

## CHAPTER 9

### DYNAMIC PASSIVITY AND THEOLOGY

#### Theism and Panentheism: Aristotle and Plato

Reliance on God, of course, does not mean passivity.  
On the contrary, it liberates man for a clearly defined  
activity, 'the will of God'

**Thomas Merton**

The Supreme Identity has been expressed in many different ways. In subjective mode I have referred to union with this Identity as an experience of 'dynamic passivity'. One also thinks of such striking expressions as St Paul's 'Not I, but Christ in me'. On the other hand, a remarkable early conception of the Supreme Identity in objective mode is Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, or 'actionless action', which he equated with God.

Like Plato, Aristotle also directed his attention to the question of Being and Becoming. He considered the World of Becoming imperfect because all processes point to the ideal of a perfectly and harmoniously self-sustaining activity that transcends time and which he designated 'activity without change' (*energeia akinesias*). The ideal of Rest to him was equally illusory, on the grounds that anything that really ceases to be active also ceases to be. In the perfect Being, according to Aristotle, there can only be perfect activity without change. The paradox here, of course, is the notion of an activity, life and consciousness devoid of change, because we are accustomed to considering a changeless activity as rest, or death. But he maintained that activity without change does in fact carry the notion of activity *per se* to its logical conclusion: to the point where it becomes perfectly regular and frictionless, and thus in a state of perfect equilibrium.

A useful analogy can be taken from biology's concept of adaptation. If we were to pose a hypothetical case of perfect adaptation, for instance, the relationship of the organism to its environment would be unchangingly the same – an unremitting equilibrium owing to the perfect balance maintained between its natural tendency to degeneration on the one hand and regeneration on the other. Likewise, to gain an idea of the perfect Being we can extrapolate this analogy into the sphere of consciousness.

Such a consciousness would exist permanently unimpeded, having

reached this state by gradual development of the power of attention and the suppression of unwanted interruption and mental friction. Such a consciousness would be wholly satisfying, for in Aristotle's terms it would have achieved the Best, totally unrestrained contemplation that delights the soul. Additionally, consciousness conceived in this way would exist in eternity, for, as Aristotle reasoned, in finite time activity is only real in so far as it can be measured. It follows that change must arise out of the imperfection of activity or motion, and that the perfecting of activity will of necessity mean the disappearance of both finite time and activity itself. In *Activity and Substance*, F.C.S. Schiller puts this rather abstruse notion very succinctly: 'Time is the measure of the impermanence of the imperfect, and the perfecting of time – consciousness would carry us out of Time into Eternity'.<sup>1</sup> From such a motionless functioning, finally, there would arise the supreme bliss of the Beatific Vision.

A Being that is pure activity without change, thus devoid of potentiality, belongs for most of us in the realm of the imagination as Schiller points out:

At present our existence seems immersed in a sea of possibilities which are the objects of our unceasing hopes and fears: nothing is quite all that it is capable of being; nothing can ever wholly realize itself in any single moment. . . . If, however, we imagined any being overcoming this defect and attaining to a complete and harmonious self-expression in its activities, how could it any longer even suggest a shadowy region of possibilities . . . which is the substance both of the actual and the potential? . . . for the 'appearance' would have become the 'reality' and the real would have fully appeared. . . . Such is the ideal of 'Being' Aristotle has attributed to the divine perfection, such the full import of his 'activity without change'.<sup>2</sup>

As human beings, we are hampered by our material nature and cannot be continuously active, unlike God, who is unconstrained by matter, and always all that he actually can be, with no potentiality. Such an actuality is above and beyond activity in space and time – hence the formulation, 'activity without change', which generates in the divine Being the ultimate pleasure of self-contemplation.

The problem here is that although Aristotle's conception of the Deity is extremely elegant and has its own austere beauty, it is utterly remote from the concerns of humankind.

