

**A Sermon Given by
His Holiness Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc
At the Tây Ninh Temple.**

Lunar Calendar: 15th Day of the 7th Month - Year of the Monkey
Western Calendar: 16th August 1932.

My Dear Caodaist Brothers and Sisters,

For a year, Caodaism has been in trouble. This in-fighting degrades the noble purpose that has been assigned to our religion by God. So far, I have not made any apologies. Some of you may therefore think I have taken the side of some of the current Caodaist senior dignitaries rather than support some other camp. Additionally, slanderous rumors have recently been spread about by a number of rebellious Caodaist schismatics. I do not need to elaborate upon these rumors or even spend time refuting them. Let these issues be judged by people who can see them with a clear conscience. There is one thing, however, that I am sure about: I am certain that I have never been partisan. Generally, people who take one side or another do so because they want to attain something from somebody, they want a share of power, a particular benefit, to win friends, or plot against us. Obviously, Caodaism has no fame, there is no privilege or power for you to pursue here. Some might say yes there is, but these are fake holy men who live only by stealing from others.

In real life, no-one dares declare that they are out to pursue power and benefit. This is insane. If they did, we would keep away from them. Instead, they pretend to be of high morals. They do this to seduce those of us who are honest. It is then that they can achieve authority over us and steal the hard-won possessions of the honest.

These are the ones who deploy virtues like slogans. Predictably, they begin their campaign by criticizing others. This is how they show off their righteousness. Righteousness! Righteousness! It is righteousness, you know, that helps lots of heroes rise to become kings of the nation. For example:

King Jie became immoral, so Tang of Shang was able to overthrow him and found the Shang Dynasty. King Zhou of Shang was also immoral, so Wu of Zhou overthrew him and became King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty. King You of Zhou was far too immoral, so other nobles were able to defeat him. We can see that the rulers of The Six Kingdoms grew too immoral, so Ying Zheng united China and became the King of Qin. But then the Qin Dynasty itself became too immoral, thus Liu Bang was able to found the Han dynasty. Emperor Xian of Han was immoral, so Cao Pi was able to overthrow him, and he became the emperor in his stead, and so it goes...

Righteousness is so powerful that the evil-minded take advantage of it for their own benefit. Nevertheless, a wise person never falls for the tricks of these evil people. Therefore, when Zhuge Liang gave a flattering eulogy at Zhou You's funeral, Shiyuan, who knew Zhuge Liang's true intentions, did not show any grief.

Like Shiyuan, I have turned a deaf ear to the rumors spread by these rebellious Caodaist schismatics. I simply chuckled to myself as they did what they could do to speak ill of me behind my back.

The only thing that concerns me is that they use this slogan of righteousness, which is both a Confucian and Caodaist principle, to trick others into believing that they are genuine and holy people. Fortunately, everyone knows that they are imposters. Now, I am going to discuss with you what is the Dao.

What is the Dao?

The “Đạo”¹ is a term temporarily used to identify or refer to the spiritual realm. Our Confucian forefathers said: “*It is the mystery of the relationship between God and His creatures.*”² Confucian scholars promote and contemplate the principle that says: “*God and Man rule the world together.*” This is the secular law for human societies. In light of this, there should be a mutually supportive relationship between the religious life and the secular life. Man must cultivate himself to be as righteous as God. The way to do this is also called “Đạo.”

Shintoists worship nature spirits and promote the principle that “*Sincere prayers will be granted.*” This practice is also called the “Đạo.” Christians aim at saving people, saying that God is within Mankind. Therefore, a love for the people is equal to the love for God. The practice of this is also called the “Đạo.” Taoists try to achieve calmness by seeking out a quiet refuge, they explain that our minds are blunted because of the disturbances we suffer in life. The way to achieve this calmness is also named the “Đạo.” Buddhists hold that consciousness, which allows you to reason, keeps you too attached to the physical world. This should be eliminated so that you can gain enlightenment. How to achieve this detachment is also called the “Đạo.”

According to one of the Confucian four noble books, the *Zhongyong*³ (*The Doctrine of the Mean*) we read: “*What God confers is called Nature; How to live in accordance with this Nature is called the Path; the regulation of this path is called Instruction.*” Let us break this down:

What God confers is called Nature: God grants to humanity both our nature (or our “souls”) and our destiny. It is not only

¹ The utmost principle of the universe, a religion, the way to practice a religion.

² Do we know from which Confucian text this is found?

³ A Confucian Classic, by Zisi, a grandson of Confucius.

humanity but also other living beings who have souls granted to them by God. How much spiritual advancement a soul is able to achieve decides how good or bad that person's destiny shall be.

How to live in accordance with this Nature is called the Path: most humans have to struggle for food and clothes in their community. As such they sometimes become too materialistic to know the true Path. Nevertheless, a few of them, who are full of wisdom, know that they must live in accordance with the Path in order to unite with God.

The regulation of this path is called Instruction (education or religious cultivation): those who follow the Path either teach themselves or learn from wiser persons. The techniques of these wiser persons gradually form into communities called religions. Thiệu Khương Tiết⁴ added, “*Superior people are instinctively good, so they do not need any education. They are Saints; Average people will become good if properly educated. They are virtuous people. Lower than this, people will never become good though properly educated. They are of small mind.*” Therefore, only Saints can teach themselves to become virtuous people. All the other ranks of people need some kind of education or religious guidance.

Who is God?

God is the most high and lofty one. He is powerful enough to create the universe, humankind, and all the other living beings. He is the father of all life, the lord of all souls. He is the king of all divine beings. He is the supreme being that all peoples on earth turn to in their worship. He is as mysterious and as infinite as the pace he creates. His nature is as incomprehensible and unknowable as the universe. You can partly understand this when you consider what

⁴ Or Thiệu Khang Tiết, a Chinese poet and researcher (1011-1071)

humanity has created so far. The more you ponder upon the nature of God, the more fearsomely miraculous it all seems.

