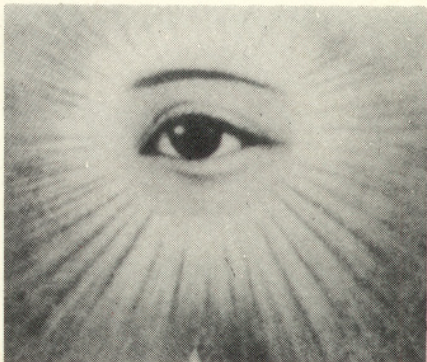


# **CAO DAIISM**

## **AN INTRODUCTION**



**MERDEKA THIEN-LY HUONG DO**

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# CAODAI: INDIGENOUS VIETNAMESE RELIGION

The Cao Dai Faith, indigenous to South Vietnam and officially inaugurated in 1926, originated not with man, but with God. Therefore, the term *Đạo Đạo*, the God Way, is also used synonymously with Cao Daiism, whose fundamental tenets are rooted in other Asian and Western religious movements and philosophical thoughts.

Cao Daiists worship *Đức Cao Đài*. *Đức* is an honorific term meaning Lord, Venerable One, or Virtuous One. *Cao Đài* is another name for God the Father, just as Yahweh which was misspelled as Jehovah in the King James Version, or Allah. Cao Daiists believe that *Đức Cao Đài* is the Creator of the Universe, the Father of mankind and of all religions, such as Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism (otherwise known as Sanatana Dharma), Islam and Christianity. Because He is the Father of mankind, peoples of the world are all brothers and sisters of One Family. This concept of universal brotherhood pervades Cao Daiism. Hence, within the Cao Dai community, the followers refer to one another as brothers and sisters, calling each other *Đạo Huynh*, *Đạo Đệ*, *Đạo Tỷ* and *Đạo Muội* (Elder Brother, Younger Brother, Elder Sister and Younger Sister) to maintain hierarchical unity and decorum. The Eldest Brother of the Community is called *Đạo Trưởng* or *Anh Lớn*. Because *Đức Cao Đài* is the Father of all religions, Cao Daiists accept the teachings of all religions and venerate their divinities. All these divinities, Cao Daiists believe, are messengers of God; they are prophets sent down so that man may know God. The teachings of Cao Dai are therefore inclusive, not exclusive. Cao Daiists worship *Đức Cao Đài*, God the Father, but venerate Buddha, Lao-Tsu, Christ, Confucius, and all other divinities because, as in Judaism, Cao Daiists believe that these divinities owe their origin to God the Father. Although Judaism is monotheistic, gods other than Yahweh are mentioned in the Old Testament, but they are unlike Him in two respects. First, they derived their origin from Him: "Gods are ye, the children of the Most High, all of Ye" (Ps. 82:6). Second, unlike Yahweh, they were transients: "Like men, they shall die" (Ps. 82:7).

One can therefore see that Cao Daiism does not offer a new doctrine. It is a synthesis of the doctrines of other religions, and simply reiterates and further reinforces the concepts of love, compassion, justice and equality.

Cao Daiists believe that God's Doctrine is communicated to man from age to age by various means and by different messengers of God. Although the words may vary, the essence of God's Doctrine is immutable. In summary, therefore, God's Way guides man towards deliverance and ultimately towards salvation. Although Truth is invariable in essence and is independent of time and space, God's Way became cloaked by man's mantle of ignorance and desire. Hence, with time, man gradually deviated further and further away from the essence of God's Teaching or from the God-Path to become a man-made doctrine, a man-path. The essence of God's Teaching, therefore, became obfuscated by man's promotion of self-interest, hatred, and violence. For example, in the Hindu

religion, material wants replaced the importance of spiritual duty. The meaning or the spirit of the rituals, which had at one time provide protection and sustenance to its followers, and largely disappeared. Chants and sacrifices, which should have been available to all, could only be obtained mostly by those who could afford to pay the priests to perform them. In Christianity, during the Middle Ages, those who could pay quaestors for papal indulgences bought their way out of doing penance.

Man further deviated from the essence of God's Teaching by using it to mask aggression. Cao Daiists believe that at one time when the world was vast and communication difficult, many different religions in various parts of the world were established so that man may know God and His Way. These religions were established according to the mores of each segment of humanity, and man practiced their religion in relative isolation. However, as the world became smaller, their religions came into contact with one another and conflict resulted. Wars were waged in the name of God. There were not only religious wars, but territorial conquests all in the name of God. One can see this in the zeal with which the Crusaders and the Moslems went to war, for example. One can also see this in colonialism with its concept of a White Man's Burden or *mission civilisatrice*: manage the affairs of the colored races and teach those heathens to know God. Yet did we consider that these heathens perhaps already know God? It may be with a different name, yet they already believed in the existence of God. Then, of course, the religions deviated from the orthodoxy, creating other branches, and even more conflict resulted. There were persecutions of the Huguenots; there is still contention between the Protestants and the Catholics in Ireland; there is still conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis; and currently, there is the Bosnian crisis. Man also became repressive not only by interpreting but also in his interpreting of God's Teachings. He abused his authority and forgot God's tenet of love and compassion. For example, during the Inquisition, the Church Fathers committed unspeakable acts contrary to all of Christ's teachings. Man with his infinite ability to rationalize, interpreted God's Words to suit his needs and his deeds. God did not teach man to war, to torture, to maim, or to kill one another, but to love, to have compassion, and to treat each other not as infidels, not as heathens, not as whites, blacks or yellows, but rather, as brothers and sisters. Thus, with the world being so small now and with so many religions at odds with one another, each claiming to be the only true religion, *Đức Cao Đài* descended to unify the religions by bringing the quintessence of all the Teachings of these religions back to the Essence with Him as the Founder and the Director of the Faith. In this, Cao Daiism is different from other religions. It is God, not man, who founded a religion. It is God, not man, who directs a religion. This can be seen in the Cao Dai rites, rituals, commandments, religious constitution, Holy Scriptures, organizational structure, and even in its architecture. God directs His religion through the medium, which Cao Daiists will proudly say is the miracle of the century, and in this way, Cao Daiists have direct communion with God.