For practical purposes the Unmoved Mover remains aloof from the world, though it retains its intellectual attraction. Schiller remarks:

For the proximate purposes of ordinary life, there is perhaps some practical value in the contemplation of a metaphysical ideal which can stimulate us to be active, and to develop all our powers to the utmost, while at the same time warning us that such self-realization

must assume the form, not of a hideous, barbarous, and neurotic restlessness, nor of an infinite (and therefore futile) struggle, but of an activity which, transcending change and time, preserves itself in an harmonious equipoise.<sup>3</sup>

From this, Aristotle's God offers us no comfort in our search for spiritual peace and fulfilment. What is required, and is utterly absent, is any idea of 'approach'. Aristotle's conception of contemplation exclusively in the heights of the soul is a form of Quietism; in his view we attain our apotheosis as human beings only when we participate in the divine self-sufficiency of the contemplative life. There is no mention of compassion for those who fall by the wayside. Rather, we have an anticipation of the absolute God of Classical Theism, who stands aloof, above and beyond the world as we know it.

In mysticism, the idea of 'approach' is what gives it its distinctive claim on our allegiance. The philosopher, says Evelyn Underhill, gives us a 'diagram of the heavens'; the mystic gives us 'a ladder to the stars'.<sup>4</sup> 'It is', she says, 'the great contribution of the mystics that they find in the Absolute, in defiance of the metaphysicians, a personal object of love'.<sup>5</sup> 'Though philosophy has striven since thought began – and striven in vain', she says elsewhere, '– to resolve the paradox of Being and Becoming, of Eternity and Time, she has failed strangely enough to perceive that a certain type of personality has substituted experience for her guesses at truth; and achieved its solution, not by the dubious processes of thought, but by direct perception. To the great mystic the 'problem of the Absolute' presents itself in terms of life, not in terms of dialectic'.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to Aristotle's transcendent and absolutist God residing above and beyond the world, Plato is generally regarded as the first philosopher in the West to address the problem of absoluteness *and* relativity in relation to the Deity to arrive at a position known as 'panentheism'. Like Aristotle, Plato also distinguished between Being, or essence, and Becoming, or existence: 'We must make a distinction of the two great forms of being, and ask, 'What is that which Is and has no Becoming, and that which is always becoming and never Is'. He posited a conception of a Deity that united both Being and Becoming, absoluteness and relativity, permanence and change, and passivity and activity, in a single context.

However, Plato located the categories of absoluteness, permanence and transcendence in one Deity (the Forms), while he situated those of change and relativity in another (the soul). Later, however, in the tenth book of his *Laws*, he seems to have changed his mind and combined the two categories of absoluteness and relativity, permanence and change, in the one Deity by suggesting the image of circular motion, which combines change or activity with the permanence of a fixed centre – a perfect analogy of dynamic passivity.

At the root of Plato's philosophical vision lay the conviction that,

corresponding to the world of multiplicity, there exists an ideal Form, the reality of which the manifest world is a derivative and weakened image. Plato describes these Forms collectively as 'Being', which is visible only to 'the eye of the understanding'. Additionally, Being is equated by Plato with unchangeable eternity. On the other hand he explains the world as we see it through the sense organs as the realm of 'Becoming'. This world is unstable and subject to change.

Nevertheless, the two worlds of Being and Becoming interact, for the visible cosmos shares in the reality of the Forms, and the agent of this mediation is 'the soul'. Moreover, this soul has an inherent affinity with the realm of Being, for it can intuit Form. Plato's philosophy of Forms pivots on 'the ascent of the soul to the intelligible realm', so that souls are 'driven to busy themselves above', in the quest for the Form of the Good. Plato therefore advises us to undergo a period of purification (*katharsis*) and practise contemplation (*theoria*), which will take us beyond the world of the senses to the heart of reality. In this sense there is a transcendental mystical drive in Plato's world view that was enthusiastically espoused by later mystics, including Molinos. As Rudolph Eucken puts it, humankind might be described as 'the meeting point of various stages of Reality'.

