

MULTIRACIAL  
COSMOTHEANDRISM

*A Practical Theology of  
Multiracial Experiences*

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## Introduction

# An Invitation to Multi/racial Experience(s)

To begin, I offer an entry from my journal reflecting on my own experience of multiraciality.

I have spent the last decade of my life in institutions dominated by the histories and forces of white supremacy and racism, enduring multiple first-hand experiences of systemic racial oppression.<sup>1</sup> At times I have felt exhausted and at other times suffocated by repeated events of dismissal, scapegoating, and exile from participation in the life of community. As a cis-gender, heterosexual, mixed-race man of color who is both Chinese-Malaysian and Mexican-American, I recognize the many ways I am tempted to reduce my experience to only an aspect of me. Yet, despite this

1. As a double-minority, mixed-race man of color growing up in many predominantly white spaces, I have experienced significant social and psychological distress due to racism throughout my entire lifetime. However, despite this, I also acknowledge there is more to my existence than experiences of racialization. I was blessed to have a close-knit immediate family with parents and siblings who loved and encouraged me. These experiences laid a foundation for my understanding of spirituality as both adventure and resistance. It is these same communal and internal resources that renew me as I continue to navigate the deadly terrain of racism prevalent in the United States of America.

pressure, I have found ways to integrate my experiences of contemplative practices and spiritualities, guided by wonderful spiritual teachers and role models, helping me to recover and reclaim the fullness of Being. Following their witness, I have received empowering mystical insights, revealing my own inherent goodness, worth, and value despite the oppression I have faced.

These realizations have compelled me to continue the work of healing justice, even in moments that involve risk to my finances, psychological well-being, and social community. I have come to realize, in moments of direct mystical experience with the divine, that compassion is the primordial energetic force of the world and is potent to transform the hatred, fear, and evil that run rampant in our world.

It has been through spirituality that I have found both safety and healing, as well as the inspiration to embody courageous action in racialized situations. While spirituality can be a way to escape from suffering as a form of bypassing, I have also found that spirituality can offer endless resources to confront, resist, and transform various manifestations of racial oppression. Through spiritual practice, my imagination has been renewed, and I have been charged to bear witness to that within the human experience which race/racism can never tarnish, namely, the possibility of healing together.

I therefore see the potentiality for spirituality to be a vital resource of empowerment and resistance for those struggling to overcome forces of racism in their own lives and in society. More specifically, to those who are multiracial, mystical expansiveness can be a potential

path enabling others to hold opposites within themselves and provide reconnection in situations of feeling isolated or alone. In my life, I have been granted the gift of recovery of my own inner resources that I had forgotten and a reclamation of the value of my own voice (and the cultures from which I hail) in the path toward liberation. I continue to become aware of both my own temporality and also the mysterious limitless Spirit that moves within (and as) my very life. This path affirms our inherent dignity and personhood and is sustained in the communal presence of one another (or as we say in my background, *en conjunto*). I do not just hope this is true; it is something I have personally tasted and is what I long to invite others to experience. It is with anticipation and hope that I begin the process of being liberated from racial oppression even while fully acknowledging the impacts of race in our midst, first in talking about it truthfully and secondly, to transcend its oppressive power by no longer allowing racial rules and assumptions to silence my voice. But this is not just about my voice, it is about all voices that have been silenced or victimized. The time is now to rise up and say another way is possible.—*Aizaiah Yong*, journal entry, Los Angeles, CA, 2019

I have chosen to begin each chapter with a short journal entry as core to my practical theological method demonstrating the ways in which I personally am implicated into this research as well as to emphasize the importance of each of us in the work of healing justice. In addition, each entry incarnates my conviction that my purpose in writing aligns with my commitment to contemplative practice and living an anchored life. It is through many kinds of practices of contemplation (such as writing) that

I find sustenance and resourcing to engage the world. Furthermore, this commitment assumes that the journey one takes to do anything is just as significant, if not more so, as whatever the outcome. As we continue to live through an increasingly polarized, isolated, and accelerated age, this book intends to *contemplate*<sup>2</sup> the rich and diverse experiences of multiracial people and share the wisdoms they embody as a practical theology of multiraciality so that the world might move toward greater wholeness and transformation. By way of further introduction, the first half of this chapter will be focused on raising the important questions, realities, and ideas that foreground this book. In the second half, I discuss the focus of the book along with my methodological approach.

## A BOOK OF MULTIRACIALITY

In a book dedicated to addressing the flourishing of people in North America, one must first have a keen understanding of race and racism. In practical theology, it is common for practical theologians to turn to disciplines outside of theology to begin.<sup>3</sup> Racism (and the category of “race” that was created in its support) is well known as a modern Western historical and socio-political project that has wedded itself to the Christian religion,<sup>4</sup> creating theologies that justify the construction of the modern colonial empire by the economic exploitation of nonwhite and poor

2. I generally use *italics* to signal a verb that I am actively participating in and to which I also invite the reader. On occasion, I use it adjectivally to emphasize a particular way of viewing a concept or idea.

3. Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

4. Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

people.<sup>5</sup> Since the creation of race in the early modern period, racist ideologies and cultures have been exported through colonialism and its various enterprises in countless ways around the world and continue to wreak social and psychospiritual devastation upon all people, not least Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in the United States of America. This is not to deny that ethnocentrism abounds even across non-Western cultural regions of the world going back centuries.<sup>6</sup> But, it is to say that the European construct with its legacy in North America is what I am focused on in this volume. Today, North American scholars from across disciplines<sup>7</sup> and fields consider racism to be the toxic sludge (and original sin) poisoning the water at the table from which all drink, requiring that any liberating vision of humanity must be cognizant of issues of race and racism.

One such way to understand race and racism is through critical race theory (CRT). CRT is a prominent field of inquiry that began in critical legal studies through the works of Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw. CRT has expanded beyond its original field of critical legal studies and is engaged in many other disciplines seeking to analyze how race and racism pervade US life so that possibilities of transformative response can be imagined. CRT asserts that racism is endemic to US society and, therefore, justice cannot be realized without confronting race

5. J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

6. Love Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong, eds., *Can "White" People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).

7. See Frank Rogers Jr., "The Way of Radical Compassion" (Lecture, TSF 4097, Claremont School of Theology, 2018); Jim Wallis, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017); and Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Random House, 2015).

and racism.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, one of the most important contributions of CRT is the concept of intersectionality, which demonstrates how social oppression is multiplied differently based on a person's varying social locations and positionalities.<sup>9</sup> CRT has since expanded significantly to focus on different racial/ethnic groups, and new subfields have emerged such as TribalCrit, AsianCrit, LatCrit, and MultiCrit.<sup>10</sup> MultiCrit is the particular lens that centers on the lives of multiracial, or mixed race, people.<sup>11</sup> The work of MultiCrit has since been expanded due to forces of globalization and migration, where researchers from all over the world are acknowledging the growth of mixed-race people and, in response, are dedicating more time and energy to study "mixed-race" populations and how their experiences inform understandings of race and racism at large.<sup>12</sup>

In the US context, an interdisciplinary field called critical mixed-race studies (CMRS) has emerged and features scholars from across psychology, education, ethnic studies, gender studies, theology, and anthropology to ask critical questions about the ways in which multiracial identity formation takes place and to what end. For CMRS, studying multiraciality is not primarily concerned with individualized identity politics but rather how race and racism function, persist, and are perniciously reinscribed

8. Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic, *The Derrick Bell Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

9. Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race & Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* (London: Routledge, 1989).

