

The Water and The Drop: Notes on Panikkar's Diary

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Theologian Raimon Panikkar lived a complex and tortuous life, although as he revealed in his notes, published *post mortem*, he was driven by a single, incessant spiritual vision. This paper is an attempt to connect his life with that vision. Thus, this study focuses on the relationship between spirituality and life and pursues how to make sense of certain of his character traits such as indecision, indifference, and estrangement. The portrait I offer is that of a genial and troubled man in search of a compatibility between acosmism and cosmic existence in this time between the resurrection and the eschaton in which human beings can be water while being still a drop.



Being water and not a drop, while [being] still a drop.

– Raimon Panikkar

1 Introduction

Philosopher and theologian Raimon Panikkar (1918–2010) is the celebrated author of fundamental writings in the domains of philosophy of religion and interfaith dialogue. The list of his most famous works includes *Worship and Secular Man* (1973), *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (1979), and *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as a Universal Archetype* (1984) in the field of philosophy of religion, and *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964), *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (1989) and *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (2004) in the area of interreligious dialogue. He was also the editor of *The Vedic Experience* (1977), a monumental anthology of the Vedas presented in a distinct style relevant to the modern reader. Born in Spain, he spent part of his life in India and the United States. In his lectures and books, he was known to offer a variety of perspectives, subtle distinctions, and evidences of an encyclopedic erudition.



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He significantly influenced interreligious thinking in the last century, yet his life and work have only begun to be addressed recently. While his ideas have been studied and adopted by prominent thinkers in both the West and the East, some aspects of his life have remained out of reach. The publication of extracts from Panikkar's diary is good news for the scholarship surrounding him. He was notoriously protective of his private life, including his most intimate thoughts. The publication of some of his personal notes opens to scholarly inquiry a more personal Panikkar – Panikkar the man, not the public figure. An extract of Panikkar's notebook was, in fact, published in 2018 and in several languages. The title, *The Water of the Drop: Fragments from Panikkar Diaries* (henceforth, *Fragments*), illustrates both the theme of the book, the interplay between the divine and the human experiences, and the eschatological state in which the drop is already water without ceasing to be a drop (Panikkar 2018a and 2018b) [1]. However, the title is also a reminder that the whole is in the fragment (Panikkar 2018a, 48, 64–65, 123, 200, 231). The book is, according to editor Milena Carrara Pavan, a prelude to publication of the entire diary, a volume still in the making (Panikkar 2018a, x) [2]. Panikkar himself selected the fragments included and he did so in 2009, just one year before he died. The criteria for the selections remain unknown. In an enclosed letter to Carrara, Panikkar pointed out that the selected notes are his life and yet they are not.

Fragments is an attempt, according to Carrara, to detect Panikkar's "true identity" (Panikkar 2018a, 318). Panikkar famously distinguished identification from identity, the former being the biography and the latter the true being. Maybe *Fragments* can operate – and this is Carrara's opinion – as a window into Panikkar's life and into his "true identity." According to Carrara, Panikkar "was a mystic who concealed his spirituality under an intellectual mantle" (Panikkar 2018a, 318). In brief, he was an *intellectual mystic*. Despite forming only a small portion of the entire diary, the published fragments confirm some hypotheses that Panikkar scholars have already articulated, although not yet confirmed. Here I offer a brief and incomplete list: Panikkar's self-perception as a mystic, his monastic vocation, the importance of his sacerdotal status, his sense of spiritual superiority over Abhishiktananda (born Henri Le Saux) (Panikkar 2018a, 147, 148), his intellectual distance from the other founder of Shantivanam, Jules Monchanin, and his friendship with Bede Griffiths (Panikkar 2018a, 17). The book also reveals aspects of Panikkar never before brought to light: his sense of solitude and isolation, his need for friends and friendly relationships, his association with fe-

male disciples, and his apparent estrangement from the rest of human race [3].

This article is not a review of the book; rather, it is an interpretation of Panikkar against the details offered in *Fragments*. At first approximation, the scope is to reframe the scholarly understanding of Panikkar the man to better understand Panikkar the thinker. Henri Bergson has written that every great philosopher thinks only one inexhaustible thought and spends his whole life trying to express it: "Et c'est pourquoi il a parlé toute sa vie" (Fr. "And that is why he has been speaking for the whole of his life." Bergson 1970, 1347). Over the half-century of his intellectual life, Panikkar insisted that his thought was an extension of his life: his life was the source of his thought. However, the truth is, defining and articulating the connection between Panikkar's life and thought has proven to be no easy matter for his commentators. In *Fragments* he proceeded one step further: he clarified that his entire life was an attempt to manifest an interior insight, a movement of the spirit inward, a mystical vision. Thus, the goal of this article can be better framed in terms of drawing a connection between what seems to be a simple spiritual insight and a complex and tortuous life. By drawing that connection, I subject the scholarship on Panikkar to a reassessment regarding a few issues related to his thought, life, and work. Another way to put it is this: in this article I suggest an architecture to make sense of a portion of the notes offered by *Fragments*, personal notes written in the context of a life in the move that now need a scholarly reorganization.

