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The Mystery of God and *Tao* in Jewish–Christian–Taoist Context

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IT is not a matter of course that a Christian reads and interprets Taoist philosophy for its relevance to Christian theology. The wisdom of *Tao-te-ching* was already available in a Western Latin translation in the sixteenth century. In this translation, which was accomplished by Jesuit missionaries in China and presented to the British Royal Society in 1788, translators wrote that “the Mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Incarnate God were anciently known to the Chinese nation.”¹

Some Western scholars concerned themselves with attempting to extend and utilize the Chinese concept of the organic naturalism of the interconnectedness of all as a corrective to the customary dualistic and mechanistic pattern of thought in the West in which God was found to be only a *machina* (*Deus ex machina*). Others attempted to interpret the *Tao-te-ching* in such a way as to make it an antidote to cure the sick and vulnerable Western society. In addition, there was an attempt to articulate the continuity between the *Tao-te-ching* and religious Taoism within a Chinese cultural system and framework.²

Recently, Jürgen Moltmann initiated, from his own theological perspective, a daring conversation with “Tao: the Chinese Mystery of the World,” seen through Western theological eyes.³ What I find intriguing in

¹ James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism*, vol.1 (New York: Dover, 1962) xiii.

² Julia M. Hardy, “Influential Western Interpretations of the Tao-te-ching,” in *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching*, ed. Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998) 165–85.

³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 172–93.

Moltmann's dialogue is his attempt at reading and discussing *Tao-te-ching* from a Jewish-Christian standpoint. Sharing Moltmann's vision of *Tao* in a Jewish-Christian way, I concern myself with discovering the wisdom of *Tao-te-ching* for a Jewish-Christian concept of the God of Israel, Jesus Christ and the Spirit.

What is *Tao-te-ching* in Taoism? Before attending to the point of my dialogue with *Tao-te-ching*, let me explain the background of Taoism to facilitate increased readability and understandability. The history of Taoism can be conveniently divided into four periods: proto-Taoism, classical Taoism, modern Taoism and contemporary Taoism.⁴ The first period, proto-Taoism spans from antiquity to the second century C.E. *Tao-te-ching* is often understood as having first appeared during the period of the Warring States (479–221 B.C.E.).

The person most revered in Taoism is known simply by the epithet Lao Tzu, which can be translated as "Old Master." According to the cultural legend, Lao Tzu was regarded as an elder contemporary of Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.). The earliest biography of the Old Master is contained in the *Shih-Chi* (*Records of the Historian* dated 90 B.C.E) by the great Han dynasty historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145–86 B.C.E).

According to this record, which admits uncertainty regarding the historicity of Lao Tzu, he was said to have been born in the state of Ch'u, where he later became an archivist at the royal Chou court under the name Lao Tan. He cultivated *Tao* and its virtue and he taught without fame in the world. He was consulted by Confucius. After he had lived in Chou for a long time, he realized that the Chou dynasty was in decline. Retiring from the court, he set off to emigrate across the pass toward the west. In the western frontier, he was asked by *Yin Hsi*, the guardian of the pass, to compose a text outlining his philosophy of *Tao*. The result was the text known as *Tao-te-ching* (*The Scripture of The Way and Its Power*), the content of which is presented in two sections that deal with the *Tao* and with its virtue [*te*].⁵ This book remains the basic text of Taoist thought to this day.

Apart from Ssu-ma Ch'ien's biography, we have little historical information about Lao Tzu in his original person. Furthermore, this biography

⁴ Cf. James Miller, *Daoism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003) 4–15.

⁵ Chapter 63 of the *Shi-chi*. Cf. Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1964) 93–94.

of Lao Tzu is qualified by its own confession that no materials existed at all for such a biography.⁶

The *Tao-te-ching* is a compilation of terse aphorisms about the *Tao* and its power. The text exists in a standardized edition made by the commentator Wang Pi (226–49 C.E.). Of all the commentaries on the *Tao-te-ching*, the most important ones are those of Ho-Shang-Kung (probably second century C.E.) and Wang Pi. The text in the first chapter speaks of *Tao* as the formless and ineffable Way that is the wellspring of creative power for a universe of constant transformation. The *Tao* is the mother of heaven and earth, the spontaneously self-generating life of the universe.

Tao as the Source of Life and Its Nature

The root meaning of *Tao*, around which everything in *Tao-te-ching* revolves, is path or way. When used as a verb, the same word means to direct, to guide or to establish communication. The Way, which by definition cannot be spoken of and cannot be named, is the wondrous beginning of the ten thousand things. The Way gives them birth, and its power [*te*] brings them up, nourishes them, makes them secure and perfect, giving to each its strength. “That’s why the ten thousand things always honor Way and treasure Integrity” (ch. 51).⁷

The Way in its formlessness and namelessness originates and completes the ten thousand things. The transcendence of *Tao* in its formlessness and ineffability is conceived of as both the initial beginning and the source of life in relation to all living sentient creatures. Its occurrence happens of itself perennially. “It was always and of itself so.” The *Tao* is called “the mysterious power,” or “dark-enigma Integrity” (ch. 51).

⁶ Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of TAO TE CHING and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove, 1978) 108. In the Chinese view the dating and evaluation of Lao Tzu is as an elder contemporary of Confucius in the sixth century B.C.E. Against this, the Western view places Lao Tzu in the fourth or third century B.C.E. even after the completion of Chuang Tzu. Cf. A.C. Graham, *Chang-tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book of Chang-tzu* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

5. Graham claims Chuang Tzu to be a compilation of works of different schools, while Fung Yu-lan conceives of it as an anthology of Taoism. Against the view of Graham, Liu Xiaogan rejects the hypothesis of the completion of Lao Tzu after the time of Chang Tzu. Cf. Liu Xiaogan, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 172, 184.

⁷ Chapter number in parenthesis in the text refers to *Tao-te-ching*, the two different texts which are used. *Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching*, trans. David Hinton (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000). Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove, 1978).

Tao eludes all human conceptual thinking because it is beyond what can be affirmed or negated. In the *I Ching (Book of Changes)*, one of the Confucian classics, *Tao* is explained as the constantly self-renewing and creating energy of life as it moves. *Yin* and *yang*, in mutual interaction, are fundamental categories of this system. *Tao* creates all that is created through a continuous interaction of *yin* and *yang*.