10. Jessica Harris, "Toward a Critical Multiracial Theory in Education," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 29, no. 6 (2016): 795–813.

11. Kerry Rockquemore, David Brunsma, and Daniel Delgado, "Racing to Theory or Retheorizing Race? Understanding the Struggle to Build a Multiracial Identity Theory," *Journal of Social Issues* 65, no. 1 (2009): 13–34.

12. Rebecca King-O'Riain et al., *Global Mixed Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

through histories and structures of power and how these systems can be resisted.<sup>13</sup> Within higher education, CMRS has gained considerable attention. This attention is likely due to the massive increase of young adults who self-identify as mixed race now that two decades have passed since multiracial status was officially added as a racial designation in the 2000 US census.

Noted mixed-race and education scholar Jessica Harris has written about the deadly ways racism specifically impacts the multiracial young adults enrolled at predominantly white universities and colleges: “[Mixed-race students] did not have much hope for the eradication of racism, monoracism, colorism, and other oppressive experiences and structures they faced on campus.”<sup>14</sup> Harris borrows “monoracism” from the work of critical race scholars Marc Johnston and Kevin Nadal, who discuss how multiracial persons are constantly assigned into monoracial groups and how relative privilege is given to those who will assimilate to monoracial logic.<sup>15</sup> Harris’s work cuts through the assumption of a black/white binary in critical race work and shows how this pattern renders multi/racial experience(s) (and multiracial people) invisible, maintaining “hegemonic identitarian illogic.”<sup>16</sup> Harris’s work does not inscribe multiraciality as yet another monolithic category for racial self-identification. Rather, Harris aims to promote new racial solidarities by dis-

13. Celeste Curington. “Rethinking Multiracial Formation in the United States: Toward an Intersectional Approach,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 2, no. 1 (2015): 27–41.

14. Harris, “Toward a Critical Multiracial Theory in Education,” 810.

15. Marc Johnston and Kevin Nadal, “Multiracial Microaggressions: Exposing Monoracism in Everyday Life and Clinical Practice,” in *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact*, ed. D. W. Sue (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. 2010), 123–44.

16. Jessica C. Harris and Z. Nicolazzo, “Navigating the Academic Borderlands as Multiracial and Trans\* Faculty Members,” *Critical Studies in Education* 61, no. 2 (2020): 229–44.



mantling the many and varied forms of racial hierarchy that have long governed US communal life through socio-racial contracts.<sup>17</sup>

While a significant portion of CMRS literature prioritizes the psychological and interpersonal dynamics that encompass multi/racial experience(s), behavioral scientists<sup>18</sup> have shown how issues of multiraciality have significant impacts on policy-making for those living in predominantly BIPOC communities. According to the 2020 US census, “more people than ever” identify as multiracial,<sup>19</sup> and this population is expected to be a majority by 2050.<sup>20</sup> Given current predictions<sup>21</sup> for continued growth in the multiracial population in the United States and globally, it is vital that social justice efforts take seriously the perspectives of multiracial people through research that acknowledges the rich diversity of multiracial stories, which then can enable better-informed decisions of how racial justice can be pursued practically by reallocating resources.<sup>22</sup>

### *A Note on Multi/racial Multiplicity*

In this book, I use the “I” and the “(s)” when I write about multi/racial experience(s) because I want to emphasize that there is not

17. Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

18. Diana T. Sanchez et al., “How Policies Can Address Multiracial Stigma,” *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 7, no. 2 (October 2020): 115–22.

19. Sylvia Foster-Frau, Ted Mellnik, and Adrian Blanco, “Mixed-Race Americans Are Fastest-Growing Racial Group, Census Shows,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2021.

20. Gina Potter. “The Invisibility of Multiracial Students: An Emerging Majority by 2050” (EdD diss., UC San Diego, 2009).

21. Pew Research Center, “Multiracial Americans: Counting America’s Population | Pew Research Center,” June 11, 2015.

22. Molly McKibbin, *Shades of Gray: Writing the New American Multiracialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018).

one definition of experiencing multiraciality.<sup>23</sup> I seek to problematize the dominant monocultural and monoracial approaches prevalent within racial justice discourse and action. For pragmatic and conversational purposes, I follow the lead of mixed-race scholars who attest that the terms “multiracial” and “mixed race” can be used interchangeably as referring to those who have parents of differing monoracial and/or ethnic backgrounds from each other. My goal in writing a book on multiraciality, then, is not the creation of another new monolithic racial identity category. As a practical theologian who is also multiracial, I am interested in ways to better support and attend to the psychological, cultural, and social distresses placed on multi/racial experience(s). I am interested in ways to more fully advocate for the diverse contributions that multiracial people offer collective justice work. As I stress that multiraciality is inherently pluralistic, I hope to pursue a multiplicity of spiritualities and spiritual-care practices that will attend to the multidimensional and fluid nature of multiraciality, including but not limited to the contextual, cultural, spiritual, and material dimensions. I further hope that my pursuit allows for more dynamic, holistic, and collaborative social engagements that resist the insidious forces of racial oppression.

Therefore, for the remainder of this work, I will use the “/” and “(s)” when I am specifically referring to the plurality and intersections present within multiracial lives and will also use the terms multiracial and mixed race<sup>24</sup> interchangeably.

23. The resistance to the multiracial population as a monolithic group continues to be problematized in multiracial scholarship. See Jessica Harris, Becka Lorenz, and Nelson Laird, “Engaging in the Margins: Exploring Differences in Biracial Students’ Engagement by Racial Heritage,” *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 55, no. 2 (2018): 137–54.

24. I will only use the hyphen in “mixed-race” when directly referring to critical mixed-race studies, which uses it.

I am convinced that, with the enormity of racial oppression, approaches to healing must be holistic (including intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural, and cosmic), pluralistic (to account for the diversity within multiracial persons), and informed by relationships of solidarity with other marginalized groups as well as the entire cosmos. No one-dimensional perspective will suffice.

## A BOOK OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

While scholars from ethnic studies, gender studies, political sciences, psychology, and education have begun to address various challenges that multiracial people face, I am interested in the additional goal of finding more empowered ways for multiracial people to live. Practical theology explicitly supports the purpose of empowerment, and I agree with John Swinton and Harriet Mowat who attest, “Practical Theology can be understood to be a framework of enquiry that is driven by the desire to create the circumstances for transformative action that not only seeks after truth and knowledge, but also offers the possibility of radical transformation.”<sup>25</sup> Recent practical theologians have made clarion calls for practical theology to address how various social locations impact personal and collective well-being,<sup>26</sup> but multi/racial experience(s) continue to be left out of many of these conversations. As a field, practical theology should be concerned about the political and social ramifications of such exclusions.<sup>27</sup>

25. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2016), x.

26. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski ask for issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality to be prominent in practical theology in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

27. Mary Moschella, “Practice Matters: New Directions in Ethnography

HyeRan Kim-Cragg is a practical theologian whose work is a notable example of how the field can pay better attention to multi/racial experience(s). One chapter of her book *Interdependence* is focused on multiracial youth. Kim-Cragg notes how experiences of multiraciality shape one's identity formation in significant ways and, subsequently, how the lives of mixed-race youth and young adults subvert notions of purity and colonial white, heteronormative family. Kim-Cragg's book is significant for practical theology as she builds off the work of James Poling and Donald E. Miller and bears witness to how the sacred is at work outside of the institutional church, transgressing boundaries between the sacred and secular.<sup>28</sup> She seeks to understand the life of the divine by bringing attention to the marginalized experiences of multiraciality, which are marginalized within theological conversations (as investigations on race have long been led by those outside of the institutional church) and from anti-racism work due to monoracial bias. Kim-Cragg affirms that all who are committed to healing from the impacts of colonization would benefit from further investigation of and focus on multi/racial experience(s) as they are integral "learning site[s] of practical theology, linked to the goal of a postcolonial feminist practical theology that stresses the importance of mutual recognition of differences for the sake of the interdependent relationships that God desires."<sup>29</sup>

This book is animated with the desire to enliven and strengthen the interdependent relationships that weave us and

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and Qualitative Research," in *Pastoral Theology and Care: Critical Trajectories in Theory and Practice*, ed. Jack Ramsay (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 8–10.

28. James Poling and Donald E. Miller are known for their advocacy that practical theology be a primary tool toward social justice in *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985).

29. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Interdependence: A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018).

all of life together. Throughout the book, I continue to emphasize the need for attention to multiraciality within practical theology. Specifically, I am interested in how racism and racial oppression can be healed and transformed through contemplative spirituality. While turning to spirituality for healing from racism and racial oppression is not new, my concern for multi/racial experience(s) gives the turn a unique depth of meaning. In the next section, I explore how spirituality and spiritual practices have played a prominent role in the formation of those who are committed to racial justice and healing.

### *The Importance of Spirituality in Social Change*

Many North American teachers, mystics, activists, and practical theologians have cultivated healing approaches to issues of race, racism, and racial oppression through their own spiritual formation. Considering the lives of those who have come before, teaching and practicing better ways of living together, is crucial to my argument for a spiritually rooted paradigm shift in our experiences with racism and racial oppression. In this section, I review their examples so as to ground this book in practical theology's long-held conviction that spirituality is a vital component of meaningful social change.

Spiritual luminary, African-American mystic, and advisor to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement, Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman believed that the fundamental core of racialized tension was spiritual disillusionment.<sup>30</sup> Thurman believed that, through mysticism and spirituality, a person could recover the power and possibility of healing broken relations within the self and find empowerment to live a

30. Alton Pollard, *Mysticism and Social Change: The Social Witness of Howard Thurman* (New York: P. Lang, 1992).

liberated life amid an oppressive world. Thurman advocates that social violence will only cease when it is first confronted and transformed by engaging the spiritual dimension of each person.<sup>31</sup> Further, Thurman describes Jesus's life teachings as a technique of survival for all those who are oppressed and who have their backs against the wall.<sup>32</sup> The call to liberation by way of spirituality and mysticism demands that both internal and external actions be taken to aid in the recovery and reclamation of cultural and divine resources that have been marginalized for those who have been racially oppressed. In this understanding, spirituality is not just an ethereal individualized experience, but it provides the necessary resources that usher in social transformation and sustained engagement. Furthermore, a person's interior strength is what compels someone to courageously bear witness to love and justice in public, even when it is costly. Thurman's nonviolent and spiritually rooted approach to justice provides a clear rationale for how even the best of social-change efforts hinge on spiritual well-being.<sup>33</sup>

Gloria Anzaldúa is another North American public intellectual and social activist who did not identify as "religious" or "spiritual" but has been vocal about the ways healing from oppression cannot be severed from interiority. She came to her own understanding of spirituality through embracing her own mixed experience. She writes, "It was a foundational change of consciousness that helped me find peace. To be a *mestiza* (mixed) is to operate in pluralistic mode. Nothing is thrust out—the

31. Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953).

32. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), 29.

33. Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1997).

good, the bad, the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned.”<sup>34</sup> Anzaldúa’s mystical assessment poignantly reveals how overcoming racialized divisions within is tethered to the interior life and is essential to overcoming social oppression. Though she does not use the language of spirituality, Anzaldúa provides one picture of how one’s inner resources enable the person to hold polarities in creative tension and relationship.

In addition to Anzaldúa, other BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ activists from beyond religious traditions have shared similar sentiments in their extensive reflections on the ways that social oppressions, particularly racism, breed through the self’s interior distortions of reality.<sup>35</sup> For these activists, experiencing intersecting oppressions (many being Black, women, and queer, and a religious minority within North America)<sup>36</sup> reveals how structural oppressions distort our societal relations with one another and reduce personal loving connections that we have within ourselves as sacred beings. Structural oppressions insidiously limit capacities of healing and sever each of us from the natural wisdom located in our very bodies. These activists and practitioners demonstrate that healing must come through reconnection to what is sacred in all of life. Healthy and necessary connections can only be restored through a renewed spirituality.

In the field of practical theology, Emmanuel Lartey proposes an intercultural spiritual-care paradigm that can attend to the spiritual and holistic needs of racialized bodies in the wake of

34. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza (La frontera)* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 61.

35. Rhonda Magee, *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities through Mindfulness* (New York: TarcherPerigree, 2019).

36. angel Kyodo Williams, Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah, *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2016).

generations of colonization. Lartey makes the case for an intercultural approach by criticizing three other predominant forms of care that are currently being offered: monocultural, cross-cultural, and multicultural.<sup>37</sup> Lartey describes monocultural care as ethnocentric and universalizing. This position assumes there are no true differences among people and prescribes solutions assimilated to the dominant culture. Lartey understands cross-cultural care as that which acknowledges difference when giving care but still assumes a hierarchical position over the “other” when providing care. The goal of cross-cultural care is still to help the person assimilate by subscribing and conforming to the dominant culture. And the third approach is what Lartey calls multicultural care, which understands inherent differences but often oversimplifies and generalizes various social locations as monolithic. Multicultural care thus gives care that is superficial and often unhelpful. In response to these problematic approaches, Lartey proposes a fourth way, what he calls intercultural care. Intercultural care respects the personal processes and unique contexts of the person receiving care and assists people in integrating polarities within their life. Lartey re-imagines an approach to multidimensional spiritual care that respects the pluralistic reality of each person as “like *one* another, like *some* others, and like *no* other.”<sup>38</sup> For Lartey, finding healing from social and racial oppression thoroughly involves the spiritual.

For each of these teachers, mystics, activists, and practical theologians, it is imperative that efforts seeking to confront racial oppression within North America be holistic and

37. Emmanuel Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), 43.

38. This view is not original to Lartey as he borrowed from the work of Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray in their book *Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1953).



spiritually resourced. Their descriptions of holistic healing include important aspects of the emotional, social, and material dimensions of life. Yet, while those I have reviewed emphasize the spiritual transformations needed to address race, racism, and social oppression, none have intentionally considered the ramifications of a spiritual approach that tends to multiraciality. In this spirit, this book offers a practical theology committed to addressing race and racial oppression in the world by centering the lived experiences and spiritualities of mixed-race people who are in predominantly white institutions in North America. I ask how understandings of multiraciality change when the spiritual dimensions and realities of multi/racial experience(s) are centered. What are some implications of an emphasis on multiracial people, and how can these implications help address polarization and heal cultural divisions amid racial oppression in North America? I contend that a renewed imagination for healing action in the world today can emerge through attending to the spirituality of multi/racial experience(s).