Pantheistic and theistic interpretations of reality share the same shortcomings in their uncompromising assertion of absoluteness. Pantheism is perhaps more reasonable in that it does not deny the claims of the will, individual freedom and creativity, as theism and pantheism tend to do. At a basic level, pantheism may be thought of as 'God *is* everything', while panentheism may be considered as 'God is *in* everything'. Like many aspects of existentialism, panentheism supports the ideal of human freedom, while removing some of the paradoxes to which deterministic views give rise.

In modern times, panentheism has been restated by the process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). In his scheme God is eminently both active and passive; God affects, and is affected by, all events. God is therefore totally passible, as well as utterly transcendent and impassible. Unlike Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, God does not exist in a state of primordial peace and bliss whatever may happen in his cosmos, but rather shares intimately in all the joys and suffering of his creation. God is, says Whitehead, 'the fellow sufferer who understands'.

Whitehead calls for a return to a view of a God who 'dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love'. 'God's role is not', he says, 'the combat of productive force with productive force. . . . He does not create the world, he saves it: or more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness'.<sup>7</sup> God is the Reality who does not coerce but who through his grace encourages, attracts and persuades, until we are drawn to willing conformity with him by acknowledging the supreme

value of that which he requires of us. Such a scheme has much in common with that of the mystics who, as Underhill puts it, ‘conceive that Absolute Being who is the goal of their quest as manifesting Himself in a World of Becoming: working in it, at one with it, yet though *semper agens*, also *semper quietus*’.<sup>8</sup>

In Christian theology, the Deity is held to be normatively revealed in the person of Jesus. W. H Vanstone puts it: ‘in reflecting on the disclosure of God which appears in Jesus, we discerned the paradoxical possibility that he who is *non passibilis* is *passus*: that the activity of God culminates in that form of activity which creates its own passion, that form of working that which destines itself to waiting. . . . So He who made, and everlastingly makes, the world also of His own freedom, waits upon the world, exposed to and receptive of its power of meaning. In all the history of the world *Deus, qui non passibilis, passus est*’.<sup>9</sup>

These sentiments are echoed by Keith Ward in his *Concept of God*:

The Christian God is not either the passionless unmoved mover or the Lord of Hosts, expressing his judgement and grace in the events of history; he is the co-sufferer, redeeming and reconciling the dark possibilities of the world to himself. This God does not rest complete in his own beatitude, drawing all things to himself by desire; nor does he interfere cataclysmically in history, using men for his own purposes, destroying and blessing whom he will; this God expresses his being in weakness, but gives his strength as an inner transformation, renewing the world by patient reconciliation.<sup>10</sup>

The true glory of God is to be discerned in Jesus, the embodiment of dynamic passivity. In him we see clearly the willed transition from mighty activity and achievement to humbling passivity and exposure:

The glory of God appears in Jesus not simply in the fact that He is the initiating subject of activity, working in unfettered freedom, nor yet in the fact that He is the passive and receptive object of that which is done to Him, but in the fact that, *of His own will and purpose*, he passes from the former condition to the latter. . . . The glory of God is disclosed at its primary level in the work and activity of God; but that glory appears at its deepest level when the activity of God achieves the exposure of God, when by His working God destines Himself to the necessity of waiting. One might say that the ultimate glory of God’s creativity is the creation of His own exposure to that which he has created . . . of such a nature is that ultimate dimension of divine glory which is disclosed in the handing over of Jesus (my emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

It is Christian apologetics of this order that are the clearest possible indication of the anti-quietist thrust of this great religion, and explain why quietistic modes of thinking have been a source of abhorrence and anathema to Christians down the ages.



## The Theology of Jan van Ruysbroeck

And from out of the Divine Unity, there shines into him a simple light; and this light shows him darkness and nakedness and nothingness.

