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### Lao Tzu and Francis Libermann on Living the Mystery

Binh The Quach

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# Introduction

The Center for Spiritan Studies, inaugurated in September 2005, is a collaborative venture between the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Duquesne University. Its purpose is to promote scholarly research into Spiritan history, tradition, and spirituality with a view to fostering creative fidelity to the Spiritan charism in a changing world. *Spiritan Horizons* is an annual publication of the Center for Spiritan Studies which seeks to further the Center's aims. The journal combines articles of a scholarly nature with others related to the praxis of the Spiritan charism in a wide variety of cultural settings. Special attention is given in each issue to the Spiritan education ethos, in view of the university context in which the journal is published. It is hoped that the journal will provide a wider audience than hitherto with access to the riches of the Spiritan charism and spirituality.

In this second edition, **Jean-Savoie** outlines the history of the *cause for beatification* of the Spiritan founder, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*. **Christy Burke** reflects on the central role of *freedom* in the vision of Francis Libermann, the Congregation's second founder; **Arsène Aubert** looks at the relatively unknown *correspondence of Libermann with his family* and **Binh The Quach** opens up new horizons in investigating points of contact between the spirituality of Libermann and the *philosophy of Lao Tzu*. **Elochukwu Uzukwu** explores the notion of *inculturation* with particular reference to the Spiritan charism and **James Chukwuma Okoye** looks at the *mission of the Third Church in the First World* and its possibilities for a "mutual exchange of energies." **John Kilcrann**, JPIC Coordinator in Rome, develops a contemporary *Spiritan spirituality of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation*. Theology professor at Duquesne University, **William Thompson-Uberuaga** explores the *role of the Holy Spirit in teaching* from the threefold perspective of student, teacher, and subject matter, relating his findings to the spirituality of Francis Libermann. **Thomas Farrelly** outlines current efforts to articulate *the mission and identity of Spiritan schools in Ireland* with reference to the inspiration of the Spiritan founders, the written, and the lived tradition. Lay Spiritan husband and wife, **Peter and Ann-Marie Fell**, reflect on the *identity and commitment of the lay Spiritan* and describe their involvement with REVIVE, a professional service of support and advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers in the Greater Manchester area in England. **José Altevir da Silva** tells us of the *impact of the Spiritan Year on young people in his native Brazil* and Mozambican Spiritan **João Luis Dimba** retraces his fascinating personal story *from refugee to Spiritan missionary*.

## LAO TZU AND FRANCIS LIBERMANN ON LIVING THE MYSTERY

### Binh The Quach, C.S.Sp.

A native of Vietnam and currently serving as a missionary in Hsinchu, Taiwan, Binh The Quach is a Spiritan from the USA Western Province. He holds M.A. and M.Div. degrees in Biblical Studies from the Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, Ohio, and a Ph.D. in the Philosophy of World Religions from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. Ordained to the priesthood in 1991, Binh has worked in the USA, in parish ministry, teaching, and as a retreat director. He also served as director of the Spiritan formation community in Houston, Texas.

*The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all.*

### MYSTICISM

Contemporary uses of the term ‘mysticism’ include the whole gamut of experiences, teachings, techniques, lifestyles, etc., of ‘mystics.’ One of the clearest definitions of ‘mysticism’ is that of William Johnston. He defines it as the “*wisdom or knowledge that is found through love; it is loving knowledge.*”<sup>1</sup> He further asserts, “*Mysticism is the core of authentic religious experience.*”<sup>2</sup> This loving knowledge is efficacious because it leads to the transformation of the individual. With this understanding of mystical theology as transforming mystical experience, we can eliminate those contemporary usages that equate mystical theology with mere doctrines and theories of mystical experience, ignoring its transforming effect. Mystical experience stands in awe of the Mystery that is beyond human conception and at the same time closer to the person than the person is to the self.