The compilation mirrors the man in the sense that, in *Fragments*, Panikkar's project is himself – self-creation and self-improvement in a written form that may align the real with the ideal and overcome his inadequacy. He was uninterested in the details of life, including the people he encountered, focused only on his own responses and feelings emerging from these encounters. Accordingly, in this article, Panikkar is problematically depicted as an *intellectual mystic* and a *troubled man* with no home in the universe. With "an intellectual mystic" I intend a man who believed he experienced the "beyond" and then he had trouble contextualizing that experience in ordinary life. By "troubled and homeless man" I mean a man who concretely lived in an eschatological horizon. A reading of his personal notes lends the impression that Panikkar lived a life in a pathless land, a land without visible lines and clear demarcation. In that bare land, Panikkar found himself disoriented, even confused. He did not find his place in the world (Panikkar 2018a, 24, 50, 65–66). In that

land, he discovered freedom; freedom, however, came with a price, that is, alienation from people, social circles, institutions, roles, and even spouses. In the end, it came with solitude: “*the solitude of my intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage*” (Panikkar 2018a, 94). With “problematically” I mean that the depiction contains some problems that suggest that a reader take my interpretation, or any interpretation, with prudence. Even after publication of *Fragments*, Panikkar remains an enigmatic figure.

I offer a portrait of a genial and troubled man in search of a compatibility between *acosmism* and *cosmic existence*. And yet, this “existence” requires qualification. According to Panikkar, his life was a living experience in this eschatological time in which human beings can be water while being still a drop (Panikkar 2018b, back cover) [4]. For Panikkar, however, this eschatological time is not related to objective time, a time in the future, but refers to practical existence and the way a human being leads his/her life. “*The Kingdom of God is within us*,” is Panikkar’s classical interpretation of Luke 17:21. The coming of the Lord that traditional eschatology frames in the classic question of *when* is rather reformulated in Panikkar’s personal notes in the existential question of *how*. Eschatological time is less chronological time and more specifically existential *sovratemporality*, that is, “kairological time,” the moment of insight (*Gr. Kairos*), in the terms exposed in the writing of St. Paul (I Thessalonians 5). Concerning the return of Christ, St. Paul explains that “*the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night*”: the return of Christ cannot be dated chronologically but executed in life. Accordingly, in Panikkar the coming of the Kingdom and the self-understanding are cemented in an authentic life (a true identity). Existence in an eschatological time refers to live an authentic existence, an existence lived in accordance with the Spirit.

Apart from a methodological note and a conclusion, the paper consists of three sections. First, *An Intellectual Mystic*, which concerns the complicated business of dealing with a mystic. In the second section, titled *A Trouble Man*, I address a less celebrated side of Panikkar, involving his disorientation in life. In the third and last section, *With No Home*, I investigate Panikkar’s sense of estrangement from all and everything.

2 Methodological Note

In his final years, Panikkar attempted to decouple his work from his life, although he had spent most of his life claiming exactly the opposite. The possible motivations of that shift are beyond the scope of this article. Quite inevitably, a growing cottage of scholarly work has been developed to close the gap between Panikkar’s thought and life. This piece belongs to that work.

I engage *Fragments* through a traditional historical theological approach: I situate the historical data – in this case, Panikkar’s diary – in a historical context, his life, and I offer a theological reflection on it. I examine the argument of the relevant notes of Panikkar’s diary, explaining their role in the overall picture, and, where it is illuminating to do so, tracing their connection with his life. The interpretation clarifies and evaluates Panikkar’s arguments, drawing extensively on all the published papers, examining the evolution of his ideas in manuscript sources, and definitively engaging several controversies about this life. This work of interpretation implies a previous knowledge of Panikkar’s work and of the related scholarship.

I use *Fragments* as a primary source, although I occasionally refer to other sources, particularly Maciej Bielawski’s intellectual biography of Panikkar (Bielawski 2013). Readers should be aware that I never met Panikkar in person, so I cannot rely on personal accounts of his persona.

Nothing is easy with a thinker of extraordinary magnitude and complexity like Panikkar. The simple term “life” needs clarification. As said, *life* is for Panikkar a *living experience* in this eschatological time. I consider *Fragments* to be essentially spiritual-intellectual material, that is, material in which Panikkar attempted to make sense of his interior life, both spiritual and intellectual in character. That said, Panikkar’s prominent eschatological orientation makes it difficult to assess the level of realism of that material. Although that material is not the result of pure inspiration, by which one proposes to express the reality of the world within, it reveals the absence of all control exercised by reason as well as of moral preoccupation. Panikkar’s diary unveils his belief in the superior reality of certain forms of intellectual frameworks, spiritual insights, and mystical missions, over the concrete and eventually painful condition of social and human cohabitation. His personal remarks signal his belief in the omnipresence of the Spirit and his disinterest in the complexity of practical life. I am not suggesting one disregard his personal notes; I suggest instead to exercise prudence in addressing

