The Creation of the Universe from Nothingness by Laozi from the perspective of Nothingness in the Christian Tradition

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On the occasion of the confirmation of a Professorship Honoris Causa from University College of Literature of Dharma Drum Mountain in 2019, Piero Coda gave a lecture on the comparison between the Nothingness of Buddha and Christian tradition. In the description of Christian tradition, he explored two main arguments: the first argument is around the phrase in the Bible: "from nothing he creates"; the second argument is "the nothingness out of love" within the Trinity, among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Based on these two arguments, this article offers a similar comparison about the concept of creation in the book named Dao De Jing *of Laozi.*

Keywords: Creation - Laozi - Chinese philosophy - Nothingness - Trinitarian ontology

Introduction

On the occasion of the confirmation of a Professorship Honoris Causa from University College of Literature of Dharma Drum Mountain (DILA) in 2019, Piero Coda gave a lecture on the comparison between the Nothingness of Buddha and Christian tradition[1]. It was an example of inter-cultural dialogue for reciprocal understanding.

In the description of Christian tradition, Professor Coda explored two main arguments with detailed and erudite analysis in a strict scientific way[2]. Based on these two arguments we would make a similar comparison to the creation concept in *Laozi*[3].

The first argument is around the phrase in the Bible: "from nothing he creates."[4] God establishes an alliance already in creation (a promise as a gift to begin a relationship) and after with the people of Israel and in perspective with all humanity. Before this alliance of creation, nothing else exists beside God Himself in eternity, only God exists.

The second argument is "the nothingness out of love" within the Trinity, among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are in an eternal, dynamic, reciprocal unity with each other in an eternal self-emptying act of love. This truth of faith provides insight about God's act of Creation.

We will now look into some ideas of Laozi, from the perspective of these two arguments above as specific lights to guide our relevant discussion.

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1 - P. Coda, *La rivelazione cristiana e il "segreto" del Nulla*, in *Silenzio e vie dell'ontologia*, a cura di M. Marianelli e S. Meattini, Pièdimosca edizioni, Perugia 2020, pp. 97-120: translation and explanation of the lecture at the University College of Literature of Dharma Drum Mountain (DILA) in 2019.

2 - For a comprehensive understanding please see the original article of Coda (see Note 1).

3 - For the transcription of Chinese words the Hanyu Pinyin phonetic system for Mandarin Chinese character is used in this article. An Explanation to the name Laozi: 'Laozi' refers to the person of Laozi, in the italic letters, '*Laozi*' refers to the book of Laozi; the book is also named as *Dao De Jing*. There are other ways of transliteration: Lao-tzu, *Dao Te Jing* or *Tao Te Jing*. About the beginning and the development of the name of the book *Laozi* and the later title *Dao De Jing* please see Tan Bao-gang (2007a, 2007b) in section of Bibliography of this article.

4 - The Latin version: '*creatio ex nihilo*'. To the development and formation of this phrase, please see Coda (2020) p. 6.

1. The Origin of Word 'Dao'

Since Dao[5] is one of the most central concepts of Laozi, and has to do with our discussion about Nothingness (Non-being), we would like to explain at first the origin and the development of the meaning of word Dao in the beginning of Chinese thought.

Between 2183 B.C. to 1112 B.C. (see diagram in Appendix), almost in a span of 1000 years, the original Chinese religious thinking was expressed in Di 帝 (supreme emperor) and Tian 天 (heaven). These two words could be found in the Oracle bone scripts. The uses of the bones are connected with the moments of important activities. For example, if we need to know a good moment to begin agricultural work, to initiate a war or to thank the heaven for a successful harvest, a victory etc.

Later in the Zhou dynasty (1111 – 249 BC, see diagram) there was a moral "turn" in the meaning of "Heaven" or "Di." They are connected now with right human behavior: heaven likes that a king should care for his people, otherwise, the dynasty would be changed to another one[6]. This moral turn of the primitive religious meaning to a more human sphere is a very important development in Chinese thought which influenced development of all "philosophical" directions in Chinese thinking (including Confucius, Laozi, Mozi etc.). It had begun with Duke of Zhou (周公)[7].