As I have said above, new prophetic and spiritually grounded paradigms are needed. In North America, the life and thought of the renowned twentieth-century spiritual teacher Raimon Panikkar can provide fertile ground for such a new paradigm. From his own contemplative experiences living betwixt and between the monocultural and monosocial realities imposed on him, Panikkar testified to a new spiritual vision that can enliven anti-racist efforts today. With Panikkar, I am convinced that “no amount of reforms will be able to offer better alternatives unless they are accompanied by and the fruit of a spiritual and personal metanoia.”<sup>39</sup>

39. Raimon Panikkar, *The Water of the Drop: Fragments from Panikkar's Diaries*, ed. Milena Carrara Pavan (London: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2018), 81.

A BOOK OF CONTEMPLATION: INTRODUCING  
RAIMON PANIKKAR AS A “BRIDGE AND PROPHET”  
FOR MULTI/RACIAL EXPERIENCE(S)

Raimon Panikkar Alemany (1918–2010) was a spiritual visionary who lived at the intersections of race, culture, ethnicity, and religion and was famously known as an apostle of interreligious dialogue and intercultural understanding. In the words of Bettina Baeumer, Panikkar was “a bridge and prophet” to a transformation possible at the deepest depths of human experience.<sup>40</sup> Famed scholar of mysticism Ewert Cousins called Panikkar “the greatest global theologian of the twentieth century” because of his openness to embrace his own mixed heritage.<sup>41</sup> While Panikkar was certainly a world-renowned theologian, in this book, I am indebted to Raimon Panikkar as a guide to contemplation. Particularly, Panikkar lived out his unique mysticism in the context of three contemporary realities that are of importance to this book: the underrepresentation of non-Western perspectives in dominant theological and philosophical discourse, the increasing awareness and acceptance of vast cultural diversity in the world, and the central role of mysticism and spirituality in the flourishing of Life.

*Panikkar as Subversive Prophet*

Raimon Panikkar has been rightfully included along with Thomas Merton, Paul Tillich, and Pope Francis in discussions

40. Bettina Baeumer, Introduction to *Raimundo Panikkar: A Pilgrim across Worlds*, ed. Kapila Vatsyayan and Côme Carpentier de Gourdon (New Delhi: Niyogi Books), 11–16.

41. Ewert Cousins, “Uniting Human, Cosmic and Divine,” *America*, January 1, 2007.

of twentieth-century Western spiritual leaders.<sup>42</sup> In addition to his place in such conversations, it is also clear that Panikkar is someone who clearly transcended and transgressed<sup>43</sup> Eurocentric or Western tendencies and must therefore be treated with deep respect for his pluralistic experience.<sup>44</sup> As a critical race theorist,<sup>45</sup> I further assert that, in North America especially, Panikkar has been read more marginally than others, not because of his rich mysticism, his multilingual vernacular, or intellectual magnitude<sup>46</sup> but because he heavily critiqued US individualistic and self-destructive culture.<sup>47</sup> His subversive behavior was evident in his bold embodiment as a Hindu-Catalonian mixed person changing his name from Raimundo to Raimon and Paniker to Panikkar, his insistence in Eurocentric academic spaces “that

42. Fred Dallmayr, *Spiritual Guides: Pathfinders in the Desert* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

43. Anand Amaladass, “Panikkar’s Quest for an Alternative Way of Thinking and Acting,” in *Raimon Panikkar: Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. J. Vergés Gifra (Girona: Documenta Universitaria, 2017), 49–69.

44. Michael Barnes, “Neither Myself nor Another—the Interreligious Belonging of Raimon Panikkar,” in *Hindu-Christian Dual Belonging*, ed. D. Soars and N. Pohran (London: Routledge, 2022), 49–69.

45. To better understand how I use critical race theory to understand Christianity, white supremacy, and religious nationalism tied to legacies of North American colonization in the US context, see the chapter co-written with Amos Yong entitled “Seeking Healing in an Age of Partisan Division: Reckoning with Theological Education and Resounding the Evangel in the 2020s,” in *Faith and Reckoning after Trump*, ed. Miguel De La Torre (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 214–27.

46. Peter Phan and Young-Chan Ro center on these qualities of Panikkar in their book *Raimon Panikkar: A Companion to His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2018).

47. Panikkar lamented about the status of US society in his journal writing, “Over the past few days I have been struck by seeing the enslavement of the American people and generally of the technological culture . . . I do believe this technological civilization is leading Mankind to suicide” (*The Water of the Drop*, 104).

India had a philosophy!,"<sup>48</sup> and through his reluctance to systematize his thoughts into "dichotomies that the Western talent for classification seems to require in order to clarify every kind of problem."<sup>49</sup> Clearly, Panikkar had deep commitments to "finding an alternative way of thinking . . . against any monocultural claim to universality."<sup>50</sup> It is for these reasons, and through a critical race perspective, that I admire the life and thought of Raimon Panikkar and lift him up as a stark contrast<sup>51</sup> to the predominantly white, Western, and Eurocentric spiritual teachers who have historically been prioritized in North American practical theology.

### *Panikkar as Intercultural Reconciler*

Raimon Panikkar boldly claimed a fourfold religious multiplicity in his own life, recognizing belonging as a Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and secular person. Furthermore, he recognized the importance of his particular racial/ethnic diversity as the child of a Catalan mother and Indian father.<sup>52</sup> He began the prestigious Gifford Lectures with an acknowledgment of his own mixed-

48. Baeumer, Introduction to *Raimundo Panikkar*, 11.

49. Raimon Panikkar, *Cultures and Religions in Dialogue, Part One: Pluralism and Interculturality*, ed. Milena Carrara Pavan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), xvi.

50. Catherine Cornille, "Religious Hybridity and Christian Identity: Promise and Problem," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 48, no. 1 (2021): 283, <http://www.currentsjournal.org>.

51. Scott Eastham also noted how unfortunate it has been that Raimon Panikkar has not been more widely read (specifically in the English language) because of how important Panikkar's critiques are of Western fundamentalisms including rationalism and scientism and because Eastham believes Panikkar carries "important seeds of renewal the West has forgotten to cultivate" (2013), 24–31.

52. George Gispert-Sauch reflects on how Panikkar asserted his mixed identity, "How often did we hear him to correct people and affirm that he was one hundred percent Indian and one hundred percent Spanish," in *Raimundo*

ness, saying, “I am standing on a podium from which, for an entire century, many great scholars have spoken. I am aware of my responsibility. I happen to be the first Catalan, the first Spaniard, the first Indian, and, with one exception from the Middle East, the first Asian. I feel I should try to convey something of the wisdom of all those countries and continents.”<sup>53</sup> He was clear that he embraced his pluralistic racial/ethnic background and that this informed his intercultural theoretical approach<sup>54</sup> and vice versa. In an interview with the *Christian Century*, he shared:

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.<sup>55</sup>

Though he does not explicitly engage this theme in his academic writing, Panikkar’s radical embrace of his own experi-

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*Panikkar: A Pilgrim across Worlds*, ed. Kapila Vatsyayan and Côme Carpentier de Gourdon (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016), 127.

53. Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), xxv.

54. Oscar Pujol comments on this similarly stating his “karmic circumstances played an important role in his interculturality . . . and was put into practice and incarnated in his life itself”; see “The Intercultural Adventure of the Third Millennium: A Homage to Raimon Panikkar,” in *Raimundo Panikkar: A Pilgrim across Worlds*, ed. Kapila Vatsyayan and Côme Carpentier de Gourdon (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016), 191.

55. Raimon Panikkar, “Eruption of Truth: An Interview with Raimon Panikkar,” *Christian Century*, August 16–23, 2000: 834.

ence of multiraciality served as the impetus for his interreligious genius. Accordingly, his experience of multiraciality ought to be understood as the implied pretext that undergirds all of his writings and thoughts.

While some have argued that Panikkar's life and writings focused on addressing the "problem between religions,"<sup>56</sup> Panikkar understood his life as participation in *incarnatio continua*,<sup>57</sup> the capacity to both embrace and transform one's culture. For Panikkar, such participation was forged in response to "one of the emerging myths of our time, that of the unity of the human family, seen from the global viewpoint of a culture of Man<sup>58</sup> that embraces all civilizations and religions as many facets, mutually enriching and stimulating."<sup>59</sup> Michiko Yusa describes Panikkar's rich example for a world in turmoil, writing, "Panikkar's urgent concern rested in bringing about a way to a more harmonious and less conflict-laden world sustained by the spirit of reconciliation—which arises out of genuine mutual understanding informed by contemplative wisdom. For Panikkar, engagement

56. Harold Coward, "Panikkar's Approach to Interreligious Dialogue," *Cross Currents* 29, no. 2 (1979): 183–89, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24458014>.

57. Phillip Gibbs discusses Panikkar's understanding of *incarnatio continua* as "taking place in a specific cultural milieu and . . . at the same time transforming the culture," in *Dreaming a New Earth: Raimon Panikkar and Indigenous Spiritualities*, ed. Gerard Hall and Joan Hendriks (Preston, Victoria [Australia]: Mosaic Press, 2013), 61.

58. Panikkar used the term "Man" as a way of speaking to the human condition in ways that embraced other than Western understandings, including other languages that he spoke. He was aware of the dangers of patriarchal portrayals of humanity and chose to use the terms he did very intentionally. For more on his rationale in using the term "Man," see *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part Two: Spirituality, the Way of Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 283.

59. Raimon Panikkar, *Cultures and Religions in Dialogue, Part Two: Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Milena Carrara Pavan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), xiii.

in intercultural philosophy had the broader aim of giving us a sense of hope for the future of the world.”<sup>60</sup> Panikkar’s example was both needed and rare. He often felt the struggle that accompanied his reconciliatory posture, writing in his journal, “It is not easy to go against the flow. It takes a lot of humility and a lot of audacity. I live against the flow in everything: the world of Maria G, that of Spain, that of the West, that of India, that of traditional Catholicism, of current agnosticism, of monotheism and atheism, of beliefs and non-beliefs.”<sup>61</sup> Panikkar’s alternative,<sup>62</sup> counter-cultural, and counter-hegemonic lifestyle resulted in a spirituality that consistently rejected singular or fixed categories of identity and offered an invitation to others to do the same, so they might know themselves more deeply and holistically.

Panikkar’s embrace of pluralistic complexity in his own spirituality deepened his intellectual pursuits. Active in diverse conversations and communities, he was able to speak to the heart of contemporary social and spiritual challenges with acuteness while overcoming temptations of binary thinking without also falling into either relativism or syncretism. He rightly understood the impending dangers of “technocratic civilization,” which gives rise to supremacist ways of being in the world. In response, he called for the transformation of the world by way of “cultural disarmament, the abandonment of the rut in which modern culture of Western origin has been entrenched: progress, technology, science, democracy, and the world economic

60. Michiko Yusa, “Intercultural Philosophical Wayfaring: An Autobiographical Account in Conversation with a Friend,” *Journal of World Philosophies* 3, no. 1 (2018): 128.

61. Panikkar, *The Water of the Drop*, 208.

62. A reference to Amaladass, “Panikkar’s Quest for an Alternative Way of Thinking and Acting.”

market.”<sup>63</sup> Panikkar argued that the healing of the world could only be available through openness, genuine dialogue, relationality, and interculturality—a process of cross-fertilization and mutual fecundation of all beings, including and especially the cosmos itself. He wrote clearly:

What then is the sociological challenge? It is that in this modern Western society, the system is breaking down. I use this simply as a codeword: the system—that is, the social, political, economic, and religious order—seems to be collapsing. To many people the system seems merely imperfect and unsatisfying. But I dare say that it is unjust and even inhuman. It cannot just be reformed. It has to be redeemed. I called it “technocracy” or “technocentrism.” I suggest that this system is falling apart because it has tried to resolve the global human predicament by and with the means and insights of one particular culture or religion.<sup>64</sup>

Panikkar reflected on the cost of trekking a new path that sought to reconcile polarization in the world through interculturality and the archetype of the monk, writing, “a [monk is] universal man; [and] the price of all of this is that he probably ceases to be a normal person.”<sup>65</sup> Panikkar’s intercultural life can easily be summarized as “ceasing to be a normal person,” realizing life as a profoundly mystical and “inter-in-dependent” reality, which he termed The Cosmotheandric Experience.<sup>66</sup>

63. “Cultural Disarmament,” Fundació Vivarium Raimon Panikkar, 2022, <https://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/home.html>.

64. Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part Two*, 209.

65. Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part Two*, 236.

66. Raimon Panikkar, *Trinitarian and Cosmotheandric Vision*, ed. Milena Carrara Pavan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 165.



Panikkar formed his understanding of the Cosmotheandric Experience through his engagement with philosophy beyond the West, namely *advaita*, living beyond monism or dualism;<sup>67</sup> and it was Panikkar's a-dualistic posture toward life that grounded his stance toward pluralism, impassioning him to call others to delight in the world's diversity.

In my reading, Panikkar cannot be understood through any single category of analysis. He invited the world beyond one-category thinking, spoke across multiple languages, philosophized across disparate academic disciplines, moved intercontinentally across the world, and practiced the monastic life across diverse cultural and religious communities. The "border-crossing mysticism"<sup>68</sup> of his life eventually led him to achieve his ultimate desire of living "at home in the East and West,"<sup>69</sup> wherever he found himself, realizing his identity in Divine Mystery alone.

### *Panikkar as Interreligious Mystic*

The "indispensable hermeneutical key" to understanding Panikkar's life and thought is mysticism and spirituality.<sup>70</sup> Remark- ing on Panikkar's multivolume *Opera Omnia*, Sante Bagnoli observes that beginning "with the volume on Mysticism is somehow symbolic, because it shows Panikkar's striving to pass on his own experience through his writings, and 'mysticism is the full experience for a man.'" For Bagnoli, rooting Panik-

67. Maria Viswas, "Understanding Advaita: A Panikkarean Perspective for a Cross Cultural Journey," *Tattva Journal of Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2021): 77–91.

