

Ecology & Justice Series

UNITY AND HARMONY

Toward an Ecospirituality

Victorino Pérez Prieto

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Complexity and Ecosophy: The Reality of a Seamless Fabric in the Face of a Fragmentary Perspective

The cosmos is a chaosmos. The physical world is the product of an organizing disintegration; it is not possible to conceive of it without referring to an incomprehensible tetragram of order-disorder-interactions-organization. . . . Complexity is not everything, but it is, all the same, what can best open itself up to intelligence and reveal the inexplicable.

EDGAR MORIN, *Mes démons*

What I am trying to do is precisely to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge and the fragmentation of human life and, consequently, my answer is always: all or nothing.

RAIMON PANIKKAR, "Reflexiones autobiográficas"

It is necessary to emphasize the wealth of reality, which overflows any single language, any single logical structure. Each language can express only part of reality. Music, for example, has not been exhausted by any of its realizations. . . . The world of sound is richer than any musical language.

ILYA PRIGOGINE, *Order out of Chaos*

When I discovered the parallels between the worldviews of physicists and mystics. . . . I had the strong feeling that I was merely uncovering something that was quite obvious and would be common knowledge in the future. . . . The reluctance of modern scientists to accept the profound similarities between their concepts and those of mystics is not surprising. . . . Fortunately, this attitude is now changing.

FRITJOF CAPRA, *The Tao of Physics*

The secret of science transcends the scientific . . .

Physicists now speak like mystics . . .

The confusion now between physics and spirit . . .

Only fantastic theories stand a chance of being true.

“It’s not sufficiently mad,” thus Bohr criticized a theory.

ERNESTO CARDENAL, *Cosmic Canticle*

SUPERFICIALITY AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS VERSUS AWARENESS OF REALITY

Raimon Panikkar often said that “the greatest epidemic in our world is superficiality.” Contrary to the outrage this statement might incite, considering that there are other much more serious problems in the world—hunger, the death of millions of children, the injustice and violence committed daily against the poor and women, war, the grave and increasing attacks committed by humans against Mother Earth—this is not a trivial expression. *Superficiality* has to do with living on the surface of

Reality,¹ not seeing Reality in depth, not thinking overmuch, as opposed to having a *deeper* philosophical and aesthetic perspective. It also has to do with the ethical and spiritual, with a way of seeing the world and being in the world. It involves living *unconsciously*, unaware of what Reality *is*. Buddhism teaches that the essence of love lies in understanding and knowledge. As the great Buddhist master Thich Nhât Hanh says, “With full awareness, we see that the other person suffers, and it is precisely this that motivates us to do something so that he or she does not suffer.” In this way, in-depth knowledge “is the very essence of love.” “Without understanding, love is not possible.”²

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze says that if anyone asks what philosophy is for, one must say that philosophy comprises “the struggle against stupidity;” “stupid thinking” is the abjection of thought. Philosophy consists of overcoming the mental laziness associated with the status quo by appealing to a “new Earth.”³ Superficiality is an attack on what it means to be truly human.

An old and well-known Latin maxim states that *nulla aethetica sine ethica*: there is no aesthetics/beauty without an ethical/moral commitment to the social reality in which one lives. This statement

¹ Reality is the most repeated word in this book. It will usually be capitalized, as I learned to do from Panikkar and Morin, who writes in his last book that “Reality hides behind our realities” (*Leçons d’un siècle de vie*, Paris: Denoël, 2021, 147). The capital R is a way of elevating its importance from the everyday concept of the same: everything that exists is part of Reality; the rational and the transrational, the animate and the inanimate, the material and the spiritual, the immanent and the transcendent. God himself, if he exists, is “real” and necessarily part of Reality.