The word Dao appeared already on an excavated bronze vase from the time of West Zhou Dynasty (1046 to 771 B.C.). It is before Laozi (571-471 B.C.) was born. At that time word Dao could mean "way," a personal name, or as a verb to mean "to say"[8]. Only when the powerful and very well organized Zhou Dynasty fell into decay, after 770 B.C., the social political situation became intolerable.

From the famous historical record *shi-ji* 史記 (from historian Si-ma-qian), in the preface of "Records of the Grand Historian" 太史公自序 we know that during the 240 years (from 722 to 481 BC), there were 52 states eliminated, 36 Kings

5 - 'Dao' is the transliteration in alphabet of Chinese word 道, which means, it is the Chinese pronunciation written in Western alphabet. However, the same word is often translated also as 'Way' or 'way', as we will see below. In these cases, it is the meaning of the word translated, not the pronunciation.

6 - Xu fu-guan 徐復觀(2013) p. 7.

7 - This is a general accepted opinion among scholars. Cfr. some of the literatures: Feng You-lan (1983); Yü Ying-shih (2016); Fu Pei-rong 傅佩榮 (2010); Chen Lai 陳來 (2005); Edward L. Shaughnessy (2006). For the detailed references see in the section VI Bibliogrphy.

8 - For a detailed explanation: PANG kun (2018).

were killed by servants, and more than 480 wars[9]. It also happens that sons killed fathers[10].

In this period of disorder, many great thinkers came out with suggestions to help[11]. The most famous ones at that time were Mozi, Confucius and Laozi. They all used the word Dao, which means in general the right way to govern, to comport oneself, in accordance with a higher principal, or the principal of Heaven. But each had his own characteristics in their teachings.

Confucius had induced from the heavenly will the "pervasive unity"[12] between man and heaven ("tian ren he yi" 天人合一)[13], from which the concept of Ren 仁 and the relevant virtues became one of the main cultural traditions in Chinese thought.

In the case of Laozi, he was able to reach a very high level of insight about the creation of the world of Being from the Nothingness and the relationship between Nothingness and Being. It is this part we would like to share in the following discussions.

What we want to emphasize here is the fact that those teachings at that period, even though they had their own characteristics, they had one thing in common: to correct the dis-order and bring good fortune and peace in the society. This characteristic is already understood by The Grande Historian 太史公 (145 B.C. - ?), as he introduced the different schools at that period (Taoism, Confucianism, Moism etc.) he wrote: «The world has hundred considerations, but is united, they return to the same point alone with different ways.» 「天下一致而百慮，同歸而殊涂。」 This opinion is accepted and used by many scholars[14].

Perhaps here we can see a fundamental difference between philosophical tradition (beginning with Plato and Aristotle) and the tradition of Chinese thinking (which began with Confucius and Laozi). While speculative thinking has had a pro-

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9 - Ma chi-ying馬持盈 (2010) *Shi ji jing zhu* 《史記今註》, pp. 3455 ff.

10 - Han feizi, *Wai Chu Shuo*, "You Shang Pian". Paragraph 141. 韓非子,《外儲說》,〈右上篇〉。141段。Cited from: Wang, Shuming 王叔岷 (1992), p. 1.

11 - It reminds us in the recent history of 19/20 Centuries that, after a period of disastrous new development in the ideas comes out. See the Chapter *Kairòs* in Coda 2017. Also in this aspect Laozi is compared to St. Augustine. See Doc. Thesis: Chan (2009). In the Abstract is written: 'Though both [St. Augustine and Laozi] thinkers are often treated in dogmatic or philosophical terms, their primary interest was in practical spirituality, a way of living. Both Laozi and Augustine searched for "the Way" for disciples of their respective traditions to nurture personal life and to maintain hope as a religious community in a turbulent world.'

12 - Fang, Dong-mei, 2003.

13 - Yü, Ying-Shih, 2016.

