

THE NEW LAW OF THE CAODAI RELIGION



Translated by
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PREFACE

Humanity must know that there is something above their head. The vast firmament above us is Heaven. HE who holds authority therein is the Creator, the Celestial Jade Emperor, Supreme God, the Lord of the Entire Universe.

Now, the Creator, under the sacred name of Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát, has employed the wondrous mystery of the Immortals to establish, in our land of Vietnam, a most exalted and noble True Way, to deliver humankind from the cycle of reincarnation. This Way is called the Third Universal Salvation of the Great Way (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ).

Out of love for humanity, the Supreme Being came to redeem us, calling Himself our Master and addressing us as His Disciples.

Therefore, we must wholeheartedly revere and worship the Creator, and devote ourselves with utmost faith to the profound and mysterious Way of the Supreme Being.

The guiding principle of the Great Way encompasses the three major religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—unifying them into one. Thus, when we follow the Great Way, we must adhere to the principles of the Three Religions, cultivating and refining our character: upholding the Three Bonds (Tam Cang), the Five Constants (Ngũ Thường), keeping faithfully the Three Refuges (Tam Qui), the Five Precepts (Ngũ Giới), and diligently practicing the Three Treasures (Tam Bửu) and the Five Elements (Ngũ Hành).

Whoever fully embraces all three paths approaches the realm of the Deities, Saints, Immortals, and Buddhas.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The New Law (Tân Luật) of the Cao Dai Religion is a sacred scripture that sets forth the moral, spiritual, and organizational foundation of the Third Universal Salvation of the Great Way (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ). This English translation is offered with deep reverence and a faithful heart, aiming to convey both the clarity of its laws and the profound beauty of its moral teachings. The New Law is not merely a set of religious rules; it is the living charter of a Divine community, guiding humanity to live in harmony with Heaven and with one another.

The text begins by establishing the structure of the Holy See (Tòa Thánh) and the roles of its Dignitaries — from the Pope (Giáo Tông), Legislative Cardinals (Chưởng Pháp), and Cardinals (Đầu Sư) down to the Priests (Giáo Hữu) and Student Priests (Lễ Sinh). It emphasizes righteousness, humility, and justice as the guiding virtues for all ranks of leadership. The code instructs every disciple to observe the Five Precepts (Ngũ Giới Cấm) and the Four Great Regulations (Tứ Đại Điều Qui, to cultivate virtue, and to live according to the teachings of the Supreme Being (Đức Chí Tôn).

Beyond matters of faith, the New Law also embraces the moral and social dimensions of life. It teaches respect within families, harmony in society, and compassion toward all beings. Marriage, funerals, education, and charity are all treated as sacred duties, to be conducted with simplicity, sincerity, and reverence. The text forbids extravagance, violence, and immoral trades, reminding disciples that a life of moderation and virtue reflects the true essence of the Way (Đạo).

The final part of the New Code describes the discipline of the Meditation House (Tịnh Thất), a place of silence and purity where disciples cultivate the perispirit in peace and strive for Divine communion. Through this inner path of meditation, one perfects the self and attains union with the Supreme Spirit.

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 (Hội Thánh) of the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Holy See (Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh). It is offered solely as a resource for study and research and should not be regarded as an official text.

Respectfully written,

Hoang Minh Le (Translator)

THE RELIGIOUS LAW

CHAPTER I

ABOUT THE DIGNITARIES GOVERNING WITHIN THE RELIGION

Article One

- Above all stands the rank of Pope (Giáo Tông), who is the eldest brother, vested with authority to represent the Supreme Being in guiding all disciples in both the religious and worldly paths. The Pope holds authority over the physical life, but not over the soul.
- The Pope is granted communion with the Thirty-Six Heavens (Tam Thập Lục Thiên) and the Seventy-Two Earthly Regions (Thất Thập Nhị Địa Giới) to pray for the salvation of all disciples.
- All disciples must obey the commands of this rank.

Article Two

- Next are the three Legislative Cardinals (Chưởng Pháp) of the Three Religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.
- These three possess the right to examine laws before their execution, whether issued by the Pope or submitted by the Cardinals (Đầu Sư). If disagreements arise, they must present the matter to the Dharma Protector (Hộ Pháp) at the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài), to seek correction from the Supreme Being.
- They also have the authority to review scriptures before publication; if any scriptures or law leads to moral corruption, they must reject it and forbid its circulation.
- Each Legislative Cardinal has a personal seal. All laws require the three seals to be validly enacted.
- The Legislative Cardinals must admonish and correct the Pope when in error; if all three witness unrighteousness in the Pope, they may submit a petition of accusation to the Holy See (Tòa Thánh).