68. Barnes, "Neither Myself nor Another," 33.

69. Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part Two*, 149.

70. Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part Two*, xvii.

kar's writing in mysticism and spirituality is significant to "not merely stimulate further studies but experience" itself.<sup>71</sup>

Panikkar was well aware of the challenges associated with the terms, "mysticism" and "spirituality," and he described how they have been wrongly understood as "esoteric phenomena" and "as separate from . . . the body."<sup>72</sup> He believed that he could offer the needed corrective by living it first and writing about it second. Speaking of mysticism in his personal journal, Panikkar described it as "undoubtedly my way."<sup>73</sup> In his scholarship, he described it as the "supreme experience of Life,"<sup>74</sup> the epitome of human fulfillment. Panikkar used other words as synonyms for *Life* from across wisdom traditions, such as *Being* or *Reality*, building on the wisdom teachings of the Dao from Lao Tzu and Qi from Confucian wisdom. In this book, I resonate with the word (and capitalization) of *Life* because it brings to bear the ways in which the sacred is in and of itself the gift of Life. The gift of Life is given and happening as the present moment and may also be understood as the subject-object relations that characterize the depth dimension of human experience throughout all space and time.

In a practical sense, Panikkar saw mysticism as his greatest contribution to alleviate the suffering of others. When Panikkar gave his rationale for his preference for mysticism he wrote, "If social revolution were the only way to help my fellow-beings to live a more human life, I should simply become an activist revolutionary; if proclaiming the Good News of salvation were the

71. "Opera Omnia Presentation," Fundacio Vivarium Raimon Panikkar, 2022, <https://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/home.html>.

72. Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part Two*, xvii.

73. Panikkar, *The Water of the Drop*, 30.

74. Raimon Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part One: Mysticism, the Fullness of Life*, ed. Milena Carrara Pavan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), xiii.

solution, I should become a preacher. I think that in this article I justify my Cosmotheandric vocation, which I try to live the best I can—in spite of my conscious and unconscious failings.”<sup>75</sup> Panikkar’s Cosmotheandric vocation was his personal mysticism, which he hoped to offer others. In spite of his passion for this, he openly taught that there can be no one definitive mysticism that triumphs over the rest. Instead, he focused on carving his own unique path led by his understanding of the mysticism of Jesus Christ, which he also called the “Cosmivision of Christ.”<sup>76</sup> In his identification with Christianity, he coined the term *Christophany* to explain his own transformational mystical experience as radically trinitarian, *advaitic*, and interrelational, in harmony with the *Cosmotheandric Principle*. For our discussion, I will delve into detail about these terms in the third chapter.

Panikkar knew the Cosmotheandric experience could not be adequately expressed as a reality separate from mundane experience, as esoteric or exclusive to a few particular people in one culture. Rather, Cosmotheandric experience is the experience of being most fully human, and it is available in differing ways to all people, regardless of life circumstance,<sup>77</sup> across cultures,<sup>78</sup> and in Life’s each and every “tempiternal”<sup>79</sup> moment. Milena Carrara Pavan writes that, for Panikkar, “the mystical experi-

75. Panikkar, *The Water of the Drop*, 324.

76. Cynthia Bourgeault, “Christophany Notes by Raimon Panikkar,” Contemplative Community, March 12, 2007, <https://www.contemplative.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Christophany-Overview.pdf>.

77. Panikkar wrote in his journal, “The fullness of life can be realized in any given human condition (in spite of injustices, poverty, etc.)” (*The Water of the Drop*, 51).

78. Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part Two*, 153.

79. One way to describe tempiternity can be found in Panikkar’s journal entry as the “experience [of] the uniqueness of each moment. This is immortality” (*The Water of the Drop*, 73).

ence is not a specialization, it is open to all mankind. Every man is a mystic to the extent in which he is aware of the life which flows within him: his greatness lies in this awareness.”<sup>80</sup>

Because mysticism is the supreme experience and oneness with Life itself, the wisdom that emerges from this experience is a peculiar liberation from the superficial distractions that often preoccupy and subordinate humanity to ignorance and fear.<sup>81</sup> The liberated mystic receives the gifts of *sat* (being), *cit* (consciousness), and *ananda* (bliss), and, in this triadic structure of consciousness, participates in the flourishing of Life even amid adverse circumstances.<sup>82</sup> No agenda or a priori actions can be pre-determined; rather, the mystic acts spontaneously in respect to the dynamic and ever-flowing harmonious celebration of Life itself. Only the person living in mystical awareness is truly “saved” and able to contribute to actions in connection with “the fullness of Life itself.” Such a person has the best opportunity to forgo participation in oppressive behaviors and actions as they are free from the bondages of self-interest. In other words, when people realize that their being is interconnected with all other forms of life (human and nonhuman), they are moved to support the totality of Life (along with their own) rather than destroy it. As a person opens to this experience, their consciousness, passions, desires, ambitions, or impulses that stem from self-survival are transformed in and through connections with the whole of Life.<sup>83</sup>

80. Milena Carrara Pavan, introduction in *Fullness of Life*, ed. K. Acharya, M. C. Pavan, and W. Parker (Mumbai: Somaiya Publications, 2008), xviii.

81. As Panikkar noted, “What do I experience in being free? First, I have to experience that I am free from fear; that is the prerequisite,” in *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part Two*, 327.

82. Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality, Part One*, xiv–xvii.

83. Panikkar, *Cultures and Religions in Dialogue, Part One*, 141.

For Panikkar, spirituality or spiritual practice serves as a “navigation chart” that can lead a person to the transformative realization of interconnected being. A person, then, receives mystical awareness through spiritual practices that foster a foundation of receptivity to all of life and its inter-in-dependencies. Panikkar himself relied on many practices, which he shared with others, but the fruit of these practices was the same: empowering others to be co-participants in what he referred to as the “banquet of life” taking place within (and as) each and every moment.<sup>84</sup> His practices reveal his own role as a spiritual guide.

In this book, I argue that Panikkar is an exemplary guide for multiracial people to imagine new and emergent spiritualities as we navigate racialization and racial oppression. As Bettina Baeumer reflects, “Panikkar could create a bridge also between mysticism and the practical implications of his experience and thought which are very relevant in the present world—the questions of peace, human rights, ecology, all of which cannot be solved without an intercultural and interreligious approach.”<sup>85</sup> Panikkar’s writings model a willingness to reconcile multiplicity both internally (which is needed to heal from racial oppression) and externally in a racialized world. I am of Hakka Chinese Malaysian and Mexican American descent, and Panikkar’s life is a shining beacon of hope<sup>86</sup> that informs how I navigate difference intrapersonally, interpersonally, interculturally, cosmically, and socially.

84. Panikkar, *The Water of the Drop*, 314.

85. Baeumer, Introduction to *Raimundo Panikkar*, 13.

86. Interestingly and to my amazement, I believe Panikkar too may have known the possibility his life could be looked to as an example even when he was alive as he recorded in his journal, “I am witnessing the crisis of many people in my generation and also younger ones. I am not saying that I am immune, but I feel as though I somehow have come through the crisis and am able to show the way out. I may be foolish to say this, and I am not so certain, but I think it is true” (*The Water of the Drop*, 49).