14 - That Laozi developed his teachings, primary with the scope of re-establish the order and gives a guide for daily life, this view is accepted also by many scholars of Laozi: Chen (2012) pp. 24, 32-33. Xu (1969), pp. 325-328. Wu, Yi (1984).

minent role in the Western tradition, the Chinese tradition began with a practical scope: to help people. In this sense, thinking must serve life, the daily life. It is not said that there were no ontological elements in Chinese thinking, but they were not in the first place.

2. The Creation from 'Non-being' (Nothingness)[15] by Laozi

It has been proven that in the whole *Laozi*, in its 81 chapters, the writing style as well as the content have a high quality of unity and connection[16], since the concept of Dao penetrated the whole work. We will only choose some chapters or some phrases in chapters which could demonstrate directly the idea about Nothingness (Non-being) of Laozi[17].

We can understand very well the difficulties of interpretation (with that also the problem of translation) of a text from more than 2000 years ago. As the renowned Chinese historian Qian-mu 錢穆 said, sometimes we just simply cannot understand the original text. Regarding scripts or books of ancient time, we try to understand the main meaning of the sayings. We cannot do more than that[18]. This could surely be the case of translations of *Laozi*.

For our purpose here, we choose two comprehensive English translations. The one is from Wu-yi (1989), abbreviated as "Wu;" the other one from D.C. Lau (2001), abbreviated as "Lau". (see both in Bibliography)

One thing that could help us to understand *Laozi*: put aside our own already acquired knowledge about "relation", including that from the Bible, and even the meaning of "creation" itself, and try to penetrate, as far as we can, the text of Laozi as it is[19].

We begin with Chapter one of *Laozi*, which contains some of the most important indications for our discussion.

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15 - "Non-being" and "Nothingness" are used in this article equivalently, both as translation of Chinese word "wu" 無, depending on different authors and translators.

16 - Chen, Gu-ying 陳鼓應, 2012, (see section VII Bibliography of this article) p. 23. Chen, however, pointed out that there could very well be some words or phrases added by his disciples or later scholars.

17 - *Ibid.*, pp. 33-38. Chen has done one of the most comprehensive introduction to Laozi/*Laozi*. This Chen's book has considered the last excavation from Guo dian chumu 郭店楚墓of 1993, and contains a list of all the studies about Laozi, and with a section of index in his book.

18 - This is what Qian-mu said about reading of Shang Shu 尚書, saying that we just try to understand the main meaning of the sayings. We cannot do more than that. Qian-mu 錢穆 (2001). P.2.

19 - An operation similar to the concept of *"epoché"* in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.

Chapter one:
Wu's translation

1	The way[dao] that can be talked about is not the constant Way[Dao].
2	The name that can be named is not the constant Name.
3	Non-being is the name of the origin of Heaven and Earth; Being is the name of the mother of all things.
4	Therefore: Constantly in Non-being, one wishes to contemplate its (the Way's) subtlety.
5	Constantly in Being, one wishes to contemplate its path.
6	These two[Non-being and Being] come from the same source, but are different in names.
7	The same source is called Mystery.
8	Mystery and more mystery.
9	It is the gateway to myriad subtleties [of Mystery].

LAU's version

1	The way[dao] that can be spoken of is not the constant way[dao];
2	The name that can be named is not the constant name.
3	The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;
4	The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.
5	Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its[dao's] secrets;
6	But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its[dao's] manifestations.
7	These two are the same, but diverge in name as they issue forth.
8	Being the same they are called mysteries, mystery upon mystery ---
9	The gateway of the manifold secrets [of mystery].

Similar expressions about "Non-being" or "Nothingness" as origin to "Being" could be found in other chapters: 4, 40, 42 and 51. But the first chapter, which we cited above, is already very clear about some key points of Laozi's idea. We will now try to give some comments on it.

1) From line 1 and 2 (in both translations), we can see that Laozi is in search of something "constant," which will never change with time and space, and even something of everlasting quality. But he cannot find it among the visible things.

2) Laozi puts this something without name (line 3, Lau's translation), or Non-being (line 3, Wu's translation) as the very origin of Heaven and Earth which could mean the universe and everything in it for the ancient Chinese people.

