PAX MYSTICA: MYSTICAL DIMENSIONS OF PEACE AND THEIR APPLICATION IN CONTEMPORARY INTERCULTURAL DISCOURSE

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Less than 50 years ago, a new field emerged within social sciences, called peace and conflict studies. A variant of this field, termed peace studies or irenology, consists of interdisciplinary research that deals with peace – or, better, with a wide range of pacifistic phenomena within the framework of many disciplines such as sociology, psychology, gender studies, religion studies, etc. However, one is tempted to suspect that irenology (also named paxology, though rarely)[1] as a science of peace is possible only against the background of a more fundamental science, that of war, called polemology.

Within the scope of this kind of research a number of questions can be raised. For example: What is peace? Are there multiple modes of peace? Etc. However, my contribution will deal mainly with non-dualistic, advaitic relations of inner and outer peace, which can be found in all the world's major religions, as well as with an examination of how spiritual practices function as a foundation for peace-making. In conclusion, I will attempt to highlight the importance of a non-conceptual notion of peace. Necessarily, this irenological discourse will be tinged with methodologies and terminology drawn from religious studies.

Notion of peace in Christian mysticism

I begin with a brief examination of three testimonies of mystical notion of peace that belong to medieval Christian mysticism. More

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[1] See, for example, J. G. Starke, *An Introduction to the Science of Peace (Irenology)*, Sijthoff, Leyden, 1968.

precisely, to Rhineland and Flemish mysticism (that is, the speculative mystical strand that emerged in late medieval Germany and Low Countries).

In contemporary studies of Western mysticism, Meister Eckhart is often acclaimed to be the Christian mystic *par excellence*. As Bernard McGinn puts it: "Perhaps no mystic in the history of Christianity has been more influential and more controversial than the Dominican Meister Eckhart."[2] Surely, Eckhart is the father of new mysticism which had brought a vast democratisation of spirituality in the West, and it may be helpful to look at how Eckhart thematises the notion of mystical peace.

In his sermon number seven, peace is allied with God:

"Our Lord said: In me alone you have peace. So far into God, so far into peace [*als verre in got, als verre in vride*]. If anything of a man is in God, that has peace; whatever of him is outside of God has no peace. St. John says, "Whatever is born of God shall overcome the world" (1 John 5: 4). What is born of God seeks peace and runs into it. Therefore he said, "Vade in pace - run into peace." The man who is running, in a continual run, into peace, is a heavenly man. Heaven runs round constantly, and in its course seeks peace."[3]

Eckhart speaks in a similar fashion in another sermon: "Because as far as you are at peace, so far you are in God, and as far as you are out of peace you are out of God."[4]

For Eckhart, the essentially Neo-Platonic structure of *exitus de labore ad quietum* ("emanation from labour to quietude") consists in an ontological passing from becoming to being. In his sermon *Vidi civitatem sanctam jerusalem descendentem de caelo* etc. (sermon 57 in *Deutsche Werke*), Eckhart quotes from chapter 11 *De divinis nominibus* (*On the Names of God*), the renowned treatise of the so-called father of Christian mysticism, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Here it becomes clear that peace encompasses the *exitus* (emanation) and *reditus* (return) of

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[2]   B. McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man From Whom God Hid Nothing*, Crossroad Publ., New York 2001, p. 1.

[3]   *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. and ed. by Maurice O'C. Walshe, revised with a Foreword by Bernard McGinn. A Herder & Herder Book / The Crossroad Publishing, New York 2007, p. 367.

