Harmony and Reconciliation in Daoism and Christianity: Contributions to a Contemporary Identity Discourse

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Abstract
In this article, the contemporary identity discourse is highlighted within a Christian perspective of reconciliation, and a Daoist perspective of harmony. Reconciliation is placed in the context of the Hebrew Bible, focusing on the concepts of liberation, covenant, sin and atonement, and on the ministry of Jesus. Daoist harmony is discussed within a cosmic system of interconnectedness, non-disruption and non-interference. Contributions of Christianity and Daoism to reconciliation and harmony are critically evaluated as to their relevance for the contemporary identity discourse.

Keywords
reconciliation, Daoism, harmony, Jesus’s ministry

INTRODUCTION

This article presents an analytical investigation of the Christian concept of reconciliation and the Daoist concept of harmony within the context of a contemporary identity discourse. In our time, globally, humans suffer discrimination and persecution based on their racial, sexual, religious and/or political identities. This article seeks to contribute to alleviate suffering by looking into reconciliation and harmony as they are founded

1 I thank Dr. Louis Komjathy, Director Center for Daoist Studies, and Prof. Dr. E. van der Borght, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Faculty of Theology and Religion, for their expert advice.

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within Abrahamic religions and non-Abrahamic Daoism, and by trying to actualize religious teaching in ways that would constructively add to the contemporary identity discourse.

Identity, as a cause of celebration as well as a cause of conflict, certainly is one of the public highlights of the millennium. Identity is a construct of narratives about individuals, groups and nations, based on race, religion, gender, or political orientation, in whatever combination. Celebrating identity has a long cultural and theological history, spanning from the Israel of the Hebrew Bible, to the Jewish rabbi Jesus, to the Roman Catholic and the Protestant theological traditions. Philosophically, ending Medieval Christian cultural supremacy, Descartes heralded Enlightenment in defining identity as the autonomous Master ego. Herder extended identity to encompass a “Volk.” Kant envisaged a white cosmopolis built on pure reason, based on a global domination of a white identity. Indeed, politically identity became defined as the white and domineering Metropolis, as the Empire which supersedes the rest of the world which is labeled as “other.” By no means, however, the celebration of identity is a typical Western phenomenon. In contemporary Asian politics, racial and religious identity is a continuing core issue.

While prejudice, actually, has a rather negative connotation, the philosopher Gadamer (as quoted in Ricoeur) indeed rehabilitates prejudice, emphasizing the “prejudice against prejudice.” Since prejudice is socially and biologically based, the morally loaded exhortation to not be prejudiced is senseless. The issue is not not to be prejudiced, but how to deal with one’s prejudice.

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3 Kant, for instance, observes that “the Whites are characterized by their inborn sense of beauty, while the Negroes don’t have any feeling except childishness” (*Von den verschiedenen*, 59).


As the person identifies with her identity, the very roots for conflict are established. The “I” is, psychologically, close; the “You” is distant. While the trias “I-me-mine” is familiar, the “other” is unfamiliar, different, potentially threatening. In this way, the racial discourse is the narrative of identities, of “us” and of “them,” of belonging or not belonging. The construct of identity forms the explosive foundation for conflict. Christian theology, for centuries, infused the socio-political space and the racial discourse from a perspective of Christian supersessionism, referring to an universalist and inclusive theology of whiteness. It offered a legitimation for white, eurocratic dominance and repression. Repression has been christologically and soteriologically rationalized as “salvation” of the heathen. Black people systematically were not only dislocated as commodities to be sold and to be “exported” to other parts of the world, theologically they were inclusively relocated into a “Christian” identity— albeit that black Christians never really could be trusted because they might fall back into their primitive beliefs—in stark contrast to the life of Christ, namely “a negation of…the life of the Son of God, who took on the life of the creature, a life of joining, belonging, connection and intimacy.”

Identity, however, can also serve as a shelter and as protection. Discriminated human beings in their varied, sometimes fragile identities, racial, religious or sexual, look for shelter, safety and acknowledgement within their own clans. There, they become proud of their belonging. They become aware of their “roots.” “Black lives matter” banners proclaim. Unfortunately, by celebrating “black” power, “white” power is, dialectically, co-created. Tragically, identities, even when celebrated, per definition create otherness. Thus, conflict is not only perpetuated, but, paradoxically,

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7 I use the terms “Christian Theology” and “Christianity” in this article as a generalizing, common denominator. The terms falsely suggest an intrinsic communality that does in fact not exist and that is exemplified by the diversity of theologies of different Christian churches and theological movements (such as liberation theology and Eastern Orthodox theology).


the foundation is laid for ever more oppression and struggle, reestablishing and continuing the vicious circle.