Let me digress here momentarily. When Cao Daiists speak of mediums and of medium sessions, they are not speaking of the common popular forms of seances or divinations, such as the holding of hands, the calling of spirits to enter the body, and the ouija board. Cao Dai medium sessions are divine sessions -grave, solemn, and dignified- and never to be taken lightly. There are a

series of rites and rituals which must be observed before the beginning and at the end of each medium session. Furthermore, only very few people can become mediums. A medium must be initiated and trained, and must follow a rigid set of rules which includes vegetarianism and the practice of mystic meditation.

Thus, to reiterate, *Đức Cao Đài* brings His Doctrine to mankind directly using the medium only as His writing instrument, instead of using man as His spokesman as He had done in the past. Sakyamuni, after attaining supreme enlightenment, gave man the Dharma which he did not conceive, but which he received by pure knowledge; Jesus Christ had direct communion with God and spoke the Word of God for God; and Mohammed received revelations from God through the angel Gabriel. But with *Đức Cao Đài* as the director and the founder of the Faith, the universality of Cao Daiism is tactfully expressed. *Đức Cao Đài* speaks to man directly. He, not man, is at the head of the religion. He is the Teacher. God the Father is God the Father for everyone and to everyone. We may employ different words to invoke Him as Allah, Yahweh, Jehovah, *Shang Ti*, *Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế*, *Đức Cao Đài*, or God the Father, but in the end, He is not a man like Buddha, Christ, Lao-Tzu or Confucius. Therefore, *Đức Cao Đài* is represented and can only be represented by a symbol, by a Divine Eye. It is the All-Seeing Eye if you wish.

Let me relate to you an anecdote regarding how the Divine Eye came to be worshipped. Governor Ngô Văn Chiêu, *Đức Cao Đài*'s first disciple was asked during a medium session to find a symbol to represent *Đức Cao Đài*. When the Governor chose the Cross, God said: "The Cross is specially reserved for a religion already in existence. You must do some more thinking to find something special. I will help you" Governor Chiêu then asked to be given a week to further study the matter. But by the end of the week, the Governor still had not succeeded in finding a symbol to be used for the Faith. Then, one day, towards the last day of March, around the beginning of April 1921, Governor Chiêu was lying on his hammock in the verandah behind his official residence at Phú Quốc Island. Suddenly before his eyes, a few meters away, appeared a huge Eye, full of spirit, shining brightly like the sun, and surrounded by a bright halo. Governor Chiêu became extremely frightened and covered his eyes with his hands, yet he could still feel the glare of the Eye. He dared not look, but the Eye kept shining even brighter than before. The glare became so bright that Governor Chiêu finally clasped his hands and prayed: "I am very frightened. If You want me to use this as a symbol to worship You, then please let it vanish immediately". After his prayer, the Eye slowly receded and faded away. But Governor Chiêu was still not convinced of what he had seen, so he did not have the Eye recreated in order to worship it. A few days later, once again he saw exactly the same thing. Once again, he prayed that he would recreate the Divine Eye to worship, and once again, the Eye disappeared. After having seen this vision twice, Governor Chiêu had the Eye recreated and set it up for worship.

As you can see, it was God who gave the Cao Daiists a vision of His image to worship. He did not manifest Himself as a man, but as an Eye surrounded by a bright halo shining brightly above a vertical line of sun, moon and star. When *Đức Cao Đài*'s other disciples were so instructed by God,

they became very perplexed. Worshipping an Eye was indeed a strange phenomenon never before seen in Vietnam. The Vietnamese had always worshipped figures--figures of Buddhas, of Christ, of Saints, and of genies--but never an Eye. But then, how can God be depicted as a man without losing His universal quality, and if He does, then how could He bring about the Era of Universal Salvation to redeem all beings?

It is started in the Cao Dai Holy Scriptures that this is the end of the Third Era in the Cycle of the Universe, known as the Era of Annihilation. Let me explain. According to the Cao Dai Holy Scriptures, a Cycle of the Universe consists of three eras:

- 1) *Thượng nguồn* - The First Era
- 2) *Trung nguồn* - The Middle or the Second Era
- 3) *Hạ nguồn* - the Last or the Third Era.

The end of each era is marked by a revelatory period, because God only comes to redeem mankind when man is steeped in sin.

