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The Work of Discovery: Interreligious Dialogue as Life-Long Learning

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At the beginning of his great treatise, De Doctrina Christiana, Augustine says that "[t]here are two things on which all interpretation of Scripture depends: the process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have learnt." By doctrine Augustine means not just the content of faith but, more fundamentally, the way we are taught by God's grace and learn how to interpret and communicate what we have learned. Scripture is made up of words, which act as signs pointing to the action of God's Word in the world and, which, therefore, form the Church in a particular way. If the text is to be interpreted and explained correctly, the work of discovery (inventio) needs to be informed by knowledge of the Canon of scripture as well as by virtues of humility and piety. Inner and outer movements work hand in hand, two parts of a single dialectical process: the conviction that "the words" do indeed point to the Word and the act of explanation, which in seeking to communicate that conviction is forever addressing questions raised by the world "beyond." Put like that, it is not that the Christian teacher first apprehends the Word by listening attentively to what has been proclaimed in the Gospel and then reformulates it, translating the terms as appropriate, so that others can understand the message. Rather, the two movements, activities of learning and teaching, work together, provoking a deeper understanding of the mystery of God's love. Listening to others and learning the skills of speaking truth in love are not by-products of "Christian teaching"; they are its very expression.

This is, first and foremost, Augustine's own experience—being called to that inner conversion of heart where he learned what he most needed and had long sought to avoid: the inner instruction of the Word of God. The treatise is neither a polemic against particular adversaries, nor a catechetical summary, which unpacks the essentials of Christian faith. It speaks rather of what the Church is called to be: a learning community or a school of faith. This, however, is no ordinary school made up of teachers and pupils in formal relationship with each other. Indeed such distinctions, as Nicholas Lash puts it, have to be subordinated to the "recognition that all of us are called to lifelong learning in the Spirit, and all of us are called to embody, to communicate,
to protect what we have learned.\textsuperscript{32} Such learning is an end in itself—not just a practical task which demands the honing of human skills for the sake of making clear what is to be passed on but one which is deeply theological because its object is nothing less than to become learned in Christ and thus taken into the very heart of God. In Book Four, written long after Book One, Augustine focuses on the qualities necessary in the Christian teacher and draws attention to the ethical problem inherent in the use of rhetoric—the disconnect, which often opens up between what one says and what one does. Truth can drown in a show of eloquence; mere words can overwhelm and distort. Before preaching, says Augustine, it is important for speakers to pray, both for themselves that they may speak effectively, and for those they address that they may listen effectively. It is thus that he ends with an important disclaimer. He thanks God that he has been able to express “not the sort of person that I am—for I have many failings—but the sort of person that those who apply themselves to sound teaching [Titus 1.9], in other words, Christian teaching, on behalf of others as well as themselves, ought to be.”\textsuperscript{5}

**REDISCOVERING OUR STORY**

This essay arises from the experience of interreligious dialogue as an experience of learning; more specifically, it is about the “sort of person” Christians are called by the Spirit of Christ to become. My primary argument is that the virtues, which make Christian living possible, are formed in response to the word of scripture and, in Augustine’s words, “on behalf of others.” Christianity is a missionary tradition, but there is much more to mission than proselytism—or indeed any set of activities, which the Church is seen to do. The renewal of missiology in recent decades has shifted attention to what the Church is—and to the inner dynamic which inspires missionary effort in the first place.\textsuperscript{4} As David Bosch has reminded us, it was only with the great colonial expansion of the 16th century that the word mission came to be used to refer to places and what went on there. In this sense, “[t]he term presupposes an established church in Europe, which dispatched delegates to convert overseas peoples and was as such an attendant phenomenon of European expansion.”\textsuperscript{5} In the globalised world of post-modernity the positions have been reversed and a richer and more ecumenically nuanced sense of mission has begun to establish itself.\textsuperscript{5} Thanks to the influence of kerygmatic theology, the Church has retrieved the concept of the Missio Dei, a Trinitarian account of God’s act of self-communication accomplished in the Father’s sending of the Son and the Spirit into the world. From the extraordinary outpourings of Pentecost and Paul’s bold experiment on the Athenian Areopagus to the practice of “inculturation” in contemporary times, the Church has sought to bear witness to the love of God made manifest in Christ. Strictly speaking, however, this is what
God does. The Church's task is not to supply a somehow "missing" Spirit but to co-operate with what God is already doing in a world shot through with the traces of God's mysterious presence.

In that sense the Church is called to practice a life-long learning, which is guided by a growing sensitivity to the Word of God wherever and whenever that Word may be spoken. If, as Augustine implies, the Good News reveals a truth, which only comes properly alive when it is communicated, then "the others" play a significant part not just in the practice of Christian discipleship but also in the movement of God's grace, which makes discipleship possible. If, to put it another way, God's loving self-revelation in Christ is properly relational, "the others" are, in a certain sense, the agents of the Holy Spirit—not in the same sense as those who strive consciously to bring the experience of God's love to explicit awareness, but motivated by the same Spirit nonetheless. To that extent, "the others" are best understood not as a ready target for Church expansion but as partners in bringing the world to a more explicit recognition of the harmony of all things, which the Church finds in Christ.

