

Article

Panikkar on Mysticism as a Middle Way between Contemplation and Action

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Abstract: Panikkar's philosophy of mysticism is best understood as an attempt to overcome monistic and dualistic ways of thinking about the divine, human beings and the universe. Mysticism, for Panikkar, is irreducible to either monistic experiences of oneness without a second or to dualistic experiences where the divine is seen as wholly other. Rather, mysticism relates to holistic experiences of Reality and Life where the divine, the universe and human consciousness are seen as distinct yet constitutively interrelated. Mysticism has often been based on dualistic views of this life and the next, worldly existence and heavenly existence, the material and the spiritual, body and soul, and action and contemplation. These dualisms have led many to view mysticism as negating life and as an escape from this world and human activities. Panikkar's philosophy of mysticism, however, attempts to overcome these dualisms and restores the equilibrium between the diverse yet united aspects of Reality and the human condition. This article is divided into two parts. The first part introduces Panikkar's conception of mysticism as an anthropological dimension and as involving holistic experiences of Reality and Life. The second part examines Panikkar's notion of pure consciousness and his understanding of mystical experiences as being the result of various mediating factors.

Keywords: mysticism; mystical experience; pure consciousness; pure presence; socially engaged spirituality; Panikkar; constructivism; non-constructivism; perennialism; essentialism; contextualism; contemplation and action; nondualism



Citation: Vélez de Cea, Abraham. 2023. Panikkar on Mysticism as a Middle Way between Contemplation and Action. *Religions* 14: 1331. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101331>

Academic Editor: Cristobal Serran-Pagan Y Fuentes

Received: 31 August 2023
Revised: 7 October 2023
Accepted: 15 October 2023
Published: 23 October 2023



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1. Introduction

Raimon Panikkar (1918–2010) was a Catholic priest and pioneer of comparative theology, cross-cultural philosophy and interfaith dialogue. He devoted his life to advancing the cause of interreligious dialogue, understood not as conversations between experts or representatives of religious communities but rather as what he called “intrareligious dialogue”, an internal dialogue and spiritual practice for everyone that results from a profound encounter with the religious other (Panikkar 1999).

Panikkar's life can be considered a symbol of openness to religious diversity without falling into shallow eclecticism and without underplaying significant differences between beliefs and mystical experiences. Panikkar was the son of a Spanish Catholic mother and an Indian Hindu father. He earned a doctorate in Philosophy at the University of Madrid and became a Roman Catholic priest in 1946. He also earned a doctorate in Chemistry at the University of Madrid in 1958 and a doctorate in Theology at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome in 1961. Panikkar left Europe for India in 1954 to search for his Hindu identity after distancing himself from Opus Dei, an organization that he joined after the Spanish civil war in the 1940s. Except for a few travels to Italy and other countries, between 1954 and 1967, Panikkar lived a life of absolute simplicity in Varanasi, in two small rooms above the Shiva temple at Hanumanghat, near the Ganges River (Panikkar 2018). In 1966, he was invited to teach at Harvard University as a visiting professor. From 1971 to 1987, he resided in India and the USA, teaching comparative philosophy of religion during the

spring semester at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and spending the rest of the year in Varanasi. As a Catholic priest, he remained affiliated to the diocese of Varanasi until the end of his life. He returned to Spain in 1987 and decided to reside in the small town of Tavertet, north of Barcelona, close to the Pyrenees, until the end of his life at the age of 91. Part of his ashes were buried in Tavertet, according to the Catholic tradition, and the remainder of his ashes were scattered over the Ganges River, according to Hindu tradition (Bielawski 2018).

Panikkar claimed to be Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and secular at the same time, fully and without contradiction. In an interview that appeared in *The Christian Century*, he was asked how such a belonging to multiple religious could be possible. He answered the following about his Catholic–Hindu identity, although it can be extrapolated to his Buddhist and secular identity: “I was brought up in the Catholic religion by my Spanish mother, but I never stopped trying to be united with the tolerant and generous religion of my father and of my Hindu ancestors. This does not make me a cultural or religious ‘half-caste’, however. Christ was not half man and half God, but fully man and fully God. In the same way, I consider myself 100 percent Hindu and Indian, and 100 percent Catholic and Spanish. How is that possible? By living religion as an experience rather than as an ideology.” (*The Christian Century*, 16–23 August 2000, pp. 834–36).

Panikkar’s intrareligious dialogue with Hindu, Buddhist and secular traditions from within his Catholic tradition was arguably in harmony with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, which he experienced firsthand as a young Catholic theologian. Panikkar’s pluralism, however, goes beyond the inclusivist position of Vatican II, but it is certainly consistent with the document *Nostra Aetate* when it encourages Catholics to “recognize, preserve, and promote the good things, spiritual and moral” found among Hindus and Buddhists. Panikkar published more than thirty books, many of them reflecting his theological and philosophical dialogues with religious diversity and the secular world.

It is not a coincidence that Panikkar’s complete works begin with two volumes devoted to mysticism and spirituality. Panikkar himself acknowledges that mysticism is the most important theme of his life, the inspiration for all his writings and the hermeneutical key to understanding his thought (Panikkar 2014a, p. XIII). Panikkar’s insights on mysticism are not based on pure speculation but rather on his own experience of Reality and Life. Mysticism involves mystical experiences but, for Panikkar, these experiences are part of a comprehensive way of life in which knowledge, love and action are intertwined. In this sense, it can be said that, for Panikkar, mysticism is a middle way between contemplation and action.

Panikkar’s approach to mysticism is inseparable from the spiritual life, which is contemplative and active at the same time and without contradiction. Mysticism and spirituality may be distinguished but not separated. He understands both terms as overlapping to a great extent, but he is not fully satisfied with any of them due to the negative connotations they have acquired in modern times. The profound connection between mysticism and spirituality permits a distinction but never a separation between contemplation and action or between the contemplative life and the active life.

For Panikkar, human life relates to mysticism because “mysticism is not a specialists’ field but an anthropological dimension, something that belongs to human beings as such. Every person is a mystic—even if only potentiality so” (Panikkar 2014a, p. XIV). Thus, mysticism as a middle way between contemplation and action is for everybody because it has to do with “the human characteristic par excellence” (Panikkar 2014a, p. XIV).

Panikkar’s work in general and, more specifically, his writings on mysticism are best understood as an attempt to overcome monistic and dualistic ways of thinking about the divine, the human condition and the universe. Instead of seeing the divine and the world or the divine and human beings or the world and human beings, in monistic terms, as one and the same reality or, in dualistic terms, as two separate entities, Panikkar conceives them as constitutively interrelated.

Panikkar calls his relational vision of Reality “cosmotheandric”, from the Greek *kosmos* (Universe, World), *theos* (God, Divine) and *andros* (Human, Man). This cosmotheandric vision entails not only that everything in the universe is intrinsically interrelated to everything else but also that every being exhibits a threefold relationship with three aspects of Reality: matter or the spatiotemporal aspect (world), mind or the intelligible aspect (human) and spirit or the open-ended, non-finite, transcendent aspect (divine).

Panikkar’s philosophy of mysticism presupposes this cosmotheandric vision of Reality. Mysticism is irreducible to either monistic experiences of oneness without a second or to dualistic experiences where the divine is seen as wholly other. Rather, mysticism relates to holistic experiences of Reality and Life, that is, experiences of the divine, but understood as constitutively interrelated to the universe and humankind.

The cosmotheandric vision of mystical experiences does more justice to the lives and teachings of the great mystics. There are instances of mystics in many traditions who devoted their lives to improving their religious institutions, participated in missionary activities, opposed various forms of social injustice and promoted peace and reconciliation in their communities. The contemplative activism of so many mystics across traditions contradicts the stereotype about mysticism as being other-worldly and socially passive. For Panikkar, the mystical way of life is concerned not only with the cultivation of inner peace but also with the quest for social justice and ecological wellbeing.