The *Thượng nguồn* or the First Era is called the *Nguồn Tạo Hoá* or the *Nguồn Thánh Đức* (the Era of Creation or the Era of Innocence). In this Era, God created the Cosmos, the Universe and beings. In this era, man was very close to God. It was a time of *lus Naturale* (a concept now obsolescent in the West) where man lived very simply in harmony with nature. When he was thirsty, he drank, when he was hungry, he ate. This was a time of peace. However, with time, man slowly drifted away from God. He became more worldly. He started to want more things, and when he became desirous, he became greedy. When this happened, man slowly forgot God. His conscience had become enshrouded, his mind had become tarnished. Man had lost his natural goodness. When this happened, God revealed Himself and established the First Era of Salvation. During the First Era of Redemption, Dipankara Buddha, Thái Thượng Đạo Tổ, Fu Hsi, and Moses appeared to bring to man God's Doctrine.

The *Trung Nguồn* or the Second or Middle Era is called *Nguồn Tiến Hóa* or *Nguồn Tranh đấu* or *Nguồn Tự Diệt* (the Era of Progress, the Era of Wars or the Era of Self-Destruction). As man become more and more covetous, greed, desire, and passion began to consume him. Material progress led to competition, and competition led to wars, and wars led to social anarchy: "... every man did what was right in his own eyes." Therefore with the degeneration of mores, of tradition and custom, God revealed himself again for the second time. This was the Second Era of Redemption. In this era, Sakyamuni Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Jesus Christ and Mohammed appeared in the world once again to reiterate the Truth to man, beckoning him to follow the righteous path. Yet only the handful heeded their noble teaching, while the rest of humanity, surrounded by the glitters and seductions of temporal life, continued to drift even further and further away from God.

The *Hạ Nguồn* or the Last or the Third Era of the Circle is known as the *Nguồn Tận Diệt* of

*Nguơn Bảo Tồn* (the Era of Annihilation of the Era of Preservation). If there is annihilation, then there must be preservation, for God is life itself. And in this last Era, instead of revealing Himself only to one man and depending upon that person to spread the Word of God, God manifests Himself directly to the world, bringing His Doctrine to redeem all beings. Thus, this is the Era of the *Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*, the God-way of the Third Universal Salvation. And when Caodaists say that this is the Last of Final Amnesty of God, one must understand this to mean only that this is the last time God will reveal Himself within this Circle of the Universe, and this is the last Redemption of this Circle of the Universe. To state it negatively, the Final Amnesty does not mean that God will never again reveal Himself in time.

Thus the Era of Annihilation is evinced by increased cataclysms - natural as well as contrived- such as widespread wars, natural disasters, and strange diseases which pervade human society. Man has sinned so much and the doctrines have deviated so far from the essence that only a very few have escaped from the wheel of Karma and have found their way back to God. It is stated that of those following the Doctrine of the Buddhas, only 600,000 souls have returned to be reunited with God, and of the Doctrine of the Immortals, only 200,000. Thus, instead of entrusting His Doctrine to man as He had done previously, God Himself must descend to earth and Himself bring His Doctrine of Redemption to help emancipate man from temporal bondage. In a medium session on October 27, 1927, *Đức Cao Đài* said:

*“Humanity was suffering from all kinds of vicissitudes, I sent Allen Kardec, I sent Flammarion, as I also sent Elijah and John the Baptist, precursors of the advent of Jesus Christ. One was persecuted, the other killed. Who did it? Humanity. Even My Son was killed by you; you worship Him in spirit but not in holiness. I wanted to talk to you just once during Moses’ day on Mount Sinai, but you could not understand Me. The promise I made to your ancestors for your redemption, the advent of Christ, was prophesied but you did not care to listen. Now I must make use of a greater spiritual agency in order to convince you....”*

This “greater spiritual agency” is the *Đại Đạo*, God’s Way or the God-Way.

*Đức Cao Đài* has promised that if man follows His Teachings, man will escape from the cycle of reincarnation and find his way back and be reunited with God. If man does not heed God’s Words, then there will be annihilation not by God, but wrought by man through his visceral desires. This annihilation does not only mean physical or corporeal annihilation, that is, death, but more seriously, complete annihilation of the soul, that is, the soul will cease to exist and the spirit will be obliterated. One must understand here that for a Cao Daiist, that is a terrifying thought, for a soul to be obliterated means that essence of what is man is also gone. He will literally cease to exist, turning into dust and air. Physical death to a Cao Daiist on the other hand is not an end, but only a continuation of life in the spiritual sense. The physical body may be dead, but the soul lives to be reincarnated or to be reunited with God which is the ultimate goal of every Cao Daiist. Thus, in the Cao Dai registers, there is a birth registry, but no death registry. We do not die, we continue on living. Because of the

seriousness of the soul being obliterated or annihilated, God has descended to redeem not only mankind, but all beings. Thus, because this is the Era of Annihilation and therefore God's Final Amnesty, *Đức Cao Đài* Himself descended to establish the *Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*, the God-Way for the Third Universal Salvation to redeem all of us. The *Đại Đạo* is God's grace. His greatest gift to all beings. It is through His grace that the mystery of God is imparted to man so that man may achieve enlightenment, if not supreme enlightenment, during his lifetime, instead of going through the many *kalpas* as did Sakyamuni Buddha before attaining not only enlightenment but also Buddhahood, which is supreme enlightenment.