**Harmony and Daoism**

Discussing a theme such as Harmony and Daoism, academically, within a contemporary context, is problematic at least. Here, it is seductive to turn to “Eastern Wisdom” in a “romantic infatuation with a ‘classically pure’ and timeless essential Daoism, embedded in one or two ancient texts” in a salvational striving for change and for remediating the problems the planet is facing. Within an Orientalist frame,¹¹ Daoism certainly would prove to be a treasure grove *par excellence*, one might assume. Indeed, popular, orientalist assumptions, based on simplified “translations” of classical Daoist texts, urge to “respect nature,” to “realize harmony,” to see humans as “one family.” These universalist assumptions make for an agreeable and pleasant conviction that the Daoist way is a way paved to help remediate the world.

Most unfortunately, however, classical Daoism¹² does not necessarily speak the language we like to hear. Its texts do not lead to remediate the planet. In fact, as Kirkland¹³ states, “Daoism offers uncomfortable thoughts, in contrast to (Western) fabricated interpretations.” In this way, Daoism, as an “Eastern Philosophy” is often privileged in a postcolonial sense, falsely commodified to support the quest to save the world. In sharp contrast to an universalist, Eurocentric reading of Daoist texts, characterized by hermeneutical injustice, we need to pay special attention to the difference and the otherness of these texts. Here, Lafargue¹⁴ lucidly points to a

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“confrontational hermeneutics” to do justice to an often-painful otherness and honoring the singularity of the texts.

Harmony and the Abode of all the Hidden Essences

Like Genesis of the Hebrew Bible, classical Daoism has its cosmogony. Unlike Genesis, however, in classical Daoism there is no Creator\textsuperscript{15}. Within a Chinese creation mythology,\textsuperscript{16} cosmic order was preceded by chaos. In fact, the Greek word kosmos signifies an orderly arrangement and might also be translated as “decoration.” According to Girardot, the cosmos can be seen as “the cosmic camouflage of chaos.”\textsuperscript{17} It is the cultivated \textit{persona} of chaos.

Daoist cosmogony points to the “abode of all the hidden essences,” the “dao”\textsuperscript{18} (“way”), the nameless. In Chinese cosmology, primordial harmony is not considered a goal to be reached but a source to return to, since primeval times a dialectical balance of opposite forces. As such, harmony, too, has to be considered dialectically with its seeming opposite, chaos, without beginning nor end. The primordial state is not stable or fixed. In fact, as Komjathy\textsuperscript{19} points out, it is an active process, beyond rational understanding.

The Dao “is the all-embracing principle through which all things are brought into being.” In Kohn’s\textsuperscript{20} words “The Dao is nature, it is also more than nature - its deepest essence, the inner quality that makes things as they are.” “While ultimately unknowable the Dao may be experienced... because Dao pervades the world and being.”\textsuperscript{21} The Dao is embedded in a systemic relation with nature and humans: “Tao as the pivot of the universe is surrounded by the interaction of all individual entities or beings that form an interlaced system of the comprehensive harmony of natural equilibrium.”\textsuperscript{22} The pan-Chinese view of cosmic harmony indeed refers to

\textsuperscript{15} Komjathy, \textit{Daoism}, 2013.
\textsuperscript{16} Norman J. Girardot, \textit{Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
\textsuperscript{17} Girardot, \textit{Myth}, 5.
\textsuperscript{18} In this article, the spelling is based on the \textit{hanyu pinyin} system.
\textsuperscript{19} Komjathy, \textit{Daoism}, 43.
\textsuperscript{21} Komjathy, \textit{Daoism}, 2.
\textsuperscript{22} Chen Guo-Ming and Ma Ringo, eds., \textit{Chinese Conflict Management and Resolution
an orderly arranged and yet dynamic equilibrium of forces, creating a vast, endless and timeless landscape of harmony. This process is not linear, but circular: the “forward” movement already implies the backward movement, the returning to the source:

“Push emptiness to the limit, watch over stillness very firmly. The thousands of things all around are active - I give my attention to turning back. Things growing wild as weeds all turn back to the source. Returning to the source is called stillness.”

The Harmony of Opposites

As Komjathy shows, yin and yang stem from traditional Chinese cosmology, (they) “are the two primary cosmological principles or forces... complementary and mutually dependent.” They designate, according to Schipper, the two fundamental phases of the Dao’s action. Non-dualistic, these pairs are not incompatible, they are mutually dependent and harmoniously complementary.

In harmony, heaven and earth are united in their dynamics. They are beyond morality. Earthquakes and floods destroy living beings. Sunshine and rain bring good harvests. Indeed, as the daode jing remarks: “Heaven and Earth are not Good, they treat the ten thousand things like straw dogs.” Harmony is not created by an external authority (God), but it is an ever-changing cosmic transformative process which includes everything and everyone. The human being has no exclusive position in this universe in constant flux. The human being is not, in contrast to the Abrahamic theocentric religions, the top of a created hierarchy, nor is she the most prominent, as in the anthropocentric Western Enlightenment view. While the universe is in eternal change within the two poles of yin and yang,


23 Lafargue, Tao Te Ching, 28 (16), 62. First number refers to cited work; number in parenthesis refers to other translations.
24 Komjathy, Daoist Tradition, 323.
26 Lafargue, Tao Te Ching, 16 (5).
“the change involved is relative rather than absolute, since all movement
serves in the end only to bring the process back to its starting point.”