The cosmotheandric vision of mysticism provides a robust foundation for a this-worldly, socially engaged spirituality. Mysticism is a middle way between contemplation and action, that is, it presupposes a comprehensive way of life that involves contemplation and action to advance social harmony, justice and freedom which, for Panikkar, are the three components of peace (Panikkar 1995, p. 64). Peace, for Panikkar, is irreducible to inner peace or contemplative peace. Similarly, peace for him is irreducible to external peace or political peace. Peace demands both social justice and inner peace. Social justice cannot be reduced to an external reality, just as peace cannot be confined to other-worldly mental states of calm and concentration. Contemplative practices to attain inner peace and the pursuit of social justice and political peace are two distinct yet inseparable elements of mysticism as the middle way between contemplation and action.

The relationship between mysticism and social transformation has received little attention from theologians, philosophers and scholars of religious studies (Ruffing 2001). This paucity of scholarly studies on mysticism and social action derives from modern constructions of religion. The modern privatization of religion and its emphasis on spiritual experiences have contributed to the perception of mysticism as having to do primarily with extraordinary, paranormal, supernatural and even pathological states of consciousness. Similarly, modern constructions of mysticism view it as a specialization within the spiritual life accessible primarily to an elite group of contemplatives, monastics, illuminati, priests or fulltime spiritual seekers.

Panikkar’s cosmotheandric vision of mysticism and mystical experiences remains virtually unknown among philosophers, theologians and religious scholars. There are at least two main reasons for this neglect. First, the depth and the complexity of Panikkar’s thought can be challenging and even overwhelming at times because he writes not as an analytical philosopher but rather as what Young-chan Ro calls an “intellectual mystic” (Ro 2018, p. 116). Second, Panikkar’s thought is influenced by several traditions, namely Roman Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist and secular traditions. Panikkar’s openness to religious diversity has allowed him to expand in creative ways his alma mater and arguably “primary” tradition, i.e., Catholic Christianity. Panikkar does not fit into the mold of a petrified conception of tradition and a narrow view of orthodoxy, what he calls “microdoxy”, but this should not serve as an excuse to ignore his work. Panikkar’s thought remains truly Catholic not only for his faithfulness to the Catholic tradition understood in a broad sense but also because it has been enriched by other traditions, which is nothing new for anyone familiar with the history of Christian theology. And yet, Panikkar’s insights on mysticism transcend restrictive sectarian labels and monocultural approaches to the philosophy of religion.

This article would like to contribute to a greater appreciation of Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision of mysticism and mystical experiences. Panikkar summarizes his ideas about mysticism in nine sūtras, literally "threads", aphorisms that invite us to ponder in a contemplative sense a variety of possible meanings. In this sense, "the sūtra does not 'mean' anything, but simply suggests" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 127). A sūtra is neither a thesis nor a synthesis of complex ideas but rather an insight that presupposes a simple way of thinking different from deduction, induction and analytical calculus.

Panikkar's sūtras on mysticism can be divided into two groups: those that relate to ontological questions and his vision of Reality (the first four) and those that focus on epistemological matters and his notion of pure consciousness (the next four). The last sūtra, the ninth, can be considered a summary of Panikkar's view of mystical experiences as a direct relation with the totality of the human condition. This article is divided into three parts that correspond to this division of sūtras. Although Panikkar's sūtras on mysticism are not intended to be guidelines for social action, I conclude each sūtra's description with a discussion of its implications for social and earthly involvement.

2. Mysticism as an Integral Experience of Reality

(1) The first sūtra states that "mysticism is the integral experience of Reality" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 128). By "integral experience", Panikkar means a holistic, complete and direct contact or "touch" with Reality. By "Reality", he means the three dimensions that constitute all beings: the spatiotemporal or cosmic dimension, the non-finite, spiritual or divine dimension and the intelligible or accessible-to-human-consciousness dimension. Panikkar prefers the term "Life" rather than "Reality" because "Life" connotes better the idea of an experience. However, in this first sūtra, he uses "Reality" rather than "Life".

Mysticism is not just an experience of our life or our reality but rather an experience of Life and Reality within us. Panikkar's first sūtra is intended to question interpretations of mysticism as experiences of a divine reality somewhat beyond this secular and temporal world. This a-cosmic or other-worldly view of mysticism is, for Panikkar, problematic because it does not do justice to many mystical traditions that speak about human beings at the crossroads between heaven and earth or the cosmic and divine dimension of Reality. Reducing mysticism to experiences of a supreme entity apart from the universe and utterly beyond human beings also fails to consider what many mystics state about the proximity of the divine or the presence of a divine dimension in all beings. For instance, if the divine is omnipresent, then it does not seem possible to define mysticism as having nothing to do with this world and the material, spatiotemporal dimension of reality. Likewise, if the divine is "*intimior intimo meo*" (nearer to me than I am to myself) as St. Augustine says, or "closer to us than the jugular vein" as the Qur'an suggests, it seems difficult to portray mysticism in terms of experiences of God understood as wholly other than the universe and human beings.

This first sūtra expands common understandings of mysticism in Abrahamic religions as "experience of God" or as "experiential knowledge of the Divine". This view, for Panikkar, is reductionistic unless one means by God in a broad sense as encompassing the whole of Reality. Mysticism is not about experiencing a supreme God beyond the universe or as wholly other than human beings. Rather, mysticism is about experiencing the whole of Reality in each being.

Panikkar understands the concept of the divine in a broad, inclusive and relational sense as constitutively interrelated to the cosmic and the human dimensions of Reality. That is why Panikkar objects to conceptions of mysticism that assume a supreme being on top of a pyramidal vision of the universe. There are religions and worldviews that do not conceive the divine as the vertex of a pyramid, and Panikkar does not want to exclude these traditions from mysticism. By expanding the scope of mysticism from experiences of God alone to integral experiences of Reality, Panikkar is also challenging hierarchical views of mystical experiences. For Panikkar, theistic mystical experiences are not considered superior to non-theistic experiences of nature or a cosmic consciousness.

Panikkar differs from other philosophers of mysticism who rank mystical experiences. For instance, Walter Stace considered introvertive mystical experiences as superior to extrovertive mystical experiences (Stace 1960). Likewise, R.C. Zaehner viewed theistic mystical experiences as more authentic than “panenhenic” (all-in-one) extrovertive experiences of nature and monistic introvertive experiences of a nonpersonal absolute (Zaehner 1957).

Mysticism tells us that there is a gate to complete Reality, that it is possible to experience Reality and Life as an integral whole, that we can perceive the fullness of Reality and Life in concrete things and in specific human activities. Thus, Panikkar introduces an intercultural perspective and an innovative approach to mystical experiences “which, by forcing mysticism to descend from the Olympus of the Gods to the land of Man, makes it impossible any longer to be considered a specialization accessible only to the few, becoming a constitutive element of the human being” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 129).

When Panikkar suggests that mysticism is an integral, holistic, complete experience of Reality and Life, he does not mean that mystics know all things in the universe in a quantitative sense. Rather, his point is that mystics experience all dimensions of Reality and Life in concrete things: “Have not some mystics said that they see God in all things and all things in God—leaving the question of what they meant by this ‘God’ unanswered?” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 131). Mystics experience Reality and Life in their entirety; they see the whole in every being, the entire universe in a single flower, even if they do not know all that there is to know about that flower.

