal to no financial troubles. His father was the owner of a chemical company and the family was relatively wealthy. During his 20 years of priesthood inside Opus Dei, he received a salary and was left free by Escrivá de Balaguer himself to "freely dispose, according to his conscience, of the income he has for his priestly work, for his publications, donations, etc."[12] The more he distanced himself from Opus Dei, the more he relied on his own finances to support himself. Upon his mother's death in 1967, he received his share of

a family inheritance, making it possible to purchase properties in India (a small apartment in Kodaikanal and Abhishiktānanda's *kutiya* at Gyansu), the United States (a residence in Montecito), and in Spain (his house and the building hosting Vivarium in Tavertet, a small apartment in Vic). He generously used part of his money for charity, helping the poor and sustaining people in trouble.

Panikkar famously got married later in life. In 1984, María Josefa González-Haba became his wife in a civil ceremony in Madrid.[13] Panikkar was 64 and María González 52. They had known each other for 36 years prior to the wedding and lived together in Tavertet for about ten years; she occasionally accompanied him to some conferences around the world, including his Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh. The couple also adopted two Indian orphan siblings, a boy and a girl (although only the girl decided to make Spain her final residence), and they never divorced. The relationship remained discrete and did not create scandal. Problems arose only when Bishop José María Guix Ferreres reminded Panikkar that he could not exercise the sacred orders for having attempted marriage (the marriage of a priest is not valid according to the canon law), a crime that implies the suspension *ad divinis*. Because of his irregular canonical situation, Panikkar could not exercise the sacred orders inside the diocese of Vic. Panikkar never ceased functioning as a priest outside the diocese of Vic; moreover, he was still a canonically incardinated priest in the Indian diocese of Varanasi. In the attempt to satisfy Bishop Guix Ferreres' critiques, Maria and the two adopted children moved to live in the building hosting Vivarium. In the later 1990s, Maria showed a slow decline in memory, thinking, and reasoning skills so she moved to Vic where she lived with her adopted daughter, Maria, and passed away in 2011. In 2003, Romà Casanova was appointed the new bishop of Vic and conversations started toward resolving Panikkar's situation. Under the supervision of the Holy See, the concurrent efforts of the parish priest of Tavertet, the bishop of Varanasi, the reluctant bishop of Vic, and Panikkar himself began to sort out his situation. On February 15, 2008, there was a public declaration of Panikkar, who regretted his own scandalous conduct. After the retraction, the bishop of Vic lifted the suspension. Panikkar died at his home in Tavertet, near Barcelona, on August 26, 2010.

Panikkar's Unknown Christ

Raimon Panikkar is widely recognized as one of the most accomplished and influential Catholic theologians of the second half of the 20th century.[14] He was convinced that his theology was simply a refinement of his meditation, and his meditation, in turn, a fundamental part of his life. Sound theology, for Panikkar,

was a theology that comes out of experience. To put it differently, his thought was integral to his life. In turn, the degree of refinement in his arguments, the sophistication of his writing style, and the propensity on his side to deal with subjects of enormous complexity—examples of these sophistication and complexity are his writings on the mysticism of Jesus the Christ—make the interpretation of his thought extremely compelling.[15] It is easy to pretend to have reached the core of Panikkar's argument while in effect one has only scratched the surface.

A remarkable man, a creative theologian, and an erudite philosopher, friends and scholars have widely recognized Panikkar as one who pursued, across his entire career, one singular purpose: to provide a vocabulary to Catholicism in an age of religious dialogue and eventually to facilitate a needed shift in Catholicism's center of gravity, from the West to the East.[16] He acknowledged that the present organization of Christianity, or at least of Catholicism, is inconsistent with the *Zeitgeist* shining on this era, as well as on the true spirit of Catholicism. He believed that the symbols of Christ and the Church have been powerful and engaging, but by turning in on themselves, they lost their force. The Christic and ecclesial myths should be replaced by symbols that are more powerful, more universal, and yet less remote to modern hearts. Some adjustments, not necessary in the field of dogmatic theology, are required. The supreme tasks of Panikkar's scholarship, according to many, was to give a soul to the growing world-consciousness of Christians and to develop theological ideas necessary for a peaceful expression of Christianity in a world community. Within this great work of creating a new pattern of living and thinking (where Panikkar would probably emphasize the former), some of his fundamental insights seem to be particularly relevant and precious, and scholars are currently working on them.[17]

One particular insight is included in an early work, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (henceforth '*The Unknown*'), originally his doctoral dissertation at the Pontificial Lateran University in Rome, then later the book that projected Panikkar into celebrity.[18] After the publication of *The Unknown*, in fact, invitations followed to install Panikkar as Visiting Professor at Harvard (1967–1971), at the University of Montréal (1968), and Professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara (1971–1985). *The Unknown* is a remarkable book, definitively Panikkaresque in its apparent easiness, highly philosophical finesse, and stylish elegance. It is, in effect, a difficult and penetrating book that is divided into three chapters: in the first, Panikkar sets the groundwork for the encounter between Christian religion and Hindu thought, which is neither cultural nor doctrinal, but experiential. In the second, he offers an analysis of the Hindu-Christian relationship in general. In the last, Panikkar concludes with a Christian meditation on a Sanskrit text. In summary, the study is a comparative reflection in both Thomistic and Vedantic

fashion on such texts as the Book of Acts (or 'Acts') 14:16–17, Acts 17:23, and *Brahma Sutra* 1:1.2. In the view of many scholars, Panikkar concludes his work by saying that Christ is already present, although hidden, in Hinduism; Christ is already present and revealed in Christianity, and therefore the work of Christians in India is that of unveiling the hidden Christ of Hinduism. This conclusion has been considered the main argument of *The Unknown*. In the following years and decades, however, this simple and straightforward interpretation of *The Unknown* was dismissed by Panikkar himself, who claimed that he meant something else.

The Unknown has been traditionally addressed in the context of the interfaith dialogue (here understood *latu sensu*, that is, including streams of interreligious dialogue, theology and philosophy of religions, and Indian Christian theology) and Christology. In a review of *The Unknown*, Klaus Klostermaier (b. 1933), a scholar of Hinduism, recognizes the sincerity and originality of Panikkar's work, lists the shortcomings, and concludes that the author is "revealing some quite interesting facts, but on the whole perhaps going rather too far with it."[19] Other scholars focused their comments on the role assigned to Shankara's Vedanta, similar to that of Aristotle for Christian scholasticism. They also highlighted the role of Īśvara—a term used in Hinduism to designate a supreme personal god—as the connection between God and world in terms functionally analogous to the cosmic role of Christ in Christianity. In his remarkable *Indian Christian Theology*, Robin Boyd (1924–2018), an expert in Indian Christianity, provides a synopsis of the book; then, he argues that Panikkar sustains that Hinduism is "an effective means of salvation and union with God, precisely *because* of the hidden presence of Christ within it" (original emphasis).[20] Boyd claims that Panikkar's core argument in *The Unknown* is the identification of Christ with Īśvara, who is the true revealer of Brahman, the pointer to Brahman, the personal aspect of Brahman. He is the agent of creation, consciously God Himself, yet himself fully Brahman. Thus, assuming an ontological equality between Christ and the Father on one hand, and Īśvara and Brahman on the other, this identification of Christ with Īśvara—this is Boyd's reading of *The Unknown*—helps us to see how "under the Īśvara of Hinduism the hidden Christ is waiting to be revealed."[21] After framing this argument, Boyd traces the almost inevitable conclusion: in *The Unknown*, Christ is invisibly present in Hinduism, and because of this hidden presence, Hinduism is an effective vehicle of salvation. In Christianity, however, Christ is not hidden, but rather fully revealed; accordingly, the work of Christian mission is to unveil the hidden Christ of Hinduism, so that the 'risen Hinduism,' the Hinduism that is fully aware of the presence of Christ and that embraces His revelation, turns, in fact, into Christianity.[22]

An authoritative comment from philosopher Joseph Prabhu, written much later, in 2010, eventually brings to completion Boyd's original insight. Of course,

Prabhu enjoyed the advantage of looking upon *The Unknown* from the privileged position of a scholar who spent decades on the text. Prabhu also had the chance to match notes with Panikkar, who was his friend and mentor. According to Prabhu, Panikkar's argument in *The Unknown* can be summarized as follows:

> Christ … [is] not, so Panikkar argues, the monopoly or exclusive property of Christianity seen as a historical religion. Rather, Christ is the universal symbol of divine-human unity, the human face of God. Christianity approaches Christ in a particular and unique way, informed by its own history and spiritual evolution. But Christ vastly transcends Christianity. Panikkar calls the name 'Christ' the 'Supername,' in line with St. Paul's "name above every name" (Phil 2:9), because it is a name that can and must assume other names, like Rama or Krishna or Ishvara.[23]

This is a brief but sophisticated interpretation of *The Unknown* against the background of Panikkar's entire scholarship, an interpretation of which scholars these days would agree.

More recently, Panikkar's early theology of religion (or simply 'theology') has been approached through the lens of *Dominus Iesus*, a declaration issued in 2001 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—the institutional body within Catholicism that is responsible for promulgating and defending Catholic doctrine. The declaration establishes important rules on the correct nature of the Christian encounter with people of non-Christian religions. In a post-*Dominus Iesus* age, Erik Ranstrom writes, Panikkar's early Christology is worthy of serious attention in the domain of interreligious dialogue. In his early works, in fact, Panikkar promoted a paradigm shift in scholarly understanding of the uniqueness and centrality of Jesus with regard to Hinduism, without stepping outside the parameters set by *Dominus Iesus*. In order to offer a better understanding of early Panikkar, Ranstrom addresses *The Unknown* in connection to Panikkar's lesser-known essays from the 1950s and 1960s, including one particular reflection on the figure of Melchizedek (*Meditation on Melchizedek*—henceforth *Meditation*).[24] Then, Ranstrom explains in theological terms why Panikkar's early writings are an orthodox resource for theologians committed to Hindu-Christian dialogue and why late Panikkar works, including the revised versions of *The Unknown*, are not.[25] In his essay, therefore, Ranstrom recommends scholars focus on Panikkar's early scholarship in light of *Dominus Iesus*.

A Problem of Interpretation

The Unknown is a fine book, a comparative study of religions with a tenuous, eventually enigmatic argument that seems unable to attract unanimous scholarly

consensus. Boyd's review of *The Unknown* carries what can be seen as a classic interpretation of *The Unknown*'s thesis: Christ is hidden in Hinduism and fully revealed in Christianity. Not all scholars are satisfied with this interpretation, however. Some prefer to link *The Unknown* to contemporary efforts to develop a planetary theology. Eric J. Sharpe (1933–2000), for example, places *The Unknown* in the category of works on the 'anonymous Christians,' together with Karl Rahner's, Anita Roper's, and Eugene Hillman's writings.[26] According to some commentators, *The Unknown* can be seen as an initial step in Panikkar's long engagement with the notion of the Cosmic Christ, that is, the central role of Christ in the creative work of God as emerging from some passages in Paul (i.e., Romans 8:19–23, Colossians 1:15–20, and Ephesians 1:9–10, 22–23) and John (i.e., 1:1–5) in which the universal meaning of the Christic mystery is explored. In *The Unknown*, this is the argument, there is already *in nuce* Panikkar's emphasis on the cosmic dimension of Christ, which he would eventually develop more fully in later writings (I will briefly address this literature in the last chapters).

Finally, some scholars believe that the interrelated issue of a sophisticated theme to explore and the need to express it adequately resulted in Panikkar adopting a cryptic style for *The Unknown*, a style which proves more evocative than explanatory. In the decades after its publication, these scholars concentrated their attention on the title and declared it vague, ambiguous, and eventually apocalyptic, then they asked Panikkar to clarify his position. Panikkar recognized this issue and obliged—a number of times. In 1981 he published a second, revised and enlarged edition of *The Unknown* (henceforth, '*The Unknown 2*').[27] This subsequent version includes a first introduction (written in 1976) plus a preface and a second introduction written in 1979. In the preface, Panikkar declared that among the reasons why this second edition was produced was, "to make explicit what was written *too cryptically* in the first version" (emphasis added).[28] In the second introduction, then, he clarified that in his book he is not implying that those aspects of Christ that are unknown to Hinduism are in effect known to Christianity. Rather, he is referring to those aspects of Christ that remain unknown to Christians and Hindus alike.[29]

Unfortunately, the new edition did not help clarify the original thesis and failed to put the debate to rest. Some scholars did not accept Panikkar's declaration that his argument remains constant between the first and second edition of *The Unknown*. They considered the second edition not a simple stylistic improvement of the original, but rather a progress in Panikkar's thought, if not a departure from the original version. A case in point is Jacques Dupuis (1923–2004), who has distinguished between Panikkar's Christology in the original and in the revised and enlarged editions of *The Unknown*.[30] Scholars like Dupuis, Jyri Komulainen (b. 1968), Gavin D'Costa (b. 1958), Cheriyan Menacherry, and the

already-mentioned Ranstrom—although from distinct angles and with different levels of originality—take note of Panikkar's explanation, but believe the thesis of *The Unknown 2* is a convenient reframing of the original thesis.[31] A case in point is Komulainen's statement that

> The first edition [of *The Unknown*] is clearly representative of the inclusivistic theology of religions, since at that time Panikkar still understood Christ to be the reality in which Hinduism was obliged to die and resurrect in order to be transformed. In [the second edition] he vehemently dismisses this kind of unequal relationship between Hinduism and Christianity.[32]

Komulainen claims that scholars should pay attention to the difference between earlier inclusivistic and later pluralistic material. The second edition of *The Unknown*, in his view, marks the decisive pluralistic turn in Panikkar's theology of religions in which, in Panikkar's words, Christ is unknown to Hindus and Christians alike. Scholars like Dupuis, Komulainen, D'Costa, Menacherry, and Ranstrom count not one but two distinct arguments, one coming out of the first edition of *The Unknown* and the other from the revised edition.[33] As said, Ranstrom argues specifically that only the former matches the theological requirements established by *Dominus Iesus*.

In sum, some scholars believe that *The Unknown* is ambiguous and reveals less than it conceals; others postulate that not one, but two contributions have been offered in the two editions of *The Unknown*. Panikkar states that the contribution is a single one, and that it is not what most scholars believe it is. Almost 25 years after the publication of the revised edition, Panikkar returned to the issue: he noticed that "my book *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964) … has at times *been misunderstood* as if it were speaking of the Christ known to Christians and unknown to Hindus. The 'unknown Christ of Hinduism' is unknown *at fortiori* to Christians" (emphasis added).[34]

These continued insistences on his argument, Panikkar's repeated attempts to elucidate his thought and refine his theology of *The Unknown*, should suffice to show that *The Unknown* is not only an innovative piece of scholarship, but also a difficult book, with a subtly framed thesis.[35] No surprise, *The Unknown* is also a controversial book, a source of relevant and continual dispute. One problem is the title, which is not simply a beautiful and evocative reminiscence of the Pauline encounter with the unknown God of the Greeks, but also—in Panikkar's words—the condensate of his thesis.[36] Over the years, the title—more than the book—has become the precipitate of Panikkar's position, a position that the author has explained, maintained (in his opinion), and (according to some scholars) eventually changed; still, the title never managed to unleash the full meaning of Panikkar's

position nor make it fully comprehensible. This position, the meaning of Panikkar's statement that the presence of Christ is hidden and unknown in Hinduism *and* Christianity, that is, the thesis of the unknown Christ (henceforth 'thesis, or 'thesis of *The Unknown*,' or 'unknown Christ' or 'thesis of the unknown Christ'), is one of the targets of this work.

This Study

As the readers should be aware at this point, the subject of this book is Panikkar's early writings, investigated through a study of *The Unknown* and, as I will explain soon, of *Meditation*, one of Panikkar's essays on the pre-mosaic figure of Melchizedek. Because of the monumental significance of *The Unknown* in early Panikkar, readers may expect an unproportional distribution of attention between *The Unknown* and *Meditation*. With regard to *The Unknown*, the focus is centered on the thesis of the unknown Christ. I am concerned with the meaning of Panikkar's thesis (what he meant with the title *Unknown Christ* and with his statement that Christ is hidden to both Hindus and Christians). I argue that, once placed against a proper context, the thesis will become crystal clear and a debate that has been ongoing for half a century will put to rest. However, this book's concern is not only limited to the declared thesis: it also focuses on the Melchizedek priesthood as presented in *Meditation*. While *Meditation* can be used, as Ranstrom did, as a prism through which the ultimate meaning of *The Unknown* can be better penetrated, it can also be used to prove that the chosen background, what I call 'proper context,' a theological as well as biblical scholarly background, effectively discloses and unveils meanings otherwise unreachable by theological investigation alone. Finally, *Meditation* stands on its own as a fine work of theology, and it deserves to be evaluated as such. In this study I go both ways, that is, I analyze *Meditation* on its own merits and use it as a way to expand my argument and prove the validity of the chosen context. In summary, the focus of this study rests on two elements—that is, the thesis, the Melchizedek priesthood—of Panikkar's early writings in which the link between theology and biblical sources seems quite relevant.

While the numerous attempts to find a central or focal point in Panikkar's theology of religions have yielded many an insight to his thought, the quest for a central key to unlock the meaning of the thesis of *The Unknown* has nonetheless remained elusive. One reason, no doubt, is simply the complexity of Panikkar's arguments. Another is a sort of stratification of the growing body of scholarly interpretations. Panikkar returned to *The Unknown* and published a revised and

enlarged edition, correcting—in his opinion—or departing from—in the opinion of some scholars—his original thesis. Nevertheless, the ambiguity about the meaning of the unknown Christ remains. Thus, despite the valiant efforts of friends and commentators to unveil the ultimate meaning of *The Unknown*, a disagreement persists among scholars, on one hand, and between scholars and Panikkar on the other. The original meaning as it was intended by Panikkar confronts scholars like geological specimens in situ, and in the process of chipping them free from their original locations, one possible outcome is the imposition on them of a frame that reflects the preoccupations not of their author but of his critics. Scholars can too easily forget the historical and cultural matrix in which *The Unknown* took shape. How is this to be avoided? In the case of Panikkar, I suggest grounding the inquiry in one key question: what problem of theology did Panikkar himself already have in mind, even before he ever started writing *The Unknown* and *Meditation*, for which he hoped to find a solution through *The Unknown*?

Here I arrive at the nodal point for posing my argument. I am sure that *The Unknown* has to do with the relation of other religious traditions to Christianity (and vice versa), but not in the sense of advocating a certain theological position regarding Christianity's view of other religions. To put it differently, *The Unknown* is not concerned with inclusivism, pluralism, or other approaches or paradigms to consider the place of other religions. The specific problem for which Panikkar hoped to offer a solution through his writings was, in effect, not a problem of approach, but of unreadiness: Hinduism and Christianity are not ready for the meeting. This unreadiness refers to both the coming of India to Christ and to the Church on one side, and to the Christians who will receive India on the other. Both India, which would become a Christian country, and Christians, who would receive it, share the same status of unreadiness, although their unreadiness is different: India has yet to receive revelation while Christians have yet to understand revelation to the point of being able to receive India. A purification of Hinduism as well as Christianity is required before the two religions can meet at the only possible point of the encounter. They need conversion: conversion means—as Panikkar promptly explained at the very beginning of *The Unknown*—"a changing 'in,' a changing into a new life, a new existence, a new creation" (p. 18). *The Unknown* is a call for conversion of both Hinduism and Christianity, although in the book only the case of the former is explicitly considered. This statement is, of course, only an approximate statement. A more precise declaration would work like this: *The Unknown* is a book about a meeting (the delicate and sound section of chapter two in which Panikkar develops his main ideas around the word 'and'). This meeting, of course, is about Hinduism and Christianity. The encounter at the meeting point, Panikkar noted, "must be mutual" (p. 4). In his book, Panikkar points out

that for a true Hindu-Christian encounter, neither a purely cultural nor a doctrinal platform for the meeting will suffice; he puts the emphasis on the existential level (pages 6–11). This existential level, however, cannot be understood in terms of either experience or psycho-physical existence, rather "ontic-intentional stratus," as Panikkar explains (pages 5 and 11–13). This existential level is the sacramental status of reality in which human existence has already been granted by grace. The whole line of thought may seem to take things too far, but it is sound Catholic theology. If one knows well Henri de Lubac's *Supernatural*, one easily gets what Panikkar is saying here (I will discuss this point at length later). Then Panikkar turns his attention to what he calls the 'analogical level,' the level of the essential reality of concepts, and he explains that he considers this level "as feasible and fruitful" as the existential level (pages 68–69). He dedicates the third chapter, the longest and the most technical, to illustrating his point through a Christian meditation on a Sanskrit text. All of this is well-known among Panikkar scholars.

In the first chapter of *The Unknown*, named 'Encounter with India,' Panikkar illustrates his main point: the meeting ground of Hinduism and Christianity is in Christ (p. 16). One sentence from this chapter illustrates well both the author's position and his style: "We all meet in God. God is not only everywhere but everything is in him, and we, including all our striving and actions, are *of* him, *in* him, *from* him, *to* him" (original emphasis, p. 16). Hindus and Christians can meet at existential and analogical levels, but in the end, the real point of the encounter is, in the words of Gregory of Sinai who Panikkar quotes in his Foreword, where "instead of a book it [i.e., the mind] has the Spirit, instead of a pen, thought and tongue" (xiii). It is only at the very Source, that is, in Christ, that Hinduism and Christianity will meet. Both Hinduism and Christianity will meet in Christ. And it is in this unique place of meeting, beyond all a place of spirit and truth, that India will be received into the depths of the Church of Christ, when the Church of Christ has finally realized the mystery of her Source. Christianity must be ready not to give to India, but to receive India. And Christianity, according to Panikkar, is not ready for that; in fact, he contended that Christianity is, in effect, far from being ready. This status of unreadiness should have been clear enough in his mind by the early 1960s, especially since he had already felt compelled to write in the Foreword of the first edition of *The Unknown* about a volume titled 'The Unknown Christ of Christianity.' The unknown Christ is unknown to Hindus, who have yet to receive revelation, and at fortiori to Christians, who have yet to go deeper into the data of revelation to be ready to receive India. *The Unknown* is focused on the Christ that is at work in India, unknown to the Hindus. "Christ is there in Hinduism," Panikkar claims, "but Hinduism is not yet is spouse" (p. 17). But, Panikkar argued, he has still to complete another study, a volume called "The Unknown Christ of

Christianity."[37] The unknown Christ of Christianity is the plastic representation of the gap that still exists in Christians' comprehension of Christ's Mystery that goes beyond Jesus Christ, a gap that precludes Christianity to receive (i.e., meet in Christ) Hinduism. What is needed, Panikkar illustrates in the first pages of his book, is a conversion (p. 18). In order for Hindus and Christians to meet in Christ, they must pass through a time of purification (healing, purgation, conversion). In other works, he will call it metanoia, liberation, or a new innocence.

The classic thesis of *The Unknown*—that Christ is unknown to Hindus—is nothing more than the tip of the iceberg, the part that alone could never sink the Titanic. What Panikkar wants to sink is the presumption, of Christians themselves, that they are ready to meet Hinduism in Christ. Yes, he says, Hindus and Christians are meeting each other at an existential and analogical level, and this encounter is "feasible and fruitful." But neither Hindus nor Christians have yet set foot on the level of change of heart, the level of 'being in Christ.' Christians have not yet reached a greater depth of the Christian revelation; they have not yet articulated an interpretation of the revelation that is more genuine, more transparent, and more universal. Christians are not yet ready for a meeting with Hinduism in the abysses of the ultimate Mystery, and so the Lord keeps the Hindus as a prophetic witness.[38]

A fundamental assumption informs and sustains the whole architecture of *The Unknown*: there is the level of rites, and there is the level of the Spirit (although the level of rites and the level of the Spirit belong to the same reality. They are two orders of the same reality, united in distinction). Hinduism and Christianity are already meeting at the level of rites but are not ready to meet at the level of the Spirit (or, it could be said that they are not ready to meet in the mystery of the sacramental unity of the two orders, which is Christ). The status of the unreadiness of Hinduism, of course, is a problem of access to revelation; the status of the unreadiness of Christianity, instead, has to do with a much greater ecclesiological question that I will introduce soon. Here it is sufficient to note that Panikkar argues that Christians "should seek God" (Acts 17: 27), but they don't because they believe that they have already found Him. And because Christians believe that they have already found Him, they transformed a wind of the Spirit into an edifice of laws and rituals, in which they worship God as He was *their* god. Christians have access to the truth (what to believe and how to show it), but, Pannikar notes, have not necessarily reached the truth, and they certainly do not own the truth. So, how can Christians expect to convert India? Here is another way of putting it: Christianity should be a nation of priests who mediate between God and the nations (the non-Christians). Christians should bridge the gap between God and non-Christians so that the former can attract the latter. This is true with regards

to all non-Christians, including the habitants of India. Unfortunately, and this is Panikkar's position, Christians are administrators of rituals before *their* God. How can Indians be attracted by God? How can Christians convert India?

Thus, the hypothesis to which my analysis begins is, quite simply, that the unknown Christ of Hinduism *and* Christianity was the problem with which Panikkar was originally preoccupied, a problem that determined the goal at which the writing of his *The Unknown* was directed. Like an iceberg, *The Unknown* is made of one section that can be seen while the rest is submerged; in his main text, Panikkar talks about what one can see, but in his Foreword he warns that what one cannot see is far more important. When Panikkar takes immense pains to delimit the existential and analogical levels of meeting, it is not the coastline of that island that he is bent on surveying with such meticulous accuracy, but the boundary of the ocean.

The Unknown is about the meeting of Hinduism and Christianity at the level of rites. In fact, both Hinduism and Christianity are not ready to meet at the level of the Spirit, that is, at the source of both religions, with Christ as that source. The meeting at the level of the Spirit can only happen in Christ. And Hinduism and Christianity are not ready to meet at the level of the Spirit because they are still at the level of rites. In Panikkar's view, Christianity's unreadiness is the consequence of a much greater ecclesiological question, that is, the interpretation of Christ at the level of rites rather than at the level of the Spirit. This interpretation (maybe I should say, misinterpretation) is mirrored in (1) the transformation of the gospel in a religion, and (2) the heritage from Judaism of a narrow interpretation of God as a national god. When a link is established between the book and the ecclesiological problem, then the thesis of the unknown, as I called it, reveals itself to be quite naturally true. The ecclesiological question refers to a profound misunderstanding affecting the Christian interpretation of the nature of the fundamental Christian fact, that is, the incarnation of Christ in time and space. Once Christ is worshiped at the level of rites, He is transformed into a national god. At this point it should be recalled that Panikkar claimed at the end of *The Unknown* that

> Saint Paul had to opposite fronts to fight against in order to defend the Christian position. On a one hand, the Jews, even when converted to Christianity, had a tendency to make Christianity into a reformed sect of Judaism. The Greeks, on the other hand, were inclined to absorb Christianity into a kind of gnosis. (pages 137–138)

Christianity risked either to replace Israel or to become another religion. "The reaction of Paul," Panikkar continued, was to show Christ as "the 'Pantocrator,' the cosmic redeemer," the Cosmic Christ.[39] But the Church did not, in effect, embrace

the Cosmic Christ. The Cosmic Christ was, ultimately, the road not taken. For Panikkar, Christianity escaped the risk of becoming a stream of Judaism: this was the output of the Council of Jerusalem. But it did not escape the risk to become another religion. Soon Christians forgot that Jesus came to bring the Kingdom and rather fell into the temptation to erect a religion and to worship *their* God.

Later in life, Panikkar explained in an innumerable number of essays and books that the incarnation was a tranhistorical event. It began at the beginning of time, at the beginning of creation; it manifested itself in the event of Jesus; and it continues until the end of time. Panikkar pointed out that incarnation "continues unfolding, renewing itself, and being reenacted in space and time in the hearts of the believers."[40] For Panikkar, the divine sonship is thought radically, in terms of a spiritual dynamic that every Christian can potentially relive by opening up to the Spirit, who is Christ. This is well-known to Panikkar scholars. My point is that this Christological reflection was already at work in *The Unknown*. More precisely, the difference between Christ at the level of rites (i.e., the national, tribal Christ, the known Christ) and Christ at the level of the Spirit (or, as I already mentioned, in the fullness of the mystery of the sacramental unity, i.e., the Cosmic Christ, the spiritual reality of the Kingdom) is the appropriate context of *The Unknown*.

The Unknown is about a meeting of Hindus and Christians that cannot be celebrated at this time for several reasons, including the fact that Christians worship a known, tribal god, rather than seeking the spiritual kingdom of God. Panikkar's close friend Abhishiktānanda shared Panikkar's view on the unreadiness of Christianity to the point that he literally used the same words: "it is only at the very source that the Meeting takes place," and the source is Christ.[41] But he is more dramatic in his conclusion: Christianity is not ready for this meeting in Christ with Hinduism because Christianity is separated from the Source.[42] Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda articulated in distinct fashions not only the status of unreadiness of Christianity but also that much greater ecclesiological question; they developed their theses in different phases and eventually reached different levels of profundity. Still, it is indisputable that they shared the same position.

Meditation deals with a certain aspect on the ecclesiological question, that of the difference between the priest of rites and the priest in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Here Panikkar applied the already framed difference between Christians worshiping a known, tribal god, rather than seeking the spiritual kingdom of God, to priesthood. The priests of rites belong to Christianity as understood as a specific religion, with its laws and rites, rules and boundaries, narrowness and parochialism. The priests in spirit, whether he belongs to Christianity or another religion, radiate the pure light of the kingdom.

Conclusion

Over the past five decades, the trend in Panikkar research was to lean into his later theological development, while considering his early theological works less relevant. Thanks to a new breed of scholars, who consider Panikkar's later theology less consistent with the required limits suggested by the Magisterium, attention has shifted to Panikkar's early theology, especially the first edition of *The Unknown*. Still, the significance of the central thesis of *The Unknown*, what I called the significance of the unknown Christ, remains unsolved. This book attempts to solve that problem. Before setting this study in motion, however, more preliminary details are needed. The next chapter is an expansion of the first.

Notes

1. Raimon Panikkar, *Opera Omnia*, Author's Foreword. See http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/opera-omnia-editorial.html (Accessed August 17, 2019).
2. In this book I use Raimon Panikkar as the identifier.
3. Raimon Panikkar, *Opera Omnia*, Author's Foreword.
4. Karl Rahner, "The Spirituality of the Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations* Vol. 20, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Dartman, Langman & Todd, 1981), 149–150, 149.
5. See, for example: Raimundo Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christie Self-Consciousness," in *Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion*, eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 89–116, 89.
6. In the second edition of his biography on Panikkar, Maciej Bielawski points out that Panikkar was formally expelled from Opus Dei. Maciej Bielawski, *Panikkar. Un Uomo e le Opere* (Roma: Fazi Editore, 2018), 276. An English translation is titled: *Panikkar. His Life and His Work* (Roma: Fazi Editore, 2018). The first edition is: Maciej Bielawski, *Panikkar. Un Uomo e il Suo Pensiero* (Roma: Fazi Editore, 2013).
7. Raimundo Panikkar, "The Christian Challenge for the Third Millennium," in Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler, eds., *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 113–125, 117.
8. Raimundo Panikkar, "El concepto de naturaleza: análisis histórico y metafísico de un concepto" (Madrid: Instituto Luis Vives de Filosofía, 1951), 106. This book is the result of the Doctoral Thesis in Philosophy and Letters of Raimon Panikkar, defended at the University of Madrid in 1946 and titled "Christian Philosophy: The Concept of Nature."
9. Raimon Panikkar, "Transforming Christian Mission into Dialogue," *Interculture: Exploring the Frontiers of Cross-Cultural Understanding* 20, no. 97 (Fall/October 1987): 19–27, 26. The article was originally the text of Panikkar's closing address at the 1983 Baltimore National Congress of the U.S. Catholic Mission Associates on the Future of Mission.
10. http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/gloss-microdoxy.html (Accessed December 18, 2019).

11. Clemens Mendonca, "The Major Concepts of Raimon Panikkar," in Milena Carrara Pavan and Kala Acharya, eds., *Raimon Panikkar His Legacy and Vision* (Mumbai: Somaiya Publications, 2008), 23–34, 23.
12. The note is preserved in the Archivo General de la Prelatura del Opus Dei, leg. 6933. Quoted in Josep-Ignasi Saranyana, "Raimon Panikkar: a Propósito de una Biografía," *Studia et Documenta* 11 (2017): 323–348, 336. The translation is my own.
13. María Josefa González Haba, born in Madrid in 1930, held doctoral degrees in philosophy from Madrid and in theology from Munich. Her doctoral thesis in theology is entitled "The Figure of Christ in Master Eckhart." She became a professor at the University of Madrid in 1952 and associate professor at the University of München in 1962. A disciple of Francisco Yela Utrilla and Michael Schmaus (1897–1993), she became the secretary of the latter. She published primarily in the fields of history of philosophy and philosophy of religion. She later left academia to start a career as a novelist.
14. See, for example, the book review by Francis Clooney, SJ: "'Without Ceasing to Be a Christian': A Catholic and Protestant Assess the Christological Contribution of Raimon Pannikkar," in *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 31 (2018): Article 30.
15. For the remark on the mysticism of Jesus the Christ, see Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 39–141.
16. See, for example: William Grimes, "Raimon Panikkar, Catholic Theologian, is Dead at 91," *New York Times*, September 4, 2010. "He was one of the pioneers in opening up Christianity to other religions and learning from them," Joseph Prabhu, a professor of philosophy at California State University-Los Angeles and editor of "The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar" (1996), said in a telephone interview. "We can see the new waves of Christianity moving toward the non-European world in the 21st century, and he prepared the ground for an authentic dialogue between Christianity and other faiths, and beyond that for the cross-cultural conversation which marks our globalized world."
17. On the primacy of life over thought in Panikkar, see, for example: Raimon Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in Joseph Prabhu, ed., *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 227–291, 241: "Our first task is to understand ourselves, to strive to become intelligible synthesis—not necessarily a system. Experience is paramount, life has the priority, and praxis always leads. Our life is the foundation of all our thoughts."
18. Panikkar published the first edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* in 1964 as Raymond: Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Longman & Todd, 1965). Panikkar's doctoral dissertation, "Religion and Religious in the Meeting of Hinduism and Christianity" (1961) and the book *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964) may be not identical. Where exactly the differences lie between the two texts remains a matter of scholarly investigation.
19. Klaus Klostermaier, "Raymond Panikkar's *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*," *Indian Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (April–June 1966): 70–73, 71.
20. Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1969), 222.
21. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 225.
22. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 222–223.
23. Joseph Prabhu, "Adieu Raimon, A Dieu," in *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 23, nos. 210 (2010): Article 12.

24. Raymond Panicker, "Eine Betrachtung fiber Melchisedech," *Kairos* 1 (1959): 5–17; Raimundo Panikkar, "Meditation on Melchizedek," originally "Meditación sobre Melquisedec," *Nuestro Tiempo* No. 102 (1962): 675–695. Published in Italian as *Maya e Apocalisse—L'Incontro dell'induismo e del Cristianesimo* (Roma: Abete, 1966), cap. 9. Translated from Spanish by Carla Ros. Recently the text has been translated into English and included in Panikkar's *Opera Omnia*. See: Raimon Panikkar, *Meditation on Melchizedek* in *Religion and Religions: Opera Omnia* Vol. II (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2015), 137–149. Panikkar wrote more papers on Melchizedek; see, for example: Raimundo Panikkar, "Christ, Abel, and Melchizedek: The Church and the Non-Abrahamic Religions," *Jeevadhara* 1 (1971): 391–403. In this study I work on the manuscript included in Panikkar's *Opera Omnia*.
25. Erik Ranstrom, "Christology after Dominus Iesus: The Early Panikkar as a Creative Resource," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 25, article 9 (2012). Ranstrom returns to the same topic in Erik Ranstrom, "Unknown Jesus or Unknown Christ? The Diversity in Panikkar's Early Christology," in Ranstrom and Mark Granquist, *Without Ceasing to be a Christian: A Catholic and Protestant Assess the Christological Contribution of Raimon Panikkar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2017), 1–34.
26. Eric J. Sharpe, *Faith Meets Faith* (London: SCM, 1977). For the cited authors' works on the subject, see: Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations* Vol. 5; English translation by Helicon Press and Darton (London: Longman and Todd, 1966); Anita Roper, *The Anonymous Christian*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966); Eugene Hillman, *The Wider Ecumenism. Anonymous Christianity and the Church* (London: Compass Books, 1968).
27. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981).
28. *The Unknown 2*, xi.
29. *The Unknown 2*, 26.
30. Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, trans. Robert Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 55–59. See also Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 150–151 and Jacques Dupuis, "Review of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Revised and Enlarged Edition*," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* (May–June 1982): 256–258.
31. Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion? Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 25; Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 15, 42–43; Cheriyan Menacherry, *Christ, The Mystery in History: A Critical Study on the Christology of Raymond Panikkar* (Theion) (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), 111–113.
32. Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion?*, 25.
33. In his essay "Unknown Jesus or Unknown Christ: The Diversity in Panikkar's Early Christology," however, through a comparative analysis between *The Unknown* and *Meditation*, Ranstrom detects elements of ambiguity even in *The Unknown*. See Ranstrom, *Without Ceasing to be a Christian*, 1–34.
34. Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 156.
35. According to Victorino Pérez Prieto, there are 16 versions of *The Unknown*, including translations, revisions, and editions with new prefaces or introductions. See Victorino Pérez Prieto, ed., "Bibliografia Generale dei Testi di Raimon Panikkar," at http://goo.gl/28ShpS (26/08/2018) (Accessed August 26, 2018).
36. "I tried to say everything in the title." See: *The Unknown* 2, 25.

37. *The Unknown*, xiii.
38. Raimundo Panikkar, "Toward a Typology of Time and Temporality in the Ancient Indian Tradition," *Philosophy East and West* 24, no. 2 (Apr., 1974): 161–164.
39. *The Unknown*, 138.
40. Originally in Raimon Panikkar, *La Nuova Innocenza II* (Milano: CENS, 1994), 173; included in Raimon Panikkar, *Hinduism and Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. VII (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 393.
41. *Mountain*, 42.
42. Abhishiktānanda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–1973) of Swami Abhishiktānanda*, a selection, edited with introduction and notes by Raimon Panikkar, translated by David Fleming and James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 254; henceforth, simply *Ascent*.

CHAPTER ONE

Methodological Issues

> Having completed this present study the author hopes to be a little more free to enter into that blessed ignorance and sacred silence.
>
> Panikkar[1]

A Problem of Sources

Panikkar was a man of encyclopedic knowledge and gigantic scholarly versatility, and in his early writings (including *The Unknown* and *Meditation*), he created both a body of academic work and a peculiar vision, a primeval world of heavenly-earthly unity and human brotherhood. Yet, not only does the ultimate meaning of that vision remain sealed, but so does its sources. When one looks for the sources of Panikkar's thought in order to unveil the ultimate meaning of *The Unknown*, in fact, the problem of Panikkar's approach (or philosophy) of sources arises. The problem can be framed as follows: as for the life and career of a man like Panikkar, who became notorious—even legendary—for encyclopedic knowledge and transdisciplinary reflection, it would seem at first glance quite indispensable—in a study on *The Unknown and Meditation*—to start with the philosophical and theological sources of his thought; from there, one might ask how far his own formal and conceptual innovations rested on biblical sources and enabled him to overcome the

'technical' obstacles left unsolved by his contemporaries. That, one must say, would in each case be the course to adopt—that is, investigating the sources of Panikkar's thought—in terms of the orthodox modes of academic inquiry, on the assumption that Panikkar worked as a professional philosopher and theologian who happened to use biblical sources.

An assumption of that sort may prove difficult for a number of reasons. First, when it comes to Panikkar the identification of the sources of his ideas is an intellectual as well as a practical problem, partly because of the fact that there are sources not explicitly mentioned in Panikkar's works. Panikkar, in fact, was parsimonious when it came to quoting sources other than the Bible or other Holy Books (including the Vedas). Perhaps it was because, as Panikkar stated, ideas cannot have copyright.[2] Panikkar rarely quoted other thinkers.[3] In absence of an explicit and recognized link between Panikkar and the specific work of some author, school of thought, or theological tradition, scholars have been forced to fill in the gaps, to infer these sources, and to eventually build up their own lists of thinkers who influenced Panikkar's writings, that is, Martin Heidegger, Xavier Zubiri, Garcia Morente, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Jean Danielou.[4]

The problem of the sources of Panikkar's thought, at first approximation, is that he did not work according to the rules of the scholarly game. Yet, the problem at the heart of Panikkar's sources is complex and goes well beyond that of undetectability of the exact materials that support his work. I refer here to the fact that Panikkar considered himself a 'source.' Panikkar has been described on innumerable occasions as an original thinker, where 'original' mostly stands for 'creative' and 'unconventional.' In his own perception, however, Panikkar considered himself an original author in the sense that he went to the origins, to the point that he was, in his words, a source:

> I don't think we can say that I had a teacher, and I say this as something negative. I believe that, in Indian terms, I am the beginning of a karmic line, rather than I am a follower of others. On the other hand, I did not come out of nothing, I had very good teachers and also many friendships with people I have respected, whom I loved and from whom I learned. […] I didn't pay too much attention at whom were the luminaries who served me as points of reference, because I've always been a bit of a self-thinker; I got influenced, but I didn't follow anyone in particular.[5]

Of course, it is a next to impossible task to identify the sources of a writer who considered himself the beginning of a karmic line. Panikkar's description of himself as a source provides a window into the complicated business of recovering the sources of his ideas. To his credit, Panikkar mentioned two sources of his writing works: life and Spirit. "I did not live to write," Panikkar argued, "but I wrote to live more consciously and to help my brothers with thoughts that do not arise only

from my mind, but spring from a higher Source that can perhaps be called Spirit—even if I do not pretend that the my writings are 'inspired.'" So, life and Spirit are Panikkar's ultimate sources.[6]

Another problem is attributable to the author himself, who indulged in the so-called *panikkarization* of sources: Panikkar usually absorbed biblical and theological sources and *panikkarized* them. For example, in a passage at the very end of *The Unknown*, "our attempt could both draw light and inspiration and get some justification from that remarkable encounter of Saint Paul with the men of Athens," Panikkar connects his study with Scripture.[7] He compounds the task by simply referring rather vaguely to Acts 17:16–34, with little or no exegesis. Thus, the meaning that Panikkar aims to vehicle by mentioning Scripture is presupposed, and the unwary reader may well find him/herself suddenly being led without further ado from an aspect of Paul's thought into an explanation of its relationship to Panikkar's own system, and vice versa. Such a facile concordism between data of revelation and theological ideas was, of course, far from Panikkar's mind. Yet, in spite of his best intentions, the impression remains that he tended to *panikkarize* Paul, that is, to project into his sources the elements of his own system.

The recovery of the sources of Panikkar's theology remains unfinished business, and circumstances seems to indicate that it will remain so for a long time. His library of almost 100,000 books (Panikkar used to writes dates and comments in books he was reading) and most of his letters are yet to be mined in any systematic or proper, scholarly manner.[8] At the end of his life, Panikkar had entrusted the publication of all his diaries and personal notes to Milena Carrara Pavan, who was for many years one of his closest disciples and followers, although Panikkar had banned the possibility of a classic biography; still, these materials remain closed to scholarly inquiry.[9] Panikkar had also entrusted to Carrara Pavan the publication of all his written works, that is, *Opera Omnia*, the comprehensive collection of Panikkar's work. Panikkar himself designed his complete works, opting for a thematic arrangement, not a chronological one. All in all, the sources of his thoughts are still hidden in his monumental amount of comments and notes yet to be reviewed.[10]

Contexts

From the brief and necessary partial review of the literature on *The Unknown* included in the Introduction emerges a clear indication that scholarship on early Panikkar has been dominated by two concerns: (1) the evolution of Panikkar's thought and (2) the elements of Panikkar's early theology. He has been depicted as a thinker who moved through several phases. Analysis of the two existing editions

of *The Unknown* has helped to cement the narrative, today almost unchallenged, of Panikkar's earlier and later thinking. Scholars openly discuss an 'early Panikkar' and a 'later Panikkar,' his 'early Christology' and his 'final Christology,' and his early writings and his most mature works. His theology (not only his early theology) has been analyzed, rather in depth, in search of his hermeneutical tools or to eventually identify and compile the "fundamental building blocks" that Panikkar produced for a new theology in order to "form a synthesis."[11] When scholars have described Panikkar's view of the unknown Christ, they have nearly unanimously concentrated on the theological linkage of the contemporary debate on interfaith dialogue and Christology. This may be true insofar as *The Unknown* can be regarded as clearly and unavoidably a book of theology of religions as well as of Christology.

At the same time, however, scholars might have conveniently missed to confront another problem, that is, the problem of the sources of Panikkar's thought, a problem that goes well beyond the case of *The Unknown*. Quite often, the work involved in analysis of Panikkar's thought is pursued in parallel with the criticism of certain 'problems' detected in his theology. Thus, the assumed problems of his theology have attracted more scholarly attention than the problem of the sources of his theology. To clarify, some scholars have pointed out certain problems embedded in Panikkar's pluralistic thinking.[12] The problem arises not within the dominion of Christian revelation itself, of course, but rather at that point where the theology of the incarnation confronts Panikkar's understanding of world religions. Panikkar has been criticized for turning the notion of Christ into a universal figure. Some scholars believe that in his project to rethink the data of Christian revelation concerning the Person of Christ within his own distinctive pluralistic system, Panikkar prompted a Christological problem. Of course, the quality of Panikkar's arguments has been discussed alongside the rigor of his arguments. In turn, different scholars have naturally interpreted Panikkar's rigor in different ways. Yet, Panikkar has never been the object of a formal investigation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. And, on the basis of this fact, his theology can be considered sound as far as his alignment to the official Catholic theology of religions. The eventual lack of Panikkar's rigor can probably be understood in terms of the rules of the scholarly game.

Scholars have developed over the last decades a critical and analytic approach to Panikkar's ideas. Authors have paid attention to differences between Panikkar's earlier and later thinking and stated that the overall picture of his arguments varies depending on which phase of life is considered. In other words, scholars like Dupuis, Komulainen, D'Costa, Menacherry, and Ranstrom pay enormous attention to the chronology of Panikkar's thinking. All in all, these authors emphasize the importance of context in the interpretation of Panikkar's arguments. From

the perspective of the history of theology, Panikkar's work has been discussed in the light of one wider theological discussion focusing on Christology. In turn, the ramifications of this wider theological discussion include three different backgrounds, against which Panikkar's theology has been evaluated. One background is the evolution of Panikkar's thought: it is an internal history of the development of his ideas, with regard to congruency and discontinuities. A case in point is the analysis of *The Unknown*: some scholars believe that the Christological problem concerns only the revised and enlarged edition of *The Unknown*; others claim that the problem can already be detected in the original edition of *The Unknown*. Another background refers to the scholarly reflection among professional theologians; the debate concering which schools of thought and theological traditions (i.e., fulfilment theology, pluralistic theology) Panikkar should be located in. Most scholarly work on Panikkar falls into this option. A third background is the Catholic doctrine and the official teaching of the Church. Ranstrom's analysis belongs to this stream of research.

I share these scholars' conviction that Panikkar should be read in context. I agree with them on the deep point, namely that theologians can learn from history and that history has a theological dimension. I do not think, however, that the proper background of Panikkar's arguments, or at least of certain arguments of his early theology, is the theological debate or the official doctrine; I do not believe scholarly understanding of Panikkar's early theology can be made clearer by viewing it through the prism of technical problems of theology. I believe instead that more can be achieved through the appropriation of Panikkar's overall biblical view of the Kingdom.

In Search of a Criteria

At this point the readers should be aware of the complication one will face in this book: (1) in order to unveil the deepest meaning of *The Unknown*, or its thesis, one needs to build a proper context, but (2) in order to build a proper context, one must circumnavigate Panikkar's reluctance to mention the sources of his thought. As a matter of fact, this book can be seen as a sort of matryoshka doll: one must first address the problem of the sources in order to later build a context with which to provide meaning to the thesis of the unknown. Where do I start?

In any study of Panikkar, it seems natural to start with biographical details then survey some of the quotes that made him famous: "I am the son of a Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother;" "I left Europe as a Christian…." When it comes to a description of his work, Panikkar is generally seen as the professional

theologian who is committed to the progress of technical disciplines such as philosophy and theology. At the same time, scholars have been aware of his peculiar philosophy of sources, that is, the nature and aims of Panikkar's sources. When asked about the sources of his published writings, Panikkar mentioned not authors or traditions of thought; rather, he pointed to life and the vital guidance of the Spirit and his hope to reach its fundamental and secret Source, which directs the entire expression of human thought. Usually scholars downplay this statement in terms of personal oddity, scholarly inconsistency, or mystical trait. Panikkar, in fact, was a polyglot, an intellectual of insuperable learning, and a mystic. And a mystic was what he remained to the end, in the eyes of his academic colleagues and intellectual successors. This has been the point of view from which a collective of Panikkar scholars saw him during his final years and still see him now; those of this collective who attended his conference papers or his lectures during his years of teaching in Santa Barbara found themselves looking upon his ideas, his methods of argument, and his very topics of discussion as something totally original. Viewed against the background of Panikkar the theologian, his later teachings indeed appeared unique and extraordinary, just as *The Unknown* had appeared to a previous generation of scholars. As a byproduct of this fact, a gulf has opened up between scholars' views of Panikkar and his sources.

Yet the question needs now to be raised whether, after all, this very dictum of life and Spirit as his more proper sources can be properly ignored or downplayed on account of the unique contribution Panikkar did apparently make to the development of interfaith theology. I invite scholars to keep one key question in the center of their mind: what meaning did the word 'source' have in Panikkar's thought? I can only hope to answer the question if I am prepared to agree that in Panikkar's early writings the word 'source' only secondarily refers to a philosophical or theological text; the primary meaning he assigned to the term is a fountainhead of dynamic spiritual life which never runs dry. By labelling Panikkar as a thinker of spiritual intensity, with an extraordinary, phenomenal, possibly unique talent for philosophical and theological invention, I believe the professional theologians have defused the impact of his faith and the intent of his work. If the story I shall be telling in the present study has any validity, one of its implications will be that the preconceptions with which his scholarly hearers approached Panikkar debarred them almost entirely from understanding the point of what he was saying. They saw him as a talented philosopher and theologian with a uniquely original technical genius, who just happened also to claim to be inspired by Spirit and life. They would have done better to see him as an integral and authentically Christian thinker, committed to proclaim the spiritual kingdom of God, and one who just happened to be working for a time as a scholar.