3 An Intellectual Mystic

these notes. Panikkar's *acosmic tendency*, so to speak, forms a cloud of uncertainty around his own words, including those utterances dealing with his acosmic tendency. In his words, the ordinary separation between heaven and earth is replaced with a vague although indisputable distinction in unity. Yet, the blending of heaven and earth in Panikkar creates a super-reality, or surreality, in which it is difficult to distinguish what is in his mind and what is out there. Thus, a certain degree of misrepresentation in these notes is probably inevitable, due to the personal, otherworldly predispositions of their author. Like in the surrealist painting *The Persistence of Memory* of Panikkar's compatriot Salvador Dalí, Panikkar's memory seems stylistically rooted in realism yet unrealistic in subject matter. Remembrances flow in familiar, realistically rendered landscapes, yet those remembrances appear to have lost their integrity [5].

If Panikkar was an *intellectual mystic* (*intellectual* is the adjective, *mystic* is the noun), what kind of mystic was he? In *Fragments*, Panikkar (2018a, 57–58) [6] wrote:

I began life with the 'divine' experience: only much later did I go through the 'human' experience, all the time longing for the theandric one, which was there since the beginning (for there is neither purely human nor merely divine experience). Now I could and should reach the fullness of the theandric experience: mystical detachment and intellectual involvement, celibacy and love, East and West, science and philosophy, Church and world, richness and poverty, alone and in company, professor and sadhu.

Panikkar explained the meaning of the second part of the sentence as follows: Panikkar can be multidimensional as long as he does not identify himself with any of those dimensions. In other words, the fullness is the integration of all, or it is the overcoming of fragmentation. Clearly, Panikkar's experiment is existential in character. His own life is the *locus* of integration. The intellectual elaboration, so to speak, plays an accessory role. Helping others find their way in a pathless land without points of reference, in fact, became Panikkar's mission for the last decades of his life. Yet, he was not a guru [7]. The decryption of the first part of the section is instead left to interpretation. This "divine" experience – which anyone is welcome to reduce to a solely psychological phenomenon – is the "pure" experience, the experience that is independent of any given historical (and religious) context in which it occurs. When Panikkar confirmed he was living "on an ontological level," he meant that the ontological level is unmediated, and consequently the mystical experience shaped at the ontological level is independent from any major mystical tradition (Panikkar 2018b, 31). This "perennial" interpretation is one among many. It brings the advantage of explaining why Panikkar claimed that in his vision Christ is present everywhere, and the Church is "a small part... of the world" (Panikkar 2018a, 42–43).

Against the background of this interpretation, the above quote means that Panikkar came *down* from a pristine, pre-predicative state in which he had grasped transcendental reality in essence, in the same state implied in John 18:36. He came down to the historical, concrete, human level, a level that is, simultaneously, *māyā* (Sa. "illusion") (Panikkar 2018a, 43–44) or "the mystical experience of reality on the material level" (Panikkar adopted both expressions in his notes) (Panikkar 2018a, 64–65). It is *māyā* because, of course, the

material level is not the ultimate reality; yet it is the translation of the pure experience at the material level. I signal this interplay between the level of the ontological and that of the concrete, human level, because it is, in my opinion, the organizing principle of *Fragments*. Accordingly, it is in the cleavage between the two levels that Panikkar's legacy must be assessed. Panikkar tells of but does not show his mystical experiences. He mentioned his encounters with the Spirit, but he did not describe them (Panikkar 2018a, 178). He believed he shared the same experiences of Abhishiktananda (Panikkar 2018a, 166) and Marc Chaduc (Panikkar 2018a, 130) [8]. But he took a Wittgensteinean orientation and maintained his silence on his mystical experiences: "*The ineffable is ineffable*" (Panikkar 2018a, 202) [9]. This situation leaves Panikkar's scholars with no other option than assuming a mystical source which tells the truth about the philosophical and theological results as they emerge from nowhere. In this regard, Abhishiktananda asked himself a question about Panikkar: "*Did he realize what he was writing?*" (Abhishiktananda 1998, 286). It is a legitimate question. Abhishiktananda did not answer his own question, so I suppose scholars must live with his same doubt. Ultimately, whether the "divine" experience was real or rather the result of psychological phenomena is irrelevant: what is relevant is that Panikkar believed so much that it happened that he framed his life accordingly.

