

H UỆ KH AI

**LƯỢC SỬ ĐẠO CAO ĐÀI
KHAI MINH ĐẠI ĐẠO 1926**

A CONCISE CAODAI HISTORY
THE 1926 INAUGURATION

 NHÀ XUẤT BẢN TÔN GIÁO

THE THIRD UNIVERSALISM OF THE GREAT DAO
The Programme of Joining Hands for Free Caodai
Publications

HUỆ KHẢI
(Dũ Lan LÊ ANH DŨNG)

**A CONCISE CAODAI HISTORY
THE 1926 INAUGURATION**

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Few phenomena in the modern history of Asia can have been so completely misunderstood by Westerners as the Vietnamese religious (and political) movement known in European languages as “Caodaism”. (...) To some extent Western ignorance about Caodaism is the responsibility of the Caodaists themselves.

Prof. **RALPH B. SMITH** (1939-2000)

“An Introduction to Caodaism”

BSOAS. Vol. XXXIII, London 1970

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FOREWORD

From the earliest beginnings of Caodaism till now, the history current has been flowing through innumerable ups and downs, heroic curves and melancholy bends. To keep the best record of such events, generations of talented and enthusiastic historians are being expected to contribute their efforts.

I myself is not at all a historian. Due to my own needs of understanding my faith's history, I have been interested in reading Caodai history books. Then, thinking that most of my co-religionists must have the same needs, I started compiling a few booklets to offer a concise and general history of Caodaism. Each booklet only focuses on a specific period or event of Caodai history. For instance, the present booklet concentrates on the Inauguration held in November 1926 at the Thiên Lâm holy house (in Gò Kén, Long Thành village, Tây Ninh province).

Collected from various sources, the portraits of twenty-eight earliest venerable Caodai apostles are printed in this booklet. Due to the paper limit, below each photo is only the apostle's name and dates. I do expect that the reader

would understand and forgive such unwillingness.

While preparing the English text included in this booklet, I have got lots of helpful suggestions and corrections provided by my respectable teaching colleague Tú Đoàn, whom I would like to express my sincere appreciation to.

At present, thousands of these booklets are placed in our friendly readers' hands thanks to our innumerable noble and generous donors, who have strongly, unceasingly, and enthusiastically supported the Programme of Joining Hands for Free Caodai Publications.

With heart and soul, we should spare a thought of them, and pray to God for His blessings upon our benefactors, their ancestors and relatives as well.

*Namo Caodai the Immortal Mahabodhisattva
Mahasattva.*

July 2015
HUỆ KHẢI

At 8 p.m. on Wednesday night of 29 September 1926, there was a large meeting so as to prepare the registration for the Caodai legal entity at the residence of apostle Nguyễn Văn Tường,⁽¹⁾ also called Võ Văn Tường, in an alley at 237 bis Gallieni street, Saigon (today 208 Cô Bắc street, district 1).

Under the co-chair of Daoist Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt (Lê Văn Trung), Confucian Cardinal Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt (Lê Văn Lịch), and Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư, the historic meeting was attended by hundreds of the earliest Caodai apostles and followers.

As a result, a list of two hundred and forty-five Caodaists' signatures was enclosed with the registration file whereas the declaration text in French dated 07 October 1926 was signed by twenty-eight Caodai apostles. Then Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt himself took all the dossier to Cochinchina Governor's Palace (today the Municipal Museum at 65 Lý Tự Trọng street, district 1) to submit to Acting Governor Le Fol.⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ As for the years of birth and death of Caodai apostles, see "Appendix" (p. 98).

⁽²⁾ [Huệ Khải 2010: 32-34].

This footnote indicates that the above information is from a book by Huệ Khải, published in 2010, pages 32-34. For the related source in details, see "Reference Books" (p. 101).

The said text in French dated 07 October 1926 is truly the official Declaration of the Foundation of Caodaism. Indeed, it can be judged as follows:

"The Declaration of the Foundation of Caodaism is a historic turning-point. It closed the earliest beginnings of Caodai faith and simultaneously started a large spread of this new faith throughout Cochinchina's provinces before the Caodai Inauguration was formally celebrated in Long Thành village, Tây Ninh province, in mid-November 1926. In other words, the Caodai Declaration in October 1926 is a milestone in the Caodai history, marking a new period when this endogenous faith was officially introduced to the public as an institutional religion." ⁽³⁾

Between the 1926 Inauguration and the earliest beginnings (from 1920 till the end of September 1926) was a transition step, which was named *Phổ Độ Lục Tỉnh* (the Cochinchina-wide diffusion) and was carried out for a month.

I. THE COCHINCHINA-WIDE DIFFUSION

In 1832, under the reign of king Minh Mạng, southern Vietnam was divided into six provinces (An Giang, Biên Hòa, Định Tường, Hà Tiên, Phiên An, and Vĩnh Long). Thus, the name "*Lục Tỉnh*" (six provinces) did exist in 1832. Two years later, "*Lục Tỉnh*" was called "*Nam Kỳ*"

⁽³⁾ [Lê Anh Dũng 1996: 182].

南圻, which literally means southern territory. In 1835, Phiên An province was named Gia Định province.

After the six provinces of Nam Kỳ had become a French colony (1867), they were divided into twenty-one provinces (1899) as follows:

- The former An Giang was split into five provinces: Cần Thơ, Châu Đốc, Long Xuyên, Sa Đéc, and Sóc Trăng.

- The former Biên Hòa was split into four provinces: Bà Rịa, Biên Hòa, Cap Saint-Jacques (say Vũng Tàu), and Thủ Dầu Một.

- The former Định Tường became Mỹ Tho.

- The former Gia Định was split into five provinces: Chợ Lớn, Gia Định, Gò Công, Tân An, and Tây Ninh.

- The former Hà Tiên was split into three provinces: Bạc Liêu, Hà Tiên, and Rạch Giá.

- The former Vĩnh Long was split into three provinces: Bến Tre, Trà Vinh, and Vĩnh Long.

Under the French colonial rule, Nam Kỳ was called *Cochinchine*; Trung Kỳ, *Annam*; and Bắc Kỳ, *Tonkin*.

Dividing Nam Kỳ into twenty-one provinces, maybe the French colonialists wished to wipe out the name “Lục Tỉnh” from the heart and soul of the residents, so as to break off their attachment to the tradition – a psychological manoeuvre coupled with oppressions against patriotic

resistance movements. Nonetheless, the name “Lục Tỉnh” (also called “*Lục Châu*”) was still kept well in the Nam Kỳ residents’ mind. Thus, in the 1926 autumn, when launching their religious diffusion throughout southern Vietnam, the earliest Caodai apostles officially named their efforts “*Phổ Độ Lục Tỉnh*”, which literally means the universal salvation in the six [former Cochinchinese] provinces.⁽⁴⁾

II. A CAODAI BOOKLET: GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE PUBLIC

In the Foundation Declaration dated 07 October 1926, the earliest Caodai apostles stated:

“Au nom de très nombreux Annamites qui ont entièrement approuvé ces études et dont la liste est ci-jointe, les soussignés ont l’honneur de venir respectueusement vous déclarer qu’ils vont propager à l’humanité entière cette Sainte Doctrine.”⁽⁵⁾

Translation:

On behalf of the majority of the Vietnamese who entirely approve these studies and whose list is enclosed, we, the undersigned, have the honour to declare that we will diffuse this sacred teaching to the whole humanity.⁽⁶⁾

⁽⁴⁾ [Huệ Khải 2010: 7-10].

⁽⁵⁾ [Huệ Khải 2010: 69].

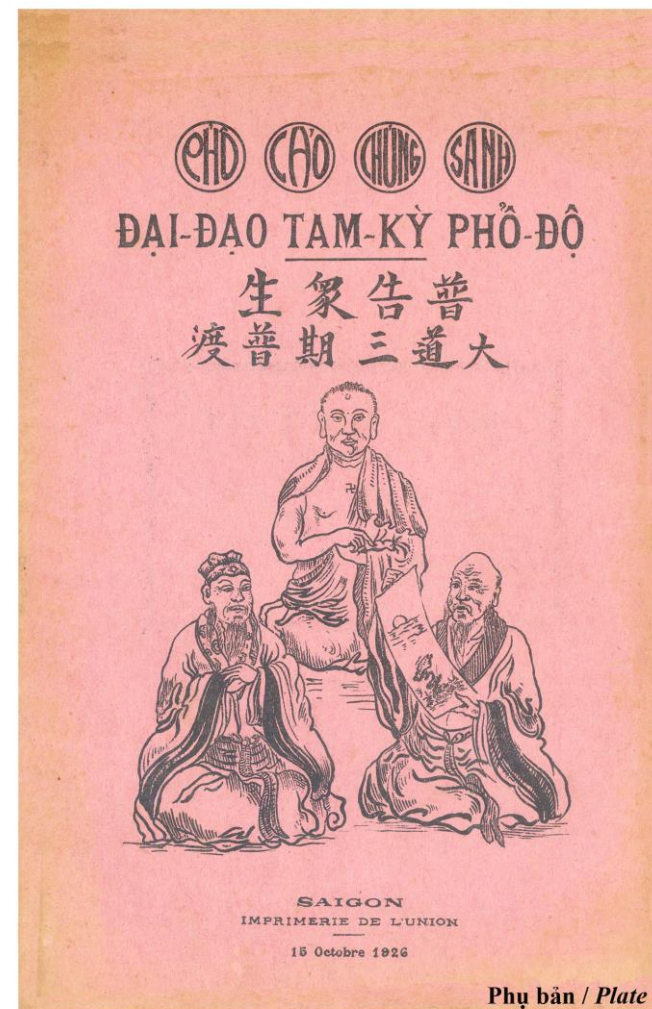
⁽⁶⁾ [Huệ Khải 2010: 57].