Let me explain. Each kalpa is thousands of lifetimes of reincarnation. And with each reincarnation, man is in danger of losing sight of the Way, of committing sins and thereby retrogress, and thus causing a setback, instead of making progress towards enlightenment. The theory of reincarnation is that unenlightened beings are reborn for all eternity, assuming in turn animal and human forms. Not everyone who attains enlightenment become Buddha. A Buddha is one who attains supreme enlightenment, a goal that takes many kalpas and much helping of others before such a rank is attained. Therefore, it was only during Sakyamuni's last life that he became a Buddha, but for that he first had to acquire the knowledge and gain merit over a vast series of kalpas. Yet in this era, to help all beings achieve salvation, *Đức Cao Đài* has granted us this grace with His Doctrine which is capable of allowing us to immediately break away from the wheel of karma, of opening the doors to immortality, of putting an end to suffering, and of ensuring eternal bliss with God. He has also united all the Doctrines under one roof with Him as its head. Because God has descended to earth to direct man's salvation, the pervasive principle in Cao Daiism is "*Thiên Nhân hiệp nhất*" which can be translated as "God and Man joined or united as One" or "God and Man in Unison". In this Third Era of Salvation, God and Man work together to achieve God's Will. And God's Will is now directly communicated to mankind through the use of mediums, instead of indirectly as He had done in the past through that one person who has heard His call or who has achieved that supreme state of gnosis.

Cao Daiism teaches that there are Three Doctrines in all religions, which God has brought back under one roof. They are *Phật giáo* or *Thích giáo* (the Doctrine for the Buddhas), *Tiên giáo* or *Lão giáo* (the Doctrine for the Immortals), and *Thánh giáo* or *Khổng giáo* (the Doctrine for the Saints). The Doctrine for the Buddhas which includes Buddhism and Hinduism, and the Doctrine for the Immortals which includes Taoism, espouse the esoteric way. Hence, in these religions there are such practices meditative self-cultivation, which is an important teaching practice in conjunction with mystic meditation, and vegetarianism.

Meditative self-cultivation means that a person must eliminate all desires and attachments to this world, and develop perfect cleanliness of mind and body. To arrive at this state of inwardness, all emotions must subside. Desire and attachment, sorrow and revulsion, delight and annoyance, love and hatred perturb the surface of the mind, preventing introspection deep within one's consciousness. With attachment severed, with peace and stillness achieved, harmony between the mind and its cosmic source will naturally follow. Therefore, selflessness, disattachment, and emotional calm are the



initial steps to arrive at complete self-knowledge, but to attain spiritual knowledge, gnosis, they must be climaxed by mystic mediation and vegetarianism. For it is through both of these practices that the soul becomes even more lucid and light.

Vegetarianism is required because of a love and respect for life, because of the belief that God is life itself and therefore everything is God's creation and everything has its place in the reincarnation and evolutionary process. Through vegetarianism, Cao Daiists observe their responsibility not to harm or destroy the opportunity of other beings to make progress in their spiritual evolution. Hence, the practice of *ahimsa*, non-killing, is also a very important condition for those following the esoteric way. For example, in India, as the Jains walk, they use a broom to sweep away the insects in order not to step on them. Cao Daiism teaches man to love life, all lives, all beings - creatures, insects, man, and even vegetation. If man could live off air, he should, but because he cannot, he must live off vegetables, the lowest form in the evolutionary process. Cao Daiists also believe that vegetarianism is a means of self-purification. Thus, although complete vegetarianism may be the goal of every Cao Daiist, it should also be stated that a Cao Daiist does not become a vegetarian abruptly. There are different stages of vegetarianism for Cao Daiists - six days a month (*chay sóc*), ten days a month (*chay thập*), and complete vegetarianism (*chay trường*).

These two Doctrines, the Doctrine for the Buddhas and the Doctrine for the Immortals, were originally devoid of rites and rituals, for their goal was the ultimate road to enlightenment, to allow one to escape from the wheel of Karma. Thus, these two Doctrines espouse their followers to abandon the material world and offer their lives completely to spiritual adventure.

The Doctrine for the Saints which includes Islam, Christianity, and Confucianism, espouses the *exoteric* way. This Doctrine focuses on teaching man how to walk the road of man. It teaches man to have love and compassion and justice for other men, and an invisible sense of the dignity of human life. Subsidiary attitudes such as magnanimity, good faith, and charity follow naturally. When Peter was asked to summarize Jesus' life, Peter only had five words to offer: "He went about doing good". Confucius taught that largeness of heart knows no national boundaries. Such a man knows that "within the four seas all men are brothers". And when Mohammed preached the message of God, he preached a message intensely democratic, insisting that in the sight of his Lord, all men were equal. As you can thus perceive, this Doctrine teaches us how to live in perfect social cohesion - the ideal relationship between human beings and the ideal terms of such relations - *caritas* if you will, justice, and equality. The Doctrine for the Saints therefore focuses on man, while the other two, the Doctrine for the Buddhas and the Doctrine for the Immortals focus beyond man.