² Thich Nhât Hanh, *Bouddha et Jésus sont des frères* (Gordes: Reliés, 2001), 35 and 36; in English, *Going Home: Buddha and Jesus as Brothers* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

³ Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche y la filosofía* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2006), 65; in English, *Nietzsche And Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

cost José María Valverde (poet and professor of aesthetics at the University of Barcelona) and José Luis Aranguren (professor of ethics at the University of Madrid) their professorships in the final years of Franco's regime. Superficiality means to live on the surface, in banality and foolishness; to live on the margins of the reality that surrounds us, on the margins of what Reality truly *is*. Superficiality means living focused only on one's own selfish material interests, without caring what happens to other human beings and to the world around me, to the Earth of which I am a part; and we are children of Adam (*adamâ*, children of the earth). Superficiality means being indifferent to the joys and sorrows of my brothers and sisters, to the joy and pain of our world; it is to be indifferent to what happens to the rest of Reality.

Superficiality, then, means living in a state of unconsciousness. It means not being aware of what we are—in *relation* to everything. We are earth and spirit, whatever that might mean for us. We are *consciousness*; if we live in *unconsciousness*, we are not. Without a religious or secular *spirituality*, we cannot be fully human. Spirituality is the only place where believers of all religions and non-religious people who seek to live their existence with depth, intensity, veneration, and honesty can find ourselves. That place is the path of Christian *salvation* or *liberation*, but also that of Eastern *illumination* and secular *fulfillment*. This is why Raimon Panikkar writes:

The history of spirituality coincides with the history of human beings. In the end, it *is the most real and effective dimension of human history*, since the true human endeavor is not so much the making of wars, nations, or cultures, as the *making of oneself* and one's "salvation." . . . The thirst for "beyond" has ultimately been the greatest force that has always impelled humanity to walk in this world.⁴

⁴ Raimon Panikkar, *Espiritualidad hindú. Sanâtana dharma* (Barcelona: Kairós, 2004), 57.

Mysticism seeks an integral experience of Reality, a life in fullness—the consciousness of *deep communion with all of Reality*. Raimon Panikkar defines it as the “full experience of life,” to which every human being is called. It is the experience of the human being who is “mystical spirit, as well as rational animal and corporeal being.” Not a “specialization,” but the integral vision of human beings; the “integral experience of life” or Reality, rather than ecstatic experiences or conceptual elucubrations.⁵

Mysticism is the *deep and attentive look* at Reality—looking deeply. To live fully is to live *consciously*, with *full attention*. It is to *open our eyes* and *awaken* to Reality, beyond any reductionist vision of it. It means daring to see Reality even beyond our ideas and beliefs, our fears and desires; to see beyond reason, for the scope of the real overflows the intelligible, since reason is limited and Reality is greater than our reason. This seems very clear to me, despite the fact that Hegel went so far as to say that “everything *real* is *rational* and everything *rational* is *real*” (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*). It is not a matter of renouncing reason, but of relativizing it in order to reach the *transrational*. For this reason, the mystical experience presupposes having not only the eyes of the face fully awake but also the “three eyes of knowledge”—the sensitive/empirical eye, the rational/philosophical eye, and the spiritual/contemplative eye (*third eye*)—in order to fully enjoy life.⁶

⁵ Raimon Panikkar, *De la mística. Experiencia plena de la vida* (Barcelona: Herder, 2005), 20–23; in English, *Mysticism, Fullness of Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).

⁶ As we will see below, in the Christian tradition the concept of three eyes of knowledge is especially prevalent in the medieval thinkers Hugo of St. Victor and St. Bonaventure. Cf. Victorino Pérez Prieto, “Los tres ojos del conocimiento en San Buenaventura. De la reductio Bonaventuriana al pensamiento complejo de Edgar Morin y la perspectiva cosmoteándrica de Raimon Panikkar,” in *Perspectivas sobre el pensamiento de san Buenaventura de Bagnoregio y otros estudios*, ed. Julio César Barrera, Luis Fernando Benítez, and Andrés Felipe López (Bogotá: Universidad de San Buenaventura, 2018).

