

Raimon Panikkar

*Cultural Disarmament : The Way to Peace*

(Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995)

Professor Samuel Huntington, Director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University has presented the thesis that world politics in the post-Cold War world have entered a new phase in which the sources of conflict will be due no longer to the military balance nor to capitalist-socialist ideological disputes but rather to the “clash of civilizations”

He has suggested that *“In the coming years, the local conflicts most likely to escalate into major wars will be those, as in Bosnia and the Caucuses along the fault lines between civilizations. On the northern border of Islam, conflict has increasingly erupted between Orthodox and Muslim peoples. This includes the carnage of Bosnia and Sarajevo, the simmering violence between Serb and Albanian, the tenuous relations between Bulgarians and their Turkish minority, the violence between Ossets and Ingush, the unremitting slaughter of each other by Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and the tense relations between the Russians and the Muslims in Central Asia.”* One can add the fighting between the Russians and the Chetchen which took place after Huntington first presented his views in 1993: Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol72 N°3, 1993. Huntington tries to indicate why the fault lines – that is, the areas where two civilizations meet – will be the battle lines of the future. *“Differences among civilizations are basic, involving history, language, culture, tradition and most importantly, religion. Different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and Man, the citizen and the state, parents and children, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear.”*

It is against this background that the book of Raimon Panikkar takes on its full importance. Panikkar, an Indian, Roman Catholic theologian, well versed in Catholic, Hindu and Western philosophical thought, here develops the need for “cultural disarmament” – using culture in the same sense in which Huntington uses civilization.

Cultural disarmament entails a criticism of culture, a radical examination of the ways ideas have shaped practices and institutions. Such criticism can not be carried on only within the intellectual framework of the culture in question. Rather what is required is an intercultural framing of the critical approach. As Panikkar stresses *“The solution to the problems of the world is not to be sought within one culture, nor will it be possible to find it monoculturally... We all need one another, and are all interdependent in all areas.”*

The book, published in the USA and based in large part on talks given in Spain, is often addressed to a Western audience with criticism of the Western world view. This is understandable in that Western models of science, economic and political thought have a world wide impact. Yet, it is largely in the Islamic world and among neo-Hindu political movements of India that we find an armed monocultural approach.

For there to be fruitful intercultural criticism and thus cultural disarmament, there must be universal myths which give people a certain common ground from which to discuss. Myths are the ground upon which intelligibility is founded. If there are not common myths, and if the intellectual foundations of cultures are too far apart, no meaningful communication is possible. A myth is not an ideology, being more complex and less rigid. Myths are stories that put into narrative form supreme realities. Panikkar outlines briefly three such myths, stressing their non-dualistic (advantic) character, for “Reality is indivisible””

The first myth is that of cosmic order. *“Human peace is bound up with the cosmic order, the human peace is our share of that order.”* Panikkar goes on to develop this insight by using the anti-nuclear-weapon peace symbol with its three equal divisions which he sees as Harmony, Freedom, Justice, justice being used in the sense of dharma. Based on these three values of harmony, freedom, and justice, he calls for efforts which develop the approach of Pythagoras, joining theoria, praxis, and therapeia.

Just as the Cosmic Order cannot separate “above” and “below”, so also time cannot be separated into a conflictual present and a divinely completed future of peace, which is the linear image of much apocalyptic thought. *“Pax in terris is a problem that concerns the entire being of each person as such, since his final destiny is at stake in the civitas hominis itself. The city of earth is regarded no longer as simply a preparation for heaven, or as a reflection of the city of God, but as an arena in which man’s ultimate destiny is being forged. And this is the case regardless of whether the life after death is denied or affirmed.”*

The third universal myth is that of Gaia. In ancient mythologies, planet earth was seen as a goddess, and the Greeks gave her the name Gaia – the Mother of all Living Things. Today, the image of the earth as an intelligent living organism based on science has been proposed by James Lovelock in *Gaia* (Oxford University Press, 1979)

These three universal myths, stressing an end to dualistic ways of viewing the world, reduce the monocultural and militant aspects of many of today’s ideologies which are nearly always dualistic. These myths may be important elements to transform the clash of civilizations into mutually profitable dialogues and synthesis.

René Wadlow

