

# A NEW SCIENCE OF CIVILIZATIONAL ANALYSIS: A TRIBUTE TO PANIKKAR

*Editor's Note: Benjamin Nelson, the eminent sociologist and historian, attended part of the Panikkar Symposium in order to make the following tribute to Raimundo Panikkar. Transcribed from a tape of his talk, the text reflects the informality of his presentation and the context of the program. Professor Nelson died before he was able to edit the transcription.*

When I was asked by Walter Capps (I was in Berkeley) to come to this meeting, I thought I knew what I wanted to say and how I wanted to honor Raimundo Panikkar. But I shall be very candid and say that I did not know until the remarks I have just heard. For they were uttered with such depth and profundity that I am at a loss to make my own remarks — which are, as I now see, of a semi-professional nature — reach the degree of profundity which I think we have just heard.

Already in the few hours I have been here today, I have had the good fortune of meeting and hearing two men who have struck me as quite exceptional living illustrations of the very sort of thing I am most concerned about: that is, interreligious, intercultural, intercivilizational encounter. Dr. King,<sup>1</sup> I must say that I have never in my life heard anyone who is himself such an expression of that. We can't all be that, but I, perhaps from what was called earlier the religion of study, go at trying to make sense of the international history of intercivilizational encounter.

To turn, then, more narrowly to what I want to say. I have met Raimundo Panikkar a number of times — I can't say how many — in halls of international conferences, where we have had fleeting conversations; and I have had the pleasure of hearing him speak most profoundly about complex traditions, which cried out to be understood with the help of a hermeneutic, or a theory, which was not available to those to whom he spoke. I recall our looking to each other at an international conference in Madrid, where we were doing our utmost to encourage those who were presumably interested in the comparative, international history of philosophy, to think about forming some wider structure which would bring

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*Benjamin Nelson, Professor of Sociology and History at the New School for Social Research in New York, was at the time of his death president of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations.*

those present into more fruitful communication with one another. In our room there were people of every sort, experts of every sort of philosophy and practioners of every religion. But as both Professor Panikkar and I had occasion to regret just a while ago, nothing was to issue from that meeting. We commenced a correspondence which has not been as frequent as it might be. I'm delighted to know that he continues to watch my own efforts in this area with great interest. And we did talk briefly about hopes of having some further meetings in California. I speak from the point of view of one who has professionally now for some years been as active as I could be in promoting the comparative study of civilizations. It is my hope that one day we will have meetings of that society here.

The topic of my paper is: "A New Science of Civilizational Analysis: A Tribute to Raimundo Panikkar." Raimundo Panikkar is an outstanding spokesman of a form of enquiry and research associated with, what I consider to be, an evolving discipline — one which, after the example of a Vico, I would wish to call, "A New Science of Civilizational Analysis." This new science draws its questions and research program from novel ways of relating to central issues which have been blossoming and burgeoning on the boundaries of humanities and social sciences and the comparative study of religions, on the boundaries of comparative cultural history, comparative sociology, and so on.

The "New Science," as I envisage it, speaks of civilizational traditions, civilizational deep structures, civilizational complexes, civilizational aggregates, and most of all concerns itself with the close analysis of intercivilizational, and intercultural, encounters. It studies them with very great specificity and care, as to precisely what the outcomes were across the world's history.

This afternoon we heard a splendid discussion of a critical case which posed very large questions that we might have debated for at least another full afternoon. But, the new study goes forward in a manner very different from that of Oswald Spengler, or Arnold Toynbee, or Pitirim Sorokin, or the older, if one will, paradigms of the study of civilization. The newer civilization analytic perspective, as I like to call it, is profoundly inspired by other thinkers. Let me mention at once one to whom I have been attached for some time, and to whom I shall compare Raimundo Panikkar: the incomparable historian, jurist, and sociologist Max Weber. And it draws upon many research-oriented investigators of civilizational issues, such as Alfred Kroeber and George Sarton, and in the field of religious studies, Rudolph Otto, Raffaele Pettazzoni, Mircea Eliade, and, of course, Raimundo Panikkar.

It proves, and this is one of my reasons for being in California, that a goodly number of the outstanding pioneers of what I am calling the "New Science of Civilizational Analysis" have done their basic work at the great university centers of California, especially Berkeley, UCLA, and University of California at Santa Barbara. Allow me to refer to a selected number

of those whose names come up in this connection. From the University of California at Berkeley, we have to mention the tremendous historian, Joseph Levenson, called, very recently in a beautiful book to his memory, the "Mozartian historian." His *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, his *Revolution and Cosmopolitanism* are works of the greatest profundity. They are not to be imagined to be histories in any ordinary sense. They are in fact writings in a new genre, which rests upon a very comprehensive and full detailed knowledge of history, sociology, religion, philosophy, and everything else.