“The movement of Dao is turning back.” The movement of the Dao
is returning, returning to ziran, to being so-of-themselves.” Komjathy
defines ziran as suchness (literally: “self-so”): “The state or condition
realized when one returns to one’s innate nature, which is the Dao.”

Ziran is the vantage point of the wise person who, in stillness, observes
the rising and falling, the yin and the yang, the something and the nothing.
Here, action is effortless and as natural as water, which does not consciously
and rationally look for what course to take, does “nothing” and by obeying
gravity finds the lowest point.

The Balance of Singularities

Within the dynamics of an everchanging system, beings are
characterized by their fleeting, impermanent singularity. In humans, these
singularities, pertain also to socio-political positions. The singularities of
social roles, their mutual dependencies and interactions, in their turn, form
a harmonious organism. The daode jing in a mild way, and the Zhuangzi in
an explicit way, criticize a strong social inequality even when well-ordered
within a clearly defined social system such as Kongzi proposes. The daode
jing acknowledges the role and the position of the ruler, but counsels him
to be cautious and modest, even to be timid:

The Excellent shih of ancient times (were)
Cautious, like one crossing a stream in winter
timid, like one who fears the surrounding neighbors.

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19-80.
28 Lafargue, Tao Te Ching, 34 (40).
29 Angus C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company,
1989).
30 Komjathy, Daoist Tradition, 88.
31 Confucius, 554-479 BCE.
32 Lafargue, Tao Te Ching, 6 (15).
Rulers behaving like these maintain a harmonious and interdependent equilibrium within the people, like a boat (the ruler) which is carried by the water (the people). As soon as the ruler positions himself independently in his authority as Head of State, or when the people don’t “carry” the ruler anymore, harmony is lost.

The Loss of Harmony

While the Sage lives in harmony by not interfering in the dynamic cosmical flux, respecting the rising of yang and the returning of yin, acknowledging singularity and difference without wanting to produce alterations, the course of the ordinary mortal is not towards but away from harmony. Daoism explains the reasons for this. No longer living in accord with nature where no government, in the Confucian sense, is needed, people “subsequently degenerated due to the increasingly complex and artificial civilization with which they have surrounded themselves.”33 The “gentlemen of old,” in contrast, never traveled beyond their own borders, because they were content where they were. But now, as the Zhuangzi describes, people have “abandoned their parents...their carriage tracks weave back and forth a thousand li and more... this is the fault of men in high places who covet knowledge.”34

In sharp contrast to Confucianism, which holds knowledge in high esteem, the Zhuangzi says: “Knowledge enables men to fashion fish hooks, lures, dragnets...but when this happens, the fish flee in confusion to the depth of the waters.”35 Harmony is destroyed by interfering. True knowledge, in the Daoist sense, points to a different level, to the insight into how the universe operates and into how these operations may be deeply perturbed and hindered. Though the cosmos is ever in flux and as such in harmony, disruptive changes are human fabricated. The human ratio enables us to coat our emotions, our emotionally tainted concepts and values rationally. We “know” what goodness is, what respect is, what loyalty is. We know what is “right” or “wrong”. The loss of harmony for Daoists implies a loss of innocence, a loss of what is “naturally so” (ziran).

33 Bodde, Harmony, 28.
35 Watson, Chuang Tzu, 10, 113.
This loss is caused by what the Zhuangzi calls knowledge, as well as by desire.36

Daoists consider the body as well as the State as a microcosm, mirroring the organization of the universe in its ideal state of harmony where nobody disruptively interferes. Desires, however, and the giving in to desires can be a way where harmony is lost. It is important to note, as Schipper37 and Lafargue38 point out, that, in Daoism, desires per sé are not criticized morally and ethically. To the Daoist, desires are hindrances on the Way, they prevent a returning to the root. They are hindrances precisely because these mental fabrications keep on asking more and more fulfillment, and thus form an ever present “noise” in contrast to the “stillness” of the Dao. Fulfillment as such only reinforces the desires, and so the person is bound in a vicious circle of which it is not easy to escape. In contrast, the Daoist ideal of the Sage is depicted,39 who does not repress or eradicate desires. Instead he watches and allows their arising and their passing without judging the one as bad or the other as good. The Sage does not act on his impulses. While knowledge and desires are hindrances along the Way, and jeopardize or even destroy harmony, Daoism does not solely offer diagnoses, but also points to ways to return to harmony and to regain it.