[4]   *Op. cit.*, p. 464.

all creation. Every (meta-)ontological phase, emanation, remaining and return, occurs within the "medium" of peace:

"First we should note the peace [*vride*] there should be in the soul. Therefore she is called 'Jerusalem.' St. Dionysius says divine peace pervades and orders and ends all things; if peace did not do this, all things would be dissipated and there would be no order. Secondly, peace causes creatures to pour themselves out and flow in love and without harm. Thirdly, it makes creatures serviceable [*diensthaft*] to one another, so that they have a support in one another. What one of them cannot have of itself, it gets from another. Thus one creature derives from another. Fourthly, it makes them turn back [*widerbougic*] to their original source, which is God."[5]

Thus, it can be argued that peace is the horizon within which one lives and is. In this context, Eckhart's claim that the human person should be "a face of peace" (DW = Deutsche Werke II, 351) is similarly of interest.[6] The birth of God in the apex of the soul transposes the human person into peace. *In ultima analysi*, man becomes Peace (or God-Peace) itself. This might be the deepest horizon of the meaning of *pax mystica* within the framework of Christian mystical theology.

John (Johannes) Tauler, perhaps one of Eckhart's most talented students, ranks among the greatest medieval mystical preachers and *lebemeister* (literally, "master/director of spiritual life"). In his sermons, which reflect a very concrete and down-to-earth mysticism, Tauler, though redolent with Eckhart's neo-Platonic apophaticism, in some passages speaks of "essential peace" *weseliche friede*, a kind of peace that can – in our modern terms, of course – be called mystical. Considering Tauler's sermon *Ascendit Jhesus in naviculum que erat Symonis*, it becomes clear that essential peace is the result of a *weselichen kere*, an "essential turn" (this to say, in Greek, *metánoia*, radical conversion); its main feature is ineffability, since it transcends all senses and intelligibility. ("*Diser fried der volget dem weselichen kere, der vride der alle sinne übertriffet …*)"[7]

Another major figure in Rhineland and Flemish mysticism, Jan van Ruusbroec, known as *doctor admirabilis*, "must rank as one of the finest

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[5]   *Op. cit.*, p. 168.
[6]   See U. Kern, "Eckhart's Anthropology", in: *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. J. M. Hackett, Brill, Leiden 2012, pp. 250–51.
[7]   *Die Predigten Taulers*, ed. F. Vetter, Weidmann, Berlin / Zürich / Dublin 1968, p. 174.

mystical theologians of the late medieval period".[8] His influence on later Christian mysticism was immense: "He played a preponderant role in mysticism in the Low Countries, and, because of the translations of his works into Latin, he was widely read throughout Europe from the fifteenth century on."[9]

In his early work *The Realm of Lovers* (*Dat rijcke der ghelieven*), Ruusbroec speaks about *ghemeyne mensche* ("common man"). He explains who these common people are:

"These are the ones of whom Christ says: Blessed are the peaceful, or the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God. The exalted spirits have made peace with God and with all their faculties and with all creatures, and have enriched and ordered all things, each in its nobility, and have possessed the realm in true peaceableness [*gherechter vreedsamheit*], and they have been swallowed up into the ground of simplicity [*ende sijn verswolghen in den gront der eenvuldicheit*]. This is the highest (level) of the realm in eternal blessedness."[10]

Similar passages are found in a number of Ruusbroec's other works; however, let us focus on one significant passage from his best-known treatise, *The Spiritual Espousals* (*Die geestelike brulocht*). There we read:

"For those who are most simple are the most quiet and the most totally peaceful in themselves [*alre best in vreden in hen selven*], and they are the most deeply sunken away in God, and they are the most utterly enlightened in understanding, and the most utterly manifold in good works, and the most utterly common in outflowing love [*alre ghemeynst in uutvloeyender minnen*]. And they are the least hindered, for they are the most God-like."[11]

Ruusbroec's ideal is not the contemplative life, fruition of God, but the common life. This "is a life in which charitable activity and fruition of God – that active and contemplative life – are harmoniously

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8   R. Van Nieuwenhove, *Jan van Ruusbroec, Mystical Theologian of the Trinity*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 2003, p. 1.
9   B. McGinn, *The Presence of God*, Vol. 5: *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350–1550)*, Crossroad Publ., New York 2012, p. 5.
10   Jan van Ruusbroec, *Dat rijcke der ghelieven*, ed. G. de Baere. Brepols, Turnhout 2002, p. 383.
11   Jan van Ruusbroec, *De geestelike brulocht (De ornatu spiritualum nuptialium)*, ed. J. Alaerts, Brepols, Turnhout 1988. p. 514.

integrated."[12] It is a life of simultaneously knowing and loving God (and in him all creatures).