Te is usually translated as virtue. To Confucius, *te* was a quality acquired by living nobly in cultured company. The virtues preached by the Confucianists are, however, in the eye of Taoism, attacked as an utter degradation of the *Tao*. In *Tao-te-ching* we read that when the great Way was abandoned and fell into disuse, the virtues of human heartedness and morality (righteousness) arose. When intelligence and knowledge emerged, great artifices and deceptions began. When family discord is rife, the duty of obedience and kindness come forth. When the State falls into disorder and misrule, loyal subjects appear (ch. 18). Human heartedness (*jen*) and righteousness (*i*) are the supreme virtues of Confucianism, the principles of which became the foundations of the ethical code of the nobility for Mencius.

In Lao Tzu's view, however, *te* is the realization or expression of the *Tao* in actual and natural living. *Te* is what happens by the natural way of *Tao* as distinct from human striving. It does not imply any supernatural intervention in the course of nature. "A noble official is never warlike, and a noble warrior is never angered. A noble conqueror never faces an enemy, and a noble leader stays below the people he wields" (ch. 68). It is this aspect which is called the *te*. It arises not out of contending with the people, but out of wielding the people. According to Lao Tzu, even the best will in the world, when forced, achieves nothing. The best righteousness, when forced, achieves nothing.

The *te* (the greatest power) is available to those who do not seek power and who do not use force. The person of highest power does not act. "Therefore the Sage relies on actionless activity, carries on wordless teaching" (ch. 2). Though one acts, one is regarded in this way. Perhaps it would be beneficial to draw a parallel with the *Bhagavad Gita*, the so-called Hindu "New Testament," and its concept of action without concern for results.

In contrast to the Confucian idea of morality, in Taoism the *te* can be attained when the *Tao* is attained. *Te* is obtained by adopting a policy of non-action. Each thing has *te* to grow and develop, so long as it is properly nourished and looked after. The *te* lies and abides in the *Tao*. Therefore, *te* is itself the manifestation of the *Tao*. The life-style based on *te* is character-

ized by production without possession, action without self-assertion and development without domination. Therefore, *te* is in harmony with the *Tao* by following the *Tao* by which it is directed.

What then is *Tao*? *Tao* is born before heaven and Earth. We may think of it as the Mother of this world. We do not know its name. It is the Immense, nameless. The ineffability of the *Tao* is affirmed in the very first chapter of the *Tao-te-ching*: A *Tao* that can be told of is not the Permanent *Tao*. Rather than maintaining “the religious art of mystical silence,”⁸ the ineffable *Tao* points to profound knowledge, according to which the *Tao*, though incomprehensible in human languages, is the source of all meaning for living creatures.

Hence Taoist mysticism, unlike Western mysticism, becomes possible without the presupposition of the personal-mystical union with a metaphysical reality of the Absolute. Taoist thinking centers around “where is the Way?” not “what is the Truth?” In this spontaneous way of life the mystical experience aims at transforming body and soul.⁹

However, this *Tao* does not refer to the metaphysical principle of transcendence in the sense of qualitative difference or dualism. It refers instead to the ground or womb from which all life springs and after which all life follows and to which all life finally returns. This carries a sense of non-duality or relationality. Of all great things, surely *Tao* is the greatest. But its ineffability remains still the mystery of all mysteries. “Those who know do not speak; Those who speak do not know” (ch. 56). *Tao* transcends space and time and is yet simultaneously within space and time. In other words, *Tao* is transcendentally immanent and immanently transcendental. The immanence of *Tao* refers to the way of the universe which is the driving force in flux of all life and nature. It is called the Mother of the world in terms of giving life to all living sentient creatures.

Mystical Elements and Principle of Mutual Interconnection

The unnamed is the origin of heaven and earth. Naming is the mother of ten thousand things. Whenever there is no desire, one beholds the mysterious way and power of *Tao*. Whenever there is desire, one beholds its manifestations in the universe. Its identity is *hsuan hsun* beyond *hsun*, all

⁸ Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, 173.

⁹ Hardy, “Western Interpretations,” 178.

mystery's gate (ch. 1). The chaotic and obscure state of *hsuan*, the dark-enigma, is the nature of the world before any distinction has been made.

This is the identity principle between mystery and manifestation from which one distinction has been made between *te* and *chi* or *yin* and *yang* or non-being and being. God's aseity (or God *in se*) exists by and through itself *sui generis*. The *Tao* operates mysteriously and secretly. In addition to the *Tao* which is incomprehensible silence, there is the *Tao* which is speakable or nameable. Lao Tzu envisioned a speaking about the unspeakable. The silence and void before heaven and earth pervades all things. Lao Tzu calls the mother of the world *Tao*, always in motion and returning (ch. 25).

The thought of *Tao-te-ching* may be a form of mysticism, though not in a theistic sense. The Taoist mystical experience does not center on an ontological union between human self and ultimate reality. Lao Tzu uses the word *ming* (light) on several occasions to mean the sage's characteristic insight into the mystery. Going to the origin of all things characterizes the main idea of Taoist mysticism. The Taoist mystics abolish time by identifying themselves with an eternal now. Lao Tzu is more concerned with how to make the best of our life in this world than with a hope in expectations of a better future. Everything comes from God, and everything goes to God.

At this point, we see similarities to Meister Eckhart's metaphysics of flow. In this there is a dynamic reciprocity and movement of flowing-forth (*exitus-emanatio*) of all things from the hidden ground of God, and a flowing-back (*reditus-restoratio*) of the universe into identity with God. The *reditus* of all things to God corresponds to the *exitus* of all things from God.¹⁰ So the future of God is to be realized and grasped in this "to-and-fro" movement.

In Chinese thought, the two poles of cosmic energy are *yang* (positive) and *yin* (negative), and their conventional signs are respectively [-] and [-]. The ideograms are associated with the masculine and the feminine, the firm and the yielding, the strong and the weak, the light and the dark, the rising and the falling, heaven and earth. The male individual must not neglect his female component, nor the female her male. Thus Lao Tzu says: "Knowing the male but keeping the female, one becomes a universal stream. Becoming a universal stream, one is not separated from eternal virtue" (ch. 28). The Taoist metaphor of the feminine in the biological-

¹⁰ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad, 2001) 71.

generative sense affirms nature. Taoist mysticism affirms and connects the world of nature to its source of life in which the feminine functions as the symbol of non-action and spontaneity.

The key to the relationship between *yin* and *yang* is called *hsian sheng*, mutual arising or inseparability. As Lao Tzu puts it,

when everyone knows beauty as beautiful, there is already ugliness. When everyone knows good as goodness, there is already evil. “For truly Being and Not-being grow out of one another. Difficult and easy complete one another. Long and short test one another. Pitch and mode give sequence to one another. Front and back give sequence to one another (ch. 2).