Returning to Harmony

The Chinese wuwei has the character wei which denotes an activity, an effortful “doing.” Wu negates wei, so that the complete significance becomes “non-action,” in the sense of non-interference, of non-disrupting ziran, not working against the grain. To return to naturalness through effortless action, does not imply action without effort: “Naturalness... must be worked at.”40 Work in the Daoist sense refers to the difficult task of allowing. Here, work implies a letting go of control and thus a trust in the Dao: the thousands of things take their course anyway, and the adept, from a still point, intelligently and sensitively discerns and appreciates whatever unfolds in front of her.

36 Watson, Chuang Tzu, 43,1.
37 Schipper, Taoist Body, 147.
38 Lafargue, Tao Te Ching, 225.
39 Watson, Chuang Tzu 5 (75).
40 Lafargue, Tao Te Ching, 238.
To the Daoist, returning to harmony implies self-cultivation by practicing apophatic meditation: here, stillness is emphasized as essential for the Way: “Who is able, as muddy water, by stilling to slowly become clear?”41 Here, again, the Sage is the role model, in the definition of Komjathy: “A Sage is someone who listens to the sonorous patterns of the universe and whose spiritual insights may be listened to by others.”42 Zhuangzi describes the Sage - a seemingly easy life, in the best of Daoist tradition, but, paradoxically, the result of hard work: “Mild and cheerful, he seemed to be happy; reluctant, he could not help doing certain things; annoyed, he let it show on his face; relaxed, he rested in his virtue. Tolerant, he seemed to be part of the world; towering alone, he could be checked by nothing; withdrawn, he seemed to prefer to cut himself off; bemused, he forgot what he was going to say.”43

**Reconciliation and Christianity**

In discussing reconciliation and Christianity, we are confronted with pitfalls quite similar to those I have sketched in my analysis of Daoism. From an universalist vista, Christianity is frequently presented as a synonym for brotherly peace, exemplified in the person of Jesus. Jesus, deracinated from his Jewish roots, frequently is agreeably packaged and commodified within an eurocratic framework. Indeed, “the oriental Jesus is theologically transferred into the occidental Christ.”44 A plethora of biblical quotes serves good purposes for almost any occasion.

None withstanding the ministry of Jesus Christ, in its focus on caritas, could be, in an exemplary way, fecundational for a discourse of identity. The concept of reconciliation indeed is frequently placed in a christological context,45 where God reconciles humankind to him through the crucifixion of his Son. Despite their diversity, the New Testamentian narratives share, as their commonality, their message as a “glad tiding,” a message of reconciliation.

41 Lafargue, *Tao Te Ching*, 6 (15).
42 *Daoism*, 81.
43 Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 6, 79.
To understand, historically and psychologically, the concept of reconciliation, it has to be placed in the wider religious context of the Hebrew Bible. Here, in vivid colors, the picture is painted of an enslaved Jewish people: far from the homeland, left alone in an endless desert, searching for ways to end their slavery.\(^46\) Narratives were told about Yahweh, the God, praised for his promise of liberation and of a country entirely theirs (Ex, 15,1-20).\(^47\)

By the sixth century BCE, Yahweh is seen not only as the one and only God, the creator mundi who turns chaos to order, but is also described as the one who brought the people out of the land of Egypt and out of slavery (Ex 20:1-4), and made a covenant with Moses and with the people of Israel. God promised that the people of Israel would be his treasured possession out of all the peoples (Ex 19:5-6), on the condition that they should live in harmony with his commandments. Rebellion against the commandments of God (Dt 1:26) and lack of trust in God (Dt 1:32) lead to God’s wrath and anger (Dt 1:34).

Sin is the leaving of this covenant, the non-obeisance to Yahweh’s rules. Sin implies the responsibility of the sinner, and her freedom not to sin. It makes humans accountable. Stott (2017)\(^48\) focuses on the relationship between culpa and poena. Repentance by the sinner is needed as is restitution. The sinner might or might not be forgiven. Murder is unforgivable, other sins are forgivable through atonement. The procedures and pragmatics of offering as atonement are explicitly described in Leviticus, 1, 2, 3. In the Hebrew Bible, the sinful trespasser of God’s commandments can repair his broken relationship with God by paying the price for his sins, by atonement, thus averting God’s anger and rebuilding a harmonious relationship with him. Depending on the gravity of the sin, on the breaking of God’s covenant with humankind, atonement, based on repentance, on the awareness of having wronged God, may take different forms. Repentance alone is not enough; sacrifices are needed.


The narrative about Yahweh describes him as experiencing emotional states such as anger, disappointment, and satisfaction (Gn 6:6; Gn 22:1; Gn 30:22; Ex 32:7). Not only is humankind created in God’s image; God, in a certain sense, is presented in anthropomorphic terms. God is humanized. God is not an abstract principle, nor is he an impassive observer. He is, as it were, “touchable.” Again, this humanization is the basis for the dialogue between Yahweh and the people of Israel. In these dialectics, humans can respond to God’s anger, they can repent, they can offer atonement and, eventually, they can become reconciled to God as God reconciles humankind to himself. The dialogue between the creator and the created, in a certain sense, “subjectifies” the object of speech. Yahweh is a God of reconciliation. His reconciliation is not a one-time event. Reconciliation is possible every time anew.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF JESUS’S MINISTRY

As Israel was losing its independence religiously, this process was paralleled by an ever-growing longing for liberation by Yahweh in the manifestation of a sent Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth was conceived as the Messiah by the first believers in Christ, all of whom were Jewish. Who was this Messiah Jesus Christ, practicing caritas, acting in the name of Yahweh, the God of reconciliation?