**FRAGMENTARY PERSPECTIVE VERSUS UNITY:
THE SEAMLESS FABRIC OF REALITY**

Superficiality has as much to do with banality, whether moral or spiritual, as with a *fragmentary perspective* of seeing Reality, as opposed to the vision of its Unity as non-duality. *Unity* only exists *in the difference* that we perceive at every moment. Superficiality is a perspective in which I see myself as an individual isolated from the rest of Reality, considering it to be at my service. It means seeing myself as a *subject* and everything else as an *object* that exists for my enjoyment. It is the perspective of the American *self-made man*, the man who believes he has made himself,⁷ when in reality we are all dependent beings, dependent from the moment of our birth until we die, always needing others and our environment to exist. Even the fifth-century Simeon the Stylite, ridiculed in Luis Buñuel's film *Simón del desierto* (*Simon of the Desert*), needed at least water and vegetables to be brought to the column on which he was perched in the middle of the desert near Aleppo (Syria) in order to subsist. Only the foolish claim that they owe nothing to anyone, or that they have made *themselves* without the help of others, when in truth numerous people collaborate on our life's journey. This is the greatness and wonder of our existence: to recognize how we *are all interrelated*, interacting and weaving webs and warps from which we emerge stronger.

⁷ This American expression seems to have originated in 1832 in the U.S. Senate. It was later linked to Benjamin Franklin, described as "the most original *self-made man*." But, in the history of the United States, the idea of the *self-made man* as an American cultural archetype or ideal was criticized by some and even considered "a pernicious myth." Cf. Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (New York: The Free Press, 1966) and John John Swansburg, "The Self-Made Man: The Story of America's Most Pliable, Pernicious, Irrepressible Myth," *Slate*, 2017, https://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2014/09/the_self_made_man_history_of_a_myth_from_ben_franklin_to_andrew_carnegie.html

Superficiality is the opposite of seeing Reality as the *seamless fabric* that it truly is: a Reality in which everything is completely *interrelated/interconnected*. Fragmentary superficiality is the opposite of *the unity and harmony of Reality*. And that does not depend on my will, on what I see or do not see, on what I think or do not think. For as Antonio Machado wisely said in one of his poem-aphorisms:

The eye you see is not
an eye because you see it,
it is an eye because it sees you.⁸

Einstein himself said, in a well-known and oft-repeated phrase, that “Our separation from others is an optical delusion of consciousness,”⁹ and this delusion is a prison for us; our task must be to free ourselves from this prison to embrace all Reality.

RELATIONSHIP, COMPLEXITY, AND ECOSOPHY

This individualistic perspective, besides being egomaniacal and immoral, is contrary to the vision of Reality that has been presented by science for over a century: *Reality is relational*. Within it, everything is connected; we ourselves, though unique and

⁸ Antonio Machado, “Proverbios y cantares I,” in *Poesías completas* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1973), 197.

⁹ The full paragraph reads: “A human being is a part of the whole, called by us “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.” Available at <https://www.thymindoman.com/einsteins-misquote-on-the-illusion-of-feeling-separate-from-the-whole/>

immeasurable beings, true microcosms, are pieces of an immense cosmic puzzle, of the macrocosm. This complex Reality is manifested in quantum physics and the theory of complexity, as we read at the beginning in the quote by Edgar Morin: “Complexity is not everything, but it is, all the same, *what can best* open itself up to intelligence and *reveal the inexplicable*.” Or, as we also read in Ilya Prigogine’s quote, Reality “*overflows any single language, any single logical structure*,” since, like music, “has not been exhausted by any of its realizations . . . the world of sound is richer than any musical language.” In the end, it will be a matter of *overcoming* “*the fragmentation* of knowledge and the fragmentation of human life,” as Raimon Panikkar said.

Complexity does not mean complicated or strange, but comes from *complexus*, “that which is woven together.” Bruno Latour, French anthropologist, sociologist, and philosopher of science, popularized the expression that Reality is a *seamless fabric*: nothing exists outside the relationships of Reality. The natural and social worlds are the product of networks of relations between actors, both human and non-human; we must surpass the contrapositions of object/subject and society/nature.¹⁰

This is also the basis of an authentic *ecology/ecosophy*, or Earth wisdom—discovering the relationship *of everything to everything* in our world, from chemical and biological structures to human social networks; discovering that relationship in Reality and seeking to live in harmony with it. Here we can see the

¹⁰ This is the *Actor-network theory*, known by the acronym ANT. It originated in the mid-1980s among Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. It was mainly Latour who popularized it; cf. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Latour’s best-known work is *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) (the original French title is *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes. Essais d’anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991)). In it, he uses case studies to prove the fallacy of the modern oppositions of object/subject and society/nature.

environmental movement as a prophetic reality of our times and acknowledge its presence in the Judeo-Christian Bible.