A few days right after the registration for the Caodai legal entity mentioned above, the earliest Caodai apostles unceasingly prepared the Cochinchina-wide diffusion. One of their tasks was the compilation of a booklet entitled *Phổ Cáo Chúng Sanh* (General Announcement to the Public).

Before having their booklet printed, the earliest Caodai apostles presented the manuscript to Caodai God for revision. At the séance on Wednesday 13 October 1926, the Supreme Being said to apostle Lê Thế Vĩnh, “*Vĩnh, read out the text, and wait for my correction! Whenever I lower the beaked basket (corbeille a bec) please have a pause.*”⁽⁷⁾

Later, *Phổ Cáo Chúng Sanh* (14 pages, 15x24cm), was printed at l’Imprimerie de l’Union (Saigon). The cover was made of thin red paper (often used for file folders). Printed on the front cover was the date 15 October 1926. As an early publication of the new faith, it was officially spread out during the Cochinchina-wide diffusion which commenced on Saturday 16 October 1926 and lasted a month.

⁽⁷⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 207].



Bản in tại Sài Gòn, ghi ngày 15-10-1926, 14 trang (15 x 24cm).
Printed in Saigon, dated 15 October 1926, 14 pages (15 x 24cm).

Plate 1: *Phổ Cáo Chúng Sanh* (1926) / *General Announcement to the Public* (1926), front cover.]

1. Summary of General Announcement to the Public

Phổ Cáo Chúng Sanh (General Announcement to the Public) contains over four thousand words. At the beginning, it asserts that all species on earth have come from the same Creator, who has been named differently by different races at different times and places. Again, it affirms that all Buddhas, Immortals, Saints, or Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., all existing religions on earth) have come from Origin, namely Dao.

In the two previous salvation eras, the Supreme Being manifested Himself on earth under various names like Dipankara the Ancient Buddha, Shakyamuni, Laozi, and Jesus Christ, etc. Presently, in the Third Era, God has come to save this world under the name *Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát* (Caodai the Immortal Mahabodhisattva Mahasattva). His name implies the Caodai guideline, which says *the Three Teachings return to Origin*, because Caodai relates to Confucianism, the Immortal to Daoism, and Mahabodhisattva Mahasattva to Buddhism.

Also, based on Caodai holy teaching, *General Announcement to the Public* explains that in the two previous salvation eras, human beings were subject to geographical separation and their knowledge was not developed enough; accordingly, God's teaching had to be split into *Ngũ Chi* (Five Branches), namely the Ways of Man, of Gods, of Saints, of Immortals, and of Buddhas, so as to accord with local customs and cultures.

In the Third Era, geographical distances have been shortened and human knowledge has been highly developed; consequently, God has founded Caodaiism to lead the Five Branches back to One (Dao). Unlike in the two previous eras, the Founder of the new religion is God Himself, not an incarnate one. In this Era, to bestow holy teaching upon man, the Heavenly Powers use a traditional way of communion known as *cầu cơ*, which means evoking spirits with a beaked basket (*corbeille à bec*).

Besides, *General Announcement to the Public* states that the Caodai icon for worshipping God is the Left Eye (*Thiên Nhãn*, the God's Eye). On the altar at a holy house (*thánh thất*, Caodai temple) are also the icons of the Three-Teaching Founders (Shakyamuni, Laozi, and Confucius), of the Three-Teaching Founders' Representatives (Li Taibai, who represents Daoism; Guanyin, Buddhism; and Guan Sheng, Confucianism), of Jesus Christ (representing the Way of Saints), and of Jiang Taigong (representing the Way of Gods).

At the end, *General Announcement to the Public* reports that on 07 October 1926 “*Lê Văn Trung, ex-member of the Conseil Supérieur de l’Indochine – the Superior Council of Indochina*” submitted the Foundation Declaration to the French Governor of Cochinchina and he “*was welcomed and praised*” (p. 14).

2. Judging General Announcement to the Public

No matter how thin it is, *General Announcement to the Public* can truly introduce some crucial points of the fledgling faith; for instance, its guideline (*the Three Teachings return to Origin; the Five Branches return to One*), its slogan (*Underlying all religions is the same principle*); its ways of worshipping and teaching, etc.

Under the French colonial yoke, Vietnamese people were always oppressed if they gathered in large number, or followed a certain “secret society”... That is why the last page of *General Announcement to the Public* tactically mentions the fact that the new religion’s legal entity was officially registered by such a Cochinchinese celebrity as “*Lê Văn Trung, ex-member of the Superior Council of Indochina*”. Indeed, this psychological cleverness implies that Caodai religion is not a “secret society” and simultaneously affirms the legal status of its Cochinchina-wide diffusion.

Why could the high social status of apostle Lê Văn Trung (Daoist Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhật) indirectly allay the people’s fears? An appropriate explanation may be as follows:

“... the weekly *Lục Tỉnh Tân Văn (Six Provinces News)*, issue No. 46, dated 01 October 1908, wrote, ‘*Our Vietnamese people are apt to be scared...*’ Accordingly, when starting something considerable, he who wants to

attract the mass should include some civil officers in his key staff. Son Nam [1926-2008, an expert in Cochinchinese culture] pointed out that the people ‘*trusted in the straight-forwardness of civil officers, who kept themselves away from political issues.*’ This psychological factor also affects even business affairs; therefore, the said weekly magazine wrote, ‘*If an undertaking is headed by some civil officers, multiple people would eagerly ask for joining it.*’”⁽⁸⁾

III. THE THREE DIFFUSION GROUPS

At the same séance on Wednesday 13 October 1926, after revising the manuscript of *General Announcement to the Public*, Caodai God said, “*You all must immediately prepare everything for the diffusion. As of the tenth of this [lunar] month, all mediums must request for a twenty-nine-day leave from work. I recommend you all to share your field of activity so that your diffusion can stretch to every corner.*”⁽⁹⁾

Obedying God’s instruction, the earliest apostles formed three groups:

Group one: Lê Văn Trung (Thượng Trung Nhật), Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh), and Trần Đạo Quang, etc. **Mediums:** Cao Quỳnh Cư and Phạm Công Tắc.

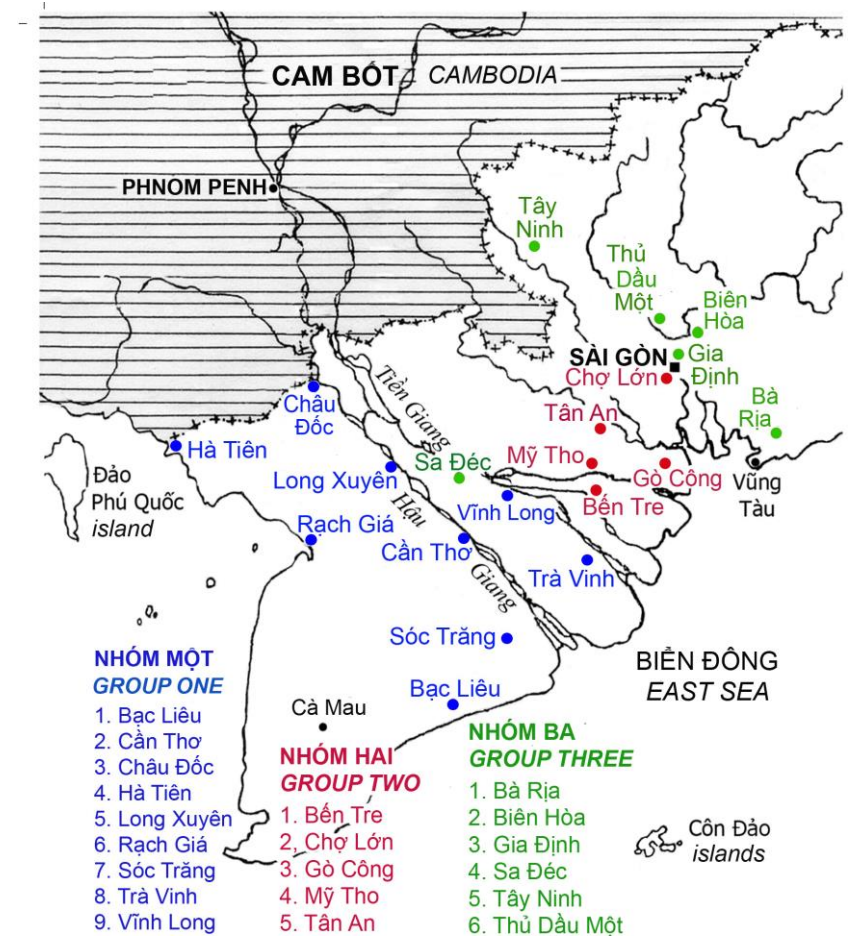
⁽⁸⁾ [Huệ Khải 2010: 20].

⁽⁹⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 207].

Group one was in charge of *nine provinces*: Bạc Liêu, Cần Thơ, Châu Đốc, Hà Tiên, Long Xuyên, Rạch Giá, Sóc Trăng, Trà Vinh, and Vĩnh Long.