Johnson’s understanding of mysticism is rooted solidly in the Christian mystical tradition, yet it remains open to a variety of lifestyles and great world religions that also are rooted in similar experiences. It is not limited to monastic asceticism and formal prayer. What is of the essence of mystical experience is the self-surrender required for authentic love in daily hectic, secular life. By defining mysticism as “*the core of authentic religious experience,*” Johnson can satisfy both those scholars who insist that only infused religious experience is mystical and those who contend that all genuine religious experience has a mystical aspect. His emphasis upon the universal call to mysticism removes it from the realm of the esoteric or that which is reserved only for an elite. Karl Rahner makes the same point:

*The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all. If by mysticism we mean, not singular parapsychological phenomena, but a genuine experience of God emerging from the heart of existence, this statement is very true and its truth and importance will become still clearer in the spirituality of the future.*<sup>3</sup>

With this working definition of mysticism, we can proceed to examine how it applies to the writing of Lao Tzu and the life and writings of Francis Libermann, and their respective approaches to the spiritual life. In this article I would like to consider how the experience of Mystery is described in the writings of Lao Tzu and Francis Libermann. There are certainly profound differences in

their understanding of the Mystery itself, but there are similarities in their experiences of its transcendent and immanent qualities, the fundamental dispositions they consider necessary for entering into it, and the harmony and peace to which it leads. Having reflected on some of their insights we will attempt to draw some conclusions with regard to our call as missionaries and as apostles of the Mystery in today's context.

*...there are similarities in their experiences of its transcendent and immanent qualities, the fundamental dispositions they consider necessary for entering into it, and the harmony and peace to which it leads.*

### LAO TZU AND THE EXPERIENCE OF TAO

Taoism, both philosophically and religiously, draws its main source of inspiration from Lao Tzu's *Tao Tè Ching*. In this book, Lao Tzu developed the first brief system of metaphysics in Chinese intellectual history which concentrates on the concept of *Tao*. *Tao* literally means a 'way' and is often extended to connote a political or moral principle by which different schools express various ideas. However, Lao Tzu gave it a totally new meaning. He regarded it as the general source and origin of the universe. It is the Ultimate Reality, as well as the first principle underlying form, substance, being, and change; nevertheless, it is nameless, formless, and transcending all categories. In chapter 25 of the *Tao Tè Ching*, Lao Tzu wrote:

*There was a thing, formless yet complete in itself, born prior to heaven and earth. Silent! Empty! Existing by itself, it remains unchanging. Pervading everywhere, it is inexhaustible. One may think of it as the mother of all beneath heaven. We do not know its name, but we term it Tao.*

The idea of *Tao* as ineffable and nameless is also emphasized in the opening chapter: "*Tao that can be spoken of is not the everlasting Tao. Name that can be named is not the everlasting name.*" In addition, *Tao* is called "*mystery*" or "*mystery upon mystery*" (chapter 1), which is at once transcendent and immanent. The transcendent character of *Tao* can be seen in the description given in chapter 25 quoted above; whereas, the immanent aspect of *Tao* is expressed by the term *Tè* which is presented in the second half of the book *Tao Tè Ching*.

*Tè* is said to be the "*dwelling place of Tao*," that is, *Tè* is *Tao* "*dwelling*" in realities. In other words, *Tè* is *Tao* concretized in time and space. Thus, *Tè* is what individual objects obtain from *Tao* and thereby become what they are. *Tè* is described in chapter 51 as a mother nurturing all things: "*It is Tao that gives them life. It is Tè that nurses them, grows them, fosters them, shelters them, comforts them, nourishes them, and covers them under her wings.*" While the *Tao* is a force beyond all creation, the *Tè* is

*Lao Tzu introduces a new way of living which is applicable, not only to his contemporaries, but also to the people today ...*

*It is this trust in Tao that makes all learning, relationship, and love possible.*

the expression of the *Tao* as the creative force or energy in people and things.