Clearly the experience of collaboration for a common purpose and the teaching and learning it inspires, an experience formulated in what has come to be known as the "fourfold dialogue," has implications for both spirituality and mission. My interest, however, is not in what holds spirituality and mission together; no doubt they can be readily interpreted as a short-hand for Augustine's "two things on which all interpretation of Scripture depends," two distinct but not separate aspects of a single dynamic process of learning and teaching. I am concerned, rather, with the theological quality of life-long learning, with what the process of discovery and presentation says about God's action as it is to be discerned in those inter-personal engagements, which bring Christians and other people of faith together. I begin with the premise that human beings find their sense of self not by cultivating some sort of inner assurance but by risking engagement with what is strictly other. To put it in the more theological terms, which contemporary writing on spirituality has made familiar, personal transformation is achieved not by cultivating discrete inner feelings but by co-operating with the movements of God's grace in the world, which Christians ascribe to the Holy Spirit. Mark McIntosh, for instance, seeking to ground spirituality in the terms of interpersonal encounter, says: "It is this beckoning of the other (and the response this beckoning elicits in us) that draws us from provisional existence into real life, into the unfolding of true personhood, and so ultimately into the most real form of life there is, namely the interpersonal trinitarian life of God." That this is a "life-long" or eternally unfolding process is clear. However much it may provide precious insights into the nature of that participation in God's life, which the discipleship of Christ promises, what is learned is always provisional. A certain recapitulation and
repetition is necessary. The engagement with the other is never finished—precisely because the other is always other and never reducible to the same. This raises a difficult question, a question which underlies all experiences of interreligious encounter, about how it is possible to remain faithfully rooted in the tradition initiated by the Gospel while at the same time entering into other thought-worlds opened up by the Spirit who leads us "into all the truth."

In addressing that question and the issues it raises, I want first to describe one particular example of an in-depth dialogue. My point, to simplify somewhat, is that life-long learning is an intrinsically relational act, in which persons from different faith traditions are led by the Spirit into the depths of God. Although much of what I shall describe is concerned with how such persons respond to issues of common interest and concern and therefore with very human problems of cross-cultural interpretation and understanding, my interest lies in establishing the principles of discovery and presentation which reflect something of Augustine's experience. In the second part I take up this experience of different communities learning not just about each other but with each other and open up a dialogue with Raimon Panikkar, the great Spanish-Indian theologian of religions. When speaking of dialogue, Panikkar often repeats an old saying: not even the philosopher can jump over his own shadow. By this he does not just mean that reality is too complex to be encompassed by reason, still less reduced to some variety of inner consciousness. More subtly, we human beings are inextricably involved in the reality we seek somehow to comprehend. At their best, the Indian sages knew how to surrender to reality rather than surmount it, to find ways of engaging with what always retains some irreducible element of otherness, which avoid coercion and violence. Thus what Panikkar commends is the cultivation of what he calls a "third eye," an awareness of the mystery of the real, which is grounded in the rational and the sensory yet never exhausts that reality.

In this essay my main concern is to focus specifically on the Christian process of teaching and learning and with the spirituality, which makes it possible. People engage in interreligious dialogue for a variety of reasons, from curiosity about their neighbours to a passion for justice. However, once they move beyond a superficial level and encounter some of the more intractable problems of communication and understanding, they often find that what is demanded is attention not just to the transactions and negotiations, to what is actually said, but to the deeper motivations and hesitations, which any inter-human engagement betrays. Discovery and rediscovery—Augustine's *inventio*, which is never finished until we rest in God—demand their own spirituality of life-long learning about the ways of God with human beings.
“FAITHS TOGETHER”

What came to be known as Faiths Together began life as an outreach project sponsored by Heythrop College in the University of London with the active co-operation of the Jesuit-run De Nobili dialogue centre in Southall, a multicultural suburb of West London. The original version ran for some eighteen months, from 2007 until 2008; a shorter version took rather more than half that time, from 2008 until the summer of 2009, but with much the same material and processes in a more concentrated form. Both courses consisted of a structured development of the approach to interreligious dialogue pioneered by Daniel Faire, a member of the French Roman Catholic congregation, the Brothers of St. Gabriel, who lived and worked in Southall for nearly thirty years. Brother Daniel founded Westminster Interfaith, a diocesan agency committed to interreligious understanding according to the principles of the Second Vatican Council. The Council’s call to Christians to engage in “conversations and collaboration” led him to set up a variety of events around, which relationships could grow—conferences, seminars, study-groups, shared liturgies, and an annual peace pilgrimage, a walk (more often than not a vigorous hike) around different places of worship in a particular part of London. For him interreligious dialogue was primarily an inter-personal experience. With his typically Catholic vision of a world graced by the Spirit of God, he found a unifying theme not in any common belief or universal idea but in the people he lived amongst, the Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists and fellow-Christians of his beloved Southall, whom he called “people of faith.” This radically pluralist religious environment he thought of as a “laboratory” where extraordinary things could happen once neighbors became more familiar with each other and learned, often painfully, what the rhetoric of respect actually demanded in terms of time, patience and good humour. Brother Daniel died in September 2007, by which time Faiths Together was getting into its stride and beginning to prove that what is sometimes the greatest barrier to understanding, namely human religiosity, can also be a catalyst for building the common good.

The project began with conversations between the present writer and Tony McCall, an experienced educator at both secondary and tertiary level. Both of us had worked closely with Brother Daniel. We wanted to expand his vision of persons living and talking together and make it the focus of a program of faith development. In so doing, a pedagogy of active learning was developed. The initial discussion paper, with the working title of “school of faiths,” was intended specifically for the formation of Catholics for ministry in a pluralist society. The aim was to introduce them to the everyday reality of multicultural London by visiting a place like Southall and engaging with the people there. It very quickly became apparent, however, that there was no reason in principle why the structure of learning, which was envisaged, should not include anyone
South Hall Scene courtesy of Michael Barnes, SJ
of any faith prepared to enter the process. At this stage, Augustine’s insight was not uppermost in our minds. We were more impressed by the experience of the demographic changes of the last half-decade in the United Kingdom and the impact they had had on the development of Roman Catholic missiology, as noted above, as well as on the politics of interreligious relations. The other is no longer taken as a problem to be accommodated within a pre-existing Christianity-centred scheme but a neighbor who shares the same geographical space and faces similar human problems of life in a pluralist secularized culture. The initial principle, which was formulated, recognised that, as people of faith, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs all have personal skills and sources of motivation, which, while they arise out of very different ways of interpreting the world, can be shared in an atmosphere of generosity and willingness to learn.