Having a holistic, complete or integral experience of Reality and Life does not amount to having a 360-degree vision of all things in the universe. Mystics do not need to know literally all things or all the parts of a single thing to know the fullness of Reality and Life. Panikkar is talking about the fullness of Reality and Life in a qualitative sense. Panikkar explains this holistic experience as an experience of the *totum in parte*, the whole in something concrete, in a particular being or part of Reality. This integral experience of Reality and Life in concrete things is both transcendent and immanent. For Panikkar, transcendence and immanence are intertwined: one cannot have an experience of transcendence without having at the same time an experience of immanence. An experience of transcendence presupposes an experience of immanence and vice versa. This integral experience of transcendence and immanence may take place both internally and externally, vertically and horizontally, within us and across the universe.

The main implication of the first sūtra for social and earthly involvement is that mysticism relates to all aspects of Reality and Life including society and the world. Another implication is that mysticism is for all human beings and not just for a select few. Yet another implication is that mysticism should not be seen as an other-worldly pursuit of spiritual experiences by self-centered individuals in search of God or the divine.

(2) The second sūtra states that mystical “experience is the conscious touch of reality” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 135). Mystical experiences involve an immediate, direct contact or “touch” with the three dimensions of Reality and Life. In this “touch”, there is no separation between the toucher and the touched, the experiencer and the experienced. This, however, does not mean that the toucher and the touched are so united that they become identical. Rather, there is a mutual going-through or *com-penetration* between the subject and the object, between the person who experiences and the reality experienced. This “touch” is an experience of the intrinsic relationship between the poles of Reality and Life, an experience of the perichoresis and radical relativity of all beings in the universe. This relationship is constitutive, non-substantialist and a-dualistic, that is, it is a union or communion irreducible to either monolithic oneness (monism) or fragmented plurality (dualism).

Consciousness is what allows us to become aware of this “touch” with the constitutive relationships that unite the poles of Reality and Life. Human consciousness is another pole of Reality and Life, a pole in between the material or cosmic pole and the spiritual or divine pole. Each pole of Reality and Life is a mediation between the other two poles. Panikkar clarifies that by mediation he does not mean being an intermediary. A mediation,

in Panikkar's sense, presupposes a relational, non-substantialist ontology, that is, beings are constituted by mediations, i.e., by intrinsic relationships.

Human consciousness mediates between the divine and the cosmic poles, just as the divine pole mediates between the human and the cosmic poles and the cosmic pole mediates between the human and the divine poles. This basically means that Reality and Life are relational in the sense of being constituted by relationships. In other words, there are not discrete substances that, once constituted as real entities, relate extrinsically to other substances or already existing entities. Rather, we have non-substantial poles that are constituted as realities by their intrinsic relationships. If the poles or dimensions of Reality and Life were not constitutively relational or mediations, then mystical experience would not involve an immediate, direct "touch" of Reality and Life.

In mystical experiences, consciousness becomes aware of the spiritual or divine dimension but in a constitutive relationship with the material and the human dimensions. Human consciousness mediates between the divine and the cosmic dimensions, but this mediation does not render mystical experiences indirect because the three poles of Reality and Life are constitutively relational, i.e., they are mediations rather than intermediaries.

Mystical experiences are deeply personal because they affect the entire person and because they allow mystics to realize the constitutive relationships that unite the whole of Reality and Life. That is, mystical experiences are also personal because persons are knots in a net of relationships. In this sense, mystical experiences cannot be private or just individual experiences. Reality and Life are personal in the sense of being constitutively relational. We cannot divide Reality and Life by cutting off the relationships that constitute any of their dimensions. That is why mystical experiences are personal and have an impact in the entire universe. We are also members and co-authors of Reality. What we experience has cosmological repercussions: "If the mystical experience touches reality, it is natural that it should be sensitive to the touch; it is reality itself that manifests having been touched" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 140).

Mystical experiences "touch" on Reality at a single point. This "touch" opens us to the whole of Reality and Life, but it also allows us to discover our contingent and tangential nature, i.e., our limitations and finitude. We discover our contingency when we realize the meeting point between the finite and infinite aspects of Reality and Life. This realization of our contingency is humbling and that is why mystical experiences are often related to the virtue of humility before something much greater than ourselves.

Human consciousness mediates mystical experiences, but Reality and Life are irreducible to consciousness, even less to rational consciousness. There are other aspects of Reality and Life besides consciousness and the intelligible aspect of things. Mystical experiences enable consciousness to realize with a direct, immediate "touch" those aspects of Reality and Life that transcend the testimony of the senses and the intuition of the intellect. This realization is the vision the third eye, the spiritual eye, or the eye of faith which, for Panikkar, is an experience: "the unmediated vision of a reality that can be proven neither rationally or empirically but that is just as immediate as the experience of the senses or of the intellect" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 141).

Consciousness may be coextensive with Reality, but this does not mean that Reality and consciousness are identical. Panikkar criticizes Parmenides for conflating Being and Thinking, that is, Reality and Consciousness. For Panikkar, mystical experiences preclude any identification between consciousness and Reality, Thinking and Being, Reason and the Real. Mystics realize that Reality is irreducible to consciousness as well as that consciousness is irreducible to its rational aspect. Panikkar expresses this insight by saying that the logos does not exhausts the whole of Reality; there is also spirit and matter.

In other words, Reality and Life are irreducible to consciousness and the human condition, and neither consciousness nor the human condition are irreducible to the logos, reason or the intelligible aspect of Reality and Life. The human condition is to be suspended between heaven and earth, to be a mediator, not an intermediary, between the divine and the cosmic poles of Reality. Realizing this human role as a mediator with an immediate,

direct, conscious “touch” on Infinity at a contingent and tangential point of cosmotheandric Reality and Life is characteristic of mysticism.

The main implication of the second sūtra for social and earthly involvement is that all our actions matter and have an impact, even if it seems insignificant at first sight. What we think, say and do “touches” the heart of Reality, transforming the relationships that constitute it and creating new possibilities. We are co-authors of Reality and Life, and that is why we need to become aware of our global responsibility and the cosmological repercussions of our actions.

(3) The third sūtra states that “Reality is neither subjective nor objective: it is our mythos” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 142). Having established that Reality is irreducible to consciousness and consciousness to the intelligible aspect of beings (logos), Panikkar proceeds to explain the ultimate foundation of the logos, which he calls “mythos.” The term “mythos” primarily refers to our horizon of understanding and the assumptions that we take for granted. We need the encounter with people from other religions and cultures to become aware of our own cultural and religious “mythos”. Here, however, “mythos” has a deeper ontological connotation and refers to the aspect of Reality that eludes the logos and serves as its foundation. Mythos denotes our fundamental presupposition, “the substrate on which we rest to say anything” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 146).

For Panikkar, mythos has to do with silence and the spiritual or divine dimension of Reality, whereas logos relates to words and the human dimension. Every word is a word within a mythos, which is its horizon and ultimate foundation. When we ask with the logos about Reality, we presuppose Reality in the shaping of the question, and that presupposition is the mythos. The mythos gives meaning and allows for the questions of the logos.

For Panikkar, the concepts of “mythos” and “logos” are complementary and inseparable from each other: “there is no logos without mythos and no mythos without logos” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 143). Mythos and logos need to be in harmony in an a-dualistic consciousness without reducing them to monolithic unity (monism) or to fragmented plurality (dualism). This insight about “mythos” and “logos” can be extrapolated to the divine and the human dimensions, to the spirit and reason. They are constitutively interrelated; they are distinct yet inseparable; they are neither one nor two.

Saying that Reality is our mythos means that Reality cannot be fully objectified by the logos or the rational aspect of consciousness. This, however, does not entail that Reality is irrational and purely subjective. The divine dimension is an open-ended, non-finite, truly free aspect of Reality that eludes the “logos”, that is, concepts and language cannot put Reality into a rational box once and for all. Reason and language may grasp the intelligible aspect of Reality but not all its aspects. Suggesting that Reality is a mythos that transcends the logos is compatible with attempts to rationally understand and describe Reality: the logos “does not give up and urges on to say something on the mythos itself” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 146).