The whole question of the sources of Panikkar's theology—that is, the lack of mentioned scholarly sources, the karmic line, the absence and denial of direct influences, Spirit and life as sources—cannot be addressed in historiographic or scholarly terms. Maciej Bielawski (b. 1963), who recently published a biography of Panikkar, once stated that to understand Panikkar, an investigation into the sources of his philosophy, as well as his philosophy of the sources, is required.[13] That is, to understand Panikkar, not only does the identification of the sources from which his theological reflection spring become an area of investigation, but so does understanding the nature and aim of these sources. And I can hope to understand the nature and aim of these sources only if I am prepared to look again at Panikkar the man and the thinker. I will do that in chapter two ('Religious Reformer'). Here it is important to anticipate that I see Panikkar as a Roman Catholic author. Certainly Panikkar has not always being perceived as a Christian or Catholic author, and his writings are not necessarily about a Christianized or Catholicized world; but surely, he wrote about a world in which the truths of Christianity are used as a lamp by which to see the world. He dreamed and wrote of a universal, apostolic Catholic Church that is only remotely reducible to the current Roman Catholic Church, but his feet remained firmly rooted in that current Roman Catholic Church.

Panikkar has been at once applauded and attacked as the author of *The Unknown*, a book that has proved a dominant influence on the early phase of theology of religions, as a man who took the ideas and methods of the discipline and refined them far beyond anything his predecessors had imagined. Ever since its publication, commentators have almost universally assumed that the fundamental concern of the book was with problems in theology of religions and interfaith dialogue. The fact that Panikkar considered these commentators' interpretations as misleading, even to the point of rejecting some of these interpretations, has been understood as indicating only that these commentators had misrepresented certain limited aspects of the work, not that Panikkar had been totally misunderstood, as he complained. So long as Panikkar is located in the technical world of theologians and philosophers, this problem of interpretation remains, perhaps, quite insuperable. But it can be overcome when one makes the mental shift to understand Panikkar not as a scholar, a professional theologian committed to contributions to the development of 20th-century theology, but rather as a religious man, a priest, and a Catholic theologian and reformer on a mission to develop an alternative theology for his church and beyond. With 'reformer' I mean a 're-former,' someone who goes back to the beginning and then starts over, that is, someone who re-forms the matter, or gives a new form to the subject. To put it differently, I argue that one of the gravest misfortunes to eventually affect a writer of such intellectual

seriousness and sacerdotal core like Panikkar is to have his ideas 'naturalized' by the most professional of theologians, that is, to have his writings viewed entirely with an eye to his contributions to their discipline. For Panikkar, a man with a strong orientation toward the interior life as a way to God, the main concern was not centered on the progress of a discipline, rather on the synergy between the divine and creation.

In this study, Panikkar is described as a priest and a Roman Catholic author who was committed to a theological project of religious reform. This reform is not about reframing Christian principles and understandings, but about experiencing purification and reaching renovation. This project of purification of the Church should be understood in terms of a recovery of the mystical character of the original Christian fact; it is a remedy to a fatal tendency that emerged within the early Church, when the first Christians had the chance to embrace the Spirit but instead decided to build a religion. Purification means to go back to the Pentecost and start over. It implies the embracement of the spiritual kingdom of God (which makes everyone free) as defined by the apostle Paul (Romans 14:16–17). With a little imagination, Panikkar's immense theological production can be seen through the prism of atonement, the rite of healing and cosmic reconciliation. His existence (including his theological work) can be interpreted as a great, life-long celebration of an atonement ritual aiming to repair damage done to the Christian message by disgraced tendencies within Christianity. I will return to this soon. Here it is suffice to mention that in this project of recovering the original Christo-pneumatic impetus, the act of washing, of cleansing was seen by Panikkar as indispensable for the ultimate restoration. This may help to explain why Panikkar's over-arching theological platform was built on returning to the source, that is, not only to life and Spirit but ultimately to the Mystery of Christ, and then to start over. This 'start over' is an approximate translation of Panikkar's statement that "I am the beginning of a karmic line, rather than I am a follower of others."

While Panikkar pointed out that life and Spirit are the principal sources of his writings, he also stated that his writings were not inspired. How can one understand these phrases? I believe Panikkar was referring to the internal afference, the internal fact of hidden grace at work in the depths of the human spirit, different from the external afference, that is, the external fact of the revealed supernatural. Thus, the sources of Panikkar's theology are, according to Panikkar himself, his life as well as spiritual reflection, the blessed ignorance mentioned in the first pages of *The Unknown* (and quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter).

In summary: scholars seem to tolerate and excuse Panikkar's reluctance to cite scholarly sources. Moreover, in addition to the inconsistency that arises from Panikkar's tendency to divorce his technical work from its sources, scholars fail to

confront what is a further puzzle—namely, that in carrying further his theological project, Panikkar mentioned life and Spirit as his ultimate sources. Similar puzzles and inconsistencies are usually ignored. But these puzzles and inconsistences, I argue, are the result of a distorted view of Panikkar, both as a man and as a theologian. They arise, I claim, from placing the sources of his writings in the wrong context. These very same features can become wholly intelligible and lose their oddity, on one condition: namely, that scholars change their methods of inquiry and see Panikkar as a religious man and a religious thinker who happened to exercise his talents, among other fields, in academia. If, in other words, I am prepared to take Panikkar's own words at their face value—that is, life and Spirit, not disciplines and doctrines, where the real and ultimate context in which the ultimate meaning of his ideas is revealed—I must look at the interaction among (1) his sources, (2) his theological project, and (3) Panikkar's personal attitude toward questions of faith and religion, as well as how Panikkar himself presumably conceived them when he embarked on the inquiries of which *The Unknown* and *Meditation* were the end product. If, in fact, scholars would prepare to see Panikkar as a religious man (a priest), and a Catholic thinker, they might discover that this very dictum of the Spirit as a source can become wholly intelligible and shed any oddity or inconsistency. And, to the extent that the Spirit is a key source for understanding his writings, they must look directly at Panikkar's general theological project and its scope, then investigate whether there might be more than a connection between the sources of his thought on one hand and his project on the other.

When the whole question on Panikkar's sources is reframed and the connection between methods and aims is restored, one can see that in Panikkar, vital sources and religious reconciliation are inextricably intertwined. And, to the extent that the Scripture is a key entry point for penetrating the ultimate Source, it necessarily played an organic role in Panikkar's theological project. In the end, biblical scholarship and Panikkar's interpretation of such scholarship are windows through which to penetrate into Panikkar's spiritual reflection. To put it differently, if I am prepared to look anew at Panikkar, I am able to detect the relevance of the biblical sources of Panikkar's theology. If I do that, the significance of biblical sources in Panikkar's writings becomes all the more apparent.

Theology and Scripture

Scholars have churned out dozens of articles and essays on *The Unknown*, seemingly leaving no stone unturned in ferreting out parallels between the book and Panikkar's later and more philosophical writings. Numerous scholars have traced

The Unknown in connection with his theology of religions and, in particular, the Hindu-Christian dialogue. A number of theologians have also discussed his book in the context of his familiarity with Aquinas and Scholasticism. Despite these differences, these scholars have had no difficulty in recognizing the value of Panikkar's work and its significance that is based almost exclusively on Panikkar's sophisticated philosophical and theological reasoning.

The assumption of this study on Panikkar's *The Unknown* and *Meditation* is that the impeccably framed technical arguments of these works should be placed against a biblical background. In this study I try to reach a deeper understanding of *The Unknown* and *Meditation* by providing an appropriate Scriptural background. I argue that the correct path to understanding Panikkar's book—that is, the path that coincides with Panikkar's own intentions—lies in Panikkar's assimilation of biblical scholarship rather than in somebody else's theological ideas. In presenting such a thesis, one must be immediately aware of the reaction it will provoke. Panikkar is known to have been a sophisticate theologian and philosopher, not a biblical scholar. Moreover, *The Unknown* is generally considered a highly technical theological study, not a work of biblical exegesis. Not surprisingly, *The Unknown* has commonly been viewed as a contribution to the development of 20th-century interfaith dialogue (as defined earlier). Yet, if one sees the publication of *The Unknown* exclusively as an episode in the history of the discipline of interfaith dialogue, one significant feature of the book remains totally mysterious. After some 131 pages apparently devoted to sophisticated propositions of Scholastic reasoning, a reader is suddenly faced with two concluding pages, the content of which seems to wrench one's head around; consider this particular phrase: "We think that our attempt could both draw light and inspiration and get some justification from that remarkable encounter of Saint Paul with the men of Athens."[14] Here Panikkar is saying that the biblical passages describing the episode of the meeting of Saint Paul with the Athenians can be seen as a justification of the theological ideas exposed in *The Unknown*, while at the same time these theological ideas can illuminate the ultimate meaning of the biblical passages describing that episode. Given the sheer disproportion of the space allotted, respectively, to the theological and philosophical arguments of these last biblical mentions, the temptation has been to dismiss the final propositions as casual afterthoughts. Yet is this interpretation of this biblical material really satisfactory? Panikkar claims that these last reflections about Scripture are both the justification and the ultimate destination of his theological ideas. If so, they are not mere claptraps, makeweights, or private afterthoughts, but they have some integral connection with the main text.

In *The Unknown* and *Meditation*, Panikkar appeared to be spinning the whole substance of his theology out of his own head, like some intellectually creative

spider; in fact, it appears that he already had a well-formed set of theological ideas and a correspondent biblical justification in mind, even before receiving his doctorate in theology from the Pontificial Lateran University. As for the origin of these justifications themselves, he presumably encountered them in the course of both his Roman upbringing and education and the recovery of his Indian roots. If I am correct, the status of unreadiness of the Church struck deep into Panikkar's mind, shaping and conditioning his interpretation of certain biblical passages. In turn, this interpretation constituted the central and common justifications of his early theological ideas. These ideas are epitomized most concisely presented in Panikkar's *The Unknown* and *Meditation*.

Anyone who tries to understand *The Unknown* must deal with one question, an inquiry that can be alternatively articulated as follows: what intellectual context is most appropriate for interpreting *The Unknown* and its thesis? And anyone is confronted not with one but two contrasting options about the very answer to these questions. These options may be referred to, for convenience, as the 'theological' and the 'biblical' interpretations. According to the former, *The Unknown* is primarily a theological book and the point of the book, or its main contribution, can be better understood against a theological background. In this context, the obvious consideration is that theological sources and biblical passages sustain and reinforce the theological arguments. From the point of view of the latter, rather, *The Unknown* is and remains a theological book and the point of the book, or its main contribution, is theological. But the ultimate meaning of its thesis and its overall message can be better penetrated when placed against the background of a certain interpretation of some biblical concepts. I believe that biblical scholarship informed, not only justified, Panikkar's theological reflection. Thus, I argue that only once Panikkar's arguments in *The Unknown* and *Meditation* are seen through theological as well as biblical lenses—rather than exclusively through the theological ones—can scholars gain a much different, fuller, and truer understand of his points.

There are three immediate reasons for doing so (i.e., to read Panikkar's arguments in *The Unknown* and *Meditation* through a biblical prism). In the first place, this point is well proved by the number of Scripture quoted in *The Unknown* and in the second enlarged and revised edition.[15] Second, Panikkar himself stated in his book that his work is based on the Scripture and is an interpretation of the Scripture. Near the end of *The Unknown*, Panikkar made the already-mentioned comment: he stated that his attempt (i.e., *The Unknown*), "could both draw light and inspiration and get some justification from that remarkable encounter of Saint Paul with the men of Athens."[16] In *The Unknown*, the justification is provided by Acts 17. Finally, Panikkar almost reiterated the same proposition in the *Meditation*,

in which a footnote clarifies that biblical passages are the justification (the same word is used in both writings) of the main idea of that article.[17]

Merely observing the connection between Panikkar's writings and biblical sources is, however, insufficient. Questions remain, such as how relevant were these sources and what impact did they exercise on Panikkar's thought, with specific reference to *The Unknown* and *Meditation*? I answer this first question by pointing out Panikkar's own theological project and the organic role Scripture played in it. In previous sections I showed that Panikkar was unafraid to mention the biblical sources which inspired his writings. The problem is that his commentators and critics have often failed to take these biblical sources seriously. Now I argue that this lack of consideration is not the result of a mistake, rather a prejudice: they saw Panikkar as the professional theologian who was committed to the progress of technical disciplines such as philosophy and theology. Viewed against this distinct background, scholars' failure to recognize the primary role of biblical sources in Panikkar's work, and ultimately the possibility of a biblical interpretation of it, is not surprising. The case is more ominous than I expected when this study began. I have searched in vain for one article, book, or monograph that carefully ties together on the one hand a study of Scripture and on the other hand a study on Panikkar's theological reflections in *The Unknown*. One would think that these two lines of research would happily merge their efforts into a single discussion; instead, it appears that these studies have run side by side for half a century without blending, even in the footnotes.

Further Considerations

This study seeks to provide the biblical background for a proper understanding of Panikkar's early writings. Panikkar's unique use of the phrase 'unknown Christ' has elicited considerable debate within contemporary scholarship, though most discussion has centered on theological parallels found in the work of other authors. This study instead argues that when placed in a biblical context, Panikkar's early thought seems to emerge from a distinct interpretation of the Kingdom.

That said, a specific analysis of the role of the Pauline literature on Panikkar's thought is necessary in the light of the role and meaning of Paul's speech to the Athenians in *The Unknown*. The thought of St. Paul is incorporated into the final pages of *The Unknown*, in which Panikkar is simultaneously making use of, and offering explanation for, Paul's thought, without bothering to provide further details. As a foundational issue related to this specific study, there is a need to further develop the link between Panikkar's unknown Christ and the Pauline

encounter with the unknown God of the Greeks described in Acts 17. To my knowledge, no research detailing Panikkar's *The Unknown* develops any significant tie to Acts 17, though it can be easily proved that the material evidence exists for such a tie.

St. Paul works in *The Unknown* as a starting point for Panikkar's reflection as well as a point of arrival. I take Panikkar's words at face value, and I suggest scholars see a dual movement at work in *The Unknown*: (1) Panikkar incorporated elements of Paul's thought into his own theological system; then, (2) he applied this system in which he has assimilated the Pauline insights to the Pauline sentences in Acts 17. With regard to the first point, scholars have often argued that Panikkar's position in *The Unknown* is derived from the Pauline's cosmic text. I will discuss this point later. For now, it is sufficient to mention that I at once embrace this argument. The position I advocate can be summarized as follows: in *The Unknown*, two lines of Paul's thought collide: the Cosmic Christ and 'in Christ.' An example of this commixture is the previously quoted passage from *The Unknown*: "We all meet in God. God is not only everywhere but everything is in him" (p. 16). For Panikkar, the fundamental question is the relationship between Christ and the cosmos, with 'cosmos' being a substitute of 'all that exists.' In his view, at least in the writings that are considered in this study, the organic relationship between Christ and mankind is extended to the whole of creation. This is turn means seeing everything from the point of view of the Kingdom, which is the only true point of view from which all can be seen. Panikkar frames his Cosmic Christ both as a ruler and a healer, the king and the high priest of the Kingdom. In Panikkar, therefore, the reader can detect the priestly lordship of the Cosmic Christ as it emerges from Panikkar's own blend of Pauline Cosmic Christ and St. Paul's 'in Christ.'

With regard to the second point, scholars may wonder why Panikkar considers it appropriate to hold that his theological ideas can illuminate the ultimate meaning of the biblical passages described in Acts 17. I will argue that the source of Panikkar's audacious affirmation is that Paul's message in Acts 17 is a message of salvation. He interests himself in the world of other religions only insofar as it has a salvific intent. He has no desire to elaborate an interreligious conversation as such, and hence no intention whatsoever of explaining how the unknown god is, in fact, Christ. For Panikkar, on the other hand, an explanation is at the heart of his whole theological system, and his appeals to St. Paul are made with the precise purpose of explaining this 'how' and of using the Apostle's thought as a point of departure for his own interreligious conversation. Placed in the context of the biblical scholarship, I will suggest that Panikkar's interpretation of Paul's unknown god may have something to do with known gods that cannot be worshiped and unknown gods that should be searched.

In the final pages of *The Unknown*, Panikkar argued a circularity between theological reflection and biblical interpretation. I take Panikkar's words at face value, and I claim that this circularity is an appropriate method through which scholars can approach *The Unknown.* While I bring Panikkar's early theology in dialogue with St. Paul, I neither claim that Panikkar considered his theology Pauline, nor that his theology absorbed Pauline scholarship. Instead, I claim that in this context of biblical scholarship, Panikkar made use of Pauline material. On one hand, his appeals to Saint Paul are so frequent and insistent that they tend to create the impression that a correspondence of Panikkar's thought with Pauline texts is indisputable.[18] On the other hand, however, it would be too extreme to say that parallels can be drawn between the two, or that 'Panikkar speaks like Saint Paul.'

When considering *The Unknown* from the point of view of historians of theology or interfaith dialogue, it seems that one can hardly do anything else than begin from Panikkar's visits to India, then ask how far Panikkar's own conceptual innovations enabled him to propel the advancement of the field of interfaith studies. Meanwhile, Panikkar's personal associations with European Catholic expatriates in India, including Jules Monchanin and Swami Abhishiktānanda, who were the explicit objects of Panikkar's friendship and admiration, have overshadowed everything else regarding consideration of his intellectual concerns and sources of inspiration. Yet the question needs now to be raised, in retrospect, whether his clash with India is after all the only source of Panikkar's theological ideas as expressed in *The Unknown*. While I do not undervalue the role of India, and that of Panikkar's friend Abhishiktānanda more specifically, I believe that the theological conversation of the 1950s and 1960s *and* the biblical debate of the same period count in the development of Panikkar's early thought. In accordance with the priority given in this study to the latter, I devote some space to framing the status of the biblical scholarship in a period dominated by the assimilation of novel materials coming from archaeological discoveries. If I am correct, what Panikkar was seeking to do in *The Unknown* and *Meditation* was to incorporate into his own theological system Pauline material seen through the lens of the biblical debate of his day. Then, he was trying to apply his system to Paul.

Terminology

So far, I have left deliberately vague the relationship between Panikkar's early thought and *The Unknown*. Of course, *The Unknown* is widely considered the main contribution of Panikkar's early theology, yet a definition of 'early theology' is needed. With 'Panikkar's early theology' I mean a body of theological work that

Panikkar developed in the years 1958–1966, a work that finds in the original version of *The Unknown Christ* its pinnacle, the definitive moment of coalescence.[19] These are crucial years in Panikkar's story: in short, this is the period between his second doctorate (chemistry, University of Madrid, 1958) and the invitation from Harvard University to teach part-time in the United States (1966). These are the years of his failed attempt to find a permanent 'home' (in his letters he often used the term 'sistematizzazione,' Italian for 'systematization,' or to become part of the 'system,' so-to-speak). These are also the years of his aborted project to establish an academic career as a full-time professor either in India (at Banaras Hindu University) or Italy (Universita' La Sapienza), or to eventually start an ecclesiastical career as a member of the curia (at the Secretariat for Non-Christians).[20] Apart for some short trips to Spain, Panikkar spent most of these years in Rome and Varanasi. In Rome, he felt perfectly at home. These, of course, were the years of the new Pope John XXIII (1958–1963) and of the exciting pre-council preparatory work, which lasted almost three and a half years. On 11 October 1962, the Vatican Council II was opened and, because of the Council, the best minds of Christianity arrived in Rome. The intellectual and cultural life of the Italian capital experienced one of its most fertile, original, and creative periods. The best Catholic theologians, including Henri de Lubac, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Jean Daniélou were in Rome in those days and Panikkar was able to communicate with them, and through them to have access to a variety of insights, sources, and ideas. In this regard, his fellowship to the so-called Enrico Castelli Meetings (1961–1977), which occurred always in January and were extraordinary events that in some way coincided with the Council sessions, helped Panikkar get to know, and to become known to, personalities like Giuseppe Dossetti, Carlo Colombo, Johannes Baptist Lotz, Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri Bouillard, André Scrima, Oscar Cullmann, Mircea Eliade, Károly Kerényi, Gershom Scholem, Paul Ricoeur, and Georges Dumézil. Panikkar remained in Rome during the first session of the Council, but during the second session he was already back in Varanasi.

These are the years of his third doctorate, in theology from the Pontificial Lateran University in Rome (1961). An original version of his dissertation was probably composed in the early fifties, revised during his time in India (1954–1958), and finalized in Rome during the years before the Vatican Council II. This is also the period of his exit from Opus Dei (1966) and his incardination in the Apostolic Prefecture of Gorakhpur-Benares (Varanasi), under the jurisdiction of Bishop Joseph Emil Malenfant, a francophone Canadian capuchin friar (1966). In the Roman Catholic Church, 'incardination' refers to the situation of a member

of the clergy being placed under the jurisdiction of a particular bishop or other ecclesiastical superior. Thus, Panikkar moved from being under the jurisdiction of his superior in Opus Dei to being under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Varanasi. In Varanasi, Panikkar was free from pastoral commitment and able to pursue at will his intellectual plans.

This period between 1958 and 1966 is especially important for para-biblical literature on the primeval history (chapters 1–11 of the Book of Genesis) and the Antediluvian Patriarchs. One of the most important discoveries for the study of the Bible was a collection of texts unearthed in the forgotten ancient Canaanite city of Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra) in 1928. This collection provides material concerning Canaanite religion, and it has been used by biblical scholars to understand the religious context of the Hebrew Bible, including many parallels between Canaanite and Israelite religious practices. In addition, the languages of Ugaritic and Hebrew are quite similar, and thus Ugaritic provides insight into the development and grammar of Hebrew. Since 1947, a series of archaeological discoveries in caves located about one mile west of the northwest shore of the Dead Sea (from which they derive their name) reshaped the scholarly understanding of the First Temple and Second Temple Judaism as well as the relationship between Judaism and Early Christianity. In these caves, also called the Qumran Caves, archaeologists discovered thousands of written fragments which represent the remnants of a larger library of manuscripts. While the majority of these manuscripts exist as small scraps of text, a certain number of well-preserved, nearly intact manuscripts has survived. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain parts of all but one (the Book of Esther) of the books of the Tanakh of the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament proto-canon. They also contain extra-biblical texts which are thought to be relevant for understanding the context in which biblical books received significance. An ancient Jewish work, the Book of Enoch, ascribed by tradition to Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah, was among these extra-biblical manuscripts. Traditionally considered to have been composed in the wake of Maccabean Revolt in the 2nd century BCE and parallel to Christian tradition, the Book of Enoch became the object of intense scrutiny after the discovery of eleven Aramaic-language fragments of the Book of Enoch in Cave 4 of Qumran in 1948. These and other discoveries (with regards to this study, the epigraphical discoveries from the Egyptian border fortresses of Elephantine are particularly significant), after being passed through the filter of biblical scholarship, injected myths, concepts, and characters like 'cosmic covenant' and 'divine plurality,' Melchizedek and Enoch, angels and gods, into the theological conversation of the period (i.e., 1958–1966). These myths, concepts, and characters of the primeval history carry a universal meaning because they refer to an era in which

humankind was still undivided, when God still had to apportion the nations as an inheritance (Deuteronomy 32:9).

Now I move to better frame the terms 'biblical' and 'extra-biblical' sources. With 'biblical sources' I mean sacred writings, that is, books included in today's Hebrew Bible and considered vessels of divine communication. 'Biblical canon' stands for a unified conception of an authoritative collection of scriptural works. 'Non-biblical books' are religious literature outside the perimeters of the canonical Bible. 'Para-biblical' is a genre of writings that retell biblical narratives in various ways; it refers to non-biblical manuscripts circulating during the Second Temple era and related to the texts now in the Hebrew Bible. 'Uncanonized texts' stands for Jewish and Christian ancient collections of writings not included in the biblical canon and therefore not regarded as authoritative Scripture, which nevertheless are part of the heritage of Judaism and Christianity and thought to be significant for understanding the meaning of the biblical. Some non-canonical texts are known as 'apocrypha' and 'pseudepigrapha' and considered by some to be biblical apocrypha or deuterocanonical or fully canonical. The Ethiopian Church has the Book of Enoch as part of their Bible.[21] The protocanonical books are those books of the Old Testament that are also included in the Hebrew Bible and that came to be considered canonical during the formational period of Christianity. The term protocanonical is often used to contrast these books to the deuterocanonical books (or apocrypha).In this study I use the term 'extra-biblical' to refer to para-biblical and uncanonized documents, or more precisely to Qumran fragments and Enochic literature, and their combined effect on the interpretation of some passages of the Bible. Finally, I use the phrase 'biblical scholarship after Qumran' generally, toward defining the status of biblical studies in the process of assimilating the findings in Qumran and other archaeological sites.

Speculative Nature and Structure

A few explanatory remarks are necessary regarding the nature of the claims I make for my argument, the limits of this study, and the structure of the book. I need to work on the biblical sources of Panikkar's theological ideas; I believe that in addressing these sources I will help make Panikkar's early theology of religion, and specifically some elements of *The Unknown* and *Meditation*, more intelligible. As for the matter of Panikkar's interpretation of these biblical sources, it seems appropriate—in the absence of more direct evidence—to look at the assimilation within biblical scholarship and how Panikkar presumably understood it. At the same time, I already made clear that a problem exists regarding the sources of

Panikkar's thought. Thus, I must say at the outset that I have only circumstantial evidence of this link between Panikkar's early work and biblical scholarship. Therefore, this book is a highly speculative exercise. It is open to criticism, merely on account of its form and also due to the serious problems of intellectual method and proof which are necessarily involved in building a case for it. My tentative solutions to these problems will have nothing particularly mystifying or high-flown about them; far from producing some Zeitgeist or intellectual context as the unenlightening key to my explanatory analysis, I simply draw attention to a large number of well-attested facts about the relationship between Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda as well as the scholarly debate around some biblical themes during the years in which *The Unknown* and *Meditation* were developed. And I shall add, as the missing premise for my argument, a severely limited number of supplementary hypotheses, several of which are at once open to indirect support and confirmation. That said, the contributions I propose are consistent with Panikkar's theology as a whole.

This book is divided in two parts. In the Introduction and the first five chapters, I present the context in which I place my argument. Then in the subsequent three chapters, I position *The Unknown* and *Meditation* in that very context. The Introduction and the first chapter (titled 'Methodological Issues') were conceived in order to provide the basic elements—problems, assumptions, arguments, subjects, definitions—chosen specifically to set the scene for the analysis that follows. For theologians of religions and scholars of Panikkar, they are redundant. The second, third, the fourth, and the fifth, chapters engage with the main elements of the selected context: Panikkar's life, Christian unreadiness, and biblical interpretation. The second chapter ('Religious Reformer') contains a brief profile of Panikkar the man and the theologian. For anyone who knows Panikkar it will contain no surprises. However, for a man who claimed that one must live what he/she is talking about, a sketch of Panikkar's life is crucial. It is based in part on autobiographical reminiscences of several eyewitnesses in India and on the writings of contemporary authors like Bielawski; it is also based in part on conversations with a broad range of friends and acquaintances, in India and elsewhere, and on standard historical authorities. I offer an interpretation of Panikkar that reframes him as a Catholic author who is committed to a project of religious purification and reconciliation. I believe that this characterization, though limited in scope like any other characterization, can help to frame a man who has been defined at times as a planetary man (according to Ernesto Balducci), a global thinker (in the words of Joseph Prabhu), and a prophet of the day after tomorrow (a "profeta del dopodomani" according to Raffaele Luise). Most importantly, I connect Panikkar's theological project with his philosophy of sources.

In the third chapter ('Christian Unreadiness'), I frame in detail both the status of the Church's unreadiness and the greater ecclesiological question. This chapter is essential to this study as it addresses one of Panikkar's more pressing arguments, that is, the Church suffers from a fundamental deficit of self-understanding related to her very nature: she is the spiritual kingdom of God. Also I clarify the role Abhishiktānanda played in the development of that question. I do not address, however, the *vexata questio* of the mutual influence of Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda because that has been investigated by other authors, including Francis Tiso and the already-mentioned Bielawski, whose conclusions I agree with.[22]

In chapters four ('Kingdom') and five ('Melchizedek') I offer a description of the scholarship on the 'Kingdom of God' and Antediluvian Patriarchs (as an introduction to Melchizedek priesthood) in the context of some new documents discovered in early to mid-20th century as well as Enochic literature which can help those uninitiated in the subject.

The reason why I take five chapters to accomplish this introductory task is this: rather than sacrifice too much of this book by maintaining focus on the arguments alone, I have decided to present the whole of my picture, in all its richness and complexity. If the ultimate meaning of the Melchizedek priesthood and the unknown Christ of Hindus and Christians are the main problems I address in this study, they are not the only problem. In fact, at least two additional questions need to be more properly framed at the start of this book: first, the problem of detecting the sources in Panikkar's early writings, and second, the relevance of biblical scholarship in the development of Panikkar's arguments. The first problem is that it seems odd to have a celebrated scholar who recognizes a profound debt to Spirit and life rather than to some other scholar or school of thought. I shall never succeed in solving this oddity if I confine my attentions narrowly to, say, his professional contributions to the disciplines of philosophy and theology. The second problem is a reflection on Bielawski's dictum on Panikkar's complicated relationship with the sources of his thought (mentioned earlier). I agree with Bielawski that it is a crucial topic to address.

In the following chapter ('Priesthood in Spirit and Truth'), I investigate *Meditation* through the prism of Melchizedek priesthood. I discuss the elusive concepts in Panikkar's writings, especially surrounding the writer's views about cosmos, covenant, and priesthood, by adopting a broader perspective for Panikkar's elements. The strategy is that of situating them within the framework of the Second Temple covenantal debate, a whole scholarly subdiscipline aimed at situating themes such as the cosmic covenant and the high priesthood in the context of the ideas inscribed in the ancient movement commonly referred to today as

Enochic Judaism. Thus, the next step in this study is to address *Meditation* both as a piece on its own and as a validation of the methodology adopted. It also reveals itself as an access point to approaching *The Unknown* in biblical terms. The sixth chapter, in fact, discuss the notion of universal priesthood, cosmic priesthood, and non-Christian priesthood in Panikkar's view in light of two works, written one by Panikkar himself and the other (a small and beautifully written book) by his friend Abhishiktānanda. Once again, my own discussion does not seriously contradict or supersede previous studies; however, it does move beyond them in placing a novel theological and biblical interpretation on Panikkar's understanding of priesthood. The central importance I have given to priesthood in spirit and truth, distinted from the priesthood of rites, is one point over which this book makes new claims, and these claims must be judged as such.

To some extent, the same is true of the manner in which I show how the concern for the Kingdom informs *The Unknown* in the following two chapters. In the seventh chapter ('Cosmic Sacramentalism'), I begin to address the relationship between theology and Scripture in *The Unknown*. I seek first to examine the theological ideas of the book. More specifically, it is in this chapter that I disengage the various elements in Panikkar's approach to the Cosmic Christ in *The Unknown* and Panikkar's other writings, mostly from the same period. I then look at the theological work of Panikkar's predecessors and of his contemporaries in the search for affinities with Panikkar's ideas. Scholarly studies on *The Unknown* are many. In this chapter I also connect his cosmic theology with Scripture. Given the theological ideas expressed in *The Unknown* and related literature, I establish a hypothetical link between Panikkar's ideas and their related biblical themes.

The eighth chapter is an attempt to deal with *The Unknown* in the context of the biblical scholarship and Panikkar's peculiar view of the Cosmic Christ. This is where my book's main contribution is justified. I show how the thesis of the unknown can be interpreted and why it stands, despite the nearly universal criticism of scholars. I once again must admit that my interpretation of Panikkar's view of Acts 14 and 17 is speculative. Although Panikkar explicitly established the link between Acts 14 and 17 and *The Unknown*, he did not offer exegetical work on it. The same can be said about the opposite relationship between Acts 14 and 17 and *The Unknown*, that is, how the former operates as a source of the latter: my view of this relationship is, in this respect, frankly conjectural.

In this study I engage only a limited number of qualified sources to offer entry into Panikkar's frame of mind in the period leading up to the publication of the first edition of *The Unknown*. Apart for *The Unknown*, I center my research

on a few passages of one of Abhishiktānanda's best-known books, *The Mountain of the Lord, Pilgrimage to Gangotri* (henceforth *Mountain*) and Panikkar's article *Meditation*. While the focus of my reflection is a handful of Panikkar's writings, the secondary literature on the biblical scholarship that I suppose is behind his writings is enormous. I mention only a fraction of such literature, mostly in the footnotes.

In writing this study, I stretched to the limits my elementary notions of biblical Hebrew and Greek. I had the feeling that it was inappropriate for me to write a book where I must occasionally depend on translations of Hebrew, Greek, and other ancient, near eastern languages (i.e., Aramaic, Ugaric, and other Semitic languages). However, I thought that it was no use waiting for a scholar with a comprehensive and proper knowledge of all these languages, for I felt it was time that someone with some knowledge of Panikkar compiled the main points. I approached translations with care and prudence. If I have misrepresented any of the translations of singular importance, no one will be sorrier than I. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations come from the New Jerusalem Bible ('NJB 1965,' or simply 'NJB'), which is a product of the age of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and already incorporates original language texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. It may help the readers to appreciate what kind of material was available to Panikkar in the period that is covered in this book. From a comparative analysis of NJB and Panikkar's quotations in *The Unknown*, however, it is evident that Panikkar often adopted his own personal translations, translation that do not necessarily follow those of NJB. Sometimes I compared NJB with the most recent version of the New Jerusalem Bible (or 'NJB 1985'). Sometimes I offer translations that are aligned with my understanding.

Conclusion

The Introduction and the first chapter worked as an introduction and built the background of this study. In the Introduction, I provided a short literature review along with an outline of the problem of interpretation I want to address. I also presented the argument of this study. In the present chapter, I discussed the basic assumption of this work, and I defended such an assumption from potential criticism. Finally, I mentioned its structure. In the next three chapters I draft a portrait of Panikkar that may solve some methodological problems related to the source of inspiration for his early theology (chapter two) and also some elements to sustain my arguments (chapters three and four).

Notes

1. *The Unknown*, xiii.
2. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in Joseph Prabhu, ed., *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, 227.
3. He was not the only 20th-century Roman Catholic theologian to indulge in such a venial sin; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) also only sporadically mentioned other thinkers.
4. The first four names are listed by Victorino Perez Prieto. The last name is suggested by Dominic Veliath. Sources include: Prieto, *Raimon Panikkar. Oltre la Frammentazione del Sapere e della Vita* (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2011), 91; Dominic Veliath, *Theological Approach and Understanding of Religions. Jean Daniélou and Raimundo Panikkar: A Study in Contrast* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti College, 1988). Daniélou's classic work on the subject is Jean Daniélou, *Les saints 'païens' de l'Ancien Testament* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1956). To the list of potential sources of Panikkar's Melchizedek can also be added Joseph Ratzinger, who already in 1963 noted that the Old Testament distinguishes the Noahite, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Christliche Brüderlichkeit* (München: Kösel, 1960).
5. Original text: "En mí se inicia una línea kármica." *Raimon Panikkar*, "Reflexiones autobiogràficas" is an interview with Panikkar done at Tavertet in 1985 and printed as a monograph on Panikkar in the journal *Anthropos*, Nos. 53–54, 1985, 22–25, 22; Italian translation, Alessandro Calabrese, in Prieto, *Raimon Panikkar. Oltre la Frammentazione del Sapere e della Vita*, 91. The translation is my own.
6. Panikkar, *Opera Omnia*, Author's Foreword.
7. *The Unknown*, 137.
8. This number requires further investigation. The Panikkar Collection at the University of Gerona, for example, consists of 13,000 books and over 700 collections of journals. The issue is addressed in Maciej Bielawski, *Canto di una Biblioteca*, trans. Leonardo Di Lisio, *The Song of a Library* (Bergamo: Edizioni Lemma Press, 2016).
9. Here I refer to the private archive of Italian philosopher Enrico Castelli Gattinara in Rome, Panikkar's private archive in Tavertet, and Panikkar's library donated to the University of Girona, in Spain (Fons Panikkar).
10. Here I depend on the information that Leonardo Marcado kindly shared on this matter.
11. Kajsa Ahlstrand, *Fundamental Openness. An Enquiry into Raimundo Panikkar's Theological Vision and its Presuppositions*, Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia LVII (Ph.D. diss., Uppsala University, Disciplinary Domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Theology, 1993); Menacherry, *Christ, The Mystery in History: A Critical Study on the Christology of Raymond Panikkar*, 49–50.
12. Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission, Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996).
13. Regarding the reference to Maciej Bielawski, see Bielawski, Maciej. "Fonti Filosofiche di Panikkar," October 7–8, 2016. presentation in Torino at Philosophia Pacis: Filosofia e Spiritualità dopo Raimon Panikkar, October 7–8, 2016, 41'06". At https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yK-Gkp5Bf4EA (Accessed September 12, 2019). In his presentation, Bielawski makes the important distinction in Panikkar between "the sources of [his] philosophy" and "[his] philosophy of the sources," (14'52").
14. *The Unknown*, 137.
15. See the Index of Scripture quoted in *The Unknown 2*, 192–195.
16. *The Unknown*, 137.

17. *Meditation*, 131.
18. As an example, *The Unknown*'s Foreword begins with two quotes from Hebrews. In the Foreword alone, Pauline texts are mentioned 6 times (in the main text or in footnotes). The first chapter begins with a quote from Romans. I cannot enumerate all quotations here.
19. Some commentators relate 'Panikkar's early theology' to his Spanish period, which ended with his first visit to India; that interpretation positions *The Unknown* and *Meditation* as 'middle' Panikkar. While I see the point of this periodization, I go with Ranstrom and others in referring to *The Unknown* and *Meditation* as part of 'Panikkar's early theology.'
20. For the note on 'sistematizzazione' see Bielawski, *Panikkar. Un Uomo e il Suo Pensiero*, 150. The translation is my own.
21. 'Apocryphal' or 'pseudepigraphal' manuscripts are a group of books or parts of books that were not part of the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Scripture, but that were found in the Greek translation of those Scripture (LXX). The books were included in most early Christian versions of the Old Testament (since the LXX was the version of the Bible most used by the first Christians). Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians regard them as scripture and often prefer to call them deuterocanonical books (indicating that they are a "secondary canon" consisting of books added to the canon later than other OT writings). Most Protestants treat them with respect but do not grant them the status of scripture. The books include 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Daniel (Song of the Three Children [with the Prayer of Azariah], Susanna, Bel and the Dragon), Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees. Three additional works are accepted by Greek Orthodox churches: 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, and Psalm 151.
22. Francis V. Tiso, 'Raimundo Panikkar on the Monk as "Archetype",' *Dilatato Corde* 1, No. 2, July-December 2011. At https://dimmid.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7B383FB138-0B7E-4BB4-9629-665574E6B40C%7D (Accessed January 12, 2020); Bielawski, *Panikkar. Un Uomo e il Suo Pensiero*, 223–229.

CHAPTER TWO

Religious Reformer

He did not leave Himself without testimony.

Acts 14:17 quoted in *The Unknown*[1]

A Countercultural Personality

The need to look anew at Panikkar is motivated by the assumption that, by labelling him as a foreigner of odd personal habits, with an extraordinary, phenomenal, possibly unique talent for theological invention, the scholarly community defused his personality and his theological intent. Surely (his scholarly colleagues agreed) Panikkar was a curious, touchy, and eccentric figure, with exotic habits of dress and social opinions and an unorthodox philosophy of the sources. Yet scholars were ready to explain them in terms of family background, relying on the fact that he was the son of a Spanish mother and Indian father, and all of that. How is this to be avoided? In the case of Panikkar, I can do so by keeping one key point in mind, that is, Panikkar mentioned life and Spirit as his ultimate sources. Thus, I am left with no alternative than to once again turn my attention to Panikkar's life and to focus on his lifestyle and intellectual inclination, all to decipher whether something of himself and his theological project can be revealed.

It is like a leitmotiv to claim that for Panikkar, intellectual activity existed in life lived rather than being a mere secretion of the brain, as he clarified in his Preface to *The Unknown 2* by saying that "When, a quarter of a century ago, I began to write the ideas expressed in this book [*The Unknown*], I had already lived them."[2] It is legitimate for a scholar seeking the sources of Panikkar's thought to investigate what life and praxis Panikkar is talking about. Is there a specific trait of his life and praxis that offers the reader a unique opportunity to get into his mindset? I shall never succeed in answering this question, if I confine my attention narrowly to, say, his dedication to the crafted art of writing, which Panikkar understood in terms of service. The need to look anew at Panikkar the man and Panikkar the philosopher and theologian leads me to suggest that if there is such a trait, that specific trait of Panikkar's personality is probably self-determination. This trait took different forms, some of them decidedly unique. For example, Panikkar felt free to rename himself Raimon Panikkar, apparently because he discovered that his paternal family name could more accurately be transcribed "Panikkar," and from then on that is how he wrote it. As far as his first name is concerned, he used the name that was recorded in the Civil Registry in its Spanish form (Raimundo) to sign his first books. Later, he would come to spell it 'Raimundo,' then he adopted 'Raymond,' and finally 'Raimon' in all his books. In 1997 he went to the Civil Registry to officially change his name from 'Raimundo Pániker Alemany' to 'Raimon Panikkar Alemany.' In summary, by going from Raimundo Pániker to Raimon Panikkar, he was Catalanizing his first name and Indianizing his last. *Nome* (*est*) *nomen* is Latin for 'the name is a sign (destiny), the name speaks for itself'. Panikkar patiently built his destiny and embodied it into his name so that the Western tradition and the Indian tradition seemed naturally to encounter one another in him.

Self-determination seems also the distinctive character of his lifestyle. Panikkar viewed himself equally as a Hindu, Buddhist, and a postmodern secularist, as well as an ordained Roman Catholic priest, all without a trace of contradiction. The secret of this lack of contradiction probably lies in what he would call 'resistance to the institution.' "I resisted the family, the industry (money and power), Opus Dei, the university, the church and all the institutions. I do not think I ever became a bureaucrat and therefore identified my life with roles."[3] In other words, he resisted the process of institutionalization that comes with the assumption of certain roles inside an institution. Institutions transform people into 'organization people,' that is, people of mainstream correctness: obedience, deference to authority, conformity. Panikkar conveniently summarized the evil of conformity in *Meditation*, an article first published in 1958, with images of priests as administrators, that is, men in white collar and black flannel robe. Thus, resistance to the institution, or rather resistance to the almost inevitable effect of normalization that comes with being

part of an institution, can be seen as a main motivation in Panikkar's life. To put it differently, it seems that he was led by an invincible distrust of institutions, seen as normalizing operations, carrying conventional social norms and cultural standards which mortify the *persona* and depress originality. He was a vehicle of a cultural and historical view that equates institution with acquiescence.

The ways in which institutions can be resisted are well-known. The institution demands homogeneity; rebels rebel by embracing diverse, individual lifestyles as well as unconventional thinking. The institution demands inhibited instinct and rigid adherence to convention; rebels rebel through hostility to any rule and every authority. Only by breaking rules do rebels discover who they are. Above all, rebellion consists of a permanent questioning of rules, a rejection of institutional prescriptions they happened to inherit. Yet, 'rebel' needs qualification; as a matter of fact, Panikkar claimed himself neither a dissident, a heretical, an anarchic, nor a mutineer.[4] In other words, he was not a radical. If Panikkar was a rebel, therefore, he was a countercultural rebel, that is, a peaceful, quiet, non-adversarial rebel. Opus Dei discharged (or expelled) Panikkar mostly for a continuous lack of discipline, and Bishop Guix Ferreres's action against Panikkar and his wife can be understood in the same perspective. Yet, he exited neither Opus Dei nor priesthood; rather he managed both events with moderation and sensibility. His self-assertion never generated scandals, but it was constantly exercised with prudence and moderation. He never challenged the institution (i.e., family business, Opus Dei, university) or raised any problem in the Church. It has been said that Panikkar's marriage was a form of protest; he was also heard saying that by marrying Maria, he had infringed only on a church law, not on any of the beliefs of Christianity. The second comment seems more in tune with the general picture of Panikkar as a silent resistant that has been painted here. Rather than protest, Panikkar researched new forms of self-expression and experiments in lifestyle.

In this perspective, many of the indulgences of Panikkar's lifestyle—meditation, pure experience, life on the edge—and of his intellectual insights (love, peace, mysticism, harmony) need to be understood as countercultural, as a form of resistance to mainstream conformism. His lifestyle was ultimately an existential rebellion; his intellectual insights were a reaction against the notion of a static, uninspired thought as well as the rejection of conventional values. Somehow, Panikkar felt that a new era would emerge from the energies of religious renewal. Moreover, growing up in the 1940s in a Catholic Spain seems to have permanently inoculated him against all varieties of dogmatic theology. For him, theology is no longer about 'conformity' but about 'difference.' It counsels not rigid adherence to the codes of the paradigm but constantly updated creativity. This imperative of endless difference (i.e., plurality) is the genius at the heart of Panikkar's thought,

an eternal fleeing from 'sameness' that satiates the current thirst for rule-breaking and paradigm-defying. With theology's reorganization around difference, Panikkar has developed a new path, a sort of intellectual tendency according to which the breaking of rules without the elimination of intellectual structure has become the central article of faith for cutting-edge thinkers. Not surprisingly, Panikkar maintains a powerful grip on the scholarly imagination.

Finally, self-determination was the mark of his intellectual production. Panikkar is considered one of the most sophisticated and most profound among contemporary thinkers. He disliked cultural homogeneity and considered problematic, or at least not obvious, the capacity of individuals to retain a certain degree of intellectual originality. He was critical of a form of thinking that is internal to existing models, frameworks, or paradigms: "it's like traveling by train or carriage … the streets and streets influence—not to say control—the place where you go."[5] Institutional thought frames the territory, limits free research, and enforces a rigid uniformity throughout meaningless, rigid codes. Organized thought, in other words, consumes the brain and the imagination, implants a deterministic order that seeks to suppress instinct, forbids creativity, and denies human impulses and individuality. Panikkar was inherently distant from this form of thinking. He was constantly and unmistakably driven by a sense of self-determination and non-conformity to basic institutional standards, including intellectual standards. The karmic line that begins in Panikkar (but not 'with Panikkar' or 'through Panikkar'), the new Pentecost, the third Christian millennium, are pronouncements that might inspire in the orthodox reader the vision of an age of the spirit, the persistence of a modern form of Joachimism. But they are more accurately the expression of an alternative that would emerge from the energies of religious renewal. They are signs of the constant undertow of the human spirit's resistance to institutional excesses wrapped in the cloak of inevitability.

In conclusion, self-assertion was the indisputable principle of his life. Panikkar managed to become his own person and to do it with a sense of innocence. In the words of Salman Rushdie, "those who do not have power over the sory of their lives, power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times changes, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts."[6] From Varanasi, Panikkar wrote to Castelli: "I try to be free, with the true freedom that has now passed the myths and objectifications." Then he continued: "(even those of God as 'substance' apart)."[7] For Panikkar, self-determination was the line of resistance against institutions that come with their assigned identity; it was the antidote to religious prefabricated myths and objectifications, including those of God as substance apart from the world. In the end, Panikkar attempted to offer alternatives and values to break the cultural momentum he rejected. More

specifically, he articulated an alternative to institutional forms of religion and religious life, an alternative based on the overwhelming presence of the Spirit; he suggested a remedy to heal the alienation between person and person, person and nature, and between person and God.

A Catholic Reformer

Panikkar has been perceived as either a radical Christian theologian or a professional theologian. He has been described, and with good reason, as a cutting-edge theologian. He is often mentioned when a point should be made that the Roman Catholic Church needs to emerge from the bond of its Latinity and to be really and ultimately Catholic, that is, universal. In his eulogy, the previously mentioned scholar and Panikkar's disciple and friend Joseph Prabhu describes Panikkar as "one of the pioneering and paradigmatic theologians of this new era." He also quotes Panikkar in one of his more memorable lines: "to the third Christian millennium is reserved the task of overcoming a tribal Christology by a Christophany which allows Christians to see the work of Christ everywhere, without assuming that they have a better grasp or a monopoly of that Mystery, which has been revealed to them in a unique way."[8] Panikkar himself contributed to this characterization of his work as progressive and innovative and eventually provocative with sentences like this: "I remember once telling Pope Paul VI during a private audience [probably dated January 1966], when he asked me what I was doing, that I was wondering if, in order to be a Christian, one had to be intellectually a Greek and spiritually a Semite."[9] Clearly Panikkar aimed to be a pioneering theologian of this new era, a theologian of the third millennium; he obviously enjoyed this specific role and the related task to push boundaries beyond their current state.

As a thinker, Panikkar has been often characterized as a progressive Catholic theologian, not necessarily in line with official Catholic teaching. This position is exemplified by theologians such as Dupuis, Komulainen, D'Costa, Menacherry, and Ranstrom. These scholars do not argue that Panikkar is unorthodox—he was never the object of a doctrinal investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—rather that Panikkar stretched theological parameters to the point that he situated himself, in a certain moment of his intellectual trajectory, far from the official Catholic position. It is easy to label Panikkar's thought in terms of radicalism; his thought, however, should be recognized as a form of reformism, an impulse to go back to the earliest and most fundamental sources and give a new form ('re-form'). Panikkar's instinct was not to modify the existing but to create an alternative, although he recognized the complexity of such a task in

his introduction to *The Unknown 2* when he refers to 'new wine' and 'old skins.'[10] Panikkar was not a progressist: he did not attempt to change, rectify, or perfect the current state of affairs of Catholicism. He detected the end of a certain form of Christianity and imagined a form of Christianity radically different. In his tens of books and hundreds of articles, he articulated the alternative to *this* world, of *this* Catholicism, an alternative that saves from this state of affairs, and he offered the worldviews and myths that underlie such an alternative. He suggested an alternative, a spiritual awakening of planetary dimensions, a different world of religious egalitarianism, in which the *persona* precedes the institution, a community ignited by Spirit makes institutions obsolete, and a new innocent mode of thinking subverts conventional mindset.