Everything and everybody are in mutual sequence. The permanent *Tao* and its manifestation of *te* are in mutual arising. In this regard Lao Tzu contradicts the Confucian idea of rectification of name, according to which a father in the family must be a good father in accordance with the name of the father. In the same way a son must be a good son in relation to his father and other members accordingly. This establishes order in human relations.

However, *Tao* cannot be expressed fully even in terms of rectification of name. *Tao* is effective in the world by non-action. *Tao*, as non-existence, is the beginning of Heaven and Earth, while existence is the mother of all being. From enmeshment with the excessive development of Confucian rationality based on rectification of names, one must return to non-conceptual simplicity, non-discriminating mutual relationship, non-action, and the way of watercourse. According to chapter 42 in *Tao-te-ching*, we read,

Tao generates the One. The One generates the Two. The Two generate the Three. Three generate the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things carry Yin and embrace Yang. They achieve harmony by combining these forces.

The *yin-yang* view of the world was later developed in connection with the theory of the five elements or energies (*wu hsing*), whose first celebrated advocate was Tsou Yen (350 to 270 B.C.E.).¹¹

The forces are so interdependent that no one can exist without all the others, just as there can be no *yang* without *yin*. This is similar to the Buddhist principle of dependent origination (*pratitya samutpada*). Dependent origination, which is based on the *sunyata*, has been developed

¹¹ Cf. Yu-Lan, *Short History*, 135.

and expanded in the direction of a fusion of horizons with *sunyata* as absolute nothingness in Buddhism and as the wondrous being of nonexistence in Taoism. If non-being and being are in mutual arising, the Taoist idea of cosmogenesis is inclined to the naturalistic panentheism of *Tao* rather than pointing to the basic law of cause and effect.

In the *yin-yang* and *wu hsing*, the organic and relational view of the world is implicit, but it becomes explicit in Lao Tzu and in Chuang Tzu. We do not find it stressed in Confucian thought until the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi (1131–1200) in which all the compatible threads of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are woven together. Perhaps the greatest advocate of this organic view was the Buddhist Fa-tsang (643–712) of the Mahayanist Hua-yen school, whose image of the universe was a multidimensional network of jewels, each one containing the reflections of all the others *ad infinitum*. Each jewel was a *shih*, or a thing-event. His principle of *shi shi wu ai* (between one thing-event and another there is no obstruction) expounded the mutual interpenetration and interdependence of everything happening in the universe. In other words, the whole cosmos is implicit in every member of it, and every point in it may be regarded as its center.¹²

The Feminine Side of *Tao* and Its Watercourse

The *Tao* can also be symbolized by the female side. The valley spirit never dies; it is called the mysterious female. The gate of the mysterious female is the origin from which heaven and earth sprang (ch. 6). The feminine, as the symbol of the origin of life and the principle of non-action and spontaneity (*tzu-jan*), is linked to the symbol of the valley characterized by its empty space and its passive receptivity. *Tao* personified as mother is not only tolerant and life-giving but also ruthless and inhumane in response to attempts to artificially manipulate it (ch. 5).

In Lao Tzu, the idea of mother—the female, the mystical womb—is closely associated with that of emptiness. This void is none other than non-being. It is efficacious because, like bellows, it is capable of producing breath at will. As Lao Tzu says, the *Tao* principle happens of itself (*tzu-jan*). *Tao* is the ultimate reality and energy of the universe; it is the Ground of being and non-being. *Tao* does nothing, but nothing is left undone (ch. 37).

¹² Alan Watts, *TAO: The Watercourse Way* (New York: Pantheon, 1975) 35. Cf. Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 130–32.

It loves and nourishes all things but does not lord it over them. *Creatio ex nihilo*, in a Taoist sense, can be conceptualized as a way of emerging and happening of itself. It refers to the character of the void. One models after the earth; earth models after heaven; heaven models after *Tao*; *Tao* models after the naturally-so, abiding by occurrence appearing of itself (ch. 25).

Modeling after *Tao* does not mean acting contrary to nature. *Tzu-jan* is a term that expresses the ultimate movement after one another. According to Lao Tzu, all beings come into existence by the virtue of having obtained primal unity. “Valleys realized primal unity and so came to fullness. The ten thousand things realized primal unity and so came to life” (ch. 39).

Unsurprisingly, Lao Tzu’s exaltation of femininity went dead against all the conventional thinking of his contemporaries, a fact which witnesses to the subversive and even revolutionary component in the *Tao-te-ching*. Lying low in stillness, the female overcomes the male (ch. 61). Lao Tzu uses the flow of water as the principal metaphor of *Tao*. It is called the Watercourse Way, the process of nature. In Lao Tzu’s favorite image of *Tao*, water is the essence of life.

THE HIGHEST good is like that of water. The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the places that all men disdain. It is this that makes water so near to the Way (ch. 8).

But *Tao* cannot be defined in words and is not an idea or concept. Water is an eloquent and extraordinary metaphor in portraying *Tao* as the flowing course of nature. The term *tzu-yan*, translated as nature, means the spontaneous, that which is so of itself. But it is also basic to the Taoist view of the world that every thing-event is what it is only in relation to all others. Therefore, the principle is that if everything is allowed to go its own way, the harmony of the universe will be established since every process in the world can do its own thing only in relation to all other things. Because of the mutual interdependence of all beings, harmony will emerge *tzu-yan*, of itself, without external compulsion. Therefore, *Tao* is esteemed and virtue is honored without anyone’s order. They always come naturally.

