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THE MYTH OF PLURALISM: AN EXPLORATION INTO THE METAPHYSICAL VISION OF PANIKKAR AND WHITEHEAD

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Introduction

No word is so much used and abused in philosophical and religious world as 'pluralism' that it has become a term that resonates the overtones of both a blessing and a threat to the contemporary existence. The human predicament today attests to the fact that the experience of pluralism cannot be just minimized. The awakening of new cultures, civilizations, linguistic groups, ethnic identities etc. has, no doubt, spearheaded the movement for the celebration of pluralism in philosophy and theology and we can say without exaggeration that pluralism has become the order of the day. Humans tend to live a mediocre existence in a world of unfocused multiplicity.¹ In the midst of these disintegrative diversities, philosophers across the globe feel that a monolithic orientation to life and other exigencies cannot root itself for a long time. The moment has surely come to begin gathering up the fragments, each of which harbours its own excellences and shortcomings. We have to consider all of the fragments of our present world in order to bring them

01. Raimon Panikkar, "Colligite Fragmenta", in *Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, ed. with Introduction by Scott Eastham, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993, 9.

together into a harmonious whole² or to work together for a unifying science. Visionaries like Raimon Panikkar³ and Alfred North Whitehead⁴ regard a dichotomous understanding of life and matter as the most disastrous of all bifurcations and propose a synthetic vision, which can also accommodate the dynamic and pluralistic character of reality. Both of them clearly point out that a total reconstruction of reality has become today a serious imperative.⁵

In this paper, an attempt is made to expose the Panikkarian and Whiteheadian paradigms of pluralism and present the cosmotheandric intuition of the former and the process vision of reality of the latter as the meeting ground for a meaningful synthesis. I shall try to do this under three sections. In the first part, I shall dwell on the fundamental philosophical problem of the great "either/or" structure as a background to the problem of pluralism anchoring on the dynamics of western philosophy and will explain the various facets of pluralism in Raimon Panikkar. This section is concluded with a brief discussion on Panikkar's integral vision, which is articulated in the cosmotheandric intuition. The second section deals with the process vision of reality as developed by Whitehead. The final section ends up

02. Panikkar, *Colligite Fragmenta*, 2.

03. Panikkar is a child of diverse cultures. He was born in Barcelona, in Spain on November 3, 1918 as the son of an Indian Hindu father and a Spanish Roman Catholic mother. Obviously he was brought up in a Hindu-Christian environment in familiarity with many languages and cultural traditions. He is cross-cultural by birth. This cross-cultural and pluralistic background made him to respond to the cross-cultural imperative of his time. See Ewert Cousins, "Introduction: The Panikkar Symposium at Santa Barbara", in *Cross Currents*, vol.29 (Summer 1979), p. 132. In his professional training and career he is a multi-dimensional man for he is a natural scientist and a spiritual teacher, a philosopher and a phenomenologist of religion and a theologian, sensitive to mystical intuition and skilled in rational speculation. He has been a professor of Religious Studies in the University of California at Santa Barbara for many years. See Ewert Cousins, "Raimondo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future", in *Cross Currents*, vol. 29 (Summer 1979), p. 143. His existential itinerary led him to speak from a fourfold perspective, the Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and finally the secularist.

04. A. N Whitehead was born on 15th February 1861 in Ramsgate, his father being Canon Whitehead, vicar of St.Peter's, Isle of Thanet. He was educated at Sherborne School and Trinity College, Cambridge. From 1885 until 1911, he was senior lecturer in mathematics at Trinity College. From 1911 until 1914 he was lecturer in applied mathematics and mechanics and later reader in geometry at University College, London. For ten years he was professor of applied mathematics at the Imperial College of Science. In 1924, he went to Harvard as professor of Philosophy. He retired in 1937 and died in 1947. His works include *Principia Mathematica*, *The Principles of Natural Knowledge*, *Religion in the Making* etc.

05. While Panikkar uses the term integration, Whitehead uses the category of 'prehension' which has the meaning of thorough understanding or grasp by the intellect or senses. See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. viii; Panikkar, "Colligite Fragmenta", 17; Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, First Paperback Edition of 1933, New York : Free press, 1990, 229.

with the possibilities for an open horizon, which may lead to a symbiotic experience of reality.

Part I: Contextualizing the Problem of Pluralism: A Panikkarian Paradigm

1. The Mono-polarity of Classical Systems

The tyranny of fragmentation or dualism is one of the greatest enigmas of human exigencies. Panikkar is an opponent of all fragmentations and dualisms.⁶ He points out very vehemently that a "look back" into the way western philosophy has developed since the time of Plato, reveals that philosophy was highly characterized or even plagued by fragmentation. In line with many other philosophers, he thinks that western thought of the last two millennia has been a philosophy of "either/or" or of dialectical opposites or binaries in which one is excluded from its opposite.⁷ He calls it as the great mistake of worshipping modernity.⁸ The impact of this piecemeal understanding of reality in the philosophical world cannot be underestimated.⁹ Stability, precision, conceptualisation and objectification were considered as the hallmarks of reality in this so-called substantialist understanding. We could identify