Pope Francis himself speaks of Reality as a *fabric* in his encyclical *Laudato si'*. His most novel contribution in this revolutionary encyclical, as we will see, is not just denouncing the assault on the environment and proposing ecological solutions; it is also the first time that a pope has dared to speak of the new and old worldview that shows that everything is interrelated. And he does so via the most oft-repeated expressions throughout the text, after *ecology* and *environment*: “Everything is connected,” “everything is related,” “everything is interrelated,” “we are intertwined,” etc. The whole of reality forms a “seamless fabric.” We are part of a “universal family, a sublime communion,” with which we are in a profound “interdependence.”

QUANTUM PHYSICS, SPIRITUALITY, THEOLOGY, AND THE ORIGINATING SOURCE OF BEINGS

This relational vision of Reality is the one provided by the new physics—specifically quantum physics, which conceives matter more as packets of energy, called *quanta*, than as substance/particles. These “energy packets” are also called wave packets; that is why *quantum* physics or *quantum mechanics* is also called *wave mechanics*.¹¹

As Fritjof Capra eloquently expresses, quantum physics “manifests a profound harmony between scientific language and mysticism.” In contrast to the *mechanistic model*, twentieth-century science overcomes this *fragmentation* and returns to the idea of *unity* expressed in early Greek and Eastern philosophies. The Eastern worldview is *organic*: all things and events perceived

¹¹ Cf. the relatively simple but well-done “Introduction” with which I entered this fascinating world many years ago: Tony Hey and Patrick Walters, *The Quantum Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

by the senses are connected/interrelated, and are but different aspects of the same ultimate Reality. As Capra writes:

The profound harmony between scientific language and the corresponding ideas in Eastern mysticism is impressive evidence that the philosophy of mystical traditions, also known as the “perennial philosophy,” provides the most consistent philosophical background to our scientific theories.¹²

Werner Heisenberg—the great German physicist, father of the uncertainty principle that is the fundamental concept of quantum physics, and winner of the 1932 Nobel Prize in Physics—wrote: “The great scientific contribution in theoretical physics since the last war may be an indication of a certain relationship between philosophical ideas in the tradition of the Far East and the philosophical substance of quantum theory.”¹³

As we shall see, the relational vision of Reality revealed to us by quantum physics and complexity is thus the one that has been shown to us for centuries by the *perennis philosophia* and the spirituality of all the great religious traditions. Reality is *One*, total and undivided.

This relational vision of Reality provided by the new physics is also that of a theology which the Irish theologian Diarmuid O’Murchu explicitly called “quantum theology.”¹⁴ Conscious of

¹² Fritjof Capra, *El tao de la física* (Málaga: Sirio, 2000), 15; in English, *The Tao of Physics* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2010). Cf. Leonardo Boff, *El Tao de la liberación. Una ecología de la transformación* (Madrid: Trotta, 2006); in English, *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

¹³ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (London: Harper Perennial, 1963), p. 725, quoted by Capra, *The Tao of Physics*.

¹⁴ Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Teología cuántica. Implicaciones espirituales de la Nueva Física* (Quito: Abya Yala, 2014); in English, *Quantum Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004).

his breakthrough ideas, he thanked his brothers in the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart for “respecting the foolish and often unconventional dreams of his heart.”

In his long introduction to the Spanish edition, José María Vigil says:

The growing accumulation of knowledge . . . occasionally undergoes qualitative leaps that imply a radical change. . . . These are the scientific revolutions. . . . One of those radical qualitative leaps in the history of science was quantum physics. It was a shock that forced a complete and radical reformulation of all our traditional concepts. Old categories, unquestioned assumptions, and first principles of knowledge considered unprovable axioms were disqualified and rendered obsolete. A new way of looking invaded everything. . . . It is quantum physics that exposes this transformation with greater radicality, to the point of leaving us defenseless, dispossessed of all logic. . . . It breaks the rules of the unquestionable traditional logic with which we have always functioned and still function.¹⁵