Christian Reflection of *Tao-Te-Ching*

Tao and Creation

In his reading of *Tao-te-ching* in the context of Christian theology, Moltmann pays special attention to the Taoist idea of nature as “the high-

est reality of not-doing.”¹³ For him, *tzu-yan* spontaneity corresponds, as a matter of course, to the self-forgetting, delighted play of Wisdom as seen in Israel’s Wisdom literature. According to this tradition, the indwelling of God in creation becomes efficacious in terms of God’s Spirit (*ruach*) and Wisdom (*hokma*) (cf. Proverbs 8.22ff). Regarding the biblical story of creation, Moltmann discerns a similarity between the concept of *tzimtzum* in the Kabbalah and the Taoist idea of the Way.¹⁴

At the level of absolute truth, the statement of the permanent *Tao* in the first chapter of *Tao-te-ching* can reflect on *Ehyeh*, or “I shall be” (Ex 3:14), yet without implying the idea of a personified God. “I shall be” is the answer to Moses’ question “what is your name?” It could mean: I am nameless because I cannot be conceived of in terms of human languages. To look at it from another perspective, the word H-W-Y-H means existence. The universe exists entirely within God, but God is more than it. Y-H-W-H as *Eyn Sof* (that which has no end), or *Makom*, is greater and more comprehensive than H-W-Y-H.¹⁵

Likewise, the *Tao* as the way of ultimate mystery cannot be perceived or clearly conceived of by human rationality. The *Tao* as the Great Void is greater and more comprehensive than the universe. The fact that the *Tao* cannot be named or clearly conceived of is due to its character of mystery and freedom. At the level of relative truth, however, the *Tao* is frequently referred to as the mother of all creatures. This is an aspect of the named *Tao*. In chapter 1, the *Tao*, considered in terms of its named or perceptible aspects, is called the mother of the ten thousand creatures. When the *Tao* causes all creatures to be born, *te* nourishes them and makes them grow. This *te* function of the *Tao* comes into play when the principle has form and name.

In chapter 1, the supreme *Tao* produces heaven and earth and then the ten thousand creatures. In chapter 42, *Tao* gives birth to the One; the One gives birth to two and three things, successively up to ten thousand creatures. Everything shoulders *yin* and embraces *yang*, blending *ch’i* to establish harmony. The concepts of *te* and *ch’i* are analogously correlated to the Jewish-Christian concepts of wisdom and Spirit.

In the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah, *En Sof*, God as an endless, limitless, incomprehensible reality reveals Godself as the ten *sefirot* within the

¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 185.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 184–85.

¹⁵ Arthur Green, *EHYEH: a Kabbalah for Tomorrow* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2003) 1.

cosmic structure. *Keter*, which represents the first undefined intent toward movement within *En Sof*, has no specific content in itself. It can be described as Nothing. The spiritual journey to and from the Nothing is continual. *Keter*, devoid of content, is a locus of pure compassion. In its very emptiness, *keter* is the point of departure of the cosmic process accepts the future movement. It may be depicted as a state of divine openness *ad extra*.

With *keter* understood as a crown or circle, the *sefirot* is a great circle in which the end is connected with the beginning, and the beginning with the end. Out of *keter* arises *hokhmah* (wisdom). The movement from *keter* to *hokhmah*, which is the first step in the primal process, is a transition from Nothingness to being. In Job 28:12, “Wisdom comes from Nothingness.” As *hokhmah* arises out of Nothingness, it brings forth its own mate, *binah* (contemplation). *Hokhmah* and *binah*, as primal pair of *yin* and *yang*, are in mutual connection with each other. The energy radiating from *hokhmah* is described metaphorically as flowing light and water. These three, *keter*, *hokhmah*, and *binah*, are the first three *sefirot*. The energy of *hokhmah* fills the womb of *binah* which in turn gives birth to the seven lower *sefirot*.

Isaac Luria (1534–72) transformed kabbalistic speculation about creation. For him, creation was a negative event, whereas in the literature of early kabbalists, creation was understood as a positive act. The *Eyn Sof* had to bring into being an empty space in which creation could take place. This was accomplished by the process of *tzimtzum*, God’s self-contraction. By going into exile, God allowed for empty space so that the process of creation could be initiated.

According to Taoist cosmogony (reflection on how the world came into being), *Tao* above and within is the source of the mystery that is life. From the *Tao* above we see the mystery of Nothingness, while seeing the appearance from the *Tao* within. Non-being gives birth to being. The *Tao*, in utter silence and mystery, revealed itself in mutual relationship and mutual permeation with all that exists through the *te* and the *ch’i* to establish harmony among all. It is called the gateway of all mystery. The principle of mutual interconnection between non-being and being, or *yin* and *yang*, presupposes the other side of the *Tao*, namely *te* and *ch’i*. Therefore, there is no difference between the triadic self-evolution of the *Tao* in the manifestation of *te* and *ch’i* and the emergence of the ten thousand things. Taoist theogony proceeds and evolves in the cosmogony of every living organism.

The permanent *Tao* describes the eternity of the *Tao* in the manifestation of *te* and *ch'i*. Speaking in Taoist fashion, creation comes from *Tao*, not out of *nihilo*. There is no void, nothing outside the *Tao* to underline and evolve everything. The *Tao* underlines and sustains everything which flows forth from it. Because of this, the Biblical idea of *creatio ex nihilo* is not sufficient to describe the Taoist idea that there is no name outside the *Tao*. The self-movement of the *Tao* refers to its self-evolving emanation from the hidden mystery to the world of form and appearance. In this regard there is a parallel between Taoist cosmogenesis and the Jewish idea of *tzimtzum*. God as holy Nothingness, or *Tao*, underlies *En Sof* (non-being) and *sefirot* (*te* and *ch'i* including the ten thousand things). God accomplished creation by contraction in the same way *Tao* caused being through emptying the void.

The Christian idea of creation depicts a more personal dimension of the divine act of creation in presupposing the existence of 'nothing' outside God. *Tao* cosmogenesis, on the other hand, refers to the natural and self-evolving way of impersonal and hidden *Tao* in which creation *ex nihilo* is to be understood as *creatio ex 'the Way' (Tao)* of the great void. *Tao* embraces being, non-being, and nothingness, one and all. This unseen is neither personal nor trans-personal. Rather, it is understood as the all-inclusive Way of the self-emptying void, the living source of life.

If *creatio ex nihilo* is understood as *creatio ex the Way (Tao)*, in which, out of God's mystery, God paves God's Way of openness to grant life and freedom to all, then a personality centered theology of God in the Western tradition could be enriched in a way that incorporates the all-inclusive living and dynamic side of God.

Lao Tzu speaks of the *Tao* that is not the permanent and constant *Tao*. This is a double play on words since the term *Tao* is also a verb, "to speak." The Chinese word *Tao* is an equivalent of both the Greek word *logos* and the Greek word *hodos*, the Way. *Tao* is God's speech, *logos*, and way. This understanding of the meaning of these words has been used in translations of St. John's Prologue—"In the beginning was the *Tao*"—and contains, therefore, echoes of the line, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." This is a Christian appropriation of Taoist philosophy in China and Korea in each Bible translation. God's speech remains still a mystery in its manifestation of *te*, the embodiment of Jesus Christ.