Panikkar’s philosophy of mysticism is not free from paradoxical language when he speaks about silence and attempts to discuss the ineffable “mythos”. In this regard, Panikkar respectfully disagrees with Wittgenstein:

“With all due respect to Wittgenstein, I would venture to say the exact opposite of his much-quoted phrase, although not the opposite of what the Austrian philosopher meant in the context. I think, then, that what cannot be talked about is what is actually worth expressing in words. The rest can be reduced to ‘linguistic analysis,’ and true philosophy knows that the wisdom of love is what really counts. All else is rational deduction. Mysticism is Silence, and the mystic is one who makes it speak”. (Panikkar 2014a, p. 21)

To attain the consciousness in which mythos and logos can coexist a-dualistically in harmony, we need participatory knowledge. Participatory knowledge is neither purely subjective nor totally objective. Participatory knowledge is relational in the sense of being inseparable from the subject. This participatory knowledge becomes conscious of the

constitutive relationship between all aspects of Reality. Panikkar calls this participative knowledge “participative consciousness”. Another term for this participative consciousness is love.

A participatory knowledge is a knowledge filled with love. Participative consciousness is characteristic of mysticism; it is a consciousness with loving knowledge or knowledge-filled love. For Panikkar, one of the functions of mysticism is precisely to restore the connection between knowledge and love. What this loving knowledge experiences is the *totum in parte*, the whole of Reality in concrete things. This participative consciousness of the whole is not an analytical and rational vision of all things and all their parts, even less a knowledge of something abstract. Rather, mystical consciousness knows concrete things as expressions of the whole. In Panikkar’s words, “By affirming that reality becomes manifest to us in the form of a mythos, we are saying that the mystical experience sees the concrete that incarnates the universal as a real epiphany of the Whole” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 146).

The main implication of the third sūtra for social and earthly involvement is that we should act with more intellectual humility without assuming that reason, scientific knowledge or our way of thinking is the absolute or the exclusive source of knowledge. There is also participatory knowledge, which is the type of knowledge that allows us to access the mythos of other cultures and religions, a knowledge that requires love. If Reality cannot be fully objectified, and if Reality is something more than just subjective thoughts and emotions of different groups of people, then we should dialogue with each other with humble openness, without assuming that we were in possession of absolute truth or as if others had nothing relevant to contribute to the expansion or refinement of our horizon of understanding.

(4) The fourth sūtra further clarifies what Panikkar means by “mythos” in the context of mysticism: “The mythos is the ultimate horizon of presence, the first step of consciousness” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 146). Panikkar compares the mythos to a picture frame in which the logos places everything we are conscious of. The mythos is also compared to the obscurity that allows the light of the logos to shine and illuminate things. In this sense, the mythos functions as the ultimate foundation for the logos. The logos may demythologize a particular story, worldview, belief or assumption but this does not entail the disappearance of the mythos. Rather, the demythologization of something implies the arising of a new mythologization that the logos accepts without realizing it. There is never a way of thinking without a horizon of understanding, a logos without its corresponding mythos.

Consciousness is the place where something becomes present to us. There is a presence to our consciousness of what is intelligible (logos), but there is also a presence that is not directly intelligible (mythos): “We are conscious that something is present in our spirit and that it does not require interpretation; it is not intelligible to us” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 150). This is the presence of the mythos. We accept the mythos as a given, without discussion. The presence of the mythos does not demand intelligibility; it simply requires that we become aware of its presence. This is an awareness of a presence as presence.

The mythos does not interpret; it believes in what presents it. The mythos is the horizon against which such presence becomes conscious for us. The mythos is the ultimate horizon of a presence that cannot be reduced to mere intelligibility. The field of consciousness is broader than the field of rational consciousness.

Strictly speaking, we cannot understand the mythos; we can only accept it and lean on it in a pre-reflective way, that is, taking it for granted, presupposing it. We accept the mythos with a movement of the spirit that goes deeper than pure rationality. This movement of the spirit involves an element of trust that allows us to be conscious of a presence irreducible to rational knowledge yet not opposed to reason. Mysticism, for Panikkar, relates to the irruption of this presence in our field of consciousness. This presence of the mythos is not irrational, “but its boundaries lie beyond strict rationality” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 151).

The main implication of the fourth sūtra for social and earthly involvement is that we need to acknowledge the mythos underlying our logos so that we do not impose them upon others as if they were absolute truth. Social justice issues require dialogue and collaborative

efforts between persons often with distinct assumptions, concerns and ways of thinking. We may not find their beliefs and practices intelligible, but we can still cooperate with them to forge a shared mythos through dialogical dialogue.

3. The Role of Pure Consciousness in Panikkar's Mysticism

Whereas the first four sūtras discuss Panikkar's interpretation of mysticism as a holistic experience of Reality and Life or an immediate and direct "touch" with the three dimensions of Reality and Life through a participative consciousness irreducible to the presence of the logos and rational consciousness, the next four sūtras focus primarily on the notion of pure consciousness and the epistemology of mystical experiences. This section examines the next four sūtras.

(5) The fifth sūtra affirms that "Consciousness is consciousness of things, of itself, of abstractions or pure consciousness" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 152). For Panikkar, the question of whether there is a pure consciousness is fundamental in giving an account of mysticism. There are three main classes of consciousness: (1) knowledge of things and their relations, (2) knowledge of ourselves and (3) knowledge of our own knowledge. For Panikkar, however, mysticism demonstrates the existence of another type of consciousness. Unlike Husserl and Brentano, Panikkar does not think that all consciousness is intentional, that is, consciousness *of* some object. There is also a pure consciousness or consciousness that is a pure presence, a pure experience devoid of specific content. If we press on the idea of consciousness as necessarily being consciousness of some object, Panikkar responds that pure consciousness is a consciousness of nothing, not even of itself. This "nothing", however, is not an object like others, and that is why some mystical traditions prefer to speak about an objectless consciousness. Mysticism relates to this type of pure consciousness that is realized as pure presence: "For many, mysticism consists exactly of this pure experience" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 153). Panikkar, however, does not claim that all mystical experiences are experiences of a pure consciousness or pure presence devoid of specific content. What Panikkar contends is that mystical experiences somehow presuppose a pure consciousness or pure presence.

Panikkar acknowledges that speaking about this pure consciousness is paradoxical because we are conscious of it only after it has passed, that is, we "know" about this pure presence when it is already absent. Experiences of pure consciousness are ineffable and can only be spoken about in the past. Panikkar relates this insight to the biblical image of knowing God from behind.

Mystics remember their experience of pure consciousness and then begin to speak about it. This means that accounts of pure consciousness are always based on a recollection, a memory that is interpreted and expressed linguistically through the logos. But a logical or linguistic explanation of pure consciousness is no longer the experience of a pure presence. There is no contradiction because human consciousness is more than rational consciousness and human beings are more than logos. It is the spirit that allows us to become conscious of the ineffable. We cannot fully describe and understand the ineffable through the logos, but we can still be aware of it and say something about it (Panikkar 2014a, p. 157).

This ineffable pure presence devoid of specific content is pure experience or pure consciousness. It is an "ecstatic" experience in the sense that it does not turn back on itself. This pure presence is not an unconscious rapture beyond all types of knowledge and awareness. Mystical experiences involve three distinct yet interrelated types of knowledge, i.e., sensory, intellectual and spiritual. There is also spiritual knowledge and a component of consciousness that transcends rational and sensory consciousness. This spiritual component of consciousness is at least latently present in all types of knowledge. In this sense, for Panikkar, "something in all knowledge is mystical" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 155).