Group two: Lê Văn Lịch (Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt), Nguyễn Ngọc Trương (Thượng Trương Thanh), and Nguyễn Văn Luật (Thái Luật Thanh, former Buddhist Karma), etc. *Mediums:* Nguyễn Trung Hậu and Trương Hữu Đức. Group two was in charge of *five provinces*: Bến Tre, Chợ Lớn, Gò Công, Mỹ Tho, and Tân An.

Group three: Lê Bá Trang (Ngọc Trang Thanh), Vương Quan Kỳ (Thượng Kỳ Thanh), and Lê Văn Nhung (Thái Nhung Thanh, former Buddhist Karma), etc. *Mediums:* Cao Hoài Sang and Cao Quỳnh Diêu. Group three was in charge of *six provinces*: Bà Rịa, Biên Hòa, Gia Định, Sa Đéc, Tây Ninh, and Thủ Dầu Một.



▲ BA NHÓM TIỀN KHAI **PHỔ ĐỘ LỤC TỈNH** (THÁNG 10-1926)
Three groups of the earliest Caodai apostles launching the diffusion throughout Cochinchina (since October 1926). Created by Huệ Khải

GROUP ONE: From left and down: Lê Văn Trung, Trần Đạo Quang, Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Ngô Trung Tín, Phạm Công Tác, Mrs *Tổng Đốc* Phạm Văn Tươi, and Mrs Lâm Hương Thanh. ►

[Plate 2: Map of the Cochinchina-wide diffusion]



Phụ bản / Plate 3

NHÓM MỘT: Từ trái sang, từ trên xuống: Các tiên khai Lê Văn Trung, Trần Đạo Quang, Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, Cao Quỳnh Cư, Ngô Trung Tín, Phạm Công Tắc, bà Tổng Đốc Phạm Văn Tươi, bà Lâm Hương Thanh. (Chụp trước nhà tiên khai Lâm Hương Thanh, Vũng Liêm). Ảnh tài liệu.

[Plate 3: Group one in Vũng Liêm district, Vĩnh Long province]]

The preaching for the three groups was given by both Nguyễn Văn Tương (Thượng Tương Thanh) and Nguyễn Văn Kinh (Ngọc Kinh Thanh).⁽¹⁰⁾ These two apostles had been converted from the Minh Sư faith.⁽¹¹⁾

After a month of enthusiastically spreading the fledgling religion, each group was able to help tens of thousands of people become Caodai adepts. Among these newcomers were lots of personages, who soon played their key roles of Caodai leaders during the construction of the first Church as well as the Caodai development in the following decades.

The earliest apostles finished the Cochinchina-wide diffusion on Sunday 14 November 1926 and gathered at the Thiên Lâm pagoda (Long Thành village, Tây Ninh province) so as to enthusiastically continue preparations for the soon-coming Inauguration. Previously, their preparations for the event had been postponed for a month because they all had to focus on spreading the new faith over Cochinchina.

⁽¹⁰⁾ [Hương Hiếu 2: 6].

⁽¹¹⁾ Before following Caodaism, apostle Nguyễn Văn Kinh was an adept of Nguyễn Văn Tương (Nguyễn Đạo Tương).

IV. PREPARING THE 1926 INAUGURATION CEREMONY

1. Some preparations before the Cochinchina-wide diffusion

Prior to the diffusion over Cochinchinese provinces, in preparation for the Inauguration to be celebrated in mid-November 1926, Caodai God converted a number of personages at various séances, and bestowed ranks upon them so that they would be qualified to hold noble positions in the early Caodai Church hierarchy in Tây Ninh province. Then, blessed with God's favour, the two women apostles Nguyễn Thị Hiếu (Hương Hiếu) and Lâm Ngọc Thanh (Hương Thanh) made religious costumes for the earliest Caodai dignitaries.

* Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ's and Lâm Ngọc Thanh's conversions

In mid-July 1926, Caodai God converted Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ and Lâm Ngọc Thanh, a Buddhist married couple.

Previously, in Cần Giuộc district (Chợ Lớn province) on Saturday 27 February 1926, Caodai God had converted apostle Phạm Tấn Đãi. Then, in July, God requested him to meet apostle Lê Văn Trung (Thượng Trung Nhật) in Saigon and they two were to visit Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ in Tân Định (district 1).

Explaining the reason of their first meeting, the two

uninvited guests told the householder of Caodai God's spiritual message. The latter insisted that he would never believe in such a tale until he himself could successfully contact Heavenly Powers. Right then, his spouse was staying in Vũng Liêm district, Vĩnh Long province.

At his home in Tân Định, after having kept three vegetarian days coupled with praying, Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ used a spirit-writing pen (*cháp bút*) to receive God's message. His testing questions on his very private affairs were exactly answered. Altogether convinced, he and his spouse willingly joined Caodai faith on Thursday 15 July 1926.⁽¹²⁾

* Monk Như Nhân's conversion

Also known as Thích Từ Phong or Nguyễn Văn Tường, Monk Như Nhân was head bonze of the Giác Lâm pagoda, built in 1887, located in Phú Lâm, district 6, Saigon.

Receiving a permit signed by the chief of Tây Ninh province on 15 July 1925, Monk Như Nhân had the Thiền Lâm pagoda constructed in Gò Kén (today at 5/11 Long Trung hamlet, Long Thành Trung village, Hòa Thành district, Tây Ninh province).

During its construction, the married couple Thơ and Thanh were great donators, who might considerably influence Monk Như Nhân.

⁽¹²⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 157].

After their conversion to Caodaism, the couple introduced the new faith to the Monk, and invited him to attend some spirit-evoking séances.

On Monday 23 August 1926, during a séance which might be held at the Thiên Lâm pagoda, Shakyamuni Buddha under the name Caodai the Immortal Mahabodhisattva Mahasattva asked Monk Như Nhân, “*This place is the holy land, where I am going to establish a holy house. Would you willingly help me?*”⁽¹³⁾

Thirteen days later, on Sunday 05 September 1926, at the Thiên Lâm pagoda, Monk Như Nhân was conferred a divine title by Caodai God.⁽¹⁴⁾

So, at the end of August 1926, Monk Như Nhân readily let the earliest Caodai apostles borrow the Thiên Lâm pagoda and transform it into a holy house named Thiên Lâm (also called Gò Kén).

*** Improving the Thiên Lâm holy house**

With the Monk’s consent, as of the beginning of September 1926, the earliest Caodai apostles wholeheartedly put money and effort into the site so as to improve the holy house, inside and outside.

Then, still surrounded with trees and bushes, the former pagoda exposed its unpainted walls and earth floor. It also

⁽¹³⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 171].

⁽¹⁴⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 181].

lacked a path leading to the traffic road. The couple apostles Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh) and Lâm Ngọc Thanh (Hương Thanh) generously used their own money to have the trees and bushes removed, a well bored, a garden built, and flowers planted, etc. Besides two rows of temporary dwellings for those participating in the site’s improvement, apostles Thơ and Thanh got an over-200-metre stony path built so that cars could run straight towards the inner gate from road 22B.

No matter how great the expenditure, apostle Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh) only wished to finish the improvement soon. Consequently, during a séance held at his home in Tân Định on Wednesday 22 September 1926, Caodai God advised, “*I request you to save your money. There will be more plans next year. Your capital should be saved for other useful tasks.*”⁽¹⁵⁾ Did God’s advice imply that His pious disciple should cut costs because at the beginning of the 1927 spring the earliest Caodai apostles would have to move out of the Thiên Lâm pagoda?

The Thiên Lâm pagoda (30x15m) can be seen today, about five or six kilometres from the Tây Ninh town, on the right side of road 22B leading to Saigon. The stony drive, which was finished nearly the end of 1926, completely disappeared; as seen in a photograph taken around 2012, the said driveway turned into a red dirt path.

⁽¹⁵⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 187].



Phụ bản / Plate 4

Cổng ngoài chùa Thiên Lâm (dựng năm 1973) bên đường 22B. Con đường đất dài hơn 200 mét dẫn vào cổng trong. / *The outer gate of the Thiên Lâm pagoda (erected in 1973) on the side of road 22B. Leading to the inner gate is the dirt drive over 200 metres long.*

Ảnh tài liệu / *Documentary photo*

[Plate 4: The outer gate of the Thiên Lâm pagoda on the side of road 22B]



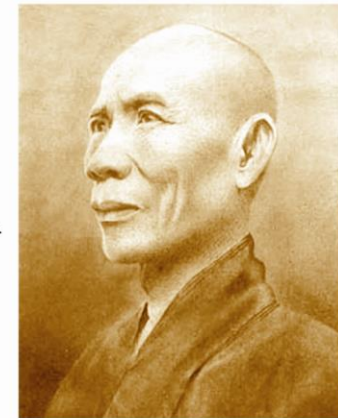
▲ Thiên Lâm Tự
(khoảng năm 2012)
*The Thiên Lâm pagoda
(around 2012)*

Hòa Thượng / *Monk*
Như Nhân

Thích Từ Phong (1864-1939) ►

Ảnh tài liệu
Documentary photos

Phụ bản / Plate 5



[Plate 5: The Thiên Lâm pagoda today]

* Preparations for the Thiên Lâm main hall

On Friday 17 September 1926, Caodai God instructed apostle Nguyễn Văn Kiệt to make seven thrones for the *Giáo Tông* (Pope), three *Chương Pháp* (Legist-Censors), and three *Đầu Sư* (Cardinals). The two arms of the *Giáo Tông* throne were carved two dragons; of the *Chương Pháp*, two phoenixes; and of the *Đầu Sư*, two unicorns. The back of each throne was carved three of the four numinous creatures (say dragon, unicorn, tortoise, and phoenix), excluding the one already carved on either arm of the throne.