### ***Two Central Concepts***

This leads us directly into two of the central concepts of the philosophical system of Taoism, that is, *Zi-ran* and *Wu-wei*. Philosophically, *Tao* is the highest concept in Taoism that gives the metaphysical support to both *Zi-ran* (naturalness or spontaneity) and *Wu-wei* (non-action). These concepts or principles are not only profoundly simple but also very challenging. Through them, Lao Tzu introduces a new way of living which is applicable, not only to his contemporaries, but also to the people today who are commonly described by psychologists and existentialist philosophers as disoriented and suffering identity-crises. These existential crises are caused by an individual experience of being disconnected with the world. To deal with these crises, Lao Tzu's philosophical concept of *Tao*, and its mutual relationship with the whole world through the principles of *Zi-ran* and *Wu-wei*, may shed light for people today enabling them to be reoriented and find a 'way' back to the *Tao*--the Mother of all things--to be nurtured and brought to maturity in a *Zi-ran* way through the path of *Wu-wei*.

### ***Zi-ran***

*Zi-ran* is the central value in Taoism. *Zi-ran* is the fundamental characteristic of *Tao* and the guiding principle of all things: "*Man models himself on earth, earth on heaven, heaven on Tao, and Tao on that which is naturally so.*" (chapter 25) *Zi-ran*, naturalness or spontaneity, is based on a deep trust in *Tao* that constantly manifests itself in and through the inherent wisdom of people and in the natural world that produced them. In *Tao, The Watercourse Way*, Alan Watts describes the situation as follows:

*If there is anything basic to Chinese culture, it is an attitude of respectful trust towards nature and human nature... a basic premise that if you cannot trust nature and other people, you cannot trust yourself. If you cannot trust yourself, you cannot even trust your mistrust of yourself...<sup>4</sup>*

It is this trust in *Tao* that makes all learning, relationship, and love possible. Without it a human person will experience meaninglessness and disorientation because his existence has no foundation or purpose. This experience of meaninglessness and disorientation is the result of a lack of trust in the *Tao*, the Way. Without trust, naturalness and spontaneity are stifled and a person grows up unable to relate to anyone in a healthy way because they have never learned to trust themselves. Therefore, adults, without this inherent and pervasive sense of trust, could

not take the personal or social risk of being wholly honest with themselves, others and the Divine Being. Such a trust, which lies at the heart of Taoism, authorizes spontaneity, that is *Zi-ran*.

*Lao Tzu invites followers of the Tao to the freedom that results from detachment from self.*

*...detachment from oneself and one's fixed ideas liberates one to be open to greater possibilities in life.*

Lao Tzu also points out that *Zi-ran* (spontaneity) does not arise from an attitude of reckless disregard for either oneself or the world. It is neither casual nor negligent. It comes instead from a disciplined yet easy following of one's own intrinsic intuition of a larger wisdom—the wisdom of *Tao*. To do this, all individual activity must be attuned to the natural unfolding of this larger wisdom. The person must be receptive to its movement by letting the uncontrived self function in accord with the larger nature of things. As soon as self-conscious deliberation appears, natural spontaneity or *Zi-ran* begins to disappear. Thus, *Zi-ran* happens when there is no interference with this larger wisdom. Lao Tzu in chapter 64 says, [a person] “*Learns to be without learning and makes good the mistakes of the multitude in order to help the myriad creatures to be natural and to refrain from daring to act.*” Lao Tzu invites followers of the *Tao* to the freedom that results from detachment from self. Thus, we need to learn through unlearning and to will through non-willing: “*Therefore, the sage, because he does nothing, never ruins anything; and, because he does not lay hold of anything, loses nothing.*” (chapter 64) This kind of detachment from oneself and one's fixed ideas liberates one to be open to greater possibilities in life. Accomplished artists, scientists, and holy people, who can create masterpieces of art, generate new insights and ideas, and accomplish extraordinary humanitarian acts, are those who are willing to transcend or even, at times, transgress the so-called conventional norms and their own ideas, in order to let themselves be directed by a larger wisdom.