Tao and Jesus Christ

Tao, as God's speech, became flesh. This parallels the Taoist idea of immanence through *te* and *ch'i*. This idea corresponds to the Jewish notion of di-

vine contraction or the self-limitation of *En Sof* (*tzimtzum*). Withdrawing or holding itself back from Godself, God as *En Sof* allows non-God to exist. This does not mean merely a once-and-for all action but a continuing divine action to allow room for the other to exist. God's creation out of God's own self and God's ongoing revelation of the divine act of creation has a parallel in structure with the Taoist notion of creation out of the Way and of radical immanence within all that exists through the virtue of *te* and spontaneity of *ch'i*.

All creatures issue from the *Tao*; they are its children. But they must return to its womb. Progressing and returning is the movement of the *Tao*. All creatures in this world are born from the seen; the seen is born from the unseen. They move from *Tao* to *Tao* in the great cycle of *yin* and *yang*. “[All things emerge together And I see them return again]. They grow and flourish and then return to the source. Returning to the source is stillness. [Stillness means returning to what is destined.] Returning to what is destined means to be [enlightened]. To know the eternal means enlightenment” (ch. 16).¹⁶

The *Tao* to which all things return is the root and origin in which they find eternal rest. This homecoming is what is destined for all. The circulation of emergence and return articulates the movement or companion of *Tao*, issuing out of itself into the life of the ten thousand things, and together with them returning to itself. This return to the root is called stillness, a submission to fate which has become part of the always-so. Those who know the always-so have room in one for everything. *Tao* is forever and not destroyed (ch. 14). Richard Rubenstein, a Jewish thinker, writes of a

Holy Nothingness, known to mystics of all ages, out of which we have come and to which we shall ultimately return....The limitations of finitude can be overcome only when we return to the Nothingness out of which we have been thrust. In the final analysis, omnipotent Nothingness is Lord of all creation.¹⁷

The person who possesses perfect virtue participates in the life-giving efficacy of the *Tao*. Lao Tzu calls this person by the name *sheng jen*, the sage. This person is illumined and enlightened. In terms of self-cultivation in a naturally spontaneous way, the holy person is illumined to know that

¹⁶ Cited from Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (London: Wildwood House, 1973). Cf. Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, 187.

¹⁷ Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill), 154.

everything comes from *Tao* to *Tao* in harmony with the eternal *Tao*. The sage follows after the Way, the non-action of *tzu-yan* and spontaneity.

For Taoists, the Christian idea of future must be interconnected with past (origin) and present (way of life in non-action). This perspective points to Jesus as the figure of *tzimtzum*, a model of going off to a far country and of coming home. In Jesus' farewell sermon to his disciples, we see a Jesus who comes from the Father to the world, and who returns to the Father, leaving the world to prepare a place for it (John 14:2; 16:28). Jesus mirrors the way of *tzimtzum*, going into the exile of the cross to allow for a space for the people. Jesus does not find a place on earth (Lk 9:58), because his place is *Makom*.¹⁸ The locus of creation exists in Christ rather than existing in the universe. The idea of *Makom* in Jesus' saying is related to his spontaneous submission to the will of God and his way of non-violence. This offers a basis for extending Christ's way to the Taoist ideas of non-action and sagehood.

Jesus Christ as the embodiment of *Tao* becomes the ideal holy person in realizing and fulfilling God's virtue and Torah. Meekness, compassion, and non-violence in the life of Jesus provide a parallel to the Taoist idea of sagehood. However, God remains mystery even in embodiment. The words of Jesus Christ are not in competition with God, nor do they replace God.

Jesus Christ and Sagehood

The sage is the one who is of childlike spontaneity (*tzu-yan*) and non-action. This is one who returns to infancy by knowing the masculine and nurturing the feminine. This is one who becomes like a river of all in abiding by perennial integrity. This is the one who is like the valley of all and returns to the boundless by knowing the white and nurturing the black. This is one who, like "a true minister for the great governing blade, craves nothing" and "returns to the simplicity of uncarved wood" (ch. 28).

Jesus' feminine compassion can be seen in his exhortation of the simplicity of a child: "Unless you become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of God. Anyone who receives one such child in my name receives me" (Matt 18:5). "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes" (Matt 11:25). Likewise, Taoist anthropology of

¹⁸ Cf. *The Talmud*, Selected Writings, trans. Ben Zion Bokser (Mahwah: Paulist, 1989) 16.

sagehood does not recommend unilateral patriarchy (*yang*) or matriarchy (*yin*) but proposes childlike simplicity in harmony with both of them.

Jesus Christ, in this light, means a perfect harmony between Jesus as a Jewish man and Christ as the Eternal Logos. Jesus lives in perfect harmony with the Supreme *Tao* (Father) of his origin in fellowship with the Spirit rather than in the ontological state of *homoousios*. He is the cardinal way of incarnating, embodying and practicing the Way of God. In other words, he is God's *te*. The Christian idea of the preexistent Christ can be understood in accordance with Jesus' saying: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8: 58). "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me" (John 5: 46). Moses bore witness to Jesus Christ who IS before Abraham was born. Essentially Jesus Christ belongs to the world of Torah, which as a companion of life leads to life, not to death. At this juncture we see a correspondence between Jesus and Moses (cf. Deut 18: 15.18).

In the Jewish tradition, Torah is not just the message given by God to Moses on Sinai but the Eternal Word of God. Torah existed before the foundation of the world. In Christianity, the Torah as the eternal Word of God is identified with the incarnation of Jesus Christ while in Judaism it remains forever the Word. The primordial Torah is seen in relation to *hokhmah* which speaks in the verses of the Books of Proverbs and Job. She was with God from the beginning and is the beginning of God's way. Jesus as the embodied (or incarnated) Torah means he has the broadest scope and dimension in the universe because all was and is created through it. From the *Zohar's* statement we read. "There is *nothing* that is not referred to in Torah."¹⁹

However, Torah is not fixed, or final, but dynamic. Prophetic inspiration has evidence in the lives of such non-Israelites as Balaam and his father, and Job and his four friends. Because of the limitations of human understanding, Moses and the prophets could not see or understand the fullness of God's mystery. For the sake of comprehensibility and communication, the Torah speaks of God in terms of analogy. In Talmudic discussion, there is no sharp distinction between *halakha* (law) and *haggadah* (or aggadah, the nonlegal teaching). As such, it calls for human imagination, exercising initiative in reinterpreting and reconstructing the Torah to each particular life context (Deut 17:8–12). Commitment to Torah becomes

¹⁹ Zohar 3:221a. Cf. *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*, trans. Daniel Chananmatt (New Jersey: Paulist, 1983).

meaningful in a living and dynamic interpretation of the texts in a contextual way.²⁰

Jesus, the incarnated Torah, can be seen as the embodiment of God's Way in terms of *te* and through *ch'i*. In this he represents the ideal of sagehood in a Taoist sense, and he appears to be childlike and living water, a figure inclusive of the knowing mother and of the children (ch. 52). "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns.... Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin" (Matt 6:26–28).