God instructed apostle Lâm Quang Bính (Thái Bính Thanh, from Rạch Giá province) to make a Globe of the Universe (*Quả Càn Khôn*), 3.3 metres in diameter, painted azure. Then, according to a French astronomy book, apostle Bính would draw three thousand seventy-two stars, and draw the God's Eye on Ursa Major.

God instructed apostle Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh) to arrange the God's Altar, where he would place the statues of the Three-Teaching Founders (Shakyamuni, Laozi, and Confucius), the Three-Teaching Founders' Representatives (Li Taibai, Guanyin, and Guan Sheng), Jesus Christ, and Jiang Taigong.



Phụ bản / Plate 6

Chánh điện thánh thất Thiên Lâm (1926).
The main hall of the Thiên Lâm holy house (1926).

Ảnh tài liệu / Documentary photo

[Plate 6: The main hall of the Thiên Lâm holy house (1926)]

*** More hands given to the preparation for the 1926 Inauguration**

Before their Cochinchina-wide diffusion, the earliest Caodai apostles held several séances in several places so as to introduce the fledgling faith to local residents. To name a few:

- The *Cầu Kho* séance: At the home of apostle Đoàn Văn Bản (Thượng Bản Thanh), in district 1, Saigon.

- The *Chợ Lớn* séance: At the home of apostle Lê Văn Trung (Thượng Trung Nhựt), on quai Testard, Chợ Lớn city.

- The *Giòng Ông Tố* séance: At the home of apostle Đỗ Văn Vàng, in Giòng Ông Tố, Thủ Đức district, Gia Định province.

- The *Hội Phước pagoda* séance: At the pagoda of apostle Nguyễn Văn Luật (Thái Luật Thanh, former Buddhist Karma), in Long Trạch village, Cần Giuộc district, Chợ Lớn province.

- The *Lộc Giang* séance: At the Phước Long holy house, formerly a pagoda, of apostle Trần Văn Giồng (Thái Giồng Thanh, former Buddhist Karma), in Chợ Đệm, Chợ Lớn province.

- The *Tân Định* séance: At the home of apostle Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh), in Tân Định, district 1, Saigon.

- The *Tân Kim* séance: At the home of apostle Nguyễn Văn Lai (Thượng Lai Thanh), in Tân Kim village, Cần Giuộc district, Chợ Lớn province.

- The *Thủ Đức* séance: At the home of apostle Ngô Văn Điều, near Thủ Đức market, Thủ Đức district, Gia Định province, etc.

On Sunday 19 September 1926, in preparation for the 1926 Inauguration, Caodai God told a number of apostles to leave the above-mentioned séances for the Thiên Lâm holy house.

On Saturday 30 October 1926, in Saigon, Caodai God relocated Nguyễn Thị Hiếu (Hương Hiếu, Mrs Cao Quỳnh Cư) and Nguyễn Thị Nhiều (Hương Nhiều, Mrs Phạm Công Tắc) to the Thiên Lâm holy house so that they could cooperate with their spouses in Gò Kén. Apostle Hương Hiếu contributed greatly to the decent food and lodging for a non-stop flow of people pouring in the holy house, irrespective of day or night. To buy vegetable and fruit, she herself went to the Tây Ninh market by horse-drawn carriage. [See plate 7.]

Tiền khai Hương Hiếu đi chợ Tây Ninh mua rau quả về tới thánh thất Thiên Lâm.

Tranh tài liệu:

Lễ Sanh Thái Rẫy Thanh vẽ theo ký ức tiền khai Hương Hiếu.



Apostle Hương Hiếu arrives at the Thiên Lâm holy house, with vegetable and fruit bought from the Tây Ninh market.

Documentary picture:

Created by Lễ Sanh (Student-Priest) Thái Rẫy Thanh, based on apostle Hương Hiếu's memory.

Phụ bản / Plate 7

*** His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch (Li Taibai) started holding the Spiritual Papacy**

Apostle Ngô Văn Chiêu did not receive the Papacy on Saturday 24 April 1926. His decision caused the vacancy of the Papal seat. On Friday 29 October 1926, Caodai God bestowed the Spiritual Papacy upon His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch.

*** Permit for celebrating the 1926 Inauguration**

Apostle Lê Văn Trung (Daoist Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt) asked the Colonial government for permission to celebrate the 1926 Inauguration, and he got a permit dated Sunday 07 November 1926. Then, invitation cards co-signed by Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt and Monk Như Nhân were sent to a great number of government officials, other religions' dignitaries, notables, and celebrities, etc.

2. Some preparations after the Cochinchina-wide diffusion

*** Forming four groups in charge of Ceremony, Reception, Receipt of offerings, and Spending**

On Tuesday 16 November 1926, Caodai God formed four groups as follows:

- *Ceremony*: Lê Bá Trang (Ngọc Trang Thanh) was the head; Lê Văn Nhung (Thái Nhung Thanh), the deputy; and two assistants. In addition, there were twelve volunteer

helpers.

- *Reception*: Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (Thượng Tương Thanh) was the head; Nguyễn Văn Luật (Thái Luật Thanh) and Thượng Hoài Thanh, the deputies. Besides four assistants, there were twelve volunteer helpers.

- *Receipt of offerings*: Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh), Như Nhân, Trần Đạo Quang, and two clerks. (Money donation was not accepted.)

- *Spending*: Lê Văn Lịch (Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt), Lê Văn Hóa (Thượng Hóa Thanh), Xài, and two clerks.⁽¹⁶⁾

* Arranging the dignitaries' positions

During the same séance on Tuesday 16 November 1926, Caodai God instructed apostles in the dignitaries' positions in the Thiên Lâm main hall while performing the ceremony.

There were three divisions facing the God's Altar: All male dignitaries queued in the middle and on the right (the same side as the statue of Quan Thánh, say Guan Sheng); female dignitaries dressing in white queued on the left (the same side as the statue of Quan Âm, say Guanyin).

Male dignitaries of three branches (*Thái*, Buddhist branch, dressing in yellow; *Thượng*, Daoist branch, blue; *Ngọc*, Confucian branch, red) queued in the middle in the

⁽¹⁶⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 216-217].

following order: three *Chưởng Pháp* (Legist-Censors), three *Đầu Sư* (Cardinals), and three *Chánh Phối Sư* (Principal Archbishops).

Next to them were *Phối Sư* (Archbishops), *Giáo Sư* (Bishops), and *Giáo Hữu* (Priests). All dignitaries of the same rank queued in three branches *Thái*, *Thượng*, *Ngọc*.

At the end of the main hall was the table for *Hộ Pháp* (Dharma Protector). Twelve mediums queued here in three groups, facing the God's Altar:

In the middle was group one, consisting of four apostles: Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Trương Hữu Đức, Trần Duy Nghĩa, and Trương Văn Tràng. Later, blessed by God on Sunday 13 February 1927, they were respectively *Bảo Pháp* (Dharma Conservator), *Hiến Pháp* (Dharma Dedicator), *Khai Pháp* (Dharma Developer), and *Tiếp Pháp* (Dharma Receiver).

On the right of group one was group two, consisting of four apostles: Ca Minh Chương, Phạm Văn Tươi, Phạm Tấn Đãi, and Nguyễn Thiên(g) Kim. Later, blessed by God on Sunday 13 February 1927, apostles Chương, Tươi, and Đãi were respectively *Bảo Đạo* (Dao Conservator), *Hiến Đạo* (Dao Dedicator), and *Khai Đạo* (Dao Developer).

On the left of group one was group three, consisting of four apostles: Lê Thiện Phước, Nguyễn Văn Mạnh, Huỳnh Văn Mai, and Võ Văn Nguyên. Later, blessed by God on Sunday 13 February 1927, apostles Phước and Mạnh were

respectively *Bảo Thế* (World Conservator), and *Hiển Thế* (World Dedicator).

Behind them were Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc, Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư (on the right of Hộ Pháp, the same side as group two), and Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang (on the left of Hộ Pháp, the same side as group three).

Beside apostle Cao Quỳnh Cư was apostle Mùi (or Muôi?), holding the *Thượng Phẩm* streamer. Beside apostle Cao Hoài Sang was apostle Lê Thế Vĩnh, holding the *Thượng Sanh* streamer.

* **Caodai God's instructions on the eve of the Inauguration**

On Wednesday 17 November 1926, Caodai God bestowed the rank of *Đầu Sư* (Cardinal) upon Monk Thích Thiện Minh, who was henceforth known as Thái Minh Tinh. Then, God continued instructing the apostles in preparation for the Inauguration. Again, He advised apostle Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh) to cut back expenses of improving the Thiên Lâm holy house.

For the *reception*, three of the four assistants and twelve volunteer helpers were grouped in three teams: the first one was in charge of the upper class as well as the French; the second, the middle class; and the third, the common people. Apostle Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (Thượng Tương Thanh) himself was in charge of the French government officials.

For the *spending*, also instructed by God, each expenditure item was to be approved with signatures of all the three apostles in charge, namely Lê Văn Lịch (Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt), Lê Văn Hóa (Thượng Hóa Thanh), and Xài.