3) "Being" (line 3, Wu) and the "named" (line 4, Lau) refers to Heaven and Earth, and is called "the mother" of everything in the world.

4) Line 7 (both Wu and Lau) says the two things: the Non-being and Being (Wu), the nameless and the named (Lau) are the same thing with two different ways to refer them. We could say, in their different functions: the one is the constant origin, the other one is "the mother" of everything in the world.

From here (line 7 in both Wu and Lau) we can see that the non-being (Wu) and the nameless (Lau) is something, not a Nothing.

And, Laozi, since he did not know more about these highest realities, he just calls them mystery, an abyss of mystery (line 8, Wu: mystery and more mystery; line 8, Lau: mystery upon mystery).

5) Laozi intuits that, between the Non-being and Being (Wu), or between the nameless and the named (Lau) there are myriad secrets. However, Laozi does not know about them. He let it be a big mystery.

Now, let's do a little comparison between *Laozi*'s Dao principle, and the "personal" concept of God in the Bible. First of all, in the Bible, God replied to Moses that «I am who I am» (Ex 3:14), revealing His name that maintains the mystery of His being.

Secondly, one thing that could be deduced from the mention of "Non-being" as origin of "Being" (mother of everything) is the concept of unity among everything in the universe, because everything comes from the same and one source. The very often mentioned "harmony" by Chinese people could derive from this historical long inherited root.

When the Bible proclaims that God is the only God (Deut 6:4), it implies the same thing: the unity of everything in the universe derives only from God. God announced it in a positive way. Laozi, not having an explicit revelation, has intuited a common "Nameless" source of everything, and expressed it in a systematic way.

A third comparison could be made in the following way: in the Bible we read: God creates mankind in His own image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27), and God makes Himself present to the created world through His Word and Spirit. In line 3 (Wu) and line 4 (Lau): "Being" (which has the same source of Non-being, line 6, Wu, line 7, Lau) is the name of "mother of all things." It could be implied that, if it is a "mother," all "children" should have the mother's image in themselves too.

In the Bible this "image" and "likeness" marks the "difference" between human beings and the rest of creation according to the principle of freedom given only to man and woman.

3. Reversal: The Movement of the Dao

In the discourse of Coda at Dharma Drum Mountain, we can see the important relationship between God-Father and God-Son. The Son gives his life for Father out of love, and comes back to the Father. This inter-active relationship brings about the whole creation and remains in all creation. Now we would like to see how it is in Laozi's conception.

The reciprocal movement between Non-Being (Nothingness) and Being is the fundamental movement that is eternal. As Chen said:

> «Dao as a creative principle has two poles: Nothing and Being. As Being, it gives rise to the ten thousand beings [Chapter 40 of *Laozi*], but Being itself is born from Nothing. [*Ibid.*] Nothing is not merely the indefinable, nameless, shape of no-shape, sign of no-thing, illusive and evasive [Chapter 1]; it is a motion that reverts itself to give rise to all beings [Chapter 40]…In a fundamental ontology of Nothing, the Absolute is motion: Nothing is pure motion.»[20]

From the Christian point of view, it is not a question of two poles of a Principle, but of three Persons eternally related to each other. In the Western tradition, the concept of "person" has its roots in the Trinitarian theology of the first centuries A.D. This question could be deepened in the dialogue with the Chinese culture.

We can see the following text of *Laozi*:

Chapter 40
Wu's translation

1	Reversal is the movement of the Way [Dao],
2	Weakness is the function of the Way [Dao],
3	All things in the world live in Being,
4	All Being lives in Non-being.

20 - Chen (2011), pp. 99-100.

Lau's translation

1	Turning back is how the way [dao] moves;
2	Weakness is the means the way [dao] employs.
3	The myriad creatures in the world are born from Something,
4	And Something from Nothing.

In Line 2 (both Wu and Lau) we see the word "weakness." It is a very important word in the Laozi's thinking, like Lau's translation said: «Weakness is the means the way [dao] employs. Dao moves from weakness, gives birth to Being, from which "the myriad creatures in the world born"» (Line 3, Lau).

