

PHÁP CHÁNH TRUYỀN
THE RELIGIOUS CONSTITUTION
OF CAODAISM

Explained and annotated by
HIS HOLINESS HỘ PHÁP



Translated by
Hoang Minh Le

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PREFACE

Because the Sacred and Mysterious Mechanism of the Way has its Heavenly Law (Thiên Điều) just as the secular world has its Laws, both serve to restrain unrighteous desires that exist in every realm and every age. Without such restraints, the harmonious balance arranged by the Divine Creator could be lost. Therefore, at the very moment of opening the Third Universal Salvation of the Great Way (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ), the Supreme Being established the Constitution (Pháp Chánh Truyền) and the New Law (Tân Luật) to govern the Administrative Body Of The Religion (Hành Chánh Đạo), to preserve the true teachings of the Way, and to safeguard the justice of the Heavenly Law. Alongside these laws, He also bestowed the Sacred Teachings (Thánh Ngôn) and Doctrines (Giáo Điều) as guidance.

To establish such a great Religion as the Third Universal Salvation of the Great Way—destined to endure and enlighten humanity through seven hundred thousand years—without laws would be impossible. Without the foundation of law, how could such a vast number of disciples, nearly encompassing all humankind, be rightly guided and harmonized? For this reason, this Constitution with Commentary must be continually reprinted from one era to another, so that all disciples may follow it in their spiritual practice, preserve the dignity of a practitioner of the Way, avoid violating the Divine Law, and keep themselves from straying from the true path.

Indeed, no legal Laws in the world can be said to be absolutely perfect. Yet every law must establish at least the fundamental principles. For example, the law of justice between people must rest upon an immutable principle: *“What you do not desire for yourself, do not do to others.”* If we wish to enjoy freedom, we must not deprive others of theirs.

Though the saying is simple, there can be no true explanation. Law is essential to maintaining order in society, and even more indispensable within the Religion—for without law, disorder would surely arise, and where there is disorder, there can be no true Way.

By establishing the Constitution, the Supreme Being affirmed the sovereignty of His Religion. Whoever carries the spirit of building the Way must naturally respect this sacred sovereignty.

Thanks to this sovereignty, the Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh)—as the earthly embodiment of the Supreme Being—possesses the necessary authority to carry out the Divine mandate and guide humanity toward salvation.

Yet the authority of the Way differs from worldly power: it arises from love and compassion, not from coercion or domination.

The laws of the Way are founded upon Heavenly Principle (Thiên Lý) and Justice (Công Lý); therefore, they are inherently impartial, without favor or inequality for any disciple. Within the Religion, from the highest to the lowest ranks, each has its rightful place. The higher ranks

do not encroach upon the lower, and the lower do not usurp the higher. If the laws are faithfully observed, the entire Way will remain in harmony and peace, and the Administrative Body of the Religion will operate smoothly according to the natural order established by Heaven, free of obstacles.

The Sacerdotal Council now rejoices in the reprinting of this Constitution with Commentary, so that it may be widely disseminated throughout Religion, enabling all to partake of the Divine Justice of the Heavenly Law. We hope that henceforth, no one may claim ignorance of the Law of the Way as an excuse for transgression.

Respectfully,

The Sacerdotal Council

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Pháp Chánh Truyền (Constitution of the Cao Đài Religion) is the sacred charter of the Third Universal Salvation of the Great Way, directly bestowed by Đức Chí Tôn (the Supreme Being). It lays down the fundamental structure of the Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh) and serves as the guiding framework for the organization, authority, and duties of all dignitaries. This Constitution ensures that the Religion is preserved in purity, order, and fairness, and that all disciples may follow the Way in harmony and justice.

The book is composed of the divine constitution itself along with the explanations provided by Đức Hộ Pháp (the Dharma Protector). These explanations illuminate the deeper meaning of each provision, clarify its purpose, and protect against misinterpretation, so that every disciple may understand both the spirit and the letter of the Constitution. Within its pages are set forth the powers and responsibilities of every rank of the Cửu Trùng Đài, both for men and women, as well as those of the Hiệp Thiên Đài. It also carefully describes the official vestments each dignity, underscoring the sacred order and symbolism of Religion.

To remain faithful in one's spiritual journey is to uphold and obey the Pháp Chánh Truyền. It is the foundation of religious life, the safeguard of divine justice, and the covenant by which disciples walk rightly in the Way established by the Supreme Being.

Although I have endeavored with the greatest care and dedication to render this translation faithfully and accurately, mistakes are surely unavoidable. Moreover, this translation has not been reviewed or approved by the Sacerdotal Council of the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Holy See. It is offered solely as a resource for study and research and should not be regarded as an official text.

Respectfully,

Hoang Minh Le

NINE SPHERE PALACE (CỬU TRÙNG ĐÀI)

I. AUTHORITY OF THE POPE (GIÁO TÔNG)

CONSTITUTION: *The Pope is the eldest brother of you all.*

COMMENTARY: The Pope represents the Supreme Being in preserving His true Way on earth. As the eldest brother of humanity, he is entrusted with guiding all children of the Supreme Being, whether elder or younger, for such is the decree of the Divine Law.

Although within the Sacerdotal Council the organization is divided into two visible branches—the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) and the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài)—yet even the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) of the Heavenly Union Palace remains the younger brother of the Pope. However, this subordination applies only to the material aspect; in the spiritual aspect, their ranks are equal.

CONSTITUTION: *He has the authority to represent the Supreme Being and to guide you in both the Way and in Life.*

COMMENTARY: The Pope shares the authority of the Supreme Being in teaching all His disciples on the path of morality, guiding them step by step, and watching over them so that they may not violate the Heavenly Law (Thiên Điều)—thus obliging them to follow the NEW LAW (TÂN LUẬT). Therefore, regardless of rank, whoever commits an offense, the Pope must not, out of personal affection, forgive or conceal it, for such indulgence would cause the offender to lose his Heavenly position, stir up resentment among humanity, and diminish the value of the True Religion. The sufferings and hardships of the followers, that is, all living beings, and the trials of the Sacerdotal Council, that is, the Heavenly Appointed Dignitaries—these the Pope must find ways to shield and console, turning a life of misery into a life of blessing. He holds the full authority of Heaven to carry out Divine transformation. That is the supreme and most sacred duty of the Pope.

CONSTITUTION: *He has authority over the body but not over the soul.*

COMMENTARY: Whenever speaking of the body, it refers to the visible part; and speaking of the visible part of living beings, which is to speak of Life. As for speaking of the soul, that refers to the Spiritual part, which is the Way.

Above, the Supreme Being has said: Having authority to guide in both the Way and in Life. This shows clearly that Pope has authority to guide all of His children both on the path of Virtue which the Supreme Being has established, and on the path of Life through which the

mission of the Way is formed. It does not mean to say that the Pope has complete authority over both the Way and Life. The distinction in meaning lies only between the word PATH (ĐƯỜNG) and the word PART (PHẦN). Please strive to understand and do not confuse these two words..

Here is the Sacred Teaching of the Supreme Being given to the Dharma Protector when he asked about the authority of the Pope:

The Dharma Protector asked: “Master, according to the laws of the Christian Religion You established on earth, You gave the Pope full authority over both soul and body. Relying on that lofty authority, the Holy Religion was able to gain visible strength as it did. Now, since You have reduced the Pope’s authority over the soul, I fear that he may not have sufficient power to save humankind?”

The Supreme Being replied: (smiling) “That is a misunderstanding of Mine, born of being too burdened with the physical body. If I were to give a human being equal authority with Me over the soul, then he would rise to sit upon My throne, and grasp the supreme authority of the Supreme Being, forcing humankind to bow submissively as slaves of the flesh even more. That precious authority—I granted out of love for you, but little did I know it would become a double-edged sword that stirs up disorder among you.

Now I have not come to take it back, but only to eliminate its harmfulness. To remove such harm, nothing is better than to divide it in two, so that no one person holds it entirely.

For whoever holds full power over both the visible and the spiritual would thereby monopolize both political authority and law. And when political authority and law are monopolized in one’s hands, humankind can find no way to escape oppression.”.

If I were to give the Pope full authority over both the body and the soul (that is, over both the Way and Life), then would not the establishment of the HEAVENLY UNION PALACE (HIỆP THIÊN ĐÀI) become utterly useless, my child? The NINE SPHERE PALACE (CỬU TRÙNG ĐÀI) represents Life, while the Heavenly Union Palace represents the Way. Without the Way, Life has no strength; without Life, the Way has no authority. Only when strength and authority are balanced can you hope to bring about an era of renewal for the world. That is the proper means for you to unite together, to care for and support one another, and to preserve My sacred teaching from becoming a profane religion.”

CONSTITUTION: *He is granted the authority to communicate with the Thirty-Six Heavens (Tam Thập Lục Thiên), the Three Thousand Worlds (Tam Thiên Thế Giới), the Sixty-Seven Earths (Lục Thập Thất Địa Cầu), and the Ten Courts of Hades (Thập Điện Diêm Cung), in order to pray for your salvation.*

COMMENTARY: The Supreme Being has said: in order to pray for your salvation, He has already made it clear that the Pope (Giáo Tông) has only the role of praying for salvation, while

the role of granting transcendental deliverance belongs to the Eight Trigrams Palace (Bát Quái Đài), which governs it.

How can the Pope (Đức Giáo Tông) communicate with the Thirty-Six Heavens (Tam Thập Lục Thiên), the Three Thousand Worlds (Tam Thiên Thế Giới), the Sixty-Seven Earths (Lục Thập Thất Địa Cầu), and the Ten Courts of Hades (Thập Điện Diêm Cung) to pray for the Disciples?

He must go to the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) to request the mystical grace of Spirit Writing (Cơ Bút) to do so. Let us cite here a passage from the Religious Constitution of the Heavenly Union Palace (Pháp Chánh Truyền Hiệp Thiên Đài) that speaks of this matter: *“Furthermore, the Heavenly Union Palace is the place where the Pope communicates with the Thirty-Six Heavens, the Three Thousand Worlds, the Sixty-Seven Earths, and the Ten Courts of Hades (Thập Điện Diêm Cung) in order to pray for the transcendental deliverance of all humankind.”*

Thus, concerning the Spiritual realm—that is, the domain of the Way (Đạo)—he has no authority at all. Even when submitting petitions to the Eight Trigrams Palace (Bát Quái Đài), it must be done through the Heavenly Union Palace.

The Heavenly Union Palace is the intermediary that unites the Pope with the Deities (Thần), Saints (Thánh), Immortals (Tiên), and Buddhas (Phật)..

II. AUTHORITY OF THE LEGISLATIVE CARDINALS (CHƯƠNG PHÁP)

CONSTITUTION: *The Legislative Cardinals (Chương Pháp) of the Three Branches are: Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism.*

COMMENTARY: That is to say, each Branch has one dignitary, and the three Religions are distinct from one another—their essence and their outward expression are entirely different, and their laws are not the same. Only by relying on the New Law (Tân Luật) as the unifying foundation can they be harmonized; thus, the Supreme Being has said.

CONSTITUTION: *Though the Laws of the Three Religions are distinct, yet before the Supreme Being they are regarded as one.*

COMMENTARY: Because they are regarded as one, the Supreme Being came to establish the New Law for humanity, harmonizing with human intellect, uniting with the human heart, so that all may equally follow one Divine Law. This provides the means to cultivate the Way without contradicting the Heavenly Law, thereby enabling each soul to attain its divine position and fulfilling the mission of universal salvation.

Previously, the Heavenly Law required humankind to elevate their virtues to match those of Deities, Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas, in order to attain holy qualities and establish their spiritual ranks. But now, those very Beings lower themselves, coming to dwell among humankind so as to guide all souls upward toward the highest spiritual rank, reaching the same level as the Supreme Being. The era of constraint is challenging, the era of opening is easy—such is the natural law. Moreover, since human intellect has advanced beyond the Cycle of Evolution (Ngũơn Tấn Hóa) [1], ascending to a supreme position. The old laws of former religions are no longer sufficient to restrain faith. And once humanity has lost faith in morality, the mechanism of self-destruction remains; and as long as that mechanism endures, humankind can hardly escape the calamity of destroying one another. World must rely on the Way in order to endure, yet the Way must also rely on the World in order to be firmly established. Who can know that the New Law, which the Supreme Being has now come to teach us to establish, will not yet undergo changes in the future, so that it may harmonize with human intelligence, with both the Way and World in mutual accord — thereby guiding all humankind through eternity.

For example, if someone asks: “Why did the Supreme Being not use the Old Laws of the Three Religions, which already existed, but instead established the New Law, compelling humanity to abandon the old and welcome the new?”

The Supreme Being replied: “Truly, I Myself once descended through the Divine Pen and declared: The Palace of Jade Void (Ngọc Hư Cung) rejects the old Law, the Temple of the Divine Thunder (Lôi Âm Tự) shatters the ancient Dharma. Thus, the Old Law has already been rejected by the Palace of Jade Void, and the Ancient Dharma has been broken by the Temple of the Divine Thunder. Therefore, today the Old Law and Ancient Dharma no longer hold any true meaning. Those cultivators who mistakenly believe they must still submit to the Old Law or the Ancient Dharma are in direct opposition to the Heavenly Laws of the Third Universal Salvation of the Great Way, which represents Heaven in governance.

For that reason, the Supreme Being has forbidden the five branches of Confucianist to employ the Old Law to delude humankind any longer.

To follow the Old Law is to submit to the Heavenly Law; yet once bound by the Heavenly Law, it is difficult to establish one’s own spiritual position.”

Please see further here, and you will clearly recognize that the Supreme Being has already determined this matter.

[1] The Upper Cycle (Thượng Ngũơn) is the Cycle of Creation; that is, the Cycle of Sacred Virtue, meaning the Cycle of Innocence (Cycle de création, c’est-à-dire cycle de l’innocence).

The Middle Cycle (Trung Ngũơn) is the Cycle of Evolution; that is, the Cycle of Struggle, meaning the Cycle of Self-Destruction (Cycle de progrès, ou cycle de lutte et de destruction).

The Lower Cycle (Hạ Ngũơn) is the Cycle of Preservation; that is, the Cycle of Re-Creation, meaning the Cycle of Returning to the Origin (cycle de conservation ou cycle de reproduction et de rénovation).

CONSTITUTION: *Thus, one becomes three, and the three are as one.*

COMMENTARY: The New Law encompasses the entirety of the Three Religions. Thus, one becomes three, and the three former Laws of the Three Religions, when united, are regarded as one—that is, the New Law.

CONSTITUTION: *They have the authority to examine the laws before they are enacted, whether descending from the Pope or being proposed by the Cardinals.*

COMMENTARY: Within the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài), the Pope represents the Divine Beings to conduct the spiritual mission. The Pope holds the authority to establish laws, a supreme power entrusted by the Supreme Being and the Divine Beings. The Cardinals (Đầu Sư), meanwhile, represent all of humanity, bearing the authority conferred by humankind. These two powers must harmonize for the Divine mechanism of World Creation (cơ Tạo Thế) of Heaven and humanity united to be fulfilled.

Often, the Heavenly Mandate surpasses human capacity, while humanity may resist the Heavenly Mandate. Should the Pope issue laws beyond human endurance, or should the Cardinals propose laws contrary to the Heavenly Law, conflict would arise between the two sides. If there were no Legislative Cardinal to stand as the intermediary authority of the Heavenly Union Palace within the Nine Sphere Palace to balance and reconcile both sides, the foundation of the Way would falter, disorder would arise, the higher and lower ranks would clash, and factions would emerge.

Therefore, the Legislative Cardinals hold the authority to examine all laws before their implementation. Any law or scripture lacking the three seals of approval from the Legislative Cardinals, with ratification by the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài), shall not be executed by the disciples of the Supreme Being. [1]

CONSTITUTION: *If the two parties cannot reach an agreement, they must submit the matter to the Dharma Protector at the Heavenly Union Palace, to petition the Supreme Being (Thầy) to descend and amend it, or to establish a new law.*

COMMENTARY: If any law issued by the Pope is found to be contrary to the livelihood of humanity, and the Cardinal (Đầu Sư) has determined that it cannot be carried out, then it is the Cardinal's duty to submit it to the Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) for revision. Likewise, if the Pope receives a law proposed by the Cardinal that violates the Heavenly Mandate, the Pope must transfer it to the Legislative Cardinal for review.

[1] Those are the words of praise from His Holiness Pope Li.

Neither side may rely on their authority to disregard the law, thereby causing disorder between the two branches; both must clearly present their case, so that the Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) may adjudicate. If, after judgment, the two sides still cannot agree, then the matter must be submitted to the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp), who will bring it before the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) to petition the Supreme Being (Thầy) for correction, or the Dharma Protector will deliberate upon both sides and establish the law anew.

CONSTITUTION: *They have the authority to review the scriptures before publication; if any scripture or law is found to be harmful to morality, they must remove it and forbid its release.*

COMMENTARY: It is said that there is authority to review the scriptures before they are made public; this means that such scriptures must be censored before publication. Thus, although the power of censorship rests with the Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp), regardless of any scripture or book that may corrupt morality or contravene the Religious Laws, he has the authority to remove it and forbid its publication. However, before granting approval for publication or prohibition, the Legislative Cardinal must submit it to the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) to request approval. This authority applies not only to scriptures written within the Religion, but also to those produced by outsiders; if any are found to corrupt customs and degrade morals, the Sacerdotal Council is obliged to support the Legislative Cardinal in eradicating them. Therefore, the Supreme Being (Thầy) has spoken these words:

CONSTITUTION: *“All disciples are obliged to lend their strength in carrying out duties before the law of the world.”*

COMMENTARY: Even if secular laws bring suffering to humanity, the Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) must seek ways to petition for their mitigation. Such authorities must rely upon the power of the Religion in order to be strong; that is to say, when the Religion is strong, humanity’s authority is strong, and only when the Religion is strong can humanity be delivered from the miseries of worldly laws.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Supreme Being advises all of you to unite in lending them your support.”*

CONSTITUTION: Each Legislative Cardinal must possess his own seal.

COMMENTARY:

- The Buddhist Legislative Cardinal (Thái Chưởng Pháp) is the Alms Bowl (Bình Bát Vu).
- The Taoist Legislative Cardinal (Thượng Chưởng Pháp) is the Ritual Whisk (Cây Phất Chủ).
- The Confucianist Legislative Cardinal (Ngọc Chưởng Pháp) is the Spring and Autumn Annals (Xuân Thu).