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06. This attitude is reflected in his life-itinerary, which is a movement towards wholeness. He says: Nothing less than unity, nothing less than truth will satisfy man. This thirst for unity is not only ontological (unity of being) and epistemological (unity of intellection), it is also sociological (unity of humankind) and political (unity of civilizations). See Panikkar, "Colligite Fragmenta", 7.
 07. Robert Fastiggi, "Unity, Multiplicity, Transcendence and Immanence" in *Dialogue and Alliance*, Vol. 6. No.2 (Summer 1992), 3-4.
 08. Panikkar is of the opinion that the crisis of historical consciousness is the underlying common and prevalent self-understanding of modern man. The awakening of trans-historical consciousness will show the dethronement of reason. See Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, p. 108. Panikkar responds to a critical moment in the history of global culture. His understanding of the three *kairological* moments in the evolution of human consciousness will help us to situate his vision and understand the problem before him. Panikkar calls these three moments *kairological* and not chronological in order to stress their qualitative character. This does not deny that there is a chronological sequence of these three moments within a single culture nor that there are living civilizations spatially coexisting and yet temporarily diachronical. Nonetheless these moments may be called *kairological* because they present a markedly temporal character and even a certain historical sequence, although they do not follow the sequential pattern of linear and quantifiable time logically or even dialectically. See Panikkar, "The New Innocence" in *Cross Currents*, 27 (Spring 1977), 14.
 09. The problem of fragmentation is visible in all spheres of life and its consequences. Subject vs. object; truth vs. falsity (epistemology); sacred vs. profane (theology); good vs. evil (morality); beauty vs. ugliness (aesthetics); being vs. non-being (metaphysics). This experience led him to re-search into the nature of reality and consequently to the re-construction of reality in order to experience every fragmented view. Panikkar, "Colligite Fragmenta", 8-9.

almost a divorce between life and matter, which has disparately poisoned all subsequent philosophies.¹⁰ It is due to this kind of divisive and truncated understanding of reality; philosophy has taken extreme positions of branding reality either as *one* or as *many*, or unity or plurality.¹¹ There are a few fundamental human attitudes at the very basis of different human traditions that are mutually irreconcilable.¹² We are still struggling to find a common truth. Pluralism is precisely the recognition that there may be several centres of intelligibility.¹³

2. Pluralism as an Existential Locus

Pluralism can be taken either as a sociological concept or a philosophical notion. As a sociological term, it deals with political theories of how to structure the interrelation between human societies. As a philosophical notion, pluralism is distinguished from monism and dualism. In short, pluralism is classically considered as a metaphysical concept, which raises certain questions about reality. Today the meaning of the word is shifted from a sociological and metaphysical to an existential locus which helps us to discover its roots. The awareness of pluralism is part and parcel of our every day experience and it has become today a human existential problem, which raises acute questions about the *one* and *many*. It has become a concrete day-to-day dilemma occasioned by the encounter of mutually incompatible worldviews and philosophies. Pluralism arises only when we feel the incompatibility of differing worldviews and are at the same time forced by the praxis of our factual co-existence. Today we face pluralism as the very practical question of planetary human co-existence.¹⁴ The problem becomes acute today because contemporary praxis throws us into the arms of one another. Today isolation is no longer possible and the problem of pluralism has become the first order of Being.¹⁵

10. Panikkar points out two main types of fragmentations, namely fragmentation of reality and fragmentation of knowledge. Fragmentation of knowledge leads to fragmentation of the knower, and if the knower is fragmented, the very life is fragmented. He emphatically says that fragmentation of knowledge is the scientific epidemic of modern times. See Panikkar, "Instead of a Foreword: An Open Letter", in Dominic Veliath, *Theological Approach and Understanding of Religions*, Bangalore: Kristujyoti Publications, 1988, 7.

11. Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, 41.

12. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*, edited by Harry James Cargas, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 154-155.

13. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in *The Inter-cultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. by Joseph Prabhu, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 252.

14. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 56. Pluralism is a living symbol whose purview includes both the nature of man and that of the world. See Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel-A Meditation on Non-Violence", in *Cross Currents*, vol. 29, (Summer 1979), 55.

15. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 57.

3. From Plurality to Pluralism

Today we can discover a dynamism that tries to go beyond the mere awareness of plurality to an acceptance of pluralism. Panikkar says that we can identify three dynamic moments of the development of this awareness. In the first stage, plurality is seen as the recognition of differences, different worldviews, philosophies, religions etc. An individual understands that there are other groups existing in the world. At a second stage, one becomes aware of varieties within one's own community. Though there are different forms, unity is an accepted fact here and variety is not seen as a challenge.¹⁶ Panikkar calls this as the awareness of pluriformity.