The recognition of pure consciousness, however, is not the mystical experience itself but its translation into the rational consciousness. The mystic recalls having had an empty consciousness by way of an experience that cannot be explained by the experience of the

rational consciousness. This leads mystics to emphasize the idea of ineffability when they attempt to describe their recollection of a pure consciousness.

For Panikkar, however, the experience of pure consciousness or pure presence is not something that exists exclusively in the past. Pure consciousness is somewhat present in all acts of consciousness: “The challenge of mystical experience is to state that there is a component of consciousness that transcends reason and that is present, albeit too often latently, in every act of consciousness” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 157).

Panikkar’s notion of “pure consciousness” has nothing to do with an absolute reality underlying introvertive mystical experiences. Likewise, Panikkar’s “pure consciousness” is not a transcendent “noumena” or “thing in itself” beyond the diversity of mystical experiences. Panikkar explicitly dismisses the concept of “noumena” and what he calls “crypto-Kantianism” for not doing justice to the claims of religions and mystical traditions. For Panikkar, mystical traditions do experience Reality in a direct and immediate way, although always at a particular point and through various factors that both mediate and modify that Reality. However, there are also aspects of Reality and mystical experiences that are not mediated and constructed by our language, concepts and doctrines.

In other words, Panikkar’s notion of “pure consciousness” does not entail essentialism or perennialism. Panikkar explicitly affirms that mystical experiences are “unique each time, and foreign to repetition” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 15). This, however, does not mean that Panikkar is a particularist or an extreme contextualist. He accepts the existence of human, linguistic and cultural invariants as well as what he calls “homeomorphic” or functional equivalents, which permit communication and comparisons across different traditions.

For Panikkar, mystical experiences are also different because they presuppose ultimately incommensurable doctrinal systems. Panikkar’s pluralism, which is not a theology or philosophy of religions but rather a dialogical and humble attitude toward religious diversity, begins precisely when we realize that religions and worldviews cannot be reconciled. In this sense, for Panikkar, a pluralist system that somewhat reconciles all religious traditions is a contradiction in terms.

Panikkar is closer to constructivism and contextualism than essentialism and perennialism. As Beverly J. Lanzetta explains, Panikkar’s perspective “differs from that of perennialists in one significant respect: he views the multiple manifestations of religious expressions as *constitutive* of Reality and hence *internal* to the interreligious task, and *not* as relative stages along the way to an overarching Tradition or Oneness” (Lanzetta 1996, p. 92).

Not being a perennialist, however, does not mean that Panikkar must be then a constructivist. Considering Panikkar a constructivist would be misleading because he speaks about a “pure consciousness” or a “pure experience” inherent in each of the factors that mediate mystical experiences. In fact, Panikkar would object to the main epistemological assumption of constructivism as illustrated by one of their main representatives, Steven T. Katz: “There are NO pure (i.e., unmediated) experiences” (Katz 1978, p. 26). Yet accepting a “pure consciousness” or “pure experience” does not mean that Panikkar would endorse “neoperennialism” either (Forman 1990; Rose 2016).

As Richard H. Jones has shown, rejecting essentialism and perennialism does not entail that one must agree with constructivism or that one must fail to pay careful attention to the context of mystical authors. Similarly, accepting non-constructivist claims like a “pure consciousness” does make someone an essentialist about mystical experiences (Jones 2020, p. 3). Panikkar’s philosophy of mysticism deserves to be understood in its own terms without being forced to fit into dichotomies that do not apply to his cosmothenadric view of mystical experiences.

Panikkar proposes his cosmotheandric vision not as a closed system or a universal metanarrative but rather as an “open horizon” and a “hypothesis” that “allows and even calls for differing interpretations” (Panikkar 1993, p. 15). A cosmotheandric view of mysticism, therefore, should not be conflated with a universal metatheory of all mystical experiences or a universal framework that assumes a mystical common denominator or one

and the same experience across mystical traditions. Panikkar rejects both essentialism and perennialism. That is, he does not claim that there is one mystical experience common to all traditions (essentialism) or a universal set of esoteric doctrines underlying the teachings of all mystical traditions (perennialism).

The fifth sūtra can be related to what Panikkar calls “cultural disarmament”, which refers to the need to overcome the violent uses of reason. For Panikkar, the ultimate root of the violent uses of reason is what he calls the “*principle of Parmenides*”, which is the main dogma of Western culture. The principle of Parmenides assumes that Reality and thinking consciousness are identical. For Panikkar, however, Reality is irreducible to thinking consciousness. It is precisely because there are aspects of Reality that transcend the scope of thinking consciousness that there is room for diverse and even conflicting doctrinal standpoints. It is precisely because the scope of thinking consciousness is limited that no culture, religion, ideology or philosophical system can claim exhaustive knowledge, wisdom or truth. By challenging absolutism, Panikkar is not advocating relativism. Rather, Panikkar’s expanded notion of consciousness presupposes the radical relativity and the contingent nature of cultures, religions and traditions. Panikkar’s notion of cultural disarmament is best understood as a middle way to peace that avoids the two extremes of cultural absolutism and cultural relativism.

(6) The sixth sūtra further clarifies the nature of the pure presence or pure consciousness found at the beginning or at the source of mystical experiences: “Pure consciousness is the experience of a love-filled presence” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 157). The experience of pure consciousness and its recollection by rational consciousness do not lead mystics to passivity and isolation from the rest of the world and society. The pure presence or pure consciousness experienced by mystics is filled with love. It is this love-filled presence that does not allow pure consciousness to collapse on itself or to revert to itself. Love is a centrifugal force that directs consciousness towards the whole of Reality.

Panikkar begins this sixth sūtra by reiterating that mystical experiences are not complete if they do not encompass the whole of Reality and Life. Mystical knowledge too would be incomplete without incorporating love and without encouraging mystics to act. Mystical experiences “touch” Reality and Life through both knowledge and love. This loving knowledge or loving wisdom characteristic of mysticism is inseparable from action: “There is no mysticism without knowledge, just as there is no mysticism without love, which in turn does not exist without action” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 161). In other words, for Panikkar, mysticism involves both loving contemplation and loving action; both are distinct yet inseparable aspects of mystical experiences and the life of mystics.

In *An Introduction to the Study of Mysticism*, Richard H. Jones contends that “mysticism is more encompassing than simply having mystical experiences” and that “mysticism involves comprehensive ways of life” (Jones 2021, p. 5). This understanding of mysticism is also best understood as a way of life irreducible to peak experiences and altered states of consciousness. Mysticism is a comprehensive way of life with cognitive, affective and active aspects.

Panikkar compares the knowledge, love and action characteristic of mysticism to the Hindu paths of *jñāna*, *bhakti* and *karman*. Just as these three paths constitute a single spiritual journey, knowledge, love and action constitute an encompassing way of life irreducible to mystical experiences. Panikkar also compares the relationship between knowledge, love and action to Martha and Mary, which are symbols for a Christian way of life that integrates action (good works) and contemplation (prayer, devotion). We can infer from these comparisons that, for Panikkar, mysticism is a comprehensive way of life that integrates knowledge, love and action or contemplation and action.

The profound connection between knowledge, love and action in mysticism is rooted in a dual dynamism found in all human beings. These dynamisms are not two separate tendencies but rather two directions of the same motion. The dynamism of love is a centrifugal force that projects outward towards Beauty, which attracts us radiating from

without. The dynamism of knowledge is a centripetal force that pushes inward towards truth, which draws us from within.

For Panikkar, it is necessary to harmonize these two dynamisms. Mystical wisdom is precisely that harmony between the attraction of Beauty and the aspiration toward truth. At the center of this dual dynamism is Goodness. This centrality of Goodness underscores the importance of moral action in the mystical way of life. The dual dynamism of knowledge toward truth and of love towards Beauty are deeply connected to Goodness, and the pursuit of Goodness demands moral action.