In Vietnamese there is the word *tu*. Perhaps it can be translated as "the practice of the God-Path", or "the practice of God's Doctrine". This word *tu* encompasses both the esoteric as well as the exoteric paths. And in Cao Daiism, unlike other religions, God has combined these two paths, giving the Cao Dai adept a choice he has never had before - to choose to go either way, or even combine them, called *song tu*. If a Cao Daiist wants to combine the paths, then in his younger years he may

follow the exoteric path. That is, he may marry, have children, have a career, yet lead a just life according to the Cao Dai Canons, which includes a largeness of heart, a sense of *caritas*, and a sense of justice and righteousness. By so doing, he can find peace not only within himself, but contribute to achieving peace on earth, thereby fulfilling God's promise. Moreover, by being good, by doing good, by being honest and charitable, by serving humanity, man is also able to help his spiritual self by requiring all his "debts" contracted or incurred during his previous lives. Then, in his later years, when his duty as husband, father, son, and servant are done, should he wish to follow the esoteric path, then he may do so through the practice of meditative self-cultivation, mystic mediation, and total vegetarianism to achieve a higher level of enlightenment, hoping ultimately to escape from the wheel of Karma in order to be reunited with *Đức Cao Đài*.

In this very brief journey down the path of *Đức Cao Đài*'s Doctrine, we have a sense of God the Father's overwhelming and absolute love for every single one of His children and for all beings. He, always the patient, forgiving Father coaxes, gentle chides, and reminds man the need to receive this love, and in receiving it, letting it flow outward again toward his fellow human beings, to his brothers and sisters. And by so doing, every Cao Daiist believes there will be achieved not only peace on earth, but also an eternal inner peace.

by MERDEKA THIÊN-LY HUONG DO

# THE NEW CANON

*The New Canon* is divided into three parts: Sacerdotal Law, Temporal Law, and the Law of the Hall of Meditation.

## 1- Sacerdotal Law

The Sacerdotal Law consists of eight canons:

Canon I - On the Governing Ecclesiastical Body.

Canon II - On the Adepts

Canon III - On the Establishment of a Congregation

Canon IV - On the Five Interdictions

Canon V - On the Four Great Rules

Canon VI - On Education

Canon VII - On Sanctions

Canon VIII - On the Promulgation of the Law.

Promulgation of the Law

## CANON I : On the Governing Ecclesiastical Body.

*Article I-* At the head of the organization, there is one rank of *Giáo Tông* (Pope), who is the Oldest Brother, empowered to represent God the Father to guide all the adepts in religious as well as in secular life. The *Giáo Tông* has power over corporal matters, but not power over the soul.

The *Giáo Tông* is empowered to communicate with the Thirty-Six Heavens and the Seventy-Two Planets in order to plead for all the followers.

All followers must obey the *Giáo Tông*.

*Article II-* Following the *Giáo Tông*, there are three *Chưởng Pháp* of the three Orders: the Order of the Doctrine for the Buddhas, the Order of the Doctrine for the Immortals and the Order of the Doctrine for the Saints.

Those three are empowered to examine the laws before implementation, whether handed down by the *Giáo Tông* or presented by the *Đầu Sư* (Patriarch). If both parties do not concur, then the laws

must be presented to the *Hộ Pháp* who will go to the *Hiệp Thiên Đài* (House of Communion with God) to invoke God the Father to descend in a medium session in order to amend them.

These three people have the power to examine religious documents before their publication. If any writings corrupt the ethical way of life, then the three *Chưởng Pháp* must disallow those laws.

Each *Chưởng Pháp* has his own seal of order. Each law must bear all three seals before it may be implemented.

The *Chưởng Pháp* must counsel and advise the *Giáo Tông* of his errors. If all three perceive that the *Giáo Tông* has infringed the law, they have the right to submit a complaint in writing to the Holy See.

*Article III-* The three *Đầu Sư* of the three orders are empowered to administer both the religious as well as the temporal lives of the adepts.

They are empowered to draft laws, but they must present them to the *Giáo Tông* for approval. These three must obey the *Giáo Tông*. Should any law go against the welfare of humanity, the these three may petition for abrogation.

If all three *Đầu Sư* sign in disagreement with any law handed down by the *Giáo Tông*, then this law must be returned to the *Giáo Tông*, and he will order the *Chưởng Pháp* to review it carefully.

Each *Đầu Sư* has his own seal of order, and each document must bear all three seals before it may be implemented.

*Article IV-* The *Phối Sư* (Cardinals) are thirty-six in number; twelve in each of the three orders. Among them are three *Chánh Phối Sư* (Principal Cardinals). These three are emowered to administer on behalf of the *Đầu Sư*, but they are not empowered to petition to abrogate a law.

*Article V-* *Giáo Sư* (Bishops) are seventy-two in number; twenty-four in each of the three orders. A *Giáo Sư* instructs the followers in their religious and temporal lives.

A *Giáo Sư* must look after the adepts as an elder brother would his younger siblings. A *Giáo Sư* keeps the registers of all the adepts, and attends to the marriages and the funerals of the followers. In a large district, a *Giáo Sư* has the authority to administer and officiate at religious services as would a *Đầu Sư* or a *Phối Sư*.