At the third stage, there is the acceptance of pluralism. Here pluralism deals with radical diversities. In certain situations, one may become conscious of mutually irreconcilable diversities, human attitudes and traditions. The problem appears when interaction is inevitable. Acceptance of pluralism is an imperative because isolation is no longer possible and unity is not convincing because it destroys one of the parties.¹⁷ Acceptance of pluralism goes still deeper to an existential acceptance of incompatible diversities. The passage from plurality to pluriformity and thence to pluralism belongs to the very dynamism of the universe.¹⁸ Pluralism is rooted in the deepest nature of things. Pluralism means pluriformity (variety) or diversity. Man becomes aware of both the need for diversity and the need for unity.¹⁹ There is a continuum between pluriformity and pluralism. Panikkar says that plurality belongs to the order of logos and pluralism to the order of mythos.²⁰

4. Threefold Approach to Pluralism

We can have three basic approaches to pluralism, viz, phenomenological, anthropological, and philosophical. There are three ways of dealing with the problem of pluralism or ultimate diversities namely, monism, dualism (dialectical method) and non-dualism. A *phenomenological approach* might say that pluralism appears

16. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", 204.

17. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", 205.

18. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", 77-78.

19. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", 60-61.

20. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 96-97; Panikkar, "Philosophical Pluralism and Plurality of Religions", p. 34. For Panikkar, mythos and logos are two irreducible, inseparable modes of awareness. Human awareness cannot be reduced to logical awareness. There is no logos without myth, nor myth without logos. Mythos is the horizon of our intelligibility. Our words and concepts are meaningful and intelligible in a mythos. Mythos is the unexpressed and logos is the spoken word. See Panikkar, *Myth, Faith, Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, Reprint, 1983, 4 f.

as a problem when every other means for dealing with diversity fails.²¹ The very nature of reality is pluralistic. A monolithic vision of reality is questionable. From an *anthropological point of view*, man himself is a pluralistic being that he is not reducible to an unqualified unity. To say human nature is one or truth is one is philosophically ambiguous. Pluralism is an exigency rooted in the pluralistic nature of reality. Pluralistic man renders false all the absolutisms, fanaticisms and reductionisms to artificial unities.²² No philosophy can claim to be universal, perennial and certain posing itself as superior to and enveloping all the rest. Even the very idea of a universal and perennial philosophy that is valid everywhere and always is obsolete.²³

5. Pluralism: The Revelation of the Ultimate Character of Reality

From a *philosophical viewpoint*, the conflict between the *one* and the *many* which has occupied man at least since Plato in the West and the Upanishads in the East is perhaps the central question of the human mind. Monism, dualism and non-dualism are some of the answers. Monism is ultimately explosive and plurality is ultimately unstable. Panikkar is of the view that we need to transcend the insufficient monistic and dualistic answers to this fundamental problem of "one and many"²⁴ and enquires whether we can offer a general typology applicable to all. Such a typology will have to transcend the 'either or structure' in order to arrive at a synthesis which is non-dualistic by nature.²⁵ In non-dualism neither *one* nor *many*, the tension of polarity is maintained. There is an acceptance, which neither forces the different attitudes into an artificial unity, nor alienates them by reductionistic manipulations.²⁶ Panikkar is of the view that a re-searching into the fundamental structure of reality shows that that reality is ultimately pluralistic.

21. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 66

22. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 75

23. Johnson Puthenpurackal, "A Philosophical Clarification of the Notion" in Johnson Puthenpurackal (ed.), *Pluralism of Pluralism: A Pluralistic Probe into Philosophizing*, Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (ed.), Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2006, 23.24

24. Panikkar, "The Dialogical Dialogue", in *The World's Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies, Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, ed. by Whaling F (New York: Cross Road, 1984), 202.

25. Panikkar yearns for synthesis. That is why he is often called a synonym for synthesis.

26. Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 65. It is sensitive to the right of power and the wisdom of tension. It appears as an awareness leading to a positive acceptance of diversity. Post-modern thinkers like Ken Wilber speaks of two types of reductionisms namely 'gross reductionism' and 'subtle reductionism'. See Ken Wilber, "The Great Chain of Being", in K.C Burroughs (ed.), *The Essential Ken Wilber: An Introductory Reader*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998, 49.

Pluralism affirms that truth is neither one nor many.²⁷ If truth is one, our attitude of pluralism would be an adjustment with error. Truth is not many either. If truth were many, we would fall into contradiction because pluralism is not plurality. Pluralism does not mean that we recognize many ways (plurality) but that we detect many forms, which we cannot recognize as ways leading to the goal. It does not mean also just tolerance of the many ways. It is rather that human attitude which faces intolerance without being broken.²⁸ In strict philosophical parlance, we are pluralistic because none of us possesses the fullness of truth, the key to the secret of the world, or access to the centre of the universe. Pluralism is not the mere justification of a plurality of opinions either, but the realization that the real is more than the sum of all possible opinions.²⁹ Panikkar argues that pluralism of truth is based on the fact that truth is a relation. We need a primordial approach.

6. Cosmotheandricism as the Primordial Vision

The basic unity of reality has been a point of interest to ancient and modern traditions. The category of unity has no real meaning except in the world of plurality and the meaning of unity has to be taken not as totally accomplished but partly as a goal to be attained. Unity and plurality are polarly related and their relationship has a certain dialogical tone in its very structure. One of the emerging myths of our times is that of the unity of the human family seen from the holistic viewpoint of a culture of man which embraces all civilizations and religions, seeing these as so many facets, mutually enriching and stimulating of a unique and total human experience.³⁰ Panikkar understands pluralism as an acceptance of incompatible human attitudes. It is not mere unity nor plurality but an attitude made possible by a cosmotheandric optimism.

