

Christophany: The Experiential Thread

alias...The View from within the Trinity

alias...the heart of the "I-I" (pneumatic perception)

"I am the thou of an I"

The heart of Panikkar's exposition of Christophany depends on the reader's being able actually to FEEL that *advaitic*, "not one, not two, but both one and two" perspective which stands between total monism ("I am God") and total dualism ("I am a creature; God is completely other"); to experience oneself as "The thou of an I." For this "middle way" in oneself is the place where one meets Christ, and where one *may* discover him to be correlative with one's own deepest "I."

Woven through Panikkar's theological investigations is this "golden thread" of personal exploration; it forms almost a subtext within the text. Here are the chief building blocks.

1. PART I: Chapter 3 ("**The Christophanic Experience**"); "Mystical Language" pp. 25-35

Here Panikkar uses a phrase from Teresa of Avila ("Seek for yourself in me, seek for me in yourself") to lead us to the conclusion, "I discover myself as thou, God's thou." (p.35). This experience, he claims, "is the Trinitarian life; this is the Christophanic experience: neither the mere dualism of creatureliness nor the monistic simplification of divinization."

2. PART II, **The Approach**, "The Pneumatic" pp. 67-74.

This is the third section of his "Three Anthropologies, where he moves beyond the standard "I-it" (individualistic) and "I-thou" (personal) perspectives to lay out theologically his basic idea of an "I-I" perspective. ("The 'other' has become your Self" (p. 71).

3. PART II, **The Approach**, "Personal Experience," pp. 78-82

In own experience of "contingency (based on the root word *tangere*, or 'touch,'" he discovers the heart of "nondual union" (p. 79): he is neither "creature" nor "Creator," but a conscious participant in the "very flux we call reality." He recounts his discovery at a young age that his "me" and his "I" were not identical; "My 'I' seems to be found beyond my 'me.'" (p.80). Then, in a breathtakingly sudden conclusion on p, 81, he discovers a "mediator" emerging within him "between the infinite, the absolute I, and my ego, my 'me'." Recalling that Christ was traditionally known as "the mediator," he introduces the notion of "Christ dwelling in the deepest center of our being" as this mediating reality.

4. PART II **The Expressions**, “The Experience”, pp. 114-120

All of Panikkar’s “The Experience” sections are helpful here (the first, pp. 99-106, explores the inner experience of “filiation,” the “I-thou” experience contained in Jesus’s words, “Abba, Father”; the third, pp 129-34 is a beautiful meditation on the personal experience of surrendering one’s deepest Selfhood back into the flow.)

But in this second one, a commentary on “I and the Father are one,” he returns again to his sense of discovering himself “the thou of an I,” and develops it in a particularly spacious and poetic way. Note particularly page 115, last paragraph, to top of page 116: I am one with the source insofar as I too act as source by making everything I have received flow again—just like Jesus.”

If you can follow this golden thread through the inner terrain of yourself, you also may be able to personally experience (not just theologize about) the following insights:

1. My own innermost experience of reality is non-dual (“not one, not two, but both one and two”). Both contingency and divinization are real, but they are not opposites (or alternative theologies); rather, they are held together in a continuous flow of receiving and releasing.
2. This flow is what Christians mean by the Trinity. It was the innermost experience of Jesus’s own mystical consciousness, as it is of our own.
3. Once we experience this “Trinitarian” flow within ourselves, we may discover a “mediator:” some stable and mysterious consciousness within us that stands between pure divinization and pure creatureliness. This mediating consciousness, our own deepest sense of Selfhood, may reveal itself to be Christ himself, living within us “as our deepest I.”