Thus the formal teaching and learning process and the safe space provided by the College’s Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue linked up with the more practical possibilities for learning represented by life on the streets of Southall. The key, however, lay not with that particular axis, although it was undoubtedly a rich resource, but with the co-operative model it represented. Academic and experiential dimensions of the face-to-face encounter, it was felt, could be adapted to cross-cultural religious life in other parts of multi-faith Britain. By shifting to the more descriptive title *Faiths Together*, the course team sought to avoid the didactic and institutional account of learning associated with the word “school” and to draw attention to what goes on when the everyday reality of human relations is treated not as mess and confusion to be ordered but as a site of graced activity to be embraced. Using terms familiar from Religious Education theory as practiced in the United Kingdom, the process was encapsulated in a series of prepositions, moving from talk of learning *about* and *from* to learning *through* and *with*. The participants, as people of faith, themselves became the center of a process of personal and interpersonal transformation. *Faiths Together* was explicitly relational. Each session had its specific aims and objectives. As a whole, however, the project was concerned less with having participants absorb a particular content than with inviting them to gain the confidence and openness necessary for moving out of a familiar world and engaging with the unknown.

Each of the two versions brought together some twenty participants from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Nothing was expected of them except a commitment to their own faith and a willingness to learn from and with one another. The program, run in the first instance over five College terms, fitted neatly into five important phases or variations on the experience of meeting. These were called, in order: encounters, conversations, engagements, dialogues, with a final stage that eventually acquired the title “living with dif-
ference.” The learning experience was intended to be cumulative, with ideas and issues being continually opened up and explored from different angles. Learners were encouraged to keep a journal so that initial impressions could be examined again with the benefit of hindsight. The second version of the course followed much the same pattern but was intended to be more streamlined, with a full academic year being split into five equal periods of six weeks. What this omitted, of course, was the long summer vacation, which in the first version, proved invaluable in allowing members of the group to work together in their own time on a common project. If there was one major difference noted between the two versions of the project, it lay with the time, which successful interreligious learning takes. At stake in such learning are not just intellectual questions, which are thrown up by another form of discourse, but, more awkwardly, the affective and emotional challenges to the sense of self, which attend any encounter with persons from another cultural, religious or linguistic world.

The phases of meeting were not mutually exclusive but ran into each other in what McCaffrey called a “spiralling movement.” A series of “encounters” introduced the most fundamental concepts—discrete themes like the sacred, religion, culture, ritual, text and spirituality, introduced as clearly and objectively as possible by expert speakers from a variety of religious traditions. The aim here was to assemble what was called an interreligious “tool kit.” “Conversations” sought to root what at first seemed abstract and even alien concepts in the lived experience of people of faith in Southall. Visits to places of worship were complemented by home visits, in which pairs of learners were offered hospitality by a couple of persons of faith from another faith tradition. The aim was to break down the human barrier—achieved for the most part by extraordinary generosity and excellent tea, fruit and sweets. For most learners such practical and personal hospitality was a turning point, teaching them some of the complementary skills involved in being host and guest. Sensing something of the inner spirit of another religious tradition prepared them for more intensive “engagements” where mixed faith groups studied a different tradition in preparation for their hosting of a speaker from another tradition. In the first version each session was spread over two weeks, allowing time for the guest to come back and respond to what he or she had picked up from the discussion. The second version used a different device. The speakers were all converts, people with sometimes-difficult faith journeys to describe. Coming to terms with other people’s shifts of allegiance opened up important questions about integrity, authority and the nature of faith itself. Both courses built up a growing sensitivity to the sheer complexity of multi-lateral meetings, with different voices expressing subtleties and nuances often lost at the purely bilateral level. This paved the way for “dialogues”—here referring to a shared engage-
ment with the practical implications of faith in a multi-religious and secular world. Issues such as education, marriage, death, gender, grieving and violence, which affect all human beings whatever their faith, were opened up with a guest speaker and designated respondents facilitating a discussion.

Alongside the cumulative awareness of the complexity of the interpersonal experience, another sensibility was growing. The final phase was kept deliberately open-ended. “Living with Difference” was a tacit acknowledgement that there is no conclusion to interreligious dialogue, whatever the terms are used, and that the best possible outcome is to stay with the process, to be prepared to risk further encounters and open up a different set of conversations. The first version of the project ended with the group attending a colloquium for people of faiths in Southall and then hosting their own workshops for a conference at Heythrop. The aim here was to ensure that ideals of empathy and hospitality, which the groups had learned together, were being more consciously rooted through the experience of communication “for the sake of others.” Christian, Muslim and Buddhist worked together to present cross-religious themes and visions. In such a way did ideals become virtues—what MacIntyre calls “dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways.” In the second version, given limits on time, participants spent a day of pilgrimage and retreat. Both, however, were encouraged to make their own commitments, whether to personal or communal concerns, and thus to make explicit some element in the learning process, which had formed them, not just as discoverers in Augustine’s sense but, as communicators. The spiralling movement showed that it is only possible to attend to the really awkward areas where the sheer difference between faiths can become potentially divisive once time has been spent on the more prosaic business of listening and getting to know one another. If there was one particularly poignant moment it came with one of the dialogues devoted to grieving and death. One member of the group had been recently bereaved and found herself, almost for the first time, talking about how prayer, family and friendship had sustained her. No one wanted to move on, to grapple further with the aims and objectives assigned for that day. There was at that point no need for external input about faith; the reality was already present in the very human interaction between people of faith. The palpable sense of learning with had turned observers into participants, collaborators in a shared endeavour. The primary aim of the project—