So that I will not seem mysterious, simply let me say that, roughly from the year 1950 to the present day, we have been witnessing the emergence of what is, in fact, a new discipline; a new, if you will, science, of what I am calling civilizational analysis — a new form of studies. There is no department anywhere in the country in which one will now find it developed, or elaborated, or housed. It is obliged to discover modes of actually expressing itself. Sometimes it does so in an East Asian program, and sometimes in a Slavic studies program, or in a program on Russia, or Africa. For a great variety of reasons, it is evident that it is likely to appear more in some of these newer programs than in the older ones.

Also, of course, from Berkeley, in California, I would simply say the name, Kroeber, without going very much deeper; but he left us some works which illustrate his own awareness that he knew a new style, so to speak, was evolving in these studies. I happen to have a manuscript I recently found in which, at a meeting of the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton, he, Arnold Toynbee, Robert Oppenheimer, Paul Schrecker, Erwin Panofsky, and others, talked about what questions one really had to get into to go forward in this area.

Now at UCLA, from which I come today, I have had the pleasure of meeting with the extraordinary, ever-innovative medievalist, Lynn White, whom I believe to be a pioneer in this new area, and with the widow of perhaps the greatest Islamicist of our time, the too soon departed, Gustav Grünebaum. I can't see how anyone could miss the fact that Grünebaum knew that he was moving toward a new discipline. His wife only yesterday told me that he was aware of this, and that he was able to bear the criticisms made of him because he had that sense that he was, as it were, breaking fresh ground.

From Santa Barbara it is of course necessary to speak of Raimundo Panikkar. Of course I do not pretend, after what I heard just now, to have plumbed the depths of the contribution that he is making and will yet make. I would like to say just a very few words along those lines. It strikes me as I ponder our correspondence, ponder our meetings, ponder his writings, that he has clearly been very deeply concerned with inter-religious dialogue and intercultural encounter, of intercivilizational relations, and that there is no corner or aspect of that international history of relations with which he has not concerned himself. Like myself, but ever

so much more profoundly, he has been looking for access routes to the advancement of systematic studies in these fields; and I always look forward to everything he writes because of the evidence that he has, in fact, looked very closely and deeply at semantic cultural structures, that have to be understood in comparative terms.

Something else has been apparent to me; and I hope, Raimundo, that you will allow me to refer to you in relation to Max Weber, for I feel that there is a question that both of you asked and that got you into all of these turnings and corners. So far as we can tell, what Weber wanted to find out was how the world in which he moved got to be the way it was. It was such a simple question. And when he was asked what it was that he was really engaged in doing, this extraordinary man, who seemed to have been led to look into everything that came his way, said he just simply wanted to know how the world in which we live together had gotten to have the character it did. He said that he was a student of "Wirklichkeitswissenschaft," the "Science of Reality," and he meant the reality of everything that we were all together engaged in.

Weber discovered that if one really tried to do that, one would, of course, need to know something about whether all places of the world were like our own. Clearly they were not; so it became critical to understand why things had one shape in one place and why they had quite another in another. So he was in the middle of what I call comparative historical differential analysis.

Weber is chiefly known, unfortunately, for a book which is flawed, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. That was a work which should never have been believed to be anything more than a provocative sketch. Few, perhaps even few here, know how he turned after the year 1910, when he had had quite enough of polemic on the subject of the modern world and the role of the Protestant ethic in its development. He turned to the comparative historical differential studies of China, India, and ancient Judaism. He expected to go forward to work on Islam, to do a book on medieval Catholic structures. He didn't live long enough; he died in 1920. But before he died, he published an extraordinary retrospection of his life, which appeared as the author's introduction to the collected essays in the *Sociology of Religion*. Unfortunately, because of the circumstances of less than perfect scholarship in Germany itself, as well as in the United States, that essay has generally been assumed to have been written in 1904-5, when in fact it was done just before he died, the very last paper to come from his hand, in 1920.