In both Europe and Asia there are a large number of highly educated people who do not believe in any religion. They want to seek the answer to the question of life on their own. They have thoroughly examined the material world in order to find out who God is. The more they study, the more confused they become. At last, they have to exclaim: “*God is absolutely high! God is infinitely great!*” They are so disappointed that they often want to give up. However, they are compelled to carry out further research for two reasons: first, they want to know the system to which they belong; second, the evolution of the universe inspires their desire for more knowledge. Due to the difficulty of their task and while researching on their own, they resign themselves to joining a religion like ordinary people in spite of each religion’s particular regulations. They accept whatever the new religion says about God though it may sound scientifically unacceptable. They do this because they know that their so-called superior education has been ineffective in studying the nature of God up until this moment. Sometimes these highly educated, but indecisive, people have to give in to more powerful political forces.

One example of this is Galileo Galilei. He was an Italian mathematician, physicist, and astronomer from Pisa. He has been called the father of modern science. Having seen the swaying chandelier in the cathedral of Pisa, he created the pendulum. He also developed the thermometer, the hydrostatic balance, the law of cosmic movement, and so on... In 1609 he made a telescope to examine closely the heavenly bodies. Using that telescope, he could present supporting observations to prove the heliocentrism of Copernicus (the astronomical model in which the Earth and planets revolve around the Sun as the center of our the Solar System). But Galileo’s work shocked the Catholic Church in Rome, who supported a geocentric system that claimed that the earth was the

center of the cosmos. The Church wanted to ban him, so they decided that the theory by Copernicus was heresy and ordered Galileo not to support it. This he promised – but he later wrote a book, arguing for heliocentrism and published it in Florence. Because of this, he was tried by the Inquisition and was forced to recant his theory when he was 70 years old. After signing the confession to recant the idea that the Earth moved around the Sun, Galileo allegedly muttered, “*And yet it does move.*” He was then placed under house arrest. He went blind and died in 1642. Alas! What brutal repression against such a talented man! The reason for his fate is that ordinary people do not possess enough intelligence to perceive the grandeur of the universe, much less be able to assess Galileo’s evidence. So, who has the truth on their side, the Inquisition or Galileo? As you can see now, the one who held the truth suffered a great deal because no one understood his evidence! Now, our religion (Caodaism) experiences the same suffering as Galileo did: we can hardly provide the evidence for the existence of God.

Since creation, nobody has ever seen God. He is the mighty and invisible creator. It is a most precious reward for someone, even for very advanced divine beings, to be with God. This is well understood! Everyone wants to achieve a close companionship with such a significant intellectual, not to mention the fact that they can achieve this with the Supreme Being. However, there has been no concrete evidence that such a meeting has ever taken place! Some fear him because they understand the injunction: “*for whatever a man sows, so shall he also reap.*” Therefore, they guess that there must be someone who rules the world. Some love him because they see that everything in nature has been forged for the benefit of the people. Some admire his talents because he reigns over the universe without bias and without leaving anyone behind.

However, there are people who hate and blaspheme God. They are too unworthy to be mentioned here. There are some religious

founders, who are instinctively religious, these are people who used to be close to God in heaven or who have attained enlightenment. On earth they naturally believe in God even though they have only briefly heard of Him. They even cry tears of love when someone mentions His name. It is almost impossible to describe this kind of affection.

Except for the founders of great religions, most people are just curious. Some of these think God is only an imaginary being (I do not dare judge these people. Think twice and judge them for yourselves, please!). These people may follow some doctrine which takes advantage of God's name for their private benefit. They do not believe in God at all, but they may form a weird kind of religion out of his name! This is acceptable if they carry out deeds based on their conscience and it is fine if they ignore the Master of this conscience (i.e. God), but it is never fair if they are called on to judge themselves. Therefore, a few people contend that God does not exist. They say that their bodies are controlled by their brains and there is nothing left of any of us after we die. Therefore, they do not believe in any religious doctrine. They respect the progress of the material world and their target to aim for is nothing but earthly happiness.

To this point, you might be really upset and question this attitude saying: "*Where do those people come from and why do they reject their origins?*" Following from this, there might ensue an endless argument in which we humans will exchange what we think is the most logical answer. We can argue this point forever, the argument itself will get us nowhere. Why? Because what we think and what knowledge we are able to attain appears only in light of God and His plan. How much knowledge about God we gain – this was already determined by Him. Our finite mind will never comprehend the Infinite or God in any complete way. We are like a frog at the bottom of a well who thinks the sky is a small circle shaped like the mouth of a well. Consequently, my dear brothers and sisters, you should know that this matter is beyond belief. It follows then that

we should tolerate what others say about God. You Caodaists are so lucky to be taught by God by means of the mystery of séance. This process also is far too miraculous for the public to understand.

Oh dear! It is hard to tell whether ghosts, Buddhas, Satan, or God comes through in the voices of these séances, isn't it? Some say it is ghosts, but we say it is Buddhas; some say Satan, we say God, yet no one can offer up truly unquestionable evidence!

On many occasions, God has instructed us that we should be very cautious about distinguishing between genuine and fake seances. In addition, He has said you can only have a successful séance with the contribution of a medium.