Reconciliation, in the New Testament, is exemplified by the ministry of Jesus Christ. Traditionally, reconciliation in Christian theology centers around the crucifixion, not around Jesus’s ministry. Pannenberg, however, integrates the office and the person of Jesus. Jesus’s work on earth must be considered in his complete activity and in his crucifixion and resurrection.

It is interesting to note, as Pannenberg does, that Jesus himself does not address Yahweh in a strictly hierarchical way. Pannenberg shows that Jesus, in blatant contrast to Jewish hierarchical tradition about Yahweh and, in fact, an explicit provocation of the theological establishment—

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49 In this article, I present some vignets from Jesus’s ministry as described in the NT, not from an historical or from a faith position. Rather, I focus on the narrative of Jesus’s behaviors in an interrelational context, in order to highlight their unique and exemplary function: as a model, within the perspective of generalization into contemporary identity discourse.

50 Campenhausen, Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.

51 Pannenberg, Jesus, 229.
addresses God as *Abba* (Mk 14:36). This word is a child’s *familiar* address to his father here on earth, completely uncommon in religious language and, in the eyes of Jewish scholars, a sacrilege. In this way, Jesus expresses his day-to-day, personal nearness to God. When I mentioned earlier the humanization of God in the Old Testament, Jesus brings God even closer and makes him almost touchable. Jesus’s reconciliation practice, which could be subsumed under the heading of caritas, of love for one’s fellows, illustrated in vignettes all over new testamentian scripture, implies this awareness of being together, albeit being one, with *Abba*, with Father. It is well worded by John (15:9), who describes the parallel of God’s love for Jesus and Jesus’s love for humankind. The various manifestations of caritas are poetically rendered by Paul (1 Cor 13:1-8).

*Caritas* implies the connection to fellow human beings, too. This loving connection forms the basis for forgiveness and reconciliation in the ministry of Jesus. In fact, it forms more than a basis; it is almost something like “a manual,” a unique exemplification of forgiveness and reconciliation. Reconciliation through the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ is the manifestation of God’s *caritas*.

It is not necessarily the sinner who needs to approach Christ in order to receive reconciliation, it is an outreaching Christ who actively seeks the presence of the sinner. Frequently, these encounters of Jesus with marginalized people such as thieves and prostitutes take place at a dinner table, in a context of hospitality. Jesus incorporates caritas as he offers hospitality to the radical other, without admission fee. The singularity of “the other” is clearly acknowledged while difference is transcended in forgiveness. It is precisely in this vein that Sheldrake contends that “sharing the table” is one of the most powerful symbols of radical hospitality and of reconciliation.

At dinner in the house of a Pharisee, a prostitute is forgiven (Lk 7:37). Jesus frequents the house of a sinner, who welcomes him (Lk 19:6). At a dinner at Levi’s house (Mk 2:15), Jesus shares dinner with tax collectors and sinners and is promptly severely rebuked for this by the scribes and

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52 Caritas (lat.): esteem, affection, love for the neighbor. In the NT translated from the Greek agapé: love.

the Pharisees (Mk 2:16). Jesus responds that people who are well have no need of a physician, but the sick ones do. When tired, Jesus asks a Samaritan woman—Jews don’t share things in common with Samaritans, whom they deem to be a lower species—for a glass of water, even when he knows that she has had four husbands already (Jn 4:1-19), Jesus accepts her unconditionally in order to be forgiven by him; there is no need for repentance, not even for the awareness of having sinned. In the same way, Jesus forgives the two criminals who were crucified to his left and to his right and “who did not know what they were doing” (Lk 23:34).

Jesus, in his role of forgiver of sins, is heavily attacked by the Pharisees. They accuse him of blasphemy, since it is only God who can forgive (Mk 2:6-7). Jesus, however, goes one essential, and even more provocative, step further. He gives the authority to forgive also to human beings.\textsuperscript{54} Jesus transfers this authority to the apostles and to the community of the church (Mt 10:1, 16:19). Every human being is not only able to forgive, but is explicitly expected to forgive (Mk 11:25). Forgiveness of the trespasses of others is explicitly mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:14), as is the love for one’s enemies (Mt 5:43). Ultimately, it is God who forgives. Hägerland describes Jesus’s role in forgiving as that of an agent, through which God acts.\textsuperscript{55}

Christology and Reconciliation in the New Testament

Reconciliation refers to the healing of broken relationships. In the New Testament it is the translation of katalasso/katallage. As such, it is most often used by Paul in a theological, christological context, pointing to the relationship between humanity and God, who reconciles humankind to himself through Jesus’s death and resurrection. Three layers of reconciliation might be differentiated here: (1) in Jesus, God reconciles his people to him. (2) reconciliation points to reconciliation between members of the Christian community (Mt 5:23-24); (3) God has reconciled all of humankind to him by his life, his death and his resurrection: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into

\textsuperscript{54} Tobias Hägerland, \textit{Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins: An Aspect of This Prophetic Mission} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 179.

