Caodaism: The Centenary Symposium

Venue: The University of Sydney
Date: Thursday 6th and Friday 7th February 2020.
(with an excursion to the two Caodaist Temples of Sydney Saturday 8th February 2020)
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Historical context:

Close to one hundred years ago in 1920, civil servant and mystic Ngô Văn Chiêu relocated to the island of Phú Quốc at the very south-east of Vietnam. Here he began his spiritual communications with a divine voice called “Cao Dai.” He envisioned the Eye of God – the symbol that would represent a vast new national religion. From these activities, a new era in the religious life of Vietnam was about to begin. From Phú Quốc in 1920, through to 1925 in the neighbourhoods of Chợ Lớn and Sài Gòn, the religion continued to develop. Other spiritualists began contacting heaven through séance and the followers of Cao Đài slowly increased. Then, on Christmas Eve 1925, the new faith was solidified through a universal declaration from heaven. By October of 1926, the faith had burst onto the national consciousness of Vietnam and was officially declared by its followers to the French colonial government.

Context of the Centenary Symposium:

Over the coming six years, the centenary milestones of this 1920-1926 period will be celebrated by Caodaists across the globe, marking 100 years of their faith. This period of celebration and reflection will be inaugurated by a meeting of leading scholars on this religion at the University of Sydney. They will gather on the 6th and 7th of February 2020 to reflect on last 100 years of the religion’s development, on scholarly reactions to it, and on the major themes that will guide the study of Caodaism into the 21st Century.

This centenary symposium will be the first international conference dedicated exclusively to the study of Caodaism. It will provide academics with the chance to reflect on the rise, the complexity, the origins, and growth of this complex and popular system of faith. Contributors will assess the place of this religion in the history of South East Asia during the 20th Century, consider the activities of its diaspora communities after 1975, as well as ponder what the next 100 years in the study of Caodaism will entail.

Confirmed keynote speakers:
- Professor Carole M. Cusack (University of Sydney): Long-time expert on the development of New Religions and co-founder of the International Journal for the Study of New Religions.
- Emeritus Professor Garry W. Trompf (University of Sydney): Eminent scholar of global religions and the history of ideas. Professor Trompf has had a long association with the Caodaist community of Sydney.
- Associate Professor Jérémy Jammes (University of Brunei Darussalam): Author of the most significant recent study of the religion (Les Oracles du Caodai, 2014 – soon to appear in an English translation).
- Dr David William Kim (Australian National University) expert in East Asian religions and director of Bloomsbury *East Asian Religions* series.
- Dr Christopher Hartney (University of Sydney): Author of numerous papers on Caodaism and the Caodaist community of Sydney.
- Dr Bùi Đặc Hùng (California), American Caodaist leader, scholar, and translator.
- Dr Bùi Đăng Cẩm Hồng (California) Caodaist scholar and translator.

The symposium will take place in the Woolley Common Room of the University of Sydney’s Woolley Building and will be fully catered. An excursion to Sydney’s two major Caodaist places of worship, the Wiley Park Temple to Đức Cao Đài, and the Carramar Temple to the Holy Mother will take place on Saturday 8th of February 2020.

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