Panikkar was contemplating possible futures in religiousness, particularly in Christianity, acknowledging that anything at all can be said to happen in the future without fear of contradiction because the future is a safe laboratory for trying out ideas, a means of thinking about reality as it can be. For Panikkar, a disciplined creativity and firm speculations were not only about scholarship; they lead toward alternative realities. Along with a fierce intellect, he had a profound sense of wonder, and he never stopped insisting on the beauty and subverting power of writing. The alternative often begins in art, including the art of words. Scholars who owe a debt to Panikkar often speak of his work as giving them a sense of possibility, of inviting them to write in ways they did not know they could. By breaking down the walls of disciplines, he handed new tools to 21st-century scholars working in what he would call the borderlands, the place where life encounters intellectual reflection. Keeping an ambivalent distance from the centers of scholarly power, he made room in his work for other voices. In years when Christianity's dominant narrative was one of European pride and Western superiority, he was aware, always, that there were other stories to tell. The scholarly mainstream once relegated his work to the margins; then, by creating alternatives, Panikkar offered to the mainstream sources of transformation. Time will tell if, in fact, it is the mainstream that ends up transformed.

Due to his position as Professor at UCSB and, more importantly, his monumental scholarly work, Panikkar has been considered by many as an academic philosopher and theologian, committed as he was to the development of the disciplines to which he had dedicated himself, with little to no mention of his Catholic faith and sacerdotal status. Yet the question needs now to be raised, in retrospect, whether he can after all be approached primarily as a scholar. He certainly never prioritized an academic career over his countercultural life: in fact, he declined an offer from Harvard University because it concerned a temporary position, accepting a proposal from UCSB instead because it offered a permanent job. However,

he negotiated a part-time commitment at UCSB that allowed him the freedom to live his life at his convenience two quarters out of three. Bielawski notes that Panikkar's thought did not fit into the classic academic environment, which reflects more particularly a conception of philosophy and theology as autonomous, professionalized academic disciplines—a conception that has become dominant in the universities of Europe and the United States but is uniquely irrelevant to Panikkar.[11] I personally believe that the opposite is true: the academic landscape, with its hierarchies, rules, and concealed operations of conformitization, did not fit into Panikkar's life. He eventually took academia in small doses.

Scholars can believe that Panikkar's creativity and monumental learning were in service to academic disciplines in progress. Yet is this reading of Panikkar really justified? Can Panikkar be seen as either a technical philosopher or a professional theologian? For sure, Panikkar held professional qualifications in both the disciplines of philosophy and theology, and his own deep commitment to the highest technical standards of scholarship is undoubtable. But he clearly did regard philosophy and theology as something more than just a career opportunity. Moreover, he did not characterize himself as a 'professional theologian.' The distinction between a professional theologian and a theologian, he would have likely claimed, is that for the latter, theology is a way of life. He wanted to be more than a professional theologian; his preoccupation was instead focused on doing original work and inspiring others to do the same. Despite being celebrated for his highly sophisticated reasoning, his passion centered not in philosophizing and developing his rich, brilliant intellect, but rather in the burning and reverent love of truth. He reiterated in his writings that his work was naturally and freely emerging from his soul and flesh. Philosophical and technological techniques sustained his inspiration but did not lead it.

Certainly there is something implausible about any picture of Panikkar as a philosophical and theological genius who is disentangled from his Catholic faith and priestly condition. This is particularly true when it comes to identifying his intentions. In his brilliant, profound, and elegantly written essay on Panikkar, Jyri Komulainen explains that

> it would be misleading to present him [Panikkar] straightforwardly as a Catholic theologian, even though he is a Catholic priest. Locating Panikkar's theology of religions in the context of Catholic theology is justified only if his intellectual independence and multireligious disposition are simultaneously recalled and emphasized. In his thinking he has courageously crossed many borders, and therefore labeling him does not do full justice to his intentions.[12]

Unfortunately, Komulainen himself provides little information about Panikkar's intentions. If the story I am telling in this book means anything, Panikkar's

intentions have something to do with a wholesale replacement of mainstream views of religion with alternative views. This monumental task, however, was pursued from within Catholicism. Surely his colleagues and friends agreed that Panikkar was a curious, touchy, and eccentric figure, with un-Western habits of dress and social opinions and a quite unfamiliar spiritual earnestness and intensity. Yet friends were ready to ignore these countercultural oddities—as I previously claimed—on account of the unique contribution he was clearly making to the development of theology and philosophy of religion. For the same reason, they were ready to downplay other important aspects of his life: his Catholic faith and sacerdotal status. Viewed against the scholarly background, the proper context of Panikkar's thinking is internal to the development of academic disciplines, while his faith and priestly condition appear irrelevant in assessing the value of his academic contribution. How is this to be avoided? In the case of Panikkar, readers can do so by keeping one key point in the center of their minds: Panikkar remained in communion—understood in terms of loyalty to the Church and her tradition—with Catholicism to the point that anyone who had the chance to know Panikkar personally found that he was viscerally attached to his belonging to the Catholic Church.[13] Panikkar considered himself in sacramental communion with the Catholic Church, for whose mental and institutional structures he attempted to provide an alternative. His intention was to nourish, purify, and renew 20th-century Catholicism, not to overcome it. Panikkar's main goal was to be seen as the man who brought the era of Christianity (as he defined it: a sociological-historical construction) to an end, only to be replaced by an era of Christianness.[14] He announced the upcoming of Christianness, a new era in which Christians would embrace a personal religiousness unfolded by Christic principle.[15]

Admittedly, this option of seeing Panikkar eminently as a scholar is difficult to reconcile with the quite notorious facts that he constantly made clear that his sacerdotal status was one of the most important sources, if not the most important, of his identity.[16] His ministry extended well beyond its ecclesial manifestations. It was a ministry at the service of the Mystery and at the service of the revelation of the Mystery. He was a Christian and a priest as well as a philosopher and theologian, and his thought, as with all proper Christian thought, was essentially Christocentric. For Panikkar, Christ figures as the center of the universe. He believed that Christ is revealed everywhere and, therefore, this Mediterranean, Semitic, and Greek understanding of Christ can no longer contain the current call for a universal understanding of the mystery of Christ. Christ is this cosmic, universal, internal presence that reveals itself freely in every human face. It is Christ that shines out everywhere.

I already mentioned that I see Panikkar as a countercultural personality and a reformer. He searched for freedom and the possibility to freely build his own identity. He refused to conform to the norms of institutions or to conventional lifestyles and mainstream mindsets. He pursued unconventional paths. His inclination to stretch the social and intellectual boundaries to the limit led him into unexplored, uncharted, and uncodified territories of mind and practice. The same pluralistic orientation, the cutting-edge area of theology in Panikkar's times, was in his view carried too timidly. Paul Kitter once noted that, for Panikkar, the pluralistic theologians were not pluralistic enough.[17] His mission was to build intellectual alternatives to the conventional through an unconventional experience of life. Locating Panikkar's theology in the context of his reforming project is justified only if his faith and sacerdotal identity are simultaneously recalled and emphasized. In his thinking he courageously crossed many borders, but his center of gravity remained within Catholicism.

I suggest that the preconceptions with which most scholars approached him debarred them almost entirely from understanding the point of what he was saying. They saw him as a unified man, as a plurilingual speaking philosopher and theologian with a uniquely original technical genius, who just happened also to adhere personally to the Catholic faith. They would have done better to see him as an integral and authentic priest who was committed to a countercultural life, which in turn was expressed in a body of highly regarded writings. They saw him in the light of the brilliant variations on the pluralistic theologies of religions which were doing so much to carry forward the interreligious dialogue. They would have done better to see him as a Catholic thinker who expressed a reformist orientation within the Catholic Church, and who just happened to be exercising his talents and personality on theology and philosophy in a scholarly environment.

Return to the Source

With that said, the residual problem on which I shall be concentrating in this section arose in the following way. Suppose I have to search the sources of a brilliant man of great sensitivity, committed to a life at the margins of the Church—understood as an institution—but ideally placed at the core of the Church as Mystical Body; this man, gifted with intellectual acumen and unusual knowledge, has embarked on a transformational project, that is, a project of religious and spiritual renewal that cannot be seen as incremental, but rather alternative to the existing religious standards. This project is an integral aspect of a personality whose values and norms of behavior differ substantially from those of mainstream Catholic

teaching. Where am I supposed to search for such sources? Should I look at the thinkers who influenced this man's thought? Or should I locate him in the history of the disciplines to which he committed?

When scholars engage in a project of detecting the sources of Panikkar's thought, they almost inevitably locate the center of gravity of their research in the philosophical and theological sources, that is, the conventional sources of their disciplines; this is no surprise. Given all the rules of the scholarly game, it is the prime task of such projects to place any detailed knowledge in the context of the supposed development of the discipline. In the case of Panikkar, however, this tends only to distract from the more appropriate picture in which Panikkar deserves to be contextualized. I prefer to take at face value what this man believes, that is, the sources of his thought are his own life and Spirit. So, the sources of his thought were, in effect, the Source, the ultimate source from which all comes. And for a Catholic priest, a Christian thinker, whatever his lifestyle and intellectual orientation, the source can be found everywhere, but for sure in Scripture and Catholic tradition. "The more we have the courage to walk new paths," he said, "the more we must remain rooted in our own tradition."[18] Thus the Catholic tradition is, together with Scripture, the source I must consider if I want to locate the offspring of Panikkar's thought. Not surprisingly, Panikkar was almost invincibly attracted by the very beginning of Christianity, the first generation of Christians who left Judaism rather than reform it. He can be seen embodying the tendencies of a movement in Catholicism that was discovering the riches of the biblical scholarship on the primeval history.

He was the theologian who said that "I can only be free of a certain Christianity or Hinduism (and the same goes for a certain type of Buddhism or secularity) by striving to be a better Christian or a better Hindu and a better citizen of the world."[19] At the core of this statement, to be free of a certain Christianity one needed to be a better Christian, there is a paradox: in order to go forward in one's spiritual path, one first must go backward. Here is Panikkar again: "the most positive way to overcome a tradition does not consist in leaving it behind as if it were just any kind of association, but rather in living out the said tradition more deeply (authentically), that is to 'transmit it,' and thus transform it."[20] To put it differently: if one wants to change the course of Christianity, one has to reach Christianity at its deepest. If theological transformation is sometimes necessary, it is never possible unless one reaches the source, that is, one is in spiritual and intellectual communion with Christianity at its deepest and most vital levels, and then one starts over. The most positive way for a theologian *à la* Panikkar, a reforming thinker engaged in a project of spiritual and religious renewal of incredible magnitude, to break out of the current predicament and

begin developing a theology that would allow Christianity to truly meet the challenges of the age is to return to the very sources of Christianity and start over. Of course! In the context of the theological revolution which the Church so desperately—at least in Panikkar's opinion—needed, the word 'source' only secondarily refers to a scholarly text; the primary meaning he assigns to the term is a source of dynamic spiritual life. In that context, it becomes evident that what is required is not scholarly progress, but a direct, unfiltered, and 'mystical' access to the deeper sounding of ancient, inexhaustible, and vital resources of Christianity. Panikkar's return to the sources of Christian tradition was an attempt to articulate, to borrow a line from Péguy, "a new and deeper sounding of ancient, inexhaustible, and common resources."[21]

The dual movement, the return to the sources of Christianity and the reformation of present Christianity, aligns Panikkar, at least in the period under consideration here, to the work of *ressourcement* theologians such as Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Jean Cardinal Daniélou. This group of mostly French theologians were committed to the renewal of the Church. They attempted to do so through recovery and reinterpretation of biblical and early Christian sources. They intended to revitalize spiritually an exhausted Western Christianity; Panikkar attempted a reformulation of the mystery of Christ and of the Church in terms of the Kingdom. His aim was a remythologization of Christianity, to put another mythical framework in its place, for without an underlying myth one cannot even think.

With regard to Panikkar, I used the phrase 'return to the source,' to summarize in one single phrase several themes, methods, and assumptions that I see embedded in Panikkar's early writings.[22] As a Catholic author, as a priest, and a reformer, his work was not ultimately a work of scholarship but rather a work of religious reconciliation. Indeed, in his early writings the word 'source' only secondarily refers to a historical document; the primary meaning he assigns to the term is a fountainhead of dynamic spiritual life which never runs dry. The events and words of Scripture, the rites of the liturgy, the teaching of the great spiritual masters, are, for him, sources inasmuch as they are channels of the one, incomparable source that is the Mystery of Christ. The ultimate goal of the return of the source is not, then, a more accurate understanding of Christian doctrine; instead, Panikkar would have likely said, 'a recentering in the person of Christ and in his cosmic mystery.' When Panikkar named life and Spirit as his sources, he most probably meant that by immersing himself in the forms and categories of the ancient world of the Patriarchs and in the apostle Paul, and in all of the corresponding diversity and concrete specificity, he hoped to discover and imbibe that Spirit which was their common inspiration and source.

Further Considerations

I establish a parallel between St. Paul and Panikkar. Paul understood the coming of Christ not only for the twelve tribes of Israel, but also for the disinherited nations, nations that are the result of Yahweh's dispersal of the nations at Babel (Deuteronomy 32:8–9). Those disinherited should be appreciated with respect to Yahweh's inheritance, Israel, and the rectifying message of Jesus. Paul saw his ministry as instrumental in bringing back those people from the disinherited nations in Israel, and he interpreted himself as a conduit for their return to the true God: "And so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). The reality of the emerging Church, the true Israel, including the disinherited nations, displaces the old identities and establishes a new one. Panikkar shared with Paul the idea that Israel, so to speak, should be understood as large as the very human family. In Paul's thinking, instead of humanity divided as 'Israel and the nations,' which is the classic understanding of Judaism, Israel was the world. To Paul, Israel was all of mankind. And so it was to Panikkar. To both, one spirit, Christ's spirit, flows in every living being and should be respected. To both, it was more than a matter of faith; it was hope, and most of all, it was love.

St. Paul was the disciple to the Gentiles. He was the apostle to the nations. His ministry was about reclaiming the nations. Panikkar's ministry was about the same: reclaiming the nations. I am sure Panikkar—as a Christian who knows his Bible—maintained the conviction, until the end of his life, that however that may be, the heritage of India belongs to Chris and its spiritual treasures will be shared by His Church. But he also believed that his Church was not ready to meet the nations in Christ. He invited Christians to commit to a metanoia, to embrace a new innocence, to become a kingdom of priests, that is, a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). And, in fact, Christianity is a kingdom of priests, a priestly community in which the sacerdotal nature of baptized and the ministry of the ordained priests operate side by side. Who are priests? They are mediators between God and people. And a covenant of priests is what Panikkar envisioned so that everyone should seek God, and, quoting Paul, "by feeling their way towards Him, succeed in finding Him" (Acts 17:27). "And indeed," Paul continues in his speech in Athens, "He is not far from any of us." Panikkar contemplated a covenant of priesthood, elsewhere called the covenant of eternity or, more recently, the cosmic covenant. It was the primeval covenant, the covenant of peace, the covenant of the priesthood of eternity associated with the ritual of atonement, as I will show later.

While I dared to somehow build a parallel between him and Paul, I must clarify that the parallel is mostly descriptive and operates as a pedagogical tool to clarify the point: Panikkar was on a mission. In other words, the parallel with St.

Paul should not be stretched excessively. In this book, I carefully avoid the phrase 'Panikkar's Pauline thought.' If one can detect a Pauline character in *The Unknown*, such a character stands neither for Panikkar's thought on St. Paul nor for a Pauline influence on Panikkar, but for the thought of St. Paul incorporated into Panikkar's theology. Panikkar's personality, however, is another matter. I do not claim that Panikkar's personality showed Pauline traits; this may be the subject for another book. Nevertheless, some assonances are evident on the spot. Panikkar was a missionary like Paul. Panikkar was a missionary of the nations whose mission is to change Christianity to the point that Christianity can meet the other religions at the source because the meeting can only be at the source, and the source is Christ. Like Paul, Panikkar has multiple identities. Paul has multiple identities which he could adjust to accommodate Gentiles, Romans, and Jews, because in the end, Paul's identity distils to one who is 'in Christ.' The unity of those who are in Christ (have faith in Christ) is far more important than adherence to any identity. The same can be said of Panikkar. "I left Europe [for India] as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian." Panikkar has multiple identities which he can adjust to accommodate Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists, because in the end, his identity distils to one who is 'in Christ.' Like Paul, Panikkar feels unbounded. Christ has come and set his people free from every bond. For both, Christ is in the first place a liberation beyond the names and forms of religion. Both were men of interior freedom, yet quite apart from his interior freedom, Panikkar enjoyed a different sort of freedom.

Panikkar was a fascinating man and a superb intellectual, rightly celebrated as one of the more profound minds in interfaith dialogue. He was, as I tried to explain here, a religious man, a man of God, a Catholic priest. He was also an obedient member of the Catholic Church. He was a Catholic author committed seriously and deeply to the advancement of Catholicism through a return to Christ. He wrote about mystics and he loved being mystical in his writings. Most scholars have concentrated on the brilliant contributions of Panikkar's pluralistic theologies of religions, which are doing so much to carry forward the interreligious dialogue. Yet they must observe a duty to take Panikkar at face value with regard to his statement that all his writings were inspired by his life. So, what kind of life was that? Among other things, it was a life that in his case was one of privilege and autonomy. To that end, scholars may find a possible connection between that privilege and autonomy and his pronouncements about liberation from institutions and cults.

On the one hand there is a man who benefited from all of the economic privileges that come with being the son of an industrialist; always remained open to the possibility of acquiring properties in India, Europe, and California, all places he

lived; and, unabashedly showed his independence, to the point of getting married despite being a Roman Catholic priest. On the other hand, there is a philosopher and theologian whose final words to his friend Victorino Pérez Prieto were emphasizing the "liberation of theology from the micro-doxic constraints to which too often it has been reduced. And not just theology, but religion in general, which has been equated with an institution and, too often, a cult. This is a job that makes us all responsible."[23]

Panikkar has often pointed out that his philosophical and theological work is the result of his personal life circumstances. He was at home in Europe then in India, then finally in the United States. He was well versed in Christian theology as well as Buddhist and Hindu thought. A planetary exposure, dual nationality, fluency in several modern and classic languages, and three doctorates all surely build a remarkable resume of what was a distinct, prodigious personality. However, his economic condition clearly aided the pursuit of his goals. To use a more recent adage, he was part of the wealthy 1 percent. He was wealthier than most of the academic friends he met at Harvard or Santa Barbara or the colleagues he encountered at workshops and conferences. The point I make here is that Panikkar was not only a kaleidoscopic personality but also a wealthy man, and this financial capability not also helped him to lay out an independent life, but also supplemented him with a distinct vision of life.

Panikkar was born in Barcelona, the son of a Hindu father and a Spanish mother, but he was also born rich. He enjoyed a privileged status. He loved to teach and to give lectures; he definitively wanted to become an academic and appreciated a certified role in the world of scholarship. But he did not require an academic job, in the way normal people need a job and a salary. He did not need a career (in the normal meaning of the term), and in fact he had none. The fact is, Panikkar financially supported his own intellectual project; he was free to build his own intellectual path. He was free to travel without colluding with the academic calendar and the bureaucratic regime of an academic department. He was able to select a scholarly topic of his choice without any mundane preoccupation with tenure track. He was not forced by material, practical conditions to accept the normal compromises that enrich and bother the life of ordinary scholars. He was a priest, and he adored his condition to the point of considering his priesthood more important than his academic status. He was the cosmic priest, not the bureaucrat but the mediator between earth and heaven, the great reconciler. But he was also a priest—from a given moment on—with no ecclesiastic tasks to accomplish, with no duties to execute, and consequently, with no salary. He was a priest, and for some time a member of a strict religious order, but somehow he was able to disentangle himself from the rigid code of Opus Dei and initiate a journey that led him to a level

of ecclesiastic freedom of which most of his fellow priests could only dream. He was an independent man. He responded to a bishop, but he made clear that the bishop-priest relationship is not canonical, rather sacramental.[24] Moreover, he did not report to the bishop about some task to absolve, including teaching tasks; he responded to his bishop with regard to whether or not he might accept an invitation to teach at Harvard. The point is, he was able to personally finance this independent-within-the church journey. He did not depend economically on the institution. He answered to his bishop for his behavior, and for his writings to the Magisterium, but he never had to worry about the financial consequences of a potential conflict with the institution like, for example, Jacques Dupuis did.[25] Actually, he did not depend economically on anybody.

Panikkar's privileged condition gave him freedom to build his own life-path: a property in Spain, another in India, another in California, although not all simultaneously. It also gave him the opportunity to build a family and afford the economic burden that comes with it. He was free from the engaging work of a parish, an ecclesiastic office, or the administration of a department, although he was a chaplain in Salamanca, Roma, and Varanasi. In other words, he was free to do with his life whatever he desired, including using his life to build a new identity. There is no shame in being rich. Some of the most creative Catholic theologians of the 20th century—I only mention Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Hans Urs von Balthasar—were born rich. The only reason I raise this subject at all is because I think financial autonomy gave Panikkar a distinct life and a peculiar mindset. If Panikkar was correct in that ideas do not flow from the ethereal world of ideas, but from the practical experience of life, then his affluent condition offered him the opportunity to frame a distinct view of life that was outside the compass of his fellow scholars and priests. For this reason it is important to spell out the financial condition in which he lived, because it probably provided him with a sense of possibility that only great freedom can offer. Can we be sure that as a salary-dependent teacher, eventually a tenure-track assistant professor, Panikkar would have developed the same conceptual frameworks?

He did not pay an exaggerated price either for this autonomy or his lifestyle. It helped that he did not aim to change the existing, but rather to build from scratch. He was not a radical; he did not challenge the *status quo*. This tendency protected him from the otherwise probable reaction of the ecclesiastic institution that he loved but—for the second half of his life—maintained at distance.[26] And, of course, there is the matter of his marriage, which was conducted for decades in a casual and an unadvertised manner, a matter that was concluded successfully in full reconciliation with the Church. In the scholarly world, the high levels of secularization of European and American societies *de facto* relegated the matter of his

marriage to a level of irrelevance. Panikkar's lay friends and his fellow scholars—once they found about his marriage—considered his condition of married-priest as a non-problem: Protestant priests are married, the celibate condition of Roman Catholic priest is socially deprecated in the contemporary world, and 'the personal life of our acquaintances is not our business.' The very same separation between theory and praxis he frequently biased in his writings also came to his advantage, as liberal theologians are trained to guard the beliefs-ideas relationship, not to connect the life of the authors to their intellectual product. In India and some ecclesiastic circles, however, the reaction was different. His marriage created a separation that was not perceived in terms of different ideas or degree of appeasement to the canonical law, but of life-path.[27]

Conclusion

In this chapter I drafted a picture of Panikkar the man and the thinker that I believe (1) resolves the inconsistency of his philosophy of sources, and (2) explains the relevance of the biblical sources in his texts. I also delivered a picture of Panikkar that I maintain may prove valuable in and of itself. Panikkar's style of life and intellectual project in this chapter were designed to shed light on the relevance of the status of unreadiness of Christianity and the overall ecclesiological question itself. It is time to turn my attention to these issues. It will be the final step before beginning my investigation into the status of the biblical studies in the 1950s and 1960s.

Notes

1. *The Unknown*, vii.
2. *The Unknown 2*, 10.
3. Letter from Raimon Panikkar to Rita e Carlo Brutti, June 23, 1994, from Tavertet (Archivio Brutti in Perugia). Quoted in Bielawski, *Panikkar. Un Uomo e il Suo Pensiero*, 272. The translation is my own.
4. Raimon *Panikkar*, *Saggezza stile di vita* (S. Domenico di fiesole: Cultura della Pace, 1993), 90. The translation is my own.
5. *Raimon Panikkar*, *Invitacion a la sabiduria* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1998), 105. The translation is my own.
6. Salman Rushdie, *One Thousand Days in a Balloon, in Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (New York/London: Penguin, 1992), 439.
7. Letter from Raimon Panikkar to Enrico Castelli, May 6, 1966, from Varanasi. Quoted in Bielawski, *Panikkar. Un Uomo e il Suo Pensiero*, 272. The translation is my own.
8. Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 10.

9. See, for example: Raimundo Panikkar, "The New Role of Christian Universities in Asia," *CrossCurrents* 41, no. 4 (Winter 1991–1992): 466–483.
10. *The Unknown 2*, 9–11.
11. See Bielawski, "Fonti Filosofiche di Panikkar."
12. Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion?*, 7.
13. See, for example: "One thing is certain: my loyalty to the Church … one thing I would like to be clear: my loyalty to the Church and my adherence to tradition." Raimon Panikkar, "Apologia pro doctrina mia," in *Cometas*: *fragmentos de un diario espiritual de la postguerra* (Madrid: Euramérica, 1972), 92, 93, 99.
14. Raimon Panikkar, "The Dawn of Christianess," *Cross Currents* (Spring-Summer, 2000), Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter 1991–1992), 466–483.
15. Panikkar ends *The Trinity and World Religions* with these words: "Man is more than 'man'; he is a theandric mystery." Raimundo (Raimon) Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon—Person—Mystery* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 71. See also: "all beings can thus be seen as manifestations of the christic principle," In Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man,* 130.
16. See, for example: "In any case, I am a Catholic priest." Raimon Panikkar, *Entre Dieu et le Cosmos. Une vision non dualiste de la réalité* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998) for a long interview by Gwendoline Jarczyk, with a Catalan edition: Lleida 2006), 60.
17. As Paul Knitter observes, Panikkar reminds John Hick and other pluralists not to get stuck on the notion of a pluralism of religions. See Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2002), 129.
18. The complete quote reads: "The more we have the courage to walk new paths—he said—the more we must remain rooted in our own tradition, open to others who let us know that we are not alone and permit us to acquire a wider vision of reality." Quoted in Josep-Maria Terricabras, Laudatio of Raimon Panikkar Alemany during the solemn academic ceremony of his investiture as Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Girona (2008). See http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/laudatio.html (Accessed September 9, 2019).
19. Quoted in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*; see http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/X-2-Il-Cristo.html (Accessed September 9, 2019).
20. Quoted in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*; see http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/X-2-Il-Cristo.html (Accessed September 9, 2019).
21. Charles Péguy, "Preface," *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, 1 March 1904, repr. In *Oeuvres complètes 1873–1914* (Paris: N.R.F., n.d.), vol. 12, 186–192.
22. 'Return to the Source' is the title of several books of spirituality in several religious traditions. Lanza del Vasto's story of his trip to India, including his period with Gandhi and his pilgrimage to the sources of the Ganges river in the Himalayas, deserves special mention. See: Lando del Vasto, *Return to the Source* (New York: Schocken, 1972).
23. "[La] liberazione della teologia dalle ristrettezze microdossiche alle quali troppo spesso la si è voluta ridurre. E non solo la teologia, ma la religione in generale, che è stata equiparata a un'istituzione e, troppo spesso, a una setta. Questo è un lavoro che ci responsabilizza tutti." Prieto, *Raimon Panikkar. Oltre la Frammentazione del Sapere e della vita*, 12. The translation is my own.
24. Quoted in Prieto, *Raimon Panikkar. Oltre la Frammentazione del sapere e della Vita*, 71.
25. Gerard O'Connell, *Do not Stifle the Spirit: Conversations with Jacques Dupuis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 250.

26. I have heard the argument that Panikkar's status of global academic celebrity protected him from disciplinary actions of the ecclesiastic institutions such as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I doubt that. In recent past decades, the Congregation has had no problem investigating and disciplining theologians, even those with impeccable academic credentials and worldwide recognition, about the bases of supposed doctrinal or theological errors and ambiguities. I prefer to think that Panikkar's countercultural orientation, that is, his theology announcing the new innocence in a third era of Christianity, was considered inoffensive by the Congregation's realistic watchdogs. As far as I know, the only point in Panikkar's theology that attracted the attention of the Church's central doctrinal authority was his famous axiom, "Jesus is the Christ, but the Christ is not only Jesus" (see, for example: Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 57–58). Joseph Ratzinger, in his capacity as head of the Congregation, delivered the criticism against Panikkar's thesis in his address, "Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures" at the Meeting with the Doctrinal Commissions in Hong Kong (March 3, 1993).
27. I am aware of comments like those of Fr. Francis X. D'Sa, Director of the Institute for the Study of Religion in Pune, India, and a Panikkar expert. In his words, "I doubt whether Panikkar's marriage would be a significant fact in an Indian obituary." See: Dennis Coday, "Panikkar's Marriage," in *National Catholic Reporter*, September 10, 2010, at http://goo.gl/WybSdH (Accessed May 4, 2019). However, during my own extended stays in India, I collected a variety of comments, including critical remarks. While some scholars may be concerned with the status of Panikkar's orthodoxy, in fact, others prefer to pay attention to his orthopraxy.

CHAPTER THREE

Christian Unreadiness

> The task of Christians … may be the conversion—yes, conversion—of a tribal Christology into a christophany less bound to a single cultural event.
>
> Panikkar[1]

Christian Unreadiness

Sometime during the second half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, Panikkar determined that Christianity was not ready to convert India. The assumption behind this condition is that the Christianization of India could not be envisioned simply as an expansion of Christianity, but rather as a mutual—although asymmetrical—influence, a mutual transformation, or a mutual reform (concepts that are present in the first chapter of *The Unknown*). As a fruit of this transformation, India will become open to receiving the Christian message of salvation, and Christianity better penetrates the data of revelation and more perfectly embraces its course toward universality.

Panikkar was not the only Christian thinker to raise the question of the (un) readiness of Hindus and Christians. An idea had circulated in the Catholic milieu since the late 1930s with regard to the Christianization of India. It was framed in terms of dual assimilation: India would assimilate Christianity and Christianity

would assimilate Indian philosophy. The idea was elaborated in an informal encounter between Henri de Lubac and Jules Monchanin in Lyon, nearly 25 years before *The Unknown* was published. In that encounter, the former suggested the latter go to India to collide with Indian thought in order to uncover the primitive expression of Christian faith. De Lubac believed that in coming into contact with India, Monchanin would be able to free theology "from all accessory elements and rediscovering the entire essential."[2] A synthetic expression of this movement emphasizes the effect of a positive encounter with another religion as a way to interrogate tradition with new questions and to ultimately discover new depths in the Christian mystery. Monchanin identified the return to the sources as the necessary point of encounter between Christian and Indian traditions. He seemed to see Christian tradition as composed of two parts: an "infrangible core of the Revelation itself," the dogma at its pristine state, and several "constellations" formed around this nucleus—the subsequent development that began in the times of the Apostolic Fathers carried on through the course of the European history of Christianity. He argued that "no medieval summa and no critical history of dogmas can surpass the theology of Paul and John."[3]

On the other side, Monchanin claimed that the "essence of Indian culture was mysticism."[4] Since the essence of Indian tradition was mysticism, the challenge for Christianity in India was to penetrate the Indian mystical core, or, as Monchanin put it, "to focus on the inner Holy Spirit in its Indian forms."[5] This is the logic behind Monchanin's missionary project. In 1939, he left France to relocate permanently to India and to pursue a project of contemplative mission. The project found concrete realization in 1950, when together with a Breton Catholic monk, Henri le Saux-Abhishiktānanda, Monchanin established a Christian ashram in Tamil Nadu, where Christian monks would practice contemplation in Indian traditional forms. Their project was to reach the very core of the Indian soul and to Christianize it from within. As monasticism has been the primary form of spiritual quest and religious commitment in India since the Vedic era, the raison d'être of an Indian Benedictine ashram was an attempt to integrate into the Church the vocation of the Indian monasticism.

The dual movement of Monchanin's theological enterprise in India is clear. On one side, he clashed with India in order to reach the essence of Christianity. This essential core, on the other side, once freed "from everything incidental," would become the irreducible, non-negotiable pure state of Christian dogmas, the criteria presiding over the replacement of the incomplete, eventually erroneous truths of Indian tradition. In theorizing this semi-essentialist character of tradition, Monchanin created an anti-assimilation stance against the risk of misrepresentation of the revealed mystery, and he protected faith from any sort of hybridity. The

fundamental essence of faith and tradition is pure and authentic and autonomous from its cultural cloths: if the path of inculturation is reversed and Christian missionaries liberate themselves from indigenous customs, if they plumb the depths of their faith, then what they will find is fundamentally Christian.

Simplifying his line of reasoning, one might say that Monchanin eventually concluded that the plan of dual assimilation, discussed with de Lubac, had fallen through: India and Hinduism were not ready for a serious encounter with Christianity. But, he added, maybe he (Monchanin) was too Greek—as a short-cut for the Christian mindset that emerged from the synthesis between biblical narrative and Greek philosophy in the Classic Era—to penetrate the depths of Indian mysticism and capture the fact of the matter.[6] Monchanin never addressed the problem of the unreadiness of Christianity. His co-founder, however, is another matter. Abhishiktānanda believed that the Christianization of India is not a theoretical problem and cannot be solved intellectually, as Monchanin thought. It is not a question of reframing theological assumptions and updating theological ways or reasoning. For Abhishiktānanda, it is a meeting that can only occur at a spiritual level. The meeting has nothing to do with dogmas about the Trinity, Incarnation, or Resurrection; simply put, it is rather an encounter through the Spirit. Thus, Abhishiktānanda reached a different conclusion: it is not Hinduism that is unready, but both Hinduism and Christianity. When confronted with the incommensurable depths of spirituality and mysticism in Hinduism, Christianity seems still too 'Neolithic,' that is, a proper and full-grown religion. "Christian people are not ready," Abhishiktānanda declared to himself in his personal notebook, to meet non-Christian people at the Source, who is Christ.[7] He then immediately added, "nor are non-Christian people." The discussion between Abhishiktānanda and Panikkar on this and other themes can be followed in their letters.[8]

Abhishiktānanda shared with Panikkar the belief that Christianity needs to change to the point that Christianity is ready to meet the other religions at the source, because the meeting can be only happen at the source, and that source is Christ. However, Panikkar took the reflection on Christian unreadiness one step further: he believed the meeting requires a conversion (a purification, a new innocence) of all, Christians and non-Christians. That meeting requires a metanoia of Christianity's self-understanding, a fundamental transformation of the Christian interpretation of the nature of the original Christian fact: the incarnation. In Panikkar's words: "The task of Christians … may be the conversion—yes, conversion—of a tribal Christology into a christophany less bound to a single cultural event."[9] The task of Christians is the conversion from a religion built around a national god. This, in a nutshell, is the answer to the ecclesiastical question.

This theme of conversion is well-known, and scholars of Panikkar have investigated this topic on several occasions. The same can be said with other elements of the ecclesiological question: for example, the crisis of 'religion' as a system of beliefs and juridical institution, and the 'tribal Christology' still bounded to a single cultural event mentioned in the quote above. However, scholars have studied these elements in the context of other themes, such as the christophany and the limits of a Mediterranean mindset, in this following Panikkar himself. For example, the interpretation of the nature of the original Christian fact, whether it is determined by spatial and temporal coordinates or not, is at the core of Panikkar's famous criticism about the Semitic and Greek roots of Christianity that work as unnecessary limits to a much needed universalism. I already mentioned the episode of the private meeting with Pope Paul VI in which Panikkar wondered if Christianity must be indefinitely bound to its Greek and Semitic origins. In his *Opera Omnia*, Panikkar, immediately after this remembrance, clarifies the meaning of his question: "the proclamation of the gospel has been linked to *one* ideology" (emphasis added).[10] Thus, the historical circumstances of the Greek-Semitic roots of Christianity mentioned during the meeting with the Pontiff are firmly connected with the condition of cultural captivity of the Church. As far as I know, however, scholars have neither linked these elements to the question of the unreadiness of Christianity nor to *The Unknown*.

Abhishiktānanda's criticism about the inability of Christianity to move beyond forms and word, that is, to be too Greek, is another subject that has been investigated in depth. But it has been linked to matters of spirituality and interreligious dialogue, not to the Church's unreadiness. On the same matter, Abhishiktānanda has this terrible note in one of his notebooks: "Jesus [has] expressed his own mystery in terms of the Old Testament ideas that were most common in his time: the Son of man, the suffering Servant."[11] This note is 'terrible' in the sense that in it Abhishiktānanda identified the Jewish roots at the level of Jesus's mental patterns, therefore excluding any possibility of severing Christianity from its Jewish roots. How will it be possible to elaborate a serious and genuine Indian theology if the very source of the gospel is hopelessly Jewish?

Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda

Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda became friends during Panikkar's trips to India in the 1950s and 1960s. Both had moved to India from Europe, the former for limited periods of time, between his commitments in Europe and the United States, the latter indefinitely.[12] They both had culturally clashed with the post-colonial, post-Independence India, still under the influence of the disciples of Gandhi. The

country was poor and largely rural, with myriads of villages populated by both people and animals. Both seemed to be truly enchanted by the Indian landscape, particularly by the overwhelming cosmic sense it generated in their souls and minds. In Panikkar's words:

> [India] is an a-historical scenario, or in a certain way supra-historical, because it is a cosmic landscape in which man (sic) and the surrounding world form a unity, a truly creaturely unity. In seeing and traveling those fields, those mountains and those villages […] one feels with extraordinary intensity that nature and man they must be united, they belong to each other, just like there is here a stream, there is a flock and further on three women with burdens on their heads who walk slowly and rhythmically. The one is as natural as it is the other, and that pond is not clear if it is the work of the hand of man or the Creator and that coconut palm forest it is not possible say whether it is the result of man's sweat or the sheer spontaneity of Mother Nature.[13]

On the roads, wondering and begging *sadhus*, naked and silent, were revered and fed. When they passed through town, people were waiting for them, trying to feed them with a ball of rice or attempting to get them into their houses. The caves of the hills in South India and the peaks of the Himalayas hosted thousands of hermits who had renounced everything, including clothes and identity, and just sat quietly, unaware of their body or their surroundings. Great gurus, such as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Gnanananda Giri, and Sri Harilal W. L. Poonja (Abhishiktānanda met the first and became acquainted with the other two), carried on the timeless tradition of Indian inner-oriented spiritual saints who attracted masses of people satisfied to sit in front of the master and adore him. Religion permeated the entire Indian society in a gentle and non-intrusive way. On top of that, the Vedas, the holy books of the most ancient among the Hindu religious traditions, promised to unveil to the two Christian friends the incomparable spiritual treasures of India.

Henri le Saux was a French monk and Roman Catholic priest from the Benedictine monastery at Sainte-Anne de Kergonan, in Brittany. Le Saux had left France in 1948 to join Monchanin, and together they established Shantivanam, a Christian ashram. In India, le Saux changed his name into Abhishiktānanda. Quite soon after, he lost interest in the ashram and preferred to live long retreats of silence and solitude in caves and in abandoned Hindu temples. He pursued his spiritual search at the intersection of Christian monasticism and Vedanta, one of the world's oldest and most comprehensive spiritual philosophies, based upon the Vedas, or sacred scriptures of India. Under the spiritual direction of his guru, Sri Gnanananda Giri, he embraced *sannyasa*, the sacred Hindu tradition of renunciation and ascetism, and "lived almost totally as a Hindu monk [although only for limited periods of time]," as he wrote in his correspondence, "and no longer as a

more or less dilettante *sannyasi*."[14] In the absence of better and more indigenous examples of Christian gurus, Abhishiktānanda is still today the closest thing the Indian Church has to a mystic.

Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda came from a pre-counciliar Catholic environment, marked of dogmatic rigidities, obedience to superiors, traditionalism (in the case of Panikkar), and some degree of devotional practices (in the case of Abhishiktānanda). Panikkar belonged to a movement (Escriva always opposed the idea that Opus Dei is a religious order, as it is open to laypeople) aiming to Christianize the world from within, like "an intravenous injection in the bloodstream of society," as Escriva once said.[15] In those days, the movement was characterized by secrecy, aggressive recruiting practices, and isolation of members from their families, but apparently Panikkar did not suffer from these traits of the Opus. Showing a remarkable mix of clerical acceptance and—as he put it—Asian passivity, he remained part of the Opus for 27 years and left only because he was dismissed.[16] Abhishiktānanda belonged to a congregation within the Benedictine order, the Congregation of Solesmes, which was instrumental to the renewal of the liturgy within Catholicism, that is, a Eucharist-centered liturgy that facilitated participative worship for all members of the Church. This attention to the liturgical participation might explain the concern about rites that accompanied Abhishiktānanda's life in India, when he was often ambivalent between his loyalty to the Eucharist and his belief—which he borrowed from Vedanta—that the Truth lies beyond rites. By contrast, the co-founder of Shantivanam, Monchanin, was more open than Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda to the new lines of thought within Catholic theology and more in tune with *ressourcement*, the best school of pre-counciliar French theology. Monchanin was an academic devoted to evangelization, a disciple and student of Valentin, Podechart, and Tixeront, and an intellectual who could match the rigor and granularity of thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. In the last period of his life, he became skeptical about the possibility of integrating Indian mysticism within Christianity.[17] He believed his partner Abhishiktānanda was reacting too radically to the encounter with Indian spirituality. During his time at Shantivanam, he became a privileged source on the progress of Catholic theology for Abhishiktānanda. Monchanin did not leave notes behind regarding his brief and sporadic meetings with Panikkar, but it is known that he appreciated Panikkar's sophisticated lines of reasoning.[18]

Ecclesiastical Question

By clashing with the reality of India, the two friends discovered cultural galaxies which had reached spiritual peaks with no connection to the biblical revelation and

boasted mental frameworks that did not integrate the Judeo-Hellenistic Christ of the Christian tradition. In turn, the Christ of the Christian tradition, forged into Judeo-Hellenistic mental frameworks, was unable to integrate and supersede the truths generated into, and manifested by, Indian cultural galaxies. By clashing with a reality of India, that is, Indian gurus and *sanniasis*, Hindu sacred mountains and holy temples, Vedic Scripture and non-duality (or Advaita Vedanta), Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda discovered a cosmic conception of the divine, an a-historical as well as non-anthropocentric view of the divine. In the words of the latter:

> India, free from history and especially free from … that impossible 'people of God'! and also free from the *logos* and the concept [*eidos*], immediately grasped the universal mystery, the Purusha who, outside all history and every *eidos*, … appears at the origin of everything, at the origin of the cosmic whole.[19]

Thus, in Indian religiosity the two friends found the traits of a cosmic vision of the mystery. When they applied this cosmic conception of the divine to Christianity, they became captivated by the Pauline notion of 'Comic Christ.' In Abhishiktānanda's words, "Christ is the cosmic Man, the *Purusha*.[20] Christ is God manifested in the totality."[21] A few years later Panikkar would state that "the New Testament is full of this cosmic conception of the meaning of Christ."[22] A distinct Christo-pneumatic interpretation of the nature of the fundamental Christian fact, that is, the coming of Christ in this world, was at stake in Panikkar's and Abhishiktānanda's reflection: Christ is Spirit and the ones who worship Him must worship in spirit (John 4:24).[23] Or, in Abhishiktānanda's words: "Jesus said to his disciples: It is good for you that I go away. And in effect he disappeared … the one who dies, rose, ascended to heaven is therefore no longer 'known' except in the *pneuma*, the Spirit, in a spiritual, *pneumatikē* form."[24] In his famous *The Unknown*, Panikkar framed the Cosmic Christ in Pauline terms.

In India the two Catholic priests reached the conclusion that the 20th-century long history of Christianity was the result of an enormous, unfortunate misjudgment: the Church, not the people of God, is the spiritual Kingdom of God. This is the ecclesiological question.[25] Christianity is not and cannot be a religion like any other religion. With 'religion' I mean a system of beliefs, practices, and doctrines. Christianity, if one still wants to use this term, is humankind in the post-Pentecostal era, after the effusion of the Spirit. "Christ lives in the Spirit," according to Abhishiktānanda, "not in the Pope or in the formulas of the Creed."[26] Thus, Christians are not the members of a religion among the others with its rites and doctrines, rather those who carry the Spirit. "We must bring people today to recognize the Spirit, much more than the story of Jesus."[27] Christians carry the Spirit as well as ferment creation. As Panikkar put it, Christians' task is to be salt, and to give more flavor to all things, so that everything is more beautiful and

better (Mark 4:11–12).[28] Their task is to be cooperators between the divine and all creation, to be synergic to the coming of the Kingdom (1Peter 2:8).[29] Previously, Abhishiktānanda had used the same words: "The primordial role of Christian, to be leaven in the dough; by his (sic!) own humility, sincerity, etc., to make whoever approaches him more humble, more sincere."[30] The Church as *kenosis*—that is, naked seed—is the ecclesiological theme that underlies and unifies much of Panikkar's theological work and of Abhishiktānanda's reflections on his own spiritual experiences. In articulating this theme, the two Catholic priests stand apart from their contemporaries as provocative and innovative reformers. Once again, 'reformer' is understood in terms of re-form, that is, to return to the original form, at the source, and start over. And the source is Christ. Their encounter with India and Hinduism provided them the stimulus to recover a vision of the Church that was not a new one, but one that had been forbidden after the very first generation of Christians.

Both Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda expressed the same fundamental idea: the reception of revelation was sold out by the first Christians soon after the departure (i.e., Ascension) of Jesus. According to Abhishiktānanda, "the revolution brought by Jesus … was immediately defused, from the very first Christian generation."[31] Panikkar offered a much more articulate version of the story. In his view, the clash between Peter and Paul at the so-called Council of Jerusalem was a clash between two potential destinies: Christianity could either become a new reformed sect of Judaism or an emancipation from Judaism. In the Council of Jerusalem, the small original group of Christians broke free of the testament, the law, the circumcision and all the other signs that mark "the primordial sacrament of the covenant of YHWH with His People."[32] They broke the covenant when they realized that the Holy Spirit blows how and where it chooses, reaching Gentiles and not only Jewish people. That was the output of the Council of Jerusalem. Christians were satisfied to be light, salt, and seed, and to give more flavor to all things, so that everything is more beautiful and better. Borrowing the idea from Justin Martyr, Panikkar defined Christians as the seeds of the Word in other religions, rather than builders of their own religion. Then this original group of Christians fell into temptation and desired a new testament, laws and doctrines, and a tribal god, and inevitably Christianity became another religion among others, a religion with its own laws and its own covenant and its own god.[33]

"Christianity has been ossified into a religion." This is Abhishiktānanda's dramatic and conclusive opinion on the Church. "By becoming a religion," he wrote, "Christianity has lost its mystery" and its redemptive power.[34] Christianity also lost its most precious gift, that is, total openness to the total human community.[35] In his personal journal he described the spiritual deficit of the modern Church,

but his main critique goes to the twenty centuries old Church, described as the Neolithic Church. The Neolitic Church is the Church living in the Neolithic era, the era of religion. It was supposed to have ended 2000 years ago at the Pentecost, but it did not end there. Also Panikkar articulated his critique to Christianity on two levels: one is the corrupting effect of modernity on Christianity; the other is the ecclesiological question as it emerged at the origins of Christianity, when "the primitive Christian effort … to breaking the covenant, the testament of YHWH with his people—the circumcision" was initially successful and then failed.[36]

In Panikkar's and Abhishiktānanda's view, it is through the incarnation that the Spirit has penetrated the universe and now everything shines with the brightness of the Spirit. Christ is the Spirit that blows freely, but He is worshiped by Christians as a tribal god, as *their* god (the 'impossible' people of God, as Abhishiktānanda argued). Abhishiktānanda framed the situation through statements like: "The Jew burdens God with his own personality. Everything is centred on himself (sic!) for the Jew. God must fight for his people, exterminate his enemies … Yahweh is a national God. The Christian Israel has inherited Jewish chauvinism."[37]

Christian Unreadiness (Abhishiktānanda)

During his 25 years in India, Abhishiktānanda certainly expressed on several occasions, in public writings and private notes, a severe opinion on the state of Christianity: Christianity, he said, is not ready to meet Hinduism at the very depth, which is Christ. In his words:

> I have no idea … whether the Lord will ever make India a Christian country. In any case, this will not happen in our time, and probably not in the course of the immediately following generations, because the Christians are unfortunately very far from being prepared for it.[38]

In his private notes and published writings, Abhishiktānanda had often raised the problem of the 'unreadiness of Christians.' His main point was that Christians and Hindus can only meet in Christ. Abhishiktānanda wrote in *Mountain* that "it is only at the very source that the Meeting takes place we only meet each other when we meet God" (p. 42). So, for Abhishiktānanda Hindus and Christians can only meet in Christ. But, Abhishiktānanda observed, Christians are not ready to meet Hindus in Christ because they have not yet realized their total mystery in Christ. In a letter written a couple of months after his pilgrimage to Gangotri, Abhishiktānanda explained in plain terms that "the further I go, the more I believe that the essential task in India is not to bring the Gospel to the Hindus, but to

convert the Christians to the *Gospel* [original emphasis] and to 'catholicism'."[39] Thus, Christians still need to convert to the Gospel. To put it differently, for Abhishiktānanda the Church had yet to reach he hidden depths of her source. Christians needed to return to the source of their faith, which is the Gospel, and ultimately Christ; only then will they be ready to enter in dialogue with Hinduism. In a letter to his sister, Abhishiktānanda described what seemed to be his vision of Christianity as totally converted to the Gospel: "a life conformed to the Gospel … when the Church, or rather, Christians as a whole, radiate the pure light of the Gospel … then … the non-Christians will ask for baptism."[40] But what exactly is holding the Church back? Why has she yet to discover her source?

At a one level, Abhishiktānanda considered the Church sick of rationalism.[41] In his opinion, Christianity was on the verge of a spiritual crisis, showing symptoms of a spiritual deficit that can only be cured through a return to the sources of Christianity. This crisis is not limited to the lay people; on the contrary, the crisis involved primarily the religious orders, including the monastic ones. "Monks *claim* (emphasis added) to belong to the Eschaton," he wrote in 1970. "But Benedictines think of the Beyond only under the form of an abbey choir."[42] While he referred to rationalism, Abhishiktānanda had a much clearer diagnosis in mind, something that had to do with a theologically based sociological impossibility in the Christian reality of his days of reaching a true and total experience of Christ.[43] The solution, quite obviously, was to invite Christians to rediscovery the interior dimension of their faith: "Only an immersion in the real depth will save the Church. Launch out into the deep."[44]

However, there is a deeper level: in his personal journal, he mentioned the 'Neolithic Church,' three times. The first time was in 1956, eight years after his move to India and one year before Monchanin's death. Abhishiktānanda had already reached the point of considering the possibility of leaving Shantivanam to embrace the wandering life of the Indian sadhu. In his personal journal he describe the Neolithic Church as the Church living in the Neolithic era, an era characterized by *nous* (mind, Greek) and *manas* (thought, Sanskrit)—an era "in which humanity 'builds' the earth for its own use and in its own style."[45] The Neolithic age is the time "of making plans, of rationalizing the world."[46] The Neolithic era is the era of the external world, of materialism, of the artificial. To put it differently, the Neolithic era is a non-atmic era, an era in which humanity has yet to reach undifferentiated awareness, a state of identification, not with individuality, not with groups of beings, "not through the medium of the intellect coupled with the external world," but with all pervading life itself.[47] Eleven years later, in 1967, Abhishiktānanda returned to the theme of the Neolithic era. "Church and religions," he claimed, "are tied to the Neolithic era which is coming to an end." They are provisional solutions in preparation of human beings taking control of

themselves.[48] Finally in 1970, Abhishiktānanda wrote clarifying notes about the Neolithic Church. It is worthwhile to quote most of the passage:

> Pentecost inaugurates what is beyond religion. Christ lives in the Spirit, not in the Pope or in the formulas of the Creed. Realization after 2000 years of the Pentecostal era … The Church, a transitory form between the descent of the Spirit and humanity's realization of the mystery of the Spirit—until such time as human evolution become capable of this purification (end of the Neolithic age). Christianity has been ossified into a religion.[49]

That passage contains much more than I want to disentangle here. For example, scholars of Abhishiktānanda recognize his critique of formulas, rites, names, and thoughts, and experts of Panikkar can detect a quote from *The Unknown*.[50] In any case, the point is clear: the Neolithic era is the era of religion. Pentecost was supposed to end that era 2000 years ago, but it did not end there. In another note, written in the months before his death, Abhishiktānanda seemed to clarify his point about the consequences of the path not taken:

> And then came the Councils! That means Hellenization with its transforming power, plus Roman legalism taking over from the Jewish Torah. And the Church feel into the intellectualism of the Middle Ages and the idolatry that went with it. What a shame that the Reformers were not able to discover the Spirit![51]

In brief, the Church is still at the stage of formulas and rites.