God reminded the apostles of even things that might be thought of as trivial ones. For instance, He advised apostle Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh) to locate the generator at a distance far enough so as to lessen the noise. He told apostle Trần Đạo Quang to bind the *Spring and Autumn Annals* with a red ribbon, and to choose a *patra* (almsbowl) made of copper, not porcelain. (In Caodai faith, the Spring and Autumn Annals, the dust whisk, and the patra respectively symbolize the Three Teachings: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.)

V. THE INAUGURATION

According to the programme, the Inauguration was planned to last three days and three nights, from Thursday 18 through Saturday 20 November 1926 (from the fourteenth through the sixteenth of the tenth lunar month). As of Wednesday 17 November, crowds began pouring into Gò Kén (Long Thành village, Tây Ninh province) for the ceremony at the Thiên Lâm holy house.

During the daytime, the apostles were busy entertaining guests. On Thursday, after the midnight worship before the altar, the apostles held a séance in the Thiên Lâm main hall. First, Caodai God bestowed the religious surname HƯƠNG

upon female dignitaries.⁽¹⁷⁾

Then, God bestowed the rank of *Giáo Sư* (Bishop) upon apostle Lâm Ngọc Thanh (say Hương Thanh); and *Phó Giáo Sư* (Deputy Bishop) upon Ca Thị Thế (apostle Ca Minh Chương's daughter).

At midnight, Thursday 18, and into the small hours of Friday 19 November 1926, the ordination of the earliest Caodai dignitaries was conducted in the Thiên Lâm main hall. Dignitaries of the Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian branches (respectively dressed in yellow, blue, and red) positioned themselves according to the arrangement instructed by Caodai God during the séance on Tuesday 16 November 1926.

After God's ascension, the Thiên Lâm main hall was disturbed by evil spirits due to the carelessness of apostle Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt (Confucian Cardinal Lê Văn Lịch) while practising occult power to protect the séance. However, apostle Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư managed to expel evils with holy water from the God's Altar.

Despite such a regrettable disturbance, everything still went on smoothly the following morning. Then, after the noon worship, a séance was held; Caodai God arrived and blamed the apostles for their carelessness resulting in the

⁽¹⁷⁾ God bestowed the religious surname THANH upon male dignitaries at midnight, on Sunday 08 August 1926 at Vĩnh Nguyên pagoda (Long An village, Cần Giuộc district, Chợ Lớn province).

evils' occurrence.

That night, during another séance, Caodai God bestowed the rank of *Giáo Sư* (Bishop) upon seven male apostles, one of whom was promoted from *Giáo Hữu* (Priest). God also summoned volunteers for spreading Caodaism to Annam and Tonkin (northern and central Vietnam).

1. The earliest dignitaries conferred by Caodai God

After Thursday 18 and Friday 19 November 1926, there were more dignitaries conferred by Caodai God. Excluding *Lễ Sanh* (Student-Priests), the newly-conferred dignitaries together with the previous ones are listed as follows:

- *Three Chương Pháp* (Legist-Censors):

Thái Chương Pháp (Buddhist Legist-Censor): Như Nhân (ex-Monk).

Thượng Chương Pháp (Daoist Legist-Censor): Nguyễn Văn Tương (former high-ranking priest of the *Minh Sư* faith).

Ngọc Chương Pháp (Confucian Legist-Censor): Trần Văn Thụ (former high-ranking priest of the *Minh Đường* faith).

- *Three Đầu Sư* (Cardinals):

Thái Đầu Sư (Buddhist Cardinal): Thích Thiện Minh (ex-Monk).

Thượng Đầu Sư (Daoist Cardinal): Lê Văn Trung.

Ngọc Đâu Sư (Confucian Cardinal): Lê Văn Lịch.

- *Three Chánh Phối Sư* (Principal Archbishops):

Thái Chánh Phối Sư (Buddhist Principal Archbishop):
Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ.

Thượng Chánh Phối Sư (Daoist Principal Archbishop):
Nguyễn Ngọc Tương.

Ngọc Chánh Phối Sư (Confucian Principal Archbishop):
Lê Bá Trang.

- *One Thượng Phối Sư* (Daoist Archbishop): Lê Văn Hóa.

- *Three Thái Giáo Sư* (Buddhist Bishops): Lâm Quang Bính, Lê Văn Nhung, and Nguyễn Văn Luật. (Both Nhung and Luật were former Buddhist priests, ranked *Yết Ma* or Karma.)

- *Fifteen Thượng Giáo Sư* (Daoist Bishops): Dương Văn Hoài, Hà Văn Bút, Lại Văn Hành, Lê Văn Sơn (Thượng Châu Thanh), Ngô Trung Tín, Ngô Văn Kim, Nguyễn Tấn Hoài, Nguyễn Văn Chức, Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Nguyễn Văn Lai, Nguyễn Văn Nhơn, Phạm Trí Viễn, Tống Quốc Định, Vương Quan Kỳ, and Vinh (from Chợ Lớn).

- *Five Ngọc Giáo Sư* (Confucian Bishops): Bùi Văn Thông, Ngô Tường Vân, Nguyễn Phát Đạt, Nguyễn Văn Kinh (former priest of the *Minh Sư* faith), and Nguyễn Văn Muội.

- *Nineteen Thượng Giáo Hữu* (Daoist Priests): Bùi Văn

Thiên, Đoàn Văn Bản, Huỳnh Văn Giới, Huỳnh Văn Sơn, Lê Văn Cúc, Nguyễn Ngọc Lân, Nguyễn Văn Cúc, Nguyễn Văn Phương, Phạm Văn Thập, Võ Văn Kinh, and Nghi.

- *One female Giáo Sư* (Bishop): Hương Thanh (Lâm Ngọc Thanh).

- *One female Phó Giáo Sư* (Deputy Bishop): Ca Thị Thế (daughter of apostle Ca Minh Chương).

- *Fifteen mediums*: Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc, Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư, Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang, Ca Minh Chương, Huỳnh Văn Mai, Lê Thiện Phước, Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Nguyễn Văn Mạnh, Nguyễn Thiên(g) Kim, Phạm Tấn Đãi, Phạm Văn Tươi, Trần Duy Nghĩa, Trương Hữu Đức, Trương Văn Tràng, and Võ Văn Nguyên.⁽¹⁸⁾

2. Pháp Chánh Truyền (the Orthodox Dharma) bestowed by Caodai God

On Saturday night 20 November 1926, during the séance in the Thiên Lâm main hall, Caodai God bestowed *Pháp Chánh Truyền* (the Orthodox Dharma), establishing eight dignitary ranks of *Cửu Trùng Đài* (the Nonuple hierarchy), from *Giáo Tông* (Pope, the top rank) down to *Lễ Sanh* (Student-Priest, the eighth rank). In the following night, Caodai God stipulated the rules of publicly selecting dignitaries, from *Lễ Sanh* up to *Giáo Tông*.

⁽¹⁸⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 232-234].

VI. EXTENDING THE THIÊN LÂM GREAT CEREMONY

According to the given programme, the Inauguration ceremony was to be closed at the end of Saturday 20 November 1926. Nonetheless, due to continual flows of people pouring into the Thiên Lâm holy house, the ceremony had to be extended, and lasted three months rather than three days and three nights. During those three months, there were lots of significant events.

Relatively, the following events are listed in the order of their importance. Each event may include several steps in sequence, which are recorded in the order of time.

1. The Caodai calendar

During the séance on Wednesday 02 February 1927 (the first day of the traditional Tết), Caodai God said, “*This day last year when I established Caodaiism, I had only twelve disciples...*”⁽¹⁹⁾ Then He added that within a year from that establishment, the number of Caodai followers amounted to over forty thousand thanks to the Supreme Being’s miraculous power and the devotion of His six apostles as well.⁽²⁰⁾

⁽¹⁹⁾ The twelve disciples were Ngô Văn Chiêu, Vương Quan Kỳ, Lê Văn Trung, Nguyễn Văn Hoài, Đoàn Văn Bản, Cao Hoài Sang, Lý Trọng Quý, Lê Văn Giảng, Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Trương Hữu Đức, Phạm Công Tắc, and Cao Quỳnh Cư.

⁽²⁰⁾ According to [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 112], the six apostles were Thượng Trung Nhật (Lê Văn Trung), Phạm Công Tắc,

According to the above holy message, the Caodai calendar should commence on the first day of the year Tiger (Saturday 13 February 1926). In other words, whenever the Vietnamese people’s traditional Tết begins, the Caodai congregation also starts its own new calendar.

During the said séance, Caodai God twice praised *Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh* (Buddhist Cardinal Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ) for his devotion. He promoted *Giáo Sư Thái Bính Thanh* (Buddhist Bishop Lâm Quang Bính) to *Phối Sư* (Buddhist Archbishop); *Giáo Hữu Thượng Bản Thanh* (Daoist Priest Đoàn Văn Bản) to *Giáo Sư* (Daoist Bishop), and *Lễ Sanh Thượng Trò Thanh* (Daoist Student-Priest Nguyễn Văn Trò) to *Giáo Hữu* (Daoist Priest).

Caodai God said, “*I bestow favour upon all of you, including My absent children. I am going to raise the beaked basket, and you all are to crawl under it to receive My blessing.*” Before leaving the séance, God repeated, “*Again, I bestow blessing upon you all, My children.*”⁽²¹⁾

2. Establishing *Tân Luật* (the New Law)

On Tuesday 30 November 1926, Caodai God complained that, in preparation for *Tân Luật* (the Caodai New Law), just Legist-Censor Như Nhãn finished the bill

Cao Quỳnh Cư, Nguyễn Trung Hậu, Trương Hữu Đức, and Thượng Bản Thanh (Đoàn Văn Bản).