For Ruusbroec, there is no split between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. While they are not exactly the same, it may be said that are a--dual. In mystical experience, there is no duality, but instead a constant interplay between resting/enjoying in God and being in activity, between the peace of passivity and the peace of activity, between love and knowledge; then, between mythos and logos, between tradition and modernity, etc. The paradoxical fusion of resting in the abyss of (inner) peace and active (outer) love and compassion for all people is thus a distinctive characteristic of Ruusbroec's dynamic Trinitarian mysticism. Here, indeed, is much that is reminiscent of Meister Eckhart. However, even though the themes are similar, Eckhart and Ruusbroec speak from a different point of view. Like Tauler, Ruusbroec is (literally) a very down-to-earth mystic: "The mystic [Ruusbroec] is not shuttled away to the clouds and back again, but remains planted on the native earth of ordinary humanity."[13] To put it differently, in Ruusbroec, "common human experience is integrated into the heights of mystical love."[14]

Not only medieval or early modern mystics, but also many contemporary spiritual thinkers or leaders would share his conviction that social and political problems are rooted in a profound spiritual crisis. Let us briefly look at some contemporary examples that come from Buddhism.

Nhat Hanh—a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet and peace activist who was exiled to France during the Vietnam War—has a number of important works on peace-making and on the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, both philosophically and in practices. He is one of the contemporary witnesses who suggest that to practice peace requires the attitude of peace, which is realised through the practice of spirituality. Two brief quotes would suffice to demonstrate the connection Nhat Hanh makes between the practice of peace and spirituality:

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[12]   Van Nieuwenhove, *op. cit.*, p 191.
[13]   P. Mommaers, *Jan van Ruusbroec. Mystical Union with God*, Peeters, Leuven 2009, p. 89.
[14]   *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

"The Sanskrit word ahimsa, usually translated 'nonviolence,' literally means 'non-harming' or 'harmlessness.' To practice ahimsa, first of all we have to practice it within ourselves."[15]

Much of Nhat Hanh's writing is concerned with how to practice ahimsa through mindfulness, sitting and walking meditation, and other spiritual disciplines: in another of his adages we read that "Those who work for peace must have a peaceful heart."[16]

Likewise, the Dalai Lama, winner of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize said:

"Although attempting to bring about world peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way. […] Love, compassion, altruism are the fundamental basis of peace. Once these qualities are developed within an individual, he or she will create an atmosphere of peace and harmony. This atmosphere can be expanded and extended from the individual to his family, from the family to the community and eventually to the whole world."[17]

However, it is possible to claim that all spiritual practices are inherently tied with peace-making: "All major religious traditions maintain that such a compassionate life, the directions of which is toward peace, can only be brought about through the spiritual practice of pursuing inner peace."[18]

A religious or mystical dimension of peace is ineluctable in any discourse about peace, even political peace. Any merely political struggle for peace can be counterproductive, in the worst cases leading to additional violence, even war: "… crusades of all kinds have been carried out to establish the reign of justice and peace – be it God or Democracy."[19]

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[15]   M. K. Duffey, etc. (ed.), *Justice and Mercy Will Kiss: The Vocation of Peacemaking in a World of Many Faiths* (Marquette Studies in Theology), Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, Wis. 2008, p. 14.

[16]   *Op. cit.*, p. 15. For further research and bibliography on notion of inner peace in Buddhism, see K. Kraft*, Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY 1992.

[17]   See M. Jaoudi, *Christian Mysticism East and West: What the Masters Teach Us,* New York: Paulist Press, 1998, p. 48.

[18]   *Cf.* M. K. Duffey, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[19]   R. Panikkar, *De la mística. Experiencia plena de la Vida*, Herder, Barcelona 2007, p. 61.