To explain this relationship between the experience at an ontological level and that at a material level, I consider the case of Abhishiktananda. In his diary, Abhishiktananda noted that Christ had made Himself known to Abhishiktananda through the mediation of Hindus (Abhishiktananda 1998, 162). He did not mean that the experience exhibited certain structural features that linked it to the experiences of Hindu mystics; the experience for him, in fact, transcended the particularities of the Hindu tradition. Abhishiktananda was rather saying that his post-experiential interpretation assigned that experience to the Hindu context. To put it differently, Abhishiktananda was not saying that his experience was shaped by the religious tradition of Hinduism, but that he was interpreting and framing his experience within the context of Hinduism (mostly because he established a relationship between the experience and his pre-experiential immersion in Hindu monastic spirituality). Basically, he was assigning his experience, as a means of translation, to the realm of Hinduism (rather than, say, Christianity). The same can be said of Panikkar: the "divine", "pure" experience preceded the human experience. He framed his experience in terms of "Cosmic Christ". In the case of Panikkar, the trans-

lation of the experience on the ontological level to the one on the concrete, material level, as he called them, included a call to action. In his personal notes Panikkar is adamant that his vision (or state) came with a "noetic" component. It involved knowledge, but it also came with a certain urgency to translate that noetic component into action. Of course, action did not mean "doing" something. Panikkar was very clear that his job, so to speak, was *being*, simply *being*. However, in this finite, concrete, material reality, *being* assumes a certain level of doing; it implies a certain action (Panikkar 2018a, 82) [10]. The problem is that, according to Panikkar himself, he was not "*a man of action*" (Panikkar 2018a, 21).

In the rest of the article, I will frame Panikkar's problem with action in the same way he framed it, namely, as a problem of character. Here, instead, I address Panikkar's problem with action in the light of his mysticism. Panikkar was a man between two worlds, the world outside time and the world in the mists of humanity, and in search of an existential and intellectual synthesis between the two. A tension is detectable throughout most of his diary between his acosmism and his cosmic existence, a tension that his peculiar interpretation of priesthood as cosmic priesthood (a priesthood that mediates between and belongs – according to Panikkar – to both worlds) should have helped to resolve, but it did not. Or better, he found a synthesis at an intellectual level but not at the level of action (Panikkar 2018a, 176) [11]. This unresolved tension between the freedom of acosmism and the constraint of this cosmic existence brings the reader once again back to Abhishiktananda. Both Abhishiktananda and Panikkar shared the problem of reconciling an *acosmic orientation* with a *cosmic existence*, but the source of the problem was different: for Abhishiktananda, it was at the level of orthodoxy, while for Panikkar it stood at the level of orthopraxy. In 1980, at 62 years of age, Panikkar confessed his problem in words of rare clarity: "*The somewhat doctrinal and theoretical torment... of Abhishiktananda is not my own. Mine is existential, personal, and related to orthopraxis: it [note: i.e., the torment] is... what I must do, carry out; it is... being... as action*" (Panikkar 2018b, 110–11). How to translate in concrete terms the cosmic priesthood, the priesthood of a Church which extends to the edge of the universe, was the existential challenge of his life. He became a theologian, a philosopher, a monk (within), a guru, and a spouse. All of these dimensions somehow failed to round out the original, sacerdotal vocation, but cumulated over it. In Panikkar's words, "*all of my words are an effort of incarnation: Silence becomes Word and*

4 A Troubled Man

Word becomes Flesh... I... suffer for the incarnation (of the word in my life)” (Panikkar 2018b, 89–90).

Thus, it is in terms of translation, the translation of the pure experience into a human experience, that Panikkar’s problem must be addressed. Did he translate correctly? Panikkar’s impetus to make the world holy emerges from his diary as genuine. The question remains: did he testify the Mystery? Did he sacralize the world? Was he, as he thought he should be, “a man of the sacred, a man of the mystery?” (Panikkar 2018a, 75–78). The question of translation is, in brief, a question of whether Panikkar reached spiritual freedom. For those who know well Charles de Foucauld, I attempt a comparison. In his travels to the Holy Land and North Africa, de Foucauld acted as a “universal brother” of every person he met (de Foucauld 1966, 34). During his cosmopolitan life, Panikkar never forgot to act as a “universal priest” – the priest of the Ecclesia of the Universe, as he called it. While de Foucauld, a spiritual giant of the 20th century, was successful in developing his own path to spiritual freedom, Panikkar, if one takes his diary for granted, struggled. Another possible comparison is between Panikkar and his friend Abhishiktananda. In his diary, Panikkar made an interesting observation: they experienced the same problem, but Abhishiktananda was a monk. He probably meant that Abhishiktananda’s monastic vocation gave him a path to close the gulf between this world and the other world (Panikkar 2018a, 95–96). On the contrary, Panikkar had no path and had to build one. Of course, he liked mentioning Antonio Machado: “Wanderer, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking” (Machado 1912, 87). But the *adagio* was easier to preach than to practice. Panikkar eventually became a mystic in the sense that he had perceptions and visions, but not necessarily liberation from mental restraints and emotional bondage. In a dialogue between the two friends (written by Abhishiktananda), Panikkar reminded Abhishiktananda that he was free to pursue his path: nobody “can tie down the sons of the Kingdom anywhere” because Christ has come and, “the Truth which he proclaimed [note: has] set his people free from every bond” (Abhishiktananda 1998, 46). Abhishiktananda complained that there were things which held him back and prevented him from totally pursuing his path. The same may have held true for Panikkar.