### Ruysbroeck

Mystics such as Molinos, Eckhart and Ruysbroeck derive their teaching from Dionysius the Areopagite, who in turn was indebted to the ideas of the Neoplatonists, especially the emanationism of Plotinus (AD. 205-270). Plotinus taught that the ultimate divine reality, which he called the One, overflows into the surrounding Void. In the first place there emanates Mind (nous), which corresponds to Plato's realm of ideas, or Forms. A further weakened emanation produces Soul, knowledge of which can be gained only discursively. It is Soul that corresponds to the world as we normally perceive it, and which maintains it in being. These emanations can be arrested, however, by returning to the unity of the One in contemplation. Thus to ascend from Soul through Mind to return to the One in contemplation is to gain enlightenment:

In this way, we and all that is ours are carried back into real Being. We rise to it, as that form from which we originally sprang. We think intelligible objects and not merely their images or impressions, and in thinking them we are identified with them. And the same is the case with the other souls as with our own. Hence, if we are in unity with the Spirit, we are in unity with each other, and so we are all one.<sup>12</sup>

Plotinus' theory of emanation, in which the power of the One enters the world, is a significant attempt to combine the notions of absoluteness and relativity in one whole to provide later mystics with a panentheistic framework within which to describe their own experiences. This can readily be seen from the following description by Rudolf Otto of Eckhart's conception of the Deity:

God is, in Himself, tremendous life movement. Out of undifferentiated life movement He enters into the multiplicity of personal life and persons, in whom the world and therewith the multiplicity of the world is contained. Out of this He returns, back into the original unity . . . but it is not an error to be corrected in Him, that he is eternally going out from and entering 'into' Himself; it is a fact that has meaning and value – as the expression of life manifesting its potentiality and fullness. The issuing forth becomes the goal again of that process *enriched by the course of its circuit* (my emphasis).<sup>13</sup>

The whole of the created universe, including ourselves within it, has meaning and value for God and in God, albeit not as it appears to our normal consciousness limited as it is in time and space, but to the mystical consciousness that is united coeternally with the Supreme Identity. Thus we, and the whole of creation, partake of this dual movement of going out from the Void and returning to it: the very moment of going out being also the moment of return, although eternally rather than in the temporal sense. Each pole of this movement – the active and the passive – is therefore part of this one reality, a reality that may be expressed symbolically, as in the following lines by the writer Ouspensky:

I asked myself: 'What is the world?' . . . Immediately I saw the semblance of some big flower, like a rose or a lotus, the petals of which were continually unfolding from the middle, growing, increasing in size, reaching the outside of the flower and then in some way again returning to the middle and starting again at the beginning. . . . In this flower there was an incredible quantity of light, movement, colour, music, emotion, agitation, knowledge, intelligence, mathematics, and continuous unceasing growth.<sup>14</sup>

In the following beautiful lines Ruysbroeck gives a moral dimension and a sense of our personal involvement in this irradiation process:

At each irradiation of God, the spirit turns inward, in action and fruition; and thus it is renewed in every virtue, and is more deeply immersed in fruitive rest. . . . Thus the man is just; and he goes towards God with fervent love in eternal activity; and he goes in God with fruitive inclination in eternal rest. And he dwells in God, and yet goes forth towards all creatures in universal love, in virtue, and in justice. And this is the supreme summit of the inward life. All those men who do not possess both rest and work in one and the same exercise, have not yet attained this justice.<sup>15</sup>

The mystic who participates in the Godhead experiences both these worlds at one and the same time, the active world of Becoming and the passive world of Being, or as Ruysbroeck describes his experience of transcendence: 'Tranquillity according to His essence, activity according to His nature: perfect stillness, perfect fecundity'.