A *Giáo Sư* is empowered to present an entreaty to God regarding those laws that injure humanity or to plead for the mitigation of those laws. A *Giáo Sư* must be close to the followers like siblings in a family helping one another.

*Article VI-* A *Giáo Hữu* (Priest) propagates the teachings of God the Father, is empowered to request

for the mitigation of the laws, and is empowered to oversee several temples in the minor provinces.

*Giáo Hữu* are three thousands in number, one thousand in each order. These number should not be increased or decreased.

*Article VII-* A *Lễ Sanh* (Deacon) must have good character, and is selected among the adepts in order to perform services. A *Lễ Sanh* is empowered to perform the initial ceremony of enshrinement for each adept. One must be admitted into the rank of *Lễ Sanh* before aspiring to enter into the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

*Article VIII-* Should a *Đầu Sư* aspire to become a *Chưởng Pháp*, all three *Đầu Sư* must vote to elect him.

Should a *Phối Sư* aspire to become a *Đầu Sư*, all thirty-six *Phối Sư* must vote to elect him.

Should a *Giáo Sư* aspire to become a *Phối Sư*, all seventy-two *Giáo Sư* must vote to elect him.

Should a *Giáo Hữu* aspire to become a *Giáo Sư*, all three thousand *Giáo Hữu* must be vote to elect him.

Should a *Lễ Sanh* aspire to become a *Giáo Hữu*, all the other *Lễ Sanh* must be vote to elect him

As the rank of *Giáo Tông* (Papacy), the *Chưởng Pháp* and the *Đầu Sư* may compete, but they must submit themselves to election by all the adepts. Only when God the Father bestows this rank, may this law be waived.

The laws that govern the establishment of the Sacerdotal Council are based on God's Teachings.

## **CANON II:        On the Adepts.**

*Article IX-* To seek conversion, one must have two adepts of good standing recommend that person to the head of the parish. These two adepts must instruct and guide the new adept in the way of the faith.

*Article X-* Each Temple from this day must administer the Vow of Faith. As for the new adept, they must be registered on that same day, and must immediately take their vow before God. It is compulsory that they know their prayers and understand the laws that have been promulgated

*Article XI-* The head of the parish or the cleric representing that person must come to perform the Initial Ceremony of Enshrinement for the new adept.

*Article XII-* After conversion, a person is called an adept. There are two levels:

- 1- The first level still leads a secular life, has a family, works for a living, but must maintain a vegetarian diet of six or ten days a month, must obey the Five Interdictions, and must observe the Temporal Law of the *Đại Đạo* (the God-Way). This level, the *Hạ Thừa* ( the Primary Level), is comprised of those who only follow the Faith.
- 2- The next level observes a completely vegetarian diet, abstains from killing, and obeys the *Tứ Đại Điều Qui*, the Four Great Rules. This is called the *Thượng Thừa* level (the Secondary Level )

*Article XIII-* At the *Hạ Thừa* Level, whoever observes a vegetarian diet of ten days or more, may be admitted into the Temple to receive meditative teachings for purifying himself.

*Article XIV-* The governing body of the Faith, beginning from the rank of *Giáo Hữu* must be chosen from the adepts who have achieved the *Thượng Thừa* level.

*Article XV-* At the *Thượng Thừa* level, according to the God-Way, adepts must let their beard and hair grow, dress simply, wear all white cotton, or the color appropriate to their own order. They must also be thrifty.

### **CANON III:        On the Establishment of the Parish**

*Article XVI-* Wherever there are a large number of adepts, about five hundred people or more, it is permitted to establish a separate parish and erect a separate oratory. One cleric will be appointed to administer the Temple.

*Article XVII-* Only the *Giáo Tông* has the authority to establish a parish.

*Article XVIII-* The adept of a parish must obey the instructions of the administering cleric of the congregation in each and every matter of the Faith. They must not take the law into their own hands, let they violate the law.

*Article XIX-* Every month on the two days of *Sóc Vọng* ( the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> days of the lunar calendar), adepts must assemble at their local oratory to attend services and to listen the sermons, except those who have been excused by the administering cleric of the parish.

*Article XX-* The administering cleric must perform Divine Service four time a day according to the four hours: the *Tý, Ngọ, Mão, Dậu* exactly at six o'clock in the morning, at noon, six o'clock in the evening, and at midnight. One sequence of bell must be struck prior to the ceremony. During these hours, adepts may attend the prayer sessions if they wish.

## **CANON IV:        On the Five Interdictions.**

*Article XXI-* After conversion, a person must perfect his or her virtue. That person must observe the Five Interdictions which are:

- 1- Do not kill, that is, one should not kill any living things.
- 2- Do not rob or steal; that is, it is forbidden to take without permission, cheat, or borrow without returning, or conceal stolen goods, or pick up lost objects, or covet property wrongfully gained, intentionally injure others for self-gain, gamble and swindle others
- 3- Do not commit adultery; that is, it is forbidden to take or attempt to take another's spouse, lead a lascivious life, incite others into committing immoral acts, be aroused by a woman's beauty, or speak flirtatiously, except between husband and wife.
- 4- Do not indulge in gluttony; that is, it is forbidden to eat and drink excessively, get intoxicated and disrupt the peace of the community, or always pine for good food and good drink.
- 5- Do not utter injurious words; that is, it is forbidden to lie, to deceive others, to be boastful, to expose other's faults, to turn a falsehood into a truth, to weave a truth into a falsehood, to ridicule, to denigrate, to malign others, to incite anger, to bring suit against others, to speak vulgarly, to curse others, to denigrate religions, and to break promises.