\textsuperscript{55} Hägerland, \textit{Jesus}, 181.
one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:13).

Like creation, reconciliation, too, has to be placed in an eschatological dimension. Crucifixion points to an ultimacy and, within a time frame, it points to resurrection and ascension. Next to the christological and theological dimensions of reconciliation, Schwöbel\textsuperscript{56} adds a pneumatological dimension. Here, within the concept of the triune God, it is the Spirit through which God’s love floods our hearts. God’s love is manifested in accepting his Son’s sacrifice and in forgiving humankind for its trespasses. Forgiving stems from God’s compassion for his creatures. The broken relationship between Creator and created is healed by forgiveness. This broken relationship is described by Kärkkäinen as a “primordial alienation between God and humanity,” reconciled through his Son’s suffering and death, which lead to his resurrection and ascension and beyond.\textsuperscript{57} Though crucifixion and resurrection are final events, soteriologically and eschatologically, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews (9:24) speaks of the continuation of the intercessory ministry of the ascended Christ as well as the hope of his return (Heb 9:24). God’s forgiveness not only restores the relationship between him and humanity, but, within an eschatological perspective, it offers a firm base for such a perspective, in the form of “a new covenant-based relationship of mutual love and commitment.”\textsuperscript{58} God’s message of love is exemplified by not sparing his Son from crucifixion and by raising him from the dead on the third day. Forgiveness of the sinner is possible through God’s love, which makes love in all its dimensions possible. Luke (7:47) illustrates it when he describes a prostitute who, while Jesus dines in a Pharisee’s home, lovingly washes and anoints his feet—something the Pharisee did not do—and she is forgiven her sins “because she has shown great love.”

\textsuperscript{56} Chr. Schwöbel, “Reconciliation: From Biblical Observations to Dogmatic Reconstructions,” in C.E. Gunton, The Theology of Reconciliation (London: T&T Clark, 2003.)

\textsuperscript{57} V. Kärkkäinen, Christ and Reconciliation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 358.

\textsuperscript{58} Kärkkäinen, Christ, 365.
DAOISM AND CHRISTIANITY: AN INTERRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

In exploring interreligious perspectives, hermeneutical injustice is one of the most serious pitfalls. All too frequently, cross-connections or even universal concordances between religions are established by putting them in a Procrustean bed. These so-called concordances often simply do not exist. In this chapter, I place Daoism and Christianity in an interreligious perspective, approaching both religions in a frame of their singularities. There are deep and fundamental divisions in their answers to creation, to the human condition, and to suffering. Christian dualism and Daoist nonduality almost make for different worlds.

Harmony

According to Campenhausen, the Christian concept of creation has to be conceived as a *creatio continua* in the sense of *creare est semper novum facere*. Creation has to be placed into a soteriological as well as an eschatological perspective. A clear perspective is offered to those who have followed Jesus and they too will sit on the thrones, close to the Son of Man.  

Christianity is fundamentally dual; God’s authority is external to humankind and to the universe. Humankind and the universe are subordinate to God. The Hebrew Bible presents a God who speaks and a God who listens. It presents a God who punishes and a God who cares.

In the narrative of Daoism’s cosmogony, there is a beginning and yet, as the classical Daoist text says, there is no beginning; the beginning is called “mysterious” and “nameless,” a synonym for “dao,” the Way. The human being does not have a special position. Humanity was not exclusively created. The human being, in Daoism, which is neither theocentric nor anthropocentric, is part of the universe. All beings evolve gradually from chaos, and as such there is no essential, let alone a hierarchical order between humans, other living beings, and material objects: all these are intimately interwoven. Harmony, in Daoism, refers to an interconnected living system of balance and equilibrium.

60 Mt 19:25-28.
Harmony is not a concept foreign to Christianity, though it has a different connotation. Here, harmony manifests as a balance between God, Adam and Eve, and nature. Adam and Eve still are innocent, they are “not-knowing.” They are in full accord with God’s admonitions. Within a hierarchical system and Yahweh’s covenant, God and humans are in harmony, as long as the humans maintain the covenant. Harmony for humans is dependent on their obedience to God’s prohibitions.