### **Wu-wei**

*Wu-wei*, therefore, is the practice of non-action through detachment by which the disciple of *Tao* is to realize the central value of *Zi-ran*. In Chinese, *Wu-wei* literally means “no behavior” or “doing nothing.” However, it is not absolute non-action:

*Wu-wei is, rather, a concept or idea that is used to negate or restrict human action. In other words, Wu-wei means the cancellation or limitation of human behavior, particularly social activities. There are a number of gradations in the Taoist theories of Wu-wei: Wu-wei is a non-behavior or doing nothing; Wu-wei is taking as little action as possible; Wu-wei is taking actions spontaneously or naturally; Wu-wei is waiting for the spontaneous transformation of things; and Wu-wei is taking action according to objective conditions and the nature of things, namely, acting naturally.<sup>5</sup>*



*...people in general have a tendency to overdo; therefore, they interfere with the natural process of life.*

Lao Tzu believed that *Wu-wei* could lead to a peaceful and harmonious society because people in general have a tendency to overdo; therefore, they interfere with the natural process of life. *Wu-wei* also can help to attain an inner peace that serves as a solid foundation for living, even when one's life-journey is shaken by unpleasant experiences. It also enables one to react appropriately to the circumstances of the moment like the movement of water because a *Wu-wei* action arises spontaneously out of the flowing continuity of events. Through *Wu-wei*, one attains an inner balance and equilibrium that does not disturb the harmonious momentum of spontaneous happening. With this inner balance, one can naturally accomplish what normally would not be possible for the person: "*One does less and less until one does nothing at all, and when one does nothing at all there is nothing that is undone.*" (chapter 48)

Furthermore, from this inner balance of dynamically moving stillness comes an intuitive, purposeless, selfless doing. This is experienced as a charged emptiness in which both action and inaction are spontaneous and unconsidered. Everything and nothing become the same. Everything is crucially important yet not one thing matters. Changing becomes still and stillness moves. And from this condition *Wu-wei* happens of itself. As Lao Tzu explains: "*The heavy is the root of the light; the still is the lord of the restless.*" (chapter 26)

### **Principle of Dialectics**

In Taoism, as one seeks harmony, the principle of dialectics is central to the reconciliation of opposites. The paradoxes of life can only be resolved through holding them in dialectical tension. The opposites of any duality are identified within themselves and there is no need to seek a higher synthesis. There is a simultaneous occurrence and acceptance of difference and identity: "*Great music is without sound. Great form has no shape.*" (chapter 41) It is in dialectic that unity is found between the subjectivity of human beings and the objectivity of things. This is the most important aspect because, through it, one is simultaneously freed from the objectivity of the known and from the subjectivity of the self as knower: "*Therefore, the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action and practices the teaching that uses no words.*" (chapter 2)

Lao Tzu's dialectics are the ways in which a person embraces the tension between opposites that seem to be irreconcilable. By emphasizing interdependence, reversibility, and complementarity, Lao Tzu avoids the dualism that has often afflicted Western

*The spirituality of systemlessness creates an environment where dialogue among cultures and religious traditions is possible.*

*One needs to see life as a journey full of paradoxes.*

metaphysical and philosophical thinking. By embracing the tension that exists between opposites without eliminating their distinctions, a follower of *Tao* is able to discover the creativity of the way of interdependence. Lao Tzu creates a process that goes beyond system. In other words, this process is not closed-in and its boundary remains open. The process enables persons to avoid the rigidity of bias and enter in a larger dialogue. The spirituality of systemlessness creates an environment where dialogue among cultures and religious traditions is possible. Therefore, the well of knowledge and insights will be shared among all people of different paths and traditions. For Lao Tzu, no one tradition or culture can claim the possession of all the truth. It becomes possible for us to overcome the anxiety created by any philosophical system that calls for a selection of one polarity over another. One needs to see life as a journey full of paradoxes. Once one wants to eliminate paradoxes, one becomes off-balance. And once one centers in a closed-in system, one becomes off-center. In order to regain a balance in one's life, Lao Tzu tends to underline the supreme importance of certain personal qualities such as stillness (chapter 26, 45), softness (chapter 43), weakness (chapter 36, 76, 78), and femininity (chapters 20, 28). These qualities are pictured as "conquering" all contrasting qualities opposed to them. This is because people generally seem to lean toward those qualities that are conventionally viewed as being desirable, such as strength, power, masculinity, activity, etc.