The difference between the level of the spiritual crisis of contemporary Christianity and that of the Neolithic Church is evident: the former requires a spiritual turn, a turn that cannot be led, in Abhishiktānanda's opinion, even by the contemplative religious orders within the Catholic Church. The dialogue with Hinduism, in this perspective, is an opportunity to fill the spiritual gap that is troubling Christianity. The latter, however, is a different story: here the point is that at the Pentecost, Christians had the chance to enter into a post-Neolithic age, but they took another path. The relationship with Hinduism is framed in plain and firm terms: the institutionalization of Christianity into a religion in a very early stage of its history has consigned Christianity to a rank inferior to Hinduism. From here it follows that Christians need to convert (to the Gospel): it is in and through living out the Gospel that the Holy Spirit works and conversion takes place. If that is to happen, it will take time; in fact, in *Mountain* Abhishiktānanda suggested about generations. Abhishiktānanda believed that Christianity requires a return to the sources of its faith, to start over—that is, to start at the Pentecost a Pentecostal era. It is only at that point that Christians can meet Hinduism at the ultimate source—that is, Christ—and India will be Christian. Until then, Christians and Hindus will live their days as a time in between, a time of experiential, cognitive, and cultural meeting.

Christian Unreadiness (Panikkar)

Like Abhishiktānanda, Panikkar articulated his critique to Christianity on two levels: one is the corrupting effect of modernity on Christianity. Scholars are aware of Panikkar's critical opinion about modernity and its later development, that is, technocracy (understood as technocratic system).[52] The other is the ecclesiological question as it emerged at the origins of Christianity, when "the primitive Christian effort … to breaking the covenant" did not last. "Since it is difficult to be free, the temptation of 'the fleshpots of Egypt' (the temptation par excellence) led [the primitive community of] Christians to accept a new testament, and circumcision was replaced by baptism."[53] The Church has replaced Israel. She does not recognize the privilege of race and blood for entry into the Kingdom, but still recognizes as members of the Kingdom those who accept certain laws, forms of worship, and doctrines. Pentecost inaugurated what is beyond religion, an era in which the inner experience of the Spirit, who is Christ, reveals the interior presence of God. In the end, Christianity is this revelation. Every human being bears the sign of this inner presence. Every human being is filled with Spirit. Yet, this realization was immediately defused from the very first Christian generations. And then came the councils.

Today Christianity is all about the formulas of the Creed, the rigor of the dogmas, and the tribal forms of worship, and it fails to recognize the universal dimension of the mystery of Christ. The Church, "provisional and not self-sufficient," as Panikkar described her in *The Unknown*, a transitory form between the descent of the Spirit and the humanity's realization of the mystery of Christ, is yet unable to recognize the universal and impalpable presence of Christ, a presence that is reflected in every human face. The Church has yet to discern that the revelation of Christ, although providentially poured into the Jewish-Greek matrix, is so transcendent that new, deeper, and eventually equally real manifestations of this revelation will develop providentially in other cultures. The Church is not catholic enough. This is why a Second Council of Jerusalem is needed: to reaffirm that Christianity is the spiritual kingdom of God, not a religion built around a national god. In fact, there is no law and no covenant and there is no national god because "the kingdom of the Spirit is near and where the Spirit is, there is freedom" and the Kingdom of God is in-between us (Luke 17:21).[54]

Christianity should meet Hinduism in Christ because only Christ leads to God. But Christianity, Panikkar believed, is not ready for this.[55] Christianity is still at the stage of conceptual or sociological formulas and dogmas, incapable of recognizing that everything shines with the brightness of Christ. Christianity has yet to surrender itself totally to Christ. Only when liberated from cultural,

dogmatic, tribal forms will Christianity then be able to penetrate everywhere, in Christ. A purification is needed of the Christian message and of the Christian experience, both so primitive by being practiced at the level of religion.[56] And a purification is needed because Hinduism will not come to Christ until the Church cannot see Christ in the depth of her heart. A great, monumental, epochal rite of atonement is required at this point, through which Christianity will be cleansed, washed, and purged, the damaged parts and the impurity absorbed. Not surprisingly, Panikkar called for a Second Council of Jerusalem.[57] The first council opened the Jewish church to the Gentiles. But, Panikkar argued, it did not do enough to liberate Christianity from its rootedness in the history of the people of Israel.[58] Christianity was supposed to be based on a kenotic understanding of the incarnation, but it became a religion. Pentecost flared up for a short time, then the Church became the synagogue again. A Second Council of Jerusalem, therefore, is required to make sure that Christians do not make it difficult for the nations, in particular the nations beyond the nations, the non-Abrahamic religions of Asia, who are turning to God (Acts 15:19).

Panikkar and Biblical Scholarship

For most of his life Panikkar showed an instinctive attachment to non-modern civilizations and a similar attraction to the reality of the very early Church. However, he also found congenial that time before the Israeli history, the primeval history as told in the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis. He embraced that history and already in the 1950s he found in it inspiration for writing beautiful texts, including *Meditation*, reflecting on the cosmic (or eternal) covenant (mentioned in both *The Unknown* and *Meditation*), and developing his interpretation of the Cosmic Christ. The primeval history is the favorite landscape to some of Panikkar's preferred quotes from the Scripture, such as John 8:58 ("before Abraham was born, I am") and Romans 16:25–26 (Christ is "the mystery kept secret for long ages"). In the primeval history he found evidence to support some of his deep beliefs, including the fact that Christianity is not a religious sect that has existed for two thousand years, but rather the concrete expression of what exists from the beginning and at the beginning, when there was the Word. Christianity is not as a religion but—here I quote Panikkar, who in turn is quoting Saint Augustine—"that religious feeling of Man that has existed since Adam (and that now we call Christianity)."[59] Finally, in the primeval history he found the pre-existent Christ of Colonnians, the firstborn of creation, in whom all things exist and hold together (*primogenitus omnis creatura in omnia condita sunt et constant*) (Col 1:15–17).

At this point, one can only speculate whether Panikkar turned his attention to the primeval history in the 1950s on his own, or if he reacted to a much larger shift in biblical scholarship. In the absence of more direct evidence, I can hope to answer only if I am prepared to look at the situation Panikkar was in during the period in which he conceived *The Unknown* and *Meditation*. He was a brilliant man of great sensitivity, exposed to rigorous training in philosophical, scientific, and theological fields. So what biblical scholarship might we expect to have been available to Panikkar? I can identify this link between theological reflections and biblical themes in Panikkar only by attempting a hypothetical reconstruction of the underlying logic on *The Unknown* and *Meditation* in the context of the broader biblical scholarship of those days. In other words, I must forget about the ideas and methods that Panikkar presented in *The Unknown* and *Meditation* and then put to use for his own theological purposes. Instead, I must look directly at how Panikkar intersected the exciting advancements of 1950s and 1960s biblical studies. If my assumption is correct and Panikkar's contributions cannot be removed from the biblical scholarly context in which they originated, it is in the biblical sources quoted in his book, and in the way Panikkar interpreted them, that the ultimate meanings of the elements discussed above can be found.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Panikkar spent most of his time in Rome. Here, according to my hypothesis, he framed a biblical justification that would direct his theological reflection. In those days, theological reflection was influenced by the effect on biblical studies of the archeological discoveries already mentioned. One of the major effects of these discoveries was the influence of Enoch tradition on Second Temple Judaism, with regard to notions such as high priesthood, cosmicization of covenant, and patriarchs, including Melchizedek. In turn, these notions caused scholars to look at biblical texts, including the Book of Hebrews (or 'Hebrews'), from a new perspective. Another of these major effects was the discovery of a fragment of Psalms 82, in which a divine council is described. This description, in turn, forced biblical scholars to reframe notions such as the Son of God, Paul's principalities, and sons of God in biblical text such as Daniel 7, Deuteronomy 32, and Pauline cosmic epistles. My hypothesis is that Panikkar was aware of these scholarly advancements. If the hypothesis stands, I can make more transparent Panikkar's thesis of unknown Christ and his discussion of Paul's unknown god that is included in *The Unknown*. In the process, I can also attempt a more precise interpretation of Panikkar's concept of Cosmic Christ included in *The Unknown*. Finally, I can address in a more sophisticated fashion his interpretation of Melchizedek.

As far as I know, Ranstrom was the first to establish the link between *Meditation* and *The Unknown*. While I leverage Ranstom's brilliant intuition

to link *The Unknown* and *Meditation*, I incorporate the link within a distinct line of thought: I propose to place this link in a biblical context. With 'biblical context,' I do not mean a generic context but rather a distinct biblical scholarship, one that was emerging from the assimilation of the new resources made available by archaeologists working at mid-century, that is, non-biblical literature which came before the canonical Old Testament (Canaanite and Ugaritic mythologies, etc.) and non-canonical literature that came after it (pseudepigrapha, Qumran, etc.). By the late 1950s, these resources had already begun to challenge the conventional wisdom of Bible scholarship in so many ways and had unleashed a new understanding of biblical texts. During that period, prominent studies emerged examining novel, or recovering old and forgotten, biblical themes, such as the high priestly tradition with regard to the atonement rituals, the eternal covenant binding together all creation, the concepts of divine plurality and binitarianism, and the consequent pre-Christian origins of the Trinitarian framework. I must make clear that I do not claim that Panikkar was directly influenced by these new resources and therefore I am not suggesting that parallels can be drawn between this biblical, non-biblical, and non-canonical literature on one hand and Panikkar's writings on the other. I argue instead that Panikkar was sustained in his theological reflection by biblical concerns. And to the extent that the biblical studies of that time are key to understanding *The Unknown* and *Meditation*, I can hope that this investigation will cast light on this book and show how the central vision of Kingdom (with regard to *The Unknown*) and Melchizedek priesthood (*Meditation*) emerges from the 1950s and 1960s debate on Enochic Judaism, the cosmicization of covenant, and the divine council in Second Temple literature.

With regard to *The Unknown*, the biblical topic I am thinking of is best identified both lexically and thematically with the Kingdom's presentation of divine ruling beings who bore a unique relationship to their creator. This theme is particularly relevant with regard to Paul's specific use of the expression 'unknown God' as it could be understood in the Catholic intellectual milieu of the 1950s and 1960s. With regard to *Meditation*, the biblical theme I envision is the novel interpretations of Hebrews in the light of Enochic material. In the decades after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, biblical scholars became aware that Hebrews presupposes a notion of cosmic covenant similar to that found in Enochic texts. This extra-biblical literature mentions Antediluvian Patriarchs, in particular Enoch, Noah, and Melchizedek—the Antediluvian Patriarchs who lived on Earth over the period immediately before and after the Great Flood swept across the land—and modified established codes of biblical interpretation. The distinctiveness of the new cosmic covenant elaborated in Hebrews, once seen in the view of

Enochic literature, in fact, provides an important framework for understanding the theological tendencies at work in the years in which *Meditation* was conceived.

At the same time, I must make it clear from the outset that in this book I do not say that biblical sources are the only sources that matter when it comes to Panikkar's early writings. I do not do anything to cast doubt on either the importance of the theological debates of those days or the originality of Panikkar's philosophical and theological reasoning (and I will offer evidence of my intent in the following chapters). On the contrary, once *The Unknown* and *Meditation* are put back into context and the biblical interpretations of Panikkar's thesis are identified, the true novelty and significance of his philosophical and theological reasoning becomes all the more apparent.

Let me add that the biblical and extra-biblical literature I mention in this study is not something intended to divert attention from the real matter at hand, which relates directly to Pankkar's move to India and his encounter with Abhishiktānanda. In other words, I do not do anything to undervalue the crucial role played by Abhishiktānanda in the development of Panikkar's thought. That said, I must still insist that in *The Unknown* and *Meditation*, theological and philosophical ideas on one hand, and biblical interpretations on the other, are essentially bound up with one another. One goal of this book is to describe these two themes (the Scripture and Panikkar's early theology) in such a way as to make the connection between the two seem natural and seamless.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters it was initially suggested and proved that the Scripture is a reliable background to Panikkar's theological works, including *The Unknown*. What remains to be done, however, is to identify the biblical scholarship Panikkar had in mind when he was writing the theological reflections that he included in the first edition of *The Unknown* and in *Meditation*. It is time to turn my attention to the status of the biblical studies in the 1950s and 1960s. It will be the final step before beginning my investigation into the biblical context of the priesthood *à la* Melchizedek.

Notes

1. Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 162.
2. Monchanin described his farewell meeting with de Lubac, just before his leaving to India (April–May 1939) in a letter to Duperray: "J'ai revu le P. de L […], seul, longuement. Il m'a redit toute

son amitié, étant celui qu'il cherchait, réalisant l'intuition qu'il avait eue, dès séminaire: repenser tout à la lumière de la théologie et celle-ci par la mystique, la dégageant de tout l'accessoire et retrouvant, par la seule spiritualité, tout l'essentiel […] Il a surtout aimé mes notes sur l'amour et celles sur l'Inde. Il pense que c'est en me heurtant à l'Inde que je pourrai refaire la théologie, beaucoup mieux qu'en creusant les problèmes théologiques pour eux-mêmes." Jules Monchanin, *Ecrits Spirituels*, Edouard Duperray, ed. (Paris: Editions Le Centurion, 1965), 21–22. The translation is my own.

3. Jules Monchanin, *Théologie et Spiritualité Missionnaires* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), 86.
4. Harold Coward, "Book Review," Review of *Jules Monchanin, Pioneer in Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, by Sten Rodhe, *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 7 (1994): 1–3, 2.
5. Ibid.
6. Quoted in Rodhe, *Jules Monchanin, Pioneer in Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 47.
7. *Ascent*, 307.
8. See, for example: Abhishiktānanda's letter to Panikkar, July 10, 1969, in Abhishiktānanda, *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through His Letters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989, new edition in 1995, reprinted in 2000), 216–217; henceforth, simply *Letters*. It is well-known that Abhishiktānanda's original notebooks from 1966 to 1973 have been destroyed and what scholars can access is the manuscript written by March Chaduc out of the original notebooks.
9. Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 162.
10. Raimon Panikkar, *Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. III.2, A Christophany (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 39.
11. *Ascent*, 329.
12. In the period under investigation, Panikkar went to India three times: three and half years between 1954 and 1958, two years between 1964 and 1966, and then for five years between 1967 and 1972, although not permanently and with long absences to teach at Harvard University (three months per year) and to attend conferences in Europe.
13. In 1958 and 1959, Panikkar wrote a series of articles on different aspects (i.e., religious, political, linguistic, etc.) of India. These articles became the core of a book: Raymond Panikkar, *La India. Gente, cultura y creencias* (Madrid: Rialp, 1960), awarded with the Spanish Premio Nacional de Literatura. The translation is from the Italian translation of Raymond Panikkar, *L'India. Popolazione, Cultura e Credenze*, trad. di Adriana Ceccato (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1964), 110. Translation is my own.
14. Letter to A. le Saux (April 11, 1952), in *Letters*, 55.
15. John L. Allen, *Opus Dei* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 17. According to Escriva, members of Opus Dei simply operate in the world as Christians; their faith, in other words, is not limited to interiority, but highlights in everything they say or do.
16. "Forse c'è in me un grande peso di passività indiana." Letter (in Italian) from Panikkar to Enrico Castelli, from Varanasi, May 6, 1966. Source: private archive of Italian philosopher Enrico Castelli Gattinara in Rome.
17. "Unfortunately Indian wisdom is tainted with the erroneous tendencies and looks as if it has not yet found its own equilibrium." Jules Monchanin, *Contemplation: The Essential Vocation of the Church and of India* in *Swami Parama Arubi Anandam (Fr. J. Monchanin), 1895–1957: A Memorial*, Saccidananda Ashram 2007, 125).
18. Bielawski, *Panikkar. Un Uomo e le Opere*, 94.

19. December 25, 1972. Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda*, 363.
20. Nonduality (or Advaita Vedanta) is a sub school of the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta. Its core principles and teachings are referred to as a monistic system of thought. The canonical texts include the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahman Sutras.
21. October 19, 1966. Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda*, 283.
22. Originally in Raimon Panikkar, *La Nuova Innocenza* (Gorle, Bergamo: Servitium, 2000), 112; included in Raimon Panikkar, *Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. III. 2, A Christophany (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 28.
23. "Christ is Spirit" is a fundational biblical principle of Shantivanam, the ashram launched by Abhishiktānanda and Moncahnin. See: "God is a Spirit and can be reached only by the way of the spirit." Jules Monchanin (in collaboration with Henri le Saux), *An Indian Benedictine Ashram* (Shantivanam, Tannirpalli, 1951), 22.
24. April 15, 1956. *Ascent*, 149.
25. In this book I do not discuss the mutual influence of Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda with regard to the ecclesiological question. That said, if one conducts his/her investigation on this issue in strictly chronological terms, one cannot escape the feeling that a certain degree of Panikkar's intellectual dependency on the matter of the ecclesiological question from Abhishiktānanda in effect exists. I offer two examples: November 8, 1956: "The Church looks terribly like a conventicle. Its viewpoint is sectarian, not universal." For those who know their Panikkar well, the second note from Abhishiktānanda's notebook (dated June 5, 1958) is even more revelatory: "I persist in believing that baptism by water was never 'thought of' by Jesus as the essential way to enter into his Church. What was expected was a baptism in the Spirit and in fire [*in Spiritu et igne*, Matthew 3:11]. And this baptism was received at Pentecost. The often repeated formula in the Acts 'and the Spirit fell upon them.' Baptism was practiced by the Apostles in imitation of the baptizers of those days. And little by little the visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit 'passed' into an invisible outpouring at the time of baptism by water." *Ascent*, 156 and 217.
26. September 9, 1970. Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda*, 319.
27. Ibid.
28. Panikkar, *La Nuova Innocenza*, p. 115; included in Panikkar, *Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. III.2, 29.
29. Quoted in Raimon Panikkar: La Nuova Innocenza, 50' Puntata 3 di *Una Serie a Cura di Werner Weick e Andrea Andriotto*, Lugano, Televisione Svizzera Italiana, 2000. The series was composed of three episodes: (1) the art of living; (2) the smile of the wise man; and (3) the new innocence, from which the quote above is taken. Translation is my own.
30. May 11, 1964. Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda*, 273.
31. November 2, 1969. *Ascent*, 307.
32. Panikkar, *La Nuova Innocenza*, p. 114; included in Panikkar, *Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. III.2, 29.
33. Ibid.
34. *Ascent*, 367.
35. *Ascent*, 343.
36. Panikkar, Panikkar, *Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. III.2, 29.

37. July 19, 1956. *Ascent*, 151.
38. *Mountain*, 42.
39. Letter to Sr Marie-Gilberte, August 11, 1964. Source: *Letters*, 165.
40. Letter to Mother Theophane, April 13, 1965. *Letters*, 170.
41. For the remark on 'rationalism,' see, for example, his letter to Canon J. Lemarie, April 10, 1970. *Letters*, 229.
42. Letter to Mother Theophane, March 18, 1970. *Letters*, 231.
43. Enrico Beltramini, "Abhiṣiktānanda and Roman Catholicism's Retrieval of the Sacramental Order of Reality," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection,* Vol. 83, Issue 1, 2019, 106–123.
44. Letter to Mother Francoise-Therese at Lisieux, November 30, 1972. *Letters*, 279.
45. January 21, 1956. *Ascent*, 140–141.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. October 22, 1967. *Ascent*, 296.
49. September 9, 1970. *Ascent*, 319. The original French, however, reads "Le christianisme a été sclérosé en religion" (Christianity has been sclerosed (i.e., affected by sclerosis) into a religion). See: Abhishiktānanda, *La montée au fond du cœur. Le journal intime du moinechrétien—sannyasi-hindou (1948–1973)*, introduction et notes de RaimonPanikkar, (Paris: OEIL, 1986), 390.
50. "Christianity is 'foolishness,' because Christianity is provisional and not self-sufficient—being only for this temporal existence." *The Unknown*, 63.
51. February 2, 1973. *Ascent*, 371.
52. Raimon Panikkar, 'Some Theses on Technology,' *Logos* 7, 1986, 115–125, 115.
53. Panikkar, *Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. III.2, 29.
54. Ibid.
55. Abhishiktānanda's letter to Panikkar, July 10, 1969, in *Letters*, 93.
56. *The Unknown*, 63.
57. See, for example: Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, 25.
58. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, 25.
59. Panikkar, *Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. III.2, 28.

CHAPTER FOUR

Kingdom

Great is Yahweh … terrible above all gods.

Psalm 96:4[1]

Kingdom

There are two true meanings to the Kingdom: first, it is the realm in which God exercises his authority, which is described in Scripture both as a kingdom that is presently entered into and as one which will be entered in the future; second, the Kingdom is God's authority and right to rule. [2] In the second perspective, the Kingdom is the rule of God. God desires to rule over all the created, that is, both the invisible heavenly realm and the earthly realm (Psalm 92:1). This is God's kingship. Through these lenses, the Kingdom is identified, respectively, with mission and with cosmic order. Usually the Kingdom is related to the teaching of Jesus. In the New Testament, the Kingdom is introduced by means of parables: the Kingdom of God is like the sower, the grain of mustard seed, the measure of yeast, the pearl of great price, the great net of fishes (…), and yet these parables are for those people "who are outside … so that they may see and see again, but not perceive; may hear and hear again, but not understand." Then Jesus explains

that "the *secret* of the kingdom of God is given to you," his closest disciples (Mark 4:11–12, emphasis added).[3] Ignatius, bishop of Antioch at the end of the 1st century AC, wrote to the church at Philadelphia about those secrets Jesus revealed to his disciples: "to Jesus alone, who is our high priest and has been entrusted with the Holy of Holies, are the secret things of God committed" (*Philadelphia* 9). Here the important point is the connection between the 'secret things' and 'Jesus high priest.' It is a specific characteristic of the Enoch tradition that the high priest brings teaching from heaven. Ignatius believes he knows which secrets are denied to "those who are outside," who see and hear but cannot perceive and understand, and instead are revealed only to Jesus's disciples. He claims in fact to know about celestial (or heavenly) things, the rank of the angels, the array of principalities, and things visible and invisible (*Trallians* 5), that is, the state beyond the visible material world. For reasons that will become clear later in this study, Jesus the high priest mentioned by Ignatius, angels and principalities and powers who stand beyond the visible side of creation, became relevant to the Christian notion of the Kingdom in the mid-20th century.

It was only at the end of the 19th century that scholars began to consider the possibility that the Kingdom was not unique to the teaching of Jesus, but rather derived from an older tradition.[4] Albert Schweitzer, an author well-known to Panikkar, further developed this insight, making explicit the link between Jesus's Kingdom and the Old Testament. For Schweitzer, it was the prophetic and apocalyptic writings of the Old Testament that inspired Jesus' vision of the Kingdom, especially the prophetic ethics of Deutero-Isaiah (Book of Isaiah 40–66) and the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7. To Jesus, inspired by the Book of Daniel, the Kingdom of God was a supernatural event of divine intervention. This is Schweitzer's view of the Kingdom.[5] Protestant theologian Wilhelm Bousset, author of the influential *Kyrios Christos* on the Hellenization of the original Christian community, recognized the role played by older apocalyptic texts in the emergence of Christianity.[6] This, of course, was the situation before the archeological discoveries of the early and mid-20th century, most of which were not available to Schweitzer and Bousset but have since become available to scholars.

Archaeological discoveries made in the ancient Near East during the 19th and 20th centuries have revolutionized the biblical study and imposed corrections or readjustments of previously assumed interpretations. These discoveries have raised challenging new questions and provoked re-evaluation of findings and reassessment of assumptions and methods. It is now impossible to study the Scripture without taking into consideration such discoveries. This is true not only for biblical scholars, of course, but also for those theologians who aim to anchor their theological reflections into biblical roots.

On one side, the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics and the ancient Sumerian, Akkadian, and Canaanite languages provide scholars with critical devices that make it possible to read texts written before Abram and in some cases texts composed during the lifetime of biblical writers. This wealth of material is very useful in providing historical and religious backgrounds for the interpretation of the Bible. They also raise new challenging questions with regard to the uniqueness of the literature of the Bible and, more in general, the revelation and inspiration of the biblical text. On the other side, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 supplies not only new evidence but also new perspectives from which to interpret previously available information. While the Dead Sea Scrolls are generally associated with Qumran, properly they also cover other discoveries such as those at Nahal Hever, Murabbaat and Masada. The Qumran finds involve manuscripts from the 3rd century BCE through the 1st century AD. The finds at Nahal, Hever and Murabbaat include documents from the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt (CE 132–135), while Masada involves Jewish scrolls from the time leading up to the Roman conquest (CE 73) and subsequent Roman documents. Finally, increasing attention has been paid to the pseudepigrapha. The term 'pseudepigrapha' properly refers to literature written under an assumed name (generally of some famous Old Testament person). However, the pseudepigrapha has become almost a catch-all category for intertestamental works which do not fit elsewhere. Here 'intertestamental' stands for the period that goes between the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians (BD 586) and the destruction of the second temple by the Romans (CE 70).

The uncovering of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940s culminated a century of astonishing biblical discoveries that are significant for understanding the world of the Bible. Important archaeological discoveries in the Near East, including the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, mark the history of biblical archaeology in the last decades of the 20th century: the house of David inscription, the amulet scrolls, and a Galilee boat. For the sake of this study, the discovery of scrolls or parts of scrolls and fragments in caves overlooking the northwest end of the Dead Sea, as well as the recovery of an ancient city known as Ugarit, are particularly relevant with regard to the discovery of a hierarchical, coherent, heavenly system of administration of the Kingdom. This system includes the notion that the gods (or 'sons of God') exercised territorial control over the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 32:8–9).[7]

The significance of Ugarit is the recovery of a forgotten history of the Middle East in the Bronze Age, which sets the background for the reinterpretation of some words, sentences, and episodes of the Hebrew Bible. One of the most significant revelations produced by the discovery of the tablets of ancient Ugarit and the

subsequent comparative investigation into the religion of ancient Israel and Ugarit was that the Hebrew Bible contained the presence of a divine assembly of gods.[8] A divine assembly (or council) is a pantheon operating on divine spheres. The essential business of the council is discussion leading to a decision, but the actual process is highly variable in the cases of Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Israel.

The concept of a divine council of gods appears in the Old Testament in the famous divine council scene of Daniel 7. This vision is notable in that it presents a plurality of divine beings (i.e., the "thrones" of Daniel 7:9), beings which seem to function as an assembly of plural gods. Other indications of plural divine beings that are often considered as part of the council motif can be found in the Psalms (Psalm 82:6 and Psalm 97:7) and in Job (5:1) and Deuteronomy 33:2–3, etc.). These 'other gods' operate under the cover of a variety of names or titles in the Hebrew Bible: spirits, holy ones, and gods (or 'sons of the God'). The phrase 'sons of God' means that they are deity and belong to the divine realm. In Genesis 6:2, 4 and Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7 these deities are called 'sons of God'; Psalm 82:6 reads 'sons of the Most High'; Psalms 29:1 and 89:7 read 'sons of the Mighty.' When a fragment of the text of Deuteronomy 32:8 was found, a fragment which read 'sons of God,' scholarship focused on later versions of this text.[9] The majority of witnesses to the Septuagint read 'angels of God' in its place, a translational move that appears to be more interpretive than textual.[10] In the following years, trends in scholarship would make clear that the more recent theology of angels is, in fact, a development from the Hebrew Bible's original theme of celestial cosmology. Since the Old Testament was translated into a different language, Hebrew 'gods' came to be known as Greek 'angels' within the writings of the intertestamental period. The gods will have been lost, but only in translation. In Jewish tradition this celestial cosmology appeals directly to the Table of Nations in Genesis 10–11, where the family of Abraham was chosen by Yahweh while the foreign nations were given to pagan gods.[11] Thus, the 'divine assembly' implies a heavenly bureaucracy of the Kingdom in which plural deities (Elohim, plural) presume their real and independent personal existence at the service of Elohim (singular), the chief deity of the Hebrew Bible and Israelite religion, as the biblical passage quoted in the epigraph of this chapter clearly implies. A text such as Psalm 82:1 presents this ability to speak of both a singular and plural Elohim ('God'/'gods') within tight spaces: "God (singular) stands in the congregation of gods (plural); he judges among the gods (plural)." The first occurrence of Elohim is followed by the singular verb 'stand,' while the second is preceded by a noun meaning 'amidst' or 'among.'

The discovery of the Qumran manuscripts and the translation of Mesopotamian literature of the great antediluvian sages have expanded scholarly understanding of the Book of Genesis. The famous story of the building of the Tower of

Babel is often seen as a story about reaching the heavens, the realm of the gods. More precisely, it is a story of a ziggurat, a man-made sacred mountain in which Babylonians believed heaven and earth intersect. The Tower of Babel, accordingly, is about bringing the divine down to earth and recovering Eden at terms other than those God has set. At this point, God breaks the original unity of mankind "and confuses their language on the spot so that they can no longer understand one another" (Genesis 11:7–8). Out of a single mankind, God produces the nations and disperses their people. Thus, "Yahweh scattered them thence over the whole face of the earth, and they stopped building the town" (Genesis 11:9). After the transgression, God disinherits the nations, that is, the people of those nations are no longer in a relationship with him. In a passage of Deuteronomy it is said:

> When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided the sons of men, he fixed their bounds according to the number of the sons of God; but Yahweh's portion was his people, Jacob his share of inheritance (Deuteronomy 32:8–9).

There is much here to unpack. It is clear from the text that God divided mankind "according to the number of the sons of God" and declared Israel his own "portion." The "sons of God" are created divine beings (*elhoim*) who belong to the administrative structure of creation. They are, in other words, heavenly administrators.[12] Thus, the Most High allocates the people of the nations under the authority of "the sons of God." Of course, Yahweh is superior to these lesser *elhoim*.[13] He is the Most High (*elyon*) (Deut 32:8–9), the single uncreated God. Yahweh is distinguished as the creator of all other gods, the pre-existent One, making him ontologically distinct. By virtue of ontological superiority, Yahweh alone is sovereign. This is one side of the story. The other side is that God announces that He will begin anew with a people that do not yet exist: Israel. In Genesis 12, in fact, the very next chapter after the chapter on the Tower of Babel, God names Abram the father of the nation of Israel. The whole story is summarized in a passage of Deuteronomy, in which Moses says to the Israelites that "Yahweh your God has allotted them [the sons of God] to all the peoples under heaven" so that the nations worship and serve other gods beside Him. "But," Moses concludes, "as for you, Yahweh has taken you" (Deuteronomy 4:19–20).

The 'divine assembly' or 'divine council' soon became a focus of biblical scholars, beginning in 1939 with J. Morgenstern's lengthy article on Psalm 82, likely the clearest biblical attestation to an Israelite divine assembly.[14] During the 1940s and 1950s, prominent studies emerged examining the striking and unmistakable correspondences between the god of Israel and two of Ugarit's most important deities, El and Baal.[15] The seminal work on the divine council as a motif throughout the Hebrew Bible, however, was a 1944 article by Henri Wheeler Robinson.[16]

Robinson's early study was followed in the next two decades by detailed analyses of the council and of its members, conducted by a number of scholars.[17]

The first book-length study of the divine council was published in 1980 and was followed by significant works detailing various aspects of the divine council throughout the extant literature of Canaan.[18] An important book by Mark S. Smith brought scholarship on the divine council up to date in 2001. In the first sixty years of scholarship on the divine council, biblical scholars reached a consensus on the fact that the Ugaritic and larger Canaanite council were the conceptual precursors to the Israelite version of the divine council.[19] In other words, there was scholarly consensus with respect to the presence of a divine assembly of gods in Israel's faith prior to the 6th century BCE and the exile into Babylon. In this context, Israel's council is thought to reflect a pre-exilic, polytheistic bureaucracy that included the notion that the gods (or 'sons of God') exercised territorial control over the nations of the earth (Deut 32:8–9). In that period, Israelite religion underwent an evolution from an initial polytheism to a firm monolatry, where the other gods of the divine council were tolerated but not worshiped. Monolatry, defined succinctly, is the belief in many gods alongside the belief in one god, presiding over the others who are lesser gods, with the prescription that only the supreme god be worshiped.[20] After Israel emerged from exile, however, the religious crisis of Israel's early 6th century prompted the scribes to compose new material declaring that Yahweh had punished Israel for her sins, brought her out of bondage, and put the other gods to death.[21] As a result, the divine council disappeared from the Hebrew Bible as Israelite religion achieved the breakthrough to true monotheism, where no other gods existed except Yahweh. Monotheism, therefore, amounts to the denial of the existence of other gods.[22] Scholars who have discussed the subject at length have noted that the most explicit references to a divine assembly in the Hebrew Bible are found in late canonical texts such as Psalm 82, (the Book of) Job 1 and 2, and (the Book of) Zechariah 3:1–7. These texts, dating to the exile or afterward, are also regarded as the most transparent parallels to the Ugaritic council. This, by the early 2000s, became the mainstream thesis.[23]

In the last two decades, however, scholars have disallowed the conclusion of the mainstream thesis and sustained the alternative thesis that a divine council survived the exile in the Second Temple period, dated from the construction of Israel's second temple, ca. 516 BCE, to its destruction in 70 CE. They noted, in fact, that references to other gods in a divine council exist in exilic and post-exilic canonical texts and in the non-canonical writings of Judaism's Second Temple period. The context for these references reflects a worldview held by the exilic and post-exilic writer-redactor(s) that is consistent with pre-exilic affirmation of the divine council.[24] It is apparent from the data that Jews of this post-exilic era saw

no contradiction or insurmountable difficulty in reserving worship to one deity, who had no species equal, while accepting the divine status of other heavenly beings. Even the Shema need not be considered as a declaration of monotheism. Labuschagne comments on the Shema:

> We may conclude that the exclusiveness of the confession, Shema, is not the result of monotheistic thought, but the result of Moses' work, as well as Israel's experience in history that Yahweh is incomparable … When Israel, therefore, confesses in the Shema that Yahweh, 'our God', is the Single One, she expresses at the same time that she owes undivided loyalty to Him alone, for He is the only One for her. The qualification of Yahweh as 'our God' in the confession is indispensable, for it witnesses the very personal relation between Israel and Yahweh.[25]

For these reasons, Israel's religion could be better classified as monolatry, no matter how inferior the surrounding deities or how consistently it is forbidden to worship any lesser deity.

Today a growing body of scholarship asserts that the divine council permeates the New Testament, with studies in the fields of angel Christology, angelomorphic Christology, and Christian soteriology;[26] the question of monotheism and Christology in the "Pauline Shema" of 1 Corinthians 8:5–6;[27] the matter of Wisdom Christology;[28] the relationship of Michael and Christ traditions;[29] Johannine and Pauline theology of divine sonship, adoption, and glorification (apotheosis);[30] Paul's use of Yahweh texts from the Old Testament;[31] New Testament terminology for the heavenly host, namely 'principalities' and 'powers';[32] the divine council scene of Revelation 4–5;[33] the thorny 'Son of Man' problem for New Testament studies;[34] and, the relationship of 1 Enoch to the New Testament.[35]

For the purpose of this study, the relationship between Christ and the gods, or sons of God, who administrate the nation of the world, is particularly pertinent. A major point of the Hebrews is that Christ's enthronement takes place beyond the created realm in the unshakable kingdom where God's throne is located (i.e., Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; cf. 12:25–29). The belief that Jesus was enthroned at God's right hand was one of the earliest and most important affirmations of Christian faith and is well-attested by Paul who proclaims that Christ "rose higher than all the heavens to fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10), and that "God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names" (Philippians 2:9). The author of the Hebrews goes further and explains that the heavenly exaltation of Christ is not limited to the receipt of a new name. Here Christ is compared with the angels (or the sons of God, as it was clarified earlier): "he is now as far above the angels as the title which he has inherited is higher than their own name" (Hebrews 1:4). Moreover, Christ's enthronement renders obsolete the previous role of the sons of God. Thus, the enthronement of Christ coincides with the displacement of gods

and with the reclaiming of the nations under the kingship of Christ. People from the nations once under the administration of the gods will return to God.

Angels in Catholicism

The impact of the biblical scholarship based on the new archeological discoveries is exemplified by Jean Danielou's work on angiology.[36] One of the foremost theologians at the Second Vatican Council, Father Jean Danielou discussed the mission of the angels in the economy of salvation in a work of patristics first published in 1953, in French, then translated into English four years later. The current Roman Catholic catechism defines angels as "purely *spiritual* creatures [who] have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendour of their glory bears witness." Among the sources of this sentence there is, apart from the gospel of Luke (20:36) and the Book of Daniel (Daniel 10:9–12), the Encyclical *Humani Generis*. Issued by Pope Pius II in 1950, the papal letter was concerned with some theological and philosophical tendencies that, according to the pontiff, threatened to undermine the very foundations of Catholic doctrine. The encyclical is known to have addressed the theories of the new theologians—particularly the work of Henri de Lubac, *Le Surnaturel*, as this book and its author somehow became the concrete symbols of the movement—on the matter of the development of doctrine from a Neo-Thomistic viewpoint. Father Garrigou-Lagrange, the famous Dominican theologian, is said to have been a dominant influence on the content of the encyclical.[37] In the *Humani Generis*, however, a note was dedicated to the angels and the invisible world: "Some also question whether angels are personal beings, and whether matter and spirit differ essentially. Others destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision" ($26). This is the incipit Jean Danielou chose when beginning his book on angiology.[38]

Danielou begins by following a historical order, dealing with the angels in the world before the Incarnation, during our Lord's earthly life, and as presiding over the growth and development of the Church.[39] One chapter is dedicated to 'The Angels and the World Religions,' where Danielou mentions the covenant between God and the entire humanity, the cosmic covenant that is mentioned in Acts 14:16. Then he turns to the "divine assistance to the nations" provided by angels. He explains this according to an ancient tradition that goes back to *the Greek translation* of Deuteronomy 32:8, which declares that God had entrusted the nations to his angels. He translates Deuteronomy 32:8 in terms of "When

the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he appointed the bounds of people according to the number of the *angels of God*" (emphasis added). Danielou quotes Daniel 10:13–21 (but not 7:18) and Acts 17:26, translated as "and from one man he has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth, determining their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands."[40]

In his analysis of the Fathers of the 3rd and 4th centuries, Danielou mentions Origen and Origen's ideas on the Tower of Babel and the angels who had "come into a presiding office over particular nations in this words."[41] Danielou comments: "In accordance with the Jewish tradition, he [Origen] relates this division of the people under the angels to their dispersion after the tower of Babel."[42] Father Danielou continues his study on the angiology of the Father of the Church by mentioning St. Basil and John Chrysostom. Then he addresses Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite and quotes from *De Coelesti Hierarchia*: "Theology has apportioned to the angels all things which pertain to us, naming Michael the angel of Israel … and giving other names to the angels of the other nations … In fact, the Most High has determined the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the angels of God."[43] According to Danielou, the "divine assistance to the nations" provided by angels consists primarily of spiritual assistance, then of protection and temporal support.[44]

When Danielou was addressing the angels as rulers of the nations, he was entering into a complicated debate as well as making assumptions. The debate, as anticipated, is about whether monolatry, which is congruent with pre-exilic Israelite religion, is also congruent, or not, with Israelite religion after the exile and into the Second Temple period. At the time Danielou was writing his books on angelology, the notion that Israelite religion underwent an evolution that culminated in monotheism was widely accepted. Israelites began their spiritual journey like any other ancient Canaanite population, worshiping a variety of deities. El-Elyon and Yahweh were the main deities, positioned in the council as father and one son among many in an Israelite divine council. Yahweh eventually rose to single prominence as El faded into the background. Eventually, in the 8th century BCE or so, various political and religious crises prompted Israelite thinkers and the biblical writers to fuse the two deities. Yahweh emerged as the lone deity for Israel. Worship of any other deity was forbidden, but the reality of other deities was not denied, even in the Shema. For the sake of this analysis of Danielou's work, however, the crucial point is that as time went on, the book of Deuteronomy and the redaction of the Deuteronomistic History dealt with those other gods, and the gods of Yahweh's own council, by downgrading them to angels. This demotion was accentuated by specific denial statements, repeated in still later canonical material,

asserting that Yahweh was the only God who actually existed. To put it differently, the demotion of the other gods and the rise of monotheism were concurrent movements in post-exilic Israelite religion. The Dead Sea Scrolls, as far as the findings up to the 1950s, written by committed, ardent monotheists, confirmed the change.

Through the analysis of Father Danielou's work on angels, one is aware that echoes of the mainstream thesis—the pre-exilic view of God and his divine council had changed very little by the 1st century CE—can be found in mid-20th-century Catholic theology, with specific reference to the evolution of the term 'angels' in the Scripture. According to this view, while terms referring to 'angels' in pre-exilic biblical texts describe distinct classes of heavenly beings, thereby distinguishing the council gods from angels, the same terms are not distinct in late canonical and Second Temple texts, so as to eliminate the gods from any belief in a heavenly council. In other words, after the return from exile, the erasure of the gods of the council due to the advent of monotheism left only God and the angels for a divine council. This was the thesis in the 1950s.

Conclusion

In this chapter I proposed an investigation of the status of biblical scholarship on the Kingdom of God in the period immediately preceding the publication of *The Unknown*. I believe that in looking at the biblical debate related to the Kingdom I can help make more intelligible Panikkar's intellectual preoccupations and achievements in *The Unknown*. In the next chapter I will do the same with regard to the literature concerning the Antidiluvian Patriarchs, including Melchizedek.

Notes

1. This is my translation from Biblia Sacra Vulgata. It reads: "Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis terribilis est super omnes deos." NJB translates: "Yahweh is great, loud must be his praise, he is to be feared beyond all gods." NJB 1985 reads: "Great is Yahweh, worthy of all praise, more awesome than any of the gods."
2. For the bibliography of this and the next chapters, I am partially indebted to Michael Heiser, *The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004) and Ronn A. Johnson, *The Old Testament Background for Paul's Use of "Principalities and Powers"* (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004).
3. NJB 1985 reads: "To you is granted the secret of the kingdom of God, but to those who are outside everything comes in parables, so that they may look and look, but never perceive; listen and listen, but never understand."
4. Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. Richard Hyde Hiers and David Lattimore Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971; German original, 1892).

5. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion,* trans. and introduction by Walter Lowrie (London: A. & C. Black, 1914; German original 1901).
6. Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Reuther und Reichard, 1903); Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970; rev. ed. with new introduction by Larry W. Hurtado (Waco, TX, 2013; German original, 1913).
7. See the archaeological findings at Kuntillet Ajrud and the Elephantine papyri; from Qumran, there is 4QDeutj with a variant to Dt 32,8f.
8. See the fragment KTlfl 1.20 i 4. For the reading, see: Wayne T. Pitard, "A New Edition of the 'Rapi'uma' Texts: KTU 1. 20–22," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 285(1992)*: 33–77.
9. Patrick W. Skehan, "A Fragment of the 'Song of Moses' (Deut. 32) from Qumran," BASOR 136 (1954): 12. Several revisions of the LXX, a manuscript of Aquila (Codex X), Symmachus (Codex X), and Theodotion also witness to this reading; see Fridericus Field, ed., *Origenis Hexaplorum Tomus I: Prolegomena, Genesis-Esther* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), 320.
10. See Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 269. Also, see John William Wevers, ed., *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Auctoritate Academ iae Scientiarum Gottingensis Editum*Vol. 3 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 347, and John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 513.
11. Jewish tradition has placed the number of pagan nations at seventy. According to rabbinic sources, this number would derive from the nations listed in Gen 10 as created by the Babel incident in Gen 11 (cf. Targum Ps.-Yonathan in Gen 11:8; Ps.-Clem. Horn. 18:4; TestNaphth. 8). In Ps.-Clem Rec. 2:42, however, the number of pagan nations is seventy-two, which apparently derives from the Babylonian calendar.
12. The sons of God are not angels, although in Catholic tradition they are often labeled this way. The sons of God (*beney elohim*) are administrators, while angels (*mal'akim*) are messagers. In the Septuagint, however, sometime the former is translated as the latter. The gods may have been lost, but only in translation.
13. On the hierarchy of divine beings in the heavenly realm, see: E. Theodore Muller Jr., "Divine Assembly," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 215–216; Simon B. Parker, "Sons of (The) God(S)," in Karel van der Toor, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, Boston, Cologne, Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 798; Michael S. Heiser, "Divine Council," in John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz, eds., *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellhingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2010), 2.
14. Julian Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," *HUCA* 14 (1939): 29–126.
15. For example, Marvin Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, VTSup 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955); Arvid S. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1952); Julian Obermann, *Ugaritic Mythology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948); Michell J. Dahood, "Ancient Semitic Deities in Syria and Palestine," in *Le Antiche Divinita Semitiche*, Studi Semitici Vol. 1, ed. Sabatino Moscati (Rome: Centro di Studi Semitici, 1958), 65–94; Otto Eissfeldt, "El and Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956): 25–37.
16. Henry W. Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1944): 151–157.
17. Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 22–47; Edwin C. Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh," *JBL* 83 (1964): 279–286; John Gray, *The Legacy*

of Canaan, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965); James S. Ackerman, "An Exegetical Study of Psalm 82" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1966); Patrick D. Miller, "The Divine Council and the Prophetic Call to War," *VT* 18 (1968): 100–107 and Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: An Historical Analysis of Two Conflicting Faiths* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968); Matitiahu Tsevat, "God and the Gods in Assembly," *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970): 123–137; Richard J. Clifford, "The Tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting," *CBQ* 33 (1971): 221–227 and Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, HSM 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Conrad L'Heureux, *Rank Among the Canaanite Gods*, HSM 21 (Missoula: MT: Scholars Press, 1979); David Noel Freedman, "Who is Like Thee Among the Gods? The Religion of Early Israel," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, Patrick D. Miller, et al., eds.(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 315–336; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).

18. E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, HSM 24 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980). For further studies, see: Marjo Christina Annette Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1990); Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994); Hugh R. Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of Its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
19. See, for example: Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 3–77, and Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 1st edition (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 145, n. 143; Simon B. Parker, "Sons of (the) God(s)," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., 2nd rev. ed. (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999), 794–798, and Simon B. Parker, "Council," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., 2nd rev. ed. (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999), 204–208; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (JSOT) Supplement Series (JSOTSup) 265 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 13–67.
20. Michiko Yusa, "Henotheism," *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Lindsay Jones), 6:266.
21. Bob Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity After the Exile," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times*, Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel, eds., OtSt 42 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 4. Scholar Michael Heiser argues that "In view of the defeat of Israel by pagan nations and their gods, it is thought that Israel's religious leaders were forced to deny the existence of other gods, so as to attribute their situation to the judgment of Yahweh alone—in denial of the notion that Yahweh had been defeated by another nation's deity. See Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature," 17.
22. Robert K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel*, JSOTSup 241 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 201–205; Theodore M. Ludwig, "Monotheism," *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Lindsay Jones), 10:69; Yusa, "Henotheism"; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 151, 279, n. 20.

23. The history of the scholarship on Israel's religion up to 2000 is sketched and summarized by Gnuse, *No Other Gods*, 5–150 and by Patrick D. Miller, "God and the Gods: History of Religion as an Approach and Context for Bible and Theology," in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, Patrick D. Miller, ed., JSOTSup 267 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 142–181 and 365–396.
24. Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth Century Judah*, HSM 46 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Norbert Lohfink, "The Cult Reform of Josiah of Judah: 2 Kings 22–23 as a Source for the History of Israelite Religion," in P. D. Miller, Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride, eds., *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 459–475, 468; Gnuse, *No Other Gods*, 206; Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'*, FAT, Reihe 2 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2003), 60–75; Casper L. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 138–141; Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, Oudtestamentische Studiën 37 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); Christopher R. Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *JBL* 109, no. 2 (1990): 229–247; Max E. Polley, "Hebrew Prophecy Within the Council of Yahweh Examined in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting," in *Scripture in Context: Essays in the Comparative Method*, Carl D. Evans, William W. Hallo, and John B. White, eds., PTMS 34 (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1980), 141–156; Frank M. Cross, "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES* 12 (1953): 274–277; Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
25. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, 138–141. See also MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'*, 60–75.
26. Angel Christology deals with the question of whether Jesus was an angel, while angelomorphic Christology is the idea that Jesus appeared as an angel. See Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, AGJU 42 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 28. See also, Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology, and Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997); Richard Bauckham, "The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis, eds. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 4–69.
27. Paul Rainbow, "Monotheism and Christology in 1 Corinthians 8:4–6" (D. Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1987); James D. G. Dunn, "Was Christianity a Monotheistic Faith from the Beginning?" *SJT* 35 (1982): 303–336.
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29. Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity*, WUNT 109 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999).
30. Brendan Byrne, "Sons of God"—"Seed of Abraham": A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul Against the Jewish Background, AnBib 83 (Rome: Pontifical Institute Press, 1979); Olle Christofferson, The Earnest Expectation of the Creature: The Flood Tradition as the Matrix of Romans 8:18–27 (Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990); Harold Riesenfeld, "Sons of God and Ecclesia: An Intertestamental Analysis," in *Renewing the Judeo-Christian Wellsprings* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987), 89–104; James Tabor, "Firstborn of Many Brothers: A Pauline Notion of Apotheosis," *SBL Seminar Papers*, 1984, Kent Richards, ed., SBLSP 21 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 295–303.