Thus, mysticism as a way of life involves not only a harmonious integration of knowledge, love and action but also a harmonious integration of anthropological dynamisms towards truth, Beauty and Goodness. Panikkar calls “perfect consciousness” the “consciousness of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness without possible separation” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 163). The experience of a love-filled presence or pure consciousness manifests in the perfect consciousness of mystics. To facilitate the manifestation of this perfect consciousness in their lives, mystics must experience first the love-filled presence of pure consciousness. To experience this pure loving presence, consciousness must be devoid of all other content (images, concepts, mental fabrications) and emptied of every desire (longings, selfish tendencies, attachments).

Mystical experiences have a loving and an intellectual dimension. The loving dimension saves us from solipsism and excessive introversion, whereas the intellectual dimension saves us from credulity, sentimentalism and excessive extroversion. In Panikkar’s words: “The mystical experience holds the balance between introversion and extroversion. The mystic is neither an activist nor an ‘intimist’. Martha and Mary, in Christian terms, are the two parts of the ‘necessary One’. Or, as St. Teresa of Avila says, with feminine elegance, in her *Moradas*, ‘Martha and Mary must remain united to play host to the Lord’” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 164).

When Panikkar speaks about pure consciousness as an experience of a love-filled presence, he is not necessarily referring to a theistic conception of the divine, even less reducing mysticism to introvertive experiences of a loving God. Panikkar admits that non-theistic mystics are also “touched” by that love-filled presence; they “may be able to ‘feel’ with even more intensity ‘this’ presence, but they do not project it onto another being” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 165).

Panikkar suggests that the experience of this love-filled presence entails a discovery of the person, the discovery of the “you”. This experience of the person or the “you” presupposes a relational view of Reality and Life. The person is a knot in a net of relationships, and the discovery of the “you” entails an experience of the relationships that constitute us. This experience expands our sense of identity and dissolves the individualistic ego. The relational experience of the person and the “you” is cosmotheandric. This means that the discovery of the person or the “you” does not refer to just an encounter with a divine reality nor just with our human neighbors nor simply with the cosmos.

Panikkar clarifies that the “you” is neither “another” nor the “I”. The “you” is a-dualistically related to myself, that is, it is neither the same as me nor different from me. The experience of the whole of Reality as a personal “you” entails a new sense of identity beyond the individualistic ego, an expanded “Self” that encompasses the three dimensions of Reality. Thus, for Panikkar, the experience of a love-filled presence is inseparable from the cosmotheandric vision of Reality and Life.

It is unclear whether Panikkar would consider experiences of a love-filled presence and the cosmotheandric experience two different types of mystical experience or rather two aspects of the “same” mystical experience. If we adopt the first interpretation, then Panikkar’s two experiences would correlate with the distinction between introvertive and extrovertive mystical experiences. However, the second interpretation seems to do more justice to Panikkar’s thought. That is, rather than speaking about two different types of mystical experience, I prefer to understand the experience of pure consciousness and the cosmotheandric experience in a-dualistic terms as two distinct yet inseparable aspects of

mysticism or the mystical way of life. Panikkar's relational and a-dualistic vision of Reality does not seem to allow for a sharp distinction between two separate experiences. Even if we accepted that Panikkar is referring to two different types of mystical experience, it would be necessary to emphasize their constitutive relationship and inseparability.

The main implication of the sixth sūtra for social and earthly involvement is that they should be accompanied by the simultaneous cultivation of knowledge, love and action, that is, by the development of both Martha and Mary understood as symbols for an a-dualistic middle way between action and contemplation.

(7) The seventh sūtra states that "What we call experience is the result of multiple factors" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 167). To summarize the six factors that mediate mystical experiences (E), Panikkar proposes the following formula: $E = e.l.m.i.r.a.$, where "e" stands for pure consciousness, which is ineffable and accessible only through the mediations of language (l), memory (m), interpretation (i), reception (r) and actualization (a). In a previous work, Panikkar simplifies the formula and speaks about four factors: $E = e.m.i.r.$ (Panikkar 2014b, p. 15; 2001, p. 45). Here, we discuss the expanded version of the formula, which is the one that appears on his latest monograph on mysticism (Panikkar 2005, p. 131; 2014a, p. 167).

Panikkar explains that these six factors are experienced as mediations, not as intermediaries. This means that the factors are intrinsically or constitutively interrelated, i.e., mystical experiences would not exist without these factors, which can be distinguished but not separated. This also means that, for Panikkar, each mystical experience is unique and, strictly speaking, incomparable. There is not a neutral vantage point outside mystical traditions that allows us to compare them. We always speak and interpret things from our limited and contingent window into Reality.

The concepts of "e" and "E" should be clearly distinguished to avoid possible misunderstandings of Panikkar's philosophy of mysticism. Strictly speaking, "e" is ineffable, although mystics talk about it all the time. Panikkar's claim is that "e" is an immediate, ineffable experience at the source or at the beginning of specific accounts of mystical experiences (E). For Panikkar, "e" is not the same thing as the Kantian concept of "noumena" nor something we know through rational induction or deduction. Rather, "e" is an experience of pure consciousness. This pure consciousness is remembered and subsequently expressed, interpreted, received and actualized by mystics, giving rise to different accounts of mystical experiences (Es).

Panikkar compares "e" to light, which is invisible but allows us to see things. This comparison would suggest that "e" exists not only in the past but also in the present. Without "e", there would not be "E" or a particular account of mystical experience. Pure consciousness is not conscious even of itself; it is pure silence, pure nothingness, pure emptiness, devoid of content, ineffable and immediate. Whatever we try to say about "e" is already something mediated by language, culture and religion. Panikkar calls e' this mediation of "e". The intentionality of e' is "e", but e' is not the ineffable and unmediated "e". We can only know "e" through its mediations. Language is the primary mediation.

Panikkar explains that "e" is a pure presence inherent in each of the factors that is discovered as the dimension of the infinite (divine) present in every being (Panikkar 2014a, p. 170). We cannot give "e" any content without infecting it with our mediations, which have no reason to be universal.

Speaking about a pure consciousness or pure presence inherent in each of the factors that constitute mystical experiences should not be mistaken with presupposing a common denominator or the same Reality experienced by all mystical traditions. For Panikkar, mystical experiences are truly different. We cannot affirm that mystical experiences are the same in all cases or that they differ across cultures and religions because the constitutive factors of "e" do not render the experience impure but, rather, real. We cannot isolate this "e" in and of itself; we cannot purge it from its constitutive factors. Whenever we state that mystical experiences are the same or different across religions and cultures, we are

not speaking about “e” but about “e’”, which is always seen from the perspective of a particular E.

Panikkar advocates neither essentialism nor perennialism. Each mystical experience “is one experience, not in the sense that it is the same one, but in the sense that it is unique in every case, and uniqueness is not comparable” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 172). The path by which we arrive at “e” already modifies it. Given that “e” is inseparable from the other factors that give rise to accounts of mystical experiences, “E” is unique in each case. In this sense, for Panikkar, “there is no sense in discussing whether mystical experience is the same or different within the various mysticisms” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 172).

Panikkar goes as far as to reject what he calls “crypto-Kantianism,” which conceives “e” as a noumenon beyond the diverse mystical traditions, a transcendent Real or thing in itself that is never known in a direct and immediate way. For Panikkar, such “crypto-Kantianism” does not do justice to the insights of mystical traditions. Mystics experience Reality holistically, and this involves a direct, immediate touch on Reality. The concept of noumena is rejected by Panikkar because it entails that Reality is never touched or known in a direct and immediate way by mystics. However, Panikkar accepts that we can never refer to “e” without mediations. This means that when we discuss “e” it is already interpreted and understood according to certain categories of mystical traditions.