O’Murchu highlights many of these disconcerting discoveries provided by quantum physics, which radically change the vision we have had for centuries. Thus, while we have traditionally understood matter to be the leftovers of the cosmos—something lifeless, purely passive, sterile—and this concept invaded philosophy, theology, and spirituality, quantum physics tells us this concept is completely wrong. “Such matter does not exist,” says O’Murchu. As long as we continue to think and talk like this about the matter of this world, without drastically correcting the concept behind that word, we will deceive ourselves and live in a mirage. Matter is energy, which springs forth in a quantum

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 10–11.

universe that makes all things consist from within at every level. Matter is force, it tends toward informed self-organization, it is the germinator of life . . . and of mind and spirit. As Morin says, we are not in a *cosmos*, but in a *chaosmos*, as we shall see later; a *cosmogenesis*, essentially and universally evolutionary. The universe is the result of an evolution in which an infinity of factors converge. Our fixist image of the world—as static, created like this directly by God—is left behind, insists O’Murchu. Moreover, *anthropocentrism*, the human being as the measure of all things, falls apart.

This vision of the new cosmology “does not sit well with the religious interpretation of the purpose of the cosmos,” adds Vigil in his introduction. “The central message of the religious narrative elaborated in the times of the other cosmology seems misplaced, or even frankly incorrect.” We are not “in the image and likeness” of God *as opposed to* all other living beings, the species that owns the planet and the cosmos. We come from within, not from outside the Earth; we come from below. That is why Vigil concludes:

We have the right—and the obligation—to reconcile the discourse of our religion (its symbolic heritage, its stories, as well as our theology and spirituality) with the story of the cosmos that science offers us, so that we are not forced into a state of schizophrenia between our religiosity and our condition as people of today.¹⁶

O’Murchu confesses beautifully at the beginning of the book:

Dare I compare myself with some of the pioneering figures of twentieth-century science—Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrödinger—but every time I read their personal memoirs I feel a strong

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 15.

resonance. Yes, mine, too, is a searching, questioning, exploratory heart just as theirs is a discerning, spiritual, and theological adventure—at least at the subconscious level. Indeed, it is probably quite accurate to suggest that it is in the moments of mystical awakening that these two strands meet. And that is not simply an encounter of like minds; much more to the point, it is a meeting of burning hearts.¹⁷

Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, a connoisseur of contemporary theology and science, recently wrote:

One of the most persistent quests among scientists, generally coming from the Earth and life sciences, is that of the unity of the Whole. This quest is called the *Grand Unified Theory* or *Quantum Field Theory*, or the pompous *Theory of Everything*. No matter how much effort they have made, they all end up frustrated, abandoning this pretension as impossible. The universe is too complex to be apprehended by a single formula.

However, research on subatomic particles and primordial energies has led us to perceive that they all refer to the so-called *quantum vacuum*, which is not a vacuum at all but rather the fullness of all potentialities. All beings and the entire universe have emerged from this *bottomless bottom*.... Others call it the *Original Source of Beings* or the *All-nourishing Abyss*.

One of the greatest cosmologists, Brian Swimme, calls it the *Ineffable* and the *Mysterious* (*The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*). Well, these are characteristics that religions attribute to the Ultimate Reality, which is known by a thousand names: Tao, Yahweh, Allah, Olorum, God. The Void, pregnant with

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 17.

Energy if it is not God (God is always greater), is its best metaphor and representation.¹⁸

The intimate relationship between *complexity*, *ecology*, and *mysticism* is what we will try to express here. We will turn to science and philosophy, but also to theology and spirituality/mysticism, taking into account the *Original Source of Beings* or the *Abyss* mentioned by Leonardo Boff, the presence of the Divinity in any of its conceptions. As a theologian of today who wants to be honest in his work, I want to seriously consider a brilliant statement by one of the greatest and best-known Christian theologians of all times—paradoxically, a theologian who lived over seven hundred years ago and who has a reputation for being reactionary among many people today, but who was ahead of his time: Thomas Aquinas. He says, “A mistake about creation results in a mistake about God” (*Summa contra Gentiles*, 1,2, c.3). Developing a theology for today involves approaching and humbly taking into account what today’s sciences tell us, albeit without yielding to the scientism of some scientists, which is reductive of Reality. From mysticism, I also want to learn from the mystics, who have been able to penetrate Reality better than even the most prestigious scientists, as some of the greatest physicists of the twentieth century have acknowledged; for the mystics do this *directly*, and not through intermediaries, as scientists do. This is what Ken Wilber says in one of his most beloved books (*Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World’s Great Physicists*), from which I have learned much of what I know about the matter over the years. Wilber says in the Introduction (*italics* by the author):