Panikkar’s impatience for social conventions, institutional roles, and cogent laws and rules, which he saw as obstacles to spiritual freedom and cosmotheandric experience, is well known. This resistance against the law is an intellectual predisposition, namely, the presence of a specific intellectual template that one might call “end of the law.” “Law” stands for a *rule of action*. The law in discussion is neither the law of nature that binds all men and women at all times (Romans 1:20; 2:14, 15) nor the moral law that is perpetual (Matthew 5:17, 18) and holy (Romans 7:12). It is rather the ceremonial law, the law that prescribes the rites and ceremonies of worship. After Christ, that law has been fulfilled (Hebrews 7:9, 11; 10:1; Ephesians 2:16). The same can be said of the judicial law, the law that directed the civil policy of the Hebrew nation and was translated into the canon law. This predisposition for the “end of the law” is detectable in part of Panikkar’s work and represents an evident assumption of several of his most famous neologisms. But it is explicitly declared in his diary: “I have a direct insight (experience) of the Pauline statements: the Law is superseded, the just do not need the Law, Life is a radical novelty and this not according to any special rules or regulations” (Panikkar 2018a, 186). The quotation continues as follows: “all ‘ius’ is just ‘fictio,’ rules” (Panikkar 2018a, 186). Panikkar scholars are well aware of this predisposition.

Panikkar believed himself to be a spiritually free man. He was free of conventions, roles, and belongings. In *Fragments*, he defined this form of freedom as “spontaneity from within, having no constraints from without” (Panikkar 2018a, 42–43). As a consequence, he became a multi-dimensional person who was simultaneously a philosopher, theologian, mystic, priest, and poet. But this is not how he saw himself. By crossing borders and limits or, as he would say, letting himself be open to the flux of life, he believed he was delivering a work of integration. This work of integration, in turn, was propaedeutic to a final step, that of nullification: “the Spirit leads me to the authentic way of nothingness” (Panikkar 2018a, 42–43). If one has to trust Panikkar’s private notes, however, spiritual freedom played no significant role in the most important decisions of his life. Actually, indifference and incapacity to make the right decision, as well as a certain passivity in the face of the events of life, really made the difference. Indifference should be received as “Ignatian indifference,” to borrow a phrase from Panikkar. But, according to *Fragments*, indifference was also the character of his relationship with mankind. The personal notes in *Fragments* allow expansion of that indifference well beyond the border of the familiar figure of the ascetic mystic unimpressed by surrounding reality. He

claimed that he had not “*taken full advantage of the profound, unique and unrepeatable encounter with men [sic!]*” (Panikkar 2018a, 278–79). As a definition of “irresolution” I borrow a line from Panikkar’s diary. He is talking about himself: “*lack of courage, caution, capacity to make a decision*” (Panikkar 2018a, 198–99). In its very essence, the concrete, practical existence of the celebrated author of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* and many other famous works is permeated by detachment and irresolution, by the never-ending return to the spiritual, to the mystical. Surely there is a certain overlapping in Panikkar’s notes between indifference as acceptance of the life of the spirit, on one side, and simple passivity and irresolution, on the other (Panikkar 2018a, 13) [12].

Before proceeding, I need to address one problem of interpretation. The difference between the story Bielawski told and the one Panikkar himself told cannot be more remarkable. In Bielawski’s intellectual biography of Panikkar, the latter emerges as a vital, self-directed, active individual who was in change most of the time. In *Fragments*, Panikkar listed a series of decisions he regretted – marriage, the move to the United States, cancellation of a meeting with the pope (probably referring to that scheduled for June 28, 1966) – and asked himself how they happened (Panikkar 2018a, 291–92). The source of Panikkar’s notes is Panikkar himself; the sources of Bielawski’s biography are the people around Panikkar. The gap between the perceptions within and without, in a thinker like Panikkar, is excusable. Yet, scholars do a disservice to Panikkar if they consider the private notes more reliable than Bielawski’s biography. It would equal a fall into a cartesian temptation; it is better for scholars to accept the gaps and live with them.

Panikkar’s ideal was “*to be a man, just a human being,*” which is the unity without confusion of humanity and divinity lived and symbolized by Jesus (Panikkar 2018a, 43). Panikkar had in mind the “I Am” of Abhishiktananda, although Panikkar never mentioned it in his notes. Of course, he was well aware that this ideal must be embodied in this life. However, the embodiment cannot be confused with the ideal; as a consequence, Panikkar was a priest but not your usual priest. It comes as no surprise, then, that Panikkar was a married man but not your usual married man. But, again, Panikkar was “*in the world but not of the world; in the Church but not of the Church*” (Panikkar 2018a, 49). He was in the priesthood but not of the priesthood; he was in the marriage but not of the marriage; he was in academia but not of academia, and he was in India but not of India (Panikkar 2018a, 49). In Panikkar there is the