United, these are called the Sacred Emblem (Cổ Pháp), have always been revered by the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp). Upon the Minor Vestment (Tiểu phục) of the Dharma Protector must appear these three Sacred Emblems. Upon the Major Vestment (Đại phục) of the Pope are three other Sacred Emblem:

1. The Dragon Fan (Long Tu Phiến),
2. The Heroic Sword (Thư Hùng Kiếm),
3. The Ritual Whisk (Phất Chủ).

These constitute the Sacred Emblem (Cổ Pháp) of the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) and the Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm).

CONSTITUTION: *The three seals must be placed upon each law before it can be enacted.*

COMMENTARY: Regardless of any law or scripture, even if it has already received the approval of two Legislative Cardinals (Chưởng Pháp), if the third is lacking, it still cannot be promulgated. That means: the Pope has no authority to approve it above, and the Cardinal (Đầu Sư) has no authority to implement it below.

The Nine Sphere Palace governs worldly administration, while the Legislative Cardinals are entrusted with the authority of law. Thus, the Legislative Cardinal represents the Heavenly Union Palace within the Nine Sphere Palace. This is a Divine Plan, rare through both ancient and modern times.

III. AUTHORITY OF THE CARDINALS (ĐẦU SƯ)

CONSTITUTION: *The Cardinals (Đầu Sư) have the authority to govern the Way and Life of the disciples of the Supreme Being (Đức Chí Tôn)*

COMMENTARY: Here, the Supreme Being uses the terms “the Way (phần Đạo)” and “Life (phần Đời)” to define the authority of the Cardinals (Đầu Sư). This means that the Cardinals hold full authority over the political affairs of the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) and over the laws of the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài). Thus, they are granted the right to represent both the Pope (Giáo Tông) and the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) before humankind. Whoever acts on behalf of the Pope and the Dharma Protector is thereby a person of both the Nine Sphere Palace and the Heavenly Union Palace. For this reason, the Cardinals are required to submit to the authority of both in conducting administration and are not permitted to act according to their own will or to exercise any measure without the mandate of the Pope and the Dharma Protector..

CONSTITUTION: *They have the authority to establish laws but must submit them to the Pope for approval.*

COMMENTARY: The Cardinal (Đầu Sư) is granted the authority to establish laws in harmony with the governance of the Religion, in a manner consistent with human sentiment and not contrary to the Divine Will. However, because what accords with human sentiment often stands in opposition to the Will of the Divine, the Cardinal is required first to submit such laws to the Giáo Tông (Pope) for approval. The Pope, as the representative of the Supreme Being, shall deliberate and ensure that humanity does not act against the Divine Will.

CONSTITUTION: *Such laws must be examined carefully to see whether they are truly beneficial to humanity?*

COMMENTARY: This statement clearly indicates that any law established by the Cardinals must be genuinely beneficial to humanity. Therefore, the Supreme Being advised:

“The Nine Sphere Palace and the Heavenly Union Palace must examine most carefully; whatever law or scripture proves harmful to morality, the Cardinals should neither establish nor enforce it.”

CONSTITUTION: *The Pope must entrust the Legislative Cardinals with the examination before granting approval.*

COMMENTARY: Even if such a law is in accordance with the will of the Pope, he still does not have the authority to approve it immediately but is required first to submit it to the Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) for careful consideration.

It has been decreed from above that: any law which has not received the unanimous approval of all three Legislative Cardinals (Chưởng Pháp) shall not be promulgated.

Therefore, the Cardinal (Đầu Sư) and the Pope (Giáo Tông) must not agree together in opposition to the Constitution; if both sides bypass the examination of the Legislative Cardinals, they violate the Law. And whoever violates the Law, regardless of their rank, will hardly escape judgment before the Court of the Three Religions (Tòa Tam Giáo).

The Cardinal (Đầu Sư) is required to comply with the command of the Giáo Tông (the Pope) in order for the law to be promulgated; therefore, the Supreme Being (Thầy) declared:

CONSTITUTION: *“They must obey the orders of the Pope, and act exactly according to the laws and decrees instructed by the Pope.”*

COMMENTARY: The Cardinal (Đầu Sư) is bound only to obey the command of the Pope. Even though the Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) is the one who represents the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) in matters of law, Such a law must first have been examined by the Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) and approved by the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài); that is to say, the decree of the Heavenly Union Palace has already been established within it.

CONSTITUTION: *If any law is contrary to the livelihood of humanity, they may petition for its annulment.*

COMMENTARY: This does not refer only to the New Law (Tân Luật) of today. Even if, after this New Law becomes the Old Law (Cựu Luật), should it conflict with the livelihood of humankind, the Cardinals (Đầu Sư) are likewise permitted to request its annulment.

CONSTITUTION: *The Supreme Being advice you, My children, to love and support them.*

COMMENTARY: The Supreme Being advice the Sacerdotal Council to recognize the heavy responsibility borne by the Cardinals, and to love and support them so that they may fulfill their sacred duty.

CONSTITUTION: *I instruct you: should there be anything of great necessity, you must petition them.*

COMMENTARY: The Supreme Being instructs all His disciples—that is, all humanity—that whenever a matter of great necessity arises, they must present their petitions to the Cardinals, for the Cardinals represent the complete authority of the Way on this earth.

CONSTITUTION: *Though the three Branches are distinct, their authority is the same.*

COMMENTARY: The Three Branches of the Way—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism—though distinct, share equal authority because all follow the New Law. Thus, the One becomes Three, and the Three are as One.

Among the three Cardinals, none is higher, and none is lower; [1] their authority is equal. Any law approved by the Pope or proposed by sentient beings (the Cardinals), once reviewed by the Legislative Cardinals, and ratified by the Heavenly Union Palace, must be promulgated if even one of the three Cardinals agrees to obey. [2]. Only when all three unanimously refuse to comply may the law be returned to the Pope, who must then submit it to the Legislative Cardinals for further review. [3]. Therefore, the Supreme Being declared:

CONSTITUTION: *“If there is any law that the Pope has promulgated, but all three have signed their refusal to comply, then that law must be returned to the Pope, and the Pope will command the Legislative Cardinals to examine it once again.”*

COMMENTARY: The Supreme Being has firmly decreed: If all three sign their names in refusal to obey the law, then I (Master) am certain that such a law is indeed contrary to humanity; and what is most essential is that, once the opposition to humanity has been clearly demonstrated, only then may the Cardinal disobey the order from above and petition for the law to be annulled. However, if even one among the three is able to obey the command, it cannot yet be decisively affirmed that the law is truly contrary to humanity; and if it is not entirely opposed to humanity, then it must be promulgated.

This authority, though strict, might seem severe; yet it is willed by the Divine so that the three must act in unity. [4]

[1][2][3][4] Excellent. This is the praise of the Supreme Pope Li

CONSTITUTION: *They each must have their own seal; every document, whatever it may be, must bear these seals in order to be conducted.*

COMMENTARY: These three seals are: Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism. Every document that is to be conducted must bear all three seals of the Cardinals in order to be valid.

Before the Cardinal assumes the authority of governance, he must establish a solemn oath at the Holy See, ever maintaining an impartial heart in practicing the Way, just as the Dignitaries of the Heavenly Union Palace have sworn.

THE POWER OF UNITY: Once the oath has been taken, the Cardinal is entrusted with the authority over both the Administration and the Laws.

Thanks to this great authority, the Cardinal will possess sufficient sacred power to prevent evil authority from harming the Way. Should there arise a time of peril when the three Principal Archbishops (Chánh Phối Sư) are not strong enough to resist, then the Cardinal may employ this unified authority to direct the entire Sacerdotal Council. All Dignitaries of the Nine Sphere Palace and the Heavenly Union Palace must obey his command—even the Pope and the Dharma Protector as well. [1]

IV. AUTHORITY OF THE PRINCIPAL ARCHBISHOP (CHÁNH PHỐI SƯ)

CONSTITUTION: *“Each Branch shall have twelve Archbishops (Phối Sư), making thirty-six in total; among them, three are Principal Archbishops (Chánh Phối Sư).”*

COMMENTARY: The three Principal Archbishop must be chosen from the three Branches: Buddhism (Thái), Taoism (Thượng), and Confucianism (Ngọc). These three are not only the heads of the thirty-three other Archbishop, but they also represent the authority of the Cardinals (Đầu Sư) in performing duties, possessing the same authority as the Cardinals.

They stand as representatives of the Sacerdotal Council of the Nine Sphere Palace (Hội Thánh Cửu Trùng Đài) and of all humanity.

They hold full authority in administration but must follow the commands of the Cardinals. They may not alter or create commands on their own; all matters must await the Cardinal's order. Yet, at the same time, the Cardinal is not permitted to usurp their authority. Should the Cardinal encroach and act without the consent of the Principal Archbishop, which would exceed his authority and thus violate the Constitution. [2]

[1][2] [Excellent. Commended by His Holiness Pope Li.]

Recalling once more: when the Supreme Being (Đức Chí Tôn) gave the command to establish the New Law, for what reason did the Pope entrust the Principal Archbishops to examine and revise it before submitting to Him? Thereafter, the Principal Archbishops would review it, then it would be presented to the Heavenly Union Palace for approval; finally, the Dharma Protector must bring that Law down to the Nine Sphere Palace to proclaim and promulgate it.

Furthermore, when the three Principal Archbishops submitted the Law that the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) and the Supreme Life (Thượng Phẩm) attended the séance for the Pope to make revisions (on the 13th day of the twelfth month, year Bính Dần). The Pope commanded the three Cardinals (Đầu Sư) and the Legislative Cardinals (Chưởng Pháp) to ascend their thrones. Then, He summoned the three Principal Archbishops (Chánh Phối Sư) to offer the ritual, and called the Taoist Principal Archbishop Thượng Tướng Thanh, saying: *“Beloved friend, observe how the I perform the ritual, and follow accordingly.”* He further instructed the three Principal Archbishops (Chánh Phối Sư), that when submitting a law, they must together use six hands to support it fully, without leaving any gap, in order to present it to the Cardinals. The Cardinals, with their six hands, would then offer it to the Legislative Cardinals, who in turn, with their six hands, would submit it to Him (the Pope Li). At that moment, He (the Pope Li) commanded them to proceed straight into the Great Hall (Đại Điện), passing above the heads of the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) and the Supreme Life (Thượng Phẩm). The Pope then lowered the Divine Spirit Writing (Ngọc Cơ) so that the law might even pass above Himself. [1]

After the Legislative Cardinals received the law, they immediately passed it even over the heads of Jiang Tiangong (Khương Thái Công) and Lord Jesus. Later, the Dharma Protector lamented with the Supreme Being (Đức Chí Tôn) about this matter. The Supreme Being smiled and taught: “The Immortal rank of Li Bai is still below that of Shakyamuni, Confucius, and Laozi. Otherwise, this code of law would have also passed over the heads of those Divine Beings as well, for it is the Heavenly Law, my child.” [2]

The New Law was placed before the Immortal rank of the Pope for one day and one night for Him to review. On the following day, He descended by spirit-writing and lamented: *“The wondrous Heavenly Law of the Way is still lacking in many parts.”* He then smiled and continued: “Such matters you, dear Virtuous Friends, could never compose on your own...

[1]Excellent. Commended by His Holiness Pope Li.]

[2] (Smiling...) “The value of the New Law (Tân Luật) is so great, yet the entire Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh) has despised and disregarded it, causing the Elder to resign from the office of Pope (Giáo Tông), in order to let the Heavenly Law (Thiên Điều) examine and punish. Alas! How many have fallen into perdition in the realm of Hades (Phong Đô) because of this.”]

Alas! Without that mysterious and hidden Divine plan, the Law cannot be completed; and if the Law is not completed, how could the Way ever be established? The Pope Li smiled and continued: I (Lão) reported to the Great Merciful and Great Compassionate One (Đại Từ Đại Bi) to add into the Law those secret and essential matters. Therefore, you too must earnestly pray with Me. Within this last week of this month, begin your prayer and instruct all Temples; all fellow disciples must keep a sincere heart; join Me, and petition for the Sacred Law, do you hear? (smiling...) When the Way is held in reverence, then naturally you will also be revered. Thus, knowing your own worth, you must strive to perfect the people of the world. From now on, I will protect you ever more. And if at times I must compel Myself to exercise the authority of clear reward and punishment, it is only with the intention of raising your value even higher. Therefore, I ask you not to take it to heart with displeasure, do you hear?”

He (the Pope Li) immediately summoned the two Legislative Cardinals to take the Law and present it to the Heavenly Union Palace. He then instructed the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) and the Supreme Life (Thượng Phẩm) to descend to the Nine Sphere Palace and stand at their appointed positions. The Dharma Protector then formed the Dharma Protector’s mudra (ấn Hộ Pháp), while the Supreme Life (Thượng Phẩm) held the Dragon Fan above the mudra. Then the Dharma Protector commanded the two Legislative Cardinals, as such: “*I grant you one month to submit the Law.*”

The Legislative Cardinals, after receiving the Law, were given one month to review and refine it before submitting it to His Holiness Pope Li (Đức Lý Giáo Tông). Thereafter, the Pope entrusted the two Cardinals (Đầu Sư) to present it to the Heavenly Union Palace for the Dharma Protector to petition the Supreme Being (Đức Chí Tôn) to descend and amend it. Through the prayers of the Pope and the Sacerdotal Council, the Supreme Being descended through the Divine Pen to transmit the esoteric method to the Dharma Protector. [1]

[1] [Joy is indeed a little for humankind. The Sacerdotal Council of the True Teaching with the New Dharma has attained such practices as the rite of “Releasing Resentments,” (Phép Giải Oan) the rite of “Opening the Gate of Birth,” (Phép Khai Sanh Môn) the Ban Kim Quan, and so on... Yet there are still many other esoteric methods that the Dharma Protector has not been authorized to teach, and which humanity and even the Sacerdotal Council, in their obscurity, have not yet applied. Today, who knows whether the Divine Beings—Deities, Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas in the Eight Trigrams Palace—have received the Supreme Being’s command to exercise these Laws, since such authority belongs to Them? What is to be done now? Among these esoteric methods lies the mysterious means of attaining the Way—will those Beings now allow it to be known, or not? Alas! (smiling) If I (the Pope Li), had a way to rectify the foundation of the Way, then it could be achieved; but without it, not a single person would attain the Dharma. Even the Nine Sphere Palace has already overshadowed the authority of the Eight Trigrams Palace! Truly so, indeed, just a little!]

From this it is clearly seen: the Pope called the Principal Archbishop Thuong Tuong Thanh to observe and imitate his actions, which is sufficient to show that He granted full authority of officiation to the Principal Archbishop. At the same time, He required all three to place their six hands together, meaning that all three must unite as one in order to be complete. The Cardinals, likewise, and the Legislative Cardinal, likewise, must unite as one to fulfill the Sacred Teaching: *“One becomes three, and three are as one”* [1]

Why was the task of revising the New Law entrusted to the Principal Archbishop? Will it also be entrusted to the Principal Archbishop again in the future?

It has already been said that the Principal Archbishop is the one who represents all of humanity within the Sacerdotal Council; he is the one who presides over humanity in the foundation of the Way [2]. If they are called the Supreme Being of humanity, then they themselves are humanity.

Within the Eight Trigrams Palace, from the rank of Immortal upward to the Supreme Being belongs to the realm of the Perfect Beings (*classe des Parfaits ou des Purs*) [3]. From the rank of Saint downward to that of human belongs to the class of Saints (*classe des Épures*) [4]. From the animals downward to matter belongs to the class of the worldly and impure (*classe des Impurs*). [5]

Thus, in the Eight Trigrams Palace, from the level of Saintly souls there remains the duty of regulating Heaven and Earth, maintaining relations with the perispirits still within the material realm, uplifting and guiding the worldly classes so that they may advance toward the rank of Saint. Once one attains the Saintly rank, one naturally possesses self-knowledge. Even if cast down into the human world again, one still preserves Saintly Virtue and cultivates the Way until reaching the state of Perfection. When that state of Perfection is attained, one

[1] [That is the invisible mechanism of the union of Essence, Energy, and Spirit, do you understand, dear friends? “Ngoc (Confucianist) ” represents Essence, “Thuong (Taoist) ” represents Energy, and “Thai (Buddhist) ” represents Spirit.” If the three do not unite, the Way can never be attained—remember this well!]

[2] [*“This too should be explained: why is it that from the rank of Principal Archbishop downward, it belongs to the secular sphere—that is, the World; while from the rank of Cardinal upward, it belongs to the sacred sphere—that is, the Way? Likewise, within the Heavenly Union Palace there is both the World and the Way, and the Eight Trigrams Palace must also have the same, so that the mechanism of uniting the World with the Way may be fulfilled. Thus, within the Way there is the World, and within the World there is also the Way.”*]

[3] [4] [5] [Excellent. Commended by His Holiness Pope Li.]

then shares equal authority with the Creator—merciful, content, indestructible, and eternal.

Within the Heavenly Union Palace, the Dharma Protector acts in place of the Divine Beings and the Supreme Being to safeguard the justice of Creation, protecting humanity and all living things so that they may advance to the state of ultimate Goodness and ultimate Beauty, humans attaining perfect Goodness, and creatures attaining perfect Beauty. [1]. It is not by exerting one's own power to establish this, but rather by protecting the natural process of evolution from obstruction. If it is said that there is the authority to protect, then there must also be law, applying law to restrain humanity, just as the Perfect Beings use Heavenly Law to govern Heaven and Earth.

The Dharma Protector is the embodiment of Perfect Beings. [2]. He then entrusted authority to the Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm) to establish the Way, guiding the perispirits to their highest ranks. This means uplifting and defending both the disciples and the Heavenly Appointed Dignitaries, so they are content in their position just as the Deities and Saints regulate Heaven and Earth in peace and harmony, supporting the life and transformation of all beings. The Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm) receives the perispirits from the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) and leads them into the Gate of the Way; the Supreme Rank is the embodiment of the Way in relation to the Saints, and thus the head of the Saints. As for the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh), in worldly matters He brings the perispirits into the Gate of the Way—whether original souls or transformed ones, all must rely on Him for salvation. The Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) receives the mandate to transform the world, to guide humanity out of the sea of suffering and transmigration. [3]. It is mandated that the Supreme Life is bound to remain close to those without the Way, to console and instruct them, and from the irreligious downward to the material realm belonging to the secular. Thus, the Supreme Life is the embodiment of the World, the one who stands at the head of the world. [4]

Within the Nine Sphere Palace, the Cardinals correspond to the rank of Earthly Immortals, the Legislative Cardinals correspond to the rank of Human Immortals, and the Pope corresponds to the rank of Heavenly Immortals: The Three Stern Powers represent the authority of the Buddha in this world.