The "weakness" means the negative pole of "strong". The Chinese word for "reversal" (Line 1, Wu) and "turning back" (Line 1, Lau) is "fan" 反, which could also mean "negative"[21]. In comparison to Christian love in the Trinity, as Professor Coda explains, the Son emptied himself for love of the Father, returning to the Father, and the Father emptied himself generating the Son, and through the Son freely creating all things. We can compare the concepts like "weakness," "negation," and "emptiness" (used in *Laozi* to show the move to the other pole) with the reciprocal "self-emptying" in the relationship of the Trinity, as we mentioned above[22].

The concept of "emptiness" derives from the Greek word "kenosis" found in a sacred text of the New Testament which refers to the love of the Son of God for humanity which reveals the love that He has towards the Father and Holy Spirit.

The other point we would like to mention here is the saying that everything, at the end, should come back to Non-being (Nothingness) as their last "constant" state. Constant here does not mean "static" state, but life (as translated in Line 4 Wu below).

For Christians too, all of creation is oriented to return to God and to participate in the Trinitarian life where everything is in loving relation with the others.

21 - See note 52 in Chapter 10 of Fu Pei-rong (2010), p. 246.

22 - A further reference: the American philosopher C.S. Peirce claims in his evolutionary cosmology a very similar process to Laozi. An original nothing produces potentiality, which then produces the existential entities. In this process, nothing also annuls itself and becomes being, first as potentiality. Cited from Chen (2011), pp. 160-161. In later development of Heidegger's thinking there are discussions about 'Nothingness' and 'Being': Chen (2011), pp. 182-202.

Chapter 16
Wu's translation

1	Practice emptiness to its ultimate. Maintain tranquility sincerely.	
2	All things rise together: I only contemplate their return.	
3	All things flourish; Each return to its root.	
4	To return to the root is tranquility, It means to return to life.	
5	To return to life is constancy, to know constancy is enlightenment.	
6	One who does not know constancy acts blindly and is in danger.	
7	Knowing constancy, one's mind embraces all.	
8	Embracing all, one treats all things equally.	
9	Treating all things equally, one is kingly.	"king" means Sage-king, which represents ideal human being.
10	Being kingly, one is in accord with Heaven. In accord with Heaven, one attains the Way [Dao].	
11	Attaining the Way, one lives long. One's entire life is without danger.	

Lau's translation

1	I do my utmost to attain emptiness; I hold firmly to stillness.
2	The myriad creatures all rise together, And I watch their return.
3	The teeming creatures, all return to their separate roots.
4	Returning to one's roots is known as stillness.
5	This is what is meant by returning to one's destiny.
6	Returning to one's destiny is known as the constant.
7	Knowledge of the constant is known as discernment.

8	Woe to him who willfully innovates, while ignorant of the constant,
9	But should one act from knowledge of the constant, one's action will lead to impartiality,
10	Impartiality to kingliness, Kingliness to heaven, Heaven to the way, the way to perpetuity,
11	And to the end of one's days one will meet with no danger.

Nothingness as female principle[23]

Here we would like to mention one more thing: the Nothingness as the female Principle[24].

Already in the cited Chapters of *Laozi* above, we could intuit it, but we cite a Chapter in which it is explicit about this principle:

Chapter 6

Wu's translation (abbreviated explanations are from Wu)

1	The spirit of the valley never dies	Valley as analogy of emptiness
2	It is called the mysterious female.	Mother of all things
3	The gate of the mysterious female is called root of Heaven and Earth.	'Gate' is 'root'
4	Constantly it seems to exist.	Being empty, it seems not to exist; but as function, it seems to exist.
5	There is no labor in its use.	As Nature: using it does not require strength or power, so, it is used without labor.

As Chen said: «according to the masculine logic of the fixity of life, from nothing nothing comes; according to the feminine logic of life, from nothing all beings come. Dao is the Nothing that becomes the world.»[25].

23 - Also in the Trinitarian Ontology of Professor Coda, he speaks of the feminine aspect with specific reference to Mary in his Manifesto.