## **CANON V:        On the Four Great Rules.**

*Article XXII-* Observe the following Four Great Rules to perfect one's conduct:

- 1- Obey the instructions of Superiors, and superiors do not feel slighted by the counsels of subordinates. Treat each other with civility to maintain harmony. If a mistake is made, repent and accept the consequences.
- 2- Do not be boastful of one's talents. Do not be arrogant; forget oneself to promote the welfare of others. Help others to succeed in following the Way. Do not bear grudges. Do not suppress the meek and gentle.
- 3- Keep a clear account of money matters. Do not borrow without repaying. Behave respectfully towards superiors: superiors teach the subordinates with civility, subordinates counsel the superiors with humility, modesty, and respect.
- 4- Be respectful equally in the person's presence as well as in his absence; do not show respect before, then contempt afterwards. Do not remain indifferent without words of reconciliation

as fellow adepts engage in rivalry. Do not make public private. Do not attend to personal matters and disregard collective ones. Obey the law. Do not take personally the instructions of superiors and the advice of subordinates. Do not use authority to repress the capabilities of others.

## **CANON VI:        On Education**

*Article XXIII* - The Oratory will build schools to teach general and religious education.

*Article XXIV*- The method of instruction and the organization of the school will be dealt with a separate law.

*Article XXV*- Only those who graduate from this school will be subsequently appointed into the ecclesiastical ranks.

## **CANON VII:        On Sanctions**

*Article XXVI* - Minor infractions of the law will be judged by the head of the parish, and he may administer the “quì hương” measure (kneeling before a burning stick of incense before God’s altar, and depending upon the gravity of the infraction, the transgressor must kneel until half, or one or more than one stick of incense have burned) and the transgressor must recite the “Prayer of Repentance”.

*Article XXVII*- If the infraction is a serious one, or in the case of recidivism, then the transgressor’s offense must be submitted to the General Council of Clerics for judgment.

This council is headed by a *Đầu Sư* (Patriarch) or a *Phối Sư* (Cardinals) of the order to which the transgressor belongs and there are two clerics of the other two orders to deliberate. This council has the power to excommunicate.

*Article XXVIII*- In secular matters, if discords among adepts take place, they must be brought before the head of the parish for arbitration.

*Article XXIX*- Members of the clergy who have transgressed the laws, must be brought before the Court of the Three Faiths for judgment.

*Article XXX*- The Court of the Three Faiths is headed by the *Giáo Tông*, with the three *Chuông Pháp* to deliberate. A *Đầu Sư* of the transgressor’s order is to present the charges. A cleric of *Hiệp Thiên Đài* (House of Communion with God) acts as defense attorney.



*Article XXXI-* This court is empowered to demote or to excommunicate.

## **CANON VIII:                    On the Promulgation of the Laws**

*Article XXXII-* Six months after the Promulgation of this law, all adepts must abide by all the articles.

Exceptions are:

- 1- Those people whose trade or profession violates the laws have a grace period of one year to change their trade or profession.
- 2- Members of the clergy who have not yet been able to follow a complete vegetarian regime are given a grace period of two years to train themselves. All the Canons that God the Father have already reformed must be obeyed as changed. In all other matters the Old Canons must be followed.

## **2- Temporal Law**

### **CANON IX**

Temporal Law consists of twenty-four Articles.

The person who has been baptized must observe the Temporal Law as follows:

*Article I-* When one follows one Master, one is considered as a child born of one Father and must love one another, maintain close contact with one another, help one another, treat one another with sincerity and honesty, and assist each other in religious as well as in secular matters.

*Article II-* Once converted, an adept must forget all previous grudges; must avoid jealousy, envy, and lawsuits. An adept must be tolerant and live in concord with one another. Should any differences arise, an adept must willingly listen to the counsel of the head of the congregation.

*Article III-* An adept must uphold the *Tam Cang Ngũ Thường* (the Three Duties between King or country and subject, father and son, husband and wife, and the Five Virtues: benevolence, civility, righteousness, knowledge, and loyalty) which are the foundations of Nhon Đạo, the Ethics of Man: A man must uphold filial piety to his parents and harmony with his siblings, loyalty, civility and righteousness, and honor and dignity; a woman, while unmarried, is her father's dependent, while married, her husband's dependent, while widowed, her son's dependent. She must also be educated in the arts of domesticity, of decorum, of speech, and of conduct.

*Article IV-* In social relationships, one must learn and exercise moderation, compassion, civility, humility, and tolerance.

*Article V-* Towards fellow adepts, one must nurture social relationships with each other to form a closed bond. Adepts who still lead a secular life must remember two events, funerals and weddings.

*Article VI-* Marriage is the most important event in a person's life. One must choose a spouse among the adepts or those who agree to be baptized, and only may wed after baptism.