Nature for Jesus implies God's Way of being present, sustaining, and nurturing. Jesus' self-description as living water (John 4:10), given for us to drink, provides a striking example of the Taoist source of living water. Those who drink the living water of Jesus abide in the source which gives water that is eternal life. "From their innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). This refers to the indwelling of the Spirit.

Jesus embodies the spirit of valley and follows God's Way of emptiness. In chapter 76 of *Tao-te-ching*, we read a striking example of the Taoist ideal of sagehood in continuity with the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 and with Jesus' beatitudes.

WHEN HE is born, man is soft and weak; in death he becomes stiff and hard. The ten thousand creatures and all plants and trees while they are alive are supple and soft, but when they are dead they become brittle and dry. Truly, what is stiff and hard is a "companion of death"; what is soft and weak is a "companion of life." Therefore "the weapon that is too hard will be broken, the tree that has the hardest wood will be cut down." Truly, the hard and mighty are cast down; the soft and weak set on high.

Likewise Jesus says, "blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the peacemakers, who will be called children of God" (Matt 5:3, 5, 8).

According to Talmudists, a sage is a peace-lover and peace-maker. The ways of peace are mentioned in Psalm 15: Walking with integrity, pursuing righteousness, speaking the truth in the heart, no slandering with the tongue, committing no evil against a fellow-human, bringing no shame to a neighbor, despising a vile person, honoring those revering God. In Micah, these ways are reduced to three: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (Mic 6:8). In Isaiah, keeping justice and

²⁰ *The Talmud*, 11.

doing righteousness (Isa 56:1) are the two cardinal paths to peace. Amos reduced them to one, "Seek me and live" (Amos 5: 6), or, Habbakuk reduced them to one, "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:4; B.T. Makkot 23b-24a).

In Ex 18:30, the path people are to walk in refers to the law, but the work they are to do refers to acts of sagehood, beyond the measure of the law. Ethical conduct does not mean a soulless formalism. Even in messianic times of liberation and enlightenment, human spontaneity leads to the right action in every situation without a need of the law. In the hereafter the laws will become obsolete.²¹ As R. Yohanan said, "Jerusalem was destroyed because her people hewed strictly to the letter of the Torah."²²

The Taoists considered all social values to be prejudices, but prejudices form and shape our tradition, language, culture, and society. Human beings live in the world of prejudices. The *Cogito* principle (*I think*) is captive in the world of contradiction and opposition. The point is to get out of the vicious circle of contradiction and opposition by transcending or overcoming it. Transcending might be referred to as the Taoist logic of embrace and harmony rather than the Buddhist logic of neither-nor.

No matter how hostile and sinful people are, the *Tao* may not deny them. The Taoist logic of embrace and harmony constitutes and regulates the way of human life, as well as creaturely life in nature for harmony and peace. In the *Tao* all contradiction and opposition is reconciled and canceled out from the life source of *Tao*. The *Tao* is a source of life, of peace-harmony, and of salvation, even for the wicked. The *Tao* rejects no one. No one is really good or really wicked. "The Holy man is a good savior of humans and rejects nobody." The life of a holy person represents and embodies the Way, Truth, and Life of *Tao* in a universal-spontaneous manner.

Heavenly *Tao* conquers without striving. *Wu-wei* and non-violence are the most effective means of getting power and holding on to it. *Wu-wei* is not pure passivity. The holy man, when acting, expects no reward for his actions. Once the good deed has been done, he does not bask in his merit. The holy person who performs great achievements dies, not abiding in his or her merits (ch. 2). This is a Taoist's understanding of God's grace and human attitude. "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit" (Matt 7:18). The sanctified person does not abide in his or her achievement, because it comes in a natural-spontaneous way

²¹ Ibid., 55.

²² Ibid., 49.

rather than out of human striving. God's grace does not oppose God's way of nature but is efficacious in the web of complementarity. Likewise, love of God and of fellow-humans is to be done only for the sake of love rather than for the sake of merit and reward.

Spirit and *Ch'i*

The *Tao* emits the vital energy [*ch'i*] and gives rise to change. Consequently, heaven and earth came into being. In turn, they produced the ten thousand things, namely, all beings. Like a mother (chs. 1, 25, 52), the *Tao* creates the world and also nourishes it with its powerful energy. The claim of transcendence is balanced by the idea of the *Tao's* creative power. The former aspect, which refers to nothingness or emptiness, is not an absolute absence in a nihilistic fashion.

The *Tao* as nameless is without shape or form. The cosmic energy which emanates from *Tao* brings forth all forms of life in primal unity with the *Tao* in the circular balance of *yin* and *yang*. The emptiness of the *Tao*, properly understood, is no less than a way of affirming the fullness of the vital energy. The void of non-being is no less than the Whole or the wondrous being which causes all to live.

The cosmos is constituted and sustained by vital *ch'i* energy which pervades all levels of existence. In *Tao-te-ching's* cosmogeny (ch. 42), the *Tao* as the emptying void produced the One which in turn generated *yin* and *yang*. These two gave birth to the harmonious, the clear and the turbid. These three forms of energy are differentiated to form heaven, earth, and human beings, which together produced the ten thousand things.²³ All existence depends on the vital essence of *Tao* in virtue of the vital essence. At this point, we may understand the One as life-giving virtue or energy.²⁴ The Taoist idea of *Tao*, in the manifestation of the vital energy of

²³ The Taoist trinity can be found in chapter 42 of the *Tao-te-ching*; "The Tao gives birth to One; One gives birth to Two; Two gives birth to Three; Three gives birth to the myriad things." By the time of T'ang dynasty, the Taoist trinity had become well established. By then, Nestorian Christianity was also active and well known in China. Certainly, there was contact and interaction between the two religions. The primal celestial one, controlling the past, has been likened to God the Father. The precious celestial one, controlling the present, has been compared to God the Son, and the Way-and Its Power celestial one, controlling the future, has been compared to God the Holy Spirit.