24 - Chen (2011), pp. 93-98.

25 - Chen (2011), p. 93.

A Hypothesis

A hypothesis could be made on the basis of the Trinitarian Ontology explained by Professor Coda in his above-mentioned discourse (see note 1). The inter-active relationship in the Trinity, above all the movement between the Father and the Son, could help us to give a detailed description of the movement between the Non-being and the Being by Laozi. It is just a hypothesis which could be furthered studied, especially by deepening the "creative principle of the Dao" composed of two poles and the "personal" God of the Bible; the "ontology of Nothingness" (Chen) and the "Trinitarian ontology" (Coda); the "masculine and feminine logic of life"; the ontological and ethical concepts of Dao; the "weakness" understood as a means employed by the Dao and Christological "emptiness", etc.

Coda emphasized that the Father, out of love, emptied Himself entirely toward the Son, and the Son, then, out of love, emptied Himself toward the Father, in reciprocal communion of the Holy Spirit. This dynamic of reciprocal love is freely and gratuitously extended beyond the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in creation. This rhythm of reciprocal love is the place in which creation exists and lives.

We can imagine the following sequences of inter-active movement between the Non-being and Being by Laozi. They are "logical steps" in the sense Fung Yu-lan has suggested, not a sequence of time[26].

(Step 1)

The Non-being (something full but without form) gives itself totally to the Being.

(Step 2)

The Being gives itself totally to the Non-being, in doing so, the Being creates the whole world[27].

(Step 3)

The whole world should flourish, the relationship between Non-being and Being should remain in the world, in everything[28].

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26 - Fung, Yu-lan 冯友蘭 (1947) *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy* «中國哲學之精神» Kegan Paul: London, p. 62.

27 - Step 1 and Step 2 could be found, among other Chapters of Laozi, in Chapter 40: 'The myriad creatures in the world are born from Something [in Chinese 'you' 有 : Being], and Something from Nothing.' (Lau's translation)

28 - Step 3 could be found for example in Chapter 51: 'therefore, all things without exception venerate the Way [Dao] and value virtue. The Way's venerability and virtue's value are that they do not command but constantly are natural [spontaneous]. Therefore, the Way brings them forth, virtue nurtures them, grows them and rears them, matures them and ripens them, nourishes them and shelters them. Producing without possessing, acting without taking credit, growing without controlling – This is called mystical virtue'. (Wu's translation)

(Step 4)

But the reverse is the final development which brings everything back to the Being, and through Being to Non-being, where is the root of eternal life[29].

(Step 5)

The eternal dynamic will continue (from Step 1 to Step 4).

In the Trinity, the reciprocal movement is motivated by radical love, which is not mentioned in *Laozi*. But the constant reciprocal movement between Being and Non-being implies necessarily a totally harmonious move between them. And the maternal care for the growing of the all creation, as demonstrated in footnote to Step 3, can testify to an eternal love.

4. Some Reflections

There were some reflections raised during the process of writing this article.

1) There was one personal experience on the comparison of Chinese culture with the Bible. I had a moment of hesitation when I first read the "Axial Age"[30] of Karl Jasper. He compared some great thinkers in the world during the period between 800 B.C. to 300 B.C., including figures from the Bible and sages from China, especially Confucius and Laozi.

My first reaction was this: how can we compare Chinese sages (even though they were great thinkers, but there was no explicit Revelation from God) with religious people from Israel (where there is a Revelation)? The two cultures belong to totally different historical contexts. I just dropped the book, and did not continue to read.

At that time, I just made my second conversion to Jesus (in the Catholic Church), and tried to live my faith with great fervor. For me, at that time, the faith is everything in the world. Nobody can be compared with Jesus.

Only afterwards, I learned that there can be a comparison "philosophically," in the sense that we can use our human understanding or imagination to compare, not necessarily directly related to the faith. (We do this, as someone said before, because we want to understand what the other people think, and to make a dialogue with people of other convictions possible)[31].