Hence, were the divine messages from God or from the medium? From the Buddha or from the medium? From Satan or from the medium? From ghosts or from the medium? Actually, there is no certified way to tell which is which. That is why some believers - those who have not learned about Caodaist esoteric practices because of its difficult-to-master techniques – have received fake messages from the séances that they have held. Especially those séances conducted without the permission of the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council. Look! Even at the Caodaist Inaugural Celebration, some evil force could enter our séance. If that can happen, then unauthorized seances were surely controlled by Satan! That is why the Caodaist dignitaries under the Hiệp Thiên Đài organization - those who had been chosen to be the Caodaist mediums by God - had sometimes to be ashamed and bear the humiliation of supposedly producing false messages. These accusations mean that they have not been trusted enough by other Caodaist believers! Please, be generous enough to tolerate them in the way that God does. Brothers and sisters, please!

Unlike Caodaism, some religions maintain that God has no image, has infinite power, and can do what He wants. Those contradictory

opinions should confuse you all. Therefore, I would like to literally quote the poem from a divine being, who in one lifetime was incarnated as the great poet Victor Hugo in France (for us he is Nguyệt Tâm Chơn Nhơn⁵ who resides in the Quảng Hàn Cung⁶. He taught me the nature and the authority of God in creating the universe and all living beings. These are the verses he gave us:

Poem Given through Séance 20th of April 1930, 1AM

Hugo:

My respects to you Hộ Pháp,
They are coming to slander you
To push, once more, our brothers into chaos.
They are out to make you miserable but
By doing this they will only increase your renown.
Oh, what it is to be so close to traitors!
But it is just for this that we were born to lead.
Hộ Pháp – let us move on from this
Give to me your questions.

Hộ Pháp:

I wish to be instructed on the origins of our Master
And of his powers.

Hugo:

It is not easy to understand this mystery,
The eternal quest to find an answer is no longer clear.
He may have, I tend to think,
Many more universes than ours – worlds to infinity.
These would be more or less vast than ours
But the life forms and beings would be the same.
One of these would be more advanced -
From the point of view of spirits and humanity.

⁵ Nguyệt Tâm - lunar spirit, Chơn Nhơn - enlightened person.

⁶ The moon.

At one stage, it would look much like ours
 But with progress would become a great example.

In all its heavens, beauty would reign,
 Its beings would be by greater part divine,
 Peace and harmony would rule its lands
 Its inhabitants would live ignorant of the word “war.”

Nothing is relative here, all is clear:
 Great souls would compete in the tasks of escalating virtue.
 All production would be centered on science and wisdom,
 And the strength of each soul would master human frailty.
 These higher worlds would not need law
 United, as they would be, under divine faith.

Death would be vanquished by a higher conscience.
 Nothing would distinguish the living and the dead.
 The love of each being would be widely proclaimed,
 Souls and men would be united now in holiness.
 There is amongst us, in a certain fashion,
 A place where this kind of life is germinating.
 Where you will be able, one day, to perceive its great importance.
 And our own earth will be raised to a higher level.

Hộ Pháp –
 When will the earth achieve this benefit?

Hugo:
 So that you have an awareness of your possibilities
 I will give a sacred and metaphorical explanation.
 From purgatories, it begins in the ranks of the blessed,
 But will take a long time to become the land of gods.
 If we want to know the origins of our master
 You have to be with him, to penetrate his nature.

No spirit has a perfect inside into this.
 Even Buddha worked from assumptions.
 Now, don't take my instructions seriously,
 I only pass on what various spirits have been thinking but
 Suppose our creator, at his very start,
 Was just a soul living in one of these other universes.
 His mind must have made so long a journey.
 From matter, he rose to human form, and then to sage.
 Through the ranks of spirits, he passed each stage
 Then finally enters into the full mystery of Creation.
 Through his successive lives, He develops a power
 That makes him master of Wisdom and Science.
 He knows also to surround Himself with the best minds.
 They form His court of assistants and friends.
 Once His heaven developed its full power
 He traversed infinity with his escort.

Hộ Pháp:
 So, he had a heaven of his own?

Hugo:
 Yes, each of us has our demarcated domain.
 We make it with the strength of our own mind.
 Souls and beings that emerge from our karmic state
 Form in this way our own sky, our own republics...
 But the people in these worlds are rarely faithful to us
 For all this is conditioned by our original error.

As long as we neglect the secrets of its own purification process
 We leave open our skies to such terrible demons.
 So, we must ask – where does Satan, the great devil come from?
 If we look for the truth of this and disregard the folk tales on this
 It comes surely from the process of the divine –
 That our creator could not make it purely sacred.
 In this way it is the rule that those close to us are our betrayers

And through jealousy, or envy, or simply by wicked capriciousness.

Ah, you have, Hộ Pháp, a cramp in your hand –
Let us talk again tomorrow.

Continued 21 April, 1930

This kind of ill-speaking never ceases
But now that we are considering our divine master
Give no thought to these pathetic men
They will come around when they grow some common sense.
I will continue to develop my point of view on Genesis
With great respect to those who look kindly upon you.

We begin in a place of darkness
It is stagnant, noiseless, with an absence of movement.
Inside a gas which is neither steam nor liquid
Sleep these molecules at the height of their lethargy –
They are enveloped in an overwhelming cold...
No creature can live in this, no matter can grow.

Hộ Pháp:

Can we say that this is the form of water
Spoken about in the Christian version of Genesis?

Hugo:

Yes, it is the kind of gas that we call hydrogen
More or less dense – which make this the part that is most clean.
To say that the spirit of God floats above the waters –
It is in this sense that the word can be understood.
With his astral body which is made of light
He illuminates these inert chemicals with his warmth.

A layer of oxygen then forms and moves into action
 As the contact of the two gasses sparks a detonation:
 The divine fire is born as the sacred waters are formed.
 And under the effect of these two elements, everything is
 transformed.
 These burning materials form a gas, the gas burns.
 This produces fluids, and the pure form of these give us vitality.
 It is this vitality that holds a power
 To give to spirits in both birth and death.