¹⁸ Leonardo Boff, “El Cristo Cósmico: Una espiritualidad del universo,” <https://www.atrío.org/2016/09/el-cristo-cosmico-una-espiritualidad-del-universo>.

I would simply ask, you of orthodox belief, you who pursue disinterested truth, you who—whether you know it or not—are molding the very face of the future with your scientific knowledge . . . to you I ask: *what does it mean that the founders of your modern science, the theorists and researchers who pioneered the very concepts you now worship implicitly, the very scientists presented in this volume, what does it mean that they were, every one of them, mystics?*¹⁹

Suspicious, like myself, of any useless concordism between science and religion, Wilber says of the mystical experience and the scientific work of today's physicist:

In the *mystical* consciousness, Reality is *apprehended directly and immediately*, meaning *without any* mediation, any symbolic elaboration, any conceptualization, or any abstractions; subject and object become one in a timeless and spaceless act. . . . Mystics universally speak of contacting reality in its "suchness." . . .

Now, when the *physicist* "looks at" quantum reality or at relativistic reality, he *is not looking at the* "things in themselves," at noumenon, at direct and nonmediated reality. Rather, the physicist is looking at *nothing but a set of highly abstract differential equations*. . . . Physics deals with shadows; to go beyond shadows is to go beyond physics; to go beyond physics is to head toward the *meta-physical* or *mystical*—and *that* is why so many of our pioneering physicists were mystics. The new physics contributed nothing positive to this mystical venture, except a

¹⁹ Ken Wilber, *Cuestiones cuánticas. Escritos místicos de los físicos más famosos del mundo* (Barcelona: Kairós, 1987), 12; in English, *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1984).

spectacular failure, from whose smoking ruins the spirit of mysticism gently arose.²⁰

The contributions of Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Eddington, and other great physicists to quantum theory show that the classical ideal of scientific *objectivity* is no longer feasible. In this sense, modern physics also shatters the myth that science is something completely *objective*, alien to values and spiritual experiences. The patterns and structures that scientists observe in nature are intimately related to the patterns and structures that exist in their minds; to their concepts, their thoughts, and their values. Thus, the scientific results they obtain and the technological applications they investigate will be conditioned by their own mental structures. This is what Raimon Panikkar calls the “myth of science,” for many unquestionable, as are all myths.

Many will agree that we must not allow ourselves to be dominated by the machine and that we must progress in spirit to keep up with material development. But few will dare to touch *the taboo of modern science*. . . . This is the myth. *We have relativized everything*: from what the Aztecs thought to what Jesus Christ said. *But we have not relativized our science*. . . . The successes of science and its symbiosis with modern technology have made people believe that *there is no salvation outside of science*.²¹

Scientists, therefore, have not only an intellectual responsibility toward their research but also a moral responsibility. Thus humbly writes Erwin Schrödinger, winner of the 1933 Nobel Prize in Physics:

²⁰ *Ibid.* 22-23.

²¹ Raimon Panikkar, *Paz y desarme cultural* (Santander: Sal Terræ, 1993), 100; in English, *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

The *scientific picture of the world* around me is very deficient. It provides a great deal of factual information, reduces all experience to a wonderfully consistent order, but *is sepulchrally silent* about every aspect related to the heart, *with everything that really matters to us*. It cannot tell us a single word about what it means for something to be red or blue . . . painful or pleasurable; it knows nothing of the beautiful or the ugly, the good or the bad, of God and eternity.²²

And for this reason, we could also read with feeling the magnificent verses of Ernesto Cardenal's *Cosmic Canticle* at the start of this chapter, in which he also quoted another great quantum physicist, Niels Bohr (1885–1962, Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922):

The secret of science transcends the scientific . . .