Raimon Panikkar – interculturality, mysticism, peace

Now let us turn to Panikkar's hermeneutics of peace. Raimon Panikkar (1918–210), was an Indian, Roman Catholic theologian, well versed in Catholic, Hindu and Western philosophical thought. He was also an international authority on the study of religions and intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Panikkar emphasises the easy dichotomy of inner and outer peace. He accepts that inner peace paves the way to outer peace, be it social or political. Yet, without outer peace inner peace cannot be complete, since it is reduced to its psychological aspect: "Without outer peace, simple inner peace is but a chimera, or an exclusively psychological state of isolation from the rest of reality – an isolation that turns out to be artificial or costly."[20] Outer peace without inner peace is fragile. Because of lack of inner peace, inner disorder is the root of outer disorder, violence and war. This is the lection we learn from all religions, at least monotheistic. We, for example, read in Gospel according to Matthew:

"For out of the heart [*ek gàr tês kardías*] come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Mat 15:19).[21]

To be at peace is not merely the absence of war and violence, and hostility. Yet one should not allow oneself to be trapped in the dialectical logic of peace and war: "Peace is not the contrary of war. The suppression of war does not automatically yield peace. The conquered cannot enjoy the peace of the conquerors. Peace is not the outcome of any dialectical process."[22]

Peace, furthermore, is not "quality of life". Peace too is also not pacifism. Peace cannot be reduced to ideology. Moreover, peace is an in-

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[20]   R. Panikkar, *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace*, trans. Robert R. Barr, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky 1995, p. 17. Cf. R. Panikkar, *Paz e interculturidad. Una reflexión filosófica*, Herder, Barcelona 2006, p. 153.

[21]   Eng. Translation according to NIV (The New International Version Bible). Greek words are inserted from Nestle-Aland Revised 28th Edition of New Testament (all data retrieved from *Bibleworks 9* software).

[22]   Panikkar 1995, p. 19.

herently polysemic and pluralistic concept, which can lead to many misunderstandings: "My notion of peace can be nonpeaceful for others."[23]

Although most of the wars in history that have been waged have been wars of religion, almost every religion proclaims that its chief concern is to bring peace to the world. Not peace as a doctrinal issue, or as a (monosemic) ideological construct, but in terms of an existential attitude. Religions thus purport themselves to be "institutions" that foster inner peace.

Peace or peacefulness is also not merely a virtue or a problem of morality. It is crucial to see that inner (or mystical) peace is encompassed by a horizon within which spirituality and ethics are fully integrated. It is from an attitude of loving knowing and knowing loving (the Other) that peace emerges.

This leads us to the notion of interculturality. Interculturality, according to Panikkar, is not something that is similar to interdisciplinarity, which points to mutual enrichment of diverse (scientific) disciplines in order to overcome the barbarism of specialism (Ortega Y Gasset's *barbarie del especialismo*). Cultures cannot, of course, be like disciplines. In addition, we should too avoid the trap of multiculturality or multiculturalism.[24] Multiculturalism, according to Panikkar, suffers from a colonialist syndrome. Because the State always represents a dominant culture (that is, a metaculture or superculture), it is the way of life and values of this dominant culture that frames the laws that all subcultures and minorities are forced to accept, and which, as such, can only ever be more or less inclusive or "tolerant" of these subcultures.

This is also the case with globalisation, which can be viewed as the imposition of a kind of Americanisation – or at least occidentalisation – a dominant culture whose values stipulate that everyone should engage in science, democracy, etc.[25]

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[23]   *Op. cit.*, p. 21.
[24]   *Cf.* Panikkar 2006, p. 35.
[25]   Hence the need for cultural disarmament: "Peace is not possible without disarmament. But the required disarmament is not only nuclear, military, or economic. There is also a need for a cultural disarmament, a disarmament of the dominant culture, which threatens to become monoculture capable of engulfing all other cultures and finally along with them. ... It is an all but immediate evidence that military disarmament is impossible without cultural disarmament" (Panikkar 1995, p. 62).