primacy of the “already” upon the “not yet,” and therefore an unresolved relationship between the “otherworldly” and the “worldly,” an imbalance between inner and outer life. There is in Panikkar, consequently, a certain fatigue of living (“*I still believe that I carry the entire universe within*”), a certain degree of indecision and even disorientation in dealing with the concrete, practical, ordinary rhythm of existence (Panikkar 2018a, 150). One feels in Panikkar a kind of gap between the limitless world within and the concrete, limited, convoluted reality around (Panikkar 2018a, 46–47). Of course, Panikkar emerged as joyful, smart, and fascinating to his audiences. He recognized that, “*yes, I do realize that: a powerful energy comes out of me*” (Panikkar 2018a, 154–55). But in *Fragments* he revealed an unquestionable level of confusion in placing himself in the grand scheme of life. Panikkar played and played again with the otherworldly formulas “*I am nothing therefore I am all,*” “*I am all, therefore I am nothing,*” and “*I could be something*” but “*it is better to be nothing*” (Panikkar 2018a, 42–43, 156–57, 162–63, 171–72). The emerging picture behind the formulas, however, is that of a man with self-perception but little to no correspondence to the real situation. Panikkar was a priest, but in his opinion every contemplative is a priest (Panikkar 2018a, 282–83). Of course, he had in mind the idea of the “cosmic priest,” but his real condition was to be a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. He was a priest, but he felt monasticism was his real vocation [13]. He was a married priest, but he disregarded the possibility that he somehow broke his sacerdotal vows (and apparently, he never considered the possibility that he broke the marital vows). If in the real life he “*did not seek or choose*” but rather “*passively accepted*” (Panikkar 2018a, 125) in the realm of the inward, including the intellectual dimension of the inward, he created himself as an artwork (Panikkar 2018a, 124–25).

Those who are familiar with the diary of Abhishiktananda easily detect the signs of a similar malaise (Panikkar 2018a, 95–96). Both Abhishiktananda and Panikkar were unsettled, unhappy, and uncertain of their condition (Panikkar 2018a, 95–96) [14]. Both were constantly questioning what they were doing and where they were going to. Both existed in a permanent inner turmoil. Both were convinced that they had a mission to pursue, but neither knew what this mission was. The difference, however, is that Abhishiktananda felt he had to make a choice between Christianity, his faith, and Hinduism, the source of his spirituality. His problem was to tear back a separation between religions that was not mirrored in his own experience of a Benedictine monk living as a Hindu sannyasi. On the contrary, Panikkar emerges from his per-

sonal notes as an estranged presence in this world, in which he felt he had no preassigned role or aim. He had to make a choice about who to be and what to do, and the choice appears to have been beyond his capacity.

5 With No Home

Panikkar's efforts to take control of his life and own narrative are well known. He changed his name and last name and built his own story by means of admirable remarks, such as, "I am the son of a Hindu Indian father," or "I left Europe as a Christian." These remarks have become the irreplaceable elements of any biographical sketch of his life as well as prisms to penetrate his thoughts. These efforts were deliberate and constant during his entire existence. Self-assertion was an indisputable principle of his life. Panikkar managed to become his own person. In the words of Salman Rushdie (1992, 439), "those who do not have power over the story 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." From Varanasi, Panikkar wrote to his friend Enrico 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" (Bielawski 2012, 272) [15]. For Panikkar, self-determination was the line of resistance against institutions that come with their assigned identity; it was the antidote to prefabricated religious myths and objectifications, including those of God as substance apart from the world. All this is well known to Panikkar's scholars.

Fragments reveals an unexpected side of these efforts: Panikkar did not give any thought to this unique activity. No reference to this work of self-determination can be found in his personal notes, apart from one: "every man must create the work of art that is himself" (Panikkar 2018a, 123). What a reader can find in his personal notes, instead, are traces of his persistent sense of estrangement from people, social contexts, and even his family (Panikkar 2018a, 148, 174–75, 182). Several times he wrote that he had no friends (47, 49, 50, 191). The estrangement from people and social contexts, however, was propaedeutic to a much deeper form of estrangement: Panikkar's self-perception as a person different from most people. "De Lubac, Abhisikta, (Bede a little less)... all are conscious of playing a role... I have no role" (Panikkar 2018a, 211). Here the list of names is probably more relevant than the concepts. De Lubac, Abhishiktananda, and Bede Griffiths are not exactly the names that come to mind when one thinks of people playing roles within the Roman Catholic Church and society at large. These three priests

were courageous men, at the intellectual, spiritual, and geographic borders of their worlds. They paid high personal, and ecclesial prices for their intellectual and spiritual search beyond the mainstream. All of them, priests and members of religious orders, believed they were following God's will. Yet, Panikkar distanced himself from these people, positioning himself as different from them because he was with no role. This is not the occasion to discuss whether Panikkar's comparison was realistic or delusional; the point is the sense of estrangement he felt even toward people he knew, respected, and with whom he was friends. Finally, *Fragments* signals Panikkar's estrangement from ordinary life. "I feel strong and powerful in the face of the world of ideas, in its most profound and realistic sense... but in the face of everyday things, especially everything that involves decision and organization, I am completely disoriented" (Panikkar 2018a, 230–31). Panikkar saw himself as someone unsuitable for the life of ordinary, mortal people because he was attracted by "the Presence of God" (Panikkar 2018a, 281). This estrangement from ordinary life, in Panikkar's opinion, is the result of "mystical awareness" [16]. This estrangement, however, has consequences: the most important is a certain indifference to concrete matters such as money, career, institutions, and conventions (Panikkar 2018a, 51).