In addition to mixed-race individuals such as Panikkar and myself, Panikkarian philosophy can be a powerful and needed corrective to race relations in the United States, allowing for divergent worlds to flow with the harmonious experience of Life. Panikkarian harmony is not about homogeneity or synthesizing all differences into commonality, but about embracing the transformation that occurs as each difference is open to new ways of being in relation to others. A Panikkarian harmony is a pluralism that asks that we embrace difference within and beyond us, as a necessary mystery that allows Life to exist at all.<sup>87</sup> With Panikkar's mystical witness, I wonder if current conversations on race can be transformed and if we might experience the liberation that he attests is possible:

Only the mystic will survive. I consider that what I have to say, and what I have generally said in the realm of ideas (and I refer to living, praxis-generating ideas) is relevant and important, but I doubt that my personal life, except for a very small circle of friends, is at all interesting, except for the fact that it could be described in a picturesque way. In other words, I am not convinced that the value of my life is translated into words or writings, or even that it has a paradigmatic value for some or provides the necessary background for understanding my ideas. When I get up before dawn and all is quiet around me, including the stars, I am not doing it to "win heaven," accumulate merit or even simply get some work done. I am not doing it for work, but for life; I am doing it so I may live and live as authentically as I can. To live authentically means to be ready to die tomorrow without missing a thing . . . the mys-

87. Barnes, *Neither Myself nor Another*, 34.

tical dimension becomes imperative, and redemption acquires its true meaning here. Only through a living symbol, and by associating myself with it, can this be possible. The closer I come to the centre, the nearer I will be to liberating power.<sup>88</sup>

Panikkar's interreligious mysticism shows us a picture of one who is fully alive, "living Life for itself and not something else."<sup>89</sup> Rather than living in order to arrive at certain outcomes or achieve finalized solutions to problems, the one who is fully alive is one who acts in the ultimacy of Truth amid life's incompletions and challenges.<sup>90</sup> Living fully alive, the mystic becomes the priest and the prophet who can courageously and nonviolently confront injustice in the world.<sup>91</sup> "By not acknowledging the power of the powerful and by not allowing [themselves] to feel threatened by the power even when life is at stake,"<sup>92</sup> the mystic lives the epitome of a liberated life that is grounded in knowing that all Life is in relationship and fear has no ultimate foundations.

## FOCUS OF THE BOOK

This book prioritizes and reflects on a variety of multi/racial experience(s) and seeks to support them with the life, philosophy, and mysticism of Raimon Panikkar and the methods of critical mixed-race studies and practical theology. While the

88. Phan and Ro, eds., *Raimon Panikkar*, 12.

89. Raimon Panikkar and Milena Carrara Pavan, *A Pilgrimage to Kailash* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2018), 132.

90. Barnes, *Neither Myself nor Another*.

91. Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003).

92. Raimon Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 26.

world continues to weather an onslaught of multiple crises, there is a great need for spiritually rooted contemplation and action. This book is one such attempt to cross-fertilize Panikkarian thought with the rich insights of practical theology for the purposes of healing, transformation, and reconciliation. The purpose of this work is twofold: (1) to support the flourishing of multiracial people holistically, and (2) to pave contemporary paths in North America for broader engagement with Panikkar's life and philosophical contributions for the purposes of peace and justice amid the multiple crises in our world.

As a contemplative practitioner myself, I am deeply inspired by Panikkar's "archetype of the monk" because it seems Panikkar's embrace of monkhood was an important way that he as a mixed-race person found his peculiarity connected to the universal. I wonder how a Panikkarian vision of the monk can invite deeper connection to the depth dimension of Life for multiracial persons who are grappling with the struggle for liberation. The questions that guided this study were:

- What kinds of spiritualities are currently present within multi/racial experience(s)?
- How does our understanding of spirituality change when centering the lives of mixed-race people?
- How can practical theology strengthen its commitments to the flourishing of life as a whole by starting with multiracial people?

My intention is to prioritize multiracial people in these questions and wrestle with their experiences as they uniquely bear witness to the fullness of life by honoring the sacredness of their own body, embracing their full selves and all the identities included, and the plurality of their stories. Through this book, I



hope that others who find themselves excluded from monoracial or monocultural settings will also discover ways to experience spiritual wholeness even amid racism and be encouraged to take bold action that is grounded in their sociocultural location and that confronts racial oppression in their local context and in the world. This book is written first as a resource for those engaging the struggle against racial oppression and second to bear witness to a living hope that sustains and animates a sacred response to suffering.

### *A Triadic (Contemplative) Method*

This book privileges an interdisciplinary practical theological method that is triadic in structure and movement.<sup>93</sup> I am at once a practical theologian, a critical-race theorist, and a contemplative. All three of these disciplines are central to the writing of this book, and I weave in and out of each, resisting linear or rationalistically dominated argument, opening myself up to a synthesis that would not be possible if the disciplines were kept isolated and separate. The triadic hermeneutic is a unique method and deserves a brief introductory reflection.

Throughout this study, I depend on a thoroughly practical theological approach that is both traditional and novel. The traditional practical theological method I primarily rely on is “pastoral ethnography” with the intention of honoring the voices and diverse experiences of mixed-race people, increasing their sense of agency amid social oppression.<sup>94</sup> This traditional approach includes interviews, coded analysis of interviewee’s written

93. See Joseph Prabhu’s discussion on Panikkar’s understanding of the trinitarian perichoresis articulating four aspects of reality—tripartite structure, differentiated unity, open-ended character, and rhythmic quality—in his foreword to *The Rhythm of Being*, xvii.

94. Moschella, “Practice Matters,” 10.

reflections, as well as participatory observation and action.<sup>95</sup> As I have previously stated, I assume that there is inherent diversity within the myriad of multi/racial experience(s), and thus the need for humility, respect, and openness when engaging the issue(s) of multiraciality is essential. With this perspective, I do not assume any universal definitions of what it means to be multiracial even while I do seek to find themes that may trend across their diversity in order to find previously hidden connections.<sup>96</sup> I make this clarification to reiterate that, although I am discussing multiraciality at large in this book, I do not seek to construct a universal ideology or spirituality that exhaustively meets all the needs of multiracial people. I do not believe this is possible.

As a critical race theorist, I seek to interrogate and problematize the nuances and complexities of how race functions and co-create alternatives that are in solidarity with experiences from the margins. The depth and breadth inherent to multi/racial experience(s) will help each of us to understand the racialized dimensions of one another (especially in the United States). In this book, I aim to resist generalizations and universal prescriptions for multiracial people as these techniques have often been used for racist ends. By centering often forgotten and/or minimized racial experiences, I attempt to support the collective human experience as we uncover new and helpful ways to heal from the destructive effects of racialization. By engaging

95. I relied upon the work of Elaine Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 1 (January 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2013-0010>, and Helen Cameron, ed., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), to create my own practical theological methodology.

96. John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009).

race-talk, I seek to redeem and transform conversations about race to be more robust and inclusive of the many cultures and experiences of multiracial people so that the entire structural (il)logic of race (which includes racisms, monoracism, and racialization) might be rendered defunct altogether. This book does not intend to eradicate race-talk but to transform how we relate to race and racialization through the power of our innermost wisdom.