Article Three

- The three Cardinals (Đầu Sư) of the three branches govern the spiritual and temporal affairs of the disciples.
- They hold the right to draft laws, but must submit them to the Pope for approval. They must also obey the commands of the Pope. If any law conflicts with the well-being of humankind, they have the right to petition for its repeal.
- If a law decreed by the Pope is unanimously refused by the three with their signatures, it must be returned to the Pope, who will then command the Legislative Cardinals to re-examine it.
- Each Cardinal has a personal seal; no document is effective without all three seals.

Article Four

- There are thirty-six Archbishop (Phối Sư), twelve from each of the three branches. Among them are three Principal Archbishops (Chánh Phối Sư).
- These are empowered to act in place of the Cardinals, but hold no right to alter laws.

Article Five

- There are seventy-two Bishops (Giáo Sư), twenty-four in each of the three branches. The Bishops instruct the disciples in both the religious and worldly paths.
- The Bishops must care for the disciples as elder brothers care for their younger siblings.
- They keep the register of disciples, and must oversee each person's rites of marriage and funeral.
- In major provinces or cities, the Bishops (Giáo Sư) have the authority to administer affairs and conduct worship to the Supreme Being (Thầy) just as the Cardinals (Đầu Sư) and Archbishops (Phối Sư) do.
- The Bishops may submit petitions to revise or repeal laws harmful to humanity.
- The Bishops must remain close to disciples, as members of one family, aiding them with diligence.

Article Six

- The Priests (Giáo Hữu) are those appointed to disseminate the True Way (Chơn Đạo) of the Supreme Being (Thầy). They have the authority to propose modifications to the Religious Laws and are permitted to conduct ceremonies when presiding over

temples in smaller provinces. There are 3,000 Priests in total, with 1,000 for each branch, and this number must neither be increased nor reduced.

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Article Seven

- The Student Priests (Lễ Sanh) are virtuous individuals selected from the disciples to perform ceremonies.
- They are authorized to inaugurate altars for each disciple.
- One must first enter the rank of Student Priest before aspiring to become a dignitary.

The laws establishing the Sacerdotal Council are were enacted in accordance with the Divine Teachings (Thánh Ngôn).

Article Eight

- A Cardinal may ascend to Legislative Cardinal through nomination by the three Cardinals.
- An Archbishop may ascend to Cardinal through nomination by the thirty-six Archbishop.
- A Bishop may ascend to Archbishop through nomination by the seventy-two Bishop.
- A Priest may ascend to Bishop through nomination by the three thousand Priests.
- A Student Priest may ascend to Priest through nomination by all Student Priests together.
- The office of Pope may be contested by the Legislative Cardinals and Cardinals, but must be confirmed by the vote of the entire community of disciples.
- In exceptional cases, only when the Supreme Being bestows reward through Divine revelation can these laws be set aside.

The laws establishing the Sacerdotal Council are were enacted in accordance with the Divine Teachings (Thánh Ngôn).

CHAPTER II

ABOUT THE FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY

Article Nine

- Those who wish to be admitted into the Way (Đạo) must have two virtuous persons introduce and lead them to the head of their Religious Family (Hộ). These two sponsors are responsible for guiding and instructing the newcomer so that they may understand the doctrines and principles of the Way.

Article Ten

- From this time forth, every Holy Temple (Thánh Thất) must establish an oath of initiation. Anyone newly entering the religion must, on the very day their name is registered, stand before the main altar and take the solemn vow.
- They are required to learn the scriptures (Kinh) by heart and to understand clearly the Laws promulgated by The Great Way (Đại Đạo).

Article Eleven

- The head of a family group, or a member of the Clergy (Chức Sắc) acting on their behalf, must come to perform the ceremony of consecration (trấn thần) and installation (an vị) for the person newly entering the Way (Đạo).

Article Twelve

After initiation, one is called a disciple (tín đồ). Among the disciples, there are two ranks:

1. The first rank consists of those who still live in the secular world — having spouses and engaging in ordinary occupations — yet are required to observe vegetarian fasting for either six or ten days each month, to keep the Five Precepts (Ngũ Giới Cấm), and to follow the Worldly Laws (Thế Luật) established by the Great Way (Đại Đạo). This group is referred to as those who uphold the Way, belonging to the Lower Rank (hạ thừa).
2. The second rank consists of those who practice permanent vegetarianism (trường trai), abstain from taking life, and strictly observe the Four Great Regulations (tứ đại điều qui); these belong to the Upper Rank (thượng thừa).

Article Thirteen

- Among the disciples of the lower level (hạ thừa), anyone who observes vegetarian abstinence (trai kỳ) for ten days or more each month is permitted to receive the

esoteric Dharma (Bửu Pháp) and may enter the meditation chamber (Tĩnh Thất) to be guided in the practice of cultivating the Way (luyện Đạo).

Article Fourteen

- All dignitaries (Chức Sắc) governing within the religion, from the rank of Priest (Giáo Hữu) and above, must be chosen exclusively from among those of the Upper Rank (thượng thừa).