Panikkar revealed he had a problem in coping with social environments, people, and ordinary life. He felt a sort of distance or estrangement from reality. This feeling can be obviously explained in various ways, and the future publication of his personal notes will probably add critical details in this regard. As for now, I suggest taking Panikkar at face value and to explain this feeling as a product of a mystical orientation which altered the relationship between Panikkar and the reality around him. In 1991, he wrote: "I can say that I have had this cosmotheandric experience since my earliest youth... this is why I have... been too indifferent to all 'external' events" (Panikkar 2018a, 81–82). Without reading too much into these sentences, I suppose a plain interpretation may read like this: when you have experienced the absolute, the experience of the finite adds little to nothing to your life. You accept it (eventually with gratitude), but without giving it too much importance. How this experience of the absolute eventually altered Panikkar's view of reality (say, the ontology) around him is probably traced back to his writings. How it altered his relationship with reality (epistemology) is clarified in his notes. He became "indifferent," a word he used several times in his diary (Panikkar 2018a, 187). He became indifferent to the physical and social world around him, and this indifference opened new possibilities to him. The inward reality took on a life of its own, assuming the role of organizing principle of reality *tout court*. In Panikkar, therefore, one recognizes

a predominantly allegorical interpretation of reality, by which I mean an unworldly, spiritual, ahistorical, and eventually asocial interpretation of reality. He relativized, and sometimes refused to recognize, the value of the literal, that is, the material, the historical, and the social. In his own words, “*what seems to dominate within me is this non-historical sense of life. Everything seems like a superficial game... I do not give much importance to outer events; is this perhaps an unbalance between the inner and the outer life, as if I had too much inner life?*” (Panikkar 2018a, 125). Thus, he was not a “real” monk in the sense that he did not belong to a monastic order and was not recognized as such, but he was a monk nevertheless because he perceived himself as such (a monk within) (Panikkar 2018a, 182) [17]. Or, to be more nuanced, he believed that the literal is always already included in the allegorical, so that the allegorical always positions, qualifies, or criticizes the literal. Panikkar’s “*obliteration of the literal*” was at the core not only of his work, but also of his life: this is the message from *Fragments*. Biographers will decide whether this obliteration was due only due to mystical predisposition or to other more concrete, personal situations (Panikkar 2018a, 291–92) [18].

Panikkar’s vision, in his own words, implies the eclipse of religion as an institutional, dogmatic, and confessional form of faith: “*it is a fascinating vision, that of your Presence everywhere and in the midst of every religion and every being*” (Panikkar 2018a, 42–43). This vision is not theologically neutral. His framing of Christ as Cosmic Christ forced him to a reformulation of Christianity after the eclipse of religion. “*But then what about the Church? ... The Ecclesia of the Universe, the priestess of the cosmos serving every being, praying for everything, considering herself in union with Christ*” (Panikkar 2018a, 42–43). In this end, this reformulation is, in fact, a grandiose project of deterritorialization of Christ and, at the same time, of reterritorialization of Christians (Christianness). At an intellectual level, the project was successful, in the sense that the project and its author received the scholarly attention they deserved. At the more modest level of Panikkar’s personal life, however, the project was far from being satisfactory. Panikkar neither deterritorialized himself completely from the older belonging nor reterritorialized himself in a space he could call his own. The problem Panikkar raised is, of course, relevant: once Christ is spatialized – that is, once He is in everyone and everything – what is left to Christianity, as a religion, and to the Church, as an institution? Panikkar’s priesthood, therefore, is a cosmic priesthood, a mediation of the absolute with “*all structures – religious, sacred, cultural, and profane – of the world*” (Panikkar 2018a, 42–43). Not surprisingly, Panikkar could find himself at home wherever he was, with Hindus and Christians, with other priests and lay people.

He was a mediator of Christ with all. This is the intellectual elaboration. In the context of the concrete and intricate reality of human existence, however, *Fragments* tells a different story, a story of estrangement and solitude [19].

6 Conclusion

Raimon Panikkar, one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century, is in many ways a man without a spiritual biography (Hühnerfeld 1950, 9) [20]. The publication of *Fragments* attempts to respond to this deficiency. *Fragments* is merely a fraction of Panikkar’s personal notes, and scholars should resist the temptation to draw too much from a partial exposure to Panikkar’s internal dialogue. That said, *Fragments* confirms certain hypotheses that Panikkar scholars have already articulated and, for this reason only, it must be granted a crucial place in his scholarship. This article has traced some connections between the internal life and the peripatetic existence of an intellectual giant of the 20th century. More specifically, the article shows how Panikkar might have faced a certain level of trouble to match his Kairos, his moment of insight, in the practical circumstances of his life.