It is important that Ruysbroeck is not describing union here according to ordinary consciousness, but union according to the mystical consciousness, which operates beyond time and space as we normally perceive these dimensions: in the eternal moment, a coalescence of Being and Becoming, rest and motion: 'The spirit of God Himself breathes us out from Himself that we may love, and may do good works; and again He draws us into Himself, that we may rest in fruition. And this is Eternal Life; even as our mortal life subsists in the indrawing and outgiving of our breath'.<sup>16</sup>

In this panentheistic scheme, God is absolute in the sense that he is creator, cause, activity and eternal, but relative in the sense that he is temporal, effect and passive, that is, having receptivity in his nature. Thus both absoluteness and relativity, transcendence and immanence, passivity and activity, apply in equal measure to God, who is thus dipolar. We all have the freedom and opportunity to participate as a co-creator with God in building the earth. Thus it is the mission of mysticism to unite us in God according to both aspects of his nature, for the Deity in whose image we are made operates under two modes. In fact, the same dichotomy existed for the Greeks, who split the divine nature into the passive unchanging God and the demi-urge, the latter to exercise the creative activity. In the divine union these modes – called by Meister Eckhart God (active) and Godhead (passive) – coalesce in the eternal repose of the Godhead, only to flow out into the temporal world of multiplicity as activity and passivity in separation, to be drawn back once more into unity and eternity.

At this point it is most important to make clear the distinction Eckhart and Ruysbroeck make between God and Godhead as Molinos based his own theology on something very much like it. That he was aware of Ruysbroeck's theology, is clear from reference made in his *Defence of Contemplation*. To restate: the Godhead is eternal potentiality, containing within itself both modalities, active and passive, as yet undifferentiated. The Godhead, perceived as the darkness of the Void, is where enlightenment takes place.

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### **The Theology of Meister Eckhart**

Everything in the Godhead is one, and of that there is nothing more to be said. God works, the Godhead does no work, there is nothing to do.

#### **Meister Eckhart**

According to Eckhart, enlightenment has a number of stages encompassing a process of detachment, a stripping away of all worldly attachments, which may lead initially to the transient rapture he calls *gezucket*, a state of contemplative quiet. However, Eckhart aims for the more permanent state he designates 'the birth of God in the soul', which is when the light glowing within becomes a constant feature of the spiritual life. The process that leads up to the birth of God in the soul is thus a gradual process of self-naughting in which one's natural preoccupation with things of the world diminishes to be replaced by the nothingness of the Void: 'The soul should give Birth to nothing inside herself, if she wishes to be the child of God in whom God's Son shall be born'.<sup>17</sup> The birth of God in the soul likened to a pregnant woman giving birth in the Void, an image that is this apotheosis of dynamic passivity: 'He became pregnant with Nothing like a woman with child, and in that Nothing God was born, He was the fruit of Nothing. God was born in the Nothing'.<sup>18</sup>

As both Eckhart and Ruysbroeck insist, the union of God with humanity is an ever present and inalienable reality, if only we can become aware of it, and does not somehow have to be achieved. Rather, as Ruysbroeck puts it, union is a natural, dynamic process:

This essential union of our spirit with God does not exist in itself, but it dwells in God and it flows forth from God and it depends upon God and it returns to God as to its Eternal Origin. And in this wise, it has never been, or ever shall be, separated from God; for this union is within us by our naked nature, and, were this nature to be separated from God, it would fall into pure nothingness. And this union is above time and space and is always and incessantly active according to the way of God.<sup>19</sup>

Eckhart emphasises that most of us need to make some kind of ascetic effort to release ourselves from the obfuscating concerns of everyday life. For this reason he insists on the need for detachment and of the establishment of 'nothing' inside. When this nothing becomes a permanent feature of the interior life then at this point we have the birth of God in the soul. Eckhart compares the detached soul that characterises the birth to a wax tablet upon which God is free to write as he wishes:

When the detached heart has the highest aim, it must be towards the Nothing, because in this there is the greatest receptivity. Take a parable from nature: if I want to write on a wax tablet, then no matter how noble the thing is that is written on the tablet, I am none the less vexed because I cannot write on it. If I really want to write I must delete everything that is written on the tablet, and the tablet is never so suitable for writing as when absolutely nothing is written on it.<sup>20</sup>