### **A Process of Liberation**

Through the concepts of *Tao*, *Tē*, *Zi-ran*, *Wu-wei*, and dialectics, Lao Tzu provides a process whereby his followers learn to liberate themselves from intellectual patterns or practices that impede the experience of harmony or right relationship with nature, the self, others, and *Tao*. Through this process, one is at home and at ease within the *Tao*'s ever-changing flow. One's actions are at once power-filled and efficacious, unhindered by daily worries, and thus focused as an embodiment of *Tao*, that is, *Tē*. If *Tē* is *Tao* "dwelling" in realities, individuals who embody *Tao* will be agents of *Tao* nurturing and fostering the development of *Tē*, that is, harmony in the world. *Tē*, as we have seen, is described by Lao Tzu as a mother nurturing all things. It is, therefore, through the practice of *Wu-wei*, *Zi-ran*, and dialectics, that the followers of Lao Tzu experience true freedom through the state of being in union with *Tao*. This state of union with *Tao* enables them to entrust themselves to *Tao* as the guiding and nurturing force of all things and, therefore, to become embodiments (*Tē*) of virtue, harmony, and justice. Trust is the essential virtue of the followers of *Tao*.

Similar to Lao Tzu's concept of *Tao* as both transcendent and immanent, Libermann understands God both as infinitely and essentially holy and as immanently experienced as mercy and justice:

*God is infinitely and essentially holy. The holiness of God in his dealings with his creatures appears in two ways: through his mercy it transmits itself to creatures; then through his justice, it rejects them. Nevertheless, God only created us in a design of mercy and in order to communicate himself to us in his holiness. Thus his mercy is never withdrawn; it always far surpasses justice in God's dealings with us. Moreover, God's justice only acts when forced to, that is to say, when the creature refuses mercy.*<sup>6</sup>

*While Tao is impersonal, Libermann's God is the God of the Old Testament who repeatedly shows his Hesed and Emeth to his people.*

However, Lao Tzu's concept of *Tao* is different from Libermann's understanding of God. While *Tao* is impersonal, Libermann's God is the God of the Old Testament who repeatedly shows his *Hesed* and *Emeth* to his people. His *Hesed* is rooted in his *Emeth*, his fidelity, and his faithfulness in their time of need. *Emeth* is translated as *Aletheia* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and is used in the New Testament for *Truth* by Jesus (John 14:6). It is the truth that brings to right relationship (justice). It is ultimately the truth given by God in Christ and the truth that will make all relationships right. Jesus is the epitome of God's *Hesed* and *Emeth* (John 1:14). Jesus is the incarnate *Hesed* that makes it possible for us to be progressively led to all truth (John 16:13). While Lao Tzu poetically and philosophically uses the concept of *Tê* to describe the immanent nature of *Tao*, Libermann, with both his Jewish understanding of the transcendent God, Yahweh, and the Christian understanding of Jesus as the Incarnate Word, and the Spirit who dwells in our hearts, joins the two aspects of the mystery: God-beyond and God-within.

### **Libermann and the Experience of Mystery**

Libermann's understanding of spirituality – life in the Spirit – is totally rooted in the human experience of the Mystery of God – God the origin of all, God enfleshed with us and God who indwells our hearts. It is in this God, who is both beyond and within, that Libermann puts his trust. Trust is, therefore, foundational to Libermann's understanding of spirituality.

For Libermann, trust in the experience of the Mystery is at the center of life in the Spirit. The trust he calls for is as radical as that found in the faith of Abraham. Libermann is very conscious

of the Mystery as both transcendent and immanent in human experience of it. At the heart of his spirituality is trust in following the way where the Spirit leads. He points to two indispensable conditions for allowing the Holy Spirit to act in us and bring about right relationship with God, oneself and others: 1) trust in the merciful love of the Father for oneself and for all people, a love which comes first and which is gratuitous and indefectible; 2) trust in the active presence of the Holy Spirit within us, the sole author of our holiness. Thus, he writes:

*At the heart of his spirituality is trust in following the way where the Spirit leads.*

*If you give in to anxiety and distress, the Holy Spirit won't be able to act in you as he would wish. He won't be able to make himself the absolute master of your soul. Soften, soothe, ease and calm down your imagination. Let us never be concerned about the future, nor tormented about the past. Let us place our soul in the present moment in the hands of God with peace, humility and gentleness.<sup>7</sup>*

*...let everything be natural in you and come from the Holy Spirit.*

Therefore, the goal of a Christian is to “*let everything be natural in you and come from the Holy Spirit.*” He further explains: “*Everything which flows from this Spirit is gentle, mild, modest and humble. Strength and mildness, that is the divine action; it is also a summary of all apostolic action.*”<sup>8</sup>

Since trust in the merciful God who is both above and within is at the heart of Libermann's experience, he thus builds his spirituality on the two foundations: **faith in God's love** and **faith in the Holy Spirit**. His faith in God is the faith in the God of tenderness and mercy revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. He advised his confreres:

*You are a child of God; live as such. You are even a privileged and favored child; be tranquil and peaceful before your heavenly Father, who loves you with so much tenderness. True love of God will never establish itself in your soul if you accustom yourself to entertain fears and apprehensions.<sup>9</sup>*

With regard to faith in the Holy Spirit, he distinguishes two sources of activity in us. On the one hand, the self, with its natural faculties: intelligence, will, and affectivity. Libermann, following St. John and St. Paul, views these faculties as distorted and undependable because, insofar as our activity issues from this source, it is spoiled by self-seeking, egoism, and self-love wrongly understood. This defective or perverted love taints even our best efforts to live a life of love.

On the other the hand, the Holy Spirit who is given to us by the resurrected Jesus Christ, the full revelation of *Hesed* and *Emeth*, will lead believers to all truth (John 16:13). For that

reason, Libermann constantly directs his friends and conferees to submit themselves to the Holy Spirit. As Libermann wrote to a seminarian in December 1837: “All you have to do is to keep yourself docile and pliable in the hands of the Spirit of life, whom our Lord has placed in your soul to be your all.”<sup>10</sup>

*...detachment from self and attachment to a larger wisdom is the antidote to the meaninglessness and disorientation in human experience.*

In order to remain pliable and docile to the Holy Spirit who gives life, Libermann further points out the necessity of remaining detached and calm regarding personal inclinations or egoistic passion, and of submitting to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This process of detachment from self and attachment to a larger wisdom is the antidote to the meaninglessness and disorientation in human experience. It demands that we put aside the illusion that we control our lives and our natural world. What is required is that we let things unfold in their own time. This process, consequently, will generate in us an inner tranquility to perceive everything happening around us with a sense of trust and objectivity. We will respond to them naturally through non-interference that is similar to *Wu-wei* of the *Tao*. With regard to this process, Libermann also advises:

*Never want to advance further than is given you from on high. Be content to aim at renouncing yourself in everything and having a peaceful desire to live for God alone; then wait in all tranquility until it pleases him to give you what he thinks fit. Make no demands on him or on yourself either. Say calmly: My Jesus, you know well that I am nothing, that I can do nothing, that I am worth nothing. Here I am as you find me, that is, a poor nobody. Take me, if you are good enough to show that mercy. I abandon myself and hand over myself into your hands and I ask for nothing more.*<sup>11</sup>

Henry Koren<sup>12</sup> points out that Libermann’s spirituality is ‘God-anchored.’ Such a spirituality is fundamental for the apostolic life. It is when we are able to detach from self-centered desires that we can learn to accept ourselves and to remain docile and pliable in the hands of the Spirit, the Divine Energy who gives life and shows the way. Thus, we do not get in the way of God’s using us as a means to further reveal his loving fidelity (*Emeth*) and his loving merciful faithfulness (*Hesed*) in bringing about reconciliation and harmony, that is, justice. He writes:

*When we enter this way of pure faith disengaged from the senses, we see ourselves as a heap of misery. For all that, we must not trouble ourselves or get agitated but wait until it pleases God to deliver us. If he does not judge that opportune, we content ourselves with being poor people before him,*

*knowing that nothing we do is worth anything but, at the same time, that he will do everything in us. In this way, we come little by little to act no more by our own movement; it is the Spirit of our Lord who then does everything in us, and gradually we acquire a supernatural force in all our activity. Nothing can stop us, and our activity becomes activity wholly divine, because nothing more of ourselves is found in it and the Spirit of our Lord alone carries it out in us, at least in great part.*<sup>13</sup>

While Lao Tzu relies on *Wu-wei*, *Zi-ran*, and dialectics, to be in the state of union with *Tao* and to experience harmony and true freedom, Libermann stresses the necessity of abandonment to God's love dwelling within us, the Spirit, who gifts us with holiness:

*Christian perfection does not consist in a certain more or less elevated state of prayer, but in a union of perfect love with our Lord, founded on a complete renouncement of ourselves, our self-love, our will, our ease, our satisfaction, and everything we prize. The more perfect our renouncement the more perfect is our love.*<sup>14</sup>

A disciple of the way of abandonment is likened to a ship that submits itself to be spontaneously directed by the wind of the Holy Spirit:

*A ship has sails and a rudder; the wind blows into the sail, getting the ship to proceed as it should, so it advances by its sails and takes its general direction. Yet this direction could be too vague and could lead the ship astray at times. So there is the rudder, to guide it exactly in its due course without straying in any way. Your soul is the ship, your heart represents the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind; he blows into your will and your soul goes forward, proceeding towards the goal God proposes for it. Your mind is the rudder to prevent you, in the strength and vivacity of the movement given to your heart, from departing from the straight line determined by the divine goodness.*<sup>15</sup>

*Your soul is the ship, your heart represents the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind*

Therefore, for Libermann the act of abandonment to the Divine Love is the means whereby one can transcend one's limited and miserable condition to open oneself to receive the unmerited grace-love of God, the Holy Spirit.

## CONCLUSION

Having reflected on the *Tao Te Ching* and the insights of Father Libermann, we can see certain similarities in their experience of Mystery:

*Committed Spiritans who practice abandonment or Wu-wei and Zi-ran will be creative and generative in their ministries...*

- They both describe transcendent and immanent dimensions of the Mystery.
- They both understand that by following the way we come to know harmony and peace in relationship with the Mystery, within ourselves, with others, and with creation. This interior right relationship leads us to seek exterior right relationships (justice) in all aspects of life.
- For both, trust and submission are essential human attitudes necessary for following the way and coming to harmony and peace.
- Radical trust leads to freedom that is manifested in spontaneity and 'naturalness' in the everyday flow of life.
- Both understand that non-action and receptivity, or a greater wisdom in the face of paradox, is the way to reconciliation and harmony.

For Spiritan missionaries working in an Asian context, these are some of the essential elements of lived experience of Mystery that can allow us to introduce the fullness of the Christian message and the principles inherent in Libermann's understanding of life in the Spirit to the culture. More importantly, it is how they are a part of our lives that will speak most convincingly to the hearts of our Asian brothers and sisters. Committed Spiritans who practice abandonment or *Wu-wei* and *Zi-ran* will be creative and generative in their ministries that seek to reconcile the fragmented lives of the individuals and communities we serve. Rooted in right relationship with God, God's justice, we will be ministers of *Hesed* and *Emeth*, and thus of reconciliation, peace, and justice.

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**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Johnson, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Rahner, "Spirituality of the Church of the Future," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 20, p. 149. Also cf. Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Watts, *Tao, The Watercourse Way*, p.32.

<sup>5</sup> Liu, "Taoism," p. 243.

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert, *A Gentle Way to God*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Libermann, L.S. I, p. 167 (author's translation).

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert, *You have laid your hand on me*, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Libermann, L.S. II, p. 77 (author's translation).

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert, *You have laid your hand on me*, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Koren, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>13</sup> Gilbert, *You have laid your hands on me*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 120-121.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

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