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FAITH SHARING IN DIFFERENCE

In describing the Church’s experience of religious pluralism as it is refracted through the Faiths Together project, I have tried to show that interreligious learning involves both an assimilation of content, the “facts” about religion—teachings, rituals, traditions, and a more personal and intractable engagement with ultimate questions about value, identity and truth, which face every human being. I have also noted that the various stages of meeting and dialogue have built a certain communicative competence as participants learn how to work with and encourage each other as persons committed to a religious interpretation of life. In other words, life-long learning is not a mechanical process of assimilation; it demands a critical self-reflection on personal (including inter-personal) experience. Adult educational theory, with its concern for what is specific to a transformative model of learning, recognises the significance of the synergy between religious learning and faith development. To over-simplify somewhat: religious learning is not the result of education about “religious things” but an exploration of whatever human beings experience as having a transcendent significance in their lives. Some thirty years ago, Gabriel Moran put it like this:

Abstractly defined, religion and education collide. But placed in relation to the idea of development, the educational and the religious achieve a working relationship. Education needs a religious impulse, or else its concern to put things in order close off further development and thereby undoes the meaning of education. Religion needs educational restraint and challenge so that its impulse to transcend the world does not lose touch with the world to be transcended. Otherwise, religious activities are not a going beyond but a gone beyond, leaving us with a sphere called religion which no longer transforms our lives together.17

In Moran’s terms, religion is not an object of study, not even a source of “spiritual values,” but a catalyst for learning. When the personal pursuit of values and truth comes up against other persons’ analogous pursuits, the field of endeavour subtly changes. As persons of faith we may speak in different religious idioms and exhibit very different assumptions about what makes for ultimate significance, but, at the interpersonal level, we work at a task which is shared: to bring a wealth of inherited wisdom to bear upon this encounter. The question is: how this challenge of “sharing in difference” may not just be pursued with integrity but also enhance rather than undermine the sense of self, or—to put it another way—how an encounter with the other can build up faith rather than destroy it.

Four important principles emerged from the Faiths Together project. Firstly, and most obviously, inter-religious learning does not come about through
the collecting of interesting data and captivating thoughts about the other. It demands a sometimes painful attention to one's own self and to the difficult process of making sense of whatever (or whoever) does not fit my own comfortable categories. Secondly, difference is never straightforwardly symmetrical any more than any relationship can be reduced to binary terms. Other factors come into play—the economic, social and cultural as much as the more obviously religious or theological. Interreligious questions go hand in hand with the intra-religious; the most difficult challenges often come from within a tradition and arise from questions about loyalty and authority. Thirdly, growth in understanding of the other is never straightforward and takes time. The Faiths Together participants were encouraged to distinguish between different stages in the process, in particular learning how an initial tendency to focus on supposedly universal or mediating concepts gives way to a more risky acceptance of points of difference and “otherness” which do not fit the expected pattern. The challenge is to find ways of holding continuities and discontinuities together, noting different analogies, hearing unexpected resonances, and noticing oblique references. Finally, while the process of encounter often achieves a deeper understanding or appreciation both of one's own tradition and that of the other, it also encourages the skills of interpersonal engagement. It is of the very nature of learning that processes of discovery and presentation work together; intellectual and more intuitive skills are involved in understanding what is strange and other. What is less obvious, but often powerfully experienced, is the way persons working together become proof against the tendency to domesticate the other. Clearly respect and friendship do grow. But something more is going on: given the right conditions, the very struggle to communicate a deeply held truth builds an empathetic response. The more “religion” takes on a particular face, not abstractly Buddhist and Christian but more precisely Nichiren Shu and Methodist, the less adequate do the universalising categories of some sort of putatively global history appear. The adult learners of Faiths Together present themselves not as finished examples of some well-defined tradition but as persons of faith rooted in their own tradition and seeking to make sense of an increasingly intractable yet deeply absorbing experience of struggling with intellectual and affective barriers. What is gained from the process of dialogue is a certain inter-linguistic competence, a learned capacity to translate. Just as learning a language means attending to grammatical and syntactical structures as much as to picking up a different vocabulary, so inter-religious dialogue demands not just a sensitivity to what other persons of faith say of themselves but skills of discerning the less obvious patterns of living inscribed in stories and liturgical performance.
Muslim College courtesy of Michael Barnes, SJ
CULTIVATING THE SPIRITUAL "THIRD EYE": THE WITNESS OF RAIONM PANIKKAR

Few theologians have focussed so insightfully on the "grammar" or deep structure of religions as Raimon Panikkar. His imaginative if infuriatingly allusive essay, The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man, begins with a definition of spirituality as "one typical way of handling the human condition ... [which] represents man's basic attitude vis-à-vis his ultimate end." He distinguishes between spirituality and religion on the pragmatic grounds that the former term is more flexible. Where religion is largely conterminous with belief systems and culturally bound institutions, spirituality crosses religious boundaries because it focuses on practice, especially on the different forms of prayer, which provide the inner energy or motivation for action. Where religion often divides, spirituality—as described by Panikkar—unites. His last work, The Rhythm of Being, is a much more ambitious synthesis of the world's religious wisdom. The term spirituality hardly appears. However, the underlying premise of his earlier work—that "typical ways of handling the human condition" somehow have to be reconciled if faith is not to become dangerously idolatrous or naively superstitious—is given much greater prominence.