Where the Christian God does care about what humans do or don’t do, Daoism places the person in an universe that is entirely beyond morality: “Heaven and Earth are not Good,” as the daodejing remarks, people are nothing but “straw dogs,” ready to be burnt after the festival is over. Like all organic material, people die. As a biological fact, they transform into organic matter of a different form, continuing, in a harmonious way, the dynamics of the universe of which they, forever, are and will be a part.

The Christian narrative is linear. It knows, in the garden of Eden, a harmonious beginning, teleologically it is future oriented, it knows an harmonious ending: salvation is promised as the kingdom of God, people of good intention will sit on the thrones next to God. The Christian narrative is a soteriological “exodus,” leading from original sin and dependency to freedom.

In contrast to Christianity, the Daoist narrative is an universe that is in constant flux. While the Christian model is future-oriented, pointing to regaining God’s paradise of harmony, the Daoist model is characterized by “returning,” as I have shown earlier. It is a returning to our original state, to innate nature, to the Dao.

Harmony can be lost. Christians lose harmony by revolting against God’s laws through their sins. In Daoism, “not knowing” and “non-action” instead are emphasized: transcending the right versus wrong. Christianity in its essence is a religion of relationship. It spells out not only the nature of the connection of God with the human being he created but also defines the ingredients of human relations. Here, caritas is the most fundamental element. Daoism, on the contrary, is a religion of personal cultivation, the person being part of the vast universe of matter without morality. Christianity is both theo- and anthropocentric: any relationship requires an “other” in order to be a relationship. Christian and Daoist are confronted with the source of harmony as God or as the Dao, respectively, of which
both are a sacred source to be acknowledged and respected. Infringement in the unicity hereof leads to a broken connection and thus to the loss of harmony.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation points to God who reconciles humankind to him through sacrificing of his son in crucifixion. Christian reconciliation implies a twofold relationship, from God to humans through Father and Son. However, on an interrelational level, harmony between God and the person is precarious and unstable; it may be lost any moment through sin where the individual’s dependency on God shows itself in a fundamental way.

In the nondual way of Daoism, an interpersonal model of reconciliation does not exist. The individual does not have an exclusive relationship with other singular human beings. The individual is not cherished as such, not being exclusively created; she is like a straw dog, nothing more or nothing less than part of the greater cosmic unity in which she is embedded together with all that exists.

Notwithstanding this cosmocentric position, Daoism does imply a soteriology, as does Christianity. In contrast to Christian linearity, however, the Daoist soteriological model is circular. Christianity’s active need of atonement and restoration of damage as a sequel to sin is opposed to Daoism, which emphasizes nonaction, *wuwei*. It is, paradoxically, through nonaction, that the Way, soteriologically, is realized as a returning to the Source, to the “Uncarved Block,” to the Dao, and thus to harmony. The person might be “reconciled” to cosmic harmony. Here I use the word “reconciliation” in its literal sense. The Latin preposition *re* means again or back. The verb *conciliare* means to connect. Indeed, the human being can be reconnected, can be reconciled to the harmony that she has lost.

Reconciliation, in the Christian sense, involves an active dialectical and dialogical participation. Where there is a teleological *activity* on the one side, Daoism points to stillness as a reunion with the Dao, to be reached by *nonaction*. From a Daoist perspective, interfering action can only lead to disruption. In contrast to an interpersonal, action-oriented dialectic of reconciliation based on *caritas*, the Daoist practices individual self-cultivation through apophatic meditation.
CHRISTIAN AND DAOIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY DISCOURSE

Both Christianity and Daoism cherish harmony in a soteriological way. Both offer, albeit along different routes and on different preconditions, points of application for reconciliation and the restoring of harmony. Does this imply that their respective teachings have any relevance at all for contemporary identity discourse? Do they have contributions to offer that could make a difference? And, above all, do they have any legitimation to have a voice that merits to be heard in the discourse? These are painful questions indeed. Christianity has been foundational and instrumental in establishing identity conflicts in the first place. Having created a problem, how could Christianity be part of a solution, as it is based on dualism as the basic cause for conflict?

There have been, however, clear voices within Christianity that emphasize the brotherhood or sisterhood of all beings. One of the most classic examples is Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), who focused on Jesus’s humility, poverty, and simplicity.61 It was Francis of Assisi, too, who taught that caritas and compassion are the essential ingredients in any form of reconciliation, be it in the natural, the interpersonal, or the sociopolitical realm. The Franciscan ecological position on the intense, intrasystemic connectedness of everything created, human and nonhuman, is reflected in the Daoist cosmic vision of the Dao. Francis’s namesake, Pope Francis, in his encyclical Fratelli Tutti (2020),62 raises the question whether it is possible to be Christian without believing in God. By posing the question, an affirmative answer seems to be implicit.

The question must be raised concerning in which ways Daoism and Christianity would have to speak in order to be able to contribute to the contemporary discourse on identity in a secular world. Could both of these religions build meaningful connections not only with the inner circles of their proper adherents but, more importantly, with all those outside of

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these religions? The modern church tries this in two ways, by focus on adaptation or by focus on faith.