When we read it, we discover where he had been led to go in order to answer this question: namely, how the world as we know it had gotten to have the character it has. I don't believe that it is possible for many to doubt that he has made, at the very least, some extraordinary contributions to the understanding of the civilizational study of the history of the world conceived in international and in intercivilizational terms. Again

and again this afternoon as I heard remarks developing, I thought of phrases in his writings and questions he might have asked, particularly, for example, with regard to Buddhism in China. He had fascinating notions along those lines.

Now I believe that Raimundo Panikkar is asking a question rather like Weber's. He wanted to know how the world had gotten to be the way it was, as well as to make the world over in a manner which is perhaps closer to the heart's desire. Therefore I think that it was imperative for him, as it was imperative for Weber, to look in all sorts of corners that some others of us do not really look into.

Like Weber, like Panikkar — like myself, may I say — we find ourselves strongly drawn, as we proceed in this work, to become increasingly pluralist. I couldn't help but notice the title of your talk for this evening, Raimundo.<sup>2</sup> Pluralists have a pluralistic vision of variety, multiplicity, and so on. And I have come to feel that it is indispensable to do justice to these varieties, diversities, and multiplicities if we are really to tell the histories and understand the structures, not only of pasts, as they can come to be known, but also of futures, as they are in the making.

I would like to close with some remarks which I hope you won't consider excessively methodological. Civilization analytic models, as I conceive them, place their stress on cultural and processional specificities. They part company with other sorts of models that are every day increasingly in the ascendancy in the Western world, and especially in the United States of America. They simply part company with, and will not accept, uniformitarian schemas, which rest on the assumption of universal invariant psychologies. They reject unilinear evolutionary logics of irreversible development. They will not accept elementary behavioral science models, which rest upon this very same assumption, and which in fact undergird what is, in fact, taught and acted on in the social sciences and often even in the humanities. They do not accept what I suppose we would be allowed to call "system theoretic models," which postulate general system structures as the ground base of all process. Civilization analytic models insist that if we are to understand our present, and our likely futures, we need access to the specificities of these diverse cultural traditions and must somehow find a way of reaching into the roots of these structures as they have in fact related one to another. There are worlds in the making. None of us can tell what shape they will have. The danger of accepting the uniformitarian models is that the futures will be aborted because the pasts will have been stereotyped and frozen by alien molds that simply do not do justice to actual histories in process.

I was simply delighted and honored, Dr. King, by your review of this story of missions in Africa, of the Fanti people, and others, because only in that way can we in fact come to see what we are in the midst of in the world now and how our futures may be influenced in one way or another. I think, Raimundo, that you have done very great service in this cause; and

I hope you will live with us many years more and do increasing work on behalf of that effort.

<sup>1</sup>Noel King, of the University of California, Santa Cruz, had just given a talk entitled "Elimina, Cape Coast, Musama Disco, Christo, and Ahmadiyya': Fantiland Revisited."

<sup>2</sup>The title of Raimundo Panikkar's talk was announced as "Pluralistic Society or Pluralistic Man," but was changed to "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel — A Meditation on Non-Violence." The talk is published below, pp. 197 ff.

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## **Introduction** (*Continued from p. 134*)

Paul Ricoeur, University of Chicago

"The Symbolic and the Narrative in Religious Thought"

Fritz Buri, Basel University

"The Significance of the Problem of Being and Meaning for Cross-Cultural Religious Understanding"

The following are listed in the order in which they were scheduled during the morning and afternoon sessions:

David Ray Griffin, School of Theology at Claremont

"Can Christians Learn from Other Religions?"

Patrick Burke, Temple University

"The Presence of Cultures in Religion: Some Structural Considerations"

Thomas Berry, Riverdale Center for Religious Research

"The Fourfold Scripture: Cosmic, Verbal, Historical, Psychic"

Robert Gimello, University of California, Santa Barbara

"The Buddhist Mind as 'Its Own Place': Reflections on the Autonomy and Responsiveness of Buddhism"

Klaus K. Klostermaier, University of Manitoba

"The Religion of Study"

Noel King, University of California, Santa Cruz

"Elimina, Cape Coast, Musama Disco, Christo, and Ahmadiyya': Fantiland Revisited"

Richard Hecht, University of California, Santa Barbara

"The Hermeneutics of Traditions: The Cases of Midrash and Nirukta"

Charles Wendell, University of California, Santa Barbara

"An Ethical Crux in Ibn al-Muqaffa's *Katāb Kalīla wa Dimna*"

Eliose Knapp Hay, University of California, Santa Barbara

"T.S. Eliot's Negative Way"

Gary Lease, University of California, Santa Cruz

"On the Origins and Nature of Religion"

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