Physicists now speak like mystics . . .

The confusion now between physics and spirit . . .

Only fantastic theories stand a chance of being true.

“It’s not sufficiently mad,” thus Bohr criticized a theory.

In short, this is why a passage in the Upanishads said, more than two thousand years ago, “From the *unreal*, lead me to the *real*! From *darkness*, lead me to *light*!” The millenary texts of Hinduism speak of higher and *lower knowledge*; they relate the latter to the various sciences and the *higher* to *religious consciousness*. In-depth knowledge of Reality can never be adequately described

²² Wilber, *Cuestiones cuánticas. Escritos místicos de los físicos más famosos del mundo*, 128.

in words, because it is beyond the realm of the senses and the intellect, from which all our words and concepts are derived. That is why the Upanishads also state:

The eye does not reach there.
 The word does not go, nor the mind.
 We don't know it, we don't understand it.
 How could I unite to *teach it*?

Buddhists speak of *relative knowledge* (conditional truth) and *absolute knowledge* (transcendental truth). One of their greatest teachers, Nagarjuna (150–250), says that reason cannot grasp the essence of the absolute, One Reality. And more than half a millennium earlier, Laozi, who calls this Reality the Tao, says the same thing in the first maxim of the *Book of Tao (Daodejing)*: “The Tao that can be expressed is not the true Tao.” This knowledge is an experience arising from a non-ordinary state of consciousness, which we might call a “meditative” or “contemplative” state. In this meditation, the mind has emptied itself of thoughts and concepts, thus preparing itself to function intuitively, completely open to Reality, without conceptual conditioning.

This book—written during the long pandemic lockdown of March–May 2020, but also the fruit of many studies, conferences, and previous publications of mine—follows a path from matter to spirit, from the empirical to the spiritual, from the bottom up and the top down in continuous motion. As can be seen from the many quotes by Raimon Panikkar, I am very much indebted to the thinking of this great teacher and friend. He once told me, “I am happy to serve as a springboard for you to jump higher.”²³ He shone down from high above, and I will barely

²³ Prologue to Victorino Pérez Prieto, *Más allá de la fragmentación de la teología, el saber y la vida: Raimon Panikkar* (Barcelona: Tirant lo Blanch, 2008), 15.

reach his level; but, as a wise medieval saying goes, walking “on the shoulders of a giant,” I hope to “see further” and contribute something new with this text, where I present some ideas that go beyond Panikkar.

I start from complexity in science and philosophy, particularly the thought of Edgar Morin and Raimon Panikkar. I then shift to an ecological perspective, and the vision of Reality as a harmonious unity in difference, from the challenge of ecologists, theology, and spirituality; Eastern thought and religiosity; early and Indigenous peoples and the Judeo-Christian Bible; ecopacifism, ecofeminism, and the holistic perspective. All to arrive at an *eco-theology* and *eco-spirituality* in the company of three great Christian mystical ecologists: Francis of Assisi, John of the Cross, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. In both chapters, I will approach Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato si’*; a text that knows how to unite a denunciation of the assault on the planet and ecological proposals with a vision of Reality as an indissolubly united Whole—the *seamless garment* of Reality, of which we are a part, as a harmonious unity in difference.

I hope the non-believer/religious reader, who I hope will also read these pages, will not quit after the first chapters but make it to the end. For this book is born from a desire to learn without prejudice. Thus, it attempts to overcome both the old faith/science conflicts and the assumed European/Western “superior culture” pitted against all the other “backward” cultures. I set out from the conviction that it is a mistake to oppose faith and science, because each complements the other. Against *heteronomy*, the dependence and submission of one to the other—the case for a long time in the West with science in regard to religion—and *autonomy*, a freedom fairly won by science, but which led both to walk separately and even in conflict, I am in favor of what Raimon Panikkar calls *ontonomy*: the relationship of everything to everything, of the different spheres of knowledge and ways of

knowing mutually complementing each other. Moreover, I am trying to overcome the conflict between Christianity, which has also considered itself superior, and the other religions, knowing that they have much to learn from one another.