²⁴ In contrast to an interpretation of the One as the vital essence in the tradition of Ho Shang Kung, Wang Pi took the One to be that of non-being as a negative concept. From non-being and because of non-being comes the One. Cf. Alan K.L. Chan, "A Tale of Two Commentaries: Ho-shang-kung and Wang Pi on the Lao-tzu," in *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching*, ed. Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue (New York: State University of New York

ch'i and *te*, balances a relation between *Tao* in utter silence and emptiness, and *Tao* as the life source of all in terms of the all-pervading movement of *ch'i*.

In the tradition of Neo-Confucianism, Chang Tsai (Chang Heng-chu, 1020–77), stressed particularly the underlying unity of *ch'i*. Inspired by his study of the *Book of Changes*,²⁵ Chang said that the Great Harmony (or the Supreme Ultimate) known as the *Tao* is a name for the *ch'i*, or “wandering air” in its entirety of the dynamic movement of the *yin* and the *yang*. The universe originates in *ch'i*, which is both the source of the universe and the driving force of endless changes.

In the beginning, there existed *ch'i* without form, and it was called the Great Void. Because of the void of *ch'i*, there is neither non-existence nor emptiness in the Buddhist sense. All things in the universe are based and formed on one and the same *ch'i* which is no less than the *Tao*. This *ch'i* then begins to contract and consolidate, because of the interaction between *yin* and *yang*, that from which heaven and earth emerged.

All creatures are constituted by consolidated *ch'i*, which has various shapes, and all creatures return to unconsolidated, or dissolved *ch'i*, which has no shape. The great ultimate produced the two forms (*yin* and *yang*) in the Great Void which is none other than *ch'i* or the material forces. Since *ch'i* is everywhere, its constituents, *yin* and *yang*, are also active everywhere. Thus the eternal process of change and transformation takes place in the universe.

In Jewish tradition, especially Hasidic sources, *Shekhinah*, regarded as the tenth *sefirot*, is God who is fully immanent within the natural and physical world. The whole earth is filled with God's glory. In kabbalistic teaching, *Shekhinah* is *malkut*, the kingdom in which perfect harmony and fulfillment are found. The image of *Shekhinah* is portrayed in feminine terms or in aspects of natural elements linked to femininity. This *yin* of God is the symbolism which balances her relationship with other masculine *sefirot* in the divine sphere. *Shekhinah* is the flow of creative energies throughout the universe. Energy runs forward through the *sefirotic* channels and into *Shekhinah*, back from the outer world, into *Shekhinah* and up through the *sefirot*, reaching back toward *keter*.

In the *Zohar*, *Shekhinah* is likened to the holy Sabbath, the day that is the source of blessing for all the others. All the upper *sefirot* are to be

Press, 1998) 105.

²⁵ In Appendix III of the *Book of Changes* it is stated: “In the *Yi* there is the Supreme Ultimate which produces the Two Forms [i.e. the *Yin* and *Yang*].” Quoted from Yu-Lan, *Short History*, 279.

found with *Shekhinah*, which represents the final letter of God's name. Human access to the Divine always begins through *Shekhinah*. From this standpoint, the transcendence of God is affirmed as immanent in the universe without taking away human freedom and responsibility regarding the reality of evil. Already in the rabbinic period, the doctrine of the *Shekhinah* was formulated to denote the indwelling divine presence within the universe.

In the Talmud (*Meg.* 29a), we read:

Come and see how beloved Israel is before God, for wherever they went into exile the *Shekhinah* went with them; in Babylon, the *Shekhinah* was with them and in the future, when Israel will be redeemed, the *Shekhinah* will be with them.²⁶

From the biblical perspective, God's Spirit (*ruach*) is the breath of God's life. In the Genesis account of creation, the Spirit is present, hovering above chaos with its vibrating field of energy before the foundation of the world (Gen. 1:2). As the *ruach* is the breath of the eternal God and vitality of created beings, so *ch'i* is an emanating spirit of *Tao*, a principle that gives life to all that exists. The Spirit in the Bible is not only active in human redemption, but also as the Creator of all life in a proleptically new creation and consummation. The work of the Spirit in creation and the Spirit's presence in the life of the church and believers are interconnected with the phenomenon of life in all its breadth. All living things are created, preserved, and renewed in the continual flow of *ruach* and its presence within them.

Ruach is the cosmic Spirit. If God hides God's face, every living thing is dismayed. When God takes away the breath of divine life, they die and return to dust. When God sends forth God's breath, God renews the face of the earth and every living thing that is created (Ps 104:29ff; Job 34:14). The breath of God's life fills the world and holds together all things (Isa 34:16).

Therefore, the Psalmist asks: "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there: If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there" (Ps 139:7–8). The spirit of life constitutes the connection and cohesion of all living creatures. All living things are mutually dependent in symbiosis within each other. In Isaiah 32:15f, we read the "ecology of God's Spirit."²⁷ God's Spirit fills

²⁶ Cf. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism: History, Belief and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 350.

²⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, trans.

the earth, which in turn, as our mother, brings forth plants, trees and animals, and a human life within its atmosphere and biosphere.

Today's environmental problems are the result of nature being more and more subject to domination and exploitation by human civilization and technology. Creation in bondage (Rom 8: 22) is captive to "the companion of death" (ch. 76). In the groaning of creation, the Spirit intercedes with sighs or groans. The Spirit is the Mother who gives life, the companion of life, and she is present in the life process of all living creatures. The presence of God is immanent in the world and present in all things. God's Spirit is present everywhere, sustaining, nourishing, and quickening all things in heaven and on earth. The earth is the place of God's indwelling of all. All living creatures are invited, through the power of God's *ch'i*, to become God's house. In using Luther's metaphor, creatures are *larva Dei*, and mummery of God.²⁸

In a scientific discussion of energy, we see that the function and role of the Spirit is related to the external, invisible, and incomprehensible field of force. In understanding the Spirit as the Creator Spirit, the life-giver, Christian theology perceives the presence of the Spirit at work in natural processes and in a spiritual and unifying force. The Spirit, as the third Person of the Trinity, participates in the original creation of the past, in the on-going creation of the present, and in the final consummation of the future.

When we meet the Taoist metaphor of life-giving water, we find a striking parallel in the Bible to the Spirit of life. The power of the life-giving water characterizes the direction of Christian discipleship in terms of non-violence and spontaneity. In the context of Ezekiel (31:4), the water with its rivers continually extends all around its planting place. Furthermore, the creative and providential work of God is portrayed in terms of wisdom which is seen as a personified agent of God (Prov 3:19; Jer 10:12; Matt 11:19). The concept of wisdom (Sophia) plays a double role in terms of the Logos as well as the Spirit.²⁹ Both are universal in scope in the embodiment of divine action.

