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Komulainen, Jyri

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Erik Ranstrom and Bob Robinson, *Without Ceasing to Be a Christian: A Catholic and Protestant Assess the Christological Contribution of Raimon Panikkar*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017. Pp. 249. \$79.00.

Raimon Panikkar (1918–2010) was one of the most intriguing thinkers in the field of the theology of religions. He was born in Spain to a Catholic mother and a Hindu father. Regardless of this inherently multicultural background, he was brought up in a society imbued with pre-Conciliar Catholicism. It was only later in his life that he visited India, his father's land of birth. In effect, Panikkar's mature vision of Christianity drew from many Occidental and Indic sources, becoming so wide-ranging and inclusive that it prompts many questions regarding the limits and the possibilities of Christian theology.

There seems to be continued interest in Panikkar's legacy. For instance, an ongoing project aims to publish his multivolume *Opera Omnia* in multiple languages. In addition, there are some academic studies published recently. One of these publications is the theologically creative and shrewd book under review here. I find it very fitting that Panikkar's multifaceted theology is analyzed in ecumenical dialogue by two theologians with different backgrounds: Ranstrom is an American Catholic, and Bob Robinson is a New Zealand Anglican with an Evangelical tint.

The book sheds light on Panikkar's thinking from two complementary denominational angles. In practice, the ecumenical approach means that the chapters are written individually by both authors, with the concluding chapter bringing together some themes in a form of discussion. Even though the authors come from different theological traditions, both are very ecumenically minded and hold the "Great tradition" in high esteem. In their use, this term denotes "that broad and ever expansive stream of Christian tradition common to the *oikumene* and marked by the profession of the faith of the apostles through canon, creed, and council that Jesus Christ is Lord" (p. xviii).

Mirroring Panikkar with the Great tradition proves to be a rewarding starting point. With their sympathetic reading, Ranstrom and Robinson show lucidly that Panikkar's christological musings are well-grounded in the Christian mainstream tradition. Especially in his earlier writings in the 1950's and 1960's, Panikkar made a bold and innovative effort to recognize revelatory aspects of Hinduism from a robustly Catholic perspective. In fact, Ranstrom makes a valuable contribution when drilling into the Spanish writings of Panikkar's lesser-known period in *Opus Dei*, thus unsealing this early chapter of

his oeuvre for the English-speaking audience. His interpretation of Melchizedek as a kind of prototype of the Cosmic religion forecasting Christ is especially worth reading.

Ranstrom also tries to contextualize the evolution of Panikkar's thinking in major shifts in his life, one of which was the above-mentioned acquaintance with India. Even though it seems hard to pinpoint when and why Panikkar amplified his thinking to his later phase of "radical pluralism," dispensing ultimately with the concept of God, there is no doubt that something happened in his thinking. Ranstrom suggests quite plausibly that one of the major shifts in Panikkar's intellectual evolution occurred when he moved to the "post-Christian" milieu in Santa Barbara, California, in the early 1970's: "It is quite possible that Panikkar, discerning the academic and spiritual contexts where he was living and working, decided that he must undergo a *kenōsis* into the traditions and life of peoples that were outside of the church, in order to keep pace with the cultural movement of global humanity" (p. xiii). Surely, the same applies also to Panikkar's earlier relocation from Europe to India.

Eventually, Panikkar's method of self-emptying results in a very idiosyncratic interpretation of the Great tradition that upholds High Christology but, at the same time, yields "a de-kerygmaticization of Christianity" (p. 111), to quote Robinson's expression. Both authors make critical observations about Panikkar's proclivity to sever Christ from Jesus of Nazareth, whose meaning almost disappears from his thinking. As Robinson remarks, this split entailed "a distinct tendency towards idealism and away from praxis" (p. 171). As the value of history is drastically reduced in Panikkar's original vision of "Christophany," one is forced to ask with Robinson whether the outcome of an extraordinary career spanning almost seven decades is eventually "the Panikkarian Vedicization of Christianity" (p. 102).

Still more, one can discern an obvious lack of liberative dimensions of the Christian faith in Panikkar's oeuvre, which is noteworthy, given the mounting impact of liberation theology in ecumenical thinking in recent decades. This seems to suggest that Panikkar was betraying an unintended Brahmanical bias, given the methodological shift in Indian Christian theology toward the subaltern perspective that is detectable, above all, in Dalit theology.

Without Ceasing to Be a Christian abounds with sharp questions and meticulous remarks concerning Panikkar's thinking. I find it a very readable and reliable work of research elucidating his theological side with special emphasis on Christology, as the title of the book already suggests. For its overall lucidity,

I dare to recommend the book as stimulating reading not just for Panikkar specialists but for anyone interested in adventurous (re)interpretations of the Christian faith. To my mind, Panikkar should be counted among the most intrepid and ingenious theologians of the twentieth century. His multireligious legacy is worth exploring even outside the purview of interreligious dialogue.

Jyri Komulainen, University of Helsinki, Finland