For Panikkar, “e” is not a common denominator either: “Our Es are different and do not have a common denominator because e has not and cannot have any qualification” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 174). The “content” of pure consciousness is not something, yet it is not nothing in the literal sense of being the opposite of being, i.e., non-being. The nothingness or the emptiness or the lack of content of “e” should be properly understood: it is neither “is” nor “is not”, neither being nor non-being.

When Panikkar speaks about “e” in terms of nothingness or emptiness without any qualification, he is not endorsing a Buddhist view of mystical experiences. Panikkar distinguishes between experiences of vacuity (*śūnyatā*) or the nothingness of things and experiences of being. For Panikkar, these experiences are different; both are primordial and irreducible to each other. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to claim that Panikkar subordinates experiences of being to experiences of emptiness: “The experience of Being is not subordinate to the experience of the nothingness of things. They are two parallel paths that meet in infinity (in the mystical experience) because previously they had their beginnings in the abyss (bottomless, infinite) of (human) contingency” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 174).

Mystical experiences are unique not only because “e” can only be discussed through various mediating factors but also because the mystical languages and the doctrines that they presuppose are incommensurable. Language is inseparable from the mystical experience (E): “Language actually configures our experience itself” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 177). Language is not the same thing as our experience, but language conceals and reveals what we experience. In this sense, mystical language is “a continuous process of self-disqualification: *neti, neti* (that is not it, that is not it)” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 178).

For Panikkar, mystical language is apophatic even when it appears to be cataphatic. The language that expresses mystical experiences is the symbol. Symbols require participatory knowledge to be understood, i.e., experienced. In this sense, symbolic knowledge is different from rational knowledge. Understanding the concepts used by mystics is not the same thing as participating in the symbols of a mystical language.

Another factor that mediates mystical experiences is memory (m). Memory allows us to relive the experience, to become conscious of it. This act of remembering entails a reflection. By remembering and reflecting on the mystical experience, memory modifies it. Memory also relativizes our mystical experience by introducing the factor of time. Once we remember and reflect upon a mystical experience, we cannot help but to interpret it. Interpretation (i) is another factor that mediates mystical experiences. Interpretations also modify mystical experiences.

Panikkar differentiates between the interpretation we make once something appears in our consciousness and a second interpretation that he calls reception (r). The reception of a mystical experience refers to the cultural framework in which interpretations take place. Cultural contexts and their conceptual frameworks also modify mystical experiences.

Once a mystical experience is interpreted through the lenses of specific individuals (i) and the cultural framework of those individuals (r), there is yet another mediating factor that Panikkar calls actualization (a). This actualization of mystical experiences refers to “the existential factor of every experience: its active translation, its expression in life, its power to transform, its manifestation in practice” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 183).

Another term for this existential actualization or expression of mystical experiences in the life of mystics is “action”. Mystical experiences change our lives, our existence and our actions. For Panikkar, this existential impact and transformation enabled by mystical experiences comprise the test of their authenticity. Unless mystical experiences transform our actions and our lives, we cannot speak about genuine mystical experiences.

By considering the existential expression of mystical experiences one of their mediating factors, Panikkar is highlighting the inseparability between mysticism and action or between action and contemplation. Panikkar is not simply acknowledging that mystical experiences have existential repercussions in the lives of individuals. Panikkar is claiming that mysticism and mystical experiences necessarily involve an active component: “if human experience is not manifested in action (life, activity, change. . .) that is to say, if a [actualization] is zero, then there is no experience (E)” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 185).

Panikkar explains that the existential or active side of mystical experiences relates to love. The love-filled presence experienced by mystics is expressed in all aspects of their lives. Panikkar explains this active side of mystical experiences in Christian terms by suggesting that mysticism involves repentance (*metanoia*) and good deeds. Panikkar quotes St. James: “Faith, if good deeds do not go with it, is quite dead.” Panikkar relates mysticism to faith understood as inseparable from loving wisdom and loving action. Neither faith nor mysticism have to do with passivity and denying the world or society.

This view of mysticism entails that it cannot be reduced to isolated mystical experiences apart from the lives of mystics. Mysticism entails a comprehensive way of life and that is why the active side of mystical experiences should not be separated from it. Instead of viewing mysticism as a comprehensive way of life in which knowledge, love and action are intertwined, modern constructions of mysticism tend to view it as socially passive, other-worldly and as having to do primarily with peak experiences and altered states of consciousness.

Panikkar’s understanding of mystical experiences is incompatible with such a view of mysticism. Mystical experiences cannot be a-cosmic and asocial not only because they are cosmothendric and presuppose a way of life in which knowledge, love and action are intertwined but also because they have an existential or active component.

The main implication of the seventh sūtra for social and earthly involvement is that we need to consider the multiple factors that mediate any social justice issue. Without critically analyzing the multiple factors that cause and condition a social justice issue, we probably fail to address it properly, thus generating subsequent problems that complicate matters further. No two social justice issues are alike and that is why it is necessary to pay close attention to the particulars and the existential component of each situation.

(8) The eighth sūtra explains that mystical experiences involve a holistic type of knowledge that is irreducible to the knowledge of a special faculty, eye or sense: “we are aware of a threefold experience: sensory, intelligible, and spiritual” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 186). Mystical experiences are holistic not only because they experience the whole of Reality and Life but also because they require cooperation of the senses, the mind and the spirit.

Panikkar compares this threefold experience to three doors or windows that open us to both the inner and the outer world. Human beings encounter the three dimensions of Reality and Life inside and outside themselves. This means that human beings are an

image of Reality, just as Reality is an image of human beings: “each of us is a microcosm that mirrors and impacts the macrocosm of reality as a whole” (Panikkar 2014a, p. V).

Panikkar also compares the three senses to the stages of the spiritual path: the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive. The purgative path corresponds to the body and calls for the submission of the senses; the illuminative path correlates with the soul and demands the illumination of the mind; and the unitive path is associated with the spirit, which seeks an a-dualistic union or communion with the fullness of Reality and Life. For Panikkar, mysticism has lost its anthropological foundation due to modern mind–body dualism. This dualistic way of thinking about human beings has led to the reduction of mysticism to peak experiences along the illuminative path. However, mysticism cannot be reduced to mere “illuminated” knowledge because mysticism presupposes a holistic approach to the spiritual life in which *jñāna* (wisdom), *bhakti* (love) and *karman* (action) are simultaneously cultivated.

Mystical experiences cannot be reduced to suprarational insights attained only through the third eye or eye of the spirit. Panikkar makes it clear that the mystical contact or “touch” with Reality “is not mediated by any special faculty of ours” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 139). The three eyes or senses are inseparable and necessary to have a holistic vision of Reality: “The three senses are inseparable, in that if separated they give us a distorted vision of reality” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 188). The three eyes are distinct and irreducible to each other: “sensory knowledge is neither mental (intellectual) nor spiritual, and the latter two are also distinct” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 187). A complete vision of Reality would be incomplete without the spiritual eye, just as it would be incomplete without the eye of the senses and the mental eye.

Panikkar explains that the key to understanding the relationship between the three eyes and the three dimensions of Reality and Life is the Trinitarian experience. This means that the three eyes as well as the three dimensions of Reality and Life are “related to one another, as in the Trinitarian perichoresis” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 191). Just as the three persons of the Trinity are distinct yet constitutively interrelated, the three eyes and the three dimensions of Reality and Life are distinct yet constitutively interrelated; they are neither one and the same reality (monism) nor separate realities (dualism). Similarly, just as it is not possible to claim that one person of the Trinity is superior or subordinate to others, it is not possible to claim that one eye or dimension of Reality and Life is superior or subordinate to others. In Panikkar’s words: “In reality there is nothing that prevails. The senses do not dominate Man, as materialists claim; nor does the mind dominate sensuality, as Plato would have it; nor indeed does the eye of faith dominate the eye of the intellect, as a certain medieval Christian school would wish. A natural harmony exists among these three faculties, organs, or dimensions of reality” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 189).