Thus, these dignitaries correspond in rank with the Perfect Beings of the Eight Trigrams Palace. The Pope entrusts authority to the Cardinals; the Cardinals in turn delegate authority to the Principal Archbishops [3], thereby establishing the Way to save humanity. In the same manner, the Dharma Protector entrusts authority to the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) and the Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm). The Principal Archbishops and Bishops correspond to the

[1] Excellent! (Commended by His Holiness Pope Li.)

[2] [3] [4] (*Excellent!* Commended by His Holiness Pope Li).

Heavenly Saints; the Bishops correspond to the Human Saints; the Priests correspond to the Earthly Saints; the Student Priests correspond to the Heavenly Deities; the Chief Administrators, Deputy Chief Administrators, and Law Administrators correspond to the Human Deities; and the disciples correspond to the Earthly Deities. [1]. Thus, these dignitaries, corresponding to the ranks of the Saints in the Eight Trigrams Palace, hold the authority to establish the Way.

The heretics, the left-handed sects, and the irreligious, holding for themselves secular power, oppose the True Teachings. They borrow worldly authority to destroy the good and nurture the evil, to delude humanity and bind them to the dust of the world. They recognize neither Heaven above nor revere Earth below. They treat people as instruments for the pursuit of fame, office, and worldly influence. They disregard the law of reincarnation, value matter more than spirit, and set their heart's desire on the fleeting splendor of this life. Like animals, trees, or stones, they only know how to live without knowing why they live; they know not even that, and when they die, they know not that they are gone. Such are the profane—that is what is called the world. [2]

The Supreme Being has taught that humanity must make its own laws, and since the Principal Archbishops are the ones who represent humanity, then naturally the authority to establish laws rests in their hands.

Political authority belongs to the Cardinals, while authority over officiation belongs to the Principal Archbishop. Otherwise, the offices of Pope and Cardinal would bear no restraint, for both political power and legal authority would be united. Moreover, the Supreme Being has decreed that the rank of Pope be filled by election between Cardinals and Legislative Cardinals; if the power of the Cardinals is not limited, how could the Legislative Cardinals ever hope to be elected?

Since the Principal Archbishops are the ones who represent humanity, they must only obey orders, not dispute them. They may present laws to the Cardinals to request amendment, but they have no right to establish laws themselves. In the future, if the Supreme Being grants humanity once again the authority to establish laws, then they will have the power to revise them as they do now. Therefore, the Supreme Being has said:

[1] Excellent! Commended by His Holiness Pope Li

[3] Excellent!... such a piece of writing is truly praiseworthy, said the Pope Li.

CONSTITUTION: *“The three Principal Archbishops have the authority delegated from the Cardinals, yet they do not have the right to petition for the annulment of laws.”*

COMMENTARY: If one disobeys the Divine Mandate, altering the laws in practice—whether adding or subtracting—then such action violates the Heavenly Law and turns Sacred Teaching into a worldly teaching. Humanity is worldly, while the Sacerdotal Council is sacred. Without the approval of the Sacerdotal Council, any changes made by the Principal Archbishop—that is, by humanity—are all worldly; and once worldly, it is difficult to hope for attainment of a saintly rank. [1]. For this reason, the Supreme Being does not allow the Principal Archbishops to establish laws; this too is a wondrous mystery of the Way, which eliminates the worldly. [2]

V. AUTHORITY OF THE ARCHBISHOPS (PHỐI SƯ)

COMMENTARY: The Archbishops are those who receive authority delegated by the Principal Archbishops, sharing equal authority and rank with him whenever responsibility is entrusted to them. They may not act in anything without the command of the Principal Archbishops. In every matter they must obey their orders when assigned to administer various places. Any alteration or deviation constitutes a violation of the Constitution and will surely be brought before the Three Religions Court.

VI. AUTHORITY OF THE BISHOPS (GIÁO SƯ)

CONSTITUTION: *There are seventy-two Bishops, with twenty-four belonging to each branch.*

COMMENTARY: There are seventy-two Bishops, divided equally with twenty-four in each Branch, and it is not permitted either to increase or to reduce this number.

CONSTITUTION: *The Bishops are those who teach and guide the disciples in both the Way and in life.*

[1] [2] Excellent! (Commended by His Holiness Pope Li)

COMMENTARY: It is already known that the Bishops exercise the authority on behalf of the Cardinals and Archbishops in administering the Temples in the larger provinces. Nevertheless, the Supreme Being has decreed that their authority is only to instruct; yet their scope is broader in that they teach both the Way and worldly life. This is nothing surprising, for all the dignitaries of the Sacerdotal Council of the Nine Sphere Palace, established by the Supreme Being, must follow the principle of the Religion—namely, the orientation toward education. Since the Supreme Being has called Himself “Teacher” in order to instruct, the very titles of the dignitaries clearly show that the primary duty of each is teaching and guidance: such as Priest (Giáo Hữu), Bishop (Giáo Sư), Archbishop (Phối Sư), Cardinal (Đầu Sư), and Pope (Giáo Tông). Looking closely, one sees that in each title the word Giáo (Teaching) or Sư (Master) is never absent. From ancient times until now the system of the Way has always been so, harmonizing with the saying: “*What Heaven ordains is called nature; to manifest nature is called the Way; to cultivate the Way is called Teaching.*” The Supreme Being relies on the Sacerdotal Council which He has established to act in His authority, to teach all His children—that is, all beings—toward goodness. This is the foremost duty of the Sacerdotal Council.

CONSTITUTION: *They are required to care for all of you as an elder brother care for his younger sibling.*

COMMENTARY: The Supreme Being requires the Bishops to care for the disciples within their authority as an elder brother cares for his younger sibling. This means being close to the disciples as though they were members of the same family—concerned for their well-being, offering help, winning their affection so that they may love and rely upon you. One must share joy and bear burdens with them, fostering bonds of love, and truly become like an elder brother to the disciples. Only then is it in accord with what the Supreme Being has ordained. [1]. The words “as an elder brother care for his younger” are sufficient in meaning.

CONSTITUTION: *They keep the registers of all the disciples.*

COMMENTARY: The registers of births and deaths, marriages, admissions, or expulsions of all disciples are all under the charge of the Bishops. The Bishops are the custodians of the worldly registers of the Religion; their authority has been firmly established, and no other dignitary may get it.

[1] Excellent! (Commended by His Holiness Pope Li)]

CONSTITUTION: *They must take care of each disciple's matters of marriage and funeral.*

COMMENTARY: Since they are custodians of the life registers, it is most convenient for them to attend to marriages and funerals. The four rites—officialdom, marriage, mourning, and sacrifice—are the most essential aspects of human life, yet the Supreme Being has decreed that only marriage and funeral are entrusted to the Bishops. Thus, the Bishops have full authority to arrange and administer these two matters so that they may harmonize with the customs of humanity, according to the traditions of various peoples; yet they may not violate the dignity of the Religion, meaning that any reform or modification must be approved by the Sacerdotal Council. When the Supreme Being said: “of each disciple,” it must naturally also be understood as “of each nation.”

CONSTITUTION: *In the large provinces, each one has the right to administer and to perform offerings to the Supreme Being, like the Cardinals and the Archbishops.*

COMMENTARY: Here the Supreme Being has said that in the large provinces, one must understand that this refers to the authority under the responsibility of the Bishops. They are granted the authority to perform offerings to the Supreme Being like the Cardinals and the Archbishops. Yet, since they are permitted to perform such offerings as the Cardinals and Archbishops do, they must also follow the rites and regulations established by the Cardinals and Archbishops. Thus, the right to perform offerings does not belong entirely to them but is determined by the Sacerdotal Council.

CONSTITUTION: *They are permitted to submit petitions appealing against laws that harm humanity or to request that such laws be amended.*

COMMENTARY: Any New Laws or Old Laws that are clearly harmful to humanity, the Bishops are permitted to appeal or to petition for their amendment.

CONSTITUTION: *They must be close to each disciple, like brothers in one family, always ready to help—do listen!*

COMMENTARY: This is a saying the Supreme Being repeated once again, affirming that the Bishops must be close to each disciple of the Supreme Being as though they were members

of the same family, caring for and assisting them. For this reason, the Supreme Being emphasized the words “do listen,” urging that attention be paid.

Since the Bishops exercise authority on behalf of the Cardinals and Archbishops in administering the Temples and performing offerings to the Supreme Being, they are therefore required to obey the Archbishops and must not disobey their orders. Except for the specific authority expressly granted by the Supreme Being, in all other matters they must follow the established order, acting only under the command of the Archbishops and never altering anything on their own. To alter would be to violate order; and to violate order is to oppose the Constitution and will surely be brought before the Three Religions Court.

VII. AUTHORITY OF THE PRIESTS (GIÁO HỮU)

CONSTITUTION: *The Priests are those appointed to disseminate the true Way of the Supreme Being.*

COMMENTARY: In order to disseminate the true Way of the Supreme Being, the Priests must first study and thoroughly master the true Way of the Supreme Being. Thus, the rank of Priest requires proper training. The duty of dissemination is a great and noble responsibility; if one does not fully understand the principles of the Way, but spreads to humanity ideas contrary to its truth, one brings harm to the Way. Moreover, the Supreme Being has said that the Priests are those closest to humanity. Therefore, if individuals without virtue, without cultivated hearts, and lacking in character are chosen, they cannot set forth a clear example of the Way. Humanity will look to them to either praise or criticize the Way, judging its truth or falsity by their conduct. The students must be like the teachers; just as the teacher is, so must the students be. Humanity will look at the students and from them judge the teacher. The dignity of the Religion of the Supreme Being is called truth; therefore, the practice of the Way must manifest truth exactly as the Supreme Being has ordained. The intellects, when seeking to evaluate a religion, need not examine all its dignitaries; they will look instead to one of its lower ranks, but most essential ones, to compare character and virtue, and thereby determine the principles and essence of that Religion.

The rank of Priest is therefore an extremely important rank. Thus, the Priests must embody the Way in a manner worthy of the noble principles of the Religion. To be worthy, they must thoroughly understand all the truths of the Way.

CONSTITUTION: *They are granted the right to request the amendment of laws.*

COMMENTARY: The Priests are granted the right to submit petitions to their superiors requesting the amendment of laws. For whoever can tell—one day they may be assigned to disseminate the true Way of the Supreme Being in another country or among a people whose customs cannot conform to the laws of the Religion. If the laws are not amended to harmonize with the practices and rituals of that people, then salvation would be difficult to achieve. This is why the Supreme Being grants the Priests the right to request the amendment of laws.

CONSTITUTION: *Three thousand Priests are to be equally divided, one thousand for each Branch; this number must not be increased or reduced.*

COMMENTARY: This statement is clear enough and needs little explanation. However, it must be emphasized that the rank of Priest is meant for all peoples across the globe, not solely for this nation of Vietnam. Even the rank of Pope in the future may be held by individuals of various nations who exercise governing authority. [1]

CONSTITUTION: *They are permitted to perform ceremonies when presiding over temples in smaller provinces.*

COMMENTARY: When speaking of smaller provinces, it also implies smaller regions or smaller nations. And these smaller provinces, regions, or nations must be subject to the authority of the larger provinces, larger regions, or larger nations.

Thus, the Priests must be subject to the authority of the Bishops. When presiding over the Temples, the Priests are permitted to perform ceremonies exactly according to the rites established by the Bishops. They are not permitted to alter anything and must await the command of the Bishops in all matters; to act in disobedience is to violate the Constitution.

CONSTITUTION: *Whatever they request, the Pope is required to give the greatest diligence.*

COMMENTARY: It has been said that the Priests are those closest to humanity, while from the rank of Priest upward to the Pope the distance is great. Thus, the Priests are near to humanity,

[1] Excellent! (Commended by His Holiness Pope Li.

while the Pope is far from humanity. If the Pope desires to be close to humanity, he must be diligent in associating with the Priests. The Priests know humanity better than anyone; therefore, if the Pope wishes to know humanity, he must listen to the Priests.

The Divine Will desires that the Pope may be as close to humanity as the Priests are. For this reason, the Pope is instructed to be attentive and diligent in considering each petition presented by the Priests above all others. Yet, in all matters, the Priests are not permitted to disturb the order of hierarchy; meaning that they must rely on the ranks above them when submitting petitions.

CONSTITUTION: *Whenever there is something uncertain, they are the ones sent to investigate and verify.*

COMMENTARY: Humanity belongs to the Secular (Life), and in order to understand the Secular, one must be close to humanity. Only by being near to humanity can one truly know its happiness as well as its suffering.

The ones closest to humanity are the Priests. If there arises anything that causes discord between the Way and the Life, leading to doubt or uncertainty, no one is better suited to observe and verify than the Priests. For this reason, the Supreme Being has entrusted this special responsibility to them. [1]

CONSTITUTION: *They must cultivate virtue and character in abundance, for they are those who are closest to humanity—do listen!*

COMMENTARY: This matter has already been explained above; here it is simply to emphasize once again the Supreme Being's decisive words "do listen!" Pay careful attention.

(Oh! what a great responsibility this is, and so forth ...)

[1] Excellent! (Commended by His Holiness Pope Li)].

VIII. AUTHORITY OF THE STUDENT PRIESTS

CONSTITUTION: *The Student Priests are those of virtue, chosen from among the disciples to perform ceremonies.*

COMMENTARY: The Supreme Being has said that the Student Priests must be chosen from among the disciples of the Supreme Being who are most virtuous. They must possess complete moral integrity. Moreover, since one must first become a Student Priest before aspiring to advance into the dignitary ranks, the Student Priests must be worthy individuals, possessing character and learning sufficient to become Heavenly Appointed Dignitaries in the future.

It is known that when the Supreme Being established the Constitution, He prescribed that ceremonies be performed in this manner because the customs and traditions of our Vietnamese people required it. Yet, when compared to the title “Brother” (Frère) in Christianity, how exalted then is the role of this dignitary!

Henceforth, the Student Priests are required to hold a degree from the Religious School before being eligible for nomination to this rank. The Student Priest is the one who acts in place of the Priest when the Priest is absent, to perform the offerings to the Supreme Being, but always under the authority of the Priest. [1]

CONSTITUTION: *They are permitted to establish the altar for each disciple.*

COMMENTARY: The Student Priests must visit the homes of the disciples to help them set up the altar and teach them the rites for worshiping the Supreme Being, acting in place of the Priest.

In the future, when the Religion expands abroad, there will be many nations unable to worship in the same manner as in Vietnam. What then will be the duty of the Student Priest? At that time, the duty of the Student Priests will be to visit the disciples, to comfort, instruct, and diligently guide them both in the Way and in life, acting in place of the Priest.

[1] Many times, you have misused the title of Student Priest by applying it to those who merely present offerings, thereby diminishing the dignity of the Heavenly Appointed dignitaries. Therefore, I designate those who present offerings as Ceremonial Attendants (Lễ Sĩ).

CONSTITUTION: *The Supreme Being instructs you: The Student Priests are those whom the Supreme Being cherishes; therefore, you must not oppress them.*

COMMENTARY: Be moved by the compassion of the Supreme Being, for He knew that the Student Priests must submit under the authority of those who direct them. Therefore, they must possess virtue, so that they may know their place, and be willing to endure humility and subordination. Yet the Supreme Being also left this instruction: the Student Priests are beloved by Him. This is the Divine Will, that those of higher rank must not use their authority to oppress those beneath them.

CONSTITUTION: *“Only by first entering the rank of Student Priest may one hope to advance into the dignitary ranks.”*

COMMENTARY: This has already been explained above, so there is no need to repeat it, but it must be reminded that a Student Priest, whether through election or academic qualification, must attain this rank before advancement.

CONSTITUTION: *“Otherwise, only by a special conferment from the Supreme Being may one bypass this stage—do listen!”*

COMMENTARY: One must hold the certificate of Student Priest in order to advance into the rank of Priest. Otherwise, only through a special conferment directly bestowed by the Supreme Being can one bypass the Constitution. The Supreme Being affirmed this with the words “do listen!”—pay close attention. [1]

[1] [Oh! The harm comes from the excessive love of the Supreme Being in bestowing such favors, which has caused disorder for the True Teachings. I am firmly resolved to implore the Supreme Being not to grant such things anymore].

IX. AUTHORITY OF CHIEF OF ADMINISTRATOR (CHÁNH TRỊ SỰ)

COMMENTARY: The Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) is a dignitary established by His Holiness Pope Li [1] and must act under the authority of the Student Priests. He is to preside within the authority of the Priests and represent the Religion as the elder brother within that jurisdiction.

Here let us recall the words of His Holiness Pope Li, who descended in spirit to explain the rank of Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) and requested the Dharma Protector to grant the laws of the Heavenly Union Palace to this dignitary [2] so that he may possess sufficient authority to fulfill his responsibility.

The words of His Holiness Pope Li: “The Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) is the one who represents Me, acting as the elder brother of the disciples within his authority. I hope that it may be as though I am present everywhere, to the edges of Heaven and the corners of the seas. I believe you also wish this to be so. [3]. Among humanity, the smart is few, but the ignorant are many. If we do not have sufficient power to mediate, it will be difficult to spread the truth of the Way everywhere. The closer we are to humanity, the more difficulties, and troubles we must endure. We must devise means to eliminate these difficulties at their very beginning, so that the foundation of the Religion will not fall into disorder. Therefore, I request you to grant authority to the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự), giving him the power to administer, so that he may instruct, admonish, and correct on our behalf in the rustic villages and countryside.”

At that time, the Dharma Protector accepted these words [4] and understood well their noble intent.

[1] Must be! (Commended by His Holiness Pope Li).

[2] Laugh!

[3] I wonder what you, dear friends, think of this. I ask? Thuong Trung Nhat replied: “Venerable Sir, this is a precious blessing; from ancient times until now, humanity has never received such grace.”

[4] I praise the memory of the Dharma Protector

Later, the Supreme Being also descended in spirit and likewise urged the Dharma Protector to bestow this authority.

According to the Divine Will of His Holiness Pope Li, the authority of the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) is as follows: The Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) must care for and assist in the livelihood of the disciples of the Supreme Being entrusted to his oversight—helping those in hardship, aiding the poor, and regarding all disciples as younger siblings. He has the authority to judge, especially in cases of minor disputes arising within his authority, but must act under the authority of the Priests, the Student Priests, and the Head of the religious community (Đầu Họ).