Finally, this book is written in the spirit of devoted contemplation informed by the life, thought, and mysticism of Raimon Panikkar. As Panikkar wrote, “A book is a drop in the ocean of the public opinion, a sincere prayer is a glass of water, but a book that is the fruit of contemplation can be wholesome rain.”<sup>97</sup> Throughout the book, I remain focused with the intention of *advaitic wholesomeness*. This work is grounded in contemplative encounters with Panikkarian mysticism that involve what Scott Eastham has described as a concentric hermeneutical deepening “in, out, and all around.” My contemplative approach to this book is inspired by this triad of circles with no clear boundaries or distinctions. I engage practical theology, critical mixed-race studies, and Panikkarian mysticism with a contemplative resistance to academic traditions of separating discourses, people, and experiences from one another. In the first and innermost circle, I give thanks to and for the life and thought of Raimon Panikkar. Here, I have found an example of multiraciality lived out through spirituality, and, as such, his “nine rules”<sup>98</sup> have

97. Panikkar, *The Water of the Drop*, 206.

98. When Panikkar was asked how to best practice contemplation, he responded in typical Panikkar fashion by sharing there is no one “best way” and must include a variety of approaches, yet he had nine rules that rooted him nevertheless. These nine rules have greatly influenced my own approach to integrative diverse spiritual practices in a spirit of contemplation. To read the list, see Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, 156.

benefitted me. In the second and outer circle, I operate as a trained critical theorist and bring in critical mixed-race studies as a way to pay attention more acutely to the experiences of those who have experienced multiraciality to better identify racism and how it can be dismantled. Finally, in the third and all-around circle, as a practical theologian, it is not acceptable for me to muse about multiraciality without living in touch with the experiences of other mixed-race people and, following their lead, considering how I can offer support and nourishment to them. As a committed practical theologian, this book includes the qualitative analysis of a newly created spiritual formation program that centers multiraciality.

The book as a whole and each chapter within it unfolds through this triadic contemplative process. I begin with a contemplation of multi/racial experience(s) from across the disciplines of psychology, sociology, literature, and education and then bring those insights into dialogue with the life and thought of Raimon Panikkar. In this cross-fertilization, I create a new spiritual formation program with corresponding qualitative analysis. The book concludes with the fruit of my contemplative and triadic process: a practical theology of multiraciality that I call Multiracial Cosmotheandrisms.

### *Outline of Chapters*

In this invitation, I have reviewed the focus of my book and shared its foundational themes, ideas, terms, and methods. I conveyed the background of this book, which is the prevalence of race and racial oppression in the North American context as well as the rationale for focusing on mixed-race people. I then introduced Raimon Panikkar as a contemplative example of

what being a spiritually rooted<sup>99</sup> “mixed” person might offer so that new and creative possibilities can be embodied amid a fragmented and divided world.

In the chapter that follows this, I introduce the critical discourse that focuses on mixed-race people in the US context and then review several prominent theories from the fields of psychology, education, and sociology that are foundational for contemporary critical mixed-race studies as an emerging interdisciplinary field created by and for multiracial people. I then transition to provide an overall analysis of multiraciality in its gifts and longings by applying critical race theory, practical theology, and contemplation. My hope is that this chapter will provide both a bigger picture and a sense for the multifaceted and diverse challenges faced by multiracial people and will also demonstrate the vast underrepresentation of multiracial voices. In identifying these various dimensions of multi/racial experience(s), I develop a more substantive and holistic approach to tending to the beauty and challenge of being multiracial in North America for the purposes of identifying spiritual pathways that will better support multiracial people to move toward wholeness.

Chapter 2 focuses on contemplating the life of Raimon Panikkar as a spiritual icon for multiraciality. To do this I categorize his life and thought in five ways that I believe have direct connections to the genius and spiritual longings present in multi/racial experience(s). The five sections are (1) Blessed Simplicity: Panikkar’s Roots in the Archetype of the Monk, (2) A Life Fully Lived: Raimon Panikkar’s Contemplative Mood, (3) Intra-religious Dialogue and a Pilgrimage to Kailash: Panikkar’s Unique Spiritual Practices, (4) A Christophanic Example: Rela-

99. Panikkar wrote the following in his journal, “It is necessary to be rooted and my roots are very clear; but roots are justified because they allow the tree to grow in all different directions” (*The Water of the Drop*, 76).

tionships that Cultivated Panikkar's Mysticism, (5) Mysticism, Compassion, and Multiraciality (MCAM): Creating a Spiritual Formation Program for Multiracial Christophany. This chapter clarifies how I understand Raimon Panikkar to be a spiritual guide for multiracial people par excellence and advocates that multi/racial experience(s) are fundamentally sacred and worthy of tender attention and care. From these foundations, I formulate a new spiritual formation program that centers multiraciality and seeks to lead participants toward their own experience of Multiracial Christophany.

In Chapter 3, I discuss MCAM, the spiritual formation program I created and led, including an overview of the format of the program, the basic contents of what was shared, and highlights of what I discovered through qualitative analysis of it. The program is unabashedly mystical, pluralistic, and collectivist in its commitments by maintaining an unflinching resolve to center multi/racial experience(s)<sup>100</sup> in their struggle to heal racial oppression in society through spiritual, communal, non-violent methods.<sup>101</sup> The findings arise from the lived experiences of the program participants, and, therefore, much of the chapter is dedicated to direct quotes from the lived experiences of participants. This chapter uplifts the special role mixed-race people can play in empowered and embodied vulnerable risk-taking that creates possibilities for social wholeness where the outcome cannot be predetermined in advance. The conclusions I draw here set the foundation for what I review in the final chapter as

100. I have begun this work and how I understand multiraciality to be important to healing racial oppression in my article "All Mixed Up: Multi/Racial Liberation and Compassion-Based Activism," *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020): 402.

101. F. Rogers Jr. details how these factors are vital to social change in a lecture he gave during the class "The Way of Radical Compassion" (2018), CST Lecture, TSF 4097.

a new practical theology of multiraciality, which I call “Multiracial Cosmotheandristm,” which reveals unique ways multiracial people can spiritually transform racial justice paradigms.

Chapter 4 is grounded in the spiritual step of *discerning new paths forward* and weaves together the entire book, proposing a practical theology of multiraciality called Multiracial Cosmotheandristm. A practical theology of multiraciality is useful in supporting mixed-race people but can also spark imagination for new action(s) to be taken by individuals as well as institutions to heal from race and racial oppression and dream of a future where all can thrive. I conclude the book with imagining how the world could be renewed if a practical theology of multiraciality was more widely embraced. In closing, I share considerations as to how this work might impact the fields of practical theology, critical mixed-race studies, and Panikkarian studies—perhaps deepening engagement with the complexities of North American life in and through a spirit of *blessed simplicity* and contributing to the healing, resistance, and empowerment of people amid ongoing conditions of racialization.

### *Contribution of the Book*

Corresponding with the practical theology of multiraciality that I have called Multiracial Cosmotheandristm, a profound transformation within myself emerged as a fruit of this triadic hermeneutical process. Multiracial Cosmotheandristm celebrates the lives of mixed-race people in their many gifts and wisdoms with the purposes of supporting all those pursuing justice and liberation. In writing this, I hope the various fields of practical theology, critical mixed-race studies, and Panikkarian studies will benefit from this dialogue that not only happened between different peoples, cultures, and spiritualities, but within the depths of my being.