What marvels all this certifies for us!
 What mysteries will it go on to keep for us?
 Everything comes from the hand of our master
 - Though it be very difficult for us to comprehend.
 As the divine fire is fed, and as it grows
 It throws its cloudy nature out towards infinity.
 So, throughout the universe this fire is seeded
 These compound within itself to break down in such a way
 That its clouds now flourish into suns.
 This creates worlds and then more worlds with all their aspects.
 And where the consciousness of God and his light animate all things
 Beings are completely penetrated with it - even the smallest of
 lifeforms.
 The spirit of the divine has expanded throughout all.
 Those who are alive carry with them part of this whole.
 Of these fluids radiated with divine light
 The most impure metamorphosize into stones.
 In earth, plants, animals, or in flesh –
 The most dense in air and thee more pure in ether.
 Intellect is in this way given to all creatures,
 As is due to their states, one dose - more or less pure.
 The soul is in this way created as is the body.
 And it is this vitality that determines each soul's fate.
 From here you can understand the rest
 So, it is here that I will stop.

Hộ Pháp

May I ask, however, if everything comes from our master,
Shouldn't everything be perfect? Why is it that we can
Still see the imperfections of nature?

Hugo:

What are these imperfections?
How can I explain this to you...

Hộ Pháp:

The wickedness and uselessness of beings
Just as much of humans as of animals
Or even plants.... their morality cannot be
Easily appreciated.

Hugo:

Nothing is bad or useless in nature.
To maintain life, we need to eat.
And our good God loves us, his children, ardently.
With this great love, he provides us with the means to live.
For their progress he creates great challenges.
They then need, equally, the means of defending themselves.
Have you seen on this earth a man who is truly pious?
What is wicked for us, is useful to them!
How can we forge great sages into being?
What else is there in the pages of human history?
A fierce and relentless struggle between the weak and powerful.
And so often the strongest become the greatest.
The opposition of these two gives us an ascending progress
Of the ideas and revelations of the learned.
Our dear world is purely relative.
'Wicked' and 'Useless' in this way are merely qualifiers.

Upon this globe each of us has a place;

The worlds of other heavens are like classes –
 The universe is thus a school for souls and spirits –
 The more they frequent it, the more erudite each soul becomes.
 But those who too often skip school
 Must double the years they spend here and repeat their studies.
 And all the souls hope to read this eternal book –
 For it contains the secret to becoming immortal.
 The goal is to complete the challenges of our spirit's career:
 But it takes time, many conditions, and careful conduct.
 To move from the fallen world to pure divinity
 We must make our way by holding fast to eternity.
 The result comes from understanding what we must know,
 And then understanding, by our conscience, the men and women
 we must become.

The difference in personalities exist for a reason –
 These help us to make particular comparisons.
 In your assessment of these, make room for tolerance,
 Class each soul according to their aptitude.
 Separate out those who are clearly human.
 Then set aside those who seem already a little divine.
 Elevate to the priesthood your best examples.
 Teach by all your talents the unbelievers,
 Do not hate them if they fall into error.
 Look only to the salvation of their souls!
 Always be devoted to giving humanity
 These two truths: first Love and then Eternity.

Reading these verses in depth, we can see that none of the divine
 beings have fully comprehended the origin of God. Even the
 Buddha could only take a guess at this! Therefore, you might very
 well commit the sin of pride if you think yourselves more
 knowledgeable than the Buddha, ponder this if you keep discussing
 this issue.

However, we further understand the secret message from God “*Children, I am you; you are Myself*” and “*You can evolve up to My level*” or “*I would step down Myself so that you could climb even higher*”. Oh! How great is the grace of God! The more I ponder, this the more I love God. He is always eager to share his divine power with his children, even those who are traitors to him.

It is no wonder then that a human father would also do the same for his children. Despite the difficulties and the suffering, he simply wants his children to grow up to become the best adults they can be. Who can develop their family career sees this. One day, I asked His Holiness Nguyệt Tâm Chơn Nhơn⁷ why God who is the Father also calls himself Master. That’s confusing, I thought, because father and master are different.

Hugo answered:

He is at the same time father and master,
 This is because it is from him that we receive our whole being
 He nourishes our body with all that is healthy.
 And produces our spirit from that which is divine.
 In him is all source of science and wisdom.
 The progress of each soul is his work without end,
 The basest materials are jewels to his eyes:
 Vile spirits he is able to forge into gods.
 His law is love, his power is justice.
 He knows only of virtue and nothing of vice.
 As a father: he gives to his children his vitality
 As a master: he gives to them his own divinity.

⁷ Nguyệt Tâm - lunar spirit, Chơn Nhơn - enlightened person.

Generally, it is common for parents on earth to consider their children's education the highest priority. Parents always think it fortunate if their children become more educated than they are. To this end, they select the best schools and seek out the most qualified teachers for their children. Similarly, the whole universe is the school of God. It is where souls can attain more knowledge. They need to learn the following: first, that they know themselves, second, that they know the nature of others and finally: that they evolve by means of rebirth through the world of suffering. When they do this and achieve the highest level of divinity, they will finally achieve, through profound insight, the divine secret of the universe and will achieve eternal life.

It is not unrealistic for you, one day, to achieve what God has achieved today by the ongoing process of self-perfection. Cosmic space is vast enough for all souls to establish what is called a "personal realm." Both the divine and earthly laws are alike. They are connected to the cycles of birth and death and of establishment and destruction. In order to rise to become a Creator, souls have to incarnate on earth many times. In doing this, they build their material world. This allows them to develop their spiritual world. This rule is very much in force among souls, who incarnate on earth, without any exceptions. Souls have to keep learning the lesson of God eternally – even though they know that the material world will be destroyed sooner or later. As long as they still breathe, they keep trying harder and harder.