31. David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992).
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35. James C. VanderKam, "1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch in Early Christian Literature," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, James C. VanderKam and William Adler, eds., CRINT 3.4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 33–101; Lawrence VanBeek, "1 Enoch Among Jews and Christians: A Fringe Connection?" in *Christian-Jewish Relations Through the Centuries*, Stanley E. Porter and Brook W. R. Pearson, eds., JSNTSup 192 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 93–115.
36. Jean Danielou, *The Angels and Their Mission. According to the Fathers of the Church*, trans. David Heimann (Notre Dame, IN: Santa Maria Press, 1957; original in French, 1953), vii.
37. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani Generis*, issued in Rome, August 12, 1950. It is worth mentioning that the encyclical mentions no names and condemns no individual, nor did any ecclesiastical censure fall on anyone after the document was published. No one was 'silenced,' nor was any individual book officially condemned by name.
38. Jean Danielou, *The Angels and Their Mission. According to the Fathers of the Church*, trans. David Heimann (Notre Dame, IN: Santa Maria Press, 1957; original in French, 1953), vii.
39. Jean Danielou, *Les Anges et leur Mission, d'après les Pères de l'Église* (Chevetogne, Belgium: Editions de Chevetogne, 1952); trans. David Heimann, *The Angels and Their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church* (New York: The Newman Press, 1957).
40. Danielou, *The Angels and Their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church*, 15.
41. Danielou, *The Angels and Their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church*, 16. See also: Jean Danielou, *Origene* (Paris: Table ronde, 1948); trans. Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1955), 221–235.
42. Danielou, *The Angels and their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church*, 16.
43. Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite, *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, 9, 2. For a translation in English, see: Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy* (n.d.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).
44. Danielou, *The Angels and their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church*, 16.

CHAPTER FIVE

Melchizedek

Through the blood of Jesus

we have the right to enter the sanctuary.

Hebrews 10:19

Biblical Studies and Qumram

The finds at Qumran have earned their status as artifacts that prompted biblical scholars to reconsider consensus opinions. The Dead Sea Scrolls are evidence of a priestly community living in the same age of Jesus. The Dead Sea Scrolls include more than 225 biblical and extra-biblical manuscripts, about 215 of which were found at Qumran. Some biblical books appear to be favorites among the priestly community, as 37 manuscripts include passages from the Psalms, 30 include passages from Deuteronomy, and 21 cite passages from Isaiah. The remains of 20 scrolls of Genesis and 21 of Isaiah did not come as a surprise, but the remains of 20 scrolls of (the Boof of) 1 Enoch—compared with only 4 of (the Book of) Samuel and 3 of (the Book of) Kings—revealed how the Enoch literature must have been important for the priestly community in discussion. This is a significant number of scrolls and exceeds the Qumran finds for most books of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. This suggests that the Qumran community regarded 1 Enoch as a

scriptural book, as does the way in which the book was used at the site.[1] Another surprise came with the remains of 8 copies (and 3 copies of a related manuscript) of (the Book of) Jubilees, a text probably written in the 2nd century BCE with interpolations of material from 1 Enoch. Among the early Christian authors who embraced Jubilee are Epiphanius, Justin Martyr, and Origene.

There are three major compilations of several separate works, most of which are apocalyptic, labelled by scholars as 1, 2, and 3 Enoch. 1 Enoch, preserved most fully in Ethiopic (or, the Ethiopic book of Enoch), was originally written in Hebrew during the last two centuries BCE. It predicts the punishment of Israel's enemies and the general resurrection of Israelites. Fragments of 4 of its 5 sections in Aramaic have been discovered in Cave four at Qumran. The missing section (chapters 37–71) is usually attributed to a period contemporary with or later than the gospels. The Book of 2 Enoch (or the Secrets of Enoch) has been known in its Slavonic form in the West only since the 19th century. Originally written in Greek during the early Christian era, it likely originated in the Egyptian Jewish community around the days of Jesus. It gives a complicated version of the age to come after the judgment. The Book of 3 Enoch was written in Hebrew and collected by Babylonian Jews in the 5th century CE.

A handful of important early Christian thinkers such as Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, and Clement either advocated 1 Enoch as worthy of canonical status or considered it authoritative with regard to certain matters of doctrine (Christians in the first two centuries did not have a sacred canon of books). However, the book became canonical only in the Ethiopian Church. Scholars have detected reminiscences of 1 Enoch in the Book of Peter (or 'Peter') and the Book of Jude ('Jude'). It is clear that the Enoch tradition had been part of both Christian and Jewish traditions, and yet by the end of the 4th century, it began to vanish from Christian tradition. Christian authors ceased to use 1 Enoch, Augustine rejected it, and the Enoch literature was for many centuries no longer quoted in Christian sources. Compilations of books that are not canonical were not considered inspired and, as such, not worthy for biblical understanding. Early in the 20th century, the Enoch tradition was still considered marginal, if not alien, to mainstream Judaism. It was not simply considered extra-scriptural, but irrelevant to the study of the New Testament. In his masterly introduction to the Old Testament (1955 edition), Protestant liberal theologian Otto Eissfeldt considered 1 Enoch a collection "of non-Jewish material."[2] The discovery and the subsequent publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran changed the situation in the sense that research on the Enoch manuscripts soon became the fastest growing area of biblical study. The status and canonicity of the Enoch literature have not changed, but that is no longer an excuse for neglecting it in the study of Scripture. The Enoch literature,

it became clear to scholars, belongs to a distinct tradition—found in a variety of ancient sources and manuscripts—that was excluded from the Hebrew canon but accepted in the early Church, at least for a while. Once the importance of the Enoch literature was re-established, scholars recognized that 1 Enoch provides a picture of Judaism in the time of Jesus and early Christianity that helps decode the meaning of several Christian themes.

While 'apocalypse' may refer to a catastrophic event, 'apocalyptic,' in biblical scholarship, represents a literary genre. Many scholars have recently begun to address 'apocalyptic eschatology,' which represents ideas and motifs thematic of the general movement that are not unique but are found in other genres and social settings. Relevant examples of apocalyptic literature are the Enoch tradition and the New Testament Book of Revelation (or simply 'Revelation' and also called 'The Apocalypse'). The increase in available texts from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE, especially the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran, has urged subsequent scholars to re-draw the landscape of Judaism in the period, in which some connections between the Scrolls and apocalyptic literature have become apparent.[3]

The discovery of the Enoch fragments from Qumran have added weight to the view that there was a wide range of speculation about a vast array of information in the apocalyptic mode concerning eschatology. Apocalyptic literature embodies a rich tradition covering many important biblical themes and ideas that have had significant influence on Judaism and on the early stages of Christianity. Unfortunately, biblical scholars in the past paid only infrequent attention to many of the primary texts. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls changed the whole situation: the apocalypse genre became an area open to pioneering scholarship that proved willing to work with the mysteries of its revelation and offer fresh insights into a hidden world. Not surprisingly, scholarly attention shifted toward apocalyptic texts such as Enoch and its key concepts, that is, the high priesthood, the angels, the celestial things, and the Revelation, which is the beginning of the reign of God on earth, the Kingdom. Therefore, the Enoch literature (including Jubilee), an ancient Jewish apocalyptic religious body of work, became crucial to most recent scholarly studies of Judaism and established apocalyptic—in the words of Protestant scholar Ernst Käsemann—as the mother of Christian theology.[4]

In the apocalyptic genre, or literature of revelation, the revelation is not carried by a prophet but by ancient historical mediators, that is, biblical characters with impressive resumes. Fragments found among the Dead Sea Scrolls concerning Melchizedek, the obscure king and priest of Shalem at the time of Abraham, mentioned him eleven times, a surprising number of references due to the limited information about him in Genesis 14. Understanding how the Jews thought of Melchizedek colors scholarly understanding of what the writer of Hebrews is

arguing concerning Melchizedek in Hebrews 7. Through the lens of a fragmentary scroll from the Qumran library of the Dead Sea Scrolls (11QMelchizedek or formally 11Q13), Melchizedek is not merely human. How divine he is, how close he is to God himself, however, is unclear. The author also quotes Psalm 82:1 ("Elohim stands in the council of El") but inserts "Melchizedek" in place of "Elohim" (God). Within the Enochic priestly tradition, to which Melchizedek belonged, Melchizedek was a pre-partition sacerdotal order. What followed the discovery of the scrolls concerning Melchizedek was a renewal of the so-called literature of the Patriarchs, the biblical and proto-biblical literature of the pre-Egyptian history of the Hebrews and all of humanity. The Patriarchs (patriarch means 'father-ruler') are narrowly defined as Abraham and his lineage (his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob, also named Israel, the ancestor of the Israelites). More broadly, the definition includes also the Antediluvian Patriarchs, that is, Adam, Seth, Enos, Kenan, Mahalel, Jared, Enoch, Methusalem, Lamech, Noah, and—depending on the source—Melchizedek.

One provocative and interesting facet of Enochic Judaism, a point that has become increasingly manifest in recent years, is that in it the priestly tradition and the cosmic covenant can be seen as related concepts. The cosmic covenant is the proclamation, to borrow the words of Robert Murray, of a "divinely willed order harmoniously linking heaven and earth … [that] was established at creation, when the cosmic elements were fixed and bound to maintain the order."[5] Through these lenses, scholars are reminded of the Hebrew backdrop to the New Testament. The cosmic covenant, or 'eternal covenant,' is based on Enochic, not Mosaic, Law and is really 'cosmic' in scope, expressing more formally the belief of the elect community that God's salvation will ultimately be extended to those outside of national Israel.

Melchizedek

Melchizedek is one of the more enigmatic figures in the Bible. He is mentioned in only two passages in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:17–24; Psalm 110) and in Hebrews (Hebrews 5, 6 and 7). In Genesis 14:17–18, Melchizedek is the king-priest: the text reads as follows in the NJB in the context of the Melchizedek-Abram meeting: "Melchizedek king of Salem brought bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High." So, Melchizedek is the royal priest, king of the pre-Israelite Jerusalem (Salem) as well as priest of "God Most High, creator of heaven and earth," that is, "Yahweh, God Most High, creator of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:20). Melchizedek comes to meet Abraham. Here there is a question of rank. The Christians claim that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek (Hebrew 7:2–4), implying that Melchizedek is the greater. Genesis 14:20 reads as follows

in the NJB: "And Abram gave him a tithe of everything." However, the Hebrew text of Genesis is ambiguous here, saying simply that "he received a tithe." Nearly everything said about Melchizedek in the Old and New Testaments seems to produce interpretive problems. Another reference to Melchizedek in Psalm 110 shows that the Davidic kings in Jerusalem retained the Melchizedek priesthood, which was rooted in the phase of Hebrew history represented by Abraham rather than by Moses. However, the Hebrew of Psalm 110 is notoriously difficult to translate.

Melchizedek is a minor character in the Old Testament, where he is mentioned only two times (Genesis 14:17–24 and Psalm 110:4).[6] However, he received ample attention during the period (ca. 500 BCE–70 CE) and the New Testament. Over time, certain elaborations were made on the Old Testament material, so that earlier Jewish sources described him as a king-priest, and Second Temple literature as a king-priest and a heavenly being, associated with messianic kingship (Psalm 110). Christian texts say he was a type or prototype of Christ, although not Christ himself (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20–7:28). Melchizedek is also one of the more enigmatic figures in the Bible.[7] A simple question like, "Who was Melchizedek?" morphs into a dozen other questions, including speculation on the nature and meaning of his name. Was it a name or was it a title? His name could either be some sort of description ("my king is righteous") or it could be a theophoric name ("my king is *Tsedeq*"—or Zedek). A theophoric name is a name that includes in it the name of a deity. He is king of righteousness and also king of peace (Hebrews 7:2). His identity as a Canaanite (non-Israelite) raises questions as well about his priesthood in respect to the priesthood of Aaron. Melchizedek is easily one of the most complex topics in biblical studies.[8]

Melchizedek is king of Salem and priest of Most High God (וְהוּא כֹהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן, w'hû khohën l'ël el'yôn) (Genesis 14:18). He is not an Israelite; he is a Canaanite. If, as it should be, Salem (Greek: Salem; Hebrew: Shalem; then known as Yerushalayim) is Jerusalem (Psalm 76:2), then at the time of Melchizedek, Jerusalem would have been considered a Canaanite city. Abraham met Melchizedek in Canaan.[9] What does it mean that a Canaanite is the priest of the Most High God, the God of Israel? It means that Melchizedek chooses to worship the true God—the Most High God, that is, Yahweh. He worships Yahweh, however, as a Canaanite. In fact, he is the high priest of the god *Tsedeq,* or Zedek, head of the Canaanite pantheon. However, Zedek is the Canaanite name of the Most High God, the same god the Israelites identify as Yahweh. Here is the interpretation offered by scholar Bernard Batto:

> Aspects of the West Semitic god Zedek were absorbed into Yahwism (see MAY 1937 and RESENBERG, 1965). Rather than remaining as an independent deity, Ṣedeq, 'Righteousness', was translated as a quality of Yahweh. Thus, at times Ṣedeq and Yahweh are found in synonymous parallelism.[10]

The Most High God is a deity that goes by different names among different people or groups. Melchizedek could bear the name Zedek and refer to him as Most High because Zedek is Yahweh. In summary, Melchizedek is the Canaanite king of pre-Israelite Jerusalem and the high priest of Zedek, the Canaanite name of the Most High God, the same deity the Israelites call Yahweh.[11] At no point in Genesis 14:17–24 is there any sense that Melchizedek is a divine being.

The Second Temple literature focuses mostly on Psalm 110, especially verse 4, where Yahweh makes the Davidic king a Melchizedek priest, but the process and the setting are unclear.[12] This literature shows an eschatological tendency and connects Melchizedek to the messiah. The messiah plays both roles: he is the ruler and the priest. As a king and a priest, Melchizedek validates the figure of the messiah. Verse 4 states: "You [i.e., David] are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." Here the Septuagint version conforms to the Hebrew text, and Melchizedek's priestly *order* might be better understood in terms of 'according to the nature, in the manner, in the likeness,' rather than a lineage or a specific institute of ecclesiastical priesthood. A possible translation is as follows: "You are a priest forever, in the manner of Melchizedek."

In the New Testament, Melchizedek is the focus of Hebrews, in which he is mentioned eight times.[13] In the Hebrews, Melchizedek represents a priesthood that is linked to Abraham, that is, to the pre-Mosaic era of Hebrew history, when the promise was given to Abraham long before the Law was given to Moses (Romans 4). Consequently, the Melchizedek priesthood is most fundamentally different from the Levitical priesthood because it is not dependent on tribal lineage. Moreover, the order of Melchizedek is declared to be an eternal order. This affirmation does not apply to the Aaronic order of priesthood; in other words, Melchizedek represents a priesthood higher than the Aaronic or Levitical priesthoods. The Melchizedek priesthood precedes not only chronologically but also hierarchically the subsequent priesthoods. The author of Hebrews, moreover, links Melchizedek to Jesus in the sense that the Melchizedek priesthood foreshadows the priesthood of Christ, which is independent of lineage. Because Melchizedek resembles Jesus, Melchizedek's priesthood is to be understood as independent of lineage, too (Hebrews, 7:3).

In Hebrews, Melchizedek is compared to Jesus. The two passages at the end of Hebrews 6 and into Hebrews 7 reads in the NJB that "Jesus has entered before us and on our behalf [into the inner place behind the veil], to become a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, and for ever" (Hebrews 6:20). Here Jesus is addressed in terms of priestly qualification: he is the high priest, the only priest who can enter in the inner apartment of the sanctuary, or 'most holy place'; he is the priest who alone can minister in the tabernacle before his Lord and creator.

Then the text mentions that Melchizedek "is like the Son of God. He remains a priest for ever" (Hebrews 7:3). It is Melchizedek who resembles the Son of God. The old priest, Melchizedek, was raised up in the likeness of Jesus, where 'likeness' is probably quoting Psalm 110:4, although not the Old Greek version. Because Melchizedek resembles Jesus, Melchizedek's priesthood is to be understood as being independent of tribal lineage. His priesthood preceded Levi and temporarily coexisted with the Levitical priesthood. Melchizedek's priesthood was the priesthood of the resurrected, who do not die, and so it was the eternal priesthood. To put it differently, Melchizedek priesthood is the alpha and omega of priesthood: it is the primeval priesthood and the last one, the priesthood of the resurrected.

However, traditions diverge regarding the nature of such a link: because Christ is the high priest, Melchizedek must be a heavenly being or even the Lord (Philo).[14] In Hebrews, however, it is clear that Melchizedek is compared to Jesus, not the other way around. Melchizedek was made by God to resemble the son of God who would come. Jerome follows this tradition.[15] In other traditions, Melchizedek is seen as an angelic figure. Ambrose, writing in Milan at the end of the 4th century CE, regards the appearance of Melchizedek to Abraham as a theophany.[16]

The Jewish para-biblical (i.e., pseudepigraphon) literature shows a distinct interest in the Melchizedek priesthood. In the Qumran library of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 11QMelchizedek (or formally 11Q13) depicts Melchizedek as a divine rescuer. In particular, fragment 11QMelch 2.15–16 represents him as an angelomorphic figure.[17] Melchizedek is also assimilated into the Enochic tradition (1 Enoch and 2 Enoch).[18] According to this tradition, Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:21–14), and he alone is given secret divine knowledge (1 Enoch 41:1, 72:1, 74:2, and 80:1). He has a tour of the cosmos, thus his knowledge is cosmic and applies to all people. In this tradition, Enoch is the initiator of an antediluvian priesthood of priest-kings. From 2 Enoch, we are told that this list of priest-kings ends with the Patriarch Melchizedek who survived the Great Flood because Gabriel took him to heaven (2 Enoch 70–73). What the Enochic tradition is saying is that the Melchizedek priesthood was in line with the tradition of the priesthood of Enoch and the generation before and after the Flood.[19] I will return to this later. The Book of Jubilees claims that many of the prescriptions of the Torah were far older than Moses and had been given to Noah by his ancestors, the ancient king-priests (Jubilees 7.34–9; 10.13).[20] The Enoch tradition also offers a third account of Melchizedek's origin. The Christians claimed that Melchizedek was without father or mother or genealogy (Hebrews 7:3), and the Jews said he was in fact Shem, son of Noah. Giving him a genealogy emphasized that he was not an angel. The Books of Enoch claim that Melchizedek was the great-great

grandson of Enoch, Noah's nephew, who was born miraculously after the death of his father, Nir.

In sum, who is Melchizedek and what is his function? Old Testament scholar Michael S. Heiser summarizes the nature of Melchizedek as follows: "He is the prototype. Other than being a person in history in the life of Abraham, he is the prototype for the human king-priest. He's a human leader, but he also has a mediatorial role to all other humans and back to the nations."[21] Throughout this discussion, it becomes clear that no separation is allowed between Melchizedek's identity and his function. As an historical being, in Genesis 14:17–20 Melchizedek is linked to the Abrahamic covenant. As a heavenly being, Melchizedek is also involved with the Davidic covenant (Psalm 110:4). Finally, in Hebrews, he is connected as a type of Christ to the new covenant. As to his function, most texts, both biblical and para-biblical, convey the message that Melchizedek is king of Salem and high priest and therefore frame him in the light of the royal priesthood. As such, Melchizedek is the prototype (a type) of Jesus, and Jesus is the specific seed of Abraham and the only one High Priest in the new covenant, the one who informs Christian ministers. But Melchizedek, in Heiser's view, is also associated with 'the nations.' In Genesis 10, the writers of the Hebrew Bible applied the term 'nations' to various peoples in a list of more than seventy nations, excluding Israel. These are the 'disinherited nations.' I adopt the same meaning of 'nation' here.

I already mentioned the impact of the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts and the translation of Mesopotamian literature of the great antediluvian sages on scholarly understanding of the Book of Genesis. Today scholars acknowledge the connections of Genesis to Enoch tradition as well as the original Mesopotamian backstory to Genesis 6:1–4.[22] In other words, they recognize the necessity of an intertextual reading of the Mesopotamian, biblical, and Enochic sources on the primeval history.[23] From the perspective of this intertextual reading, the Flood and the cosmic covenant come after the second of three important 'transgressions,' to use St. Paul's term in the Letter to the Galatians (3:19): the transgression that brings on the corruption of mankind (Genesis 6:1–4). The other transgressions are Adam's and Eve's sin (Genesis 3) and the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).[24] The second transgression results in the breaking of the original covenant, which in turn leads to the Flood, the covenant with Noah's sons, and ultimately to the Table of Nations (Genesis 10). The original covenant, or eternal covenant, or cosmic covenant, was a system of bonds which set and maintained the creation, constraining and controlling the forces of chaos. The covenant is never mentioned directly, but its existence is assumed in several biblical passages. See, for example, the Book of Job: "Who pent up the sea behind closed doors when it leaped tumultuous out of the womb?" (Job 38:8–10) and Psalm 104: "you imposed the

limits they must never cross again, or they would once more flood the land" (Psalm 104:9). In the Enochic (but also in the Mesopotamian) tradition, the reality of sin results in the breaking of the covenant and the release of the forces of chaos, that is, the Flood.

After the Flood wiped out everybody except the household of Noah (Matthew 24:39), God was in a covenant relationship with all the descendants of Noah (Genesis 8:20–9–17), that is, with all of humankind. After the Flood, the fabric of creation was renewed and returned to its pre-diluvial state. Moreover, the covenant was restored, and peace and safety returned to earth. As a re-installment of the Edenic covenant (Genesis 1:22, 28), the cosmic covenant can be seen as the original covenant. No biblical source establishes a connection between Melchizedek and the cosmic covenant. Interestingly, non-biblical sources manage to evade mentioning the cosmic covenant.[25] Para-biblical sources such as 2 Enoch acknowledge Melchizedek as representative of the priestly Enochic tradition, an ancient priesthood represented in the biblical texts by the figure of Melchizedek. The Enochic priestly tradition preceded the partition of the post-diluvial nations into the disinherited nations, on one side, and Israel (God's portion), His elect heritage (Genesis 12:1–3 and Deuteronomy 32:8–9), on the other. Genesis 12 explains that the third transgression, the Tower of Babel, ultimately created a fork: the Most High God dispersed the nations, and Deuteronomy 32 describes the allocation of the nations to the sons of God. All nations but Israel were allocated, because Israel was God's portion; these are the 'disinherited nations.' Israel had been reserved to God as His portion. The Abrahamitic covenant refers to the initial promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:17–21 under which God's 'portion' will gradually dispossess those nations who are under the sons of God. The Abrahamic Covenant would produce a seed which takes the lineage to David and the Davidic dynasty, then finally to Jesus.

The Enochic priestly tradition, to which Melchizedek belonged, was a pre-partition sacerdotal order. Priests of this tradition celebrated the rite of the atonement, the rite associated with the restoration of the covenant. From the Book of the Leviticus, scholar Mary Douglas extracts a definition of 'atonement.' She notes that

> According to the illustrative cases from Leviticus, to atone means to cover or recover, cover again, to repair a hole, cure a sickness, mend a rift, make good a torn or broken covering. As a noun, what is translated atonement, expiation or purgation means integument made good.[26]

Atonement means reparation, and therefore the atonement rite repaired the covenant and its systems of bonds which maintain in place the created order. The

atonement rite was an exact replica of the service of heaven, and the high priest was the Lord on earth, that is, he was the counterpart on earth of the Lord of heaven. Thus, the Lord was the one who repaired the broken covenant of bonds; however, since what was performed in the temple was the service of heaven, the rite of atonement performed by the high priest ultimately and effectively restored the covenant. To put it differently, the earthly rite had a heavenly counterpart; the association of earthly and heavenly realities suggests that an association exists between the atonement rite performed by the high priest and the restoration of the covenant of creation by the Lord.

In sum, Melchizedek is linked with Jesus through Abraham and Abraham's seed (Psalm 110), but he is also connected to the fate of all nations because he is the priest of the pre-partition era. He is the mediator between the nations of a pre-Israelite age and Elyon (the Most High God) when it comes to peace and wholeness. The Melchizedek priesthood is rooted in the phase of Hebrew history represented by Enoch and Noah rather than by Abraham.

Cosmic Priesthood

The cosmic covenant, or eternal covenant, was the original and most fundamental covenant of all. It consisted of a system of bonds which restrained cosmic forces and conserved the order of creation and allowed humans to live peacefully and safety. The establishing of the eternal covenant is nowhere described in the Old Testament, but several passages assumed its existence. "I have established my covenant with day and night" (Jeremiah 33:25). As Jeremiah 33 indicates, God made the first divine covenant, not with humanity, but with 'day' and 'night.'[27] In the Old Testament there are several covenants: with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, and with David. Jeremiah looked forward to a new covenant, which will become the Christic covenant of the New Testament.

Panikkar's interest in the eternal (Cosmic) covenant has been connected with the previous work of Romano Guardini (1885–1968), Jean Danielou, and Henri de Lubac, each of whom adopted the notion of cosmic covenant in the context of fulfilment theology to describe the relationship between Christianity and other religions. The cosmic (or 'eternal,' or 'Noahic') covenant, which is between *Christos Pantokrator* and the whole creation, and the sacerdotal lineage *à la* Melchizedek that comes with it (Genesis 9:1–17), underlie and antedate the better known covenant patterns of the Old Testament. I will return to the notion of Christ Pantocrator later (see chapter 'Theology of the Unknown'). Here it is sufficient to say that the Pantocrator is the ruler of all. Christ is the ruler of all things. This primal covenant

is between the Pantocrator and "every living creature of all flesh" (Genesis 9:17), that is, between Christ and life. The scholarly literature on the eternal covenant, or the covenant of eternity, is evidence of the increasing importance that scholars have attached in recent years to the particular brand of Enochic literature, both as a framework for understanding Qumran origins as well as early Christianity. The writers of 1 Enoch conceive of the cosmic dimensions of evil, that is, evil is not of superhuman origin, and can therefore be contained within precise boundaries through prescribed ritual action.

The eternal covenant, or the covenant of eternity, was also described as the priestly covenant, because the atoning power was assigned to priests. Only in later times did tradition transfer the atoning power to God.[28] The eternal covenant, or the covenant of peace or wholeness, bound all creation together in its bonds, but these bonds could be broken by human sin. Isaiah includes a vivid picture of how the creation collapses under the weight of human sin. Then creation was fragmented and collapsing because it had lost its union with the Creator. The bonds of the covenant were restored by atonement, and thus the creation was reunited with the Creator and renewed at the start of the year. The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 25:9) was a rite which restored the eternal covenant and enabled the whole creation, not just the people of Israel but all things, to be reinstated to its original state. On the Day of Atonement, the Jubilee year was proclaimed; in the Year of Jubilee, society was recreated by restoring people to their own ends and by removing the burden of slavery and debt. The rite of atonement was officiated by the high priest, who was the visible presence of the Lord on earth, and just as the Lord had ordered creation at the beginning, so He recreated it. Thus, the atonement was the rite associated with covenant and the renewal of creation: all creation returned to its original state.

The Day of Atonement was the one day during the year on which the high priest of ancient Israel was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies in the temple.[29] The ancient Israelite temple was divided between the great hall and the sanctuary, or 'the Holy of Holies.' The Holy of Holies was hidden behind the Great Curtain, the veil of the temple, which separated the holy places from the most holy. The veil was a huge curtain woven from four different colors—red, blue, purple, and white—representing the four elements from which the material world had been created (red symbolized fire, blue the air, purple the sea, and white the earth). The distinction between the holy places and the most holy place, or Holy of Holies, operates as follows: holy means that the person, place, or item has received holiness but cannot pass it on; most holy, instead, means that the person, place, or item is actively holy and can confer holiness. The most holy place, therefore, imparted holiness to any person or object that had been beyond the veil (Exodus 30:29). The

ritual of the Holy of Holies affirmed holiness, and the most holy one imparted holiness to others who became the holy ones.

A reminiscence of this ritual can be found in the Gospel of John. Chapter 17 is titled "The priestly prayer of Christ" in NJB, but it should be more properly titled "The highly priestly prayer of Christ" (like ESV does). The passage "Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth" (John 17:17–19) is a reference to the transmission of holiness: Jesus the high priest consecrates himself—and consecrates means to 'make holy'—by entering the Holy of Holies so that he can impart holiness to his disciples. It was therefore Jesus's holiness that was the source of his disciples' holiness. In John 17 the notion of the transfer of the holiness is retold: "Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you … I have given them the glory you gave to me" (John 17:5, 22). Biblical scholar Crispin Fletcher-Louis describes what appears to take place: "There is a chain of glory: the high priest is glorified and then his fellow worshippers are glorified."[30]

In the temple, the priests remained part of the undivided holiness of the divine presence beyond the veil, whether they remained inside the holy place or outside of it. Accordingly, Jesus's holiness was the source of the undivided holiness of his disciples: "I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:22). Moreover, Jesus's holiness was the evidence of the divine origin of his mission and message. This is the immediate background to the arguments in St. John's Gospel, where Jesus, debating with the Jews, asks: "Yet you say to someone the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because he says, 'I am the Son of God.'" (John 10:36). The consecrated one was the high priest, consecrated in the Holy of Holies that represented heaven, and then sent out into the world: "Father, may them be one in us as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (John 17:21).

The temple represented creation, both visible and invisible, and the high priest represented the Creator. The eternal, incorporeal, divine realm was recreated in the sacred space, in the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies represented a state outside time and matter, the state to which only the high priest had access; he alone had direct contact with eternity. As Old Testament scholar Margaret Bakker summarizes,

> The Holy of Holies represented … the beginning of creation … the time of unity, the time when God was one with his creation. This was the undivided or predivided state, the unity underlying the visible temporal creation. Genesis 1 then goes on to describe how this unity was divided and separated, each according to its kind. "In the

> beginning," represented in the temple by the Holy of Holies, was the state in which creation originated and not an indication of the time when it originated.[31]

The first chapter of Genesis does not mention the creation of the angels or the spiritual world. However, in the book of Job it is said that the angels had been already present at the first stage of the visible creation: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations … when all the stars of the morning were singing with joy, and the Sons of God in chorus were chanting praise?" (Job 38:4–7). The book of Jubilees, which is an ancient, alternative version of Genesis, tells how the angels were created on Day One (Jubilees 2:2), not 'the first day' of several English translations. Thus, the Holy of Holies represented the state of unity underlying and sustaining the whole creation, as well as the angels and the sons of God and the entire invisible creation. The divine creatures were part of the primordial unity and perceived as angels and sons of God only when distinct from the primordial unity, that is, when they appear outside the veil. In the temple, the Holy of Holies and the great hall were divided by the veil, which probably corresponded to Day Two, the time of division and separation within the primordial unity. The veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the hall of the temple represented the firmament separating what is above from what is below. Thus, the Holy of Holies corresponded to the invisible creation, and the great hall corresponded to the visible creation.

The Book of Hebrews echoes in many ways most of this tradition. In Hebrews, in fact, the body of Jesus is described as the temple veil: "He has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body" (Hebrews 10:20). In Salomon's temple, all priests could enter the great hall of the temple, that is, the holy places, but only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. But the Hebrews notes that "through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary [i.e., the Holy of Holies], by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body" (Hebrews 10:20–21). Jesus's body opens to all the way to the sanctuary. The parallels between the ancient tradition and the New Testament do not stop here. In the ancient temple, the veil veiled the glory of the Lord within the creation: the Lord was present in the heart of the creation but was veiled from human eyes. In the Gospel of John, Jesus asks the Father to "glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world was made" (John 17:5). The Holy of Holies represented the glory of God in the heart of the visible creation.

Thus, the cosmos was the temple of the living God. The first human being, Adam, was the high priest and had access to the presence of god at the heart of creation. The high priest performed the ritual, and the ritual postulated a relationship between the sacred service and the cosmic order. More precisely, an inherent

harmony was supposed between the heavenly order and the earthly order, and the sacred service performed by the high priest maintained such a harmony. Temple realities were the counterpart of the realities of heaven: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven" (or, "on earth as it is in heaven") (Matthew 6:10). As a matter of fact, temple rites were an exact replica of the rites of heaven. The rite was simultaneously operating in heaven and earth. The implications of this alignment of earth and heaven were that first, the service performed in the temple was the service performed in heaven, and second, the high priest was the counterpart of the Lord. Accordingly, the high priest was ultimately bringing peace to creation. He was a healing priest, a priest of peace to creation, harmony between heaven and earth, and restoration of the eternal covenant.

In Solomon's Temple, the high priest celebrated the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the bonding together of the creation and the restoration of the eternal covenant that had been broken by human sins. Isaiah offers a vivid description of the collapse of the creation due to the broken covenant: "The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the eternal covenant" (Isaiah 24:4–5). The ritual of the Day of Atonement is described in Leviticus 16. Two goats were chosen by lot, and one was sacrificed, its blood taken by the high priest into the Holy of Holies. The creation was renewed by blood. The bonds of the covenant were restored by atonement, and thus the creation was reunited with the Creator. In Christianity, however, the high priest representing the creator is Jesus Christ. The Book of Hebrews mentions that "through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary.… So as we go in, let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith, our minds sprinkled and free from any trace of bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19, 23). We enter the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, with our bodies washed from the blood of Jesus with pure water. Thus, "when the Anointed One appeared as a high priest … he entered once for all into the holy place, taking not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11–12).

In Christianity, the great ritual performed to restore the bonds of the covenant and reunify the creation to its Creator is the Eucharist. There can be no certainty about the original context of the Eucharist: because Jesus was crucified at Passover (to pass over, Exodus 12:13), it may be that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. But the liturgy of the Eucharist seems more akin to the Day of Atonement. The bread of the Eucharist opens a living way of divine participation of the creation. In the temple, the high priest and the priests could eat the bread 'of the presence' of the Lord (Leviticus 24:5–9). Since it was taken in the temple, the bread became

'most holy,' that is, it became an item that imparted holiness. For the Christians, the bread of the Eucharist, the most holy bread, is the body of Jesus that renews the broken covenant and restores the creation to unity with the Creator. Jesus not only opens to all the way to the Holy of Holies with his blood, he also healed with his body the bonds of material creation that had been destroyed by human sin. Thus, Paul can write of the "plan he so kindly made in Christ … that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth" (Ephesians 1:10) and, "all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross" (Colossians 1:20).

Conclusion

In this chapter I proposed an investigation of the status of biblical scholarship on Melchizedek and the cosmic covenant in the period immediately preceding the publication of *Meditation*. I believe that in looking at the biblical debate related to Kingdom and Antediluvian Patriarchs I can help make more intelligible Panikkar's intellectual preoccupations and achievements in *Meditation*. In the next chapter, I will address *Meditation*, Panikkar's reflection of the priesthood *à la* Melchizedek. In that chapter, Melchizedek priesthood operates as an entry point into two important elements of Panikkar's early theology: (1) universal priesthood and (2) cosmic priesthood.

Notes

1. See Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), xiv–xvii; Peter W. Flint, "The Daniel Tradition at Qumran," in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, *Studies the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature*, ed. Martin G. Abegg Jr. and Peter W. Flint (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 41.
2. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction*; for English translation of 1955 German edition see: Peter R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 620.
3. English translations of the major portions of the Dead Sea Scrolls text can be found in Geza Verne, *The Complete Dead Sea Scroll in English* (London: Penguin, 1997). Most of the biblical texts, where they vary from the classic version and incorporate Dead Sea Scrolls literature, can be seen in Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*.
4. Ernst Käsemann, "The Beginning of Christian Theology"; for English translation of 1960 German original see: Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969), 102.

5. Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992), xx.
6. In the Old Testament, 'Melchizedek' occurs in Genesis 14:18 and Psalms 110:4.
7. Existing literature on Melchizedek is substantial. See, for example: Martin McNamara, "Melchizedek: Gen 14:17–20 in the Targums, in Rabbinic and Early Christian Literature," *Biblica* 81 (2000): 1–31; David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1973). For the development of Melchizedek traditions see: Fred L. Horton Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
8. The difficulties are related mostly to the following: the reference to Melchizedek in Genesis 14 shows some attachments to a Canaanite context, an extra-Biblical, non-Israelite context (see note 10); Psalm 110 has notorious text critical problems; several Melchizedek traditions exist in Second Temple Judaism; in the New Testament, Melchizedek is only mentioned by the unknown author of the Book to the Hebrews; and, no consistent narrative has been proposed that connects all biblical sources in a unique, coherent interpretation of Melchizedek.
9. Josephus, *War* 6.438. For a translation in English see: Josephus, *The Jewish War: Revised Edition* (London: Pinguin Books, 1984).
10. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *eds*., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999), 932.
11. The overall idea, suggested by biblical experts like Jewish Professor Steven Boint and Evangelical scholar Michael S. Heiser, is that the literary background of the Hebrew Bible was the Canaanite religion.
12. For the exegetical problems of Psalm 110, see: Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150, WBC 21* (Waco: Word, 1983), 78–87.
13. In the New Testament, 'Melchizedek' occurs in Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17.
14. Philo, *Leg.,* 3.79–82. For a translation in English, see Philo, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).
15. Jerome, *Epistle* LXIII, Heb 5:5–10, 7:1–3. An English translation is found in Charles Christopher Mierow, *The Letters of Saint Jerome*, Ancient Christian Writers Vol. 33 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963).
16. Ambrose, *On the Mysteries* 8.46. For a English translation, see St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries and on Repentence* (n.d.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).
17. James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* Vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1983); Marinus de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament," *NTS* 12 (1965/1966): 301–326; Florentino García-Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (The Qumran Texts in English), 2nd ed.(Leiden: E. J. Brill and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 139–140; Joseph Augustine Fitzmyer, "Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 1 (1967): 25–41; Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 171–172.
18. English translations of all pseudepigrapha, including 1 and 2 Enoch, can be found in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983, 1985).
19. Andrei Orlov, "The Melchizedek Legend of 2 (Slavonic) Enoch," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 31, no. 1 (2000): 23–38.

20. James VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).
21. Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 111n4.
22. Amar Annus, "On the Origin of the Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*19, no. 4 (2010): 277–320; David Melvin, "The Gilgamesh Traditions and the Pre-History of Genesis 6:1–4," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 38, no. 1 (2011): 23–32.
23. Helge S. Kvanvig, *Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic: An Intertextual Reading*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, Vol. 149 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
24. For the Pauline notion of 'transgression,' see: Tyrel Steward, "Fallen Angels, Bastard Spirits, and the Birth of God's Son: An Enochic Etiology of Evil in Galatians 3:19–4:11," Paper presented at Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Diego, 2014.
25. For references on the Enochian priesthood and its relationship with Noah, see, for example: Andrei Orlov, "The Heir of Righteousness and the King of Righteousness: The Priestly Noachic Polemics in 2 Enoch and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 58, no. 1 (2007): 45–65.
26. Mary Douglas, "Atonement in Leviticus," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1993–1994): 109–130, 117.
27. NJB reads "If I have not created day and night."
28. Entry inVarious Authors, *Jewish Encyclopaedia* for 'Day of Atonement' (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906), 286.
29. This section focuses on building the context of Panikkar's interpretation of high priesthood, not on addressing the entire area of temple theology. For this reason, I do not discuss important subjects such as: the difference between the First Temple, or Salomon's temple, and the Second Temple, and the difference between temple and tabernacle; the fact that the author of the Hebrews was probably concerned with the tabernacle, not the temple; the link between the pre-Levitical priesthood and Salomon's temple, the divide and continuity between the pre-Levitical priesthood and the Levitical priesthood, and so on. A short historical note: priests do not function in a synagogue, rather in a temple. Salomon's temple, the First Temple, was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. The Second Temple was built in the 6th century BCE when the exiles returned from Babylon. The Second Temple was very different from Solomon's temple: the rituals and traditional furnishing had changed. The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 68 CE. A biblical note: the building narrative of Salomon temple is in 1 King (especially chapters 6–9) and that of the tabernacle is in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40.
30. Crispin Fletcher-Louis, "2 Enoch and the New Perspective on Apocalyptic," in *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*, Andrei Orlov and Gabriele Boccaccini, eds. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012), 125–148, 134.
31. Margaret Barker, "The Great High Priest," *BYU Studies* 42, nos. 3–4 (2003): 65–80, 66.

CHAPTER SIX

Priesthood in Spirit and Truth

… the universal and general priesthood of humanity'

Panikkar[1]

Melchizedek Priesthood

In 1964, Abhishiktānanda made a pilgrimage to Gangotri with his friend Raimon Panikkar. Abhishiktānanda and Panikkar had met for the first time in 1957, in the beginning of May, at the Roman Catholic seminary in Poona, India. They met again four months later (August 11–29, 1957) in Varanasi, where Panikkar resided at that time. In the first week of June 1964 (June 1–7), the two friends met for the third time and traveled to Gangotri. Together, they celebrated Mass at this sacred site. Abhishiktānanda wrote a short account of the pilgrimage to Gangotri in the months immediately following the pilgrimage. In 1966, Abhishiktānanda published the account of their pilgrimage as *The Mountain of the Lord, Pilgrimage to Gangotri* (also, *The Mountain*) in English. A French edition, titled *Une messe aux sources du Gange*, was published one year later.[2]

The Mountain is divided into 12 chapters. In the first 8 chapters, Abhishiktānanda is alone; in the last 4 chapters, however, he is with Sanat Kumar. Sanat Kumar is the fictional name of Raimon Panikkar. It is with Sanat Kumar that Abhishiktānanda

reaches the source of the Gange and celebrates Mass. Chapters 8–12 of *The Mountain* mostly cover the dialogue between the two. Abhishiktānanda is the narrator, and he extensively quotes Panikkar. In the dialogue as reported by Abhishiktānanda, Panikkar sets the theme in terms of the acosmic monk and the cosmic priest. Abhishiktānanda is the acosmic monk; Panikkar is the cosmic priest. The dialogue is built around the dialectic between these polarities. Of course, there is no way to certify the accuracy of these quotes. It is possible that Abhishiktānanda had directly verified the quotes with Panikkar, since the two had met again in September and then in December 1964 in Shantivanam. In January 1965, they climbed Mt. Arunachala together. It is highly improbable that Abhishiktānanda would have made these quotes public if he had believed them to be imprecise. Plus, it is known that they frequently exchanged letters and manuscripts, and that they used to send copies of their books to one another for review. During the pilgrimage to Gangotri, for example, Panikkar read the draft of Abhishiktānanda's *Sagesse hindue, mystique chrétienne*.[3] So, despite the lack of historical evidence and the fictional tract of the character, it may be assumed that the recollection of the dialogue between Abhishiktānanda and Panikkar is accurate.[4]

In his account, Abhishiktānanda wrote about their moment of deep unity. He also wrote about a difference between them: Abhishiktānanda was 'the acosmic'; Panikkar was 'the priest.' It is well-known that Panikkar made abundant reflection on his priesthood in the period prior to the pilgrimage to Gangotri and in response to his experience as a Roman Catholic priest in India during his first trip there (1954–1958). Panikkar's discomfort with the traditional interpretation of Roman Catholic priesthood of his days is also well-known.[5] He disliked the notion of priest as an administrator of the sacraments. Panikkar reinterpreted his priestly condition outside the standard constraints of Roman Catholic canon law and outside the conventional understanding of the ecclesiastic milieu of his time. On numerous occasions he clarified the distinction between intermediator, someone who links the orders of nature and the supernatural, the human and the divine, and mediator, one who participates in both realities. Panikkar considered himself a mediator, not an intermediary. He reinterpreted his priestly status in terms of 'cosmic priesthood.' In *The Mountain*, Panikkar self-identified as a priest after the order of Melchizedeck: "I am a priest of the Lord; with him and under him, I am a priest 'after the order of Melchizedek'" (p. 51). Then he linked his priesthood with the priesthood of Christ: "And it is after his order [the order of Mechizedek], not after that of Aaron, the priest of the Mosaic covenant, that Christ became a priest—and in his priesthood mine is also included" (p. 51). In the New Testament, however, Melchizedek is not only a priest, but the "great high priest" (Hebrews 4:14; see also 8:1; 10:21). He is the type of Christ who in fact

is not only a priest, but the high priest. There is only one high priest, which is Christ; the Roman Catholic priests are His ministers. Thus, Panikkar should have said more precisely that Christ is the high priest 'and in his high priesthood my ministry is also included.' Then Panikkar linked the Melchizedech priesthood with the cosmic covenant: "Melchizedek is truly the 'type' or classic example of a priest of the cosmic covenant" (p. 51). Finally, he called himself the 'cosmic': "I am the 'cosmic' living fully in the world, one of those sent by the Lord to prepare the way for him and consecrate the earth, to bring about the coming of the Kingdom in society and in the world" (p. 53).

The question is this: what was in Panikkar's mind when he framed his priesthood in terms of Melchizedek priesthood? Was Panikkar engaged in an exercise of self-understanding? Or was he projecting a picture—the overall paradigm of the high priest—that had a profound significance for him? Scholars are familiar with the dialogue between Abhishiktānanda and Panikkar during their pilgrimage to Gangotri, a dialogue that centers on the acosmic-cosmic polarities: Abhishiktānanda is the acosmic, that is, the monk, and Panikkar is the cosmic, the priest. In the text, the acosmic-cosmic counterpoint is repeated several times. The counterpoint maintains an element of oddness, or at least extravagance, as both Abhishiktānanda and Panikkar were, in fact, Roman Catholic priests. The usual explanation suggested by scholars is that, in the dialogue, Panikkar's cosmism operates as an alternative to emphasize Abhishiktānanda's acosmism. According to this interpretation, Abhishiktānanda understood himself primarily as a monk, not as a priest. But an alternative interpretation is also possible: in the dialogue, Abhishiktānanda's acosmism serves as an alternative to emphasize Panikkar's cosmism. More than that, Abhishiktānanda's priesthood serves as an alternative to emphasize Panikkar's priesthood. In the dialogue, Panikkar's peculiar interpretation of priesthood is at stake.

Abhishiktānanda recognized himself as an 'acosmic,' yet, he refused to downplay his priesthood. He seemed confident that, as a monk, he could pass into the mystery and, as a priest, he could reveal that mystery. In the dialogue, Abhishiktānanda noted that he celebrated the Eucharist in "the Himalayan village of Gyansu" (p. 53) and in the caves of Arunachala (p. 54). His point is that Panikkar was not the only priest who had celebrated the Eucharist "often at various sacred places in India … where it has never been done before" (p. 53). Yet, this important corrective did not seem to change the narrative: when it is Panikkar's turn to comment on Abhishiktānanda's words, Panikkar framed himself as the only priest: "we are both come [to Gangotri] as forerunners of the Church," Panikkar concluded, "I the priest, you the monk" (p. 55). Panikkar's unwillingness to recognize Abhishiktānanda's priestly status seems more incomprehensible if it is

remembered that Abhishiktānanda, like Panikkar, took his priesthood seriously and assigned a tremendous importance to his liturgy. Not only was Abhishiktānanda part of a monastic congregation in France that had been responsible for the liturgical renewal within the Roman Catholic Church since the second half of the 19th century, but he was also personally experimenting in India with the liturgy of the Eucharist by incorporating readings and chants from Hindu Scripture into the regular Christian worship.[6] And Panikkar was well aware of all this, as Abhishiktānanda used to go to Varanasi to share his liturgical experiments with his friend.[7]

What was Panikkar implying in his refusal to recognize Abhishiktānanda's priesthood? Was he implying that Panikkar and Abhishiktānanda were both priests according to the Canon law, the corpus of ecclesiastical law that regulates the Roman Catholic Church, but in Panikkar's opinion, only Panikkar himself was primarily and ultimately a *true* priest, while Abhishiktānanda was primarily and ultimately a monk? Not at all. In the dialogue, in fact, Panikkar made the point that the monk "is the high priest of solitude and also the high priest of the crowd" (p. 47); that is, he reframed monasticism in terms of priesthood. I can only speculate here. In *The Mountain*, two crucial distinctions are at stake in the dialogue between Panikkar and Abhishiktānana. The first distinction runs between the priest of rites and the priest in spirit and truth (John 4:24). For both Panikkar and Abhishiktānana, there is the level of rites, and there is the level of the Spirit. Accordingly, there is the priest at the level of rites, and there is the priest at the level of the Spirit. Panikkar refined the difference between the two levels of priesthood in terms of intermediation, that is, the administration of rites, the ministry at the service of a bureaucracy, and mediation between the Creator and His creation, the ministry at the service of the mystery. In Abhishiktānana's words, the priest in Spirit exercises the ministry of the "revelation to human beings of their own personally mystery and also of the total mystery in itself, what is called God or the Deity."[8] Both friends rejected the dominant interpretation of the priest within Catholicism as primarily 'priest of rites' and envisioned an interpretation of priestly ministry that goes beyond its ecclesial expressions. In their celebre dialogue on their way to the sources of the Ganger, the crux of the matter is the priesthood in Spirit.[9] Of course, true priesthood can only be the mutual impenetration of the priesthood of rites and the priesthood in Spirit. This is the explanation of one of Panikkar's most straightforward remarks on his priesthood:

> I have always considered myself a priest, although I entered [priesthood] through a very narrow door, the Roman Catholic door … you have to open the door wide; and then, once you enter this realm of mediation, you must get rid of any mentality or ideology that can make you a bureaucrat, or the representative of a particular clan …. In any case, I am a Catholic priest.[10]

One enters priesthood through the priesthood of rites, then one reaches the priesthood in Spirit and never goes back. One must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he/she has climbed up it. Yet, once one reaches the level of the Spirit, his/her priesthood of rites is not replaced, abolished, or terminated, but instead elevated, that is, fulfilled and brought to fullness. In summary, true priesthood is the integration of the priesthoods of rites and in Spirit. Melchizedek's order of priesthood is exactly that.

Then there is the second dinstinction, one between the cosmic and the acosmic priesthood, or, in Panikkar's terms, between the priesthood of the crowd and the priesthood of solitude. A possible explanation of this dinstinction is that Panikkar was the cosmic priest (about which I will return soon) and Abhishiktānanda was the monk-priest, the priest who reveals the mystery precisely because as a monk, as an acosmic, he disappears into the mystery. Panikkar was assuming several strands of high priesthood: "the high priest of solitude and also the high priest of the crowd" (p. 47), and of course the high priest of peace, that is, of unity. Eventually for Panikkar, each of these stands took on its own specific nature, although the plurality of stands is the expression of the one and same high priesthood that is constantly at work. In the end, these stands all maintain, renew, and cement the relationship between creation and Creator. In this way, all the high priestly essence flows together in the ensemble of strands and are fused into unity. Or, it can be said that the high priest of solitude, the high priest of the crowd, and the high priest of peace are like the rays of the sun, the sun being 'the high priesthood.'