Eckhart's main emphasis is on empty awareness as characteristic of the birth when 'the doors of perception are cleansed', to use Blake's phrase. The true pinnacle of the spiritual life, however, is when this elemental awareness is translated into action, which means that the inner silence and solitude must be brought into active life – the reverse of Quietism – as he explains: 'Not that one should escape from the inward man, or flee from him or deny him, but in him and with him and through him, one should learn to act in such a way that one breaks up the inwardness (*innicheit*) into reality and leads reality into inwardness, and that one should thus become accustomed to work without compulsion'.<sup>21</sup>

In *Meister Eckhart: Mystic as Theologian*, Robert Forman uses the phrase 'dynamizing the silence' to describe this 'working without compulsion':

What does 'breaks up (*breche*) the inwardness (*innicheit*) into reality (*wirklichkeit*)' mean? 'Inwardness' or the 'inward man' is what is discovered in that moment when one is 'without any activity, internal or external'. Eckhart instructs his listener to drag the inwardness

outwards, as it were, bringing it into activity. One is to learn to act in such a way that reality (*wirklichkeit*) – activity, thought, perception, etc., – is perceived and undergone while not losing the interior silence encountered in contemplation. Simultaneously one is to lead ‘reality into inwardness’, i.e. make the silent inwardness, if you will, dynamic. In other words, the advanced adept is to learn to think, speak, walk, and work without losing the profoundest quietness inside. However active, the interior silence is not lost. The silence becomes, to coin a term, ‘dynamized’.<sup>22</sup>

As far as Eckhart is concerned, the main focus and aim in the spiritual life is after all simply a reflection of the motto of the Dominican Order to which he belonged: *contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere*: ‘to contemplate and to give others the fruits of contemplation’. The culmination of the spiritual life is the state he calls ‘breakthrough’, where the soul cannot rest content with contemplation exclusively in the heights of the soul – it needs to attain the stillness of a Void that functions dynamically, as ‘the immovable source of all moving things’. Thus although this source ‘is an impartible stillness, motionless in itself’, nevertheless says Eckhart, ‘by this immobility all things are moved’.

‘Breakthrough’ represents the crowning and perfecting of the birth of God in the soul and is intensely dynamic:

In the breaking through [i.e. to the Void of the Godhead], I am more than all creatures, I am neither God nor creature; I am that which I was and shall remain for evermore. There I receive a thrust which carries me above all angels. By this sudden touch I am become so rich that God [i.e. God as opposed to Godhead] is not sufficient for me, so far as he is only God and in all his divine works. For in this breaking through I perceive what God [the Godhead] and I are in common. There I am what I was. There I neither increase nor decrease. For there I am the immovable which moves all things. [i.e. I participate in the dynamic passivity of the Godhead, or Void] Here man has won again what he is eternally and ever shall be. Here God [i.e. the Godhead] is received into the soul.<sup>23</sup>

Eckhart’s new life of ‘breakthrough’ is captured by him in the following perfect image of dynamic passivity:

And however much our Lady lamented and whatever other things she said, she was always in her inmost heart in immovable detachment. Let us take an analogy of this. A door opens and shuts on a hinge. Now if I compare the outer boards of the door with the outward man, I can compare the hinge with the inward man. When the door opens or closes the outer boards move to and fro, but the hinge remains immovable in one place and it is not changed at all as a result. So it is also here.<sup>24</sup>

It is also from the Void, says Eckhart, that the Holy Trinity flows. Although Christ the Eternal Word made flesh came into being at a particular time and a particular place two thousand years ago in Bethlehem, according to Eckhart's theology he is also the Word forever being born in the human soul, and hence represents the continuous possibility and potentiality of our enlightenment as individuals, in whom the totality of the universe may become conscious:

The Father begets his Son unceasingly, and furthermore, I say, He begets me as His Son and the same Son. I say even more: not only does He beget me as His Son, but He begets me as Himself and Himself as me, and me as His being and His nature. In the inmost spring, I well up in the Holy Ghost, where there is one life, one being and one work. All that God works is one: therefore He begets me as His Son without any difference.<sup>25</sup>

And the effect of this union is joy:

The child is fully born when a man's heart grieves for nothing: *then* a man has the essence and the nature and the substance and the wisdom and the joy and all that God has. *Then* the very being of the Son of God is ours and in us and we attain to the very essence of God. . . . If this child is born in you, then you have such great joy in every good deed that is done in the world that this joy becomes permanent and never changes.<sup>26</sup>

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### **The Theology of Fray Luis de León**

As Christ is a source or rather is an ocean which holds in itself all that is sweet and meaningful that belongs to man, in the same way the study of his person, the revelation of the treasure, is the most meaningful and dearest of all knowledge.

