



Raimon Panikkar at the age of 87
(Photo: Roland R. Ropers)

***„Raimon Panikkar is one of the giants
in the field of intrareligious dialogue“***

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Christophany & Christology

- The word „***Christophany***“ unlike ***christology*** suggests that the encounter with **Christ** cannot be reduced to a simple doctrinal or intellectual

approach. It stands for manifestation of Christ to humans and includes an experience of Christ and a critical reflection on it.

- **Christophany** cannot – or better must not – ignore or abolish traditional **christology** of the two previous millenia.
- Any growth requires both continuity and change.
- **Knowledge of Christ, gnôsis Christou** (Phil. 3:8), the knowledge which brings **eternal life** (John 17:3), cannot be a fragmented knowledge. Partial knowledge cannot bring salvation, realization.
- Any knowledge is fragmented, not only when the knowing subject has split his knowledge, reducing it to sensitive perception or to rational intelligibility, forgetting **the knowledge of the third eye**, as many traditions including the Christian one maintain (**oculus carnis, oculus mentis et oculus fidei**).
- Saving knowledge, **Christian gnosis** or **vedantic jnana**, is the holistic vision that assimilates the known and the knower. It is what scholastics have called **visio beatifica** when it has reached its fullness.
- Who is **Christ**? A supreme **pantocrator**? A divine western prophet? The private God of Christians? The universal saviour? A man like all the others?
- We know that every interpretation depends on the context and cultural approach of the person who elaborates on it. We know, moreover, that Christians believe that understanding of Christ is modelled on faith that illuminates the Christian intellect to grasp, as much as possible, the reality of Christ. We also know, however, that in every „revelation“, it is up to us, as limited historical beings, to understand the language of „**revealed words**“. „**Divine revelation**“ is received in the „**vessel**“ of our limited minds: **quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur** (whatever is received is received according to the modality of the receiver). The „**Divine revelation**“, therefore, becomes also human revelation.
- Perhaps the popular feeling today understands **Christ** as „**the son of man**“ more sympathetically, without being too conscious of the trinitarian profundity of the intuition that God has a human mother and man has a divine son.

- It is understandable that, starting from first traditional images of *christology*, other peoples of the world have seen *Christ* as an exotic figure, more or less attractive or, as a suspicious construction, associated with foreign conquerors and invaders, responsible for military operations that go from crusades to *reconquista*, from colonialism up to the Gulf war, and so on.
- *Christology* is not a chemically pure product of the mind, but it has a *Sitz im Leben* that affects interpretation of what Christianity tries to explain. Christology, briefly, with all its profundity and grandeur, is a western product bound to history of a culture. This is simply a fact, not a judgment of value.
- Long discussions in the history of Christian spirituality between „*la mystique du Christ et la mystique du Dieu*“ (Jules Monchanin, the founder of *Shantivanam*) are still tributes to a mentality that, in order to save a rigid monotheism, falls into a dualism that splits Christ into two.
- The existential situation of the world in this end of the century is quite serious. The world is suffering from a human and an ecological crisis of planetary proportions. 75% of its population live in subhuman conditions. Since 1945 wars have been killing more than 1.200 people a day; injustices are multiplying. Religious intolerance is still very much alive all over the planet as is the ongoing conflict among religions.
- The situation of the world is not only a question of justice and goodness, but also of truth and beauty.
- We cannot ignore today the present situation of interculturality, that is, the double fact that we are aware of the values of many a culture and of the specific osmosis with the dominant technoscientific culture of European origin. Encounters of cultures is inevitable.
- That there are Christians in the five continents is experienced today as a dilemma by Christians themselves, culturally marginalized from their own historic-cultural background.
- Either *christology* limits itself to being monocultural (even if it has a broad spectrum of subcultures), or it must renounce the right of universal citizenship that had been acknowledged by the colonial period.

- **Christology** has only been cultivated inside the cultural frame of the Western world. Despite its trinitarian soul, as a matter of fact, christology has not become detached from the monotheism inherited from the Abrahamic tradition.
- The great sage **Eihei Dogen**, who introduced **ZEN** into Japan, wrote in 1233 a short essay, the **Genjokan**. The first paragraph says **„Now, as all things are contemporaneously authentic things: then illusion and awakening exist, the practice of life exists, birth exists, death exists...“**
These words are sufficient to presume that neither Aristotelic logic, nor linear time, nor history, nor „objective reality“, nor body-soul difference, nor inert matter, nor individuality enter into the conception of reality underlying this text. Man is just one of six manifestations of living beings with consciousness; things are non-substantial, the creator God does not exist, etc..
- We are not interested in discussing whether these ideas are more or less true inside a worldview which makes them plausible. We simply ask ourselves which meaning traditional christology can have in such a cultural world.
- Although a Greek word, I use the name **christophany** to indicate a Christian reflection to be developed in the third millenium. **Christophany** does not claim to offer a universal paradigm. Neither does it say that historic Christianity should adopt this model.
- **Christophany** stands for manifestation of Christ to man and includes an experience of Christ and a critical reflection on it.
- The substitution of the word **christology** for **christophany** does not mean forgetting the **logos**, but overcoming the merely rational approach and a thematical poening to the action of the Spirit in the study of the figure of Christ. The **Son of Man** is not comprehensible nor real without the Spirit who gives him life.
- Two words help us to convey what we mean. The first is **phania**, i.e. manifestation, direct apparition (without intermediaries) to human consciousness that becomes aware of something, even if it is not comprehensible by

reason. The second word is *experience*, understood as the awareness of an immediate presence and so as the ultimate instance in any human activity.

- ***Christophany*** emphasizes also a more passive attitude, more feminine, in receiving the impact of Christ on the human spirit, in contrast with a more aggressive search of reason that aims for the intelligibility of rational evidence.
- ***Christophany***, as it is open to a dialogue and in search of an integration of the figure of Christ within a broader worldview, is not a discipline centred exclusively on a certain past event, but tends to be a wisdom on „***the way, the truth and life***“ (John 14:6; John 5:6).
- Every being is a ***christophany***, as I have been sustaining now for half a century. It is not a question of converting all the world to Christianity, but of recognizing that the nature itself of reality shows a non-dualistic polarity between the transcendent and the immanent in all manifestations.
- **Trinity is not monotheism (it would be docetism) and GOD is not a substance (it would be tritheism) or a mere universal concept (it would be atheism). Christ opens us to the trinitarian mystery.**
- Divinization of man has been a human theme since at least the beginning of historic consciousness. Even if our body should descend from other less developed animals and our soul should be the fruit of a bio-neurological evolution, the real concrete man is not however a species of an ***animal*** genre. The awareness of his possible divinization – his aspiration to the infinite – makes him essentially distinct. There is a spirit in man which allows him to enter into communion with the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).
- **The real divinization is full harmonization. Christ divinizes man. This divinization makes sense only accepting the Incarnation and the Trinity – because it is impossible and blasphemous in a strict monotheism.**

(Source: “Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity”, New Delhi 1999)