Universal Priesthood

The Mountain is not the only text in which Panikkar called himself a priest after the order (or, in Panikkar's terms, 'the dharma') of Melchizedek, a mediator in the entire divine-cosmic struggle for salvation, a cosmic figure who participates in both worlds.[11] In 1959, Panikkar published a paper titled "Eine Betrachtung fiber Melchisedech" (Meditation on Melchizedek) that provides further details on his view on Melchizedek priesthood. The paper was written after he returned to Europe from his first trip to India (1954–1958). In 1962, he published a second version of the same text as "Meditacion sobre Melquisedec" during his period in Rome. When he resided in Milan, Italy, from 1963–1964, Panikkar edited his doctoral dissertation for publication, which would become the original edition of *The Unknown*, and he sent "Meditacion" and other articles on Hindu-Christian dialogue to an Italian press house in Rome. In a compilation of articles published in Italian in 1966, a new version of *Meditation* would be published as "Meditazione su Melchisedek." In March 1964, Panikkar left Milan to return to Varanasi. In

June he had his pilgrimage to Gangotri with Abhishiktānanda. Scholars can detect from a letter to his friend and Italian philosopher Enrico Castelli that Panikkar received news of the publication of *The Unknown* while at work on the first drafts of *Meditation* in Varanasi in 1964.[12]

In *Meditation*, the subtext is Panikkar's interpretation of Melchizedek priesthood as well as the theological status of Brahminic priesthood. In this section, however, I focus only on the parts of *Meditation* that are relevant to Melchizedek and the notion of high priesthood. First, Panikkar mentioned his priesthood in the context of Melchizedek's priesthood. Then he called Melchizedek the 'cosmic priest.' Finally, he claimed that Melchizedek's task was to maintain "the continuity of the priesthood since the beginning of the world" (p. 143). Here Panikkar was suggesting the existence of a pure prediluvian, and pre-fall, priesthood, from which all the subsequent priesthoods descend. Panikkar expanded this point by specifying Melchizedek's mission: "meeting with Abraham in order to restore the bond that united him, from the beginning, to the universal and general priesthood of humanity" (p. 144). It is worth noting once again that Melchizedek priesthood is more properly high priesthood. Panikkar was saying that a sacerdotal tradition had existed "since the beginning of the world," a tradition of a "universal and general priesthood" that precedes the Israelite priesthood of Aron. This pre-Israelite high priestly tradition is carried by Melchizedek, who transmits the lineage of this universal and general high priesthood to Abraham, and through him, to Israel. According to Panikkar, in other words, Melchizedek meets Abraham in order to carry the lineage of this primeval high priesthood: the high priesthood is crucial for humanity and should be preserved.

Panikkar's appeal to the universal priesthood in the above passage is not unusual. In his theological writings he frequently mentioned the universal general priesthood of humanity, Melchizedek priesthood, and the cosmic priesthood, giving the impression that what he was doing was simply transposing into his framework the great cosmic affirmations of the Scripture regarding cosmic covenant and high priesthood. Panikkar further compounds the problem by simply referring to these notions, often vaguely, with little or no exegesis and hardly a mention of the sources of his thought. Perhaps I can best disengage the various elements—Melchizedek priesthood, universal priesthood, and cosmic priesthood—in Panikkar's approach by first detecting the sources of his thought and then trying to determine more precisely what he meant with them. With regards to the universal priesthood, I already summarized the scholarship on an ancient sacerdotal lineage that was focused on the protection of the cosmic covenant and the restoration of the unity of creation and its Creator. The description of such an ancient priestly lineage has not survived from antiquity complete in any one

source, but scholars have been able to piece together the description from a variety of materials, including non-canonical sources such as the books of 1 Enoch and 2 Enoch, the book of Jubilee, and some fragments found in the Qumran Caves near the Dead Sea.[13]

Although the biblical figure of Melchizedek is the natural point of entry into high priesthood, high priesthood is actually a much better way to penetrate the significance of Melchizedek. It is clear at this point that when the author of Hebrews mentions Melchizedek, he is referring to a more ancient priesthood than that of Aaron, the older brother of Moses (Exodus 28:1–3). The author of the Hebrews is referring to a specific high priesthood, not the same that was in place in the days of Jesus; a pre-Levitical sacerdotal tradition to which Melchizedek belongs and that he somehow symbolizes (Hebrews 6:20). It must be added that this ancient form of priesthood recalls an antediluvian history leading up to the Flood and the world order established afterwards. In fact, Enoch, not Melchizedek, was the first priest of this ancient sacerdotal tradition. Enoch, who said he "walked with God" (Genesis 5:22), is a biblical figure. His story is told in three non-canonical books, called 1 Enoch, 2 Enoch, and 3 Enoch.[14] From these books, particularly the first two, readers learn that Enoch was the first human being to envision the temple of the supreme God and to receive divine knowledge. 1Enoch in particular is a reliable source of material about the ancient high priesthood; it says that the first high priest of this ancient sacerdotal tradition was Enoch. Fletcher-Louis notes that "Enoch is a model, in particular, of the true priest who ascends to heaven to receive divine revelation just as the high priest enters God's innermost place on the Day of Atonement."[15] Enoch is the father of the antediluvian high priesthood, that is, the lineage of the heavenly ordained priests, the guardians of the cosmic covenant. In the words of Jewish scholar Rachel Elior, "The beginnings of the priesthood were thus set back in time as far as possible, because of the relationship between cosmic order and ritual order."[16] The ancient sacerdotal tradition linked creation and covenant, eternity and time, sacred space and earthly space.

The transmission of the priesthood from Enoch to Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Nir, and Melchizedek is recounted in the Genesis 5, 1 Enoch 81–82 and 106–107, and 2 Enoch 68–73. Enoch transmitted his priesthood to his son Methuselah, Methuselah to his son Lamech, Lamech to his son Noah, to Nir (Noah's brother according to 2 Enoch 70), and to Melchizedek. The continuity of the high priesthood was maintained by generations of priests, up to Melchizedek. The chain of transmission then was replaced by the Levitical priestly lineage, which somehow obscured the previous sacerdotal tradition. In *Meditation*, Panikkar was in fact saying that Melchizedek transmits to Abraham the lineage of this "universal and general priesthood." Or, if I am correct, Melchizedek transmits to Abraham the lineage

of the priesthood in spirit and truth. To transmit this lineage is an important task as this universal and general priesthood guarantees the undivided state, the unity underlying the visible temporal creation with the invisible spiritual creation. In *Meditation*, Panikkar notes the continuity of the blessing, that is, the continuity of the high priesthood throughout the ages, and the meaning of the blessing: "a blessing … is a psycho-physical reality that in itself proves the deep unity that there is between the material and the spiritual worlds" (p. 143). Panikkar's Melchizedek is not the pre-Israelite priest who brings divine protection and blessing to Abraham, but the post-diluvial priest who maintains the continuity of the high priesthood. This high priesthood was established in heaven, was taught to Enoch, and subsequently was passed down to Noah and Melchizedek.

Cosmic Priesthood

Panikkar reinterpreted his priestly condition in terms of 'cosmic priesthood.' What is a *cosmic* priest? Cosmic is the point where creation touches the uncreated. The created world is both the visible and the invisible, the earth and the heaven, as Psalm 102 puts it: "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands." Thus, cosmos is all things in earth and all things in heaven (Colossians 1:19–20). The created world includes humanity, nature, created spiritual beings, angels—that is, the entire reality that is non-uncreated. And what is a cosmic *priest*? A cosmic priest is the priest of the cosmic covenant. In fact, Panikkar linked Melchizedek to the cosmic covenant. The connection is elaborated in the initial part of the section called 'The Interpretation' of *Meditation*. Here Panikkar noted that there are three covenants (or testaments): the Adamic (or Edenic), the Abrahamic, and the Christic. He articulated his idea of Melchizedek as priest of the cosmic covenant. He argued that the Melchizedek priesthood was the priesthood of Noah and the generation after the Flood (an Enochian interpretation). He claimed a more ancient priesthood than of Moses, in continuity with Hebrews, but also a more ancient covenant than that of Abraham, a covenant represented in the biblical texts by the figure of Melchizedek.

Christ is the great healer of creation, the cosmic priest, the high priest of the rite of atonement, and, in His high priesthood, Panikkar's ministry is also included. Panikkar is ministering the rite associated with the restoration of the covenant, because Christ, the high priest, is the high priest of the rite of atonement. Traces of this reasoning can be detected in Panikkar's liturgy. His cosmic tendency was evident in the liturgical celebrations he performed all over the world, in a chapel in Madrid, in a Gothic cathedral in Saltsburg, at the sources of the Ganges, or in his

own home in Tavertet. His biographer Bielawski mentions a mass that Panikkar celebrated in Assisi, in which he threw the remains of the consecrated bread into the air at the end of the mass, claiming that in Assisi pigeons are not lower than the angels, and that they deserve to be fed with the consecrated bread.[17] Joseph Prabhu, Panikkar's friend and author of numerous scholarly books on Panikkar's thought, recalls the lasting effect of Panikkar's Eucharistic celebrations in the parish church of Santa Barbara:

> His famous Easter service in his Santa Barbara days would attract visitors from all corners of the globe. Well before dawn they would climb up the mountain near his home in Montecito, meditate quietly in the darkness once they reached the top, and then salute the sun as it arose over the horizon. Panikkar would bless the elements—air, earth, water and fire—and all the surrounding forms of life—plant, animal, and human—and then celebrate Mass and the Eucharist. It was a profound "cosmotheandric" celebration with the human, cosmic, and divine dimensions of life being affirmed, reverenced, and brought into a deep harmony. The celebration after the formal service at Panikkar's home resembled in some respects the feast of Pentecost as described in the New Testament, where peoples of many tongues engaged in animated conversation.[18]

Prabhu's account of Panikkar's celebrations in California emphasizes not only the cosmic character of these liturgies—air, earth, water, and fire—but also the sense of a cosmic temple. The only place for Atonement was the temple. Thus, even if Panikkar is not in a temple, his liturgy implies a temple setting. As a matter of fact, Peter claimed that Christians are the living stones of a spiritual temple (1 Peter 2:5). Panikkar might say that, in his view, the temple is the entire cosmos. By paraphrasing a célèbre sentence from one of his most famous books, it could be said that since his early youth, he had seen himself as a high priest, but one without a temple or at least without a temple other than that of the entire planet.[19] This is the notion of the high priest of the temple, where the one temple is the entire cosmos. Finally, Prabhu's account of Panikkar's celebrations in California transmits a sense of primordial unity recovered ("deep harmony"). This is not the traditional liturgy of a Roman Catholic priest, the administrator of the sacrament of the Eucharist and the officer of the celebration of the Mass. This is the ancient pre-Israelite high priest at work: during the worship, the original stance of the cosmos is sacramentally reconstituted, and plant, animal, and human all took their place again in the greater order of creation. This is the task of the high priest: to maintain creation, visible and invisible, bounded with its creator. This is what a high priest in the pre-Mosaic sacerdotal tradition does: he renews the cosmos in the liturgy-as-microcosm. This is what Panikkar was doing: restoring cosmic order through the rite of the atonement.

All Priests in Spirit and Truth Are Priests

In *The Mountain* Panikkar not only reinterpreted his priestly status in terms of 'cosmic priesthood' but he also clarified the relationship between the Roman Catholic priesthood and the Hindu priesthood in the context of the cosmic covenant. In his dialogue with Abhishiktānanda, Panikkar made some remarks regarding this relationship, and for the sake of this article, I mention some here. The first: "India and its Scripture belong to the great cosmic Covenant, which preceded the Covenant of Sinai as well as that which God made with Abraham—in Biblical terms we may call it the Covenant with Noah" (p. 38). Panikkar then called this covenant with Noah "the original covenant" (p. 38), and later Panikkar talked about himself in these terms:

> I am a priest of the Lord; with him and under him, I am a priest 'after the order of Melchizedek.'…. "Here in the temple of Mother Ganga as in those of Kedar, Badri and all the other shrines of India, there are priests whom I would regard as the brothers of the biblical Melchizedek … Melchizedek is truly the 'type' or classic example of a priest of the Cosmic Covenant. And it is after his order, not after that of Aaron, the priest of the Mosaic Covenant, that Christ became a priest—and in his priesthood mine is also included (p. 51).

Panikkar said that he is a priest 'after the order of Melchizedek.' He also argued that the Hindu priests are priests after the same order on the basis of the cosmic covenant. Then he continued:

> The sacrifice offered by Melchizedek, the priest of El-Elyon (God Most High) foreshadowed that of Christ. In the same way it is foreshadowed … by the offering of these Melchizedeks of India (p. 51).

Panikkar also explained the role of the Christian priest: "The role of the Christian priest is therefore to give to all these signs their eschatological fulfilment in the definitive sign of the Christian sacrament" (p. 52). In his narrative, Panikkar established a link between Melchizedek and the cosmic covenant. A surface reading of the text seems to imply that Panikkar sensed a connection between Melchizedek as a prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ and of His ministers and the cosmic covenant with Noah, which makes Hindu priests after the order of Melchizedek, too. Thus, both Hindu priests and Roman Catholic priests are priests after the order of Melchizedek in the context of the cosmic covenant. Is this what Panikkar meant?

In *Meditation*, the subtext is Panikkar's interpretation of his own priestly vocation as well as the theological status of Brahminic priesthood. He was clearly dissatisfied with the Roman Catholic practice of those days, which equalized non-Christian priesthood to untrue priesthood. His intent to release Brahminic

priesthood from discredit is clear, as is his respect for doctrinal boundaries. In *Meditation*, Panikkar called the order of Melchizedek "the existential order" and made clear that this distinct order is "the factual-existential condition to humanity before being transformed by Christ" (p. 147). He also pointed out that this existential order is not 'natural,' that is, the non-Christian religions are not simply natural, because a "purely natural" state "has never existed" (p. 147). Panikkar used Melchizedek to bridge the Christian high priesthood and the high priesthood of the nations: "Melchizedek is certainly … a 'type' of Christ, but, however, … [he] blessed the father of the nations [i.e., Abraham] so that this blessing could remain among them" (p. 143). He also explained what a blessing means: basically, it is the acquisition of the presence of the Lord. "A blessed object," here Panikkar is mentioning the objective reality, "contains something that an object that has not been blessed does not possess." This 'something' is a "spiritual content" that "impregnates its very matter [i.e., of the object] and it bestows a new value in it" (p. 143). One of the roles of the high priest is, in fact, to keep the elements of creation united in distinction. Finally, he managed to relate Christian priesthood and non-Christian priesthood to one another in terms of "physical continuity" and "moral discontinuity" (p. 144).

In *Meditation*, as mentioned above, Panikkar called the order of Melchizedek "the existential order," that is, the post-Fall condition to humanity before redemption (p. 147). What is this existential order? Panikkar explained that it is the order "that demands to be newly elevated in order to recover its lost plenitude and that suffers because of its incapacity of becoming free unless a Savior comes to aid" (p. 147). In a nutshell, the order of Melchizedek, that is, the existential order, is the order of the 'suspended middle,' to borrow an expression from Hans Urs von Balthasar's study of Henri de Lubac's predicament.[20] With regards to the order of Melchizedek, Panikkar noted in *Meditation* that in Melchizedek,

> Christian tradition has seen […] the sign of the grace of Christ, of His free 'coming' and of the natural human impotence to elevate itself to the supernatural order, which does not come from the body of from the will of Man, but rather is born directly in God (p. 147).

However, and this is an important corrective,

> God's grace will always be present while the world exists because Christ was already before Abraham at the very beginning of creation; He is not only the Only Son, He is also the firstborn of all creatures (p. 147).

The 'grace' mentioned in the former passage is not the same 'grace' mentioned in the latter. In the first passage, Panikkar affirmed, in agreement with tradition, that everything comes from God and proceeds from on high. But although attention

is directed explicitly upon the grace as the external gift (mentioned in the first passage), the reality of an internal gift cannot be denied. This is the grace mentioned in the second passage. Panikkar was basically saying that grace is not an exclusive prerogative of Christianity: the existence of this internal grace in "any human being after the fall of Adams" (p. 147) needs to be legitimately considered. Panikkar explained that the order of Melchizedek is part "of the Christian order, which can never be reduced to a devitalized, impoverished, and 'supernaturalized' order" (p. 146). Thus, the order of Melchizedek is part of the Christian order, which in turn is not a supernaturalized order. Is the Melchizedek order, then, part of a natural order? The status of Melchizedek, Panikkar continued, "is neither supernatural, because it is a fallen state, nor purely natural, since 'pure nature' has never existed." He then concluded:

> This is why we say existential order, the order of any human being after the fall of Adam, the order that demands to be newly elevated in order to recover its lost plenitude and that suffers because of its incapacity of becoming free unless a Savior comes to aid (p. 147).

Clearly Panikkar was rephrasing de Lubac's contribution on the nature-grace relationship. It is de Lubac who claims that "the state of pure nature has never existed in fact, even for only an instant."[21] This status, "neither supernatural […] nor purely natural" is for Panikkar the status of "any human being after the fall of Adam" (p. 147). Thus, the order of Melchizedek is the existential order (in Panikkar's terms), the order of the suspended middle (in Balthasar's terms). He then concluded:

> This is why we say existential order, the order of any human being after the fall of Adam, the order that demands to be newly elevated in order to recover its lost plenitude and that suffers because of its incapacity of becoming free unless a Savior comes to aid (p. 147).

This order demands a supernatural gift, the exterior grace, "in order to recover its lost plenitude." In a word, this order needs revelation: the teaching and precepts of Christ, which, confided to the apostles, are communicated by the Church. I will return to this later.

Panikkar then linked Melchizedek to the non-Christian priesthood. In *The Mountain*, Panikkar stated that India and its Scripture belong to the great cosmic covenant, which preceded the Mosaic Law. He was basically saying that India and its Scripture belong to the Table of Nations. He was also pointing to a covenant more ancient than the Law, a covenant represented in the biblical texts by the figure of Melchizedek. "Melchizedek is truly the 'type' or classic example of a

priest of the cosmic covenant" (p. 51), Panikkar argues. The connection between Melchizedek and the cosmic covenant is elaborated in the initial part of the section of *Meditation* called 'The Interpretation.' Here Panikkar noted that there are three covenants (or testaments): the Adamic (or Edenic), the Abrahamic, and the Christic. He stressed the 'continuity' among these three covenants (pp. 142–143). He noted that the cosmic covenant is the one that includes the nations, while the Mosaic Law was given to the nation of Israel. In general terms, he was claiming that what is theologically relevant includes all people, all nations—not only the Christians. He was concerned with how God's plan of redemption works for the whole world, for all the nations, not only for the Christians and not just for the Church. Clearly, Panikkar was much grander and cosmic in his outlook. For Panikkar the Christians are part of something bigger, something that transcends Christianity as a sociological group. In *Meditation* he claimed that "God has never forgotten his creation, and [He does not] leave the rest of the nations of the cosmos aside" (p. 144). This is probably a paraphrase of Acts 14:16–17. The original phrase opens *The Unknown*. Back to *Meditation*: Panikkar assigned greater importance to a covenant that is cosmic because it has universal implications. What really matters—what is really significant for humans—is a covenant to all nations that precede the Mosaic Law (and, I may say, the Abrahamitic covenant). What is really significant is the cosmic reconciliation, the covenant of peace and union.

Immediately after that, Panikkar explained what seems to be the main assumption behind his article:

> God has never forgotten his creation, and in choosing the people of Israel and bestowing them a special mission on Earth, he has not forgotten to connect them to the rest of the world, so as not to leave the rest of the cosmos aside (p. 147).

Although the nations and Israel are separated as far as their destiny is concerned, that is, the nations have been disinherited and Israel has been chosen by God, both remain in God's mind, so to speak. At this point, the importance of the sacerdotal tradition of the pre-Israelite priests, represented in the Bible by the royal priest Melchizedek, is clear: "Melchizedek—Panikkar noted—embodies the priesthood of the first alliance between God and Man, and his priesthood … still remains in pre-Christian religions" (p. 144). Melchizedek becomes, in Panikkar's essay, the primeval form of priesthood, not simply in chronological terms; Melchizedek is the original priest, and all priests are, in some way, like him: they maintain the unity of the cosmos, and with 'cosmos' I mean the whole reality, seen and unseen. Melchizedek, the Canaanite priest, is the priest of the Most High God, just like "in a certain sense, all true priests of the only God in the multiple religions of the Earth participate in the priesthood of this first testament" (p. 144). Therefore, all

priesthoods, that is, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist priesthoods, participate in the original. Panikkar claimed that not only Christian priests, but all priests of the nations, that is, non-Christian priests, are in effect priests. Panikkar concluded this section with a simple sentence: the priests of all religions are priests of the Most High God (p. 144).

How is that? How is it that the priests of all religions—as quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter—are the priests of the Most High God (El-Elyon is translated in the Septuagint as 'God Most High')? I can try to answer this question in a two-step process. At the level of rites, all priests are different, but at the level of the Spirit, all priests are the same. They are the priests in Christ, who is Spirit. This is the first step. It starts with Panikkar's reference on "the existential" line (or 'order'). This is a phrase that Panikkar repeated in *The Unknown*: "Christianity and Hinduism … really meet … in another deeper stratum that could be well called the existential level."[22] Panikkar ended the line of thought by saying that this meeting point is Christ: "Christianity and Hinduism both meet in Christ."[23] Thus, it is safe to say that this existential order has something to do with Christ. The priesthood of Melchizedek is, more properly, the priesthood of Christ, "the Redeemer" (p. 144), as Christ is already there, hidden but present, at work though still invisible.

The second step works as follows: all priests in spirit and truth are priests. In *Meditation*, Panikkar mentioned, "all true priests of the only God in the multiple religions of the Earth." So, what does 'true' mean? It means that every act of worship—as long as it is a *true* act, that is, a pure act of service or love ("the pure of heart will see God," Matthew 5:8), perpetrated by a priest, no matter a Christian or non-Christian priest—in cooperation with this Christ inward is a genuine and sincere gesture of worship that makes the priest a 'true priest.' Panikkar explains this line of reasoning in *The Unknown*: "It is Christ who inspires the payers of man and 'hears' them. It is he who whispers to us any divine inspiration and who is speaks as God, whatever forms the 'patient' of the divine may believe in or think of."[24] It is Christ who suggests to the priest—as long as the priest is a true priest—the words of his rite of atonement, and it is Christ who is the ultimate receiver of his prayers, regardless what god the priest believes he is worshiping. "Insofar … priests are truly priests," Panikkar argues in *Meditation*, these priests are "mediators, chosen men, chosen among the others for the salvation of their brothers" (p. 145). For Panikkar, priests are priests, as long as they are true priests, that is, priests in spirit and truth, regardless of the religions to which they belong. And the trues priests are, to borrow a line from Panikkar, "the true priests of the Almighty" (p. 148). All priests, if they are not priests only in name, not at the level of rites, but are priests in spirit and truth, are priests in Christ, and as such they are true priests

and worship the Most Almighty God, regardless of the religions to which they belong. In this sense, there is only one priesthood, the priesthood of Christ, the only high priest, the high priest of the order of Melchizedek, in which all priests are "ministers of the diverse religions that exist" (p. 148).

Christian and Non-Christian Priesthoods

For Panikkar, the priesthood of Melchizedek is both the beginning and the end of priesthood. It is the priesthood of the first covenant, the original priesthood, the priesthood of human brotherhood, on one hand; on the other hand, it is also the universal priesthood. It is the priesthood of the cosmic covenant, and as such it is the "universal and general priesthood" after the order of Melchizedek, the pre-partition priestly tradition, which makes sure that the cosmic covenant, that is, the covenant between God and His entire creation, is conserved and protected. God holds the entire humanity in the bonds of the cosmic covenant, bonds of covenant that, one might say, human sin (transgression) can break. All priests, "the priests of all religions who truly deserve this name" (*Meditation*, p. 149), are high priests in the order of Melchizedek, that is, all priests are healing priests. The creation is renewed in the overthrow of sin, and all priests contribute to the cosmic reconciliation through the atonement rites or, more generally, the rites associated with the cosmic covenant. All priests are priests of peace, union, and restoration. All priests who are priests *à la* Melchizedek preserve and renew the bonds of the original covenant.

The Melchizedek priesthood is the beginning and the end of priesthood, and as such informs the relationship between Christian and non-Christian priesthoods. For sure, Melchizedek is the center of Panikkar's important claims about Christianity and its relationship to Hinduism. The Hebrews emphasizes the Melchizedek-Abraham relationship in the context of Jewish-Christian debate on priesthood. In an interesting twist, Panikkar underscored the Melchizedek-Noah relationship in the context of his discussion on nations-Christian Christology. He transformed a Jewish-Christian debate on priesthood into a Church-nation debate of priesthood. He argued that the Indian priests are "the brothers *of* the biblical Melchizedek (emphasis added)" (p. 51), as he aimed to draft the contours of a specific priesthood, the priesthood of the nations. But he might also say that he and the Indian priests are brothers *in* Melchizedek. In Melchizedek, both priesthoods, his and their priesthoods, are included, so what did Panikkar mean when he said in 1964 that he and the Hindu priests belong to the same priesthood after the order of Melchizedek? How do the two priesthoods, that of the Church and that

of the nations, both priesthoods after the order of Melchizedek in the context of the cosmic covenant, relate to each other?

The relationship between Christian and non-Christian priesthood is asymmetrical, an adjective which clarifies that two movements are at work in the few statements from *The Mountains* and in the manuscript of *Meditation*: a movement of unity of Christian and Brahminic priesthood, and a movement of distinction between Christian and Brahminic priesthood. The movement of unity is clear: Christian and Brahminic (and Buddhist and Muslim) priests maintain through their liturgical work the primordial unity of humankind with God. "Here in the temple of Mother Ganga as in those of Kedar, Badri and all the other shrines of India, there are priests whom I would regard as the brothers of the biblical Melchizedek" (p. 51). These priests officiate the sacred rites and make sure that the cosmic covenant, that is, the covenant between God and all of humankind, is conserved and protected. This is the function of the "universal and general priesthood" (p. 144) after the order of Melchizedek. But there is a second function, a function more specific and special, which belongs exclusively to the Roman Catholic priesthood. This is the second movement, a movement of distinction between Christian and Brahminic priesthood. This movement is described in *Meditation* in the final part of the section of the paper called 'The Interpretation.'

Here Panikkar noted that Melchizedek "embodies the priesthood of the first alliance between God and Man, and his priesthood—*although containing many strains*—still remains in pre-Christian religions (emphasis added)" (p. 144). So, the Melchizedek priesthood contains many strains. In fact, both Christian and Brahminic are cosmic priests, but Christian priests are not only cosmic priests. The role of the Christian priest, he claims in *The Mountain*, is "to give to all these signs their eschatological fulfilment in the definitive sign of the Christian sacrament" (p. 52). The sacramental is the encounter of the order of nature and the supernatural. This encounter is the premise of salvation. The role of the Christian priest is to vehicle the supernatural ingredient that helps nature, already infused of the internal grace, transcend itself. The Christian priesthood is a cosmic priesthood because it is based on a cosmological belief. But the Christian priesthood is also based on the Christian belief in the Resurrection, which allows the Christian to see in the things He has made His everlasting power and deity, however invisible (Romans 1:10). In other words, the Christian priesthood enjoys the unique fullness of the divine revelation, while the non-Christian priesthood's practices express some elements of the one divine mystery.

Unity in distinction is a cardinal principle in Panikkar's theology. In *Meditation*, the unity between Christian priest and Hindu priest is clear: they both belong to the cosmic covenant. They are both 'cosmic priests.' The distinction is

clear, too: the Christian priest not only recognizes the creative presence of God in the cosmos, but also His redemptive presence. The cosmological belief, in fact, is the Cosmic Christ; the Christian belief belongs to the Mystical Christ. Panikkar, in fact, managed to relate Christian priesthood and non-Christian priesthood to one another in terms of "physical continuity" and "moral discontinuity" (p. 144). Here he is probably echoing de Lubac, who stated that the essential distinction, from the Church Fathers up until the High Middle Ages, remained one between natural and moral. De Lubac argued that the former distinction was authentically Christian:

> on the one hand there was created nature; on the other hand there was created spirit, which was free, and intellectually reflexive ('personal'). This 'moral' realm was in some sense not just created; it bore a more radical imprint of divinity: the *imago dei*.[25]

In other words, the natural (understood not in terms of 'pure nature') is the essential and necessary order; the moral is the free and personal order. The distinction is between the natural order, that is, the cosmic order, and the moral order, that is, the historical-eschatological order. In the latter, the goal is the supernatural understood in terms of mystery, the goal of the historical-eschatological framework. Thus, the distinction between Hindu priests and Roman Catholic priests is not built on an ontological distinction between natural religions and Christianity as the supernatural religion.[26] Rather it is based on a distinction between a cosmic order and an historical-eschatological order, that is, between cosmos and mystery. Panikkar really means that both Hindu priests and Roman Catholic priests are priests after the order of Melchizedek in the context of the cosmic covenant. They are both 'cosmic' priests. However, the Melchizedek priesthood contains many strains, and priestly roles differ: the Hindu priests represent all nations before the Cosmic Christ; the Roman Catholic priests reclaim all nations for the Mystical Christ.

Conclusion

It is well-known that priesthood played an important role in Panikkar's life. Later in life, he not only critiqued the Roman Catholic priesthood of his time, but also manufactured clamorous forms of protest against it. Less known, however, is the kind of priesthood he wanted to pursue. What type of priesthood did he have in mind when he critiqued the traditional Roman Catholic priesthood? In this chapter, I examined Panikkar's early notion of priesthood not only because it provides the context for his own self-understanding, but also because it operates as a central

theme in Panikkar's early theology. Panikkar framed his interpretation of priesthood in terms of 'high priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.' Melchizedek priesthood, in Panikkar's view, is a cosmic priesthood. The high priest after the order of Melchizedek exemplifies Panikkar's set of ideas regarding a priestly figure who performs the rite of the atonement, that is, the rite of cosmic reconciliation. While recent literature has addressed Panikkar's Melchizedek priesthood from an historical and theological perspective, in this chapter I took a biblical and extra-biblical standpoint.[27]

The next step on my agenda is to move to *The Unknown*. My hypothesis is that *The Unknown* is less a paradigm shift and more a restoration: in reading Panikkar's wide-ranging investigation, one feels the tectonic plates shifting, coming together in a very old configuration, and one sees the outlines of primal sources once again interrogated. To read and reread Panikkar's early works is to share his sense of unity, to be invited into the presence of the divine embedded into the reality of the world. It is to become part of a universe at its beginning, when the religious is omnipresent and God is not a subjective choice but an objective reality. It is like becoming part of a divinely created order of the cosmos and sharing a primordial and mystical vision of reality that is crystallized in all religious traditions.

Notes

1. *Meditation,* 144.
2. Abhishiktananda (Henri le Saux), *The Mountain of the Lord: Pilgrimage to Gangotri* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1966; repr. Madras: CLS, 1967; new and rev. ed. Delhi: ISPCK, 1990). Revised by the author as *Une Messe aux Sources du Gange* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1967); Italian edition: *Alle Sorgenti del Gange. Pellegrinaggio Spirituale* (Quaderni di Ricerca, 46); new edition by Milena Carrara and Espedito D'Agostini (Troina: Servitium, 2005).
3. Abhishiktananda, *Sagesse Hindue, Mystique Chrétienne* (Paris: Editions Centurion, 1965); Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda. A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984).
4. Yet, Panikkar's notes on *The Mountain* are stored in the Panikkar Collection at the University of Gerona. These notes, probably written decades after the publication of *The Mountain*, are critical to some parts of Abhishiktananda's text. However, these notes do not refer to the matter of priesthood nor do they refer, more specifically, to the portions of Abhishiktananda's text quoted here.
5. Panikkar became a priest on September 29, 1946. The Bishop of Madrid, Leopoldo Eijo y Garay (1878–1963), led the ceremony that made Panikkar a priest, together with other five members of the Opus Dei.
6. Abhishiktananda to Canon J. Lemarié, December 22, 1965, in *Letters*, 175.
7. For example, Abhishiktananda went to Varanasi to discuss his liturgical improvements with Panikkar in December 1965.
8. December 21, 1971. *Ascent*, 335.

9. *Mountain*, 36–60.
10. Raimon Panikkar, *Entre Dieu et le Cosmos. Une vision non dualiste de la réalité*, 60. Translation is my own.
11. Raimon Panikkar, "A Christophany for Our Time," *Theology Digest* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 6–20, 20.
12. Raymond Panikkar, Letter to Enrico Castelli, December 12 or 19, 1964, from Varanasi (in Italian).
13. See, for example: Andrei Orlov, "The Sacerdotal Traditions of 2 Enoch and the Date of the Text," in Andrei Orlov and Gabriele Boccaccini, eds., *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012), 103–116. For the connection between the ancient priestly tradition and Early Christianity, see the work of Margaret Barker, particularly *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003). See also: Rachel Elior, *The Temple and Chariot, Priests and Angels, Sanctuary and Heavenly Sanctuaries in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University/Magnes Press, 2003); Crispin Fletcher-Louis, "Jesus as the High Priestly Messiah: Part 1," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 4, no. 2 (2006): 155–175 and Fletcher-Louis, "Jesus as the High Priestly Messiah: Part 2," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 5, no. 1 (2007): 57–79.
14. The First Book of Enoch (also 1 Enoch) is not regarded as scripture by Jews or Christians, apart from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which to this day regards it to be canonical. Scholars assert that it dates from about 300 BCE to the end of the 1st century BCE. The first part of Book of Enoch describes the fall of the Watchers, the angels who fathered the Nephilim (Genesis 6:1–4). The remainder of the book describes Enoch's visits to Heaven in the form of travels, visions and dreams, and his revelations. The Second Book of Enoch (2 Enoch), known as Slavonic Enoch or The Secrets of Enoch, is usually considered to be part of the Apocalyptic literature. Late 1st century CE is the dating often preferred. 3 Enoch is an Old Testament Apocryphal book probably written in the 2nd century CE. George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation. Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); Alexander Jack, *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (Albuquerque: Star Point Publishing, 1972). Enoch is also mentioned in the book of Jude as the seventh patriarch of the world (Jude 1:14).
15. Fletcher-Louis, "2 Enoch and the New Perspective on Apocalyptic," 128.
16. Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples. On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism*, trans. David Louvish (Oxford; Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005), 173.
17. Maciej Bielawski, *Panikkar: Un Uomo e il Suo Pensiero*, 57.
18. Joseph Prabhu, "Raimon Panikkar, 'Apostle of Inter-Faith Dialogue,' Dies," *National Catholic Reporter* August 31, 2010.
19. Raymond Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 6.
20. The epithet 'suspended middle' comes from: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, trans. Joseph Fessio, Michael M. Waldstein, and Susan Clements (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 16–17.
21. Quote from Henri de Lubac, *Théologie dans l'Histoire. I- La Lumière du Christ II. Questions disputées et Résistance au Nazisme* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1990), 141. De Lubac's initial writings on the question of the supernatural is Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes Historiques* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1946). Much of the material of Surnaturel is reproduced in modified form in two later books: Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard, introduction by Louis Dupre´ (New York: Herder & Herder-Crossroad, 2000), and Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, introduction by David

L. Schindler (New York: Herder & Herder–Crossroad, 1998). In turn, de Lubac is indebted to Blondel's thesis of the dual afference. See Maurice Blondel, "L'Encyclique *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*," *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne* 155 (Oct., 1907): 5–9.

22. *The Unknown*, 5.
23. *The Unknown*, 6.
24. *The Unknown*, 16–17.
25. De Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes Historiques*, 487.
26. This thesis is affirmed also in *The Unknown*, 36–37: "the conception of natural religion […] would seem to exclude the work of grace and of Christ inside the other religions […] to call a religion a natural religion amounts to saying that it is not religion at all." Here Panikkar argued that non-Christian religions are not natural religions (in the sense exemplified by Jean Danielou and Romano Guardini), as pure nature has never existed; for the same reason, Christianity is not a supernaturalized religion.
27. Bielawski places Panikkar's Melchizedek in the context of Panikkar's life and thought. See: Bielawski, *Panikkar: Un Uomo e il Suo Pensiero*. Ranstrom focuses on the different economies of salvation at work in Panikkar's Melchizedek. See: Ranstrom, "Christology after Dominus Iesus: The Early Panikkar as a Creative Resource"; Ranstrom, "Raimundo Panikkar's Interpretation of Melchizedek in Genesis 14," in *Global Perspectives on the Bible*, Mark Roncace and Joseph Weaver, eds. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2014), 21–23; Ranstrom, "Unknown Jesus or Unknown Christ? The Diversity in Panikkar's Early Christology," in Mark Granquist, *Without Ceasing To Be a Christian: A Catholic and Protestant Assess the Christological Contribution of Raimon Panikkar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2017), 1–34. See also: Gianni Vacchelli, *Per un'Alleanza delle Religioni: la Bibbia tra Panikkar e la Radice Ebraica* (Milano: Servitium, 2010), which includes an analysis of Panikkar's Melchizedech.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Cosmic Sacramentalism

> The Kingdom of God suffers violence
> precisely because it is within us
>
> Panikkar[1]

The Unknown

It is time to engage in a closer look at *The Unknown*. In *The Unknown* there is an impressive portfolio of creative ideas which has already attracted the attention of skilled scholars and commentators. I narrow the focus to what Panikkar calls 'Christ' and the related concepts of 'Christic principle' and 'Cosmic Christ.' My main goal in this chapter is to connect theological reflection and biblical themes, including those of the Kingdom. I establish a link between one main subject of *The Unknown*—that is, the Cosmic Christ—and the biblical theme of the Kingdom. In the next chapter I will expand the link between theology and biblical scholarship with reference to Acts 17.

Previously, I mentioned Robin Boyd's review of *The Unknown*. His review carries the classic interpretation of *The Unknown*'s thesis: Christ is hidden in Hinduism and fully revealed in Christianity. Accordingly, the mission of Christians is to unveil the hidden Christ and help Hinduism to accede the truth and to convert,

that is, to become Christianity. Boyd supports his interpretation through a handful of quotes from *The Unknown*: "That Christ which is already in Hinduism, which, therefore, Christianity recognizes and worship, that Christ has not unveiled his whole face … there. He still has to grow up and to be recognized."[2] Thus, the same Christ that Christians already recognize, Hindus have yet to recognize. At this point Panikkar adds the following: "He [Christ] has to be crucified there, dying with Hinduism as he dies with Judaism and with the Hellenistic religions in order to rise again." As for now, Hinduism is a true religion: "For Christianity, Christ is already there in Hinduism in so far as *Hinduism is a true religion*" (emphasis added). These and other quotations seem to sustain Boyd's interpretation of *The Unknown*, an interpretation that is shared by several others.

Panikkar, however, disagreed with this interpretation. In the revised edition of *The Unknown*, as already noted in a previous chapter, Panikkar stated that

> my main concern was not to speak of a) an unknown Christ of Hindus who is 'known' by Christians, nor b) of an unknown Christ of Christians who is 'known' to Hindu, under whatever form and name … my primary intention was to speak c) about the 'unknown' Christ of Hinduism, which can be either unknown, or known *qua* Christ, to Christians and Hindus alike.[3]

I already alluded to scholars who suspect that in his revised edition, Panikkar does not make explicit his original thesis, but rather elaborates and eventually departs from it.[4] He denied this allegation and remained firm on this view for the rest of his life, constantly maintaining the point that even the original edition of *The Unknown* carried the same message: not unknown to Hindus and revealed to Christians, but somehow unknown to both. This is the author's position and deserves to be taken seriously. Moreover, in the second part of the Foreword of *The Unknown*, written by Panikkar in Rome in 1962, he anticipates, almost word for word, what he will repeat in 1981: "As an introduction to that book (i.e., 'a book on Christ, making sense for Hinduism') the author [Panikkar himself] sometimes feels tempted to write, if at all, a volume called: 'The Unknown Christ of Christianity.'"[5] Although framed vaguely, it seems that already, in the first edition of *The Unknown*, Panikkar argues that Christ is unknown to both Hindus and Christians. Thus, his thesis remains unchanged through the different editions of the book.

In "A Self-Critical Dialogue," one of many essays from the last part of his life, Panikkar displays a grand amount of scholarship and once again returns to the issue and explains his view. In this text he masterfully harmonized the findings of his life-long philosophical and theological work and merged them into a complex web of simple, clear sentences. "My study," he notes with regard to *The Unknown*, "did not refer to the known Christ of christians or to any 'Christ in itself' on which christians know one aspect and hindus another aspect under another name."[6] His

study, in fact, presented one harmonious vision in which the entire creation reflects the glory of God and Christ is charged with the task of raising all of creation to union with the Godhead. In Panikkar's opinion, *The Unknown* is, in a nutshell, a Trinitarian vision of the *cosmos,* of Christ within that *cosmos*, and therefore of *the economy of salvation*, the salvific interplay between the cosmic, the human, and the divine. For Panikkar, Christ is much broader than a rescuer from sin and death, a Divine undoing of man's mistake, but points rather to God's eternal plan for whole creation. In the Preface of the 2007 edition of *The Unknown of Hinduism*, Panikkar made some comments that, for the sake of this present study, are worth quoting in their entirety here:

> I enphasize that the adjective 'unknown,' as referring to Christ, is also applicable to historical Christianity. I have repeatedly suggested that the meeting of religions, which is indispensable today, implies a mutation in the actual self-understanding of religions, and in this case of Christianity itself. After being historically anchored for almost two thousand years to the monotheistic traditions originated from Abraham, Christianity, if it claims to be Catholic, must meditate deeply on the *kenosis* of Christ and have the courage, as it did at the first Council of Jerusalem, to free itself from the Jewish tradition … and from the Roman tradition … without breaking with them, and let itself be fertilized by the other traditions of humanity.[7]

In the conclusive commentary of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* written by its author, Hinduism is barely mentioned. Panikkar's focus was Christianity. He devoted the whole preface to clarifying that the unknown Christ is unknown to all religions, including Christianity (seen as a religion) and drafting a picture of Christianity from the first generation onwards. He claimed that Christianity lost his way after the First Council of Jerusalem, so that it must meditate on the *kenosis* of Christ, to transform itself toward becoming something else in order to meet the other religions.

Reading *The Unknown* through the eyes of biblical sources requires shedding the filters of a mixture of creedal statements and modern rationalism: Panikkar was less prone than most of his colleagues to conceptualize. At the very beginning of *The Unknown*, Panikkar quotes Gregory of Sinai to say that the true knowledge is reached through the guide of the Spirit: "the mind guided by the Spirit, traces words in the pure hearts of those who listen." Then he locates his source of inspiration, his *locus theologicus maximus*, in the blessed ignorance and sacred silence.[8] As a matter of fact, only God knows God; the Father alone knows the mystery of Christ. Panikkar developed an experiential concept of knowledge of the Mystery based upon the notion that God is not known through a purely intellectual process; when one is in communion with God (i.e., restored to his/her natural state), one can and even must enjoy a direct knowledge and experience of his/her Creator.[9]

This property is not simply intellectual; it implies purification of the whole being, ascetical detachment, and ethical progress. This is to say that in any systematic presentation of Panikkar's thought, there is always the danger of forcing it into the mold of rational categories foreign to its very nature. This is precisely what occurs in several commentaries on Panikkar's theology, which claim to interpret faithfully his theology without showing his same unity of method and congeniality of approach. Commentators generally take for granted that the dramatic character of the theology of the unknown is philosophical in character, but Panikkar most explicitly formulated it in terms of the ineffable and of silence.

Christ and Christic Principle

As a case in point, in *The Unknown* Panikkar writes that Christ is a symbol of the Mystery.

What is the Mystery? In first approximation, for Panikkar the Mystery is the Ultimate, the Absolute. "All that has been said about truth, goodness and beauty," he explains, "are all aspect of the Mystery."[10] It is clear that the category of 'the Mystery' serves to integrate some of the most important themes in *The Unknown*. In this sense, 'the Mystery' provides an excellent point of entry into a framework otherwise characterized by a diversity of nuances and evolving reconceptualizations. All of this of course leads to the important question: what precisely does Panikkar mean by 'the Mystery'? Before proceeding, it is worth noting a certain ambiguity in Panikkar's account of 'the Mystery.' In the Introduction of the first edition, the two Introductions of the revised edition of *The Unknown*, and the innumerable manuscripts in which he returns to the *vexata questio* of the thesis (what I called 'unknown Christ,' the meaning behind the title of *The Unknown*), the phrases 'the Mystery,' 'Christ the Mystery,' 'the Mystery that Christians call Christ,' and 'the Mystery of Christ' are sometimes specified and distinguished and in other instances used interchangeably. Panikkar seems to sometimes overlap between the Trinitarian and the Christic levels. In his Introduction to *The Unknown 2*, Panikkar notes that "though Christ is the Mystery in the sense that to see Christ is to reach the Mystery, still the Mystery cannot be totally identified with Christ." In sum, it is through Christ that the Mystery can be reached; yet, the Mystery cannot be totally identified with Christ. Still, Christ is the symbol of the Mystery and the Mystery itself. In another paragraph, he explains: "the paradigm for this Mystery is the *Trinity*" (original emphasis).[11] A tension can be perceived between the Mystery as Trinity and the Mystery of Christ: in fact, Panikkar distinguishes and mingles at the same time the Mystery as Trinity and the Mystery

of Christ because, of course, the three persons of the triune God are distinct from one another and yet inseparable. How can (the Mystery of) Christ be approached in isolation from the (Mystery of the) Trinity?[12] I personally believe that this is Trinitarian language, the same language readers can find in Acts 16, in which the Spirit is addressed first as 'Holy Spirit' (16:6) and then as 'Spirit of Jesus' (16:7): the Spirit is distinct, yet united to Christ. In the same way, Christ is distinct, yet united with the Trinity. The same can be said about Christ in the mentioned passages of *The Unknown*, in which He is depicted simultaneously as present reality and part of the Mystery of the Trinity that surpasses all definitions. Christ is the Mystery, but the Mystery is not exhausted in Christ. Panikkar will elaborate on the relation between the Trinitarian hypostases in later works.[13] Without further dispensing with the *intentional* semantic ambiguity in Panikkar's account, at this point suffice it to say that in *The Unknown*, readers can detect a distinct form of Christocentric Trinitarianism.

In *The Unknown*, the Mystery is another word for the hidden presence of God within the reality—in Panikkar's words, "all that exists, i.e., the whole of reality, is nothing but God: Father Christ and Holy Spirit."[14] For Panikkar, the Trinity is not something that refers exclusively to God but to the entire reality. What Christians call the Mystery refers to the Trinitarian core at the heart of whole creation. Minds which are filled with modern preconceptions, which try always to see relations between beings as material and logical, are quite content to think of the Mystery by analogy with the architecture of reality. For them it is much more like a structure than a gratuitous movement of divine love in the triune God's own life. The point is that the Mystery is neither structurally part of reality nor simply juxtaposed to reality. The Mystery is the revelation of the ground of all, of the Source of all, and of the relationship of not-otherness between the two: the Source and all are not other to each other. To put it differently, the Mystery is the Trinitarian character of an underlying core of whole reality, in which the reciprocal, interpenetrating, dynamic relation internal to the Godhead permeates and preserves the reality. This is Panikkar's sacramental theology. At this point one discovers that the notion of Trinity, as expressed by Panikkar, leads to a distinction in the Godhead between His transcendent essence and His properties, such as 'power' or 'goodness,' or 'truth,' which express His existence and action *ad extra*, not His essence. The dynamism of the Trinity makes communion the true purpose of creation, which is transparent to divine action in the world. Accordingly, the reality in *The Unknown* is considered to be completely and fully Trinitized, that is, the created is saturated with the tri-unity of the divine Godhead. The reality is, to borrow a quote from Pope Paul VI, "impregnated by the presence of God and of a nature, consequently, that permits a constant self-exploring."[15] Some commentators understand the

Mystery in Panikkar's thought as extrinsic to creation.[16] It is not. For Panikkar, the Mystery is at the very heart of creation. In this sense, for Panikkar "there is nothing but God."[17] For him, everything is sacred; reality cannot be conceived independent of the Mystery. The Mystery is not about things which bypass human reason. The Mystery surely surpasses human reason, but it is eventually embedded in human reason—embedded in the whole reality. A self-contained, self-sufficient, and autonomous reality, without reference to the Mystery, is not good Christian theology. This sacramental understanding of reality is lost in most of the rationalistic analysis of *The Unknown*.

Christians identify the Mystery with Christ. This is the language of St. Paul, according to whom Christ is "the mystery of our religion" (1 Tim 3:16). It is likewise the position of St. Augustine, who maintains that *Non estaliud Dei mysterium, nisi Christus* [there is no other mystery of God, apart from Christ].[18] Thus, there is only a Mystery: the Mystery of Christ. In the Introduction to *The Unknown 2*, Panikkar is careful to stress "the presence of *the one* Mystery (not necessary the 'same' Mystery) in both traditions [i.e., Christianity and Hinduism]" (emphasis added).[19] I interpret this sentence as follows: Panikkar highlights the fact that the Mystery is constituted by many mysteries, and he understands that each mystery always expresses the whole of the Mystery. For Panikkar, the Mystery that Christians call Christ does not stand alongside other mysteries as one particular instantiation of a more general relationship between humanity and God. The Mystery is rather the one mystery to which all other mysteries bear a strictly derivative relation. Thus, Panikkar expands Christ to the point of becoming the unique point of insertion of any human being into the Mystery.