If a disciple violates the laws of the Religion, the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) must counsel and admonish that person at least a few times. If the disciple refuses to repent and amend, then he must send a report to the local Priest, who will summon the disciple for instruction and admonition. If, after being admonished by the Priest, the disciple still relapses, then the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) has the right to submit a petition to the Head of the religious community, requesting that the Sacerdotal Council either discipline or expel the individual in accordance with the New Law.

This petition must be made in two copies: one sent to the Heavenly Union Palace and the other to the Nine Sphere Palace.

If there are violations of the laws of the Religion and the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) has repeatedly reported them to the Nine Sphere Palace but it remains silent, then the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) is permitted to report directly to the Heavenly Union Palace and appeal for a decision. [1]

The Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) is forbidden to encroach on the jurisdiction of others of the same rank and is not permitted to conduct administration outside his assigned area. He is required to administer in this way: “*Divide his jurisdiction into several smaller districts,*” depending on size, and assign them to the Deputy Chiefs of Administrator (Phó Trị Sự).

The Deputy Chiefs must take turns delivering thirty volunteers per month to the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự)—meaning that each day one volunteer must be present to serve him. The Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) then sends that volunteer throughout the authority to visit the disciples regarding illness or poverty. If anyone within the authority suffers misfortune, the volunteer is ordered to stay there to assist and care: if ill, to provide

[1] Only in this way can the abuse of authority be avoided.

nursing; if poor, to join with others in relieving the hardship. This is the exalted duty of the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự), and it is this noble aspect that manifests the beauty of the Religion.

His Holiness Pope Li also taught: “Thus must it be as members of one family, concerned for each other, sharing joy and sorrow together, united in hunger and fullness, protecting one another’s rights without envy or strife. If one is hungry, all must share to feed; if one suffers loss, all must strive to protect; if one is humiliated, all must share in bearing it—only then will authority be respected.”

Before assuming responsibility, the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) is required to come to the local Temple to take a solemn oath, declaring: “To keep an impartial heart in administering the Way. Even toward father or mother, siblings, wife or children, I must not act with partiality. To preserve a sincere heart and practice the Way in accordance with Heaven. The Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự) is thus the junior Cardinal.”

X. AUTHORITY OF DEPUTY CHIEF OF ADMINISTRATOR (PHÓ TRỊ SỰ)

COMMENTARY: *The Deputy Chief of Administrator is also a dignitary established by His Holiness Pope Li.*

He shares authority with the Chief of Administrator within the authority entrusted to that Chief. He holds authority in administration but not in law. He is permitted to arrange, assist, guide, and instruct the disciples within his assigned authority, but he has no authority to judge. Each month, he is required, in turn with the other Deputy Chiefs, to provide thirty volunteers to the Chief of Administrator, so that the Chief may organize aid for the helpless, the sick, and those in distress within the authority. When, under the order of the Chief, he delivers such volunteers to the home of any disciple, he must oversee and ensure that the duty is properly conducted. If there are any shortcomings, he must report them to the Chief of Administrator so that corrections may be made. Each day, he must submit a Daily Report (tờ Nhật Để) so that the Chief of Administrator may understand the activities and status within his authority. Especially if anything arises that may harm the Way, he must immediately notify the Legal Administrator (Thông Sự), so that it may be resolved in peace. In cases of complaints or confirmed violations of the laws of the Religion, he is not permitted to conceal or ignore them but is required to pass them to the Legal Administrator for adjudication.

The Deputy Chiefs are forbidden to encroach upon authority concerning the law. Excellent! [1]. The Deputy Chief of Administrator is thus the Junior Pope.

XI. AUTHORITY OF THE LEGAL ADMINISTRATORS (THÔNG SỰ)

COMMENTARY: The Legal Administrators (Thông Sự) are dignitaries established upon the advice of His Holiness Pope Li to the Dharma Protector.

The Legal Administrator shares the same rank as the Deputy Chief of Administrator within his authority, but he holds authority in matters of law, not in administration.

He belongs to the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) and acts under the authority of the Chief of Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự). His duty is to observe and examine the conduct

[1] Excellent! Commended by His Holiness Pope Li.

of the Deputy Chief in practicing the Way. Any matter that undermines justice within the authority of the Deputy Chief, and which the Sacerdotal Council does not fully perceive, becomes the responsibility of the Legal Administrator. [1]

Any violations of the laws of the Religion, disobedience to instructions passed down from the Sacerdotal Council, alterations to the New Code, or modifications of administrative orders [2]—if these are carried out by the Deputy Chief without authorization from the Chief of Administrative Affairs, and the Sacerdotal Council remains unaware—then the fault lies with the Legal Administrator.

Although he must act under the authority of the Chief of Administrator, he nevertheless has the right to correct the Chief's errors. If he perceives evident irreligious acts of the Chief, the Legal Administrator is permitted to admonish and correct him. If, after many admonitions, the Chief refuses to listen, and reports have been sent to the Nine Sphere Palace, but it remains silent, then the Legal Administrator is permitted to submit a petition directly to the Heavenly Union Palace, appealing for correction. He must care for and defend the helpless, regardless of whether they are disciples or outsiders—whether struck by sudden misfortune, poverty and hunger, illness and solitude, forced exile, weakness, or abandonment in old age [3]. In all such cases, he has full authority to require the Deputy Chief of Administrative Affairs to arrange aid.

Regardless of rank, whether great or small, when a Legal Administrator encounters urgent matters in the administration of the Religion, all dignitaries are obliged to assist and support him. Those who are repeatedly admonished by the Legal Administrator for obstinacy, refusing to aid others in times of urgent need despite sufficient evidence, will be subject to disciplinary action by the Heavenly Union Palace, which will request judgment from the Sacerdotal Council. Before assuming responsibility, the Legal Administrator must go to the local Temple and take a solemn oath, as does the Chief of Administrative Affairs. The Legal Administrator is thus the Junior Dharma Protector.

The Supreme Being has said: "If under your eyes you still see any matter lacking justice, then the Religion has not yet been established."

[1] [2] [Excellent! (Commended by His Holiness Pope Li)].

[3] [In worldly life, exemption from taxation is granted to those disabled and unable to support themselves. As for the elderly, exemption from obligatory duties is given to those afflicted with illness, or else to the aged who are left solitary and without support.]

COMMENTARY: It is the lower classes of humanity who most often suffer oppression through the loss of justice. For this reason, the authority of the Legal Administrators is of the utmost importance.

RELIGIOUS VESTMENTS OF THE MALE DIGNITARIES OF THE NINE SPHERE PALACE

VESTMENTS OF THE POPE

COMMENTARY: The Pope's vestments consist of two sets: the Major Vestment and the Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment is entirely white fabric, embroidered with golden lotus flowers from top to bottom. On both sides of the collar, each side bears three sacred emblems: the Dragon-Tufted Fan (Long Tu Phiến), the Heroic Sword (Thư Hùng Kiếm), and the Ritual Whisk (Phất Chủ). (These are the sacred emblems of the Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm) and the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) in governance.) Upon his head rests a five-tiered golden crown in the form of the Eight Trigrams (Bát Quái) (symbolizing the Five Branches of the Great Way), joined into a rounded cap sealed at the center. At the very top of the crown is the character “Vạn” (Ten Thousand), within which is the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhãn Thầy), encircled by a halo of Radiant Aura (vòng Minh Khí). Along the band of the crown must be engraved the three sacred emblems, clearly shown, just as on both sides of the collar. In his right hand he holds a staff measuring 0.90 meters, at the top of which is the golden character “Vạn”, within it the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhãn Thầy), surrounded by a halo of Radiant Aura (vòng Minh Khí). (Very beautiful!)

The Minor Vestment is also entirely of white fabric, embroidered with golden characters of the Eight Trigrams (Bát Quái), placed as follows: the Kan trigram (Khảm, Water) at the Lower Elixir Field (Hạ Đôn Điền); the Ken trigram (Cấn, Mountain) at the right hand; the Chen trigram (Chấn, Thunder) at the left hand; the Dui trigram (Đoài, Lake) at the right shoulder; the Sun trigram (Tốn, Gió) at the left shoulder; the Li trigram (Ly, Fire) at the heart; and the Kun trigram (Khôn, Earth) at the center of the back. On his head he wears the Mitre of Union (Mão Hiệp Chưởng), also of white fabric, with a height of three tấc (0.3 m), three phân (0.03 m), and three ly (0.003 m), totaling 0.333 meters. It is stitched into a jointed form with one raised seam in front and one raised seam behind, joining together into a folded seam (symbolizing the union of yin and yang). A tied cord binds the folds, and on the left side hang two strips, one long and one short (the long strip measures 0.03 meters wide and 0.30 meters long). On the front of the mitre, above the forehead, is embroidered the character of the Qian trigram (Cung Càn). On his feet are shoes of “carefree serenity” (giày vô ưu), entirely white, with the characters “Tịch Đạo Nam Nữ” (Sacred Name Register for Men and Women) embroidered on the tips. For example, during the tenure of His Holiness Pope Li (Đức Lý Giáo

Tông), at the tip of His shoes was the word of Sacred Name Register Thanh Hương. (Excellent!).

THE VESTMENTS OF THE LEGISLATIVE CARDINALS (CHƯỜNG PHÁP)

I

COMMENTARY: The Vestments of the Buddhist Legislative Cardinal (Thái Chưởng Pháp) consist of two sets: the Major Vestment and the Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment is entirely yellow (the color of the Dao), embroidered with the Eight Trigrams (Bát Quái) just as on the Minor Vestment of the Pope. Over the vestment is draped the red Bá Nạp Quang, also called Khậ. On his head he wears the Mitre of the Buddhist Patriarch (Mão Hiệp Chưởng Hòa Thượng), in his hand he carries the ritual bowl (Bát Vu), and on his feet are yellow shoes of “carefree serenity” (giày vô ưu), the same color as the vestment, with the character “THÍCH” (BUDDHISM) inscribed on the tips.

The Minor Vestment is also yellow, the same as the Major Vestment, but without the red Khậ and without the mitre, instead covering the head with a yellow scarf folded nine times in the character “Nhứt” (One).

II

The Vestments of the Taoist Legislative Cardinal (Thượng Chưởng Pháp) consist of two sets: the Major Vestment and the Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment is entirely of white fabric, with the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhãn Thầy) encircled by a halo of Radiant Aura (Minh Khí) embroidered on the chest and the back. On his head he wears the Mitre of Union (Mão Hiệp Chưởng), also in white, just like the mitre of the Pope’s Minor Vestment. In his hand he carries the Ritual Whisk (Phất Chủ), and on his feet are white shoes of “carefree serenity,” with the character “ĐẠO” (WAY) inscribed on the tips.

The Minor Vestment is white like the Major Vestment, but without the mitre, instead covering the head with a white scarf folded nine times in the character “Nhứt” (One).

III

The Vestments of the Confucian Legislative Cardinal (Nho Chưởng Pháp)

The vestments of the Confucian Legislative Cardinal consist of two sets: the Major Vestment (Đại Phục) and the Minor Vestment (Tiểu Phục).

The Major Vestment is entirely pink (the color of the Dao), with the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhân Thầy) encircled by a halo of Radiant Aura (Minh Khí) embroidered on the chest and the back. On his head he wears the Văn Đẳng mitre, pink in color, with the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhân Thầy) on the forehead, encircled by a halo of Radiant Aura, and above it the image of the Lord of the Northern Dipper (Bắc Đẩu Tinh Quân). In his hand he holds the Spring and Autumn Annals (Xuân Thu), and on his feet are pink shoes of “carefree serenity,” with the character “Nho” (Confucianism) inscribed on the tips.

The Minor Vestment is also pink, the same as the Major Vestment, but without the mitre, instead covering the head with a pink scarf folded nine times in the character “Nhứt” (One).

THE VESTMENTS OF THE CARDINALS (ĐẦU SƯ)

I

COMMENTARY: The Vestments of the Buddhist Cardinal (Thái Đầu Sư) consist of two sets: the Major Vestment and the Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment is entirely yellow fabric (the color of the Dao). On the chest and back are embroidered the six characters “Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ” (the Third Universal Salvation Of The Great Way), encircled by three circles of vô vi (non-action), with the character “Thái” (Buddhism) in the center. The vestment has nine strips. Over it is draped the red Bá Nạp Quang, as with the Buddhist Legislative Cardinal (Thái Chưởng Pháp). On his head he wears the Eight Trigrams Mitre (Bát Quái Mạo) in yellow, embroidered with the eight trigrams around it. On his feet are black shoes of “carefree serenity” (giày vô ưu), with the character “THÁI” (BUDDHISM) inscribed on the tips.

The Minor Vestment is also yellow, the same as the Major Vestment, but without the mitre, instead covering the head with a yellow scarf folded nine times in the character “Nhứt” (One).

II

The Vestments of the Taoist Cardinal (Thượng Đầu Sư) consist of two sets: the Major Vestment and the Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment is entirely of sky-blue fabric (azure, the color of the Dao). On the chest and back are embroidered the six characters “Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ” (The Third Universal Salvation of The Great Way) encircled by three circles of vô vi (non-action), just as with the Buddhist Cardinal, but with the character “Thượng” (Taoism) in the center. The vestment also has nine strips. On his head he wears the Eight Trigrams Mitre (Bát Quái Mạo),

as with the Buddhist Cardinal, but in sky-blue. On his feet are black shoes of “carefree serenity,” with the character “THƯỢNG” (TAOIST) inscribed on the tips.

The Minor Vestment is also sky-blue, the same as the Major Vestment, but without the mitre, instead covering the head with a sky-blue scarf folded nine times in the character “Nhứt” (One).

III

The Vestments of the Confucian Cardinal (Ngọc Đầu Sư) consist of two sets: the Major Vestment and the Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment is entirely pink fabric (the color of the Dao). On the chest and back are embroidered the six characters “Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ” encircled by three circles of vô vi, just as with the Buddhist and Taoist Cardinals, but with the character “Ngọc” (Confucianism) in the center. The vestment also has nine strips. On his head he wears the Eight Trigrams Mitre (Bát Quái Mạo), as with the Taoist Cardinal, but in pink. On his feet are black shoes of “carefree serenity,” with the character “Ngọc” inscribed on the tips.

The Minor Vestment is also pink, the same as the Major Vestment, but without the mitre, instead covering the head with a pink scarf folded nine times in the character “Nhứt” (One).

THE VESTMENTS OF THE PRINCIPAL ARCHBISHOPS (CHÁNH PHỐI SƯ) AND ARCHBISHOPS (PHỐI SƯ)

COMMENTARY: The vestments also consist of two sets, distinguished as the Major Vestment and the Minor Vestment, just as with the Cardinals (Đầu Sư). On the chest and back are embroidered the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhãn Thầy), encircled by a circle of vô vi (non-action).

For the Principal Archbishop (Chánh Phối Sư), the vestment has nine strips. For the Archbishop (Phối Sư), the vestment has three strips. The Principal Archbishop of the Buddhist Branch (phái Thái) wears over the Major Vestment the Great Bá Nạp Quang in red, while the Archbishop of the Buddhist Branch wears the Small Bá Nạp Quang. On their head they wear the Eight Trigrams Mitre (Bát Quái Mạo), just as with the three Cardinals (Đầu Sư), but in the color proper to their own branch. On their feet are black shoes of “carefree serenity” (giày vô ưu), with no inscription on the tips.

The Minor Vestment is the same as the Major Vestment, but without the mitre, instead covering the head with a scarf in the color of their branch, folded nine times in the character “Nhứt” (One).

THE VESTMENTS OF BISHOPS (GIÁO SƯ)

COMMENTARY: The vestments of Bishops consist of two sets: the Major Vestment and the Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment is entirely of fabric according to the color of each branch (sắc phái). On the chest and back are embroidered the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhãn Thầy), encircled by a circle of vô vi (non-action). The vestment has three strips. On the head is worn the Celestial Cycle Mitre of the Eight Trigrams (Thiên Ngươn Mạo Bát Quái), in the color of the branch, embroidered with the Eight Trigrams (Bát Quái) around it; at the top of the mitre is the Minh Châu Lý (Precious Pearl of Principle). Bishops are not permitted to wear shoes.

The Minor Vestment is the same as the Major Vestment, but without the mitre, instead covering the head with a scarf in the color of their branch, folded seven times in the character “Nhơn” (Humanity).

Only the Bishops of the Buddhist Branch (phái Thái) must wear over their vestment a Small Bá Nạp Quang, called Khậ, and on their head the Mitre of Union (Mão Hiệp Chương) of the Zen tradition, embroidered on both sides with the Divine Eye (Thiên Nhãn).

THE VESTMENTS OF THE PRIESTS (GIÁO HỮU)

COMMENTARY: The vestment of the Priests consists of only one set. It is entirely of fabric according to the color of each branch (sắc phái), without any embroidery, and has three strips. On the head is worn the Ngưỡng Thiên Mạo, also in the color of the branch. The height of this mitre must measure exactly 0.150 meters. On the forehead is embroidered the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhãn Thầy), encircled by three circles of vô vi (non-action). Priests are not permitted to wear a scarf.

THE VESTMENTS OF THE STUDENT PRIESTS (LỄ SANH)

COMMENTARY: The vestments of the Student Priests are the same as those of the Priests (Giáo Hữu), entirely of fabric according to the color of the branch. On the head is worn the Khôi Khoa Mạo, made entirely of white fabric, the same for all branches. On the forehead is embroidered the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhân Thầy), encircled by a halo of Radiant Aura (Minh Khí). Student Priests are not permitted to wear shoes.

THE VESTMENTS OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR (CHÁNH TRỊ SỰ)

COMMENTARY: The Chief Administrator wears vestments similar to those of the Student Priests (Lễ Sanh), but entirely of white fabric. Around the waist is bound at the waist with a stiff ceremonial belt (dây nịt) made of white fabric, 0.05 meters wide. The religious vestment has a closed collar trimmed with golden thread. On the left sleeve are embroidered the three colors of the Way (ba sắc Đạo), measuring 0.06 meters wide and 0.10 meters long. On the head is worn a black turban folded seven times in the character “Nhơn” (Humanity). At the center of the turban, on the forehead, are embroidered the three sacred emblems (Cổ Pháp), just as on the mitre of the Minor Vestment of the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp).

THE VESTMENTS OF THE DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR (PHÓ TRỊ SỰ)

COMMENTARY: The Deputy Administrator wears vestments similar to those of the Chief Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự), but with the closed collar trimmed in white thread instead of gold. He is not permitted to wear the white ceremonial belt across the waist. The vestment has one strip. On the left sleeve are embroidered the three colors of the Way (ba sắc Đạo), measuring 0.03 meters wide and 0.05 meters long. On the head is worn a black turban folded seven times in the character “Nhơn” (Humanity).