⁽²¹⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 313].

assigned to his Buddhist branch (*Thái*).⁽²²⁾

During the repeat séance, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch commanded that at the beginning of the next month all dignitaries should be present at the Thiên Lâm holy house so as to establish the New Law. He also requested that the final version of the bill should be available then for approval by Caodai God.

On Monday 06 December 1926, Caodai God requested the apostles to stay frequently at the Thiên Lâm holy house so as to establish the New Law, composed of three parts: (a) *Meditation House Law*, stipulating the meditation practice. (b) *Religious Law*, stipulating the administration of the Caodai congregation. (c) *Secular Law*, stipulating the life of Caodai followers.

On Saturday 18 December 1926, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch instructed Daoist Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt (Lê Văn Trung) to request dignitaries to temporarily cease their diffusing the new faith so as to focus on the New Law establishment. On Christmas day (24 December 1926), they all would have to gather at the holy house. The three Principal Archbishops (namely, Thái Thơ Thanh, Thượng Tương Thanh, and Ngọc Trang Thanh) would have to submit their assigned bills then. In the following day (25 December 1926), the bills would be debated under the co-chair of Daoist

⁽²²⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 236].

Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt (Lê Văn Trung) and Confucian Cardinal Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt (Lê Văn Lịch). All dignitaries were to join the debate in the following order: first, the Buddhist branch (*Thái*); then, the Daoist (*Thượng*); and finally, the Confucian (*Ngọc*).

On Friday 24 December 1926, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch instructed Daoist Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt (Lê Văn Trung) to conduct the debate on the bills of the New Law (*Tân Luật*) in three sessions: morning (6-11am), afternoon (14-18pm), and evening (20-23pm). If the bills could not be finalised, they would carry on with the debate likewise in the following day.

• The first debate

On Saturday 25 December 1926, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch blamed Daoist Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt (Lê Văn Trung) for his unsuccessful chairing of the whole day's debate on the bills of the New Law (*Tân Luật*). His Holiness Lý added:

“As for the process of passing the bills into the New Law, if our Master [Caodai God] let Me take charge, it would be completed within two hours only. Nonetheless, if I Myself established the law, none of Caodaists could obediently follow it.

That is why our Master gives His disciples full rights to establish the law. He deliberately wishes to have some human power contribute to the law, and then He will

exercise his Divine power. Indeed, that is His virtue of justice.

So, I first assign Thái Thơ Thanh the amalgamation of the three draft bills.⁽²³⁾ Within a week, your amalgamation must be completed. Next week, it will be the turn of Thượng Trưng Thanh. The week after next, it will be Ngọc Trang Thanh's.⁽²⁴⁾ That is to say, despite any circumstances, the draft New Law must be completed within three weeks, and then the debate will be repeated at the [Thiền Lâm] holy house."⁽²⁵⁾

On Saturday 15 January 1927, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch instructed the apostles to hold a séance to evoke His presence in the Thiền Lâm main hall before conducting the debate. During the debate process, the dignitaries were to wear their major ceremonial dresses, not minor ones,⁽²⁶⁾ so as to pay reverence to Caodai God and the Heavenly

Powers, who invisibly witnessed the debate.

• The second debate

On Sunday 16 January 1927, Spiritual Pope Lý Thái Bạch revealed that Caodai God had instructed Him “to base on the original text by the Church’s dignitaries, and only amend the secret mechanism of the law.” His Holiness Lý instructed the dignitaries in ceremonial formalities to present the draft New Law right before His statue on the God’s Altar. These formalities were to be carried out on that Sunday afternoon. The document would be left there the whole night. In the following Monday, both Daoist and Confucian Legist-Censors would hold a séance so that His Holiness Lý would be able to give instructions on submitting the document to *Hiệp Thiên Đài* (the Heaven-Joining Body).⁽²⁷⁾

On Monday 17 January 1926, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch gave instructions on ceremonial formalities to submit the draft New Law to Dharma Protector Phạm Công Tắc and Thượng Phẩm Cao Quỳnh Cư (while Thượng Sanh Cao Hoài Sang was at work in Saigon).

• Putting the New Law into effect

On Wednesday 16 February 1927, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch complained:

⁽²⁷⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 2: 266-268].

⁽²³⁾ That is to say, the three bills drafted by the three branches *Thái*, *Thượng*, and *Ngọc* (Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian).

⁽²⁴⁾ Respectively, they were *Thái Chánh Phối Sư* (Buddhist Principal Archbishop) Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, *Thượng Chánh Phối Sư* (Daoist Principal Archbishop) Nguyễn Ngọc Trưng, and *Ngọc Chánh Phối Sư* (Confucian Principal Archbishop) Lê Bá Trang.

⁽²⁵⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 253].

⁽²⁶⁾ Of the three branches *Thái*, *Thượng*, and *Ngọc* (Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian), only *Giáo Sư* (Bishops) and higher ranks have got both major and minor ceremonial dresses. (Đức Nguyễn, *Cao Đài Từ Điển*, vol. 1, entries *đại phục*, *tiểu phục*.)

“Your Master [God] instructed you to put the New Law into effect at once but the Law has still been left before My statue for three days. How regrettable that I have not got a physical body like yours!

Since the Church establishment till now, you have not completed anything. Take it right now. Tomorrow you must manage to put it into effect without delay. If the Supreme Being blamed Me, it would be your fault!” ⁽²⁸⁾

On Monday 07 March 1927, Caodai God approved the New Law. He said to *Đầu Sư Thượng Trung Nhựt* (Daoist Cardinal Lê Văn Trung), *“Trung, let your co-religionists know that the New Law has been established already. The Church is to bring it into force.”* ⁽²⁹⁾

Tân Luật was first printed at l’Imprimerie Commerciale C. Ardin, Saigon, 14 pages (15x24cm), and its distribution started at the beginning of June 1927.

⁽²⁸⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 332].

⁽²⁹⁾ [Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển 2: 37].



Phụ bản / Plate 8: *Bìa Tân Luật* (bản in đầu tiên, Sài Gòn 1927)
The New Law, front cover (the first edition, Saigon 1927).

[Plate 8: The New Law, front cover (1927).]

3. The Orthodox Dharma for female dignitaries

During the séance on Wednesday 02 February 1927 (the first day of the traditional Tết), His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch arrived, establishing *Pháp Chánh Truyền* (the Orthodox Dharma) for female dignitaries of *Cử Trùng Đài* (the Nonuple hierarchy), from *Đầu Sư* (Cardinal) down to *Lễ Sanh* (Student-Priest). Thus, the female hierarchy excludes the ranks of *Giáo Tông* (Pope) and *Chưởng Pháp* (Legist-Censor). Female *Đầu Sư* is subordinate to *Giáo Tông* and *Chưởng Pháp* of the three branches.

His Holiness Lý also instructed in the ceremonial dress for each rank of female dignitaries. Unlike the male ones, all female dignitaries are to dress in white because they are not split into three branches *Thái*, *Thượng*, and *Ngọc* (say Buddhist, dressing in yellow; Daoist, blue; and Confucian, red).

Due to the absence of several female dignitaries, His Holiness Lý requested *Giáo Sư* Hương Thanh (Bishop Lâm Ngọc Thanh) to send letters, inviting them all to be present at the holy house on the fifteenth of the first lunar month to be conferred ranks by Caodai God.

Later, on Tuesday 15 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, Caodai God conferred four dignitary ranks on His female disciples as follows:

- Two *Phối Sư* (Archbishops): Lâm Ngọc Thanh, and Lê Thị Ngân.

- Eight *Giáo Sư* (Bishops): Bùi Thị Giàu (Nguyễn Ngọc Tương's spouse), Đãi Thị Huệ (Lê Văn Trung's spouse), and Nguyễn Thị Hiếu (Cao Quỳnh Cư's spouse), etc.

- Twenty-eight *Giáo Hữu* (Priests): Ca Thị Thế (Ca Minh Chương's daughter), Lâm Thị Tiếng (Lâm Quang Bính's daughter), Nguyễn Thị Huyền (Nguyễn Văn Tương's daughter), Nguyễn Thị Hương (Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ's daughter), Nguyễn Thị Nhiều (Phạm Công Tắc's spouse), and Trần Thị Lựu (Cao Quỳnh Diêu's spouse), etc.

- Fifty-six *Lễ Sanh* (Student-Priests): Nguyễn Thị Sanh (Trương Hữu Đức's spouse), and Nguyễn Thị Thơm (Lê Thế Vĩnh's spouse), etc.

4. The Orthodox Dharma for the Heaven-Joining Body

On Sunday 13 February 1927, Caodai God established *Pháp Chánh Truyền* (the Orthodox Dharma) for *Hiệp Thiên Đài* (the Heaven-Joining Body).

The highest was *Hộ Pháp* (Dharma Protector) Phạm Công Tắc, administering the *Pháp* (Dharma) branch. On the right of *Hộ Pháp* was *Thượng Phẩm* Cao Quỳnh Cư, administering the *Đạo* (Dao) branch. On the left of *Hộ Pháp* was *Thượng Sanh* Cao Hoài Sang, administering the *Thế* (World) branch.