With the Trinitarian framework firmly established at the very core of reality, one can begin to look at Christ's central position in Panikkar's *The Unknown*, in which the fate of humanity is tied to that of the entire cosmos. Panikkar realized that there is more to this link than humanity and God. The entire universe—the cosmos—is also part of this intimate bond. The visible and invisible aspects of the universe constitute but one cosmos. In this context, the triune God in the second person, that is, Christ, the Son of God, brings not only humanity, but all of creation (both visible and invisible) into a deific union in the life of the Trinity. Thus, Christ is the ontological link between creator and creation. Christ is the intermediary between God and the world, but this intermediary is nothing less than God Himself, who in this way leads the whole creation, visible and invisible, natural and supernatural, to the profundity of His immanent, Trinitarian, transforming action. For Panikkar, the fact that Christ acts as mediator, that Christ recapitulates in himself the elements of the entire world, is relevant for the outlining of this active role of mediating: "the symbol Christ … 'recapitulates' in itself the Real in its totality, created and uncreated."[20]

Thus, Christ is the mediator, the Way, as Panikkar calls Him.[21] Yet in exercising this mediating role, Christ must at the same time and in some way sanctify creation itself, and in so doing bring to it a promise of continuous healing and purification. Panikkar amplifies the dimensions of Christ: not simply the mediator, but the reconciliator, who reunifies the created and the uncreated. In fact, in Christ, the duality between the created and the uncreated is transformed, through an act of gratuity and love, into a unity unthreatened by dissolution. Panikkar is an orthodox thinker, for whom divine 'nature' and created 'nature' are distinguished and show totally dissimilar modes of existence. The first is totally free from the second, while the second depends upon the first. For a Christian (a Catholic), the forces of nature cannot be divine, nor can they be subject to any form of natural determinism. Yet, divine nature and created nature are united. For a Christian, the forces of nature are sanctified, which implies that they are restored to the original and natural order of the world. Nature has not been created as an autonomous or self-sufficient being; its very *nature* is truly itself only in as much as it exists 'in God' or 'in grace.' Grace therefore gives man his 'natural' status. At all times Panikkar remains doggedly committed to Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

This task of healing, recreation, and reunification makes Christ the unifier of reality. This is not divinization (or Christopantheist, that is, absorption, fusion, assimilation); it is constant, permanent reunification (or panchristism, as Panikkar's friend, Jules Monchanin, would call it: the idea that Christ is at work in every little thing). What Christians call 'Christ' is the unity that is present in the Trine God and radiates and vitalizes all of reality.[22] He is the full manifestation of the immense love of God, who penetrates the whole universe. Christ is the bounder of creation who unifies the tangible and intangible worlds, and in this capacity, He is universal. As universal, He is present anywhere. He is at work everywhere, and He penetrates everything. In sum, the presence of Christ at the heart of all things is intimate and distinct at the same time; His presence not only unifies the creation, but also vivifies and elevates the creation.

This is, in a nutshell, the generation of the Christ principle. The spirit is the active, generative principle. And Christ, who is spirit, is that principle, the vivific, unifying, purifying principle of creation. This action of mediation and unification, of uniting created and uncreated, intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and universe, that is, of uniting diversity, with all diversity preserved, is the Christic principle.[23] For Panikkar, "in the heart of this Reality, Christ, the Lord, stands for the universal principle, the ultimate pivot of everything, the beginning and end of reality."[24] Panikkar also calls this principle 'Trinitarian,' which eventually stands not so much on the immanent Trinity as on the cosmotheandric character of reality.[25] With 'cosmotheatric' I mean—in the context of the unknown Christ—that Christ is at the heart of all the realms of being: cosmic, human,

and divine. Christ intends to rule over creation in a relationship of love and to establish and protect the harmony of the whole creation. The fate of all creation is tied to its agent in creating, ordering, and healing, that is (in biblical terms, as I will show later), to be its king and high priest, and thus in His turning toward God, the entire cosmos is turned toward God. To put it differently, He brings the entire cosmos—visible and invisible—back to the Father. Christ is the principle that ties together all that is, the universal principle of all. For Panikkar, Christ is this active principle "seeing and recreating all hearts and renewing the face of the earth."[26] The principle remains privileged and its purpose of turning it all toward God remains unchanged, but its mode of existence is inconstant according to its intentional decisions.

Theology of Cosmic Christ

The origins of the phrase 'Cosmic (or 'cosmic') Christ' in the realm of the theology of religions are sometimes traced back to Joseph Sittler's address to the 1961 World Council of Churches Assembly meeting in Delhi. His address was based on Paul's passages such as Colossians 1:15–20 in which the word 'all' is mentioned six times. According to Sittler (1904–1987), God's redemption is for all, that is, it is "cosmic in scope," and the Christ envisaged in those passages is the "cosmic Christ."[27] Others identify Paul David Devanandan as the person who can be credited with the phrase 'Cosmic Christ.' In his address at the same 1961 meeting, he suggested from Ephesians 1:10 that a Cosmic Christ unites all things to Himself. In his address, Devanandan (1901–1962) recapitulates his theological thought: the work of the Holy Spirit in history, the gathering of all people into the Kingdom of God, the hidden Christ at work by renewing Hinduism. In Christ's new creation and new humanity, Christ unites non-Christian religions to Himself.[28]

The important writings of these Protestant theologians were probably indebted to the immense work of Eastern Orthodox scholars who redeemed Maximus the Confessor (580–662) from obscurity and brought his cosmic theology back to light in the first half of the 20th century. Maximus has undergone a remarkable rediscovery in modern times, and his conception of the Word of God's permeation of the entire cosmos to transfigure it has become one of the most profound and far-reaching intellectual contributions to theology since the mid-20th century. During the same period, Roman Catholic theologians turned to Maximus' penetrating theological vision and have attempted to reconcile it with Western Christian thought and to investigate the implications of such a vision with regard to theological and spiritual concerns of this present era. This rediscovery has

occurred against the dominant Neo-scholastic tendencies of the early 20th century which somewhat sidelined the importance of Maximus's profound spiritual experiences and penetrating theological vision, not only within the Byzantine thought but the whole Christian tradition.[29] Orthodox and Catholic theologians in the first half of the 20th century have agreed about the establishment of the reputation of Saint Maximus the Confessor as the greatest of all Byzantine theologians, with a wholeness of vision that speaks directly to many of our concerns today.

In 1915, Sergey L. Epifanovich wrote in Russian a pioneering work on Maximus.[30] Epifanovich's originality was to treat Maximus's work not only as a synthesizer of the previous Greek Patristic tradition, but as an initiator of a new era of Byzantine theology. While Epifanovich's thesis was initially received with skepticism, it would become the mainstream interpretation in the second half of the century. In the 1920s, the work of Venance Grumel on Maximus's dogmatic theology, and his encyclopedic entry on Maximus for the *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, reintroduced Maximus to Catholic theological reflection.[31] A decade later, Marcel Viller established the link between Maximus and Evagrius of Pontus and emphasized the orthodoxy of the former compared to some disputable contributions of the latter.[32] In the same period, Catholic thinkers such as the Jesuit patrologist Irénée Hausherr and philosopher and historian of medieval thought Etienne Gilson proved the role of absolute relevance of Maximus in the Christian tradition.[33] They confirmed that so thoroughly did Maximus's thought come to influence the Byzantine theological tradition that it is impossible to trace the subsequent history of Orthodox Christianity without knowledge of his work. At the same time, two translations of Maximus's 'Mystagogia' appeared in Italian and French, while Russian theologian Georges Vasilievich Florovsky wrote a dense and profound study on the organic character of Maximus's theological thought.[34]

In 1941, Hans Urs von Balthasar, a prominent Swiss theologian, considered to be one of the most important Catholic dogmatic theologians of the 20th century, addressed Maximus in one of the finest works on the Byzantine theologian. Von Balthasar's book, written in German and titled *Kosmische Liturgie* (tr. Cosmic Liturgy), contributed greatly to the rediscovery of the paramount significance of Maximus's theological legacy in the West.[35] Von Balthasar's aim was to unfold a comprehensive picture of Maximus' theological vision through a concrete and rigorous analysis of the structure and meaning of Maximus' writings. The fact is, in von Balthasar's opinion, Maximus' 'cosmic liturgy' relies widely on the patristic reference to the idea of the liturgy as an icon of heaven on earth. The liturgy is for Maximus more than a mere symbol; it is effective, that is, an operation to effectively transform the reality into transfigured, elevated existence. For Maximus, as perceived by von Balthasar, "the liturgy is ultimately always 'cosmic liturgy': a way

of drawing the entire world into the hypostatic union, because both world and liturgy share a christological foundation."[36]

This form of Eucharistic spirituality and cosmic reference became common in the Catholic milieu into the 1950s. Theologians like Monchanin, Henri de Lubac, and Pierre Charles (1883–1954) and poets like Paul Claudel (1869–1956) articulated distinct styles of sacramental theology, sometimes associated with the work of Christ, sometimes rooted in the Church. The teachings of Maximus readily support this sacramental view of creation by affirming a universal, ontological, and real presence of the Logos of God. Teilhard de Chardin's theology is, above all, based on his profound conviction of God's presence and, more immediately, Christ's presence throughout the universe. Teilhard demonstrated an awareness of the teachings of Maximus that suggests an introduction to the Cosmic Christ tradition as early as 1916. While the term "Christogenesis" was not coined until 1939, in this early essay the relationship between Christ and the cosmos—a relationship that will become one of Teilhard's master ideas—is already present:

> the Body of Christ must be understood boldly, as it was seen and loved by St. John, St. Paul, and the Fathers. It forms in nature a world which is new, an organism moving and alive in which we are all united physically, biologically.… It is first by the Incarnation and next by the Eucharist that [Christ] organizes us for Himself and imposes Himself upon us.… By His Incarnation He inserted Himself not just into humanity but into the universe which supports humanity, and He did so not simply as another connected element, but with the dignity and function of a directing principle, of a Center toward which everything converges in harmony and in love.[37]

The above passage is interesting for a number of reasons, including its reference to the world as organism, the significant mention of the Eucharist as organizing opus operandi, and the assigned function of 'directing principle' to Christ. Teilhard appeared to have in his sights the cosmic theology of Maximus, although with an important difference: Maximus placed the Cosmic Christ in the context of a static universe, while Teilhard puts it in the context of an evolutionary universe: "Christ," he says, "has a cosmic body that extends throughout the universe."[38] Thanks to the work of theologians such as Teilhard, Catholicism embraced a highly dynamic concept of universe, which is driven by the creative power of Christ's love. Fourteen years later, in an academic lecture, Teilhard defined the relationship between Christ and the cosmos:

> Let us remember that the supernatural nourishes itself on everything, and let us accept fully those magnificent perspectives according to which the Christ of St. Paul appears to us as He in whom all has been created and He in whom the whole world finds its stability, with all its height and depth, its grandeur and greatness, with all that is material and all that is spiritual.[39]

He believed that it is legitimate, while remaining faithful to the sources of revelation, to speak of a genesis which is Christic as well as one which is cosmic. It is against this background that I place my analysis of Panikkar's thought on Cosmic Christ.

Panikkar's Cosmic Christ

For Panikkar, the whole mystery of Christ is that everything is held together in Christ (Col. 1:16–20). Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of all creation. In *The Unknown*, he mentioned exactly that: "He … the beginning and the end…."[40] In Panikkar's view, the intermediating and reunifying action of Christ is the lens through which to interpret the beginning and the goal of the universe. The theology of the unknown Christ is cosmological: Christ is at the very center of creation, the mediator and the reunificator, and He brings the entirety of creation with Him into the divine life of the Trinity. The kenotic love of Christ is naturally inclined to the task of unifying the multiplicity and divisions of creation and offering it back to God. This Christic principle, this dynamic foundation of all things, this ground of being that is essentially active, is the Cosmic Christ. Some scholars believe that the Christic principle corresponds functionally to the role of Cosmic Christ in Christian thought. I share their opinion and therefore I would call it this way, although Panikkar himself rarely used the expression 'Cosmic Christ,' and rather talked about 'the cosmic mystery of Christ.'[41] In this study I use both expressions. While I share the opinion of those scholars who see a cosmic character in Panikkar's Christology, here I embrace the task of narrowing down a more precise definition of Panikkar's Cosmic Christ. Once his arguments are put back into context, their distinct meaning becomes all the more apparent.

The term 'cosmic' is used to designate more than a geographical location: it stands for a reality set apart because of a divine presence or operation, which is related to the created world and that is ordering, healing, or stabilizing that created world. I do not think it is too audacious a claim to argue that—in Panikkar's view—cosmos is a synonym for 'life.' The Cosmic Christ, in other words, creates, orders, and preserves life: "I am the light of the *kosmou* (cosmos), whoever follows me … shall have the light of life": Christ is "the light of the cosmos" and "the light of life" (John 8:12). For Panikkar, the Cosmic Christ, or better, the cosmic mystery of Christ, is nothing less than the voluntary, gratuitous action of progressive movement of sanctification of the cosmos led by Christ. In this movement, the multiplicity and divisions of creation find their unifying principle in Christ (i.e., the Christic principle).

Panikkar mentioned the Cosmic Christ at the very end of *The Unknown*: "how in Christ the hidden mystery of God has been revealed and how he, the Pantocrator, the cosmic redeemer, the beginning and the end …."[42] Here Panikkar was mostly rephrasing Revelation 21:6. He used the term 'Pantocrator' (or Pantokrator), the title given to the Father by the Jews of Alexandria in their Greek translation of the Old Testament. Where one would expect to see God the Father creating, however, one sees instead his Word, Jesus Christ, making the cosmos and being the light of the cosmos (John 8.12). The Pantocrator is Christ the Creator and Ruler of all things—the Christ of Glory, the Enthroned Christ. Pantokraror as a divine designation intends to express something similar to the more dynamic concept of the kingdom of God, namely that God is the Lord of his Creation and that in it he has realized or shall realize his will. The Pantocrator is Christ the Almighty (Revelation 1:8).

Seen through the lens of Catholic theology of the mid-20th century, the early Panikkar central theme of the Cosmic Christ must be understood in the following terms: Christ is not upon nature, or added (as a principle) to nature, but already present in the natural order. Strictly speaking, a natural order, understood as autonomous from Christ, does not exist. By virtue of this intimate participation in Christ, Panikkar believed that the generation of the Son, in Teilhard's line of thought, is concomitantly to the creation of the world. In other words, the whole creation, visible and invisible, natural and spiritual—I quote Panikkar here—belongs entirely "to the kingdom and sphere of the Son."[43] The entire creation is thus virtually (potentially) the same as the Kingdom. At the same time, Christ cannot be considered a physical agent (or principle) of the same order as nature. Christ comes sacramentally, that is, as a real presence and as a sign that not only points beyond itself to the supernatural but also makes present that to which it points. In Panikkar's words:

> Christ, manifest or hidden, is the only way to God. Even by definition the unique link between the created and the uncreated, the relative and the Absolute, the temporal and the eternal, earth and heaven is Christ, the only mediator. Between these two poles everything that functions as intermediary, link, 'conveyor', is *Christ, the sole priest of the cosmic priesthood, Ruler of the Universe par excellence* (emphasis added).[44]

The Cosmic Christ is not only the ruler: He has a sacerdotal status. For Panikkar, Christ is a Melchizedek figure, the eternal universality of Christ's mystery and ministry above all creeds and denominations. In Panikkar's words: "Christ [is] the sole priest of the cosmic priesthood, Ruler of the Universe par excellence."[45] According to Panikkar, His kingdom is more precisely a priestly kingdom, and His rule is more correctly a priestly lordship. To understand what Panikkar meant by

the Kingdom, therefore, it is necessary to recover both the high priesthood and the kingship of Christ. I already addressed the required literature.

Scripture does not only label Melchizedek the high priest, but both priest and king. He maintains that double title. The order of Melchizedek is an order of priestly kingship. Melchizedek is the unique type of Christ, the incarnate God, who is at the same time the high priest and the one divine king. This interpretation of the priestly kingship of Melchizedek, which finds its entire fulfillment in the manifestation of Christ, shows the symbiotic exercise of Melchizedek's office. Christ is the priest-king. As a ruler, Christ brings the Kingdom, that is, He renovates the whole creation; as a priest, however, He is the healer, the unifier, the sanctifier. Christ is the healing ruler, the unifying lord of all, the royal high priest, the sanctifier of His own dominion. If this argument is valid, what Panikkar had in mind when he wrote *The Unknown* and *Meditation* was not the theological concept of the Cosmic Christ—that is, creating, ordering, and sustaining the universe—but the biblical-driven idea of the indissoluble unity of Christ's act of healing and ruling.

For Panikkar, it is the primeval landscape of the Kingdom that drew humanity to a deeper participation in the divine life. As anticipation for a point I will address more precisely in the next chapter, however, I must add that not only is Christ's priestly kingdom everywhere, but also in Christ's priestly kingdom everything is, for in His priestly kingdom everyone lives, moves, and exists (Acts 17:28). I take as an example the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. It is included in *The Unknown* and it states: "the Kingdom of God suffers violence precisely because it is within us." (p. xiii). In later works, Panikkar will change his view—and accordingly the interpretation of the original phrase from the Book of Luke—to say that unlike the King James translation of Luke, which says that the kingdom of God is *within* you, or the New English Bible which has God's kingdom *among* you, he finds it more correct to know that the Kingdom of God is *between* you, which is what the Greek preposition 'entos' means and which clearly emphasizes the relational nature of everyone with God.[46] What he will never change is this idea of the Kingdom in the midst, that this relational nature can be understood in the dual sense that Christ's sacerdotal lordship is everywhere and in it everything is. He knew his Hebrews well (*The Unknown* begins with two quotes from Hebrews); Christ is the high priest: "Jesus has entered before us and on our behalf [into the inner place behind the veil], to become a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, and for ever" (Hebrews 6:20). In the so-called priestly prayer of Christ in NJB, Jesus mentioned the glory he had shared with the Father before the world was ever made (John 17:5). Panikkar believed that Jesus was their high priest. He also believed everyone is 'in Christ.' And since everyone is in Christ, everyone can enter the Kingdom.

Scholars of *The Unknown* are suggested to consider Christ's priestly lordship, or the unknown Christ, at work everywhere, hidden in the very heart of creation, and therefore in Christianity as well as in Hinduism. And through his priestly lordship over the cosmos, He brings all of creation into a deific union in the life of the Trinity. The royal priesthood, or the priestly lordship, is central—I believe—to a deeper understanding of *The Unknown* and *Meditation*. Another way to put it is that the indefectible integration of political and ecclesial powers in the figure of Melchizedek make the possibility of worldly rulers and spiritual priests, so familiar to modern minds, unfeasible to Panikkar's early theology.

In Panikkar, the generation of the Son and the creation of the world are one and the same act. In *The Unknown*, Panikkar adopts the same framework: "Christ is not only at the end but also at the beginning."[47] Christ is not only the goal of creation but also the prime mover. Christ is the principle and the end, for all things come from him, by him, and toward him (Romans 11:36). In biblical terms, it means that the Lord of the Old Testament is the Lord of the New Testament, exactly as St. John explained in his prologue. For Panikkar, the Son of God has been manifested both as the Lord in the Old Testament and as Christ the Lord in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Son had been described both as the Spirit which inspired the prophets and also as Wisdom. In the New Testament is the risen Lord. Thus, the editors of the Jerusalem Bible, who chose to use Yahweh in the Old Testament and the Lord in the New Testament, destroyed, with one editorial decision, the unity of Scripture. For Panikkar, like Philo and Justin before him, the Old Testament is not about God the Father; he found the Son of God in the Old Testament.

It would not be too much to say, by way of conclusion, that the Cosmic Christ, "the sole priest of the cosmic priesthood, Ruler of the Universe," the source as well as the ruler and the healer of creation, the cosmic redeemer, provides an entry point to the most-guarded edifice of Panikkar's thesis of the unknown. Essentially, such an entry point is an extension and further clarification, within a different system of thought, of traditional teaching concerning the Kingdom of God and the figure of Melchizedek. If the generation of the Son and the creation of the world are one and the same act, so that the whole creation belongs entirely to the Kingdom and sphere of the Son as Panikkar states, then it follows that Christ is *not* King of the world because His Father has declared Him to be such, but because He is indissolubly united to the world, infinitely intimate and yet at the same time infinitely far away. There are two reasons for such a pronouncement. The first is that the link between Christ and creation is not juridical. Here the reader can probably see once again at work Panikkar's reaction to the juridical approach, this time in the domain of Christology. The second is that Christ is not extrinsic to creation.

It has been said that He is the Lord of all because all has been given to Him, like a spiritual reality added and juxtaposed to creation. Nothing can be further from the truth: Christ and creation constitute an organic whole. Or, to put it differently, Christ's Lordship and high priesthood over creation are mystical, that is, sacramental in character. In this context, Christ is the substantial bond linking together the universe to the Godhead and unifying, healing, and restoring all creation.

Panikkar's Cosmic Christ in Context

From a very cursory summary of a modern theological trend, it is possible to conclude that Panikkar's thought—with regard to *The Unknown* and more generally to Panikkar's early theology—is much closer to the contributions of some Catholic theologians that proceeded him than it is generally recognized. With that, I am not arguing that what he did was simply transposing into a pluralistic framework the great cosmic affirmations of von Balthasar, Monchanin, de Lubac, and Teilhard; on the contrary, Panikkar was sometime critical of the work of other Catholic thinkers: a case in point is Teilhard. I am rather noting that Panikkar's project has strong affinities with those of certain Catholic thinkers. I propose a short list of these affinities: the Christ principle (Teilhard), the sacramental character of reality (von Balthasar, Monchanin, de Lubac, and Teilhard), and the panchristism (Monchanin and Teilhard). Another trait common to all of them (including Panikkar) is the idea that Christ is the mysterious inner principle or power of the entire cosmos, perpetuating itself through all times, continually living and yet expressing itself in physical forms. These theologians belong to a generation of Catholic thinkers that became dissatisfied with Neo-scholasticism and its distinction between the supposedly natural order and the supernatural order. This generation rejected the notions of both the naturalization of the supernatural, that is, the supernatural manifests itself in natural forms, and the spiritualization of matter, that is, matter assumes supernatural qualities. Human beings do not live in two-tier universe, in which an autonomous physical level (our reality) runs parallel to a similarly autonomous spiritual level. The two levels, so to speak, maintain their distinction, but they are united. The sign, the liturgy, the Church—each of these realities plays a mediating role in linking the natural to the supernatural. Panikkar would agree with some if not all elements of this list, adding to it one more element, mysticism, understood here as 'reading of signs.'

For this generation of Catholic thinkers, Christ is the mystery, and this should be understood as both the essential mystery of Christ and the historical dimensions of the mystery. Here 'mystery' stands for a truth that reveals God to

us. In Catholicism, the term is often used interchangeably with 'sacrament.' This mystery of Christ appears more properly like the framework within which all the other mysteries have their place—not in the sense that one mystery stands alongside another, but that they are complementary expressions of a single Christian mystery, including that of the intimate relationship between the supernatural and nature. The 'mystery of Christ' is, in fact, the sacramental sign as well as the reality and serves as a key to enter into the nature-supernatural relationship. This relationship is itself a mystery because it relates wholly to Christ: in their relationship—and here I borrow a statement from de Lubac—the two elements, nature and the supernatural, "have been joined in intimate union in dependence on and in the image of the two natures in Christ."[48] This dual-aspect concept of Christ—sacramental sign and reality on one hand and the entry point into the nature-supernatural relationship on the other—taken together refers to the fact that the mystery of Christ is not completely spiritual, but exists and acts in the midst of the world. This language of 'mystery' became an abiding element of Catholic theology of mid-century.

This is not a study on the direct or indirect influence of von Balthasar, Monchanin, and Teilhard's writings on Panikkar (for that, someone with the talents and experience of a Veliath or an Ursula King would be required). It is enough here to note the striking similarity of the basic orientation of these thinkers, and to therefore pay due attention to a certain Catholic flavor in Panikkar's vision, of which I offer some evidence: first, I mention the beautiful *Mass on the Altar of the World*, one of the finest examples of Teilhard's spiritual writing. On the Feast of the Transfiguration in 1923, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin found himself alone at sunrise, under a tree in an oasis of sorts in the Ordos Desert of Inner Mongolia. As the sun came up, Teilhard wrote, "Over there on the horizon, the sun has just touched with light the outermost fringe of the eastern sky. Once again, beneath this moving sheet of fire, the living surface of the earth wakes and trembles."[49] He was deeply moved and wanted to celebrate mass. But he had no altar, no bread, and no wine. So, he resolved to consecrate the whole world to Christ with no altar, no bread, and no wine. He eventually made the world itself his altar and the circumstances and worldly affairs the bread and the wine for his mass. I believe that *Mass on the Altar of the World*—"I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar"—can be seen as a precedent to Panikkar's celebration of the cosmic Eucharist.[50] Second, I consider the already-mentioned term Pantocrator (or *Pantokrator*), which can be found at the very end of *The Unknown*. I believe, although I cannot prove it (notably, I cannot disprove it either) that Panikkar borrowed this term from Monchanin, who was the first to reintroduce it into Catholic theological discourse via his 1937–1938 lecture series at the La Ligue missionnaire des Etudiants de France.[51]

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a closer look at *The Unknown*. I have been particularly interested in the interpretation of the book, and I have tried to offer some suggestions in this regard; I have also placed the book in the much greater context of the Catholic contributions to the cosmic theology of those days. At the same time, I have aimed to identify a link between theological reflection and biblical sources with regard to the Cosmic Christ and to see how this task presented itself to Panikkar. The stage is thus set for a deeper investigation of *The Unknown*.

Notes

1. Foreword (written in 1962 by Panikkar) in *The Unknown*, xiii.
2. *The Unknown*, 17.
3. *The Unknown 2*, 25–26.
4. Jyri Komulainen presents a carefully drafted analysis of Panikkar's Forwards to *The Unknown 2*. While Komulainen recognizes the continuity between *The Unknown* and *The Unknown 2*, he stresses the change: "[*The Unknown 2*] differs *significantly* from the first edition" (emphasis added). If I understand Komulainen correctly, he thinks that the change may involve the big picture, that is, Panikkar's systematic thinking about Christ; he does not argue specifically that the distinct argument that is the object of this study has changed between the two editions of *The Unknown*. Also, Dupuis and Ranstrom seem to focus their reflections on the trajectory of Panikkar's thought, not on the thesis of *The Unknown*. So, I think it is safe to say, in a nutshell, that some scholars believe Panikkar's theology may be evolved, as consequently, so has his argument. In my opinion, Panikkar sustains that his thought may be evolved, but his argument has remained the same. See Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion?*, 25, 125, 127.
5. *The Unknown*, xiii.
6. Raimon Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in Prabhu, ed., *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, 268.
7. Panikkar, *Hinduism and Christianity: Opera Omnia* Vol. VII (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 6.
8. *The Unknown*, xiii.
9. Panikkar insists that Man is the undivided Anthropos. Man is rooted is *manas*, mind, and consciousness and is not gender exclusive.
10. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in Prabhu, ed., *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, 269.
11. *The Unknown 2*, 24–25 and 23.
12. Daniel P. Sheridan argues, in fact, that *The Unknown* is a work of theology of the Trinity rather than of Christology. See: Sheridan, "Faith in Jesus Christ in the Presence of Hindu Theism," in Joseph Prabhu, ed., *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 145–161, 151.
13. See, for example: Raimon Panikkar, *The Silence of God: The Answer of Buddha* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).
14. *The Unknown*, 131.

15. Paul VI, speech at the opening general congregation of the second session of the Second Vatican Council, September 29, 1963.
16. See, for example, the quotation: "'Mystery' is a concept denoting a meta-level," in Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion?*, 100.
17. *The Unknown*, 130. In his letter to Abhishiktananda, Panikkar quotes Thomas a Kempis: "quiquid Deus non est: nihil est" (and whatsoever is not God, it is nothing). Panikkar qualifies Thomas as 'sober,' to indicate the total orthodoxy of this concept. See Raimund Panikkar, "Letter to Abhishiktananda on Eastern-Western Monasticism," *Studies in Formative Spirituality* 3, no. 3 (1982): 429–451, 446. For the quote, see: Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. and edited by Ronald Knox and Michael Oakley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 161.
18. Augustine, Letter 187 (to Dardanus), c. 11, n. 34. For a translation in English, see: St. Augustine, *Letters 156-210* (High Park, NY: New City Press, 1995).
19. *The Unknown 2*, 28.
20. *The Unknown,* 28.
21. "He is the Way" (original emphasis). See *The Unknown 2*, 25.
22. For Monchanin's panchristism, see: Monchanin, *Ecrits Spirituels*, 'Panchristisme,' 160. The notion of pancristism is well rooted in modern Catholic theology. Maurice Blondel wrote a whole philosophical treatise in which he tried to explain how Christ is the substantial 'bond' linking together the universe and giving life to all creation. See Maurice Blondel, Une *Enigme Historique, le 'Vinculum Substantiate,' d'après Leibniz et l'Ebauche d'un Réalisme Supérieur* (Paris: Éditions Gabriel Beauchesne, 1930).
23. See, for example: Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christie Self-Consciousness," 89–116, 113.
24. Panikkar, "Christianity and World Religions," 102.
25. *The Unknown 2*, 29.
26. *The Unknown 2*, 20.
27. Sunand Sumithra, "Conversion: To Cosmic Christ," address to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting, New Delhi, 1961. Published as Sunand Sumithra, "Conversion: To Cosmic Christ," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 16 (1992), 385–397.
28. Paul David Devanandan, "Called to Witness," address to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting, New Delhi, 1961.
29. See, among many other studies on this topic: Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Lars Thumberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Enzo Bellini, "Maxime interprète de Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite: Analyse de l'Ambiguum ad Thomam," in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, Fribourg, 2–5 septembre, 1980, ed. Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn, Paradosis 27 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg, 1982); George C. Berthold, "The Cappadocian Roots of Maximus the Confessor," in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*; Alain Riou, Le Monde et l'Église Selon Maxime le Confesseur, *Théologie Historique* 22 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1973); Polycarp Sherwood, "The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism," *Studia Anselmiana, Philosophica, Theologica* Vol. 36 (Rome: Orbis, 1955).
30. Sergey L. Epifanovich, *Prepodobnyi Maksim Ispovednik i Vizantiiskfie bogoslovie* (Kiev: n.p., 1915), 136–137.
31. Venance Grumel, " L'union Hypostatique et la Comparaison de l'Âme et du Corps chez Léonce de Byzance et Saint Maxime le Confesseur," *Revue des etudes byzantines* 144 (1926): 393–406; Venance Grumel, "Maxime le *Confesseur*," *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, t. 10(1928): coll. 448–459.

32. Marcel Viller, "Aux Sources de la Spiritualité de Saint Maxime: les Oeuvres d'Evagre le Pontique," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*11 (1930): 156–184, 239–268, 331–336.
33. Irénée Hausherr, "Ignorance Infinie," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 2 (1936): 351–302; Etienne Gilson, "Maxime, Érigène, Saint Bernard," in *Aus der Geisleswelt des Mittelalters, Studien und Texte Martin Grabmann zur Vollendung des 60. Lebensjahres gewidmet*, Supplementband III, Part I (Münster: Aschendorff, 1935), 188–195.
34. Massimo Confessore, *La Mistagogia ed Altri Scritti*, trans. Raffaele Cantarella (Florence: Testi Cristiani 1931); Myrrha Lot-Borodine, "Mystagogie de Saint Maxime," *Irénikon* Vol. 13 (1936): 466–472, 595–597, 717–720; see Vol. 14 (1937): 66–69, 182–185, 282–284, 444–448; see Vol. 15 (1938): 71–74, 185–186, 276–278, 390–391, 488–492; Georges Vasilievich Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century* (Paris: Cerf, 1933).
35. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Komische Liturgie: Das Weltbild Maximus des Bekenners* (City: Freigorg, 1941).
36. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (Washington, D.C.: Communio Books, 2003), 322.
37. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "La Vie Cosmique," (written in 1916, unpublished), in *Écrits du Temps de la Guerre: 1916–1919* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 24–25, 30.
38. de Chardin, "La Vie Cosmique," (1916), XII, 58 E; 67 F.
39. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Essai d'Intégration de l'Homme dans l'Univers," (1930), Lecture 4, 12; MD, 153; Eng. tr., 114.
40. *The Unknown*, 138.
41. For Jyri Komulainen, "the strongest association Panikkar's name evokes in the minds of most theologians is probably with cosmic Christology." See: Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion?*, 125.
42. *The Unknown*, 138.
43. *Panikkar*, *The Trinity and World Religions: Icon-Person-Mystery*, 54.
44. *Panikkar*, *The Trinity and World Religions: Icon-Person-Mystery*, 52.
45. Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions: Icon-Person-Mystery*, 52.
46. See: Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 334.
47. *The Unknown*, x.
48. Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 85; quoted in Susan Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 126.
49. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961). A previous and somehow distinct version of the work, titled *The Priest*, was written in 1918 in the Forest of Laigue, where Teilhard was serving as a stretcher-bearer during the World War I. In that version, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Priest," in *Writings in Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), 203–224, 205.
50. Yet, a fundamental difference remains between Teilhard and Panikkar with regard to the meaning of the cosmic Eucharist: for the latter, it was the rite of healing and recreation rather than propitiation. Also, once being asked to write something about 'The Mass on the Altar of the World,' Panikkar answered that he would rather write 'The Mass of the World' (not on the world), which makes a difference. See Maciej Bielawski, "Evoluzione e Armonia. Teilhard de Chardin e Raimon Panikkar," in *Teilhard Aujourd'hui. Rivista Centro Europeo Teilhard de Chardin*, Versione italiana Vol. 10 (2012): 64–70.
51. Monchanin, *Théologie et Spiritualité Missionnaires*, 121.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Theology of the Unknown

The mystery of the hidden Christ.

Panikkar[1]

Pauline Material

At the end of the Intriduction, I posed a question about *The Unknown* which I claimed would shed light on the real significance of its thesis, that is, Christ is unknown to both Hindus and Christians. That question was: what problem of theology of religions did Panikkar himself already have in mind, before he ever started writing *The Unknown*, and hoped to find a solution for through *The Unknown* and *Meditation*? I have stated that the problem was the unreadiness of both Hindus and Christians in meeting each other in Christ. I already tried to prove my point by looking at Panikkar's life, his relationship with Abhishiktānana, his view of the Church as spiritual Kingdom rather than people of God, and several other themes that run parallel to his intellectual career in the years in which he composed *The Unknown*. In this chapter, I take another route: I explore how Panikkar read the Pauline sentences in Acts 17 in light of not only his own theological system, but also of his biblical readings and interpretations. I begin addressing a problem of interpretation of St. Paul, and I spotlight that problem because this serves to

illustrate a central point of my main narrative on the rites-spirit relationship in The Unknown: namely, that *The Unknown* rests on the distinction between the level of rites and the level of the Spirit.

As previously mentioned, difference of opinion continues to exist among scholars on the meaning of Panikkar's unknown Christ. This study takes at face value Panikkar's assertion that the unknown Christ is justified by Paul's reference to the unknown God. Panikkar claimed in the first edition of *The Unknown* that his book "could … draw light and inspiration [to] that remarkable encounter of Saint Paul with the men of Athens." Although this second remark conveniently disappeared in the second edition of his book, readers are allowed to believe that, in Panikkar's opinion, *The Unknown* is not simply a study based on Acts 17, but also a study *of* Acts 17. To put it differently, Acts 17 operates both as a source of *The Unknown* and as the object of a theological investigation in the sense that the content of Acts 17 clarifies the difference between the level of the known Christ of rites and the level of the unknown Christ in spirit.

The Unknown is a comparative reflection in both Thomistic and Vedantic fashion on such texts as Acts 14:16–17, Acts 17:23, and *Brahma Sutra* 1:1.2. Panikkar translates Acts 14:16–17 as follows: "in the ages that are past He let all people follow their own ways, and yet He did not leave Himself without testimony." With regard to Acts 17:23, he does not provide a straight translation, but instead argues that "Paul said that he was proclaiming that very God whom they, without knowing it, were worshipping."[2] Panikkar continues by saying that "he [Paul] says … that He is not far from any one of his 'pagan' listeners," an indirect quote of Acts 17:27, and concludes by mentioning Acts 17:28: "for in Him we live and move and 'are;'" here Panikkar quotes Paul, mentioning the "saying of a Greek poet: 'for we are also his offspring'." Both references to Acts 14 and Acts 17 are obviously important: I will address both in more detail later in this chapter. For now I suggest consideration of some comments Panikkar made with regard to Acts 17 as the entry point to unlocking the sources of *The Unknown*.

Near the end of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Panikkar shifts his narrative from St. Thomas to St. Paul. It is an audacious move. He argues that "*minutis minuendis*, we think that our attempt could both draw light and inspiration and get some justification from that remarkable encounter of Saint Paul with the men of Athens." Panikkar believes that *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* can both illuminate the discourse of Saint Paul in front of the *Areopagus* and receive some justification from it (Acts 17:16–34). It is a bold statement. "Nevertheless to say," Panikkar continues, "it was not a zealous 'strategy' which led Paul to utter such memorable worlds and to adopt such an attitude."[3] I believe I can interpret this passage in the following way: Paul did not make it up. His claim that the unknown

God of the Greek was the God of the Bible did not function as a means to an end. His claim was not part of a strategy of persuasion, nor was it a rhetorical expedient. He was proclaiming the truth.

In the 6th century BCE, Athens suffered a terrible plague and the city elders were at a loss as to how to abate it. They believed the city was under a curse because they were guilty of treachery against the followers of Cylon who were slayed after they had been promised amnesty. They had tried sacrificial offerings to no avail. Turning to the Oracle for wisdom, the priestess said there was another god who remained unappeased for their treachery. Who was this unknown god? The priestess did not know but advised that they should send a ship to the island of Crete and fetch a man called Epimenides who would know how to appease the offended god. Epimenides was a 6th-century BCE philosopher and religious prophet, as well as a contemporary of more famous philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, each of whom referred to Epimenides in their own writings. Epimenides arrived in Athens and postulated that indeed there must still be a god unknown to Athenians, great enough and good enough to do something about the plague if they invoked his help. But the elders questioned how they could call upon a god whose name remained unknown. Epimenides responded that any god good and great enough to do something about the plague is probably also great and good enough to smile on their ignorance, if they acknowledged their ignorance and called upon him. Epimenides advised the elders, they followed his instructions, and within one week, the Athenians stricken by the plague recovered. Six centuries later, in his visit to Athens, Paul found, among other objects of worship, an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." Then he stood in front of the *Areopagus* to deliver a speech in which he announced that the unknown god was the Christian God, Christ. Or, to put it differently, he said that Christ was not a "foreign god" as his adversaries claimed (Acts 17:18) but a God who had already saved the Athenians. Panikkar summarizes Paul's speech as follows: "there was a pagan shrine to an unknown and nameless God, and Paul said that he was proclaiming that very God whom they, without knowing it, were worshiping."

Fast forward now to Panikkar's book from the 20th century CE. According to Panikkar, *The Unknown* both provides insight and receives justification from Paul's speech. How could Paul be so sure that the Unknown God was Christ? What did he have in mind when he said, "I noticed, as I strolled around admiring your sacred monuments, that you had an altar inscribed: To an Unknown God. Well, the God whom I proclaim is in fact the one whom you already worship without knowing it" (Acts 17:23)? If Panikkar is correct, the answer to this question, the question of how Paul came to the conclusion that the Unknown God was Christ, can provide some justification for *The Unknown*. In turn, *The Unknown* can shed light on that

answer. The above quote would disappear in the edited, enlarged second edition from 1981.

I need to go back once again to this crucial sentence: "*minutis minuendis*, we think that our attempt could both draw light and inspiration and get some justification from that remarkable encounter of Saint Paul with the men of Athens." I explain this sentence as a dual movement at work in *The Unknown*: first, Panikkar incorporated into his own theological system elements of Paul's thought; then, he applied this system in which he has assimilated the Pauline insights to the Pauline sentences in Acts 17. What Pauline elements did he incorporate into his theological system? In first approximation, I would do well to extricate the various elements of Paul's cosmic theology in order to try to determine the extent to which Panikkar's thought can be supported by the teaching of St. Paul. The problem with this plan is that the cosmic function attributed to Christ in the epistles of St. Paul is an aspect of Paul's thought which itself has received relatively little attention and almost no development since the time of the Greek Fathers, especially Maximus the Confessor. To put it differently, the whole question of the relationship between Christ and the cosmos has never been denied: Paul's insistence that the whole of creation, humankind included, which is the object of redemption (Rom 8:19–23), is easily detectable. And equally evident is his firm belief that Christ is Kyrios, Lord and Master, pre-existent with the Father, in whose image He is the source as well as the instrument and final end of creation (Col 1:15–20). It is only in recent years, however, that the so-called cosmic texts of St. Paul have emerged as subjects of discussion and debate.

I believe that in *The Unknown*, Panikkar makes clear that he is aware that the data of the Pauline Cosmic Christ (Romans 8:19–23; Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 1:9–10, 22–23) is not the data of Paul's 'in Christ' (Romans 5:17, 6:11, 8:2, 8:17, 8:27, 8:33: Colossians 1:13, 2:10; Ephesians 1:4, 1:7, 2:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17, etc.). That said, he is likewise convinced that the two lines of thought are ultimately dealing with one and the same reality. Panikkar's Cosmic Christ is the result of a consolidation of two Pauline Christological views: the Cosmic Christ and 'in Christ.' A quick look at the Pauline sources quoted in the book shows the validity of the argument.[4] To put it differently, in *The Unknown*, Christ is at work "not only when God was forming all things … but also when the *rsis* were singing and handling down the 'Scriptures,'" (p. 134) "for in Him we live and move and 'are'" (p. 137). The last phrase is taken from Acts 17:28. For Panikkar, as for Paul, *in Him* "we" live, we have life, continuing life, life that does not end, self-perpetuating life (Ephesian 2:5), and *in Him* we "are" in Christ, who is perpetual life. Panikkar, like Paul, believed that each living thing is stationing in this one life. We are organically united to this one life, as a limb is in the body or a branch is

in the tree. Everything that lives is organically united to this one life. Everything that lives is in it. We are in it, but so are birds, flowers, plants, and even grains of sand. And just who is this 'we'? We, Panikkar claimed with Paul, are one nation, one people, one humanity, one brotherhood. We, because we are in Christ, are one with all. Panikkar is dramatically Christ-centered.

Then, Panikkar applied his system in which he has assimilated the Pauline insights to the Pauline sentences in Acts 17. But how to explain this audacious move on the part of Panikkar? I think the reason is, in a nutshell, that Paul says *that* the unknown god is Christ, not *why* the unknown god is Christ. The 'cosmic texts' of St. Paul were not conceived as part of a theological system. Paul has no desire to elaborate a cosmic theology as such, and therefore no intention whatsoever of explaining, for example, how Christ extends His work of redemption to the whole cosmos, the whole of creation. For Panikkar, on the other hand, a cosmic theology is at the heart of his whole system, and his appeals to St. Paul are made with the precise purpose of explaining this 'how.' Thus, in his attempt to develop theologically *The Unknown*, Panikkar is facing a dual problem: on one hand, he must refer to Paul to demonstrate his fundamental proposition (Paul is the point of departure). On the other hand, though, Panikkar needs to supplement Paul when he places Christ in relationship with the whole of the cosmos (Panikkar must integrate Paul).

The Unknown Christ

When Paul proclaimed that the unknown god was, in effect, Christ—Panikkar stated it in the last pages of *The Unknown*—he was not fabricating an argument; he was speaking the truth. It should be carefully noted that in making this statement, Panikkar is aware that Paul is not explaining the rationale of his statement, which is why Panikkar thought his book could illuminate the matter. The whole sense of Panikkar's attempt to bring light to Paul's speech in Athens, therefore, must reside in the speech itself, once it has been filtered through the lens of Panikkar's system. At this point I ask the reader to remember the assumption at the basis of this study: the central feature of the biblical scholarship in the process of assimilating the important results of the archaeological discoveries of the first half of the century struck deeply into Panikkar's reflection, shaping and conditioning the central and common preoccupations of his early writings. Moreover, I remind of Panikkar's peculiar understanding of the Cosmic Christ. My point is that Panikkar's understanding of the Cosmic Christ as Christ being everywhere and everything being in Him, and his biblical understanding of Acts 14 and 17, are put forward to offer

a plausible explanation for what Paul's sentences might mean. Fundamental to this whole effort are the direct or indirect citations from Acts that are mentioned in *The Unknown* (and eventually in *Meditation*).

The first citation stands as one of the two epigraphs of the entire book. Panikkar translated Acts 14:16–17 as follows: "In the ages that in are past He let all people follow their own ways, and yet He did not leave Himself without testimony." Here Luke is describing Barnabas and Paul addressing a crowd at Lystra, a city in central Anatolia that is now part of modern Turkey. In previous sections of this study, I have stated that in *Meditation*, Panikkar offered a paraphrase of Acts 14:16–17: "God has never forgotten his creation, and [He does not] leave the rest of the nations of the cosmos aside" (p. 144). In the translation of NJB, the verses read as follows: "In the past he allowed all the nations to go their own way; but even then he did not leave you without evidence of himself in the good things he does for you." Finally, I offer a brief exegesis of Acts 14:16–17. Two themes are connected here: first, the theme of the nations and second, the theme of God's witness. I focus now on the first. As I will soon show, in Acts 14:16 there is an oblique reference to the fact that God has scattered the nations, dividing the nations up according to the number of the sons of god. He assigned the nations and allotted them to other gods. In Acts 17:26, this time facing the people of Athens, Paul returned again to this situation; he claimed that God made the nations by "having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place."

The second citation from Acts that is mentioned in *The Unknown* is Acts 17:16–34. It covers from Paul's arrival to Athens to his departure, including his speech, or sermon, delivered at the Areopagus, or Mars Hill. The core of the sermon is recounted in Acts 17:22–32; Panikkar seems to focus his attention on verses 22–28. Here is the translation from NJB:

> 22 So Paul stood before the whole council of the Areopagus and made his speech: Men of Athens, I have seen by myself how extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters.
>
> 23. Because, as I strolled round looking at your sacred monuments, I noticed among other things an altar inscribed: to an Unknown God. In fact, the unknown god you revere is the one I proclaim to you.
>
> 24. Since the God who made the world and everything in it is himself Lord of heaven and earth, he does not make his home in shrines made by human hands.
>
> 25. Nor is he in need of anything, that he should be served by human hands; on the contrary, it is he who gives everything—including life and breath—to everyone.
>
> 26. From one single principle he not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but he decreed the times and limits of their habitation.

> 27. And he did this so that they might seek the deity and, by feeling their way towards him, succeed in finding him; an indeed he is not far from any of us.
>
> 28. Since it is in him that we live, and move, and exist, as indeed some of your own writers have said: we are all his children.

In his speech, Paul praised his crowd for not being prone to superstition. Then he mentioned the altar of the unknown god. He claimed that the God he preached to the Athenians is the very same unknown god they worshiped. His God is the creator of all, the Ruler of all, and is not an idol that can be found in temples and served by human hands. He is the God of life. From one single man [Adam], He made all humanity, then [He divided the nations up to the number of the sons of god, who have administrated the nations ever since, but] He maintained the control of the history of these nations and the boundaries of their dwelling places (here Paul is simply paraphrasing Isaiah 10:13, where Yahweh is in control of the boundaries of the nations). Why should the Athenians care that He is really the one in control [and not, in effect, the other gods]? The answer is that the gods they know are not the gods in control. It is the one god they do not know that is in control. This is not Paul's core message at Mars Hill, but it plays a crucial role in framing the asymmetric parallel between gods and God. Verse 27 comes with an important affirmation: He, God, can be found, if one would search of Him. Verse 28 delivers the equally important message that everyone is 'in Christ.' In summary, Paul's crucial message is—at least for now—that the unknown god is the Creator and Ruler of all, including the nations that may be under the jurisdiction of the known gods. Regardless of this situation, in Panikkar's translation of Acts 14:17, God "does not leave the rest of the nations [i.e., the other nations, the disinherited nations, the nations that are not His inheritance, Israel] … aside."

Before I continue, a couple of observations: first, I may warn the reader that the translation of Acts 14:16–17 and 17:23–27 from NJB is not Panikkar's. That is, Panikkar made his own translations. I leave it to the reader to assess the differences. Of course, Panikkar's translations are more functional for the case I am building here than are the NJB's translations. Second, I may add that what was probably in Paul's mind at Mars Hill is not necessarily the same thing that was in the mind of the Greeks. For Paul, Christ is the God of all gods, the Almighty God, the omnipresent, omnipotent God. The other gods, the sons of god, the members of the divine council, are administrators of the nations (e.g., they would assist their peoples in threat of war), and as such they should be recognized and tolerated but not worshiped.[5] For the Greeks, however, it was a different matter. For Greeks, gods did not create the cosmos, but came to being after the cosmos. They were considered immortal, not eternal.[6]

Who are these known gods in Paul's speech? One answer is that they are, pure and simple, false. They do not exist. They are idols, to adopt Pauline language. This scholarly instinct is, of course, driven by the label of monotheism—a modern term, appropriated and popularized by deists during the Enlightenment—applied to the ancient Israelite belief system.[7] Monotheism is in turn defined as the exclusion of other gods. Monotheism, then, amounts to the denial of the existence of other gods. As Mark S. Smith states:

> Monotheistic exclusivity is not simply a matter of cultic observance, as in the First Commandment's prohibition against 'no other gods before me' in Exodos 20:3 and Deuteronomy 5:7. It extends further to an understanding of deities in the cosmos (no other gods, period).[8]

In a previous chapter I mentioned that modern scholarship is slowly and painfully coming to the conclusion that in the Hebrew Bible, statements of incomparability are excluded. What appealed to some as exclusivistic monotheism is today seen to merely frame an argument for Yahweh's greater potency, not his exclusive existence. So, the gods are real. As noted in the earlier discussion with respect to attempts to redefine biblical scholarship in the days of *The Unknown*, the result of all the scholarly emphasis on the restriction of worship to one divine being is monolatry, not monotheism. Monolatry is the acceptance of one supreme god among the gods that turns to the insistence that only the supreme god be worshiped. Scholars identify different grades of monolatry, from 'tolerant' to 'intolerant' monolatry. For example, Panikkar's acceptance of the worship of other gods by the non-Christian worshipper, on the condition that the belief in the existence of other gods were genuine ('Priesthood in Spirit and Truth'), is not only biblically sound (Psalms 95:3; 96:4; 97:7–9; 135:5; 138:1), but it can also be considered a case of tolerant monolatry.

This distinction between monotheism and monolatry raises an inevitable question: why the other gods cannot be worshiped? Why this prohibition? I already mentioned that it is evident from the data that Jews of the Old Testament saw no contradiction or insurmountable difficulty in reserving worship to one deity while accepting the divine status of other heavenly beings. In Deuteronomy 29:25, the text explicitly refers to Israel's *crime* of worshipping gods other than Yahweh: "They [Israel] turned to the service of other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not experienced and whom He had not allotted to them." He has assigned, He has allotted the other nations to the other gods, and the other gods to them. The other gods are meant for the other nations, not for Israel. Why this prohibition about worship? Taking the idea of Yahweh's uniqueness further, it could perhaps be argued that assertions of incomparability amount to the affirmation

that other gods were ontologically inferior to a "species-unique" being. Yahweh is distinguished as the creator of all other gods, the pre-existent One, making him ontologically distinct. By virtue of ontological superiority, Yahweh alone is deserving of worship. Another option refers to hierarchy, not to ontological status: Yahweh is the one who has authority over the gods of those nations. Yahweh is consistently depicted in Deuteronomy as willfully exercising uncompromised dominion over other gods, gods who govern the other nations. Yahweh alone is sovereign and thus deserving of worship. If I bring these two options into Paul's speech in Athens, its meaning would probably go like this: the known gods one worships are the ones that do not matter. The one that matters is the unknown one, who is either a unique being (ontological difference) or the powerful one. Yet, this unique or powerful god remains unknown, probably for some reason related to the notion of Deus absconditus: hidden, remote, unreachable God.