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29 - Step 4 could be found in Chapter 16: 'All things rise together; I only contemplate their return. All things flourish; Each returns to its root. To return to the root is tranquility, it means to return to life. To return to life is constancy, To know constancy is enlightenment'. (Wu's translation)

30 - Jaspers, Karl (1957).

31 - Augustine of Hippo (354-430) had encountered the similar situation, as he tried to use philosophical principles to understand the religious Absolute (God of Israel). And he found the solution in «Where I have

I understood that it was in this sense that Jaspers had formulated his "theory" of an Axial Age. And it is in this same sense that I am undertaking this study, comparing what a human can reach with his capacity and imagination about universal realities.

2) An experience of encounter of cultures happened when Buddhism came into China, after 220 AD (see diagram in Appendix).

Professor Thome Fang reassumed this process with the following words after he had compared the characteristics of each spirit (Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism). He said: "Eventually, however, a turning point came as a result of the attempts made *to grasp the spiritual import embodied in the Buddhist rituals in terms of Laotzu's concept of "wu" as "Non-Being."*... Buddhism, the new comer, immediately joined itself with Neo-Taoism, the new school, in initiating a sort of trio of thought in the form of Three Systems of Speculative Philosophy. This was made possible by adopting Taoism as the fundamental basis, by absorbing Buddhism as a foreign element for reinforcement, and finally by forging these two, farfetchingly, into the Confucianism embodied in the Chou version of the Book of Creativity.»[32].

So, it is historically possible to accept new concepts in a culture from outside. These concepts are organically absorbed and combine with concepts that already exist within the culture to create a new understanding of reality. It could be compared with a grafting process on a tree, which needs time to grow but then bears new fruits.

It is important to emphasize for our purpose here the concept of Laozi's Non-being which opened the way for Buddhism to enter Chinese culture. Professor Coda has done a comparison between the Nothingness of Buddha and of the Christian God in his Dharma Drum Mountain discourse.[33] It could be fruitful to go deeper with a thorough comparison between Nothingness in Laozi and in the Christian understanding of God, of which this article is just a tentative beginning.

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found the (philosophical) truth, there I have found my God, the truth itself». The ontological solution of the problem of the philosophy of religion. (P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 1964, pp. 11-13. For details see section VI 'Bibliography').

32 - Fang (1991), in the section "The Mahayana Buddhist School" (Italics by Hu). For a quick and abbreviated view see: Fang, H. Thome (2003) "The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy". Section 6. (details in VII Bibliography) For a comprehensive explanation see Fang, H. Thome (1981) *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Development*, Linking Publishing Co.: Taipei. "Taoism and its impact upon the early Development of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism", pp. 119-172.

33 - See note 2.

3) Another very promising comparison could be the concept of "relationship" in the universe. As we tried to show above, the "reversal movement" between Non-being and Being is the fundamental mode of existence of Dao. This concept of relationship is deeply embedded in the Chinese mentality: the relation between man and Heaven, the relation between man and Nature, and the relation between people in the society.

The relationships in the Trinity, as Professor Coda explained in his discourse, could be an attractive point in the encounter with Chinese culture. He explored thoroughly the dynamic, eternal movement between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit which is expressed in Creation, and remains in the whole universe. This explanation could bring reciprocal understanding between Christian doctrine and the deeply lived reality in Chinese culture.

Conclusion

We have tried in this short article to make a comparison, based on two specific characteristics of Trinitarian ontology (Piero Coda), between the Christian tradition and Laozi's explanation of the beginning of the universe.

The two basic Catholic points are: God creates from Nothing, and the dynamic, radical reciprocal love between the Father and the Son.

As regards Laozi, we have not touched on many other characteristics of Laozi's teaching, which would also be worthwhile to explore.

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(from the editor's notes: Of all Professor Fang's works, the following "Inaugural Address" may be the easiest to understand, yet the most significant to mark--for a special reason. It is truly a *Prelude* to a whole series of the most important unique contributions he had made to the world of thought.)

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Appendix

Thanks to Professor Wu for his permission of using his Diagram in our paper (about his book see Bibliography)