Below them were *Thập Nhị Thời Quân* (the Twelve Sovereigns of Time), split into three branches as follows:

The *Pháp* (Dharma) branch included: *Bảo Pháp* (Dharma Conservator) Nguyễn Trung Hậu, *Hiển Pháp* (Dharma Dedicator) Trương Hữu Đức, *Khai Pháp* (Dharma Developer) Trần Duy Nghĩa, and *Tiếp Pháp* (Dharma Receiver) Trương Văn Tràng.

The *Đạo* (Dao) branch included: *Bảo Đạo* (Dao Conservator) Ca Minh Chương, *Hiển Đạo* (Dao Dedicator) Phạm Văn Tươi, *Khai Đạo* (Dao Developer) Phạm Tấn Đãi, and *Tiếp Đạo* (Dao Receiver) Cao Đức Trọng.

The *Thế* (World) branch included: *Bảo Thế* (World Conservator) Lê Thiện Phước, *Hiển Thế* (World Dedicator) Nguyễn Văn Mạnh, *Khai Thế* (World Developer) Thái Văn Thân, and *Tiếp Thế* (World Receiver) Lê Thế Vĩnh.

5. The character *Khí* at the Dharma Protector altar

On Monday 13 December 1926, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch instructed the apostles to make a long piece of felt (1.5x3 metres), embroidered with the character *Khí* 氣 (Breath); it was placed at the Dharma Protector altar, facing the God's Altar in the Thiên Lâm main hall. Using the beaked basket, His Holiness Lý wrote the character in the style of amulet. Exactly a week later (on Monday 20 December), answering an apostle's question about making the character *Khí*, Caodai God told to use red felt and yellow embroidery thread.⁽³⁰⁾

⁽³⁰⁾ [Hương Hiếu 2: 86, 110].

6. Temporary “storey” for the Heaven-Joining Body

On Thursday 20 January 1926, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch instructed the apostles to construct a temporary “storey” for *Hiệp Thiên Đài* (the Heaven-Joining Body) at the Thiên Lâm holy house. It was 4 metres deep, about 3.6 metres high, and as wide as the holy house. A staircase was to be made so that Dharma Protector would be able to enter the main hall right from *Hiệp Thiên Đài* “storey”.

7. Making the seals of Cardinals and Legist-Censors

On Saturday 19 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, His Holiness Lý instructed in designing three round seals for *Chương Pháp* (Legist-Censors) of the three branches. Each seal consists of an outer ring with the French words “3e AMNISTIE DE DIEU EN ORIENT” [3rd Amnesty of God in the Orient]. Each inner circle bears six Chinese characters 大道三期普度 [*Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*, say the Third Universalism of the Great Dao]. Each seal center shows a different image: a *patra* (almsbowl, for the Buddhid branch), a dust whisk (Daoist), or the Spring and Autumn Annals (Confucian).

The three round seals to be made for *Đầu Sư* (Cardinals) of the three branches are a little smaller than the ones for *Chương Pháp*. Their outer rings and inner circles bear the same French words and Chinese characters as described

above. Each seal center shows a different Chinese character: 太 (*Thái*, for the Buddhist branch), 上 (*Thượng*, Daoist), or 王 (*Ngọc*, Confucian).

In order to prevent fake imitations, after the six seals of *Chưởng Pháp* and *Đầu Sư* had been made, they all were to be officially registered at the court of Tây Ninh province.⁽³¹⁾

8. Establishing the Lộc Giang holy house

On Wednesday 16 February 1927, Caodai God arrived. The Supreme Being requested *Yết Ma* (Karma) Trần Văn Giồng, owner of the Phước Long pagoda, to kneel close to the evocation table. God said that He accepted Spiritual Pope Lý Thái Bạch's request to convert Giồng's pagoda in Chợ Đệm into the Lộc Giang holy house, and to rank its owner *Thái Giáo Hữu* (Buddhist Priest).

Caodai God instructed Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt (Lê Văn Trung) and Dharma Protector Phạm Công Tắc to send *Khai Pháp* (Dharma Developer) Trần Duy Nghĩa and *Tiếp Pháp* (Dharma Receiver) Trương Văn Tràng to the Lộc Giang holy house, where this pair of mediums would help Priest Thái Giồng Thanh hold séances to introduce the new faith to the local inhabitants.⁽³²⁾

⁽³¹⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 337].

⁽³²⁾ After Priest Thái Giồng Thanh's decease, the Lộc Giang holy house returned to the Phước Long pagoda, which is now in

9. Change in the number of dignitaries

On Thursday 09 December 1926, due to serious illness, Daoist Legist-Censor Nguyễn Văn Tương (born in 1879) passed away in his home village of Hữu Đạo, Cai Lậy district, Mỹ Tho province. Over a month later, during a séance on Saturday 15 January 1927, Caodai God conferred the rank of Acting *Thượng Chưởng Pháp* (Daoist Legist-Censor) on apostle Trần Đạo Quang.

At midnight of Saturday 25 December 1926, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch conferred the rank of *Thượng Giáo Sư* (Daoist Bishop) on Latapie, a Frenchman.

On Saturday 15 January 1927, Caodai God conferred the rank of *Thái Đầu Sư* (Buddhist Cardinal) on apostle Dương Văn Nương. God revealed that His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch had dismissed Thích Thiện Minh (Monk Như Nhân's adept) due to Thiện Minh's negligence of his duties as the Buddhist Cardinal.

On Saturday 19 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, His Holiness Lý reminded Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt that he should manage to finish the parish register, appoint *Ban Trị Sự* (Boards of Administration) and *chức việc* (officials or elders) to serve at *hương đạo* (village congregations). In a few months' time, new followers would unceasingly multiply, His Holiness Lý would

Tân Nhựt village, Bình Chánh district, HCMC, facing the Chợ Đệm river.

bestow dignitary ranks on more disciples so as to have more people to deal with congregational routines.

VII. LEAVING GÒ KÉN FOR THE NEW LAND

1. Monk Như Nhãn's demand for the return of the pagoda

At the end of August 1926, Monk Như Nhãn willingly let the earliest Caodai apostles borrow the unfinished Thiên Lâm pagoda and transform it into a holy house.

On Thursday 18, and into the small hours of Friday 19 November 1926, after God's ascension, the Thiên Lâm main hall was disturbed by evil spirits due to the carelessness of apostle Lê Văn Lịch (Confucian Cardinal Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt) while practising occult power to protect the séance. Such a regrettable disturbance made Monk Như Nhãn lose his belief in the new faith.

Moreover, being hard pressed by his Buddhist congregation, at the beginning of December 1926, Monk Như Nhãn decisively demanded the return of the pagoda. Consequently, during the séance on Saturday 04 December 1926, the apostles asked Caodai God to let them pay the Monk for the pagoda.⁽³³⁾

A month later, during the séance on Tuesday 04 January 1927, when Daoist Cardinal Thượng Trung Nhựt (Lê Văn

⁽³³⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 239].

Trung) reported to Caodai God on Monk Như Nhãn's demand for regaining the Thiên Lâm holy house, the Supreme Being said, *"Most of you are dissatisfied with the case, and willing to return it. I will give [Nguyễn Ngọc] Thơ instructions about the matter."*⁽³⁴⁾

Relating to Monk Như Nhãn's demand, on Saturday 19 February 1927 at the Thiên Lâm holy house, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch asserted, *"Today, I am determined to return this pagoda."*⁽³⁵⁾

2. The future Holy See and the holy land Tây Ninh

At the Thiên Lâm holy house, during the same séance on Saturday 19 February 1927, His Holiness Lý said, *"You all have to join efforts to set up the Holy See. It will be nowhere else but Tây Ninh, which is the holy land. Besides, its climate is suitable for foreigners to come and learn Caodaism. I wish to choose another location but the Supreme Being does not approve."*⁽³⁶⁾

In the following day, Sunday 20 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, Caodai God said:

"As for the Holy See, My wish is that there is union of human force and Heaven's will, which is My virtuous conduct. You should follow My example."

⁽³⁴⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 259].

⁽³⁵⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 336].

⁽³⁶⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 336].

Since I came and established Caodaism for you, I have never exercised monopoly power. If you can choose any place pleasing the Church, I will be pleased, too. You all must join efforts to carry through the Holy See. It will be nowhere else but Tây Ninh.”⁽³⁷⁾

Accordingly, in the last ten days of February 1927, for the construction of both a temporary holy house and the Holy See, an urgent need did arise to acquire new land within the holy land Tây Ninh only.

3. Instructions in hunting new land

On Sunday 20 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, Caodai God said, *“If you all understand My will, you had better be economical. Each expense is merely a means, not the end.”*

In order to afford the land for constructing the Holy See, right after that advice, Caodai God said to *Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh* (Buddhist Cardinal Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ), *“Thơ, I entrust you with the task of collecting enough money within a month. Remind your brethren that the fame and esteem of Caodaism are linked with the Holy See. Later, Thái Bạch will instruct you in the Holy See model.”*

Next, Caodai God remarked on a few areas being considered by the apostles: *Cắm Giang* was hard to supply food; *Bến Kéo* had narrow terrain; *Suối Vàng* was

⁽³⁷⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 338].

inconvenient in transport though its climate was beautiful. God also suggested that the apostles should explore *“the forbidden woods on the other side of the road, which is very ideal”*.⁽³⁸⁾

4. His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch’s directions

On Monday 21 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch said to *Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh* (Buddhist Cardinal Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ), *“Tomorrow, follow the upper road called Telegraph, then go straight to a three-way junction named Ao Hồ.”*⁽³⁹⁾

On Wednesday 23 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch said to *Đầu Sư Thượng Trung Nhựt* (Daoist Cardinal Lê Văn Trung), *“You tell Thái Thơ Thanh that after he has bought the land, I will draw another architectural plan. Do tell him to buy all of the Ao Hồ area to have sufficient space for the holy land. (...) That whole area must be bought. Later, you will have to ask for permission to reclaim the forest.”*⁽⁴⁰⁾

On Thursday 24 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch praised *Đầu Sư Thái Thơ Thanh* (Buddhist Cardinal Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ) for his finding the right land for the Holy See construction. According to geomancy, He explained why it was the holy

⁽³⁸⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 338, 339].