Towards the end of this remarkable book, in a discussion about the nature of Christian doctrine and the role played by theology in articulating the Christian tradition of faith, Panikkar says:

The first function of Christian theology is not the clarification of the "data of Revelation." There are no such data. If there is a datum at all, it is revelation itself, which has to be humanly received and understood. Such an understanding needs to take a human spirit. Even assuming that Revelation provides us with the means of understanding, there is no possible communication if this understanding, qua understanding, is not communicable.

As a Christian theologian himself, Panikkar is anchored within the "Christic fact" of the Incarnation. Yet his is never satisfied with speaking out of that position in order to explain Christian faith to others. Rather he is guided by a vision of God as loving communication, which underpins and gives life to creation itself. He speaks, therefore, of the "cosmotheandric mystery"—a neologism, which brings cosmic, divine and human together and points beyond the Trinity as the distinctive feature of Christian doctrine to the triadic structure of the whole of reality and all human knowing. For Panikkar, the silent source of all things is the Father who gives expression to form or Logos, which is constantly generating meaning through the inexhaustible life of Pneuma. His account of spirituality (or, to be more precise, of spiritualities, in the plural, as basic human attitudes towards the transcendent) and the theology it supports is through and through relational. He may not use the language of "the other," but relationality is very much his guiding theme.
The target of his work is both uncritical monism and lazy forms of pluralism. Human beings can no more be separated from the mystery of the cosmos than they can be set apart from the mystery of Godself. The human person, made in the image and likeness of God, is charged with keeping open the “dialectic of ultimate questions,” which are always in danger of being reduced to comfortable and less than ultimate answers. Thus Panikkar introduces Buddhist concepts of Anatmanavada and Sunyata and the Upanishadic mahavakyani, the “great sayings,” to show how a certain elusive spiritual awareness forces us beyond the dialectic of question and answer which would posit an unquestioned beginning to an acceptance that we cannot somehow surmount things. We are inextricably caught up in things, indeed put in question by them. According to Panikkar this becomes possible when we realise that:

We are beings endowed not only with logos, but also inspired by pneuma. Pneuma, or the spirit, is neither above nor below the logos. Logos and pneuma are not two separate “faculties” through which we enter into contact with reality— and therefore they are not subordinated to one another. Neither are they indistinguishable, the same “thing.” We need to distinguish them, but they are inseparable. If the senses are the first eye and reason is the second, then the spirit is the third eye, but the integral vision is only one, the synthesis of the three eyes.

There is a powerful, if opaque, intuition being expressed here. It takes us back to the Faiths Together experience of interreligious learning and the principled discernment of a truth, which crosses boundaries, which is both familiar yet strange.

Panikkar begins this chapter on the “Destiny of Being” with the disclaimer that his intention is “not to analyze the depths of human subjectivity.” It is rather to “approach the Whole as such”—to develop a holistic vision of the “inter-in-dependence and intra-in-dependence of all things” as it is refracted through the religious wisdom of humankind. Nevertheless, the issues, which most occupy him are epistemological, at least in the sense that he is taken up with the process, by which the cultivation of the “third eye,” life in the Spirit, gives rise to a vision of the wholeness of things. There can be no doubt, for instance, that in his book on the Trinity, for all its insistence on balance between the three spiritualities, the privileged position is given to “mysticism,” the spirituality appropriate to the Spirit which is expressed under the advaitic category of jñana or knowledge. In The Rhythm of Being he develops the theme of advaita at much greater depth. Translated as “adualism” rather than non-dualism, Panikkar finds in the advaitic experience a sort of middle way between dualism and monism. Reality is not One but neither is it “more-than-One”; whatever “oneness” is to be discerned, it is differenced and complex. His probing

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of advaïita originates with Vedanta but owes much to the Christian Trinitarian concept of perichoresis as well as the key Buddhist idea of pratitya-samutpada—the doctrine of “dependent origination” or “mutual co-inherence.”

The three concepts are not woven together in any systematic fashion; the aim is to show how the central theological insight proper to Christian faith is to be applied to the “cosmotheandric mystery” as a whole. The “Chrestic fact” is not reducible to some sort of esoteric gnosis; rather it generates an insight into the very complexity of Being, which is proof against the human tendency to totalise the plurality of things into some univocal monistic concept. Thus his grand, if decidedly opaque, interreligious narrative is occasionally interrupted by a personalist—or, more exactly, inter-personal—dimension. Advaïita, he says at one point, “amounts to the overcoming of dualistic dialectics by means of introducing love at the ultimate level of reality.”

If there is a shift between these two meditations on the Trinity, it is from the spiritual categories or “attitudes” which integrate and, in a sense, encompass the whole of reality towards the “ultimate questions,” which the other is forever pressing upon us. Thus, in The Rhythm of Being, a more nuanced account of the way of devotion begins to assert itself. As a form of spirituality Bhaktimarga hardly appears, but love, as the “force of monotheism,” which satisfies our “infinite longings,” haunts almost every page.

For instance, in a discussion of the various inner experiences which make us “realize that there is a ‘me’ and something else besides me, perhaps even beyond and above me, that is as real as I am,” Panikkar touches on the experience of an aloneness, which knows it is not alone. He finishes enigmatically: “I mention love last but stress that it occupies the first place among the factors that gives us a sense of the real. Pure reason can doubt that there is something real; authentic love cannot.”