If asked whether someone has mastered that secret power of creation or whether everyone has to be subjected to it, God will answer, "*Everyone should share the suffering of life so that their next incarnation will be better. That is why everyone is forced to learn to become a Creator although they might not achieve it.*" If God, the Being of Infinite Love, decides that we are responsible for other people's souls, that is too difficult for us. But being an everyday father, you will make any sacrifice, even the sacrifice of

your life, so that your children might have a better future. Being a Creator or a God (that is, the father of all souls) can be intensely more miserable because you want your children to become Buddhas or Gods, although – alas – they may only want to be ghosts or evil forces. How disappointing this must be!

Think about it! You and your spouse day and night worry about your children's future. You hope that one day they will find work as a governmental officials or become a well-to-do or notable person. Unfortunately, they grow up and go off the rails. It is terribly disappointing, isn't it? Similarly, our master expects that humanity will have a very bright future. Although agonizing, he sends his children into the world of suffering so they may learn their lessons. He particularly wants humanity to pass the examination of good morals and ethics and from there be elevated to the position of a divine being. It would be so painful for him to know that his children are trapped without hope in the great sea of suffering.

Establishing Caodaism here on earth, God the Father resembles a human father. He sends his child abroad for a higher education. He hopes they will graduate, then return home and continue the ancestral line. Against this hope we find that child does nothing but attend parties. They spend all their money and then write and ask for more. If a family member visits them, they might pretend to study hard. They stay abroad for a long time, but they end up with no useful qualifications. They do not reply to mail, they never come home. Full of anger, the father wants to disown his child. However, seeing the child's old belongings around him in the house, the father misses them so much that he, at last, has to go overseas to visit him. It is all these in this poem:

Being a stranger in a distant country,
The father is respected by no-one
Though in his native home

He might be a great man of power.
Traveling alone,
He is sometimes scorned by people.
Then, he is so surprised
To discover his son living in poverty,
Each day struggling with his own family.
The son is too often broke,
Having nothing more than a part-time job here or there.
Sometimes he has to fight
For filthy manual work.
He didn't study hard at college,
Dropping out after a few months.
Yet persuaded by some cunning fellows,
He blames his father for the bad situation he is in.
He vows to reject his father despite his poverty.
And decides to remain far from home
To die abroad.
He blames his brothers and his relatives,
His country and his hometown.
He never dreamed of the far away land of his birth.
Because there are too many debts to return.
He resigns himself to being exiled in this foreign land,
He tries to ignore all insults laid at him.
Now he knows he has to offer
Due compensation to his parents, but he cannot.
Day and night he suffers.
Because he turns his back on his wealthy clan.
In only a little while
He will surely die miserable and so far from home.
Wearing ragged clothes,
Walking in bad weather
And asking everyone for directions.
The father
Comes to the boy's house with a walking stick.
He then finds out that the son is too scrawny

And that there is not enough food for his family,
Not enough rice
Nor enough water.
Being homeless,
The son has to live among bandits.
The grandchildren are dirty and wild...
And terribly foul-mouthed.
The son has frequent disagreements with his wife.
He has been spurned by his friends.
And only the companionship he has now is that of scoundrels,
He tries to solve all his problems with his fists.
Ignores both his conscience and his God,
He worships Satan instead.
Seeing that, the father cannot help but cry
And thinks the son has abandoned his dad.
The father secretly returns to his hotel,
Without letting the son know he has come.
If the son could do business,
He'd help him build a large firm.
If the son was a builder,
He'd help him found a construction company.
If the son was even a bellboy,
He'd help him build a hotel.
If the son was a part-time worker,
He'd give him a happier life instead.
He wants to give his son a good career -
So that his grandchildren can live a better life.
He even files enough of the required documents
So the son can be a company manager.
Finally, the father writes a letter
Telling the son to work hard, to develop a career,
And not to reject his origins.
Back in their original hometown, the father hopes
The son, now being well-to-do enough,
Will try to live so as to be worthy enough to equal

The names of his ancestors.

Those past family members who were all wealthy and reputable.

He will try to further his education

Even if he is a boss now

Because the family only wants sages,

Not money.

But being afraid that the son will feel embarrassed,

The father decides to avoid all public appearances.

He only tells the son to remember that

The father will see the child again in their hometown.

(by which, I mean, God wants us to reattain, at the very least, our previous divine positions)

Caodaist believers, please try to think twice when you seek to comprehend the meaning of this poem. I have just told the story of a human father, who is so wise and who ardently loves his children. He makes plans to help his son succeed in life. That is a perfect metaphor for how our God the Father, (he who established Caodaism in the Third Age of Salvation) can help original souls reattain their former divine positions. If you looked at such a father on earth, you must really be so affected by his desires and, conversely, seriously criticize the son. That father is our God *the* Father and the son represents all living beings, or more exactly humanity itself. Understanding this you now know how much more serious are the sins you commit. I myself cried while writing this sermon.

Oh! My colleagues and I (i.e. the current Caodaist dignitaries) have been frequently and diligently taught by God from the very the beginnings of our religion - Caodaism. We have not seen his face, but we have had abundant evidence for his existence. These are the lessons we have received on the noble ideas of justice and love he had given us. While teaching us, he only ever made appeasements for us or lamented our slow progress. He has never gotten angry. Since we used to focus mainly on our struggle for life in society and

we did not practice a religion, we did not understand his lessons at all. What bad students we were! The incident in the Gò Kén Pagoda⁸ took place because of our stupidity. Fortunately, God only lamented what had happened, he did not punish us. He knows for sure we are all still foolish and mostly unfamiliar with practicing his religion. Since then, he has tried harder to teach us. He did this until we are assigned to the guidance of His Holiness Li Bai.⁹ Thanks to these lessons, we now fairly understand what the Đạo is and we are able to spread Caodaism to the public.