THE VESTMENTS OF THE LEGAL ADMINISTRATOR (THÔNG SỰ)

COMMENTARY: The Legal Administrator wears vestments entirely of white fabric, without any golden embroidery. On both sides of the collar are embroidered the three sacred emblems (Cổ Pháp) of the Way, just as with the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp). Around the waist is bound a stiff white ceremonial belt of the same fabric, 0.05 meters wide, made firm like a belt. On the head is worn a black turban folded seven times in the character “Nhơn” (Humanity). At the center of the turban, on the forehead, are embroidered the three sacred emblems (Cổ Pháp), just as with the Chief Administrator (Chánh Trị Sự).

WOMEN'S BRANCH OF THE NINE SPHERE PALACE

(Excerpt from the Holy Words of the Pope Li Bai (Giáo Tông Lý Thái Bạch))

The Women's Branch (Nữ Phái) was originally established by His Holiness Pope Li Bai (Đức Lý Giáo Tông).

The Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) recalled the words of the Supreme Being (Thầy) spoken to Principal Archbishop HƯƠNG THANH (Chánh Phối Sư HƯƠNG THANH), that He wished to abolish the Women's Branch. Yet, sons and daughters are equally children; as many men as there are, so are there women. Men and women are inherently equal. Therefore, the Supreme Being at the founding of the Constitution (Pháp Chánh Truyền) bestowed ordination upon the Women's Branch. Was there perhaps some hidden mystery between the Supreme Being (Thầy) and the Jade Void Palace (Ngọc Hư Cung) that caused Him to utter such words, yet then consent to let His Holiness the Pope (Đức Giáo Tông) establish it, so as to avoid violating the Celestial Law (Thiên Điều)? The more I reflect on this matter, the more I am filled with fear daily.

Looking again at the Women's Branch, if they do not cultivate knowledge and learning in order to fulfill the responsibilities of their rank, then the greater my anxiety becomes.

It was indeed Supreme Rank Cao (Cao Thượng Phẩm) who later descended in séance and declared that only through his supplication at the Jade Void Palace (Ngọc Hư Cung) was the Women's Branch granted forgiveness; otherwise, it would already have been abolished. Therefore, let all Sisters (Đạo Tỷ) take heed and be mindful of their sacred duty.

CONSTITUTION: *"The Sacerdotal Council shall hear that I (Pope Li) bestow vestments upon the Women's Branch (Nữ Phái); hear, and from this time forth, regard those noble vestments in conducting ceremonies according to rank."*

COMMENTARY: His Holiness the Pope (Đức Giáo Tông) summoned the Sacerdotal Council of the Men's Branch (Nam Phái), saying: "From this time forth you must regard the noble vestments of the Women's Branch, which I now bestow, in order to conduct ceremonies according to rank."

The expression “noble vestments” (sắc tốt) alone, whoever reads it, will silently understand its profound meaning. [1]

The Pope instructed only that these noble vestments be observed in ceremonies according to rank. By this, He strictly required order and propriety. For that reason, He Himself came to establish the rule that the Men’s and Women’s Branches must be distinguished, not mingling together—neither in body nor in spirit.

When the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) asked Him about hierarchy and rank, He taught: “Men and women are of equal rights.” Yet when asked about etiquette and social intercourse in worldly matters, He taught that a Priest of the Men’s Branch (Giáo Hữu Nam Phái) must be subject to a Bishop of the Women’s Branch (Giáo Sư Nữ Phái) [2]. And concerning ritual: when entering the Great Temple (Đại Điện), if a Male Bishop (Giáo Sư Nam Phái) encounters a Female Archbishop (Phối Sư Nữ Phái), the man must salute the woman first. Regardless of age or size, authority depends upon rank.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Women’s Branch (Nữ Phái) must be subject to the Female Cardinals (Đầu Sư Nữ Phái); yet the Female Cardinals must in turn be subject to the authority of the Pope (Giáo Tông) and the Legislative Cardinals (Chưởng Pháp).”*

COMMENTARY: The Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh) of the Women’s Branch must be subject to the authority of the Female Cardinals (Đầu Sư Nữ Phái); yet all must be subject to the authority of the Pope (Giáo Tông) and the Legislative Cardinals (Chưởng Pháp).

Upon close examination, the Constitution excludes the Women’s Branch from rising to the offices of Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) and Pope (Giáo Tông).

The Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) expressed his grievance to the Supreme Being (Thầy), saying: “Master, You have said that sons and daughters are equally children, that men and women are inherently the same; yet You deprive the Women’s Branch of the right to attain the offices of Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) and Pope (Giáo Tông). Would this not seem to violate fairness?”

[1] If you, virtuous friends (chư Hiền Hữu), would regard the Women’s Branch (Nữ Phái) as younger sisters in their innocence—knowing only how to delight in beauty and cherish what is fair—then consider carefully how to guide and nurture them, as I have done. Only thus shall you truly be sons of the Supreme Being (Thầy)

[2] Must be.

The Supreme Being replied: “Heaven and Earth are composed of Yin and Yang. When Yang prevails, life is generated; when Yin prevails, death ensues. The entire Cosmos endures because Yang is strong; all beings live by the light of Yang. On the day when Yang’s radiance is extinguished and Yin’s force dominates, that will be the day the Cosmos falls into darkness and is destroyed. Man is Yang, Woman is Yin. If I allow the Women’s Branch to hold the authority of the Pope (Giáo Tông) and govern the Way, it will mean Yin surpassing Yang; then the Way would surely fall into ruin and obscurity.”

The Dharma Protector again petitioned: “To exclude women from the authority of the Pope (Giáo Tông) is acceptable, but as for the rank of Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp), I think granting it would do no harm.”

The Supreme Being replied: “The Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) is also a Pope (Giáo Tông), but of even greater importance, for he represents the Dharma Protector at the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài). Since I do not permit the rank of Pope for women, how then could I grant them the rank of Dharma Protector? By the fate of their birth, they must accept this disadvantage; such is the decree of the Celestial Plan (Thiên Cơ). I entrust you, My son, to keep them in your heart, to cherish and defend them in My behalf, lest they suffer undue hardship.”

AUTHORITY OF THE FEMALE CARDINALS (NỮ ĐÀU SƯ)

COMMENTARY: The authority of the Female Cardinals (Nữ Đầu Sư) is the same as that of the Male Cardinals (Nam Phái), but it is confined solely to the Women’s Branch (Nữ Phái). They must not interfere in the Men’s Branch, just as men must not interfere in women’s affairs.

All matters concerning the Women’s Branch are addressed to the Pope (Giáo Tông) and the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) through the Female Cardinals.

When the Dharma Protector asked the Supreme Being (Thầy) about the throne of the Female Cardinals, the Supreme Being replied: “*The Holy See faces the West, which is the principal position of the Đoài trigram, the Trigram of the Dao. To My left is the Càn trigram, and to My right is the Khôn trigram. Rightly, the seven thrones of the Men’s Branch should be placed to My left, in the Càn trigram, but because they must fulfill the form of Humanity’s Way (Nhơn Đạo) in representing the Five Branches (Ngũ Chi), I required them to be placed in the Trigram of the Dao, the Đoài trigram, so that the number is complete. Therefore, the throne of the Female Cardinals must be placed in the Khôn trigram, to My right.*” When the Dharma Protector asked what that throne would look like, the Supreme Being replied: “It is fashioned

exactly like the throne of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Quan Thế Âm Bồ Tát): a brocaded pedestal (Cẩm Đôn) situated in the Garden of Precious Lilacs (Trước Tử) upon the Southern Sea, with two blooming lotus flowers beneath the feet.”

CONSTITUTION: *“The Female Cardinals (Đầu Sư Nữ Phái) are elected according to the laws established by the Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh) and are subject to the Sacerdotal Council’s decisions concerning both secular and religious affairs.”*

COMMENTARY: The Female Cardinals (Đầu Sư Nữ Phái) must abide by the New Law (Tân Luật) of the Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh) in both spiritual and worldly matters and are subject to the judgments of the Council just as the Men’s Branch (Nam Phái). In elections to higher ranks, they must likewise conform to the laws established by the Sacerdotal Council; in every respect their authority is the same as the Men’s Branch, without alteration, even in administration.

Their exercise of authority remains under the Female Principal Archbishops (Nữ Chánh Phối Sư). Female Cardinals are not permitted to infringe upon that authority; should they do so, they would violate the Constitution (Pháp Chánh Truyền), just as would the Male Cardinals.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Female Cardinals (Đầu Sư Nữ Phái) shall wear a vestment the same as that of the Male Cardinals (Đầu Sư Nam Phái). They must wear a Ni Kim Cô, like the veils of Buddhist nuns (vãi Chùa), made entirely of white fabric, with nine strips, embroidered with lotus flowers. Over the Kim Cô is draped a garment reaching from head to heel. Upon it is worn the Phương Thiên mitre. At the crown of the Phương Thiên, directly above the hair, is placed the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhân Thầy), encircled by a halo of Radiant Aura (Minh Khí). On their feet are white shoes of ‘carefree serenity’ (giày vô ưu), embroidered at the tips with the word ‘HƯỞNG’. Do listen!”*

COMMENTARY: The Female Cardinals (Đầu Sư Nữ Phái) wear a vestment of pure white fabric embroidered with lotus flowers, the same as the Male Cardinals (Đầu Sư Nam Phái), with nine strips. They wear a Ni Kim Cô—a white headpiece like that of Buddhist nuns, embroidered with lotus flowers, encircling the head with a golden band (Kim Cô). Over this Ni Kim Cô is draped the Phương Thiên mitre: a veil of exceptionally fine fabric, with atop it a golden cap covering the hair. In the center, directly at the forehead, is engraved the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhân Thầy), encircled by a halo of Radiant Aura (Minh Khí). The veil of the Phương Thiên must be very long—three thước, three tấc, and three phân (3.33

meters)—so that whenever the Female Cardinal ascends the throne, two Student Priestesses (Lễ Sanh Nữ Phái) must follow behind to lift it, preventing it from trailing upon the ground. On their feet are white shoes of “carefree serenity” (giày vô ưu), with the character “HƯƠNG”, indicating the Sacred Name Register (Tịch Đạo) [1], embroidered upon the tips. If the Phương Thiên mitre is worn in this way, the hair must be tied at the crown of the head (mỏ ác) (for beauty’s sake, not for any other concern) [2]

A heart of fragrance (**HƯƠNG**) reaches near to Heaven and Earth,
Virtue of wisdom cultivates the Way and guides the soul.
One thought of Avalokitesvara ensures divine protection,
For a thousand years, the branch shall preserve life.

Poem for the Male Branch:

The Way of Purity, in its third opening, lasted seven hundred thousand years.
Longevity endures like earth, flourishing in harmony with Heaven.
Returning from illusion, human life regains its breath,
Upon the eternal altar shines the Buddha’s affinity.

In the present era of His Holiness Pope Li Bai (Đức Lý Giáo Tông), the men take the character “THANH”, and the women take the character “HƯƠNG” as their Sacred Name Register (Tịch). Thus, all male and female adherents (Đạo Hữu), from lay believers (Tin Đồ) to Heavenly-Appointed dignitaries (Thiên Phong), in the administration of Pope Li Bai, are inscribed under the Registers Thanh and Hương. In the era of another Pope, the men will take the character “ĐẠO” and the women the character “TÂM”. Then all male and female adherents will bear the Sacred Name Register (Tịch Đạo) of Đạo and Tâm. In this manner, the succession continues until the Sacred Name Register is exhausted, at which point the Supreme Being (Thầy) will descend in séance to bestow a new Sacred Name Register. It is by this Sacred Name Register, whether great or small, earlier, or later, that all are distinguished (Excellent).

There are some who ask: “For example, in the era of one Pope, must the Sacred Name Register (Tịch Đạo) of the male and female adherents from the previous era—whether dignitaries or lay believers—be changed?” I say: No. For even the successor Pope must preserve the Sacred Name Register of his predecessor.

[1] Will explain the Sacred Name for Women Branch next.

[2] Because He saw that all the male and female dignitaries were quietly smiling to themselves, His Holiness Pope Li Bai (Đức Lý Giáo Tông) added this verse.

Only those believers of his own era, who are saved by his ministry, constituting his own spiritual lineage (chi tộc), may take the new Register. But dignitaries and believers remaining from the previous Pope still belong to the lineage of that Pope and are not permitted to change their Register (Excellent!).

For example: If a new Pope succeeds Pope Li Bai, then all new male and female believers entering the religion must take the Register “Đạo Tâm.” Even if among them there be one worthy of the rank of Principal Archbishop (Chánh Phối Sư), and the Supreme Being descends in séance to confer that office, yet that person must still take the Sacred Name Register of Đạo Tâm, the same as all other believers. But the dignitaries and believers who remain from the era of Pope Li Bai retain the Register “Thanh Hương” only and may not change it.

AUTHORITY OF THE PRINCIPAL ARCHBISHOPS (CHÁNH PHỐI SƯ) AND ARCHBISHOPS (PHỐI SƯ)

COMMENTARY: The authority is the same as that of the Principal Archbishops and Archbishops of the Male Branch, except they govern only the Female Branch.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Archbishop also wears the same vestment, but without the Phương Thiên crown. The vestment has three stripes, and on the chest is embroidered the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being, surrounded by a halo of Sacred Radiance (Minh Khí).”*

COMMENTARY: The Principal Archbishop wears the vestment similar to that of the Female Cardinal (Đầu Sư). The vestment has nine stripes, entirely in white fabric. On the chest is embroidered the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being, surrounded by a halo of Sacred Radiance (Minh Khí); the vestment is also embroidered with lotus flowers like that of the Female Cardinal. On the head is worn the Ni Kim Cô (white veil with a golden circlet), also like the Female Cardinal. The feet wear vô ưu shoes (white shoes of detachment), with the Sacred Religious Register (Tịch Đạo) inscribed on the front, but she is not permitted to wear the Phương Thiên crown.

The Archbishop likewise wears vestments similar to that of the Principal Archbishop, except the vestment has only three stripes. The feet also wear vô ưu shoes, with the Sacred Religious Register (Tịch Đạo) inscribed on the front.

AUTHORITY OF THE BISHOP (GIÁO SƯ)

COMMENTARY: The authority is the same as that of the Bishop of the Male Branch, except it governs only the Female Branch.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Bishop wears a vestment with three stripes; she wears the Ni Kim Cô of white cloth and does not wear shoes.”*

COMMENTARY: The Bishop’s vestment is made entirely of plain white cloth, without lotus embroidery, and the vestment has three stripes. On the head is worn the Ni Kim Cô of white cloth, which must be long enough to extend from the head down to the feet, the same as that of the Female Cardinal (Đầu Sư) and the Principal Archbishop (Chánh Phối Sư). The feet are bare, without shoes.

AUTHORITY OF THE PRIEST (GIÁO HỮU)

COMMENTARY: The authority is the same as that of the Priest of the Male Branch, except it governs only the Female Branch.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Priest wears the vestment like that of the Bishop, but without the Ni Kim Cô. She adorns her hair with a lotus flower, upon which is placed the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being.”*

COMMENTARY: The Priest wears the vestment similar to that of the Bishop, but she is not permitted to wear the Ni Kim Cô. Instead, she adorns her hair with a lotus flower, and at the center of the lotus is placed the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being.

AUTHORITY OF THE STUDENT PRIEST (LỄ SANH)

COMMENTARY: The authority is the same as that of the Student Priest of the Male Branch, except it governs only the Female Branch.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Student Priest of the Female Branch wears the vestment like that of the Priest, but with a thin strip of cloth draped across the head, tied behind at the nape, letting one end hang long and the other short. Upon the hair is placed a lotus flower.”*

COMMENTARY: The Student Priest of the Female Branch wears the vestment like that of the Female Priest. On the head, however, a thin strip of cloth is draped across, tied behind at the nape, with one end hanging long and the other short, reaching down past the waist. Upon the hair piece is placed a plain lotus flower, without the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being. (The vestment of the Student Priest must be corrected in this way, as many people have mistaken the lotus ornament in the past.)

AUTHORITY OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR (CHÁNH TRỊ SỰ)

COMMENTARY: The authority is the same as that of the Chief Administrator of the Male Branch, except it governs only the Female Branch.

The Chief Administrator wears the vestment like that of the Student Priest (Lễ Sanh), but entirely of white cloth. Around the waist is fastened a white cloth belt, made firm like a sash (width 0m03). The Dao vestment has a close-fitting collar trimmed with golden thread. On the left arm are embroidered the three colors of the Dao (width 0m06, length 0m10). The head is bare.

AUTHORITY OF THE DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR (PHÓ TRỊ SỰ)

COMMENTARY: The authority is the same as that of the Deputy Administrator of the Male Branch, except it governs only the Female Branch.

The Deputy Administrator wears the vestment like that of the Chief Administrator, but the collar of the vestment is trimmed with white thread instead of gold. She is not permitted to wear the white cloth belt like the Chief Administrator. The vestment has a single stripe. On the left arm are embroidered the three colors of the Dao (width 0m03, length 0m05).

AUTHORITY OF THE LEGAL ADMINISTRATOR (THÔNG SỰ)

COMMENTARY: The authority is the same as that of the Legal Administrator of the Male Branch, except it governs only the Female Branch.

The Legal Administrator wears a vestment made entirely of white cloth, without gold thread trimming. On both sides of the collar are embroidered the three sacred emblems (Cổ Pháp) of the Dao: the Bình Bát Vu (alms bowl), the Phất Chủ (ritual whisk), and the Bộ Xuân Thu (Spring and Autumn Annals), as depicted on the Tiểu Phục (Minor Vestment) of the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp). Around the waist is fastened a white cloth belt, made firm like a sash (width 0m03).

ELECTION LAW OF THE DIGNITARIES OF THE NINE SPHERE PALACE (MALE AND FEMALE BRANCH)

COMMENTARY: All Dignitaries of the Nine Sphere Palace, both male and female, must be consecrated by the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài), either by spirit-writing (cơ bút), by examination (khoa mục), or by election (công cử).

Therefore, during elections, the presence of Dignitaries of the Heavenly Union Palace is required to preserve fairness and avoid partiality. Moreover, there must be a way to ask the Pope (Giáo Tông) and the Supreme Being (Thầy) whether the elected person is truly the rightful one. Thus, before receiving the official decree, it must come from both the Pope and the Supreme Being.