One of these ways is that Christian Scripture is frequently eliminated, changed, or replaced by more “adaptive” readings, as in so-called ecotheology. In this way, Christian teachings within an universalist framework are generalized and watered down to one-size-fits-all. This results in the loss of individuality.

A second method employed by the church to be able to participate significantly in contemporary discourse presupposes faith in God. Greiner advises the church to oppose modern rationalism and to emphasize the mysterium fidei. Exclusion of the ones who do not believe in Christ is certainly not the way to reach out to “the other.” Instead, following the way of Francis of Assisi, the way of humility and caritas, nonbelievers should be included in the discourse, not excluded.

Daoism, globally, is a rather minor player. It doesn’t have command over important online networks. In contrast to Christian theology, which is chaired in all major universities worldwide, to my knowledge there does not yet exist a chair in Daoist religion in Europe.

In order to have a voice within global identity discourse, both religions within a perspective of hermeneutical justice must be “timid,” as the daode jing counsels; they must be modest, as Francis of Assisi advises. The risk is that, in this way, nobody will hear their voices and thus no contribution is possible. Nevertheless, there is a chance that even modest voices may be heard, not by becoming louder but by being clear and sincere.

Another question is whether and how wuwei and caritas could be operationalized in ways that would make them a relevant contribution to the contemporary identity discourse.

Wuwei frees humans from interference and disruption, because they have come to understand the sacredness, the wholeness, and the interconnectedness of all nature. In stillness, a mindset of wuwei may be cultivated where whatever presents itself is embraced and where identities, respected in their instable, nonpermanent, and fleeting singularities, are ultimately transcended.

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Christianity, in its turn, offers more instrumental pointers of action. These actions may be placed under the heading of caritas, the essence of Jesus’s ministry, implying the welcoming of the stranger. A “returning” home is envisaged in a perspective of redemption. In caritas and in wu wei, reconciliation is instrumentalized between the singularities of human and nonhuman beings that are part of a universe in which they participate together.

Where Daoism discards the concept of an independent self, the Christian concept of “other” has necessarily to be redefined. The antinomy of self and other underlies identity conflicts. Within a paradigm of the harmony of interconnectedness, human beings share humanity with each other in an attitude of hospitality that is one of the many faces of caritas: the other becomes similar. At the same time, in her singularity, the other is different. In reconciliation, difference and similarity are undivided within the presence of the other. Mbembe puts it succinctly: “A politics of humanity is fundamentally a politics of the similar, but in a context in which what we all share from the beginning is difference.”

Harmony and reconciliation, as Daoist and Christian contributions to the identity discourse as they manifest in wuwei and in caritas, as action and non-action, are circular and complementary. Both express caring, hospitality, and a respectful insight into the interconnectedness of existence that must not be disrupted. It is precisely at this point that the Way is shared by Saint Francis and the Daoist Sage.

**Summary**

In this article, contemporary identity discourse is highlighted within both a Christian and a Daoist perspective of harmony and reconciliation. The pitfalls to be encountered when entering into this discourse are elucidated as: hermeneutical injustice, inclusivism, universalism, and Orientalism and Christian supersessionism.

*Harmony* is discussed within the Daoist religion as “the abode of all hidden essences,” the Dao, the mysterious source from which everything stems and to which it returns in a cosmic system of interconnectedness.

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and complementarity. Action and knowledge as well as desires make for the loss of harmony, while noninterference with and non-disruption of wuwei restore harmony within an apophatic meditational space of self-cultivation. As a role model for the implementation of harmony, the Daoist Sage is presented.

Reconciliation is highlighted within the Christian religion. Reconciliation is placed in the context of the Hebrew Bible, focusing on the concepts of liberation, covenant, sin, and atonement, and, in the ministry of Jesus, placed in a christological context, emphasizes caritas.

Within an interreligious perspective, the Daoist concept of harmony is presented as an interdependent, living system of balance and equilibrium, while, in a binary connotation, Christian harmony depends on the maintaining of God’s covenant by his people. Christian and Daoist approaches to reconciliation are described as complementary in the sense of a Christian action-oriented approach toward restoring a relationship with God or fellow human beings and a Daoist quietistic one emphasizing the person’s returning to the harmony of the Dao.

The potential contributions of Daoism and Christianity to harmony and reconciliation are critically evaluated as to their relevance for contemporary identity discourse. From a vantage point of humility and modesty, both religions could contribute by emphasizing the non-disruptive stance of Daoism, which is wuwei, as well as by instrumentalizing the Christian notion of caritas. In order to pollinate global identity discourse, a caring hospitality is needed in which the other is welcomed in her singularity, based on the interconnectedness of all beings, within an eschatological perspective of returning to harmony, exemplified by the person of Francis of Assisi and his spiritual brother, the Sage, the Daoist ideal.

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