Panikkar claims that a new consciousness begins to emerge in our global civilization, which however in reality was always implicitly present and which fits into a kind of *advaita*, or non-duality. This vision is said to be the original and the primordial form of consciousness, the undivided awareness of reality. It takes into account the entire reality, the *dharmakaya*, it is *advaitic* in its approach and presumes the radical relativity of everything.³¹ Reality is non-dualistic polarity, dynamic, vibrant and ontonomic in so far as there is mutual relationship between the two. Polarity is

27. Panikkar, *Insight*, 26 (Octo1990), 11; See also Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 97.

28. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism," 82.

29. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism," 80.

30. Raimon Panikkar, "The Emerging Myth", in *Monchonanin*, 50 (June-Dec 1975), 8.

31. Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-style", in *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, trans. Annemarie S. Kidder, New Delhi: Motilal Banarasisdass Publishers, 1995, 85.

an ultimate character of reality and reality is ultimately *advaitic* or trinitarian.³² A polarity that is able to endure tension is the ultimate characteristic of what is real.³³ Reality is more than what we comprehend and it has to be seen in its wholeness. According to this, all the dimensions of the real—the divine, the human and the cosmic are intrinsically constitutive of everything that is.³⁴ This vision tries to overcome the monistic temptation to consider reality as one and all things in the universe as variations and different modes of one substance. At the same time, this vision is keen to overcome the pluralistic ideal of expounding two or more unbridgeable elements, substances or groups with accidental links with one another.³⁵ Pluralism adopts a non-dualistic or *advaitic* attitude that defends the pluralism of truth because reality itself is pluralistic.³⁶ The cosmotheandric vision alludes to a non-dualistic vision of reality.³⁷

7. Dialogical Openness and Creative Polarities not Dialectical Conflict

Pluralism has to be lived not by the victory of one group over others, but by the dialogical tension with the variety. Pluralism emerges when conflict looms unavoidable.³⁸ The way to handle a pluralistic conflict is not through each side trying to convince the other or by the dialectical procedure alone but through a dialogical dialogue which leads to a mutual opening up to the concern of the other.³⁹ In other words, acceptance of pluralism implies a dialogical openness by which the immense variety of what appears to be conflicts can be transformed. We can only learn from the other, opening ourselves from our standpoint to a dialogical dialogue that does not seek to win or to convince but to search together from our

32. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 233.

33. Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-style", in *A Dwelling place for Wisdom*, 94.

34. According to cosmotheandric intuition, every reality has a triune character. Every reality is cosmic in so far as it is rooted in the cosmos. Every reality is human in so far as it is knowable by human beings. Every reality is divine in so far as it has its ultimate cause in a divine reality. There are inter-relations among the three.

35. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith, Hermeneutics*, 36.

36. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 97.

37. Every reality is constitutive of three irreducible dimensions of being namely, the cosmic, divine and human dimension. There is a metaphysical aspect, a noetic aspect and an empirical aspect. Envisioning reality in terms of three worlds (*triloka*) is a human invariant of all cultures whether this vision is expressed spatially, temporally, cosmologically or metaphysically. See Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, p. 75; Panikkar, "Colligite Fragmenta", 55.

38. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony: Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 63.

39. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", 78.

different vantage points. This process of mutual learning has no end. Here the polarities remain and the ideal is not in a universal theory but in an ever emerging and ever elusive myth that makes communication possible. There is mutual fecundation possible without reducing everything to a single source of intelligibility.⁴⁰

8. Six Sutras on Pluralism

- Pluralism does not mean plurality or a reduction of plurality to unity. It means something more than sheer acknowledgement of plurality and the mere wishful thinking of unity.
- Pluralism accepts the irreconcilable aspects of philosophy, religion, culture etc. without being blind to the common aspects.
- Pluralism does not allow for a universal system because nothing can encompass reality.
- Pluralism makes us aware of our contingency and the non-transparency of reality.
- Pluralism implies a creative tension between unity and plurality, identity and difference.
- Pluralism is a symbol, which expresses an attitude of cosmic confidence,⁴¹ which allows for a polar and tensile coexistence between ultimate human attitudes, cosmologies, and religions. It means, in other words, the awareness of the legitimate coexistence of systems of thought, life and actions, which are judged incompatible among themselves.⁴²

40. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 172-173; See also Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", *Cross Currents*, 29 (Summer 1979), 226.

41. While opting for the acceptance of pluralism Panikkar rejects all truth claims of universal theories and systems. He feels the necessity of discordant voices of human traditions. But he is also for unitive plurality, inter-cultural and inter-religious concord and agreement. This concord means to walk in the same direction. It is not one rational view of theory but it means to be of one sense, one feeling, and one aspiration. See Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality" in Leonard Swidler, *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 147.

42. Panikkar, "Philosophical Pluralism and Plurality of Religions", in Thomas Dean (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*, New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1997, 34.