In a note written in California, during his first year of teaching at UC Santa Barbara, Panikkar explained that “*it is hard to have mystical awareness... and live an ordinary life*” (Panikkar 2018a, 89). Here is the core of the matter: the difficult, at times impossible merger between the initial mystical vision, the sense of the Presence, and the acosmic orientation, on one side, and on the other, the ordinary life of a priest, an academic, and a husband. The question arises about what exactly the life of a mystic should be according to Panikkar. Modern mystics in the Roman Catholic tradition like Therese of Lisieux and Charles de Foucauld have seen the answer to that question in authentic and modest testimonies of life that reveal, by contrast, the triumphant and undeniable presence of the divine. Therese offered her “little way,” namely doing ordinary things with extraordinary love; de Foucauld, instead, showed that God can be found in hidden and laborious forms of life. The more one perceives him/herself as nothing, the more he/she is permeated of divine grace. This is the inverted, paradoxical, and kenotic perspective of these modern mystics. It was definitely not Panikkar’s perspective. He thought he had to find his own way, and the tortuosity of his life is there to show how the enterprise revealed itself as demanding.

Notes

- [1] The quote and page reference are taken from the English version Panikkar 2018a. The English version is the translation from the original manuscript in Italian: Panikkar 2018b. When useful, I will translate directly from the Italian original.
- [2] Milena Carrara Pavan was a close friend and disciple of Panikkar, who entrusted her with the publication of all his written works.
- [3] In the course of Panikkar 2018a, the words *disciple* and *disciples* show up several times. Since the terms are gender-free in English, the translation sometimes risks to mask the original meaning of “female’ disciple/disciples”. The Italian version of Panikkar’s diary, on the contrary, refers to *discepola/discepole*, namely, “female disciple/disciples”.
- [4] “*Being water and not a drop, while [note: being] still a drop.*”
- [5] Scholars must decide whether to assign to Panikkar’s notes included in Panikkar 2018a and written in his eighties the same relevance of the notes he wrote at an earlier age, as typically older people tend to adjust memories and remembrances.
- [6] Note that the English version does not include “*alone and in company,*” which is instead present in the Italian original: Panikkar 2018b, 57. I included the missing part in this quote.
- [7] To be a guru, one needs to previously have been a disciple of a *guru*. Panikkar was aware of this requirement and recognized that he had no *guru*. However, he called Melchizedek and ultimately Christ his *guru*. See Panikkar 2018a, April 18, 1980 (Melchizedek) and April 27, 2004 (Christ). Of course, a *guru* is usually a real person, not a biblical character or, well, God. Thus, the issue of whether Panikkar was a *guru* should be considered unresolved.
- [8] A comparison between Abhishiktananda and Chaduc, on one hand, and Panikkar, on the other, raises the question of ascetism. The former were individuals of astonishing degree of ascetism, in contrast with Panikkar, who was not. While ascetism is not a requisite for mysticism, it is a trait that usually signals a certain interior condition. The question of the ascetism-mysticism relationship in Panikkar remains open to investigation.
- [9] Wittgenstein’s *dictum* reads: “*whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent*” (Wittgenstein 1923).
- [10] “*It is a terrible burden to live with the purpose of ‘being’ and not for an interest in ‘doing’ something. And part of the suffering comes from the fact that I have so many things to do that they put my ‘being’ in danger.*”
- [11] “*From an historical point of view [note: I am] an insignificant person who failed to seize his opportunities... from a mystical point of view [note: I am] a person with a vertiginously broad vision, with peace of mind, experience and joy; a person who lives in ‘corpus mysticum’ and operates in synergy with the universe.*”
- [12] “*Life lives in us without us being able to divert it, but only live it more intensely.*”
- [13] He believed that the acosmic monasticism was “*dead*” and replaced with the “*theandric call,*” that is “*monasticism, ascetism and solitude.*”
- [14] Panikkar labelled this condition in terms of *angoisse* (Fr. “anguish”).
- [15] Letter from Raimon Panikkar to Enrico Castelli, May 6, 1966, from Varanasi. The translation is my own.
- [16] “*It is hard to have mystical awareness (how else can I call it?) and live an ordinary life.*”
- [17] “[Note: I am not] *a hermit, despite the fact that my inner and interior life are so.*”

[18] He confessed that he was rich enough to be free from material preoccupation.

[19] The motivation of Panikkar's marriage is probably related to his solitude. See Panikkar 2018a, February 9, 1979. The English translation leaves out a word from the Italian original. To justify the marriage of priests, Panikkar proposed the example of the Zen married monks: see Panikkar 2018a, November 24, 1982. He also argued for a contemplative life that is active, too. See Panikkar 2018a, December 19, 1985. Later in his life, he admitted his marriage was a mistake. Panikkar 2018a, August 14, 2007. After reading Panikkar 2018a, one is left won-

dering whether the unusual combination of monk-priest-husband was the result of a brilliant intellectual effort of integration or a mere attempt to circumvent one's own weaknesses. For an alternative opinion, see Bielawski's intellectual biography of Panikkar. He believes that Panikkar got married for love. See Bielawski 2013, 261.

[20] The original sentence reads, "*a man without biography*", referring to Martin Heidegger.

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