To do this we only took our orders from God. We do not spread Caodaism for our own power or to achieve higher ranks. We all still try to fulfill our responsibilities, and as we go, we ignore criticism and slander.

I myself was the one who least believed in spiritualism. So, it was with great curiosity that I tried to test the mediums several times. Being afraid that I could fall into sin for this, I prayed that I would be punished by God. God, however, would never punish me. He just smiled. Doubting the honesty of the mediums, furthermore, I decided to perform automatic writing by myself at home. Sitting alone at night, raising a pen, I waited for God. At last, I was moved to tears when God came and taught me so many lessons. When Caodaism commenced, I usually judged someone because God had given me responsibility for the scales of justice on earth.¹⁰ I still do not know how to use these scales! Especially when there was a disagreement between the Hiệp Thiên Đài and Cửu Trùng Đài or when the Thập Nhị Thời Quân¹¹ did not complete their assignments. I presented a petition with the names of the failing dignitaries to God, requesting that they be punished.

⁸ Also Từ Lâm Tự, Tây Ninh, VN, where Caodaism's Inaugural Celebration was held.

⁹ The spiritual Pope of Caodaism.

¹⁰ According to Caodaist Canonical Code, Hộ Pháp is the Judge of the Caodaist Tribunal.

¹¹ The Twelve Zodiacal Superiors – 12 dignitaries under the Hiệp Thiên Đài who assist in the direction of souls.

Here is his answer: *“Being a human, you have a divine responsibility. I assign each of you a different task according to your ability. I do not force the talented to carry out the easy tasks nor the less talented to do the hardest things. Even the less-talented are necessary. I have innumerable ways to assign tasks. This is because I know you all. But you do not have these options. If you assign the weak a heavy workload, you’ll be responsible for their failure, perhaps even their deaths.”*

Now, brothers and sisters, what would you do with my “scale of justice”? How would you use it? Once, our doctrine was criticized by non-Caodaists. They even wanted to destroy Caodaism. Again, I presented another petition to God. I asked him to punish them.

God replied by asking me, *“Supposing you had some children, the older of whom are wise and pious and the younger of whom are cheeky and immoral because they lack intelligence. What would you do?”*

I answered, *“I’d resort to give them advice and then punish them. If I completely failed, I’d resign myself to having to disown them.”*

He said, *“Disown them?”* He smiled, *“While they are so young? You can’t do that! You are too good a father!”*

After some seconds of silence, He asked, *“Why don’t you say ‘Kill them!’?”*

I immediately recalled what I had written in my petition, and I felt really frightened. Seeing this, he further explained, *“Whenever I come to earth to establish a religion, people always satirically criticize myself. They have even killed me in human form. However afterwards they recognized their errors and joined that religion. They always do! So, don’t be angry! They blaspheme against me simply because they don’t know what they’re doing.”*

Brothers and sisters, you can see how much mercy God has for mankind. And can you see how hard it is for me to work as the Judge of the Caodaist Tribunal!

Oddly enough, a religion established by such a Being (i.e. Caodaism) can result in the development of schisms.¹² In these break-away movements, their “God” rebukes other people. I’ll let you judge whether the words of their “God” are spoken by a genuine or by a fake God!

Therefore, we understand God the supreme being based on the beliefs we have of him. You Caodaists may give many more explanations, for example, you might say many other people also worship God. They call him by various names, and everyone acknowledges that the supreme being, the lord of all souls, must surely exist. All souls evolve up and down the divine hierarchy until they get to the highest rank. This rank is as high as that of God. To do this each soul has to pass through innumerable hells, pass through uncountable levels of life, and through so many incarnations within so many different earths before they can enter the spiritual realm and attain the position of a genie, a saint, an immortal, or a buddha.

Each soul evolves independently towards their own higher divine status. Only after death will you be able to discover if your divine rank is high or low. Thus, it is too late for those who did not lead a moral life or who did not believe in God while here on earth. Not having attained any divine positions, these souls will have to reincarnate. They may tell themselves to fix things this time around. However, they will forget everything upon coming down to earth. Like ordinary earthly people, they will keep pursuing fame and

¹² He implies a Caodaist schism, but not say which one.

benefits – and be so obsessed with this that they sometimes ruin the religions that have been established by God!

It is part of the miraculous mechanism of the cosmos that everyone forgets their previous lives when they reincarnate. This is the keystone of rebirth. If this didn't happen there would be no people on earth and no Đạo (no religions) setting us up for salvation. The divine mechanism of the Đạo is powerful enough to give birth to Siddhartha Gautama.¹³ It was he who taught people how to free themselves from the cycle of rebirth. This might help those advanced souls, who are about to become Buddhas, but it will not help all other living beings. As a result, there are still people on earth struggling to attain a heavenly position. According to what we think of God's divine mechanism, or the Đạo, it can be described in this way:

Thanks to the sun's heat, water transforms into clouds. Clouds freeze and transform back into water (rain), which fills the earth, seeps into the ground and dissolves the salt. The salty solution then moves to springs, rivers, and oceans to nourish all beings.

In this cycle, we can see that the sun's heat is God. Water is humanity. The clouds are divine beings (Geniis, Saints, Immortals and Buddhas). The springs and rivers are religions, the oceans are the universe and salt, in this analogy, is life.