Part II: Whitehead and his Vision on Pluralism

2.1. Re-visioning of Reality as the Task of Philosophy

Alfred N. Whitehead, mathematician and scientist sought to develop a philosophical system in which religion, philosophy and the findings of science would not be mutually exclusive or even unharmonious. Remaining within the religio-scientific world, he points out the prevalent sectarian and reductionistic understanding of reality. He calls this reductionistic view as the great nightmare of "scientific materialism."⁴³ He substantiates this by referring back to the hitherto western philosophical orientations starting with Parmenides. Parmenides affirmed the primacy of being over becoming whereas Heraclitus emphasized the flux, the becoming, the process which is neither being nor non-being, but a union of those opposites.⁴⁴ Whitehead critiques and abandons this monolithic and substance-based understanding of reality and affirms that the whole is a flux changing with the lapse of time.⁴⁵ Hence a creative dialogue between Parmenides and Heraclitus must still go on. If we accept this dialogical perspective, we will realize that reality is multi-dimensional or pluriform and therefore pluralism remains at the bottom of reality. We need to understand the reality in its wholeness or integralness. Neither matter nor life can be understood in isolation.

The theory, which he developed to demonstrate this insight, was called "philosophy of organism."⁴⁶ Philosophy of organism highlights that there is dynamism of reality. Whitehead felt that philosophy should not start with clear-cut items, but rather with a sense of something going on, a process in an unending continuum.⁴⁷ Keeping this at the background, he begins his philosophical journey from the fundamental notions of modern physics. Scrutinizing the four fundamental categories namely, space, time, motion and mass, he concludes that there is nothing that is permanent. Reality is subject to change and becoming is the characteristic of reality. Attacking

43. A.N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953, 22.

44. See Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1948, 28. The term 'Flux' comes from the Latin verb *fluere* which means to flow.

45. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Lowell Lectures, 1925, Cambridge: Fontana Books, 1975, 175.

46. In fact, Whitehead has initially used the term 'philosophy of organism' instead of 'process philosophy'. This term 'organism' very well indicates the organic connections between things. The notion of organism is combined with that of process in a twofold manner. See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 138.

47. S. E Frost, *Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers: A Survey of their Ideas*, New York: Random Books, 1962, 266-67.

a substance based understanding of reality, Whitehead also points out that reality has to be seen as hierarchically ordered wherein each hierarchical level is dynamically inter-connected.

2.2 A Process Approach to Pluralism

The overarching vision of A.N Whitehead can be encapsulated as the process metaphysics. He considers the basic structure of reality as process and points out that the process itself is the very constitution of reality.⁴⁸ That is why we say that process and reality is central to an understanding of Whitehead's mature philosophical position. He conceives of the world as composed of a vast number of microcosmic entities⁴⁹ and emphasizes the organic connection between these actual entities.⁵⁰ The process of world building takes place through the solidarity of many actual entities. We know that the vision of complexly interrelated events is the foundational feature of process metaphysics. Process thought can develop a plurality of typologies of religious traditions. It speculates that the world is composed of a vast plenum of events and each event is an inexhaustible creative *synthesis* of antecedent events.⁵¹ The patterns of relationship among the events are also inexhaustible. The physical world is bound together by a general type of relatedness, which constitutes it into an extensive continuum.⁵²

2. 3. Reality as Inter-connection

Everything in the universe is, in fact, suffused by and everything suffuses everything else to its past, to their future and the minds that know them. There is a unity and a patterned universe of events. He emphasises the organic connection between things (*Pratityasamutpada*). The universe is a harmonious process of developing

48. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7

49. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 6.

50. The concept of 'actual entity' is at the heart of Whitehead's metaphysical system. It is to be noted that the term 'actual entity' is the equivalent of Aristotle's *ousia*. See Ivor Leclere, *Whitehead's Metaphysics: An Introductory Exposition*, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1965, 22. Process metaphysics is concerned with the characteristics and inter-relationships between actual entities. *Process and Reality*, 6.

51. The term 'event' is a nexus of actual occasions interrelated in some determinate fashion in some extensive quantum. Cf. C.E.M Joad, *Guide to Philosophy*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1946, 581.

52. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 81. Societies do not exist in isolation, each presupposes its social environment and they nestle inside one another as a town lies in a country, a country in a state, a state in a nation. This ultimate vast society constitutes the whole environment within which our epoch is set so far as systematic characteristics are discernible by us in our present stage of development. See also Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 223.

organisms that grows, matures and perishes.⁵³ Inter-relatedness and interdependence is substantial to any organic whole. He maintains that neither physical nature nor life can be understood unless we fuse them together as essential factors in the composition of 'really real' things whose interconnections and individual characters constitute the universe.⁵⁴ We also require that the deficiencies in our concept of physical nature should be supplied by its fusion with life. There are the ideal opposites (binaries) like permanence and flux, order and novelty etc. In the inescapable flux, there is something that abides, in the overwhelming permanence; there is an element that escapes into flux. Permanence can be snatched only out of flux and the passing moment can find its adequate intensity only by its submission to permanence.⁵⁵ Hence there is a mutual relationship and tension between permanence and change. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead offers a most cogent defence of metaphysics, a metaphysics that is against a substance-based understanding.

