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May 21, 2012: Raimon Panikkar on Church and State

Bruce Ledewitz

Duquesne University, ledewitz@duq.edu

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Title: Raimon Panikkar on Church and State

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5/21/2012—Twenty years after delivering the Gifford Lectures in 1989 and 1990, Raimon Panikkar published *The Rhythm of Being*, which was an expansion and development of them. The book is difficult and well beyond summarizing. But I was struck by Panikkar's understanding of what we would ordinarily call Church and State—the role of religion in a public sense. A piece of this description occurs on pages 234-235 of the book. Panikkar is describing "every country under the sway of technocracy" which can be understood as the modern culture of global capitalism. It is not dependent on political institutions. Panikkar would certainly include urban China, for example. In these countries, many people "still pay lip service to religious values." So the essence of a change has nothing much to do with how often people go to church or call themselves nonbelievers. In such modern cultures, the vision of reality has changed from tripartite to forms of dualism. Instead of body, soul and spirit, for example, one thinks of soul and body or spirit and matter. But this form of spirit is not the sacred. Rather, life is lived in the realms of the sensible and the rational. (I believe Panikkar would view most of what passes for religion as quite rational in such cultures.) He writes, "modern culture has constructed a civilization in which the Divine is ousted from the actual life of the civitas". He does not overlook the responsibility in this of religious institutions, which felt that the privilege of managing the sacred was theirs, which led nonmembers or nonleaders to imagine they could dispense with religion altogether. In such a culture, once "the sacred (the Divine or God) has become a superfluous hypothesis for the running of civic life, the sacred suffer social atrophy, and talk about the Divine is reduced to a more or less odd specialty for some people who are removed from 'real' life. Religious faith is sociological irrelevant; it becomes an indifferent matter whether to believe or not to believe." There is a lot here. But most important is the conclusion that there are social consequences from the privatization of religion.