CONSTITUTION: *“If a Cardinal (Đầu Sư) wishes to ascend to Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp), then three must elect each other.”*

COMMENTARY: The three Cardinals, when wishing to ascend to Legislative Cardinal, must all be present at the Holy See (Tòa Thánh) to elect one another before the Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh) of the Nine Sphere Palace and with the Heavenly Union Palace as witnesses.

When an Archbishop (Phối Sư) wishes to ascend to Principal Archbishop (Chánh Phối Sư), the Constitution does not prescribe the method. This means that the authority of the Pope chooses the rank of Principal Archbishop.

CONSTITUTION: *“If an Archbishop (Phối Sư) wishes to ascend to Female Cardinal (Đầu Sư), then 36 must assemble to elect.”*

COMMENTARY: If an Archbishop wishes to ascend to a Cardinal, then all thirty-six must gather to elect.

If two ranks of Cardinals are vacant, the ballots must be divided equally according to common election law. Each candidate must receive at least eighteen ballots or more to be elected. This election must be held at the Holy See before the Sacerdotal Council of the Nine Sphere Palace, with the Heavenly Union Palace witnessing.

CONSTITUTION: *“If a Bishop (Giáo Sư) wishes to ascend to Archbishop (Phối Sư), then 72 must gather to elect.”*

COMMENTARY: If a Bishop wishes to ascend to Archbishop, then seventy-two must gather to elect, and the ballots must be divided according to common election law. This election must be held at the Holy See before the Sacerdotal Council of the Nine Sphere Palace, with the Heavenly Union Palace witnessing.

CONSTITUTION: *“If a Priest (Giáo Hữu) wishes to ascend to Bishop (Giáo Sư), then 3,000 must gather to elect.”*

COMMENTARY: If a Priest wishes to ascend to Bishop, then all 3,000 must gather to elect, and the ballots must be divided according to common election law. This election must be held at the Holy See before the Sacerdotal Council of the Nine Sphere Palace, with the Heavenly Union Palace witnessing.

CONSTITUTION: *“If a Student Priest (Lễ Sanh) wishes to ascend to Priest (Giáo Hữu), then all the Student Priests must gather to elect.”*

COMMENTARY: If a Student Priest wishes to ascend to Priest, then all the Student Priests must gather to elect, and the ballots must be divided according to common election law. If the result is tied, the one with greater virtue is chosen. This election must be held at the Holy See before the Sacerdotal Council of the Nine Sphere Palace, with the Heavenly Union Palace witnessing.

CONSTITUTION: *“If a Disciple (Môn Đệ) wishes to ascend to Student Priest (Lễ Sanh), then all Disciples must gather to elect. However, if the Supreme Being (Thầy) bestows the dignity by spirit-writing, that person is exempt from the law.”*

COMMENTARY: If a Disciple wishes to ascend to Student Priest, then all Disciples must gather to elect, and the ballots must be divided according to common election law. This election may be held at local Temples (Thánh Thất). However, once elected, the candidate must come to the Holy See for examination; if passed, then the rank is conferred, but if failed, it is withdrawn [1]. Only when the Supreme Being, by spirit-writing, appoints a person, can this law be exempted.

[1] Excellent! Comment from the Pope Li

When the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) asked His Holiness Pope Li, about the election of Chief Administrators (Chánh Trị Sự), Deputy Administrators (Phó Trị Sự), and Legal Administrator (Thông Sự), He taught as follows:

“The Chief Administrator must be elected by all Deputy Administrators and Legal Administrator. The ballots must be divided according to common election law. This election must be held at the local Temple, before the Head of the Congregation (Đầu Họ), with Chief Administrators as witnesses. The decree appointing the Chief Administrator must bear the signatures of the Pope and the Dharma Protector.”

If a disciple (Tín Đồ) wishes to ascend to Deputy Administrator (Phó Trị Sự), then all disciples in the Congregation must gather to elect. The ballots must follow common election law. The election must be held at the local Temple, before the Head of the Congregation, with the Chief Administrator as witness. The decree appointing the Deputy Administrator must bear the Pope’s signature.

If a disciple wishes to ascend to Legal Administrator (Thông Sự), then all disciples in the Congregation must gather to elect. The ballots must follow common election law. The election must be held at the local Temple, before the Head of the Congregation, with the Chief Administrator as witness. The decree appointing the Legal Administrator must bear the signature of the Dharma Protector.

CONSTITUTION: *“As for the Pope (Giáo Tông), the Legislative Cardinals (Chưởng Pháp) and Cardinals (Đầu Sự) may contend, but the entire body of Disciples must elect. Only when the Supreme Being appoints by spirit-writing is this law exempted.”*

COMMENTARY: The dignity of Pope may be contested by the Legislative Cardinals and Female Cardinals, but the election must be decided by the entire Sacerdotal Council of the Heavenly Union Palace, the Nine Sphere Palace, and all Disciples united. Therefore, members of both the Heavenly Union Palace and the Nine Sphere Palace must be present to witness the election by all Disciples. When the ballots are complete, each must be sent to the Holy See to be examined by the Upper Council (Thượng Hội). This Upper Council is composed of members of both the Nine Sphere Palace and the Heavenly Union Palace, beginning from the rank of Cardinal (Đầu Sự), Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm), and Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) upwards, excluding those who are candidates themselves.

When the election is complete, the result must be announced to all humanity.

Once the election is confirmed — meaning the Sacerdotal Council has certified that there is no injustice — then the Council gathers to hold the enthronement ceremony. If injustice is found, the election must be annulled, repeated, or re-examined.

All Dignitaries must follow this law of election, except in cases where the Supreme Being appoints by spirit-writing.

HEAVENLY UNION PALACE (HIỆP THIÊN ĐÀI)

Before the Supreme Being (Thầy) established the Constitution of the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài), He declared: “All Disciples must obey My command.” By this, He made clear how important the establishment of the Heavenly Union Palace would be. What is the significance of this? It should be explained as follows:

The mechanism of Creation (Cơ Tạo Hóa) contains two most essential mysteries: first, to observe the visible; second, to exam the invisible. To observe the visible is easy, but to exam the invisible is exceedingly difficult. The visible and the invisible are separated only by a mysterious veil. Since the dawn of Heaven and Earth, even the most enlightened sages of humankind who attained Great Enlightenment (Đại giác) have not been able to completely lift this veil to gaze into the invisible. Yet humanity has in hand a key: to observe the mutual correspondence between the visible and the invisible in the life of all beings. The invisible and the visible must unite as one to accord with the law of creation. Heaven and Earth are composed of Yin and Yang; all beings are composed of material body and spiritual essence; humankind is composed of body and soul. The life of all creatures in the universe depends upon the union of matter (*la matière*) and spirit (*l'essence*). From material soul, vegetal soul, animal soul, Human soul, Deity soul, Saintly soul, Immortal soul, to Buddha soul and Celestial soul—each is of a different rank, thus their forms also differ. Matter is unlike plants, plants unlike animals, animals unlike humans, humans unlike Deities, Deities unlike Saints, Saints unlike Immortals, Immortals unlike Buddhas, and Buddhas unlike Heaven. In summary, form and essence are each distinct.

Matter (*la matière*) must submit to spirit (*l'essence*) to form an image. The evidence is that the appearance of humans must correspond to their spirit, thereby creating distinctions in ranks. The violent bear a grotesque appearance, while the virtuous possess a bright and noble countenance; thus, the ancients judged a person's nature by observing their features.

The body must correspond to the soul, just as matter must correspond to spirit. Matter is visible, but spirit is invisible. The invisible and the visible must accord. By seeing the visible, one may infer the invisible; by knowing the invisible, one may judge the visible.

Thus, the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) is the body, while the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) is the soul. Since the Nine Sphere Palace represents the World, it is the body of the Way; while the Heavenly Union Palace represents the Way itself, it is the Perispirit of the Way. The physical body has its limits and ranks, but the soul does not. Many exalted Divine Beings, when reincarnating, choose to live in humble ranks; while many lower

Divine Beings, through attainment of the Way, can rise to the highest rank. Therefore, spirituality has no limits, which means the Way itself has no limits. This is the hidden mystery of the Way.

Virtuous Friends (Hiền Hữu) and Virtuous Sisters (Hiền Muội), you see that the Supreme Being does not assign fixed responsibilities to each dignitary of the Heavenly Union Palace. Because of this, many difficulties arise in the ranks of the Heavenly Appointed (Thiên Phong). In truth, He leaves it to the dignitaries of the Heavenly Union Palace themselves to establish their worthiness according to their ranks.

The Nine Sphere Palace is Life, and the Heavenly Union Palace is the Way. Therefore, Life must rely on the Way to manifest true form, and only then can humanity be saved and the mechanism of creation transformed.

The importance is this: without the Heavenly Union Palace, there is no Way. Heaven and Earth may pass away, but the Way does not. Humanity may perish, but the Heavenly Union Palace does not. (Excellent!)

The Heavenly Union Palace is the hand that lifts the veil of mystery, uniting the visible and the invisible, reconciling the Way and Life. For this reason, the Supreme Being decreed that all His Disciples must never be permitted to disobey His command.

Below, the Supreme Being explains further:

CONSTITUTION: *The Heavenly Union Palace is the place where the Supreme Being (Thầy) resides, holding the Divine authority of the Way. As long as the Way exists, the Heavenly Union Palace will continue to exist.*

COMMENTARY: The Supreme Being is the Lord of the Universe, the Sovereign of the invisible realm, that is, the Supreme Being of the Way. Wherever the Supreme Being of the Way resides, there the Way is present.

The Supreme Being declared that the Heavenly Union Palace is His dwelling, the place where He holds the Divine authority of the Way. Therefore, as long as the Way exists, His dwelling—the Heavenly Union Palace—must also exist. Since it is said that the Way can never be destroyed—for if the Way were destroyed, that would mean the end of the world—thus, because the Way does not perish, the Heavenly Union Palace can never perish. (Excellent indeed!)

CONSTITUTION: *The Supreme Being has said that the Five Branches of the Great Way (Ngũ Chi Đại Đạo) fell into secularization because, in earlier times, He entrusted the True Religion into human hands; the longer it went on, the further it strayed from the True Religion, and human institutions gave rise to Secular Religions. Therefore, the Supreme Being now resolves to come to Himself to teach His children directly and will no longer entrust the True Religion into human hands.*

COMMENTARY: This verse explains clearly: the Supreme Being lamented that when He once entrusted the True Religion into human hands, over time the Sacred Virtues diminished while worldly passions regained control. Humanity reshaped the True Religion to conform with worldly influences, gradually turning Sacred Religion into Secular Religion. (Excellent indeed!)

Now the Supreme Being has resolved to come personally to teach humankind and will no longer entrust His True Religion into human hands.

If one were to ask: “If that is so, why then does the Supreme Being still entrust the True Religion to the human institutions of the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) and the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài)? What is the meaning of this?” This was explained in the sermon delivered by the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) at the Holy See on the 14th day of the second month of the year Mậu Thìn. He revealed that the Supreme Being gathered His Divine Beings—those whom He had sent before—to establish the Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh) as His own earthly form, so that He might avoid direct descent to the mundane world during this Third Universal Salvation (Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ). (Excellent indeed!). This Sacerdotal Council has two aspects on earth: the visible part is the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài), representing the World, that is, the body. The semi-visible part is the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài), representing half of Life and half of the Way, that is, the perispirit. The invisible part is the Eight Trigrams Palace (Bát Quái Đài), representing the soul, that is, the Way.

It is said: the Supreme Being is the Lord of the invisible, thus of the Eight Trigrams Palace He is the Sovereign, the Supreme Being of the soul of the Way. The soul unites with the body through the perispirit. Just as the body exists because of the soul, so too must the Nine Sphere Palace rely on the Heavenly Union Palace to fulfill the Way. (Excellent indeed!)

If one were to ask further: “The Supreme Being is the Highest, infinitely mysterious. Why then does He say He will no longer entrust the True Religion into human hands, yet He still relies on the Heavenly Union Palace, which is also composed of humans? Without the Heavenly Union Palace, could the Supreme Being not establish the Religion Himself?”

I also say: The Supreme Being is the Lord of the invisible, meaning the Lord of all unseen matters. Yet He has bestowed upon humankind sufficient Divine wisdom and knowledge to become the Lord of the visible, meaning the Supreme Being of all creation. If the invisible and the visible are to be in harmony, then both Lords must unite together. Humanity has the power to adjust the mechanism of Creation, and Creation, in turn, adapts itself to humanity so that all beings may attain supreme perfection and beauty.

Under the Divine authority of Creation, there is birth and death; such laws originate in Heaven. The decrees and principles of the Celestial Law (Thiên Điều) are already determined. Humanity is granted only one right of self-determination: to master oneself, turning and transforming ceaselessly, cultivating, and perfecting the innate Sacred Virtues in order to ascend to the highest Divine rank, and thereby enter the gate of the invisible, becoming one with Heaven and Earth. (Excellent! The Pope Li praises this.)

This right of self-mastery was predetermined so that all humankind might rejoice in the mechanism of Progress. Thus, even the Supreme Being does not alter it. For to alter it would destroy the fairness of Divine justice, upsetting the balance of reward and punishment. Since merit must be rewarded and faults punished, humankind must be given full freedom of self-mastery.

Heaven's decree has established both Hell and Paradise—realms of descent and ascent.

Hell is reserved for the cruel and violent, while Paradise is for the virtuous. Thus, the scale of Divine justice is set. No one is forced into Hell, nor is anyone carried into Paradise. Both paths are revealed; it is for each person to choose. Salvation or damnation depends upon oneself, while the Divine Beings offer only compassion and guidance.

If the Supreme Being were to use His Divine power to compel humankind to see and believe fully, to follow only the path of salvation and forsake the path of damnation, then all humanity would be driven into the way of virtue. That would mean the Supreme Being Himself had lifted souls into Paradise, preventing them from entering Hell. (Excellent!) But then, where would Divine justice remain secure? Rewards and punishment would lose clarity, and the law of reincarnation and transmigration would have to be abolished.

The Supreme Being and the Divine Beings do not possess human bodies nor speak with human language. How then could We commune with all beings, being so lofty and beyond reach, hidden and intangible? Only through chosen incarnations (lương sanh) can They assist in cultivating virtue. The Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) and the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) are those who assist the Supreme Being and the Divine Beings in nurturing the Way.

Reincarnation and transmigration are the wondrous mechanism that allows souls to redeem themselves and progress. If this wondrous mechanism were abolished, how could the Way endure firmly?

Humanity is composed of transformed beings (hóa nhân), demonic beings (quỷ nhân), and original beings (nguyên nhân), thus there are distinctions in ranks. If the Supreme Being were to employ Divine mysteries to make all humanity perceive fully the wondrous mechanism of the Way, all equally attaining liberation, then the Divine hierarchy would lose its order.

It has been said before: the Heavenly Union Palace is the perispirit, the Nine Sphere Palace is the body, and the Eight Trigrams Palace (Bát Quái Đài) is the soul. For the soul to unite with the body, it must rely on the perispirit. The perispirit is semi-visible, linking the invisible with the visible form, just as the Way receives the Sacred Virtues of Divine Beings to pour upon humanity. (Excellent! It is the praise from the Pope Li) Just as humanity must be united with Heaven, so must the Nine Sphere Palace be united with the Eight Trigrams Palace.

The Eight Trigrams Palace is the soul of the Way, and since the Supreme Being holds firmly the soul, the body must rely upon the soul to sustain life. The soul of the Way is already firmly in the grasp of the Supreme Being; therefore, the Way will never again be entrusted into human hands (Excellent!). Thus, when the Supreme Being declares that He will not entrust the True Religion into human hands, it is for this reason.

CONSTITUTION: *“Furthermore, the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) is the place where the Pope (Giáo Tông) communes with the Thirty-Six Heavens (Tam Thập Lục Thiên), the Three Thousand Worlds (Tam Thiên Thế Giới), the Sixty-Seven Planets (Lục Thập Thất Địa Cầu), and the Ten Courts of Hades (Thập Điện Diêm Cung), in order to pray for the salvation of all humankind.”*

COMMENTARY: This passage has already been explained in the Commentary of the Constitution regarding the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) of the Male Branch and thus needs no repetition here.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Supreme Being has spoken of its Divine function; He must also speak of its temporal function.”*

COMMENTARY: Its Divine function is that the Heavenly Union Palace serves as the intermediary between the Pope and the ranks of Divine Beings—Deities, Saints, Immortals,

and Buddhas—that is, the mediator between the Nine Sphere Palace and the Eight Trigrams Palace (Bát Quái Đài). The Nine Sphere Palace holds the authority of salvation, while the Eight Trigrams Palace holds the authority of deliverance. [1]. The communion of all perispirits in the universe is made possible only through the gate of the Heavenly Union Palace. That is its Divine function. As for its temporal function, it holds authority over law and justice. Just as the Way has the laws of the Celestial Canon (Thiên Điều), so too does the Heavenly Union Palace safeguard Divine justice within the mechanism of creation, transforming the Era of Struggle (Ngươn Tranh Đấu) into the Era of Preservation (Ngươn Bảo Tồn), [2] enabling humanity to live in peace and avoid the mechanism of self-destruction. (Excellent!)

CONSTITUTION: *“The Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) is under the authority of the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) as Chief Administrator, with the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) on the left and the Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm) on the right. The Dharma Protector governs the domain of Law (Pháp).”*

COMMENTARY: Thus, the Heavenly Union Palace must be under the authority of the Dharma Protector, just as the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) is under the authority of the Pope (Giáo Tông), and the Eight Trigrams Palace (Bát Quái Đài) is under the authority of the Supreme Being (Đức Chí Tôn) Himself.

[1] Excellent!

[2] The Cycle of Creation (Ngươn Tạo Hóa), the Cycle of Progress (Ngươn Tấn Hóa), and the Cycle of Preservation (Ngươn Bảo Tồn) have already been explained in the Commentary of the Constitution regarding the Nine Sphere Palace of the Male Branch.

Beneath the Nine Sphere Palace there is the Three Religions Court, just as the Eight Trigrams Palace has the Divine Three Religions Court. Whenever the Three Religions Court under the Nine Sphere Palace has rendered judgment and the accused still feels wronged and oppressed, an appeal may be made to the Court of the Heavenly Union Palace. If, after the Heavenly Union Palace has judged, the accused still feels wronged, then the final appeal must be made to the Court of the Divine Three Religions, under the authority of the Eight Trigrams Palace. Whether the Court of the Three Religions is established under the Nine Sphere Palace or elevated to the Court of the Divine Three Religions of the Eight Trigrams Palace, it must always be conducted under the direction of the Dharma Protector.