Part III: Quest for an Open Horizon

Having made a close scrutiny of the key ideas of both Panikkar and Whitehead, we shall attempt to furnish a few axes or grounds on which we can build up a unifying myth. These axes may help us to handle the problem of pluralism in an existentially meaningful manner. Panikkar emphasizes the dynamism of being and tries to give a new direction to philosophical thinking.

3.1. Radical Relativity

The basic assumption implied in relativity⁵⁶ is that no reality is absolute by its nature or that no reality is able to give the totality of truth. Radical relativity stands

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53. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, xi. See also C.E.M Joad, *Guide to Philosophy* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), p. 572. Bergson introduced into philosophy the organic conception of physiological science. Life is an unceasing, continuous, undivided process, a sort of cosmic movement of which we are expressions rather than parts. We are all motivated by this *élan vital*. See Morton White, *The Age of Analysis: The 20th Century Philosophers*, New York and Toronto: The New American Library, 1955, 67.
 54. Morton White, *The Age of Analysis: The 20th Century Philosophers*, New York and Toronto: The New American Library, 1955, p. 87. See also James A Keller, "Some basic Differences between classical and process Metaphysics and their implication for the Concept of God", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 22/1 (1982), 6.
 55. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 172.
 56. Relativity is distinguished from relativism. Relativism is a dogmatic attitude while relativity is the recognition that nothing is absolute in this relative world of ours. Everything depends on the intrinsic and constitutive relation of everything to everything else. See Panikkar, *Intra-religious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, 1978, 70.

in the background of the cosmotheandric consciousness, which affirms that everything is directly or indirectly related to everything else. All reality is relative and relational. In other words, everything is wrapped in an utter relativity of radical inter-dependence.⁵⁷ This makes us say that relation is really the heart of reality. All of these relations are most often interpreted dialectically, mainly because they are seen as binary relations. The cosmotheandric vision overcomes dialectics because it discovers the mutual relationships of everything. The relations, which pervade the universe, penetrate the innermost chambers of every being. The continuum runs from the one to the other.⁵⁸ Panikkar observes:

Reality is nothing but an inexhaustible bundle of relations. In other words, the genuine experience of contingency lead man to discover not that he is becoming another being in order to subsist, but that his own being is nothing but, a term, a pole, an element of a whole and that this whole is not the sum of existing factors but the relationship of everything.⁵⁹

We can only speak by approximations (*dhvani*) and use parables and feeble devices to symbolize realities.⁶⁰ Reality is not reducible to single intelligibility. In a pluralistic context, every view has to make sense in so far as it communicates the glimpses of the totality of truth. In short, it is not possible to formulate truth exhaustively.⁶¹ More traditional names for the radical relativity of the entire reality would be the Christian understanding of Trinity as *perichoresis*, the Hindu Saiva notion of the universal relatedness of all to all (*sarvam sarvatmakam*) and the Buddhist notion of *pratityasamutpada* (dependent origination).⁶² All of these speak about the relational nature of reality.⁶³ These notions tend to make us aware that all that exists is a net of relationships. Radical relativity implies an interrelatedness of reality.

Whitehead deals with relativity from the context of modern science. For him, the four fundamental realities of space, time, matter and motion are relative. The conception of the internal relatedness involves the analysis of the event into two factors namely, the underlying substantial activity of individualization and the complex of relatedness as entering into the essence of the given event. Apart from the relationship an event would not be itself. The concept of internal relations

57. Abraham Koothottil, "Man and Religion: A Dialogue with Panikkar", in *Jeevadhara*, vol. XI, No.61 (January-February 1981), 12.

58. Panikkar, "Colligite Fragmenta", 60.

59. Panikkar, "The God of Silence", in *Indian Journal of Theology*, vol.21, 1972, 123.

60. Panikkar, "There is no Outer without an Inner Space", in *Cross Currents*, vol. 43, No. 1 (Spring 1993), 80.

61. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 27-28.

62. Panikkar, "The Cosmotheandric Intuition" in *Jeevadhara*, vol. XIV, No. 79 (Jan 1984), 28.

63. Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism", 75

requires the concept of substance as the activity synthesizing the relationships into its emergent character.⁶⁴ Reality is considered to be a dynamic continuum, which are intrinsically related and therefore the antecedent as well as the successive units make up the reality. This points out to the relative character of reality. In this philosophical framework, pluralism can be well accommodated because the fundamental assumption is that truth is not exhaustive.

Pluralism implies that truth itself is pluralistic and not plurality. The pluralism of truth is based on two fundamental assumptions: the first is anthropological and the second is philosophical or theological.⁶⁵ The first assumption is that each person is a source of understanding. Human being is endowed with self-understanding because it possesses a specific vision of reality, a certain myth as the horizon within which things and events are discerned. If each person is a source of self-understanding, then we shall not be able to understand humans without sharing self-understanding of the persons concerned. In that sense an objective anthropology makes no sense. Human beings are not objects, but subjects. All religions deal principally with the collective ultimate self-understanding possible.⁶⁶

The second assumption is theological or metaphysical. It contests that Reality is totally intelligible (the *svayamprakasa* of the *vedantins*, the self-intelligible and omniscient God of Christians. It contests that there is a Being or a Reality that encompasses all that there is and that this reality is pure consciousness, absolutely self-intelligible. One of the philosophical implications of this view is that there is no being absolutely identical to itself. Ultimately Being is reduced to Consciousness.⁶⁷ The pluralism of truth means fundamentally two things. That truth cannot be abstracted from a relationship with a particular mind inserted in a particular context. We cannot abstract from every context and proclaim the oneness of truth. We have to recognize perspectivism⁶⁸ and contextualization. Truth is relationship.⁶⁹ The thesis is clear: a universal theory of whatever kind denies pluralism. Any alleged universal theory is one particular theory besides many others. No theory can be absolutely universal.⁷⁰

64. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 151-152. See also. Donald W. Sherbourne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*, London: Indiana University Press, 1996, 23.

65. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 156.

66. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 158.

67. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 159.

68. Perspectivism maintains that people see from different perspectives and we have to respect each other. Still the problem of the most adequate perspective may come up and some may claim superiority to give an accurate vision of reality. See Panikkar, "The Pluralism of Truth", *Insight* 26 (October 1990), 10-11.

69. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 161.

70. Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 161.

3.2. Cosmic Confidence

Panikkar speaks of a trust that sustains a common struggle for an ever better shaping of reality. This trust entails fidelity to oneself. ⁷¹ The ultimate ground for this cosmic confidence lies in the almost universal conviction that reality is ordered. This is the trust that there is some sense, direction or meaningful dynamism in the universe.⁷² Harmony implies a constitutive polarity, a play of the opposites.⁷³ He sums up this attitude that makes pluralism meaningful as 'cosmic confidence'. It is the fundamental trust in reality which impels us to trust even what we do not understand or approve of.⁷⁴ It is the new innocence. In short, the cosmotheandric intuition reveals the threefold nature of reality, which always gives rise to diversities and hence stresses the essential harmony, which makes us to accept pluralism with a cosmic confidence. Though Whitehead does not employ the term 'cosmic confidence', we could infer the nuances of the term when he speaks about dynamism of being. According to him, a creative process is immanent in the world. Hence he says: "The solid earth survives because there is an order laid upon the creativity in virtue of which second after second, minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, year after year, century after century, age after age, the creative energy finds in the maintenance of that complex form a centre of experienced perceptivity focusing the universe into one unity."⁷⁵

3.2 The Complementarity of One and Many

The human matrix of relationships is so complex that there is a rich diversity. Confronting this infinite complexity, the human mind has primarily the task of discerning and establishing structures that are important to practical life especially in religion and science.⁷⁶ The construction is always based on discernment. Discernment is necessarily of some features of the inexhaustible complexity in which we are immersed. Construction introduces interpretation and relates what is discerned

71. Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality" in Leonard Swidler, *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 143.

72. The ancient traditions called this cosmic trust as *r'ta*, *Tao*, *ordo* etc. and Panikkar called it first the "cosmological principle". See Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony", 144.

73. Panikkar uses the paradigm of music to express this idea which he styles 'discordant concord'. There is no harmonious accord if there is no plurality of sounds or if these sounds coalesce in one single note. See Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony", 147.

74. Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony," 147-148.

75. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, New York: New American Library, 1954, 107-108.

76. John Cobb, "Metaphysical Pluralism," in Raimon Panikkar, *Inter-cultural Challenge*, 47. The inexhaustible complexity of reality is far beyond the human capacity to appropriate.

in ways that may resemble or differ widely from the relations of the events in which the elements are discerned.⁷⁷ The fact that there are elements of discernment in all religious traditions shall not lead us to assume that what is discerned is the same in all. We have to discern out of the total matrix.⁷⁸ In recent times in the West there are people who hold that there is no discernment at all. Instead of discernment, they advocate deconstruction.⁷⁹

Whitehead discerns in every event a conjunction of the disjunctive *many* (of other events). He speculates that the ultimate truth about the world is that "the *many* become *one* and are increased by *one*."⁸⁰ The ultimate reality that characterizes every matter of fact Whitehead calls "creativity." Creativity is not a thing or a process or an event or an activity. Creativity is that by virtue of which actual entities are actual. Process is the creative thrust from *many* to *one*, producing a novel entity that is other than the *many* that gave rise to it and thus part of a new *many* in turn productive of new novel entities.⁸¹ This is the dynamism of reality. He says:

The term 'one' does not stand for the integral number one, which is a complex special notion. It stands for the general idea underlying alike the indefinite article 'a or an' and the definite article 'the' and the demonstratives 'this or that, and the relatives 'which or what or how'. It stands for the singularity of an entity. The term 'many' presupposes the term 'one' and the term 'one' presupposes the term 'many'. The term, 'many' conveys the notion of disjunctive diversity. This notion is an essential element in the concept of 'being'. There are many beings in disjunctive diversity.⁸²

3.3 The Power of an Ontonomic order

Panikkar is of the opinion that the history of mankind as well as the history of human consciousness individually and collectively could be conveniently understood and heuristically expounded under the three headings of heteronomy, autonomy and ontonomy. By heteronomy we understand a worldview as well as an anthropological degree of consciousness which relies on a hierarchical structure of reality which considers that the regulations in any sphere of being come from a

77. John Cobb, "Metaphysical Pluralism," 50

78. John Cobb, "Metaphysical Pluralism," 50.

79. John Cobb, "Metaphysical Pluralism," 51.

80. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, New York: The Free Press, 1978, 21; John Cobb, "Metaphysical Pluralism," 52.

81. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 238.

82. Panikkar, *Process and Reality*, 21.

higher instance and are in each case responsible for the functioning of that particular being or sphere of being. By autonomy, we understand the world as well as the human being to be *sui iuris*, self-determined and determinable, each being a law unto itself.⁸³

By 'ontonomy' we mean that degree of awareness which having overcome the individualistic attitude as well as the monolithic view of reality, regards the whole universe as unity so that the regulation of a particular being is neither self-imposed nor dictated from above. Ontonomy is the realization of the law of being at that profound level where unity does not impinge upon diversity, but the latter is rather the unique and proper manifestation of the former. It rests on the particular character of reality in which each part mirrors the whole in a way proper to it.⁸⁴ Ontonomy is intended to express the recognition of the inner regularities of each field of activity or sphere of being in the light of the whole. Ontonomy rests on the assumption that the universe is a whole that there is an internal and constitutive relationship between all and every part of reality, that nothing is disconnected. Ontonomy does not accept any dualism or metaphysical dichotomy.⁸⁵ According to him only an ontonomic order or a primordial approach which proposes a "both-and structure" of reality can help us to overcome the dichotomies.⁸⁶ In this unified vision, there is a polarity between concord and discord.

Ontonomy is intended to express the recognition of the inner regularities of each field of activity or sphere of being in the light of the whole. An ontonomic relationship can coherently accommodate various perspectives. Cosmotheandric reality is ontonomic.⁸⁷ The process metaphysics of Whitehead suggests that there cannot be any divisive or truncated understanding of reality. The dynamism of reality has to be maintained in a non-dualistic tension so that we account for the mutuality of events and experiences.

3.4 Re-discovery of a Dialogical Method

The problem of pluralism is the question of the awareness of otherness. There exists a dialogical tension between persons and not a dialectical conflict. The way to

83. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, London, Darton: Longman and Todd, 1973, p. 28.

84. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, 29.

85. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, 42.

86. The term 'ontonomy' is a special category that Panikkar develops. The concept of ontonomy refers to the internal and constitutive 'nomos' of each being. It expresses the intrinsic relationship of all. This concept is useful for the mutual fecundation of the various fields of human activity.

87. Francis X D'sa, "The Notion of God" in *The Inter-cultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. by Joseph Prabhu, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, 37.

handle a pluralistic conflict is not through each side trying to convince the other, nor by the dialectical procedure, but through a dialogical dialogue which leads to a mutual opening up to the concern of the other. The awakening of human consciousness, like the awakening into life is a process of sifting and distribution. Growth implies and requires differentiation, separation, a self-affirmation by a negation of the other, a looking into oneself, and a concern with what is happening within one's self, all concentrated in the internal process of finding the self that exists precisely because it has been set apart from other selves and thus from the totality. But the very moment one comes of age, the very moment one gets perspective by differentiation and self-identity by separation, the opposite process starts, that of *unification, of integration*.⁸⁸

General Conclusion

Pluralism is one of the most vibrant human predicaments. Our discussion on the vision of Panikkar and Whitehead brings to light certain indicators, which can handle pluralism in an existentially meaningful manner. Panikkar's suggested pluralism is challenging and rewarding. It is challenging because it involves an existential risk. It is rewarding in the sense that it ultimately aims at the harmonious co-existence of diverse human attitudes. Panikkar's thesis is that through dialogue the particular experiences of truth may be enlarged and deepened so as to open new experiences of truth.⁸⁹ The process thought of Whitehead speculates that the ultimate truth about the world is that "the many become one and are increased by one". Both the views highlight the relativity and dynamism of reality and the need to transcend the great western divide of "either/or". The implication of this understanding is that the basic attitude towards pluralism is one of conciliation and not confrontation because it can accommodate diverse views in a dynamically non-dualistic manner. The total reality is that counts because reality is a creative synthesis. We need an integrative approach to solve the problem of pluralism, which stresses that reality is interdependence, or rather the inner-dependence. The cosmotheandric view of reality starts from a more holistic perspective which views man and the cosmos as a dynamic unity in which both are engaged in maintaining the very existence of the universe. The universe is a uni-verse, a concurrence,

88. Panikkar, *Vedic Experience: An Anthology of the Vedas for the Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration* (London, Darton: Longman and Todd, 1977), p.253. The Vedic optimism is based on the cosmotheandric view of reality. It starts from a more holistic perspective which views man and the cosmos as a dynamic unity in which both are engaged in maintaining the very existence of the universe. See Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 348.

89. Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, 40.

concursus, perichoresis so that we are able to experience the *totum in parte*.⁹⁰ Both the cosmotheandric intuition of Panikkar and the process vision of Whitehead embark on a *dialogical tension* instead of a *dialectical conflict* to handle the problem of pluralism and stresses that reality is polarity or process. It is this dynamism and polarity that meaningfully explains and unravels the myth of pluralism. ■

90. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, 235.