By comparing the three eyes and the three dimensions of Reality and Life to the Trinity, Panikkar is not suggesting that mystical experiences relate to different aspects of the Christian Trinity. Panikkar is simply extrapolating to the three eyes and Reality, the relational, non-substantialist and a-dualistic way of thinking that the Trinity illustrates, but without assuming that a such way of thinking is exclusive to the Christian Trinity. In fact, Panikkar also uses concepts from other traditions to express a similar insight, more specifically, the Hindu notion of “*advaita*” understood as neither one (monism) nor two (dualism) and the Buddhist notion of “*paticcasamuppāda*” or interdependent co-origination, which Panikkar prefers to translate as “radical relativity”.

Panikkar’s epistemological claim is that mystical experiences integrate the vision of the third eye with the vision of the other two eyes without privileging or subordinating any of the eyes. The knowledge provided by the third eye does not replace the knowledge derived from the other two eyes but rather enhances them, thus generating a threefold experience that correlates with the three dimensions of Reality and Life.

This integral knowledge or holistic experience of Reality and Life explains why so many mystics were at the same time men and women of action. Mystics do not separate action from contemplation nor knowledge from love and action because they experience

the fullness of Reality and Life. Reducing mystical experiences to the knowledge of a “supernatural” third eye and merely experiences of the divine has led to questionable views of mysticism as separated from this world and ordinary human activities.

According to Panikkar, mystical experiences are corporeal, mental and spiritual at the same time, and they encompass all aspects of Reality in an a-dualistic (*advaita*) union or communion. Neither the three eyes nor the cosmic, divine and human dimensions of Reality and Life can be split into parts because they are constitutively interrelated and, in that sense, they are analogous to the *perichorēsis* that constitutes the three persons of the Trinity.

The main implication of the eighth sūtra for social and earthly involvement is that we need to remain open to different types of knowledge without absolutizing any of them. This epistemological openness does not mean that any type of knowledge is equally valid or relative. Acknowledging the polysemic and pluralistic nature of many social justice issues does not entail relativism and the impossibility of cross-cultural and interfaith understanding. Quite the contrary, the polysemic and pluralistic nature of many social justice issues demands a cross-cultural and interfaith approach, that is, genuine openness to dialogue, mutual enrichment and the possible contribution of diverse perspectives from multiple cultures, philosophies and religions.

4. Conclusion: Mysticism as a Way of Life of Action and Contemplation

(9) Panikkar’s last sūtra connects mysticism to all human problems and the whole of human existence: “The Mystical experience is in direct relation to the totality of the human condition” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 198).

The path of mysticism for Panikkar could be summarized in the advice of the Sybil “know yourself!” and the Vedic question “Who am I?”. The knowledge that the advice refers to is not to a mere epistemic or intellectual act but rather an existential identification or transformation into with what is known. The “Self” that one is encouraged to know is not one’s own ego or individual self but rather a Self that embraces all aspects of reality. To illustrate this point, Panikkar cites Meister Eckhart: “He who knows himself knows all things” (Panikkar 2014a, p. 198). In the prologue to the first volume of his complete works, Panikkar relates this knowledge to one *Upaniṣad*: “that existential knowledge through which one knows everything” (Panikkar 2014a, p. XXII). Similarly, Panikkar clarifies that the “I” of the Vedic question is not my ego and that the “I” comes from the same origin as the “Who”, which is not a “What” but a real “Who”.

These two phrases not only summarize but also express the main elements of mystical experience: a self-knowledge that embraces the macrocosm and that is made up of wisdom (*gnōsis*) and love. This is an experience of all aspects of Life, that is, it is a sensory, intellectual and spiritual experience. This is the human experience in its fullness, an experience open to everybody.

Mystical experiences open us to all human beings and all aspects of Reality and Life. Mysticism comprehends the communion of the divine, human and cosmic dimensions of Reality and Life in an a-dual relationship. The holistic knowledge of Life and Reality does not entail a monistic knowledge of one and the same reality across all single realities in the universe. Similarly, the mystical experience does not provide a dualistic knowledge of separate and independent entities. Rather, the mystical experience involves an a-dualistic loving knowledge of all dimensions of Reality, a comprehensive vision through the three eyes that “includes the Other (as alter) as much as my Self, as much humanity and earth as the divine. It is cosmotheandric experience; the rest is reductionism. Mystical experience is the complete (human) experience” (Panikkar 2014a, pp. XXII, 200).

This cosmotheandric view of mystical experiences entails that mysticism is incompatible with solipsistic individualism and the privatization of religion or spirituality. Action and contemplation cannot be divided, In Panikkar’s words: “Action and contemplation are not mutually exclusive. Not only do they complete each other, but they also mutually entail

each other, since there is no true action without contemplation, and no true contemplation without action" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 203).

Mystical experiences are both cognitive and loving and, therefore, active, although they also have a passive, contemplative element. For Panikkar, the mysticism of our times cannot be indifferent to suffering and human injustice. Mystical experiences express a dual dynamism: centripetal and centrifugal at the same time. In other words, mystical experience tends simultaneously towards the interior and the exterior, towards oneself and others. In fact, Panikkar contends that the criterion of authenticity for mystical experiences is precisely that they make persons more sensitive to human problems and human suffering.

To illustrate the relational and comprehensive nature of mysticism, Panikkar clarifies that one cannot love God without loving at the same time one's neighbor nor one can love one's neighbor without loving God. Mystical experiences know all things in ourselves and ourselves in all things, realizing a profound union between microcosm and macrocosm, interiority and exteriority. Panikkar compares this communion to the experiences of the Mystical Body and the realization of Buddha-nature in all beings. The sensitivity that mystical experiences awaken in us "is as much open to the external world as to the internal, as much to cultivating politics as spirituality, and as much concerned with others as with oneself" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 200).

The human sensitivity that authentic mysticism enhances is also concerned with this world and our time on earth. This secular world has a sacred, divine dimension that Panikkar calls "sacred secularity". Time also has a dimension of eternity that Panikkar calls "tempiternity", the experience of eternity in each temporal moment. Earth is our companion and matter is a constitutive dimension of Reality; realizing this sacred aspect of the world is the wisdom that Panikkar calls "ecosophy".

Mystics are ready to get their hands dirty if necessary but without sacrificing their peace and equanimity. Mystics do not separate their earthly existence from the divine and eternal dimensions of Reality. Mystics do not split Life into the temporal and the eternal, the sacred and the profane, this world and the other or the divine and the world not because they negate such distinctions but rather because they experience the totality of the human condition.

Panikkar acknowledges that certain interpretations of mysticism have neglected the cosmic dimension, that is, this world, matter and the human body. For Panikkar, however, "a-cosmic" mysticism does not follow necessarily from concepts such as *apatheia*, *ataraxia*, *asakta*, detachment, indifference and tranquility. Properly understood, these concepts are not a negation of earthliness and ordinary life. Rather, "they are a hymn to freedom, freeing us from our slavish dependence on factors that are unrelated to our lives" (Panikkar 2014a, p. 203). In this sense, mysticism does not negate life, society or this world but rather our lack of freedom.

Mysticism has *often* been based on dualistic views of this life and the next, worldly existence and heavenly existence, the material and the spiritual, body and soul and action and contemplation. These dualisms have led many to view mysticism as negating life and as an escape from this world and human activities. Panikkar's cosmotheandric philosophy of mysticism, however, overcomes these extreme dualisms and restores the "middle way" or equilibrium between the diverse yet united aspects of Reality and the human condition.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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