To the extent that Panikkar is describing a version of what McIntosh speaks of as the “beckoning of the other,” it is tempting to ascribe to him a sort of “reciprocal epistemology”: I know to the extent that I allow myself to be known—or, as Panikkar himself might put it, I become “me” insofar as I find myself interrogated by the rhythm of Being. In the light of the discussion raised by the Faith Together experience, it is the manner of this questioning, and its implications for the sense of self, which becomes the crucial issue. There is something plausible and attractive in the patterning of three interdependent spiritualities or spiritual “attitudes” which transcend religious boundaries. The question this raises, however, is not whether the analogy of human and divine relations restores spirituality to its right relationship with theology. Clearly it does. Nor is it whether he is right to argue for a balanced spiritual life based on a synthesis of different but complementary practices.

Again, there is an important insight here; if the Trinity is the “grammar” which gives shape to the language of Christian faith, then one should expect to find
in the practice of faith something of that complex yet integrated differentiation which echoes the inner harmony of the Trinitarian relations. The question, rather, is about the relationship between spirituality and practice, on the one hand, and language and doctrine, on the other—or, to return to Augustine’s theme, between what is given in the tradition of faith and what is learned in the process of its communication.

In unravelling the terms of this question, one important theological caveat needs to be entered against Panikkar’s mighty cosmotheandric scheme of things. He works against the background of what he calls “Christianness,” a personalised faith, which expresses a Christ-like attitude to the world. This is the trajectory given to his thought by the “rhythm” or harmony, which he finds in the complementary economies of Logos and Pneuma. Yet, for all the emphasis he gives to the experience of adventice love in his later work, the suspicion remains that the particularity of Christian faith, its rooting in historical events, is being subsumed into a universalist scheme.

In bringing Panikkar into dialogue with Augustine’s account of doctrine as a process of discovery and presentation, I have drawn attention to the Trinitarian form of Christian learning. It is important to recall, however, that the Missio Dei describes not a theological scheme which organises the sum total of human experience but a movement of God’s love expressed in the eternal self-giving of Father, Son and Spirit. The reason why the text of scripture gives the Church what it needs to learn is that it speaks of a people’s experience of being guided and formed by God’s grace. In Christian terms, the New Testament always needs to be read against the background of God’s own act of self-revelation in Christ. This is not just to say that the Paschal Mystery is logically prior to the formulations inscribed in the sacred page itself but that the text is the record of the Spirit constantly teaching the Church about that Mystery as it is repeated both in the reading of scripture and in the sacramental life of the Church, from which it is inseparable. At its best that is what the Church always is—that community, which is called to follow the guidance of the Spirit “into all the truth.” Mission forms the Church, not the other way round. God’s mission is to be discerned in the interaction between a people and the vagaries of human history—even in the halting efforts and more obvious failures of Christians to witness to “the hope that is within you” (1 Peter 3.15). Whether in the outpourings of Pentecost or through the more carefully constructed translations of Pauline preaching, or indeed in the many ways Christian missionaries have through the centuries sought to give form to the Good News, Logos and Pneuma work together to inspire an understanding which is often provoked when “the other” enters the scene.

It would be misleading to suggest that this is a new experience for the Church—as if dealing with a troublesome interreligious other is a task im-
posed by a post-modern loss of theological nerve. The Church has always been rediscovering itself through a whole variety of relations; the task of communication is, and always has been, a matter of teaching and learning. The difference today is more one of intensity than novelty; dialogue is not a new mode of mission but a more demanding way of being a Church—one which commends faith not in intellectualist terms as sets of truths to be believed but as what Aquinas calls “that habit of mind whereby eternal life begins in us and which brings the mind to assent to things that appear not.” Thus to speak of the Missio Dei as God’s action in sending the Son and the Spirit into the world is not to say that God reveals something about God. Rather God reveals Godself. Revelation is not the imparting of knowledge to an initiated elite, nor a personalised disclosure of divine truth, but a participation in God’s own life, which is always generative of wisdom and new life for the whole of human-kind. This is not to downplay the part played in the life of faith by statements of belief, whether the record of the experience of the Paschal Mystery found in canonical scripture or in the classical creeds of Christian belief. It is simply to make the point that the content of faith may not arbitrarily be separated from the manner of its teaching. Creeds and dogmas are, of course, set out in propositional form, but they have a persuasive weight not because they clarify the data of belief but primarily because they witness to the transformative power of grace in human lives.

This is what Panikkar means when he says that faith has to “take a human spirit.” He is not saying that the words, which articulate belief, are relative and negotiable but that they find their meaning in relation to a context—and that context “has undergone changes which we cannot ignore.” The work of communication has to deal with the particularities of time and place. The fact that words often fail, that communication breaks down, that personal relations are never proof against sin and selfishness (“as any lover knows,” Panikkar ruefully remarks at one point), is not an invitation to resort to aggressive polemic or to withdraw into a comfortable passivity. It is to begin again—in hope that the labour of living and learning alongside other suffering human beings may open up the possibility of our being taught by the Spirit who is the source of all life. The course of such learning is never predictable—any more than it is possible to second-guess the nature and extent of God’s providential purposes. But then religious—and more specifically interreligious—learning is not about the ordering of knowledge. Panikkar’s “third eye” is not some super-sensory intuition into the mind of God but more akin to that “habit of mind” which disposes us for the gift, which always surpasses the human capacity to understand.
THE WISDOM OF LEARNING WITH

I began this essay with a question about the role the other plays in the rediscovery of God's constant and continuous act of self-revelation. My experiment in interreligious learning in the Faiths Together project showed how the experience of difference can become a resource for personal growth and transformation. This, however, is not to instrumentalize the other—as if adding a fresh layer to the accumulation of knowledge about religious realities. A more appropriate category for describing the Faiths Together project's shift from "learning from" to "learning with" is wisdom, understood in the biblical sense of a learned and critical discernment of the ways of God with human beings. To put it in the terms Panikkar applies to interreligious dialogue, "learning from," demands a dialectic based on the principle of non-contradiction, while "learning with" implies a deepening interaction between persons rooted in passions and feelings as much as it is tied up with words and concepts.35