When Asian contextual theology encounters the *ch'i* of Taoism and its spirituality, it expands the dimension of the Spirit toward the cosmic-natural process of living organisms for the multi-religious mystical experi-

Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 25.

²⁸ *WA*, 17 II, 192, 28–31. Cf. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 213.

²⁹ C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 20.

ence of human life. Although the Spirit in Christianity is not equated with an immanent and impersonal force, Jesus does say, “the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going” (John 3:8).

Christian theology has lost, by and large, the universal function of the Spirit in respect to the cosmic process in natural life due to its over-emphasis on the sacraments of the church and on the subjectivistic-mystical experience. The Spirit needs to be reinterpreted within the wider and broader horizon of all sentient creatures.

After his work of systematic theology, Tillich expressed his perspectives on this topic in close affinity to *The Phenomenon of Man* by Teilhard de Chardin. In emphasizing the tendency toward self-transcendence in life, both of them share the same basic idea.³⁰ However, Teilhard does not discern a relationship between the divine Spirit and spirit as a dimension of life in the way that Tillich does.

According to the former, there is only one spirit which permeates and activates all the material processes. It urges them beyond themselves toward progressive spiritualization and converges in unification toward a center of perfect unity. This center marks the end of the evolutionary process and turns out to be its true dynamic origin. In so doing, the created spirit can participate in the dynamics of the spirit which is the animating power of the entire process of evolution.

At this juncture, Teilhard spoke of a spiritual inside of every material phenomenon. All energy is spiritual in character. In the manifestation of the energy, a distinction is made between a tangible energy or force and a radical energy. However, Pannenberg takes issue with how the idea of an energetic field is ignored in Teilhard's thought. An autonomous idea of energy can be conceived of as a field. In utilizing Einstein's theory of relativity in which matter is understood as a function of space, Pannenberg takes energy as the primary reality for transcending the body. Energy, as the animating subject, manifests itself through the body.

However, for Teilhard, energy is not conceived of in terms of a field, but in terms of the inside reality of bodies. At this juncture, Pannenberg perceives that confusion would occur as to which idea dominates the entire process of evolution, referring to Teilhard's idea of Omega point or the evolving entities. In revising Teilhard's idea of radical energy with a field of energy, Pannenberg maintains that field energy manifests itself in the

³⁰ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 5.

self-transcendence of the living organism and thereby shapes the process of evolution.

Therefore, the term “spirit” is applied to interpret, in a border context, the self-transcending activity of organic life in the process of evolution, and also to include the results of its self-creative and self-integrative activity, which anticipates the final goal of the evolutionary process.³¹ Insofar as God is understood as the all-determining reality, the divine spirit is also the unifying ground of the whole universe active in the natural world. In utilizing the notion of a dynamic field to describe the working of the Spirit, spirit would be equated with a force field.

However, the Taoist idea of *ch'i* is not merely a source of self-transcendence in terms of field energy. But it also allows for a principle of complementarity in unifying and sustaining harmony at the subatomic level. If the Christian idea of creation through the Word and mediation through the Spirit can be understood in terms of the principle of complementarity in quantum physics,³² then the Taoist idea of *ch'i* can be understood as the underlining principle of mediating and unifying a wavelike dimension to a particlelike one in a complementary way. Without the vital power of *ch'i*, the harmonious and complementary balance between *yin* and *yang* would collapse into a pure *yang* or pure *yin* dichotomy.

The Taoist triadic idea of *Tao*, *te* and *ch'i* attests that God's *ruach* in the Genesis account is present, hovering above chaos with its vibrating field of energy. *Tao* is both eternal and temporal in terms of *te* and *ch'i*. *Creatio ex nihilo* is also seen as an evolution *ex the Way* of *Tao* in naturalistic-spontaneous fashion in which *ch'i* as the spirit of life penetrates and pervades all living sentient creatures. The action of *Tao* happens in natural spontaneity. It reigns, but does not rule. A relationality between the Great Void of *ch'i* and its manifestation in *te* put into balance the transcendental side and the immanent side of *Tao* in utter silence, yet ready to change.

From this perspective, the concept of divine interaction with the cosmic process can be consonant with the activity of *ch'i* inside all. We find God in the process of on-going creation, not in any gaps. In the Taoist framework, there is no need to distinguish God revealed in Jesus Christ

³¹ Wohlfart Pannenberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith*, ed. Ted Peters (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 132–37.

³² Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, 192. For the relation between Taoist thought and modern physics, Kapra holds the opinion that the subatomic world of modern physics is strikingly in accord with the description of Eastern thought. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Berkeley: Shambhala, 1975). For further reading, see Matthieu Ricard and Trinh Xuan Thuan, *The Quantum and the Lotus* (New York: Crown, 2001).

from God manifest in us, which embraces a panentheistic approach of assimilating the divine and the cosmic to one another.

Nevertheless, the otherness of the incomprehensible and ineffable God remains in the realm of mystery rather than the realm of qualified dualism. However, biblically speaking, there is more Spirit than *ch'i*. The work and efficacy of Spirit is hidden and veiled within the flow of the life process, but the personhood of the Trinity is not assimilated into the immanence of nature, nor does it amount to a total identification of God with nature.

Conclusion

Theology is ectypal, assuming the character of a pilgrimage in God's Way. Theology as *theologia viatorum* is always on the way to learning from God's mystery manifested in the wisdom of world religions. There are similarities and differences between Christianity and Taoist wisdom. The Bible and the *Tao-te-ching* have, however, much in common when understood as witnessing to the mystery of God which manifests itself as the life-giver for all that exists.

Like God, *Tao* produces creatures, and nourishes and accompanies them until their return to their origin of eternal life. Unlike Christianity, Taoist philosophy would be hesitant to accept the Christian idea of naming and reducing God in a merely personified sense or in its overemphasis on the grace of God over nature, the locus in which the *ch'i* indwells.

The difference is not a barrier but an opportunity for Christians to reflect and deepen their own tradition in respect to God as the creator of the universe through the Word and through the mediation of the Spirit in encounters with other wisdoms. Wisdom can be conceived of and accepted as a free and extraordinary way of divine communication for Christians.

In crossing over the terrain of other wisdoms and returning to Christianity, the Taoist self-understanding of the way of life in the universe and of the human attitude of non-action and spontaneity is not an enemy but a friend in helping Christians actualize and renew another side of God, for enriching the good news of God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit for all. Therefore, we believe in "one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:6).