⁽³⁹⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 339].

⁽⁴⁰⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 340].

land: Three hundred metres under the ground was the intersection of six streams of groundwater, which was named *six dragons protecting the seal*.

Aspar, the French forest ranger and also landowner, set a price for the woods at twenty (or twenty-five) thousand French Indochinese piastres; however, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch advised the apostles that if they could beat Aspar down to seventeen or eighteen thousand piastres, they would finish the purchase.

5. The architectural plan by His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch

On Monday 28 February 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, Caodai God advised *Đầu Sư* Thái Thơ Thanh (Buddhist Cardinal Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ) that if it cost too much to construct the Holy See according to the architectural plan drawn by His Holiness Lý, the original size could be lessened by using *thước mộc* (Vietnamese traditional unit for measuring length equal to 0.4 metres).

As for the Globe of the Universe (*Quả Càn Khôn*) and the statue of Prince Siddhartha riding on Kanthaka horse (accompanied by his charioteer Chandaka), after Caodai God's ascension, His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch arrived and instructed *Phối Sư* Thái Bính Thanh (Buddhist Archbishop Lâm Quang Bính) in the removal of them to the temporary holy house in the newly purchased land. He also instructed the Buddhist Archbishop in using stakes to measure the

land for constructing the Holy House. Later, at that very noon, *Hộ Pháp* (Dharma Protector) Phạm Công Tắc and *Thượng Phẩm* Cao Quỳnh Cư held a séance in the Thiên Lâm main hall in order that His Holiness Lý Thái Bạch drew an architectural plan on a large sheet of paper. Only Buddhist Archbishop Thái Bính Thanh was allowed to join the séance. However, it would cost too much to build the Holy See exactly according to His Holiness Lý's plan. A few days later, accordingly, Caodai God lessened the measurements.

6. The French colonial oppression

Suspecting that the Caodai congregation were carrying out a political plot, the French colonialists began their oppression. On Tuesday 08 March 1927, at the Thiên Lâm holy house, Caodai God told *Đầu Sư* Thượng Trung Nhựt (Daoist Cardinal Lê Văn Trung) to meet Cochinchina Governor Blanchard de la Brosse immediately so as to wipe out the ruler's suspicion. In case of failure, he was to lodge a complaint with the French government in Paris by telegraph. In the end, that effort was in vain; thus, on Saturday 19 March 1927, Caodai God requested Daoist Cardinal Lê Văn Trung to meet the Cochinchina Governor again.⁽⁴¹⁾

VIII. CONCLUSION

⁽⁴¹⁾ [Nguyễn Văn Hồng 1: 349, 353].

Wednesday 23 March 1927 was the date when the Caodai apostles returned the Thiên Lâm pagoda to Monk Như Nhân. Accordingly, before this date, all belongings of the holy house had to be transported to the newly purchased land in Long Thành village.

This fatiguing removal ended the Inauguration period at the Thiên Lâm holy house, which was planned to last three days and three nights (from 18 through 20 November 1926), but which was finally prolonged to four months (because the returning of the pagoda was one month overdue). This removal also marked a turning point in the Caodai history: the construction of the Tây Ninh Holy See.

Nhiều Lộc, 28 July 2015

HUỆ KHẢI

PHỤ LỤC *APPENDIX*

Năm sinh và năm tạ thế mộ t số vị tiền khai Some apostles' years of birth and death

Ca Minh Chương (1850/1855?-1927)

Ca Thị Thế (1884-1956)

Cao Đức Trọng (1897-1958)

Cao Hoài Sang (1901-1971)

Cao Quỳnh Cư (1888-1929)

Cao Quỳnh Diêu (1884-1958)

Dương Văn Nương (Thái Nương Tinh, 1870-1929)

Đoàn Văn Bản (Thượng Bản Thanh, 1876-1941)

Đỗ Văn Vàng (1880-1950)

Huỳnh Văn Giới (Thượng Giới Thanh, 1880-1954)

Lại Văn Hành (Thượng Hành Thanh, 1878-1939)

Lâm Ngọc Thanh (Hương Thanh, 1874-1937)

Lâm Quang Bính (Thái Bính Thanh, 1876-1931)

Lê Bá Trang (Ngọc Trang Thanh, 1878-1936)

Lê Thế Vĩnh (1903-1945)

Lê Thiện Phước (1895-1975)

Lê Văn Giảng (1883-1932)

Lê Văn Lịch (Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt, 1890-1947)

Lê Văn Trung (Thượng Trung Nhựt, 1876-1934)

Lý Trọng Quí (1872-1945)

Ngô Văn Chiêu (1878-1932)

Ngô Văn Điều (1868-1938)

Ngô Văn Kim (Thượng Kim Thanh, 1868-1940)

Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (Thái Thơ Thanh, 1873-1950)

Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (Thượng Tương Thanh, 1881-1951)

Nguyễn Tấn Hoài (Thượng Hoài Thanh, 1881-1949)

Nguyễn Thị Hiếu (Hương Hiếu, 1887-1971)

Nguyễn Thiên(g) Kim (1870-1946)

Nguyễn Trung Hậu (1892-1961)

Nguyễn Văn Chức (Thượng Chức Thanh, 1873-1956)

Nguyễn Văn Kiệt (1881-1965)

Nguyễn Văn Kinh (Ngọc Kinh Thanh, 1890-1945)

Nguyễn Văn Lai (Thượng Lai Thanh, 1876-1939)

Nguyễn Văn Luật (Thái Luật Thanh, 1869-1948)
Nguyễn Văn Mạnh (1894-1970)
Nguyễn Văn Trò (Thượng Trò Thanh, 1886-1949)
Nguyễn Văn Tương (Thượng Tương Thanh, 1879-1926),
Nguyễn Văn Tường (Thượng Tường Thanh, 1887-1939)
Như Nhân (Thích Từ Phong, Nguyễn Văn Tường, 1864-1939).
Phạm Công Tắc (1890-1959)
Phạm Tấn Đãi (1901-1976)
Phạm Văn Tươi (1897-1976)
Thái Văn Thâu (1899-1981)
Thích Thiện Minh (Thái Minh Tinh, 1882-1945)
Trần Duy Nghĩa (1888-1954)
Trần Đạo Quang (1870-1946)
Trần Văn Giồng (Thái Giồng Thanh, 1879-1930)
Trần Văn Thụ (Ngọc Thụ Thanh, 1857-1927)
Trương Hữu Đức (1890-1976)
Trương Văn Tràng (1893-1965)
Vương Quan Kỳ (Thượng Kỳ Thanh, 1880-1939)

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PHOTO GALLERY



Huệ Khải, ký họa bút chì. (Họa sĩ Bửu Long)



Phụ bản / Plate 9: Thánh thất tạm / *The temporary holy house*



Cao Hoài Sang (1901-1971)



Cao Quỳnh Cư (1888-1929)



Cao Quỳnh Diêu (1884-1958)



Đỗ Văn Vàng (1880-1950)

Phụ bản / Plate 10:
Tiền khai đạo Cao Đài / *The earliest Caodai apostles*



Đoàn Văn Bản (1876-1941)



Huỳnh Văn Giỏi (1880-1954)



Lê Bá Trang (1878-1936)



Lê Văn Lịch (1890-1947)



Lại Văn Hành (1878-1939)



Lâm Ngọc Thanh (1874-1937)



Lê Văn Trung (1876-1934)



Ngô Văn Điều (1868-1938)

Phụ bản / Plate 11:

Tiền khai đạo Cao Đài / *The earliest Caodai apostles*

Phụ bản / Plate 12:

Tiền khai đạo Cao Đài / *The earliest Caodai apostles*



Ngô Văn Kim (1868-1940) Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (1873-1950)



Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (1881-1951) Nguyễn Tấn Hoài (1881-1949)

Phụ bản / Plate 13:

Tiền khai đạo Cao Đài / *The earliest Caodai apostles*



Nguyễn Thiên[g] Kim (1870-1946) Nguyễn Thị Hiếu (1887-1971)



Nguyễn Trung Hậu (1892-1961) Nguyễn Văn Chúc (1873-1956)

Phụ bản / Plate 14:

Tiền khai đạo Cao Đài / *The earliest Caodai apostles*



Nguyễn Văn Kinh (1890-1945) Nguyễn Văn Trò (1886-1949)



Trần Đạo Quang (1870-1946) Trần Văn Thụ (1857-1927)



Nguyễn Văn Tường (1887-1939) Phạm Công Tắc (1890-1959)

Phụ bản / Plate 15:

Tiền khai đạo Cao Đài / *The earliest Caodai apostles*



Trương Hữu Đức (1890-1976) Vương Quan Kỳ (1880-1939)

Phụ bản / Plate 16:

Tiền khai đạo Cao Đài / *The earliest Caodai apostles*