What Panikkar calls the "dialogical dialogue" does not dispense with the "dialectical dialogue"; indeed the two, in an important sense, need and complement each other. But wisdom witnesses the very complexity of reality and the impossibility of some purely dialectical resolution. If interpreting, reasoning persons are themselves part of the reality and cannot be extricated from it, then wisdom lies in discerning just where this or that relationship impinges on and challenges the sense of self—and how the interpersonal relates to that broader web of relations, which is only ever fully realised in God. Panikkar's pedagogy of the "third eye" is intended to enable just that sort of wisdom, which, while it is based squarely on reasoned judgement, never reduces reality to knowledge of reality—or subsumes Being within consciousness of Being. Paradoxically it is often the experience of limitation and difference, which most contributes to the development of that wisdom which is content with what has been given and learns to live with the very lack of resolution. In Panikkar's terms that is how love transforms knowledge:

The human being is certainly a rational animal and rationality may be its most precious gift, but the realm of reason does not exhaust the human field. It is not by dialectically convincing the patients that the psychotherapist will cure them. It is not by proving one side to be right that a war can be avoided. There is no dialectical proof for love. Not less, but something more is required.36

It is no doubt true that barriers to understanding and learning can be overcome once people find common purpose and a sense of solidarity. But the question with which I began was not about the pragmatics of problem solving, how to communicate a message more clearly or how to build solidarity between communities. It was about how cross-religious encounters of all kinds can generate

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a process of learning. This takes us beyond the task of edification and mutual support, the ethical concomitants of Panikkar’s “dialectical dialogue” and into the more ill-defined world of inter-personal relations where subjects find their sense of self through exploring a properly “dialectical dialogue.”

Perhaps it is in these terms that we come closest to describing the “something more,” which marks the shift from “learning from” to “learning with.” Panikkar’s gloss on advaita, “introducing love at the ultimate level of reality,” begins with the insight that human beings cannot stand outside or above the reality they seek to understand. Reality is open to thought but “not totally objectifiable”; it cannot be reduced to an abstraction or somehow frozen in time. In Panikkar’s theological terms, the “something more” comes from the exercise of that “third eye” in which Logos, the form or givenness of things, is complemented by Pneuma, the creative spark of the imagination, which is forever exploring their inner meaning.

Augustine’s experience of being taught by the Word of God as he both discovers what he needs to learn and seeks to present what he has discovered is less explicit and less complex, than Panikkar’s “cosmotheandism.” Augustine focuses in the first place on the virtues, which are needed by the Christian teacher. In this essay I have been more concerned with the virtues of the Christian learner. Not that the two can be easily separated. That, in many ways, is the point. Christian teaching is not just about passing on a particular message, for Christians are always caught up in the process of learning about the one in whom that message is embodied and from whom it may not be separated. It is also, therefore, about inviting others to share in a process of transformation, which begins with the hearing of the Word, which speaks Truth. Panikkar’s complex epistemology of the “third eye” is intended to mend the dichotomy between monism, Being as a “monolithic block,” and pluralism, Being as a “conglomeration of atomistic entities.” He does not, any more than Augustine, reject interiority, that inner voice which witnesses to the action of God’s grace. Rather, in reflecting what is new about contemporary “Christianness,” that the other has a specific face and may not be subsumed into some generic “non-Christian,” he puts greater weight on the part played by the exterior voice of the other in forming that interiority. St. Augustine and Raimon Panikkar operate out of very different contexts, but both witness to that experience of inner learning, which is ultimately the work of the Spirit. The words, which Christians have to go on reciting and listening to, so that they may continue to be instructed by the Word of God, have to be heard alongside and in dialogue with “other words.”

If the Faiths Together project has shown one thing, it is that the gift of faith as it is communicated across borders is enhanced rather than diluted by the experience of learning together. Religious traditions, with their particular
practices, their specific sets of concepts and their often intractable sense of difference, are never merely cultural-linguistic paradigms, which rely for their coherence on an intra-textual integrity. They are also communities of learners who seek to make more explicit the inner meaning of texts and traditions. Such texts are never just given; they belong within a context of life-in-the-world and have to be related to the broader movements of grace, which are forever guiding the processes of interpretation. The shift away from cross-religious essences towards a more tradition-centred paradigm, which now dominates theology of religions, does not solve the problem of cross-religious communication. But it does concentrate the mind on a life-long learning in the Spirit about what it means to be converted or enlightened, divinised or liberated—or whatever metaphor one uses to speak about that wisdom, which does not just promise some sort of ultimate fullness but, more importantly, builds a trust in the complexity of relations, which make up human living in the here and now.