Who is the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp)?

The profound mysteries of the Way are contained in the Celestial Law (Thiên Điều); the secret mechanism of the World is contained in Law. The Dharma Protector is the one who holds the mysteries of the Way, upholds the Law of the World, and judges the Heavenly Appointed dignitaries (Chức Sắc Thiên Phong) as well as the faithful disciples, granting rewards and punishments. Merit is rewarded, and transgressions are punished in this world. For when human justice is administered, Divine judgment may be averted. According to the Law of the Way, all disciples are judged so as not to fall under the Celestial Law. Each dignitary must preserve their virtue to maintain their Divine rank. By applying temporal justice, spiritual punishment is lessened. (Excellent!). The Dharma Protector holds the scale of justice, leading souls into the Eight Trigrams Palace, to unite with Deities, Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas. He holds in his hands both the Law of the Way and the Law of the World, presiding over the Chamber of Judgment.

Under the Dharma Protector there are four Lords of Zodiac:

Tiếp Pháp (Juridical Legislator)

Khai Pháp (Juridical Reformer)

Hiển Pháp (Juridical Renovator)

Bảo Pháp (Juridical Conservator)

These four share authority with the Dharma Protector whenever they are commissioned for administrative duties, though each has distinct functions and responsibilities:

Tiếp Pháp (Juridical Legislator): Receives petitions, legal documents, and complaints. He has the authority to examine and determine whether they are worthy of adjudication. If unworthy, he may, according to the Law of the Way, dismiss or return them to the Nine Sphere Palace. If deemed significant, they must be submitted to Khai Pháp (Juridical Reformer) for judgment.

Khai Pháp (Juridical Reformer): Reviews petitions and cases referred from Tiếp Pháp (Juridical Legislator) or sent from the Nine Sphere Palace. If necessary, he may notify the Nine Sphere Palace to delay proceedings for up to fifteen days, while reporting to the Dharma Protector. He must then convene the Heavenly Union Palace to deliberate, presenting the case in detail. If the assembly decides to amend the law or to uphold judgment, Khai Pháp (Juridical Reformer) forwards the matter to Hiển Pháp (Juridical Renovator).

Hiển Pháp (Juridical Renovator): When receiving the petition or case, he must open the investigation, gather evidence, and clarify the matter with impartiality. He then submits the

complete case to Bảo Pháp (Juridical Conservator). Hiến Pháp (Juridical Renovator) is forbidden to collude with Hiến Đạo (Religious Renovator) or Hiến Thế (Temporal Renovator). Once a matter enters the hands of Hiến Pháp, it becomes confidential—even other dignitaries of the Heavenly Union Palace may not inquire further.

Bảo Pháp (Juridical Conservator): Preserves the secrecy of the case with utmost confidentiality, prepares the judgment, and determines the sentence according to the Law of the Way. He then submits it to the Dharma Protector for final adjudication.

Bảo Pháp (Juridical Conservator) serves as the Chief Clerk of the Dharma Protector.

CONSTITUTION: *“The duty of the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) is to safeguard both the Law of the World and the Law of the Way; there is none who can escape the law without the Heavenly Union Palace knowing it.”*

COMMENTARY: In summary, the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) is the guardian of both the Law of the World and the Law of the Way. He preserves the Way from becoming secularized and raises the world toward sainthood. None can transgress the law without the Heavenly Union Palace knowing it. Even if the entire Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) or the Heavenly Union Palace itself errs against the law, the Dharma Protector must judge with clarity. For this reason, the Supreme Being requires all officials of the “Pháp” (Law) Branch to swear an oath of impartiality in administration.

Who Is The Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm)?

The Supreme Rank is the one who represents the Dharma Protector and must act under his command in administration. From the moment a soul enters the gate of the Way, it receives a Heavenly Rank. Once a Heavenly Rank is given, the Supreme Being raises it step by step until the soul reaches the office of the Supreme Rank—thus completing the mission of Universal Salvation (Phổ Độ).

All souls, whether original (nguyên nhân) or transformed (hóa nhân), are under the guardianship of the Supreme Rank. He protects them so that they may securely maintain their position, helping them elevate their virtue to avoid violating the law; he supervises the order of ranks so that no one contends or usurp one another, ensuring the Nine Sphere Palace remains in harmony and peace. He closes the Heavenly Gate, preventing souls from falling backward. (*Excellent!*) Through him, ranks may be elevated or demoted.

He holds in his hands the Law of the Way, protecting all Heavenly Appointed dignitaries and disciples, ensuring none violate the law, and guiding each toward the highest attainment of their Divine rank.

The Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm) is the Supreme Being of the Chamber of Legal Defense, the Advocate of the disciples.

CONSTITUTION: “[1] *The Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm) governs matters of the Way, assisted by Lords of Zodiac (Thời Quân)*

Tiếp Đạo (Religious Legislator)

Khai Đạo (Religious Reformer)

Hiến Đạo (Religious Renovator)

Bảo Đạo (Religious Conservator)

Take charge of the Meditation Chambers (Tĩnh Thất); all the Temples, must care for the disciples of the Supreme Being, protecting them so that no one is subjected to harsh punishment through violation of the law.

COMMENTARY: All Meditation Chambers (Tĩnh Thất) fall under the authority of the Supreme Rank. He protects all disciples from injustice, and he appoints dignitaries to preside over these Meditation Chambers (Tĩnh Thất); according to their abilities, assigning responsibilities with fairness.

The Supreme Rank is the banner of the Way. Wherever the Way is, there too is the Supreme Rank.

The Supreme Rank is the counterpart with the Legislative Cardinal (Chưởng Pháp) of the Nine Sphere Palace.

The Heavenly Union Palace is law, while the Supreme Rank is politic. Thus, the Supreme Rank represents the Nine Sphere Palace within the Heavenly Union Palace.

The Four Officials of the Way Branch (Thời Quân) share authority with the Supreme Rank whenever he delegates administrative power, though each has distinct duties:

[1] The Supreme Rank and the Religious Conservator have returned to their divine positions

Tiếp Đạo (Religious Legislator): Receives petitions and accusations, first examining whether injustice exists. If defense is justified, the matter is forwarded to Khai Đạo (Religious Reformer).

Khai Đạo (Religious Reformer): When receiving appeals for deliverance, he considers whether they are valid. If so, he may notify the Nine Sphere Palace to suspend judgment for up to fifteen days. At the same time, he reports to the Dharma Protector and petitions for a convocation of the Great Assembly of the Heavenly Union Palace. If deemed worthy of defense, Khai Đạo (Religious Reformer) presents the case before the assembly. Once the Heavenly Union Palace grants authorization, the case is forwarded to Hiến Đạo (Religious Renovator).

Hiến Đạo (Religious Renovator): Upon receiving the case from Khai Đạo (Religious Reformer), he must investigate thoroughly to uncover the root of the matter. He is forbidden to collude with Hiến Pháp (Judicial or Hiến Thế. Once a case is in his hands, it becomes secret, and even other dignitaries of the Heavenly Union Palace may not know of it.

He must then forward the case to Bảo Đạo (Religious Conservator)

Bảo Đạo (Religious Conservator): Maintains utmost confidentiality, prepares the defense according to the Law of the Way, and submits the case to the Supreme Rank for judgment. Bảo Đạo (Religious Conservator) serves as the Chief Clerk of the Supreme Rank.

The Supreme Rank and the four officials of the Way Branch must swear an oath to remain impartial in all administration.

Who Is The Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh)?

All beings of matter, plants, animals, and humankind are forms of living existence—collectively called sentient beings (chúng sanh). Among them are the original beings (nguyên sanh) [1], the transformed beings (hóa sanh) [2], and the demonic beings (quỷ sanh). [3]

For example: original beings (nguyên nhân) are those whose souls existed from the very opening of Heaven and Earth; transformed beings (hóa nhân) are souls of lower species that, through advancement, attain the human rank; demonic beings (quỷ nhân) are souls of either type that incline toward evil actions and are cast into the demonic state.

[1] [2] [3] *(Original beings (Nguyên sanh) are those who existed from the very beginning of Creation. Transformed beings (Hóa sanh) are those who came into existence only after Creation through transformation. Demonic beings (Quỷ sanh) are those of the two former classes who violated the Heavenly Law and fell into degradation.)*

Among all forms of living existence, only humanity holds the highest position; thus, it is called Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh).

In this Third Universal Salvation (Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ), the Supreme Being elevates all souls—whether original, demonic, or transformed—to the human rank in order to accomplish true universal salvation.

The souls of original beings who fell into the mortal realm, demonic beings redeeming their sins, and transformed beings ascending in rank—all depend upon the Supreme Life for deliverance (this is called temporal salvation). Thus, Supreme Life presides over the Worldly Way, holding in hand the laws of the world, guiding all sentient beings into the Gate of the Way.

Whoever obstructs the spiritual path of humankind may be brought before the Holy See by the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh). If dignitaries violate the law, causing disciples to turn away from the Way, he has the authority to demand immediate punishment.

Supreme Life presides over the Chamber of Legal Accusations.

CONSTITUTION: *“The Supreme Life governs matters of Life.”*

COMMENTARY: All matters pertaining to Life fall under the authority of Supreme Life.

Under him are four Lords of Zodiac of the Temporal Branch (Thời Quân):

Tiếp Thế (Temporal Legislator)

Khai Thế (Temporal Reformer)

Hiển Thế (Temporal Renovator)

Bảo Thế (Temporal Conservator)

They share authority with Supreme Life when he delegates administrative power, though each has distinct duties:

Tiếp Thế (Temporal Legislator): When receiving worldly laws or petitions from outsiders or disciples against Heavenly Appointed dignitaries—regardless of rank—he must forward them to Khai Thế.

Khai Thế (Temporal Reformer): Reviews the petitions from Tiếp Thế. If the case is deemed worthy, he must notify the Nine Sphere Palace (Cửu Trùng Đài) of the matter and simultaneously petition the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) to convene the Heavenly Union

Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) for deliberation. Once authorized, Khai Thế forwards the case to Hiến Thế.

Hiến Thế (Temporal Renovator): Upon receiving the case, he must immediately investigate and gather clear evidence, then forward the complete case to Bảo Thế (Temporal Conservator). He is forbidden to collude with Hiến Pháp (Juridical Renovator) or Hiến Đạo (Religious Renovator)

Once a case enters his hands, it becomes secret, and even other dignitaries of the Heavenly Union Palace may not inquire further.

Bảo Thế (Temporal Conservator): Preserves the secrecy of the case with utmost confidentiality, then prepares the formal accusation according to both the Law of the Way and the Law of Life. He then submits it to the Supreme Life, who may bring the matter before the Three Religions Court (Tòa Tam Giáo) of the Nine Sphere Palace, Heavenly Union Palace, or Eight Trigrams Palace for judgment. Bảo Thế (Temporal Conservator) serves as the Chief Clerk of the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh)

The Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) is the banner of Life, that is, of temporal existence; wherever Life exists, there too is the Supreme Life. He has the authority to examine whether dignitaries truly win the hearts of the faithful by their virtues. If a dignitary lacks sufficient moral qualification, he may submit a petition for reassignment.

The Supreme Life has the same rank as the Legislative Cardinal (Chương Pháp) of the Nine Sphere Palace.

The Heavenly Union Palace is law, while the Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh) represents politic; thus, he is the representative of the Nine Sphere Palace within the Heavenly Union Palace.

The Supreme Life and the four Lords of Zodiac of the Life Branch must swear an oath of impartiality in all administration.

Outside the Constitution, Under the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) are also: Bảo Văn Pháp Quân (Protector of Arts and Literature), formerly appointed as Assistant of Rites and Music (Tiếp Lễ Nhạc Quân), now installed to perfect the rites and music until the completion of the Way. Bảo Sanh Quân (Protector of Public Relief), formerly appointed as Assistant of Medicine (Tiếp Y Quân), awaiting full office until the establishment of the Way. Bảo Học Quân (Protector of Education), along with other dignitaries not yet appointed by the Supreme Being.

These positions remain under the waiting of the Dharma Protector.

CONSTITUTION: *“I advise you, My children, to act in the Way with impartiality. I forewarn you: whoever bears great authority shall also bear great punishment.”*

COMMENTARY: Because of this advice of the Supreme Being, His Holiness Pope Li Bai (Đức Lý Giáo Tông) required that all dignitaries of the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) must take a Solemn Oath (Minh Thệ) before the Sacerdotal Council (Hội Thánh), vowing to act with impartiality in carrying out the Way. To further demonstrate the gravity of their authority, He decreed that every dignitary of the Heavenly Union Palace must wear the cord of mandate (dây sắc lệnh) upon themselves when exercising administration. Wherever they conduct administration, both disciples and dignitaries must obey their command—even if error occurs—leaving only the Sacerdotal Council with the authority to judge and assign punishment. Moreover, every dignitary who has received authority from the Heavenly Union Palace must also take this Solemn Oath before being permitted to administer. (The Guardian of Literature and Arts — Bảo Văn Pháp Quân — is also included in this requirement.) [1]

THE VESTMENT OF THE DIGNITARIES OF THE HEAVENLY UNION PALACE

VESTMENT OF THE DHARMA PROTECTOR (HỘ PHÁP)

COMMENTARY: The vestment of the Dharma Protector has two sets: one Major Vestment (Đại Phục) and one Minor Vestment (Tiểu Phục).

The Major Vestment: He must wear armor, with a Golden Helmet (Kim Khôi) entirely of gold. On the Golden Helmet is the form of Tam Sơn (Three Mountains), resembling a trident, signifying his authority as the Lord of the Three Thousand Worlds (Chưởng Quản Tam Thiên) of the Western Paradise (Tam Thiên bên Tây Phương Cực Lạc). On his feet he wears boots, with the word “PHÁP” (“LAW”) embroidered at the tip. Over the armor is draped a Dragon Robe (Mãng Bào): the left side is armor; the right side is robe—symbolizing half temporal and half spiritual. The right hand (the side of the Way, that is, the side of the Supreme Rank) holds the Demon-Subduing Mace (symbolizing the power of using the World to regulate the Way), while the left hand (the side of the World, that is, the side of the Supreme Life) holds the rosary of Compassion (symbolizing the power of using the Way to regulate the World), thus

[1] [This is the advice from the Pope Li to Bảo Văn Pháp Quân]

forming half World and half Way. Around the waist is tied the Command Ribbon of the three colors of the Way (symbolizing the governance of the Three Religions within oneself, grasping both the Exoteric Law and the Esoteric Law to unify them), with the knot of the ribbon placed precisely at the center of the abdomen.

The Minor Vestment: Entirely of yellow fabric (the color of the Way), with a Hồn Ngươn Mạo also in yellow, one tấc (≈ 0.1 meter) in height. At the center of the forehead are embroidered the Three Sacred Emblems (Cổ Pháp) of the Three Religions: the Alms Bowl (Bình Bát Vu), the Flywhisk (Phất Chủ), and the Spring-Autumn Annals (Xuân Thu). Above them is the word “Pháp” (Dharma) He wears white shoes of non-attachment (giày vô ưu), with the word “Pháp” at the tip. The Cord of Mandate is worn as in the Major Vestment.

When presiding at the Court of the Three Religions (Tòa Tam Giáo), he must wear the Minor Vestment; the Major Vestment is reserved for when he ascends his own throne.

VESTMENT OF THE SUPREME RANK (THƯỢNG PHẨM)

COMMENTARY: The vestment of the Supreme Rank also has two sets: one Major Vestment and one Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment: Entirely of white fabric, with a green outer garment trimmed in silver thread. His head is uncovered, feet in white shoes of non-attachment, with the word “Đạo” (“Way”) embroidered at the tips. Around the waist is tied the Cord of Mandate as with the Dharma Protector, but with the knot on the right side. In his right hand he holds the Long Tu Fan (Long Tu Phiến) (a fan made of 36 white stork feathers, with the Fly-whisk [Phất Chủ] at its center, (symbolizing the guidance of souls to the Thirty-Six Heavens [Tam Thập Lục Thiên]), meaning attaining Divine ranks). In his left hand he holds the Rosary of Compassion, symbolizing the offering of the Way to the Dharma Protector.

The Minor Vestment: Also of white fabric, waist bound with the Cord of Mandate. He wears a white Mixed-Origin Cap (Hồn Ngươn Mạo) similar to that of the Dharma Protector. At the center of the forehead is embroidered the Long Tu Fan, and above it the word “Đạo.” (Way)

At the Court of the Three Religions, he must wear the Minor Vestment; the Major Vestment is reserved for when he ascends his throne.

VESTMENT OF THE SUPREME LIFE (THƯỢNG SANH)

COMMENTARY: The vestment of Supreme Life also has two sets: one Major Vestment and one Minor Vestment.

The Major Vestment: The Major vestment is the same as that of the Supreme Rank, with the head wrapped in a “Thanh Cân” (a green headcloth), the waist girded with the Cord of Thần Thông (a red silk sash), and the Cord of Mandate tied as with the Dharma Protector and the Supreme Rank, but with the knot released to the left side. At the back is fastened the Heroic Sword (symbolizing the creation and transformation of the World); in the right hand is held the Ritual Whisk (symbolizing the transmission of the World to the Dharma Protector); in the left hand is grasped the Rosary of Compassion (chuỗi Từ Bi) (symbolizing the offering of the Way to humankind). On the feet are white Worry-Free Shoes, at the tip of which is embroidered the word “World.”

The Minor Vestment: Similar to that of the Supreme Rank, but at the center of the cap is embroidered the Heroic Sword and Flywhisk, with the word “Thế” above them. The Cord of Mandate is worn as with the Major Vestment.

At the Court of the Three Religions, he must wear the Minor Vestment; the Major Vestment is reserved for when he ascends his throne.

VESTMENT OF THE TWELVE LORDS OF THE ZODIAC (THẬP NHỊ THỜI QUÂN)

COMMENTARY: The vestment of the twelve Lords of the Zodiac has two sets: one Major Vestment (Đại Phục) and one Minor Vestment (Tiểu Phục).

The Major Vestment is entirely white fabric, with a close collar edged in silver thread. The head is crowned with a Crow Cap (mão quạ) also of white fabric. Around the waist is tied the Cord of Mandate (dây lệnh sắc) according to one’s branch (chi), with the knot falling accordingly. The feet are shod in white shoes of non-attachment (giày vô ưu).