I turn now to the second theme in Acts 14:16–17: the theme of God's witness. I already mentioned that here Paul seems to maintain the same line of thought that he will show in Romans 1:19–20: "For what can be known about God is perfectly plain to them [the pagans, the Gentiles], since God has made it plan to them" (19). God is not remote; he is close to everyone. I mention Romans 1:19–20 because it is one of the sources mentioned in *Meditation*. Then Paul adds: "Ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen in the things that have been made. And so these people [pagans, Gentiles] have no excuse" (20).[9] So, these people have no excuse. What does it mean? Perhaps that these people have had the chance to perceive the existence and power of God in the things all around them, and so they have no excuse if they do not do that? Not at all.

In Acts 17:22–28 the theme of God's witness is repeated. From the second part of verse 27 to the end of verse 28, the theme of God's closeness is highlighted: God is not far from any one of Paul's listeners, for in Him everyone is and moves and lives. In the first part of verse 27, however, another concept is delivered: He, God, can be found, if one would search of Him. It is the same concept already found in Romans 1:19–20. Here, however, the essential condition is made more manifest than it is in Romans 1:19–20: God can be found *if* one would search for Him. In Paul's mind, people of the nations are supposed to tolerate the gods of the nations and "seek God" (Acts 17:27), that is, to worship God, something of course they do not do but instead they worship the gods assigned to them. People of the nations are supposed to seek God, that is, to worship God, the unknown god; what they do instead is worship the known gods. This feature, that only Yahweh deserved Israel's worship, is transformed by Paul in the heart of a Christian monolatry and has great explanatory power for his speech in Athens.

The confessional statements of Acts 17: 22–28 must be viewed against the backdrop of the Most High's dealings with the Gentile nations and the gods he appointed to govern them, as well as the prohibition to the Gentile nations to worship those gods. God did it so that these other nations "might seek the deity [Christ] and, by feeling their way towards him, succeed in finding him" (17:27). This is the unknown god of Mars Hill, unknown but present and at work in the other nations; in Panikkar's translation of Acts 14:17, "He does not leave" these other nations "aside." The men of Athens do have a knowledge of God, passed down through the ages. They also have a tradition of a deity in whom "we live and move and be" in God. Now Paul comes declaring that this God, who had withdrawn himself from the nations, has never been distant from the nations but is immanently near. The other gods, the gods of the nations, are not idols but they become so when people break the prohibition of worshiping only God. They transform gods into idols by means of worshiping them: they place these gods ('spirits') in a temple and serve them (gods are served by human beings; another translation reads, "made with hands"). At the same time, by worshiping them, they stop seeking God. And for this crime they "have no excuse" (Romans 1:20).

I believe this is Panikkar's interpretation of Pauline passages in Acts 17: 22–28. If I am correct, Panikkar applied this Pauline statement on monolatry to Hindus and Christians, and by doing so he provided a distinct meaning to *The Unknown*. Accordingly, this meaning would probably be as follows: the gods that one knows are not the gods to be worshiped. It is the one a person does not know that should be searched. In fact, the gods at the level of rites are not the Almighty God, and the Almighty God is not the gods at the level of rites. More precisely: the god the Christians worship at the level of rites is not the Almighty God, and the Almighty God is not the god the Christians worship at the level of rites. The Almighty God is at the level of the Spirit. As such, this one God remains unknown, or, I would say instead, He remains unknown except at a level of spiritual form. Both Hindus and Christians are required to tolerate but not worship the known gods, the national gods, the gods of Hinduism and the god of Christianity. These gods, who can be taken for granted and worshiped in temples and churches, and who are known and remain known, become idols. Both Hindus and Christians are supposed to discern between the known gods and the unknown God, to avoid confusion between the two, and they are supposed to reserve their worship for the latter. Both Hindus and Christians are supposed to seek (worship) the Unknown Christ, who is unknown and therefore should be searched and who remains unknown; for that, He should be constantly sought. Christ is not at the level of rites but at the level of the spirit. Once Christ is worshiped at the level of rites, he is transformed into a known god. Christ is not the known god of rites but the spiritual reality of the kingdom. Christ

is close to both Hindus and Christians, as He is everywhere and everyone is in Him and can be found. Thus, the meeting between Hindus and Christians requires a conversion of both Hindus and Christians.

But, and here I turn to Christians only, Christianity still believes in its known god, its national god, its tribal god ("a tribal Christology," as Panikkar would call it in another manuscript).[10] Christians make confusion between known god and God, and between known Christ and unknown Christ, and they worship the former. In doing so, Christians build an idol out of it, meaning that, in Panikkar's opinion, Christ is regarded and worshiped as a national deity. At the same time, Christians stop seeking God, and for that, Christianity needs conversion. Panikkar expresses grief for the separation of the Church from the Source; regardless, he asked for purification and reconciliation. Christianity is not ready to meet Hinduism at the Source, in Christ, who is present everywhere and in whom everything is. The hidden message of *The Unknown* is that Christianity is quite unready to meet in Christ the other religions. This is why Panikkar never ceased repeating that his book is about the unknown Christ of both Hindus *and* Christians. The unknown Christ of Hinduism is also unknown to Christianity. This point must be insisted upon, since it has been the subject of frequent misunderstanding.

The Unknown is about a meeting between Hinduism and Christianity at existential and analogical levels, because "any encounter—Panikkar argued at the very beginning of *The Unknown*—must be mutual" (p. 4). But it is a preliminary meeting, because the only possible meeting is in Christ. At the same time that Panikkar was writing a first version of *The Unknown*, Monchanin reached the conclusion that India and Hinduism were not ready to assimilate the spiritual treasures of Christianity. But, he noted, he was probably too Greek, too embedded in the semitic-Greek matrix, to assess facts fairly. Panikkar, who met Monchanin in India and with whom he had long conversations, recognized that Hinduism is not ready: it has still to 'pass over,' to borrow the words he used in *The Unknown*, that is, to complete the exodus, to move from slavery to liberation. Hinduism has not received revelation yet. This "is the Paschal adventure of Hinduism" still to be concluded (p. xi). But Christianity also remains unprepared, as it "is also on pilgrimage" (p. xi).

In his book, Panikkar framed the unknown Christ of Hinduism but mentioned the unknown Christ in Christianity, too; Christianity is not yet in Christ, the only possible meeting point with Hinduism. In his later works, he would identify the source of this unreadiness in a tribal tendency within Christianity, a "tribal Christiology that has prevailed for the past two thousand years of Christian history, and that has been quite exclusively centered on its own interests."[11] Panikkar, in his late theology, elaborated at length the causes and remedies of Christianity's

unreadiness, particularly through the notion of Christophany. But the seed of that line of thought was already present in *The Unknown*—the essential necessity of a reform, a purification, or a conversion of Christianity was already there, although cryptically, as Panikkar would recognize years later. The necessity emerged in his 1965 question to Pope Paul VI on whether or not Christians needed to be spiritually Semitic and intellectually Hellenic. He was not the only Western Christian in India to question that semitic-Greek tradition. His friend Abhishiktānanda shared the same opinion and so did a Protestant theologian whom I already mentioned and who spent considerable time in India as a missionary. In 1974, in fact, Robin Boyd published a book titled *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church*, which echoes Panikkar's concerns.[12]

In a classic Catholic fashion, Panikkar came to the conclusion that the only way for Christianity to meet Hinduism in Christ was to go back to the beginning, to the Source, eventually exemplified by the very first generation of Christians of the First Council of Jerusalem, as he called it, and start over. In the specific vernacular adopted during the Vatican Council II, one can say that Panikkar envisioned and promoted a *ressourcement*, a return to the source, in order to provoke an *aggiornamento*, a form of theology that speaks to the Church's present situation. These two terms, *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, are linked because the present relevance of theology lays in the creative recovery of its past. The Christianization of India requires a dual reform, a reform in Hinduism (*ad extra*) and another in the very core of Christianity (*ad intra*). A new innocence, a purification, or a conversion is required for Christianity to leave behind its semitic and Greek skin and to become truly universal, that is, to reconnect to the Source, embrace a more universal path, and successfully complete its pilgrimage on this earth.

Addendum

For Panikkar, the people of Athens do have a knowledge of God, passed down through the ages. They also have a tradition of a deity in whom "we live and move and have our being." In his view, Paul comes declaring that this God, who had withdrawn himself from the nations, has never been distant from the nations but instead is immanently near. As a matter of fact, it is *not* a plain interpretation of Paul's speech. The people of Athens do have a knowledge of God, passed down through the ages. They even have a tradition of a deity in whom "we live and move and exist." This is the pre-Abrahamic history. Then, God had withdrawn himself from the nations, so that only through the seed of Abraham could he be known again. Now Paul, an Israelite and descendent of Abraham, comes declaring that

very God to them. And this God is no longer distant from the nations, but is immanently near: "the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31). Since God has drawn near to the world in Christ, and the boundaries between Israel and the nations are being broken down, he now calls "all people everywhere" to repent of ignorance. Something significant for the way in which the world works happens when Jesus dies and rises from the dead and ascends to heaven. It is the momentous event that terminates the separation between Israel and the other nations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I worked primarily on Panikkar's thesis of the unknown Christ, pointing out connections to his understanding of the divine plurality in light of the biblical scholarship of that period. I argued that these two topics were closely connected in Panikkar's mind and that it was his understanding of divine plurality that provided an entry point into the thesis of *The Unknown*. While the purpose of the previous chapters was to identify a proper context in which to unlock the guiding biblical intuition of Panikkar's early theology, the next chapter offers some conclusive statements as far as the main output and limits of this study, as well as possible paths of investigation.

Notes

1. *Mountain*, 51.
2. For the translation of Acts 14:16–17, see *The Unknown*, vii. For the quote on Acts 17:23, see *The Unknown*, 137.
3. *The Unknown*, 137.
4. In *The Unknown*, Panikkar mentioned Romans 8:19; Colossians 1:15–17; Ephesians 1:9–10; Colossians 1:13, 2:10; Ephesians 1:4, 1:7; 2 Corinthians 5:17.
5. Such is the role of these national gods according to the intertestamental writers. The author of Jubilees (15:31) took the tradition ever further: "And [God] sanctified [Israel] and gathered them from all of the sons of man because (there are) many nations and many people, and they all belong to him, but over all of them he caused spirits to rule so that they might lead them astray from following him." Translation by Orval S. Wintermute, "Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, James H. Charlesworth, ed., (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 87.

6. Clinton E. Arnold opens his study on the topic with a question: Did Paul agree with his pagan contemporaries in their current conception of the spirit world? Arnold presumes that Paul did. Ronn A. Johnson admits instead that terminological similarities exist between a Hellenistic cosmology and that of the Hebrew Bible, yet he maintains that stark differences exist in their view of the spirit world. See: Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters*; Johnson, *The Old Testament Background for Paul's Use of "Principalities and Powers*."
7. Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'*, 1–21.
8. Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 151, 279, n. 20.
9. NJB reads: "… seen by the mind's understanding of created things. And so…."
10. Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 162.
11. Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, 162.
12. Robin Boyd, *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

Conclusion

> The acts of a free mind are not simply produced by nature but occur in the context of historical decisions.
>
> Hans Urs von Balthasar[1]

Panikkar

Panikkar was a remarkable man who lived a remarkable life. He spent most of his adult life as a Catholic priest, and anyone who had the chance of knowing Panikkar personally soon found that he had personal interests in spiritual and creative freedom. Though by profession an academic, by inclination Panikkar was a free thinker (or eventually a free mind, to be aligned with von Balthasar's remark quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter), preoccupied throughout his life with the larger problem of the role of religion in a modern world. A satisfactory answer to this problem, Panikkar believed, could do much to bridge the gulf which exists today between faith and worldly life. This he felt to be a question not for philosophy and theology alone but for life as well, and his own life was an attempt to enlarge the traditional boundaries of priesthood so as to frame Catholic priesthood as an entry door into a primeval, ancestral *sacerdotium*.[2] Panikkar has been labelled the pioneer of interfaith dialogue and the advocate for a universal,

really 'catholic' religion, a religion without limitation of dogmas, cults, and structures. He has been celebrated as the eminent scholar, the great philosopher and theologian, and I do not say anything in this study to cast doubt on any of these attributes. He was even called 'apostle of inter-faith dialogue,' a portrayal that makes perfect sense when Panikkar is framed against a scholarly background.[3] He was quite often described as a 'mystic,' although his aspiration to intimate knowledge of the Holy Trinity was grounded in, and integrated with, a cosmopolitan and untroubled life, not the contemplative and ascetic life of a monk, which is a form of life he personally thought was no longer suited to this late modernity era.[4] His friend Abhishiktānanda asked himself if Panikkar, who often shows in his writings a mystical inclination, "realized what he was writing."[5]

Panikkar has been addressed primarily as a scholar and a mystic, and I believe that both labels have ultimately defused the impact of his personality and religious passion as completely as they had neutralized his theological project. Panikkar should instead be treated as a Christian thinker who was concerned about the reformation of Catholicism in the meeting of other religions in Christ. He was committed to a theological project of religious reconciliation and purification, a project that implied a return to the sources of Christian faith, that is, not only to life and Spirit, but ultimately to the Mystery of Christ, and then, Panikkar would have added, to start over and see in Christ no longer the Lord of history, but the mystery of God reflecting everywhere.

The source of Panikkar's charisma, or what some may call 'ambiguity,' does not, in my opinion, lie in mystical orientation, but instead in the tension between his mystical orientation and his role within the Catholic Church. It is in this tension between a Pauline instinct and a Petrine status that scholars might more accurately locate the source of his appeal. His Pauline instinct led him to depart from the insistence of a mediating figure between mankind and God; there is no need of a mediating character between the two. His priestly status with the Catholic Church, however, re-enacts the command of a mediating character. Panikkar shares with Paul this tremendous emphasis on personal liberty, as well as the disciplining of life required to entangle liberty with service. Still, Panikkar maintained his loyalty to the church and his obedience to the hierarchy.[6] It comes as no surprise that Panikkar felt compelled to stretch his definition of priesthood to put this tension to rest.

This tension within Panikkar between 'the Christ of Paul and the Jesus of Peter,' to borrow a sentence from British author Gerald Massey (1828–1907), is detectable in several traits of his own theology: his universalism, for example, that is, God is available to all, although hidden and unknown.[7] Yet, the complete revelation of this universalism comes with the ultimate and definitive mediator, Christ.

Panikkar extends the Pauline "Christ in you" to all of humanity and to all of creation. In Christ the universe lives, is continuously restored, and expects the future visible return from heaven of Jesus, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God.[8] But from the very beginning of all up to the Parousia (or the second coming of Christ in glory), passing through the historical manifestation of Jesus, the growth of His Church reveals the Eucharistic Christ at the heart of the whole movement of the universe. And then, of course, there is his cosmic sense, the idea that Christ is God's creative and bonding power. Yet, the magisterium teaches that the world was created by God and recreated through the work of Jesus Christ, through the massive event of Incarnation. It can be easily seen, since this tension had an enormous effect on Panikkar's writings and somehow directed his thought. It is a testimony of his theological acumen and philosophical skills that he was never the object of an investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

One cannot, however, fully understand Panikkar's thought if one believes that his analysis of religion in the modern world constitutes his total intellectual concern. For as a Christian author and a Catholic priest, he was led to undertake a more specific project: to rethink Christianity within a global setting. This Panikkar tried to do primarily because he believed that the proper context of Christianity, especially in an era of globalization, is to be found in the contemporary situation characterized by religious pluralism. Panikkar was clearly moved by an inner drive, according to which Christian theology can no longer wash its hands of religious pluralism, simply to declare that no opposition exists between Christianity and other religions. Something had to be done to demonstrate concretely how world religions can exist in harmony and mutual enrichment. Until recently, Panikkar once argued, it was impossible for theologians to either deal with or describe the concrete reality of religious pluralism other than in terms of ecclesiology. Now, however, it was possible to place Christology in relationship to religious pluralism.

In addition to this, he believed that another problem, as old as the epistles of St. Paul, namely the relationship of cosmos to Christ, was in itself a problem of immense theological importance. Panikkar can be called a cosmic theologian, and rightly so. Fundamental to all his work, including his first writings, is the conviction that the data of Christian revelation concerning the other religions can legitimately be rethought within the background of Christ's relationship to the universe as a whole, that is, the Cosmic Christ. As an implication of such rethinking, theologians will be put in a position to give a new and deeper and more complete theological significance to the whole phenomenon of religious pluralism. The juxtaposition of these two theological concepts—that is, religious pluralism and Cosmic Christ—was in large part responsible for what scholars claim is on

one hand the fundamental drive of his intellectual life and, on the other, the main cause of his non-conformity to mainstream teaching.

Scripture and Theology

This book's point of departure is that *The Unknown* readily reveals less than Panikkar meant, and to unveil this hidden meaning, a closer look at Panikkar's life and biblical view is necessary. In this study I focus on both. With regard to Panikkar's early theology, most researchers have been content to conduct a search for theological parallels with contemporary theology or official teaching. While this method has afforded some helpful insights, it has not offered conclusive answers. A case in point is *The Unknown*: differences of opinion persist among scholars about the real meaning of the 'unknown Christ': what does Panikkar mean exactly with 'the unknown Christ of Hinduism and Christianity'? In some ways, in fact, this approach has succeeded in shifting the focus from a careful understanding of the biblical background of *The Unknown*. If Panikkar's writings would do scholars the favor of mirroring their own current specializations, the separation of the unknown Christ and its biblical and extra-biblical resources might indeed be legitimate and relevant. As it is, though, scholars overlook, at their peril, the interdependence of Panikkar's theology and his biblical interpretations. It was argued in this study, among other things, what is really important in Panikkar's early theology cannot be detached from the context of the biblical scholarship from which it emerges. Thus, my view of the unknown Christ developed squarely on the shoulders of Panikkar's biblical world view. The close chronological proximity of Panikkar's publications on Melchizedek (the already cited *Meditation*) and that of *The Unknown* indicate that he was simultaneously mining he same topics. In making visible for the first time this connection between *The Unknown* and *Meditation* on one hand and the biblical resources on the other, I attempted to clarify if not the fine logic of its author, at least the inspiration behind such logic; by doing so, I planned to resolve some of the controversies that arose at the time of publication, controversies that still affect *The Unknown*. I believe that by identifying the biblical and extra-biblical roots of *The Unknown*, I made its thesis more intelligible. I also hope I provided readers with a lens for a fresh and sprightly look at Panikkar's early theology of priesthood.

As said, the relationship between theology and Scripture, that is, Panikkar's theological ideas and biblical scholarship, is the underlying theme of this study. My assumption is that in order to illuminate the thesis of the unknown Christ and the ultimate meaning of Panikkar's cosmic priest, scholars need to integrate the

theological reflections included in *The Unknown* and *Meditation* back with their biblical justifications. Methodologically, I sought first to move from Panikkar's theological ideas in *The Unknown* back to the related biblical themes and arguments. From that point, I moved in the reverse direction, that is, from these biblical themes and interpretations to the theology of *The Unknown*. The same was true with *Meditation*. For reasons that I explained earlier, I was compelled to assemble a substantial body of circumstantial evidence to support the following point: the central contributions of a certain biblical scholarship struck deep into Panikkar's mind, shaping and conditioning his theological ideas. These ideas are epitomized most concisely in Panikkar's *The Unknown* and *Meditation*. If I am correct, the biblical scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s, committed to the task of assimilation of the important findings of the Qumran Scrolls and other archaeological discoveries—that is, cosmicization of covenant, Melchizedek priesthood, and divine council—can shed light on Panikkar's deepest and most controversial statements.

Brief Summary

At the beginning of this study, I introduced Panikkar the man and Panikkar the theologian; then I deal with one of his main contributions in the area of interfaith dialogue, *The Unknown*. I identified a problem of interpretation, a problem that I framed as follows: why did Panikkar maintain for all his life that the thesis of the unknown Christ is that Christ is unknown to both Hindus and Christians? In the Introduction I also presented my argument and contributions.

In the first chapter ('Methodological Issues') I mentioned a second problem, a problem of sources: when it came to unveiling his sources, Panikkar did not play according to the ordinary rules of the scholarly game. I stated that a prejudice about Panikkar exists in scholarship: he is the eminent scholar, who happened to be a priest. However, so long as I treat the validity of his contributions as technical, some of the most striking things about Panikkar's sources—that is, he relied on the inexhaustible procession of inner life rather than philosophical and theological literature, and ultimately considered himself a 'source'—will remain not just unexplained but inexplicable. I suggested to place *The Unknown* in the context of Panikkar's life and biblical scholarship, and I offered some reason for that. In this chapter I also presented other details related to terminology, the methodological limits of this study, and its structure.

The second chapter ('Religious Reformer') is dedicated entirely to Panikkar's life as a source of understanding of his early theology. The final result is the redefinition of Panikkar the man and Panikkar the theologian. Once Panikkar is

perceived as a countercultural personality who was engaged in a theological project of reform, the task of connecting his writings to his sources can be achieved without great effort. For Panikkar, the meeting of Hinduism and Christianity is in Christ, but neither Hindus nor Christians are ready. Panikkar's mission was to help Christians penetrate more deeply into the data of revelation to be, one day, ready for the encounter. In order to reach this goal, Panikkar turned back to the Source of all and started over.

The third chapter is focused on the 'Christian unreadiness,' that is, the Church is unready to meet Hinduism at the very Source, who is Christ, because she traded the notion that the Spirit reveals Himself freely in His own way for the ambition to become a religion, a much more powerful religion than Judaism. Christians have forgotten the wonder of discovering the Spirit everywhere and prefer to worship their God. Some of the contributions to this thesis were probably the brainchild of Panikkar's friend Abhishiktānanda. In this chapter I also connect Panikkar's early theology to biblical scholarship, and I pointout that the biblical context in this case should be understood as the one at the time of the writing of *The Unknown*.

In the fourth and fifth chapters ('Kingdom' and 'Melchizedek') I address the biblical scholarship that dates to the1950s and 1960s. It was a special period, in which the results of some important archaeological discoveries were assimilated into biblical scholarship. I summarized the advancements of biblical studies in the 1950s and 1960s and its contributions in fields such as the high priesthood and God's kingdom. More precisely, the chapter addresses the biblical scholarship relevant to important themes such as (1) the Melchizedek tradition within Enochic and biblical literature and (2) the Kingdom and its administration according to the key concepts of divine bureaucracy and divine plurality.

The sixth chapter is devoted to a study of *Meditation*. The chapter works as a validation of the biblical context adopted as well as an introduction into Panikkar's deeper thoughts. I investigated the universal character of priesthood in spirit and truth in Panikkar's early theology and the fact that he understood the sacerdotal status in terms of the rite of atonement. In a nutshell, Christ is the high priest of the rite of atonement and this characterizes the ministry of Panikkar and all priests. Moreover, I addressed the priests of the other religions: I claimed that for Panikkar, all priests belong to the same, original priestly tradition of Melchizedek. For reasons that I explained in that chapter, for Panikkar, all true priests worship the unique true God.

The seventh and eighth chapters ('Cosmic Sacramentalism' and 'Theology of the Unknown') are a study of *The Unknown*. While my main goal was to explain why Panikkar sustained in *The Unknown* that the unknown Christ is unknown to both Hindus and Christians, in these two chapters I piled up other contributions,

including a precise definition of Panikkar's Cosmic Christ as a combination of Pauline Cosmic texts and 'in Christ' verses. I also redefine the role of Melchizedek in Panikkar's early theology.

In summary, I worked primarily on Panikkar's thesis of the unknown Christ, pointing out connections with his understanding of the divine plurality and Melchizedek priesthood in light of the biblical scholarship of that period. I argued that these two topics were closely connected in Panikkar's mind, and that it was his understanding of divine plurality that provided an entry point into the thesis of *The Unknown*. I also address Panikkar's interpretation of Cosmic Christ in terms of an integration of St. Paul's Cosmic Christ and Pauline 'in Christ.' Finally, I dealt with the theme of the Melchizedek priesthood through the prism of cosmicization of the covenant.

In conclusion, I attempted to show that biblical sources are important in Panikkar's early writings. *The Unknown* starts and ends with citations from Acts 14 and 17, and I offered some explanation about why these citations are included in the text and what role they play in Panikkar's narrative. I suggested that the relationship between Panikkar's early and late theologies needs to be redefined: while in his late theology he went the extra mile to investigate the causes for, and suggested remedies for, Christianity's unreadiness, the topic was already present, although implicitly, in the first version of *The Unknown*. Moreover, I argued that Panikkar had some reason for claiming that his book had been misunderstood, and that in the second edition of *The Unknown* he made explicit what was written too cryptically in the first version.

On Limits

This is an introductory, limited, and circumstantial study of some issues related to Panikkar's early theology. It can be considered an experiment. It is built on the assumption that Panikkar's life, theological reflections on the status of Christianity as a religion, and biblical interpretations are useful elements to build a proper context in which to place his early theology. A note of caution is required with regards to both the ecclesiological question and the biblical landscape behind Panikkar's theological thought. In the absence of previous work on the same topic, this book is a move into virtually uncharted territory. It is limited in scope and size, as it addresses only Panikkar's early thought and focuses narrowly on a couple of Panikkar's writings (although one of them is the celebrated *The Unknown*). This is a circumstantial study because it has little direct evidence to offer; most of the claims I make in this book are speculative. It is a good thing, however, that these

claims are consistent with Panikkar's own accounts and his theological work as a whole.

While I address *directly* only two works, *The Unknown* and *Meditation*, I scanned a much wider portion of Panikkar's writings, with a specific interest in those that can be considered chronologically parallel to *The Unknown*. Thus, if the material I address directly is limited, it is placed in the much larger context of Panikkar's early work. The methodological limit, however, is another matter. In fact, one main limitation of this study is methodological and is concentrated in the supposed connection between Panikkar's early thought and the ecclesiological question as well as the biblical scholarship. I assumed the ecclesiological question is the result of conversations with Abhishiktānanda in the 1950s and 1960s and more generally of reflections made during Panikkar's periods in India. While I have direct evidence that Panikkar embraced the ecclesiological question later in his life and I have indirect evidence that he may have discussed it with Abhishiktānanda, I did not find the smoking gun, the direct evidence that Panikkar committed to the ecclesiological question while he was writing *The Unknown*. I built a circumstantial case. To be honest, I am quite sure historians of Panikkar's thought will find the needed direct evidence. More complicated to prove is the connection between Panikkar's early theology and the biblical scholarship. I have no direct evidence to offer to sustain this connection. My main argument is that the early Panikkar partially depends on the status of biblical scholarship in the period in which Panikkar wrote *The Unknown* and *Meditation*. More precisely, my argument can be framed as follows: given the situation of the biblical scholarship of the mid-20th century, and given Panikkar's own theological and biblical education before and during his studies at the Pontificial Lateran University in Rome, and also given his fellowship to the Enrico Castelli Meetings and, more generally, to the best Catholic milieu of Rome during the pre-council works and the first session of the Council, he was uniquely placed to feel the full force of effect of the archaeological discoveries on (1) the interpretation of the Jewish Bible and (2) the intellectual context of Christian origins. It would be against this background that Panikkar elaborated his interpretation of the Pauline position in Acts 17 that is epitomized most concisely in *The Unknown*.

I have mentioned several times that this argument is speculative, and in conclusion, I offer an example of what I mean by 'speculative argument.' I refer to the two chapters on *Meditation* and the effect of biblical scholarship on Panikkar's ideas of Melchizedek priesthood, universal priesthood, and priesthood of the nations. I begin with his interpretation of Melchizedek priesthood. Priesthood was a fundamental element of Panikkar's self-understanding. Bielawski correctly notes that priesthood was one of Panikkar's strongest and most peculiar traits.[9] Panikkar

called himself a cosmic priest after the order of Melchizedek. A question must be asked: was Melchizedek priesthood simply part of Panikkar's self-understanding, or was it a central theme in his thought? I can only speculate. In considering the first option, the crux of the matter was the difference between the letter and the spirit of the Roman Catholic priesthood today. The post-Tridentine Roman Catholic priest, who was a minister of Jesus Christ, the High priest after the order of Melchizedek, more concretely was a parish priest dependent upon catechism and breviary. To put it differently, the Roman Catholic priest was already *in persona Christi* a Melchizedek priest, but only formally. The form was empty of Spirit and full of ritual content and administrative tasks. The member of the parish clergy was a seminary-trained priest who operates as a local agent of the Church with administrative tasks to accomplish. If this was the case, Panikkar aimed to distance himself from a *literal* form of worship performed by an earthly ordained priest and embrace a *spiritual* form of worship officiated by a heavenly ordained priest.

Assuming the Melchizedek priesthood was a central theme in Panikkar's thought, it is easy to recognize the paradigm of the healing priest behind some of Panikkar's most important intellectual contributions to scholarship. The cosmotheandric intuition, the sacred secularity, the new monk—all are concepts that imply an undivided vision of the totality and reveal an indomitable spirit of reunification. When the analysis moves to a more granular level, however, this idea of the healing priest comes out much less clear. To begin with, what was Panikkar's intention? Was he trying to recover an ancient sacerdotal tradition and eventually assimilated it into his greater project of theological *aggiornamento*? Or rather, was Panikkar's interest in the ancient high priesthood a project of *ressourcement*, an investigation into deeper biblical sources? Was Panikkar's engagement with the ancient sacerdotal tradition of the pre-Israelite period liturgically driven rather than theologically based? In this case, his thought on Melchizedek priesthood should be addressed and examined through liturgical categories, not theological categories. Finally, is it possible that Panikkar did not aim to recover the ancient sacerdotal lineage from oblivion, but that instead he wanted to witness it?

Moreover, what might Panikkar have known about the ancient sacerdotal tradition up to 1965? How can the parallels between the Enochic tradition and related scholarship on one hand and Panikkar's interpretation of priesthood on the other be explained? The universal and general priesthood of humanity that Panikkar described, the high priestly tradition that continues since the beginning of the world and is linked to the cosmic covenant, has a name in scholarship: Noachic (or Enochic, or Ancient) priestly tradition. The problem is that most of this specific scholarly research has been developed in the decades after the publication of *The Mountain* and *Meditation*, the texts I investigated. On the contrary, the

original sources have been available to scholars since the 19th century.[10] 1 Enoch is generally understood to have been introduced to the West at the beginning of the 19th century in its Ethiopian version (the only complete version of all 108 chapters). Richard Laurence published the first English translation of 1 Enoch in 1883, followed by R. H. Charles (Oxford, 1893, revised in 1913). The discovery of Aramaic fragments of 1 Enoch among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran has motivated a more intense critical study of the book. 2 Enoch has been available for discussion since the 14th century and has been preserved in a complete version only in Slavonic. In 2009 it was announced that Coptic fragments have been found in Nubia. The first systematic exploration of the text was published in 1896 by R. H. Charles. While scholarship has for many years engaged 1 and 2 Enoch, in different languages and from different perspectives, most of the literature on the subject was developed in the aftermath of the Sixties.[11] Of course, the possibility exists that Panikkar developed his interpretation of the ancient sacerdotal lineage independently from other scholars and even from the reading of the books of Enoch. The existence and availability of the books of Enoch and some literature on the subject increases the credibility of the theory that Panikkar read Enoch or at least some literature about it. As said, in this book I sustain the hypothesis that Panikkar could have known the growing scholarship on the ancient priesthood tradition and perhaps been influenced by it.

On the other side, Panikkar's comparison between the order of Melchizedek and the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood is rooted in the Hebrews. The author of the Hebrews relates the Melchizedek priesthood and the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood to assert the superiority of the high priesthood of Jesus to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament on the basis of his connection to Melchizedek. Panikkar reinterpreted the Hebrews to emphasize the Melchizedek priesthood, which was rooted in the phase of Hebrew history represented by Noah rather than by Moses. One problem with this interpretation is that in the Book of Romans, Paul claims that Christianity was rooted in the pre-Mosaic era of Hebrew history, that is, in the promise given to Abraham long before the Law was given to Moses (Romans 4). The implication is that Melchizedek is linked to Abraham, not to Noah. When Panikkar placed Melchizedek in connection with the cosmic covenant, a possibility exists that Panikkar was following the tradition that Melchizedek was Noah's son Shem and the nations come from Noah's offspring. But the possibility is low because the author of the Hebrews states that Melchizedek has no genealogy (Hebrews 7:3), and Hebrews 7:3 operates as the basis for most Catholic interpretation of the figure of Melchizedek.

In the Old Testament, Melchizedek is linked to Abraham. In the New Testament, the Hebrews places Melchizedek in the context of Jewish-Christian

debate on priesthood. In an interesting twist, Panikkar linked Melchizedek with Noah and placed the Melchizedek priesthood in the context of his discussion on nations-Christian Christology. Even a surface reading of the biblical sources and Panikkar's statements shows a common historical and theological setting: a priesthood in the pre-Mosaic era of Hebrew history. They differ, however, on an important point: biblical sources emphasize the promise given to Abraham long before the Law was given to Moses (Romans 4); Panikkar stresses the promise given to Noah and his descendants before the promise given to Abraham. This connection between Noah and Melchizedek is definitely an Enoich twist (i.e., the list of Antediluvian Patriarchs).

Let me move on to Panikkar's notion of priesthood of the nations. In *Meditation*, Panikkar listed only biblical sources. He quoted Genesis 14 and Psalms 110 in the main text but did not include these two references in the list of sources that "justify the main idea of this study" (p. 137). He did not include in this list Gen 5 (Enoch) or 6 (Noah) or 10 (Table of Nations). He mentioned Hebrews 5:6–10 (Christ is acclaimed by God with the title of high priest of the order of Melchizedek). He referred to the Books of Daniel, Isaiah, Numbers, and Acts. He also enlisted Pauls' letters to Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Tito, and Philemon. This list could not be considered complete, as Panikkar ended the list of sources with an "ecc." He did not include in the list the work of Jean Daniélou, who is considered by some scholars, probably with good reasons, Panikkar's main source of inspiration on this Melchizedek-cosmic covenant relationship, together with Romano Guardini and Henri de Lubac. It is an object of speculation how the two thoughts related to each other—that of Daniélou and that of Panikkar.[12] In *Meditation*, Panikkar summarized the position of Tradition on Melchizedek by claiming that

> from the beginning, the Fathers of the Church have considered the 'mysterious' figure of this king and priest not only as a 'type' and precursor of Christ, but also as a representative of divine priesthood on Earth since the creation of the World. We could quote, among others, Justin, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, and others. (p. 140)

Then, Panikkar quoted Ambrose and John Chrysostom, but included no reference specifically dedicated to the Melchizedek-cosmic covenant relationship.

It is difficult to say whether or not Panikkar had access in those days to the Qumran Scrolls.[13] He may have had access to the Ethiopic version of 1 Enoch and the Slavonic version of 2 Enoch, or more generally recognized the interdependence of Noahitic and Enochic traditions.[14] If not the Qumran Scrolls directly, he could have consulted the scholarship that, after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, then returned with more interest and discipline to the books of Enoch and

the Book of the Jubilee. Again, it is difficult to say. He seems definitely uninterested in Second Temple and Enochic forms of exalted priesthood. Yet, his inclination toward a more ancient covenant than that of Moses, and a post-deluge priesthood represented in the biblical texts by the figure of Melchizedek, reveals an Enochic predisposition. So, who or what is the source of Panikkar's Melchizedek? The answer is probably hidden in the biblical sources listed in the first footnote in *Meditation*. These sources include Daniel 2:21 ("His, to control the procession of times and seasons, to make and unmake kings, to confer wisdom on the wise, and knowledge on those with wit to discern"), Isaiah 6:9–10 ("Go, and say to this people, 'Hear and hear again, but do not understand; see and see again, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people gross, its cars dull; shut its eyes, so that it will not see with its eyes, hear with its ears, understand with its heart, and be converted and healed"), and Romans 1:19–10 ("For what can be known about God is perfectly plain to them since God himself has made it plain. Ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity however invisible have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made"). Apart from the last one, scholars do not expect to find these sources listed in an article on Melchizedek. A viable path connecting these biblical sources to Panikkar's thought on Melchizedek is undiscernible, although this does not mean that there is none. But it is likely that the role of these sources is inspirational: God confers "knowledge on those with wit to discern" (Daniel 2:21); He orders to "hear and hear again, but do not understand" (Isaiah 6:9); His "everlasting power and deity however invisible have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made" (Romans 1:10).[15] These sources are not quoted to build a circumstantial case, rather to manifest the Source from which Panikkar felt inspired, although not in the sense that Panikkar's article was inspired.[16] Thus, inspired by these biblical passages, Panikkar hears and hears again, discerns, and ultimately shows a high level of theological freedom of creativity, in the positive sense of the word. What Panikkar really was into is not sustaining his case with references, but rather pursuing creative exegesis of the sources. To put it differently, the sources of Panikkar's Melchizedek manifest the spiritual inclination of his theology of the sources. In the end, Melchizedek has been *panikkarized*.

Further Directions

Here I suggest three topics that may deserve further scholarly attention: (1) Panikkar's countercultural orientation; (2) the link between Panikkar's theology and apocalyptic mindset; and (3) the connection between Panikkar's Cosmic Christ and his distinct interpretation of the Church in his theology. I will start

with the first topic. I addressed Panikkar's countercultural orientation as part of a greater project, to describe Panikkar as a Catholic thinker. Having said that, my interest in the relationship between counterculture and Panikkar is not in the direct or indirect influence of the former on the latter, much less on the question of whether his work can be seen as in any way influenced by countercultural themes. Rather, I am interested here in what must remain a kind of allusive affinity between counterculture and Panikkar's mindset. I believe that such a countercultural affinity would deserve a study of its own. For those scholars who are familiar with the phenomenon, Panikkar's countercultural orientation is unmistakable. First, the idea that we live in a paradigm, that this paradigm is old and passed, that a new paradigm is emerging, and that this emergent paradigm differs radically from the old one. It is a faith in a sort of paradigm shift in which an old era is replaced by a new era and a new perception of reality pervades and influences not only religion but all dimensions of human existence. The same can be said with regard to the character of the old and new paradigms: the former is rationalistic in kind—some countercultural thinkers name this old paradigm in terms of Cartesian dualism—and presupposes an understanding of nature as static and inert matter, sometimes labelled Newtonian and mechanicistic. The old paradigm is also non-inclusive, dogmatic, and centered on a single, unique source. The new paradigm, on the contrary, is inclusive, non-dogmatic, and open to multiple sources. Moreover, the new paradigm is post-cartesian (i.e., post-dualizing philosophy, constructionism, second-order cybernetics), organic and dynamic, and embeds an inherently holistic, ecological consciousness. In the new paradigm, one sees the world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts. This view reflects a profound and religiously driven awareness of the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena: what one calls 'parts' are merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships. Another parallel between Panikkar and the counterculture is the substitution of linear thinking with systemic thinking: the new perspective is about interaction and interdependence in a non-hierarchical and mysterious world; the old one is all about separation and reductionism. I could go on but I stop here.

Now I move to the second topic: the link between Panikkar's theology and apocalyptic mindset. In this book I carefully designed the perimeter of my assumption: I do not argue that there is a direct link between Enoch literature and Panikkar's thought. In other words, I never assumed a direct influence of Enochic literature on Panikkar's thought; rather, I suggest one should look at the influence of biblical scholarship on Panikkar, influence that was the result of a progressive incorporation of new resources made available by archeological discoveries. Thus, I do not claim the existence of any Enochic traits in Panikkar's writings. I avoid

making this claim not only because it is outside the scope of my study, but also because it would be paradoxical to assert that Panikkar, who complained for the semitic socio-historical matrix that still constrains Christianity and binds it to a certain degree of parochial particularism, was attracted by an ancient apocalyptic form of Judaism. Yet, I wonder whether the question should be raised, after all, about a possible connection between Panikkar's early writings and a certain apocalyptic mindset.

I would not describe Panikkar as an apocalyptic writer. In fact, his writings are everything but apocalyptic. I would be rather open to a possible description of Panikkar as an apocalyptic thinker who never wrote apocalypses. This description is based on a distinction between 'apocalypse' as a form-critical category and 'apocalyptic' as a set of values or conceptual features that are characteristic of many apocalyptic thinkers but also found in other types of works. The characteristic features, which certainly cannot be construed as a rigid checklist, include a claim to original knowledge, cosmological speculations, a deterministic conception of history, and eschatological expectations. With that said, I think scholars should be somewhat cautious of labelling Panikkar as an apocalyptic thinker through an analysis of some potential apocalyptic features in his writings. The point is to suggest that the way to proceed in reflecting on the relation between Panikkar and apocalyptic is not by making a checklist of apocalyptic concepts and seeing how many we find in Panikkar's texts but, instead by looking at his sources of thought. The link between apocalyptic literature and Panikkar, that is, an investigation on Panikkar as a thinker characterized by an apocalyptic mentality, would quite inevitably open a much greater—and interesting—debate within Catholicism about the apocalyptic. Since the second half of the 20th century, apocalyptic forms of theology have been developed in Catholicism, including those of Johann Baptist Metz and Hans Urs von Balthasar.[17] The latter, in particular, draws a line in the sand to mark a distinction within the genre as a whole that favors canonic apocalypses over apocalypses of the Ezra and Enoch traditions.[18] On the other side, authors such as Henri de Lubac and Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) have been suspicious about apocalyptic discourse and the practices and forms of life that such discourse encourages.[19] In this context, Panikkar's Melchizedek would represent Panikkar's apocalyptic tendency, that is, the apocalyptic genre within his writings, as well as his intention to overcome von Balthasar's line in the sand.

With regard to the third topic, that is, the relationship between the Cosmic Christ and the role of the Church, the impression is that Panikkar assigned a distinct role to the Church. For Panikkar, it is not only the encounter of the West

with the great religion systems of the East, but more precisely the exponential enlargement of Western consciousness in the first half of the 20th century—think about Teilhard's studies on palaeontology—that renders almost unimaginable the role of the Church as is over the totality of the cosmos.

In his book on Maximus the Confessor, von Balthasar includes the Church in his cosmic liturgy. "The Church," he says, "lies in the midst of the natural and supernatural cosmos like a source of light that sets all things revolving around itself; in that she represents everything symbolically, she also is an effective guarantee of the transformation of the whole universe."[20] It is the picture of the Church at the very intersection of the natural order and the supernatural. In his evocative yet scrupulous style, Monchanin offers a magnificent interpretation of the significance of the Church when she is transposed to a cosmological category: "The Church, his [Christ's] body, the place where the spiritual becomes incarnate, where the historical becomes porous to the eternal. With points of condensation: the sacraments, which, like stars, gravitate around the Sacrament—his body."[21] This is the image of the Church as the center around which the cosmos gravitates. No image of this genre can be found in *The Unknown* or *Meditation*. Monchanin and von Balthasar (and Teilhard and de Lubac) maintain the point that the cosmic horizon does not violate but instead emphasizes the ecclesial primacy. For Panikkar, rather, the Church is a sort of aeon, a reality which could not have existed before the work of Christ in the world. In a later essay already mentioned, Panikkar explained that the Church is "Mysterion Kosmikon ecclesia ab Abel, corpus Christi mysticum."[22] The second part of the sentence, the Church is the mystical body of Christ, is unequivocal. The first part, instead, requires some comments. It refers to a document of the Vatican Council II, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, in which it is said that the Church is "ab Abel iusto usque ad ultimum electum" ("from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect").[23] In turn, the origins of the expression can be found in a sermon of Saint Augustine.[24] Thus, Panikkar is claiming that the Church, understood as ab Abel, a Church that proceeds in parallel with the history of humankind, is a cosmic mystery and the mystical body of Christ. As such, the Church is in cosmic communion with the entire universe. Panikkar clarified this point in another essay, where he noted that wherever there is salvation, there is also the Church, which is like saying that wherever is Christ, there is the Church.[25] In other words, Panikkar's concept of the Church goes well beyond her social and institutional borders: for Panikkar, the Church is mystically in communion with Christ and the universe; she is Christ's salvific community open to all just people, through the universal salvific mediation of Christ, who is everywhere and everything is in Him.

Conclusion

The Unknown is a book of exceptional importance for the understanding of the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity, of the current status of Christianity, and of the development of Panikkar's theology. In this study I attempted to offer a realistic but respectful view of Panikkar as a man and a theologian alongside a fresh interpretation of his early work. It is only an attempt. Hence, this volume never rises above the level of a relatively clear, intriguing, and provocative thought experiment. I am aware of the gap between the inconsequential theologian who wrote this book and the stature of the author of *The Unknown*. Readers seeking more theological reconstructions or more nuanced interpretative judgments are advised to look elsewhere, for I am sure that other scholars will do the work better.

Notes

1. Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 37.
2. "I have always considered myself a priest, although I entered [priesthood] through a very narrow door, the Roman Catholic door." See: Raimon Panikkar, *Entre Dieu et le cosmos*: *une vision non dualiste de la réalité: entretiens avec Gwendoline Jarczyk* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2013), 60. Translation is my own.
3. Prabhu, "Raimon Panikkar, 'Apostle of Inter-Faith Dialogue,' Dies."
4. *Mountain*, 39–40.
5. *Ascent*, 286.
6. "One thing is sure: my loyalty to the Church, my obedience to the Hierarchy, deliver me to the Mystical Body." See: Panikka, apologia pro doctrina mea, in *Cometas. Fragmentos de un diario espiritual de la postguerra*, 92.
7. In truth, Massey frames this tension is terms of gnostic and historical Christianity. See: Gerald Massey, "The Historical Jesus and Mythical-Christ," a lecture first published in 1880. See: Gerald Massey, "The Historical Jesus and Mythical-Christ" (Oakland: Book Tree, 2000).
8. The expressions "in Christ" and the variations "in him/ whom" and "in the Lord" appear extensively in Paul's writings, some two hundred times.
9. Bielawski, *Panikkar: Un Uomo e il Suo Pensiero*, 57.
10. In his library donated to the University of Girona there is, in fact, a book on Enochic literature, dated 2007.
11. For early scholarship on Enoch, see: Robert H. Charles and William R. Morfill, *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896); Michael I. Sokolov, "Materialy i zametki po starinnoj slavjanskoj literature. Vypusk tretij, VII. Slavjanskaja Kniga Enoha Pravednogo. Teksty, latinskij perevod i izsledovanie. Posmertnyj trud avtora prigotovil k izdaniju M. Speranskij," *Chtenija v Obshchestve Istorii i Drevnostej Rossijskih* 4 (1910): 1–167; A. S. D. Maunder, "The Date and Place of Writing of the Slavonic Book of Enoch," *The Observatory* 41 (1918): 309–316; Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928); André Vaillant, *Le Livre des Secrets d'Hénoch: Texte Slave et Traduction Française* (Paris: l'Institut d'études slaves, 1952).

12. See, for example: Veliath, *Theological Approach and Understanding of Religions*. My opinion is that both Daniélou and Panikkar depend on de Lubac's work on the supernatural: there is nothing that is 'purely natural.' Since all is created, the 'supernatural' is always already operating within ordinary creation. See the quote from *Meditation*, 147. I must add that, in my view, Daniélou inclines toward a conservative interpretation, that of latency (the focus is on the eschatological 'not yet'), while Panikkar adopts a more aggressive interpretation, that of presence (the focus is on the eschatological 'already'). Daniélou sounds more Balthasarian, while Panikkar sounds more Rahnerian. Interestingly, in *The Unknown*, Panikkar mentions de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes Historiques* as well as the work of Blondel, Daniélou, and Guardini.
13. Between 1947 and 1968, the Dead Sea Scrolls were available only to Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) experts.
14. For the interdependence of Noahitic and Enochic traditions, see Helge Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and the Son of Man*, WMANT, 61 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), 117.
15. Coincidently, in the Foreword of *The Unknown* Panikkar claims that "having complete this present study the author hopes to be a little freer to enter into that *blessed ignorance* and *sacred silence*" (emphasis added), xiii.
16. Here I offer a flaming, uncompromising, blind literalist interpretation of Panikkar's sources. Panikkar interprets the sacred texts with great scholarly care and learning. However, the list of sources taken exclusively from the Bible may also signify his acknowledgment of Christ's presence in Scripture and the necessity of the spiritual sense. It is only a hypothesis. De Lubac's study of medieval exegesis may be at the origins of Panikkar's approach to sources. In de Lubac, the allegorical is not something 'added on' to the literal, but something that emerges from the literal as the fulfilment and telos of the literal. *Henri de Lubac's Exegese Medievale*: *Les Quatre Sens de l'Ecriture* appeared in two parts consisting of two tomes each between 1959 and 1963. Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: les Quatre Sens de l'Écriture*, I and II (Paris: Aubier, 1959–1963). All in all, this hypothesis is difficult to prove but also difficult to disprove.
17. Cyril O'Regan, "Two Forms of Catholic Apocalyptic Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20, no. 1 (January 2018): 31–64.
18. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetic," in *Theology: The Old Covenant* Vol. 6, trans. Brian McNeil and Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 326–328.
19. Henri de Lubac, *La Posterite Spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1979–1981); Benedict XVI's Habilitation on Bonaventure (1958), in which he addresses the risks of Joachimism, has been recently published together with an anthology of essays as Marianne Schlosser and Franz-Xaver Heibl, eds., *Gegenwart der Offenbarung: Zu den Bonaventura-Forschungen Joseph Ratzingers*, Ratzinger Studien 2 (Regensburg, Germany: Friedrich Pustet, 2011).
20. Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 322.
21. In *Quest of the Absolute: The Life and Work of Jules Monchanin*, 121.
22. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in Prabhu, ed., *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, 263.
23. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium, s*olemnly promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, chapter 2.
24. Augustinus, Serm. 341, 9, 11. For a translation in English see: St. Augustine, *Sermons Vol. 10 (341–400)* (High Park, NY: New City Press, 1995).
25. *Raimon Panikkar*, "El *Conflicto de Eclesiologías*: Hacia un concilio de Jerusalem II," *Tiempo de Hablar* (1993): 33–47.

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Index