NOTES

2. Nicholas Lash, Oracles, "Dissent, and Conversation. Reflections on Catholic Teaching," lecture given in honour of Michael Buckley, Boston College, October 2009. I am grateful to Professor Lash for raising this point so sharply and for sending me back to St. Augustine. I hasten to add that he is not responsible for the applications I make.
4. A shift to be noted most powerfully in the Vatican II declaration on missions, Ad Gentes, which opens with the statement that “the Church is missionary of its very nature” (para 2).
12. Daniel Fauré produced a number of collections of prayers and liturgies, some of which were published under his own imprint for a wider audience. See, in particular, Transcendence, (London: Daniel Fauré, 2005); Celebrating Jesus: a Multifaith Appreciation, (London: Daniel Fauré, 1999). He also produced for the use of visitors to Southall a guide to all the places of worship in the town: Southall: A Holy City, London, (London:

13. The experiment in interreligious learning on which these reflections are based begins with the principle that adults learn by exercising autonomy of direction and by engaging with their own personal experience. See Stephen D. Brookfield, Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning (Milton Keynes: Open University Press: 1986), especially Chapter 2. Following the theories of Malcolm Knowles educationalists tend to talk about “andragogy”—a more accurate term than pedagogy. Compared with children, adult learners tend to work out of their own experience, demonstrate a marked shift from dependency to independence and are more concerned with the immediacy of application of their learning. See especially Knowles, The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge Books, 1980). I retain the term pedagogy here because it is more familiar to the non-specialist, but the experiment in which persons from different faith traditions were learning alongside each other follows Knowles’ principles. According to Knowles, “[A]ndragogy is simply another model of assumptions about adult learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing two alternative models for testing out the assumptions as to their “fit” with particular situations. Furthermore, the models are probably most useful when seen not as dichotomous but rather as two ends of a spectrum, with a realistic assumption (about learners) in a given situation falling in between the two ends” (43).

14. Most obviously, the language of the “Non-Christian,” defining people by what they are not has been replaced by close attention to what people say of themselves—Hindus, Buddhists, Jews or Muslims. This shift is noted in much writing on interreligious dialogue from the more pluralist end of the spectrum represented by Alan Race (see his Interfaith Encounter [London: SCM, 2001]) to more traditionalist readings such as George Sumner’s incisive critique The First and the Last: the claims of Jesus Christ and the Claims of Other Religious Traditions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

15. The shift, from “learning about” to “learning from” religions, was first proposed by Michael Grimmett in Religious Education and Human Development (Great Wakering: McCremonns, 1987). Religious Education, he says, must give pupils “the opportunity to acquire skills, which enable them to use their understanding of religion in the interpretation of their own personal experiences” (216). The central idea, that exploration of religion can lead to an exploration of the self and what it means to be human, was taken up by the UK Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority in the Model Syllabuses of 1994. For an admirable “short history” and judicious comment on current practice, see Lat Blaylock, “Learning from Religion,” REToday (the journal of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education) 30.2 (Spring 2009): 10–12.  


20. Panikkar, Rhythm, 258.
21. Panikkor’s Trinity unfolds in three stages, three complementary spiritualities (taken from the Hindu trimarga of karma yoga, bhaktiya, and jnana yoga), the three persons of the Trinity, and a synthesis of spiritualities—liturgy, devotion, and mysticism, which he here calls “theandism.” The premise behind the meditation is that “[i]t is in the human experience of the person that we have a clue to this mystery of unity and diversity and it is the Trinity which offers us the ultimate model of this all-pervading constitution of reality. The person is neither monolithic oneness nor disconnected plurality.” (xv) Just so the Trinity “as pure relation epitomises the radical relativity of all that there is.” Between Word and Spirit, intelligible structure or form and fluid or dynamic life, there is a never-ending process of interchange, which reflects what is experienced in everyday interpersonal relations.

22. Panikkor quotes Augustine’s celebrated “Quaestio mihi factus sum” (Confessions, X, 33, 50) and responds: “The most we can do is to ask of ourselves, Ko’aham, who [am] I? Aham-brahman; answers the Upanishad—but brahman neither puts nor answers the question, and Vedanta adds that it cannot be self-conscious, otherwise it would be consciousness-of (itself) and not pure consciousness.” (Panikkor, Rhythm, 69).

23. Panikkor, Rhythm, 73.

24. Panikkor, Rhythm, 58.

25. Panikkor, Rhythm, 60.

26. The twelve steps of “conditioned origination” are sometimes presented as a summary of basic Buddhist doctrine more typical of the scholastic or Abhidharma tradition. This is to overlook the fundamental Buddhist insight about causality, which states that everything comes to be in dependence on something else.

27. Panikkor, Rhythm, 216.


29. Panikkor, Rhythm, 76.

30. See “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairiological Moments of Christian Self-Consciousness” in John Hick and Paul F Knitter eds., The Myth of Christian Uniqueness (London: SCM, 1987), 89–116; in which Panikkor argues that after the period of Christendom (a civilization) and Christianity (one religion among others) we are now entering the period of Christianness which he defines as “confessing a personal faith, adopting a Christlike attitude as much as Christ represents the central symbol of one’s own life” (105). For an appreciative yet sharp rejoinder see Rowan Williams, “Trinity and Pluralism” in Gavin D’Costa, ed., Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered (NY: Orbis, 1990), 3–15. Williams thinks Panikkor is an “uncomfortable ally for the more familiar ‘pluralist’ case” but finds “Christianness” a little too vague for comfort. His critique points out that what makes the Trinity the “grammar” of Christian faith is that it represents the outworking of the Christian experience of the God revealed in Christ, an experience which is not to be separated from its historical context, that of Jewish prophetic resistance to sinfulness of all kinds.


32. This subtle shift, from a “two source” account of revelation as Scripture and Tradition to the single source of God’s continuing guidance of the Church through the Spirit of Christ, is perhaps the most important dimension of Dei Verbum, Vatican II’s influential constitution on Revelation. In contemporary Catholic theology the words of Scripture are not the primary source of God’s action in the world, which are then to be interpreted by the Church but already the living record of the Word of God forming a people, which in principle embodies the whole of human kind called to a new fullness in God.

33. Panikkor, Rhythm, 258.

34. Panikkor, Rhythm, 216.
37. Panikkar, Rhythm, 216.
39. Panikkar, Rhythm, 52.