The Minor Vestment is likewise of white fabric, with the Cord of Mandate worn as in the Major Vestment. The head is crowned with a cap similar to the Minor Vestment of the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp), Supreme Rank (Thượng Phẩm), and Supreme Life (Thượng Sanh), but bearing the Sacred Emblem (Cổ Pháp) according to one’s branch. The feet wear white non-attachment shoes.

During administration, they wear the Minor Vestment; the Major Vestment is reserved for Great Ceremonies. Other positions of the Lords (Chơn Quân) may either already exist or are yet to be established, with their vestments temporarily arranged or still undecided by the Supreme Being, who will clarify later.

VESTMENT OF THE CONSERVATOR OF ARTS AND LITERATURE (BẢO VĂN PHÁP QUÂN)

COMMENTARY: The Major Vestment of the Conservator of ARTS and Literature (Bảo Văn Pháp Quân) is entirely of white fabric. On the head is worn the Sun-and-Moon Cap (Nhật Nguyệt Mạo) [1], as with the other dignitaries of the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài). At the center of each side of the cap is affixed a five-petaled lotus, upon which is embroidered the Divine Eye of the Supreme Being (Thiên Nhân Thầy). At the very front, in the middle of the cap, is placed another five-petaled lotus without the Eye. Thus, there are three lotuses in total on the cap.

Around the waist is worn the Bạch Tuyết Thần Quang (Light of the snow pure Spirit) sash, made of white fabric, three meters (thước), three decimeters (tấc), three centimeters (phân) in length, and three decimeter (tấc), three centimeters (phân), three millimeters (ly) in width ($\approx 1.33 \text{ m} \times 0.11 \text{ m}$). Its knot must be arranged in front in the form of a five-petaled lotus.

The feet wear white non-attachment shoes; each embroidered at the tip with a small lotus.

[1] According to the Divine Teaching of March 13, 1931, from the Sixth Female Immortal (Lục Nữ Ông) of the Palace of Diêu Trì: the round crown of the cap represents the “Form of the Sun of the World” (Thế Nhật Hình), while the half-moon form represents the “Form of the Moon of the World” (Thế Nguyệt Tượng). Hence the name Sun-and-Moon Cap (Nhật Nguyệt Mạo).

VESTMENT OF THE CONSERVATOR OF LIFE (BẢO SANH QUÂN)

COMMENTARY: The Major Vestment of the Conservator of Life is entirely white fabric. On the head is worn the Sun-and-Moon Cap (Nhật Nguyệt Mạo), as with the other Lords of Zodiac of the Heavenly Union Palace. At the center of the cap, three to four phân (centimeter) above the base, is embroidered a Divine Eye; two more are embroidered on each side, making three in total. Around the rim of the cap is tied a Celestial Cord (Tiên Thằng)—a white band eight phân (centimeter) in width and two thước (meter) in length. It is bound so that the central Divine Eye remains visible, with the two ends hanging down on the shoulders. Around the waist is tied the Song Quang Thần Thông sash, a strip of white silk forming two circular vô vi symbols at each side.

The feet wear white non-attachment shoes (vô ưu).

SPEECH OF THE DHARMA PROTECTOR (HỘ PHÁP)

Honored Brothers and Sisters,

Whoever bears this mortal body within the universe must acknowledge that they have received the grace of two Great Creators.

The first is Supreme Being.

He has bestowed upon us a spark of divine spirit; by relying on it, we have become wiser than all other creatures, so that we may take the place of Heaven in refining the visible order of life, bringing it toward perfection and beauty. The ingenuity of each individual is joined into the collective treasury of human intelligence and wisdom, to serve as a program of knowledge for future generations—a path where the former guides the latter, and the latter builds upon the former. Such is the order decreed by Heaven.

By seeking, we discover; by learning, we understand; by training the mind, we continue the mission of those before us. Step by step, intellect is cultivated and advanced, and on the day of the world's end, humanity will have uncovered many of the wondrous mysteries of creation.

This proves clearly and certainly that there is indeed the Supreme Being urging all beings toward the progress of intellectual and spiritual evolution.

The second is our Parents.

They have given us this human form, nurtured us into life, taught us until we became wise, and placed us within the fixed limits of reason and human duty. Upon our shoulders weigh the burdens of loyalty to Emperor, teacher, and parent (Quân, Sư, Phụ); the obligations of the three bonds and five virtues (Tam Cang, Ngũ Thường). The hardship of human life—who does not fear it? Yet fearing it without fulfilling our human duty is failing at being human. Life's difficulties often multiply with sorrow, for the harder life becomes, the more burdens arise. If we do not strive wholeheartedly to examine the problem of our own creation and set forth a clear program to guide our behavior, how can we avoid falling into harm through ignorance?

That program is found in the teachings of religions, which together have formed the Way. The Way is the path laid down to guide humanity past the hardships of life. Its purpose is to set a goal and a standard, uniting past with present, weaving together the wisdom of humankind, becoming a radiant lamp that illumines all, turning the sorrows of the world into the boat of Prajna that ferries souls across the sea of suffering.

The Buddhas, out of compassion, discovered the means to end suffering.

The Immortals, out of compassion, revealed the way of liberation from suffering.

The Saints, out of compassion, taught endurance amidst suffering.

The Deities, out of compassion, established the means to overcome suffering.

The Sages, out of compassion, attained the way to follow through suffering.

Thus, suffering is the lesson of life's great school, and the ranks of Sage, Deity, Saint, Immortal, and Buddha are the ranks of those who have graduated.

Where there is borrowing, there must be repayment; where there is a beginning, there must be an end; where there is creation, there will naturally be establishment (tout effet a sa cause). In this chaotic realm, countless karmic grievances and sins have arisen, causing the various classes of souls—even those still retaining their original purity, knowing self-respect and self-preservation—because of defilement and pollution, to find it difficult to escape easily from the gate of transmigration and rebirth..

Having advanced, there must be retreat; having erred, one must seek the good; having strayed, one must return to the right; having done harm, one must seek kindness. (The law of reparations.) The struggles and rivalries have created countless enemies and debts of karma, binding even the Divine Beings, who though having ascended to lofty ranks and cultivated their will and virtue, must, out of compassion for living beings, forfeit their destinies, and suffer exile into the worldly realm..

The mechanism of spiritual evolution is thus: a mighty force obliges all souls to obey the law of progress, step by step, until they attain parity with Heaven. Even the Ancient Buddhas cannot avoid this principle.

Where there is the visible, surely there is the invisible. The fairness of creation has already been established: as it is in this world, so it is in the spiritual realm. It is as though a mysterious law is ever present, urging humankind to awaken, to use wisdom to shun evil and seek goodness, following the examples of the Virtuous, the Spirits, the Saints, the Immortals, and the Buddhas. Even the Supreme Being (Đức Chí Tôn) Himself must conform to this law in order to bring forth the proper life and transform the world.

The law of Heaven is one: to love all beings. Therefore, it has been ordained that the ranks of the visible and the spiritual are one, meaning they must correspond to one another, so that divine justice may be fulfilled—where the virtuous ascend and the wicked fall.

The universe was born of harmony, and only through harmony can it endure. The earth must have harmony to remain whole; humanity must have harmony to survive. Just as the body must be in harmony with the soul to realize the Way, so too must humankind unite in harmony with Heaven.

Using the greater to define the lesser, and the lesser to seek the greater: this body is formed through the harmony of vital energies, so too must the soul follow the law of yin and yang in harmony to return to its original source. Since the soul has come into being through harmony, it must likewise rely on harmony in order to return.

Though the precious laws of many religions have achieved much, the true mystery lies in but one word: harmony.

Keep the body strong and refined, avoiding indulgence in the six desires, so that it may accord with wise discernment.

Let the vital energy remain strong and pure, not to be clouded by the seven emotions; then wisdom will naturally unfold in accord with the spiritual mind.

Let the spiritual mind be calm and gentle, not to be darkened by sin and passion; then it will align with Heaven's will, attain enlightenment in this world and the wondrous mysteries.

The body is essence, energy is vital force, and intellect is spirit.

To make it plain: essence is the body; energy is the vital force, meaning the intellect; spirit is the soul. When these three treasures are in harmony, uniting with one another, only then may one hope to attain the Way.

The Divine Mechanism established by the Supreme Being during this Third Universal Salvation in the Hạ Ngươn era takes a single word—Harmony—as its guiding principle.

With harmony comes unity; with unity love arises; and love is the key to opening the gates of the Thirty-Six Heavens, the World of Paradise, and the White Jade Palace. As the Supreme Being has taught, only through Compassion and Universal Love can one attain the Way of the Invisible, and only through harmony can oneness be achieved.

The Supreme Being has determined to establish the Way in order to bear witness to the religions, so that they may recognize one another in the path of virtuous deeds, abolish the harm of conflict and enmity, and bring peace to the world, thus escaping the danger of destruction.

The embodiment of the Way, as ordained by the Supreme Being, must also rely upon harmony in order to be established. The Supreme Being resolved to establish the Sacerdotal Council to serve as the representation of His form, following the law of Creation within each individual to bring forth a reflection of Himself.

The Nine Sphere Palace is the physical body, which is Essence.

The Heavenly Union Palace is the perispirit, that is Vital Energy.

The Eight Trigrams Palace is the soul, which is Spirit.

If all three do not harmonize, it is difficult to hope for the attainment of the Way.

If any worldly power could cause the Divine Body of the Supreme Being to be torn apart and broken into fragments, then our Religion would be but a false religion, destined to perish in but a brief moment.

But if indeed the Supreme Being, out of love for His children, personally descended to establish Religion in order to save humankind, then the schemes of wicked powers seeking to obstruct His Way cannot prevail against the Supreme Will; such forces cannot hope for lasting endurance.

Alas! For those without merit who attempt to divide and fragment, causing the Body of the Supreme Being to be torn asunder.

Alas! For those without destiny who reject the Sacred Teaching and oppose the True Religion, defiling and debasing the Perispirit of the Supreme Being, so that it seems ready to abandon the body.

Grievous indeed are such people! Pitiful indeed are such souls! Who dare with reckless audacity to lay hands against the Supreme Being—what immeasurable sin is that! Recall the

example of Judas who sold Lord Jesus Christ; even his betrayal was lighter, for Judas sought but thirty pieces of silver to feed the disciples of his Master. But these, here, driven solely by vain ambition, betray the Religion itself.

The Supreme Being came down, humbling Himself to serve as Teacher to guide us, ever hoping that we might unite in His compassionate and loving heart, to become one with Him. Only then would we have the power to save all beings and lead them back to their original position. Yet after six long years, the body remains scattered and weak, the perispirit still wavering and clouded—how then can the Divine Beings join together with the world, to amend the Celestial Mandate (Thiên Thơ) and gather the original souls into the Way?

Because the Five Branches of the Way are divided, human hearts are disunited, and humankind is set against one another. The Supreme Being came to unite all into one family, desiring that His children might know love and harmony.

I must leave it to those who stir disorder and breed enmity to reflect: do you truly love the Supreme Being and cherish the Way?

When establishing the Holy Religion in the West, the Supreme Being declared beforehand: “There are still many sheepfolds; I will come to gather them all into one.” This proclamation meant that many religions were still nurturing and shaping the spirit of God’s children, awaiting the day when He would unite them together as one. Today, that word has indeed been fulfilled.

The Divine Sheepfolds of the Supreme Being are as follows:

The Buddhist Way (Phật Đạo): Brahmanism (Be La Môn), Sakyamuni (Buddhism of Gautama Buddha), and the Pythagorean religion.

The Taoist Way (Tiên Đạo): The Teaching of Laozi, Yang Zhu, Mozi, (Dương Châu Mốc Định), the School of Myriad Teachings (Vạn Pháp), heterodox sects (Bán Môn), and down to ritual masters (Thầy Pháp), talisman practitioners (Thầy Phu), spirit mediums, trance mediums, (bang, chàng, đồng cốt) and so forth.

The Saintly Way (Thánh Đạo): Christianity, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam (Mahometanism).

The Deity Way (Thần Đạo): The Chinese Pantheon, the Greek Pantheon, and the Egyptian Pantheon (Chinese, Greek, and Egyptian Mythologies).

The Human Way (Nhân Đạo): Socrates, Aesop, Plato, and others in Greece; Confucius (Confucianism), Mencius, the School of the Cheng Brothers (Nhị Trình Giáo), and so forth,

along with Han traditions (Hồn Phong), Tang poetry (Đường Thi), and Jin customs (Tấn Tục) in ancient China.

Before coming to establish the Way and unite all Religions into one, He had already sent exalted Divine Beings down to earth to found Moral and Religious Societies (Hội Giáo Đạo Đức) in order to awaken humanity beforehand, such as:

Theosophical Society (Société théosophique).

Society for the Study of Buddhist Philosophy (Société des recherches sur la philosophie bouddhique).

Psychical and Psychological Society (Société Psychique).

Spiritism (le spiritisme), and so forth...

Many Religious Societies had already been established for a hundred years before the opening of the Way, in order to gradually instruct the nations of the world to understand the True Teachings. Now, the Supreme Being has come to establish a Cao Đài, meaning a lofty temple or the greatest faith in this world (la haute église ou la plus grande foi du monde), thereby founding the Religion. He even chose a humble and insignificant people of the Far East—our Annam—to fulfill the prophecy “The Way shall come forth from the East” and to accord with His humble holy will. Thus He established the Sacerdotal Council as the Divine Body of Himself, in order to firmly hold the Thunder Drum mallet to summon wandering souls, and grasp tightly the Jade Bell hammer to sound the note of spiritual awakening, so that all His children may be stirred, behold Him, and return to their original homeland.

Though the Supreme Being has humbled Himself in condescension to set an example for the Sacerdotal Council, yet in truth it is clear that He has avoided bearing the low body of mortal incarnation. Instead, He has descended in a glorious and sacred form—without body yet allowing us to see, without voice yet enabling us to hear—retaining the full authority of the Supreme Being in His hands to govern the sacred mission of the Way.

That sacred authority has had immeasurable influence upon the Religion. The Supreme Being employs conscience as His law, and love as His power, so that all humankind may behold His countenance, recognize one another within His holy virtue, and together cherish harmony and love.

Republic! Republic! These are the two precious words the Supreme Being has placed within the heart of each person. By knowing the Republic within oneself, society and nation may achieve true concord; then, as a radiant example, this noble ideal will be spread throughout the entire world, so that humanity may attain a universal brotherhood of harmony.

This is the supreme and most solemn duty the Supreme Being has entrusted to us. Yet we, failing to regard its gravity, have instead allowed ambition for rank and profit to divide us, causing enmity and insult among ourselves, betraying teachers, and turning against our brothers. In such a state, can we still be deemed worthy children and servants of the Supreme Being?

At this time, countless forces have arisen, combining their efforts to disturb the Supreme's Religion: from the outside, enemies devise schemes to destroy; from within, betrayal and slander defile the sacred name of the Faith, leaving it withered and diminished. If the Religion were to collapse, where then would humankind turn for salvation?

Because the Supreme Being feared the corruption of worldly passions and mortal nature, He established extremely strict laws, granting full authority to bind the entire Sacerdotal Council—that is, the sacred body—into unity.

For Law there is the New Law (Tân Luật). For Dharma there is the Constitution (Pháp Chánh Truyền). For Authority there is the Court of Three Religions (Tòa Tam Giáo).

These are like the sacred whistle, the staff (cây gậy), and the fence: instruments to gather all the Supreme Being's sheepfolds into one. Alas! The shepherds do not heed the sound of the whistle, the flock does not fear the staff, and the fence is weak and broken, so that wolves and tigers seize the Supreme Being's sheep and tear them to pieces. Where does such harm arise?

It lies in the fact that the Sacerdotal Council has not yet become a true Council; the Heavenly-Appointed Dignitaries exist as though absent—mere shadows without substance—so that the Supreme Being's sacred body lacks sufficient authority to move and fulfill the Divine Plan, and to overcome the evil schemes that disturb and corrupt.

All the Sacred Teachings the Supreme Being has given us since the founding of the religion have already become the New Dharma (nouvel évangile). Yet today, humankind still has not grasped their depth, because many who take part in the Heavenly-Appointed Ranks have twisted them with corrupt hearts, mocking and distorting, instead of spreading the words of righteousness—leading sincere believers astray, causing them to wander from the true path.

If the situation of the Religion remains thus, how can we hope to save all beings and establish the true form of the Way?

The Religion has the Exoteric Law (Thể pháp) as its outward form, and the Esoteric Law (Bí pháp) as its inner substance. Yet, of the ten parts of the Exoteric Law, not even three have been fulfilled, while the Esoteric Law has not yet been fully understood by anyone. Thus, the Religion has lost its value in the eyes of humankind, and faith has increasingly diminished.

This gives power to other religions to attack the True Teachings), causing those who wholeheartedly serve the Religion to worry anxiously about its truth and falsity.

For this reason, many Immortals and Buddhas have descended across the West to prophesy about the Holy Religion, declaring beforehand that only those with firm roots in cultivation may hope to preserve their faith and enter the gate of the Religion. The trials of the Religion today indeed prove this to be true.

Address to the Honorable Brothers and Sisters

I believe that we already carry a heavy responsibility upon ourselves, yet if we lack the courage to examine and govern ourselves, how then may we hope to judge others with fairness?

I must confess truthfully: it is because of our weak sincerity, our failure to devote our full heart and mind to managing the True Religion, that we have instead allowed difference and compromise to prevail. This has set a poor example, giving opportunists a chance to chase after fame, form factions, and build private interests into worldly power. Today's calls for independence and self-authority have also arisen from this cause.

Within each of us dwell two persons: one is our individual self; the other is the Ordained Dignitary (Chức Sắc Thiên Phong)—the servant of the Supreme Being.

As for us, even if our bones are broken and our bodies are destroyed in this fleeting life, it matters little. What truly matters is the sacred duty entrusted to us. If we fail to value it rightly and keep our responsibility whole, guarding the common spiritual heritage of all humankind—that is, this Religion today—then how immense will our guilt be before the Supreme Being!

Therefore, let us join together with united effort and mutual support. From this day forth, we must resolutely allow no one to violate our authority, for our authority is that of the Supreme Being. Even if only one believer remains, the Sacerdotal Council must still uphold its rightful authority.

Let us rally together, each offering strength according to his means, to safeguard the banner of the Religion—the Holy See. And let us strive to raise high, here in the Far East, in southern Vietnam, a Great Tower (a Cao Đài) to serve as a shining beacon, casting its light toward the spirit of Republic across the entire world.

THE END