#### **Luis de León**

Heir to the Western mystical tradition established in large measure by the Rhineland mystics, was the sixteenth-century Spanish humanist and mystic, Fray Luis de León. In his theological masterpiece *The Names of Christ* he too speaks of the birth of Christ in the soul, and he also equates it with joy and peace: 'The birth of Christ in us is not only that the gift of grace comes to the soul, but that Christ's very spirit comes and is united with it – nay, is infused throughout its being, as though He were soul of its soul indeed. And thus, infused and absorbed by the soul, this Spirit takes possession of its faculties and powers, not fleetingly nor in haste . . . but abidingly, and with a settled peace, in like manner as the soul reposes in the body'.

Characteristic of Fray Luis' mysticism is its fusion of nature mysticism and Christ mysticism, both of which are an integral part of his mystical

consciousness, and grounded in his notion of peace. Generally Fray Luis uses nature as the image of the peace and harmony he so ardently desires:

Christ . . . is rightly called the Shepherd. He lives in the country, enjoys the sight of the heavens, loves solitude and peace, and finds his pleasure in silence from all disturbance. For as the country contains the purest of visible things and is simple, and, as it were, the origin of all that is derived from it, so that region of life in which this glorious God of ours resides is the pure truth, the simplicity of the life of God, the original manifestation of all that exists. . . . To compare this region with our miserable exile is to liken trouble to peace, and the disturbance, uproar, and discomfort of the most restless city to purity, calm, and sweetness itself. For here we toil and there we rest: here we imagine, there we see: here shadows bring gloom and terror, there truth soothes and delights. Here are darkness, discord, and tumult: there the purest light in eternal peace.<sup>27</sup>

He defines the dynamic nature of the peace as 'tranquil ordering', synonymous with 'dynamic passivity'. In *Prince of Peace*, the image of peace he uses is the 'tranquil order' of the night stars: 'What else is it but peace, or a perfect image of peace, that we gaze on and so delights our eye? If peace . . . is tranquil order and a maintaining in calm and stability that which good order requires, that is exactly what this image now shows forth to us. For here the hosts of the stars, as it were drawn up in order and in rank and file, shine resplendently, each keeping its place inviolably; no one usurps its neighbour's standpoint, neither obstructs its work nor is careless of its own, and never breaks the eternal, holy law given it by providence.'

The peace and dynamic passivity of which Fray Luis speaks would be acquired by a sort of contemplative gazing at the night stars: 'If we are attentive to the secret of our inner life, we shall see that this harmony and order of the stars brings peace to our souls as we gaze on it, and that if only we fix our eyes on them attentively, without knowing how, our desires and troubled longings, which clamour confusedly in our breasts by day, little by little will be lulled, and rest as though asleep, each taking its own course and being reduced to its proper place, being brought unconsciously into subjection and harmony'.

Despite his plain emphasis on the pursuit of peace, like Molinos, Fray Luis is an advocate of a practical and creative spirituality in keeping with his own restless personality: 'Thou madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in thee', as Augustine puts it. No doubt Fray Luis' conception of peace arises in part from his reading of the Hebrew Old Testament and its treatment of shalom, which has two main meanings. It describes absolute welfare, prosperity, happiness and serenity; and it describes right personal relationships, and it is with this sense that Fray Luis is principally concerned

in his 'Prince of Peace'. The spiritual peace described by Fray Luis gives rise to three supremely important practical effects: 'A man may possess peace in three ways. The first is that he shall be at peace with God; the second, that he shall be at peace with himself; the third, that he shall not dispute nor contend with others'.