According to their responsibilities, all living beings create and perfect the world so that it can be the classrooms for souls to evolve and evil spirits to do penance.

Karmic debts run this divine mechanism. This is similar to what was done by the ancient Vietnamese kings. They allowed prisoners to explore unknown areas, develop the wasteland, and become

¹³ The Buddha.

residents in these places afterwards. The souls incarnating in this world are of many kinds, most of them have significant amounts of karmic debt to pay back. Only a minority of these souls that come down are volunteers, that is, elevated souls who come down onto earth willingly to achieve an even higher divine status by working here. Thanks to these high souls, the earth can develop into a more advanced planet. All such souls have contributed much to develop the earth. They do this with the altruistic aim of reducing human suffering - no matter what may be the particular reason for why they incarnate here. According to their own status, each soul incarnating on earth has a different level of intellect. This is predetermined by God. Therefore, since time immemorial the only thing divine beings have tried to do is to help living beings become more advanced or more moral – even though the souls they seek to help may have committed many sins. Consequently, we Caodaist dignitaries must always tell ourselves that we have an important responsibility that has been assigned to us by God. God usually instructs us by saying:

“People suffer because I use unhappiness to make their minds evolve. You should praise successful people and pity the unsuccessful because even the worst ones are still able to help me perfect life. It’s good to fulfill your responsibilities without committing a crime and it is good to do the right thing with a clean conscience. You should act based on your good mind. I hope you will return to me one day. As long as people love each other, I am most satisfied.”

God wants us to have mercy on all living beings just as he does. Through observing Caodaist law, we should pity the people who have a lower social status than us by treating them fairly. Being reincarnated on earth, people have a body, which is materially equal to all other bodies. If we want to be Caodaist dignitaries, we have to try to become sages in this life and for all our life. That is so difficult while we struggle to survive in these earthly societies. We

should always examine our lives and demand of ourselves that we do not lie to others. To perfect ourselves, we must not lie to, criticize, or mock anyone.

We Caodaists practice Caodaism based on our faith in God - while other groups worship the intellect and conscience. That is just another version of the Đạo. God knows this. So, he provides his eye (the Divine Eye) as the spirit of conscience for our movement. Our Divine Eye and the symbols of other groups are not alike. Some say that creating the statues of Divine Beings - including Buddha and God – that these can control people’s minds. Other groups make lots of similar statues to cheat people while they themselves never really believe in the divine beings that these statues refer to. It is their earthly thoughts that they mold into the shape of God. As a result, their “God” resembles a human in both form and characteristics. That is why their “God” can get mad, hate, grumble, scold, imitate, etc. We Caodaists cannot believe in such a God, can we?

Some rebellious Caodaists, who left us and formed Caodaist schisms, used to be our incompetent senior dignitaries. They are gone, but they left a debt of several thousand đồng.¹⁴ This must be paid by the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council. The evidence of all this is still kept here. They surely know that the donations of the average Caodaist believers is not very large because the Vietnamese are generally quite poor. Yet the Sacerdotal Council has to feed believers and other people, especially our Cambodian adherents. A rough calculation shows we have spent approximately 200,000 đồng so far.

In addition, the expense of our missionary work, especially in France, cannot be publicized for some unspeakable reason. The leaders of the Minh Chơn Lý¹⁵ know that is our Achilles heel, so they falsely accused the Sacerdotal Council with stealing believers’

¹⁴ A rather large sum of money at that time.

¹⁵ A Caodaist schism that severely attacked the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council in Tây Ninh.

money. They also insulted the current senior dignitaries and urged people to boycott the Tây Ninh Temple.

In fact, the Caodaist Temple in Paris, France is about to be inaugurated with two Giáo Hữu (priests), Monsieur Bellan and Monsieur Abadie. They will be the building's managers. Though it is still financially supported partly by the Sacerdotal Council, it can work effectively now on its own. Therefore, I am very confident to tell you about this. There are several other Caodaist temples overseas, but I cannot give a full report because these buildings have not been finished yet.

Hence, the slander of the rebellious schisms will be fairly judged by people's conscience. The budget of our Caodaist organization is still very tight. It mostly comes from the donations of our elder brothers. Some of these have had to sell their houses or their rice fields to help. Fellow believers! Be cautious about the rebellious schisms and the craftiness of those who have broken away. Please! They viciously intended to cut away the financial support of our religion, but as the saying goes "Man proposes, God disposes." They have failed in their aims to stop us. I can conclusively say that Satan's incitement to chaos in this instance has failed.

Personally, I would like to say something to those rebellious Caodaists:

Back when I led a secular life before my religious vocation, I never exploited anyone. I never took a bribe (while working in the Public Service) nor did I sabotage any other religion. In my free time I always tried to support as many of my fellow countrymen as I could. I would like to give some explanations here because all their accusations against myself seemed, somehow, reasonable. They accused me of establishing the Phạm Môn, the Phạm Từ, and the Phạm Nghiệp for my own purposes. Thankfully, everyone knows that I am a very honest soul. What I have done is for the

underprivileged, not to enrich the Sacerdotal Council. I have put all this in my will and sent it to the Sacerdotal Council.