For Panikkar, every culture is a galaxy with its own *mythos* which means that every culture has its own conception of time, space, goodness, beauty, truth, even transcendence: in short, its own horizon of intelligibility.[26] We thus have a situation of cultural alterity. This kind of "horizontal" alterity is similar to the alterity that consists between human beings. So, every dialogue between different cultures is like a dialogue between persons. In this context, one must give up one's hidden pretensions for a universality of human problems that are solely asserted in order to universalise one's own perspective. Conversely, pluralism leads to an insoluble conflict of ultimate values, which can be fruitful for true dialogue and therefore intercultural and interreligious practices. As Panikkar argues, in the realm of interculturality, which is coextensive with mythos – as opposed to logos, which represents rationality – we are freed to dialogise: "Interculturality is the realm within which the myths intersect."[27]

For this reason, we may take seriously Panikkar's assertion that "any approach to another culture without love is a violation of the other culture."[28] An approach to other culture without knowledge can in truth merely be a sentimental attraction, even a seduction. One must therefore surpass both objective information and subjective sympathy. Here ordinary empathy does not suffice.

Peace requires that we transcend the realm of ideologies into a realm higher than the merely intellectual and emotional, or psychological. For Panikkar this realm is, as already mentioned, mythos – the *conditio sine qua non* of all knowledge and intelligibility. In the depth of mythos we can establish communion with one another in love and knowledge.

Interculturality takes into account pluralism, since pluralism is inherent to *la condition humaine*. From a philosophical perspective this means that there cannot be such thing as a unique principle of intelligibility. Our goal should not be the production of a universal theory from a neutral perspective – this is the goal of the so-called comparative method, comparative philosophy, comparative religiology, etc. – but

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[26] *Cf.* Panikkar 2006, p. 34 ff.
[27] *Op. cit.*, p. 85.
[28] *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

rather a deepening awareness of both our own and the other tradition that is aimed at a convergence of hearts. This is the framework within which the cross-fertilisation between cultures should take place. In this way cultural and religious diversity would not be a detonator for "Clashes of Civilisations".

When mystical reality is correlative with what Panikkar terms "mythos", then interreligious dialogue, as a fundamental phenomenon of interculturality, can only take place on a mystical level. In this context, Panikkar's adage that mysticism and interculturality are inextricably connected sounds persuasive:

> *La mística es el pasaporte para sobrepasar las fronteras culturales – y la mística no es auténtica si falta ela amor.*[29]
> "Mysticism is the passport to overcome cultural frontiers – and mysticism is not authentic if love is lacking."

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise the transcendent character of peace itself. Peace is always a gift. It is received, not given. It cannot be the result of human striving. We cannot produce it as we manufacture everything else in our Western techno-scientific civilisation. Peace is not the outcome of our "good will", it is not a question of morality. Peace is transcendent in itself. Therefore it can be argued that peace is a profoundly religious phenomenon. Speaking somewhat monotheistically, it is possible to assert that peace is "God". In Semitic languages the word for peace is derived from triconsonantal root Sh–L–M (*Shin–Lamdeh–Mem*) and means "whole, safe, intact". Furthermore, *Al-Salām* is one of the 99 names of God in Islam. God is All-Peace who calls whole humankind in general and Muslims in particular to enter into the ontological state of peace.

To be united with Peace is to be at peace with God and human beings – this, in fact, is, as lucidly stated by Angelus Silesius, the mystical poet of the German Baroque period in one of his epigrams: "peace above peace":

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[29]   *Op. cit.*, p. 68.

Der innerliche Friede
In sich mit Gott und Mensch befriedigt sein und ein,
Das muss, bei guter Treu, Fried uber Friede sein.

Inner Peace
Within with God and Man to be satisfied and one,
This must, in good faith, be peace above peace.[30]

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[30] A more poetical translation would be: The Highest Peace // The peace most highly prized, which keeps the soul delighted, / Is knowing itself to be close with God's will united" (Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubinic Wanderer*. Transl. Maria Shrady Paulist Press, New York 1986, p. 97).

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