First, says Fray Luis, we must have a right relationship with God, and this is guaranteed only through Christ, who perfectly demonstrates the attitude of God to us, so that through him we may have peace in the presence of God. Second, a person must have a right relationship with himself. This was the sense in which the Church Fathers understood the word. Augustine, like Fray Luis, said that peace belongs to those 'who have composed and subjected to reason all the motions of their minds, and who have tamed their carnal desires'. Only then can a person say with Paul, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal.2:20). Finally, there is the right relationship with others, in which, says Fray Luis, we must 'give everyone his due and to receive one's due from others as is just, without going to law or quarrelling'. In this way 'Each sort of peace is of the greatest utility and benefit to man, and the three combined compose and construct all his happiness and well-being'.

Fray Luis envisions the Deity itself as dynamic – in other words, having both an active, ordering component and a passive, tranquil aspect reminiscent of the *wu-wei*, or 'actionless action', of the Taoists. This principle of *wu-wei*, or dynamic passivity, is well illustrated by Fray Luis in the *Arm of the Lord* in which he emphasizes the peaceful and harmonious aspects of the Deity who shows his power, in the manner of the Taoists, by 'working without appearing to do so':

Now let us speak of the character of this Arm and how its strength was shown. God, being infinitely great and powerful, and able to do whatever he wishes simply by willing it, nothing would be considered wonderful that he wrought by his absolute power and supremacy. But that which is great, that strikes us with astonishment and shows us the immensity of his incomprehensible power and wisdom, is his working without appearing to do so and bringing what he wills to pass without breaking any ordinance or using violence or appearing to care or interfere, so that the thing is done by those who wished to stop and strove to impede it. No one knows how or why, but the matter seems to bring itself to pass.

A further striking parallel to the concept of *wu-wei* is to be found in the following lines from the *Name* titled *Lamb* where the divine Christ although 'serene and peaceful' is said in Taoist fashion 'to move all things without moving himself': 'Though we read in the Gospels that Christ chastised St Peter once and the Pharisees often by word and sometimes by stripes, as when he scourged the merchants in the temple, yet he was never fierce nor

looked angry, but serene and peaceful, reproving guilt without losing his courteous, gentle gravity. In his divinity, he moves all things without moving himself and corrects and reprimands unchanged; in peace and at rest, he punishes and overthrows: so in his humanity’.

In the *Name* entitled the *Way*, Fray Luis describes the way of Christ as displaying precisely the quality of effortlessness that is so characteristic of the Tao: ‘For this Way has two qualities: it rises and is free from impediments, for, indeed, all who travel by Christ mount and are unimpeded. . . . He who treads in Christ’s footsteps jostles no one; makes way for all; does not oppose them; bears with their anger, insults, and violence; and if ill-treated and robbed thinks he has been, not wronged, but freed from a burden and lightened on the journey’.

The final name in Luis de León’s *Names of Christ* is *Jesus*, a name that he maintains originally meant ‘health’ – surely as fitting a word as we are likely to find to encompass the notion of spiritual wholeness and integrity implied by ‘dynamic passivity’. And so the Jesus who is health, says Fray Luis, gives us that peace that is constant both in prosperity and misfortune, in life and in death, and is our sole guarantor of what he calls the ‘life that never perishes and eternal glory’:

As without the light of the sun we cannot see, for it is the universal source of light, so without this great Jesus, who is universal health, none can be healthy. He is our Jesus in our soul, our body, eyes speech, all our senses; without this Jesus we can in no way have Jesus – that is, true health. In prosperity we have Jesus in Jesus; in misery and trials we keep Jesus in Jesus, in life and in death we have Jesus in Jesus. . . . When death engulfs us, he does not desert our ashes, but tenderly holds them fast and near to him, and finally is there Jesus, raising them up from death, clothing them with life that never perishes and eternal glory.