

Scott Eastham RIP (1949 – 2013)

I am writing this without having yet had the chance to really come to terms with news of Scott's sudden death in New Zealand, yesterday, on the feast day of St Francis of Assisi. Our thoughts are with his wife Mary, their daughters Casey and Alison, as well as son-in-law David, and grandchildren Jordan and Damon.

However, I find myself reflecting on the life of a true scholar, mentor and friend. I first met Scott at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC in 1982. As a Masters student, I enrolled in the "Religion and Culture" Seminar course directed by a then-young lecturer, Dr Scott Eastham. I soon learnt what a brilliant mind was before me and, before long, who Raimon Panikkar was, what interdisciplinary study entailed, and how the search for intellectual truth, with the right discipline and spirituality, was a pathway to wisdom. Scott was a wonderful lecturer with that all too rare ability to be absolutely excited by the world of ideas and, at the same time, demonstrate their practical, political, ethical and spiritual relevance for our lives.

As a result of the two courses I did with Scott, I resolved that if ever I was to pursue doctoral studies, it would be on the thought of Raimon Panikkar. Only after did I realise I had been privileged to sit at the feet of the best Panikkar scholar in the known universe. After my time at Catholic University, another young student arrived: she was so impressed by Scott, she married him! However, I was not left out of the picture, as I later followed Scott and Mary to Montréal in Canada where Scott was then teaching at Concordia University. I was doing doctoral research on Panikkar at the Intercultural Institute of Montreal and a frequent visitor to Scott and Mary, with their two young daughters Casey and Alison.

In 1989, Scott and I shared a hotel room in Edinburgh for the three weeks of Panikkar's Gifford Lectures. This was the first time I had met Panikkar in person, attended all his lectures and was gifted to share several meals with two people who inhabited a similar universe, namely Scott and Raimon. The way they interacted, bouncing ideas off one another, "learning through dialogue", was a privilege for me to witness. Subsequently, Scott, Mary and the girls moved to the Antipodes where Scott gained a position at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. In the mid-90s, with my Mum and Dad, we made a visit and were wonderfully hosted by the Eastham family who later came to Australia to visit me and my parents in Brisbane and Ballina.

Following this, Scott and I were participants in and co-presenters for Panikkar Conferences in Barcelona, Mumbai, Brisbane and Virginia. At the Barcelona Conference I remember stating that my paper (the logos) on Panikkar (the mythos) was all due to the power of the communicating symbol, Scott. He felt I was claiming too much, but from my perspective this was and is certainly the reality. Moreover, Panikkar himself told me that nobody truly understood his intercultural and interreligious vision as profoundly as Scott Eastham. This is acknowledged by inference in Panikkar's final work, *The Rhythm of Being*, which is dedicated to Scott. In fact, it was Scott with his wife Mary and their then-two young children who gave three months living in Taveret, working on the Gifford Lectures, that enabled this work to finally come to fruition in the eventual publication of the text.

Scott's amazing record of publications across multiple disciplines—literature, religion, hermeneutics, communications, media studies, film and the arts, philosophy and theology, culture studies and the sciences, ethics and the ecology—set him apart as an original thinker and prophetic voice in the

academy and society. For decades, he was editor of the journal *Interculture*. His major works include: *Paradise and Ezra Pound* (1983); *Nucleus: Interconnecting Science and Religion in the Nuclear Age* (1987); *The Medial Matrix* (1990); *The Radix: Revisioning Philosophy* (1992); *The Way of the Maker: Eric Weslow's 'Life through Art'* (2002); *American Dreamer: Bucky Fuller and the Sacred Geometry of Nature* (2007); *Biotech Time-Bomb: How Genetic Engineering Could Irreversibly Change Our World* (2009). As well, Scott was major translator, editor and advisor for Panikkar's English publications. He was also Panikkar's most outstanding English-speaking spokesperson.

Yet, this is not the time to focus on Scott's magnificent contribution to the academy in general, or to Panikkar studies in particular. And here I have not even mentioned his more public voice on local radio, in newspapers and social media, which was significant. Now is the time to mourn with Mary and the family for the loss of a uniquely intellectual and socially conscious human being who developed his immense skills and lived his all-too-short life with enormous passion, profound depth and, until the last, untiring energy. All these were a cloak for love of family, friends and strangers who, with Scott and Raimon, are called to live the "cosmotheandric mystery".

Finally, I am a little struck that the day of Scott's death was the feast of St Francis of Assisi who, like Scott, a lover of nature, knew the divine reality is present in all creation. Our prayer is that Scott will come to know that divine mystery in its fullness. But, meanwhile, I and you will still miss him as husband, father, grandfather and friends. And, so, I can do no better than finish with the Prayer of St Francis which captures much of Scott's own spirit—and concludes with the prayer we all make for Scott, that his dying is a birth to eternal life:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Amen