At the start of Caodaism, His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm and I tried very hard for our community to have a large budget and buy the properties that are now obviously a part of the religion. I can now swear to the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council that I have never wrongly taken any money. I have never interfered in the Caodaist administration or its finances. These are all the responsibility of the Cửu Trùng Đài.¹⁶

Since I resigned my government post and came to Tây Ninh to join the Caodaist religion full time, my family expenses have been covered by my personal savings alone. However, there were anonymous letters insinuating financial malfeasance. They suggested that my family became well-off because of Caodaism. They wanted to drive me out of the Holy See - just as they had done to His Holiness Cao Thượng Phẩm. Worse than that, more recently I have received 14 anonymous letters. Had I not been a Caodaist priest, I would have looked for another means of livelihood and moved out. These dishonest people even took me to court over my properties – all of which I bought with my own money. For example, I established the Phạm Nghiệp¹⁷ with my own money and with some loans from my relatives. It is used as a vocational school for everyone. The Phạm Từ¹⁸ was an ancestral temple of my family located in Cẩm Giang.¹⁹ This was built with my brothers' money. The money left over from this construction was used for a small Caodaist Temple in Cẩm Giang, which is also the launch area for Caodaist believers from the Southern provinces. On top of all this, God regularly tells me to take care of the elderly, the disabled, the

¹⁶ **Cửu Trùng Đài**, (九重臺 - Nine-sphered palace): The executive body of Caodaism which takes charge of the administration of the religion and its missionary activities. It also refers to the temple of nine degrees of evolution or nine spheres palace. The palace of nine divine planes, or the palace of nine degrees of evolution.

¹⁷ Phạm - his family name, Nghiệp - career.

¹⁸ Phạm - his family name, Từ - an ancestral temple.

¹⁹ A village 10km from Tây Ninh.

homeless, the orphaned, the poor, the unemployed and so on. Therefore, I established a nursing home called the Phạm Môn on a 3-acre plot of land that had been offered by the Chánh Phối Sư.²⁰ I bought another 8-acre plot of land for the Hiệp Thiên Đài dignitaries to build their homes. The term Phạm is supposedly said to be my family name by the Caodaist schismatic critics, but it is not. Phạm Môn (梵門 in Chinese) refers to an entrance to Buddhism. Below is some more work I have done for our community. I have established an orphanage called the Cấp Cô Độc Viên²¹ but this has not been finished due to a lack of money. I also built a vocational school called the Quảng Nghệ.²² This is for poor children and located on an 80-acre plot of land called the Thái Bình Thánh Địa.²³ I purchased another piece of land from Lê Sanh Cẩn. He is a dignitary under the Sacerdotal Council of Kiêm Biên²⁴ and built what was called there the Nữ Công Nghệ²⁵ which is for female believers to be cared for and to earn a living.

Having begged in vain to the Cửu Trùng Đài Sacerdotal Council to build a Khách Đình (bungalow) for those wealthy intellectuals to stay in Tây Ninh while studying Caodaism, I had two built myself – one for Vietnamese scholarly visitors and one for Cambodian intellectuals. I do not think we should let these intellectuals live among the uneducated dignitaries - lest they think poorly of our community. I had to resort to various loans for these constructions and I had no support from the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council. All of these constructions are for people's benefit, but those rebellious Caodaists deceitfully accused me of “stealing from the people.” Let this matter be fairly judged by everyone who looks into this! In whatever way they could do so, they have tried to discredit me. They even falsely accused me of committing adultery!

²⁰ A senior dignitary under the Cửu Trùng Đài.

²¹ The garden of Anathapindika, a generous Buddhist philanthropist.

²² Quảng - publicizing, Nghệ - job.

²³ Thái Bình - peace, Thánh Địa - Holy land.

²⁴ Kiêm Biên - Phnom Penh.

²⁵ An handicraft shop for women.

Nevertheless, do not be annoyed, my brothers and sisters! Everyone practices a religion in their own way. In the end, we have to admit that our God is different from theirs and, in the end, beg them to stop making more false accusations.

In this great age of salvation, people have to struggle for life, so there is hatred of all varieties afoot in the world. People are very good at fighting with each other inhumanely. Whenever they take a break or encounter a sad situation, they ponder their fate and know this struggling age is coming to an end. This is why when God came, he taught us to have mercy on others and love people. Mercy and love have been what all people worship, it is no wonder that Caodaism attracted a large number of followers at that time. Unfortunately, the appearance of the Minh Chơn Lý,²⁶ who promote rebellious techniques to develop their power, have caused such disagreements among Caodaist believers. As a result, anger and hatred have recently dominated our religious community. They have sought to ruin the organization that God established. What sabotage! You will see an appropriate punishment will be meted out to them in the near future.

For some years, we Caodaist dignitaries have endured this sabotage, thinking that whatever they did there was still a chance to spread Caodaism and glorify God's name. We were ready to suffer unjustly and all we did was begged them to reduce their hatred. Contrary to our wish, they increased the hatred that they held against us. They continued using every cunning process they could find to attack us. They even tried to sue us. Fortunately, God has granted Caodaist believers enough intelligence to judge all this. Only a few believers have broken away and followed them. In addition, the French government, which respects order, has judged everything based on law. Therefore, they have realized that we are

²⁶ A Caodaist schism founded by Phôi Sư Thái Ca Thanh (Nguyễn Văn Ca) in 1931 in Mỹ Tho.

religiously honest. If we had been under the Nguyễn Dynasty, we would have all been beheaded.

Brothers and sisters,

Why did the rebellious schismatics want to ruin Caodaism?

Why did they form schismatic groups?

Why did they falsely accuse Caodaist dignitaries?

Why did they denounce the doctrine of Caodaism?

For whom are they working?

It is impossible to bring them to a Caodaist trial because they themselves made the Caodaist laws and inserted a special exception for themselves at the same time. They already had a plan to avoid being convicted. Hence, we Caodaist dignitaries are unable to bring them to Caodaist judgement. The case will be left to the following generations to settle. Take care of yourselves and keep practicing Caodaism. Do this, my dear brothers and sisters, to keep the oath you swore to God our Father.

Tây Ninh, July 27th 1932

PHẠM CÔNG TẮC

Signature

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