*Article VII-* Eight days before the Wedding Ceremony, the father or the representative of the groom must have a notice posted at the local Oratory informing the other adepts in order to avoid unforeseen incidents in the future.

*Article VIII-* After the Wedding Ceremony, the parties of the bride and groom, must go to the Oratory to have the "Matrimonial Solemnization" Service performed.

*Article IX-* After the promulgation of these laws, adepts are forbidden to take concubines. If a spouse passes away, then the widower may remarry.

Should the wife have no offspring to continue the family lineage, the *Giáo Tông* in his leniency may permit the husband to marry a second wife, only on the condition that the first wife be the principle contractual party to this union.

*Article X-* Except in cases of adultery or infractions of filial piety towards the in-laws, spouses cannot divorce.

*Article XI-* Newborns must have godparents chosen for them so that they may be protected in the case they become orphans.

*Article XII-* A child one month or older must be brought to the local Oratory to receive the Sanctification Rite and be recorded in the Registry of Life.

*Article XIII-* Parents must send their children age six to twelve to school for general or religious education

*Article XIV-* Whenever there is death of an adept, those within the parish must render assistance and share their grief with the family in mourning. Each parish should establish its own cemetery.

*Article XV-* The head of the parish, if invited by the family of the deceased, must come with the other adepts in the parish to perform the Requiem Service for the departed soul according to The New Canon and to accompany the funeral procession to the cemetery.

*Article XVI-* In funeral matters, the family should not be extravagant, should not let the corpse remain

uninterred for long, should not use bright colors except white, should not hold noisy feasts thereby marring the solemnity and the sorrow of the occasion.

*Article XVII-* In the offerings for the departed souls, sacrificial animals should not be used. It would be more spiritually beneficial for the departed soul if only vegetarian food is offered. The only music permitted is that which is acceptable to The New Canon. Mourning garments are exactly as of old.

*Article XVIII-* The requiem service for the departed souls must be performed at the local Oratory during the periods of the *Cửu Cửu* (literally, Nine Nines - a requiem service that is held once every nine days for nine times starting from the day of death), the *Tiểu Tường* ( a two hundred day requiem service, starting from the day after the end of the *Cửu Cửu* service), and until the *Đại Tường* ( a three hundred day service, starting from the day after the *Tiểu Tường* service). The adepts of the parish, if invited, must come to pray for the repose of the departed soul.

*Article XIX-* Should a misfortune suddenly befall an adept, the other adepts in that parish must voluntarily contribute, each according to their financial ability, to render assistance until the crisis passes.

*Article XX-* From the day of the promulgation of this Law, adepts must not hold any trade or profession that skills or harms life. They must not hold a trade or profession that is morally corrupt. They must not write or publish stories that are pornographic. They must not sell strong alcohol and narcotics which are poisons that denigrate man.

Those who are already engaged in this trade or profession must find ways to terminate this trade or profession.

*Article XXI-* Adepts must dress thriftily, according to their means. They should also use cotton and reduce the use of silk.

*Article XXII-* Adepts in the parish must counsel any adepts who violate the above-mentioned interdictions. If those counseled do not listen, then they must be reported to the head of the parish so that the administering cleric may counsel the transgressors.

*Article XXIII-* If an adept repeats an offense, or does not forsake his bad behavior or his forbidden trade or profession, then that person must be excommunicated. No one in the Faith is permitted to recognize that person as a fellow adept.

*Article XXIV-* The General Council of Clerics consists of a *Đầu Sư* of one order to head the Council and two clerics of the other two orders to deliberate and to render judgment regarding the excommunication sanction according to the advice of the head of the parish.

This decree will be posted at the local Oratory for all adepts to see.

### 3. Law of the Hall of Meditation

#### CANON X

The Hall of Meditation consists of eight articles.

A Hall of Meditation is a hall of peace and serenity reserved for adepts to enter in order to practice exoteric meditation.

In order to enter the Hall of Meditation, an adept must adhere to the following rules:

*Article I-* Any adepts who have fulfilled their Duty towards their families and towards humanity, and who have maintained a vegetarian diet for six month or more are allowed to enter the Hall for meditation.

*Article II-* It is required that a more virtuous adept make a recommendation and another adept serve as guarantor.

*Article III-* Letters and correspondence with outsiders are forbidden except with relatives, but these letters must be examined first by the person in charge of the Hall of Meditation.

*Article IV-* Outsiders are forbidden to enter the Hall of Meditation, be they government officials, clergy, or relatives of the adept.

*Article V-* It is forbidden to talk to outsiders except for visiting parents, children or grandchildren. Even so, these visitors must receive permission from the person in charge of the Hall of Meditation.

*Article VI-* After entering the Hall of Meditation, it is imperative that the adept cease smoking tobacco and chewing areca nuts and betel leaves, and the adept cannot eat anything other than the meals served.

*Article VII-* Adepts must keep peace of mind and serenity of heart. Adepts must live in harmony, and must not raise their voices. They must be industrious and help others, and help guide others in religious matters.

*Article VIII-* Adepts must obey the instructions of the person in charge of the Hall of Meditation, and must observe the schedule for meditation.

**Note:** Women in the clergy may be ordained to the rank of Patriarch.