Article Fifteen

- Disciples of the Upper Rank (thượng thừa) in accordance with The Great Way (Đại Đạo) are required to keep both beard and hair unshaven. Their clothing should be plain and modest — made entirely of white fabric, or in the color representing their religious branch. They should dress simply, avoiding luxury in any form.

CHAPTER III

ABOUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGIOUS FAMILIES

Article Sixteen

- Wherever the number of disciples (tín đồ) reaches five hundred or more, a separate Religious Family (Hộ) may be established, with its own Temple (Thánh Thất) and one dignitary (Chức Sắc) appointed as the head to administer it.

Article Seventeen

- The establishment of a Religious Family (Hộ) must have the approval of the Pope (Giáo Tông) and must be authorized through the proper governing authority.

Article Eighteen

- All disciples within a Religious Family (Hộ) must obey the commands of the dignitary (Chức Sắc) who serves as its head. Every matter must proceed under that person's guidance; no one is permitted to act independently or contrary to the Way (Đạo).

Article Nineteen

- On the two lunar days of Sóc (New Moon) and Vọng (Full Moon) each month, all disciples must gather at their local Temple (Thánh Thất) to perform the ceremony and receive instruction, except for those excused due to unavoidable circumstances.

Article Twenty

- The dignitary (Chức Sắc) in charge of the Temple (Thánh Thất) must perform the Minor Ceremonies (Tiểu Lễ) four times daily, according to the Four Periods (Tứ Thời): Tý (midnight), Ngọ (noon), Mẹo (6 a.m.), and Dậu (6 p.m.). Each ceremony must begin precisely at 6 a.m., 12 noon, 6 p.m., and 12 midnight.
- A bell is tolled once before each ceremony begins. During these periods, followers (bồ đạo) may come freely to recite prayers if they wish.

CHAPTER IV

ABOUT THE FIVE PRECEPTS

Article Twenty-One

After being admitted into the Way (Đạo), every disciple must cultivate and preserve their moral conduct, and carefully observe the Five Precepts (Ngũ Giới Cấm), which are as follows:

1. **The First Precept – Do Not Kill** (Nhứt Bất Sát Sanh): One must not take the life of any living being.
2. **The Second Precept – Do Not Steal** (Nhì Bất Du Đạo): It is forbidden to steal, rob, or seize the property of others through deceit. One must not borrow without repayment, keep stolen goods, pick up things that do not belong to oneself, or harbor greed that causes harm to others for one's own gain. Gambling and cheating are likewise prohibited.
3. **The Third Precept – Do Not Commit Adultery** (Tam Bất Tà Dâm): One must not commit adultery, consort with prostitutes, or incite others to violate moral order. To harbor lustful thoughts upon seeing beauty, or to use words that arouse romantic or improper feelings, is forbidden. Relations between husband and wife are not considered adultery.
4. **The Fourth Precept – Abstain from Intoxication** (Tứ Bất Tửu Nhục): One must not indulge in drink wine or liquor to the point of intoxication or gluttony, for such habits disturb the mind and bring disorder to the community. Avoid craving fine wine or desiring rich and luxurious foods.
5. **The Fifth Precept – Do Not Speak Falsely** (Ngũ Bất Vọng Ngữ): One must not be deceitful, boastful, or offensive in speech. Avoid deceiving others, flaunting oneself, exposing others' faults, calling wrong right or right wrong, mocking or slandering

others, spreading gossip or words that provoke anger or lawsuits, and using vulgar or insulting language. One must never blaspheme religion (Tôn Giáo), nor speak without keeping one's promises.

CHAPTER V

ABOUT THE FOUR GREAT REGULATIONS

Article Twenty-Two

- Every disciple must cultivate virtue and uphold the Four Great Regulations (Tứ Đại Điều Qui):
 1. One must obey the teachings of superiors and not be ashamed to accept correction from those of lower rank. Deal with others through courtesy and harmony. When at fault, one must repent and willingly bear responsibility.
 2. Do not boast of talent or act with arrogance; forget yourself and act for the good of others. Help others fulfill the Way (Đạo). Hold no grudges and never conceal the merit of virtuous people.
 3. Be honest and transparent in all financial matters; never borrow without repaying. Toward both superiors and subordinates, maintain respect and sincerity, the higher should teach the lower with courtesy, and the lower should advise the higher with humility.
 4. Be consistent in conduct—behaving the same in another's absence as in their presence; do not show respect before others and disrespect afterward.
- When fellow disciples dispute, do not sit idly by without offering reconciliation. Do not turn what is common into what is private, nor neglect public duty for personal gain. Always obey the laws of the religion; do not act on selfish impulses that oppose the authority above or mislead those below. Never rely on power to suppress the talents of others.

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Article Twenty-Three

- Within the Religion (Đạo), schools shall be established to provide instruction in both secular learning and spiritual doctrine.

Article Twenty-Four

- The methods of teaching and all organizational matters within these schools shall be governed by specific regulations to be formally established.

Article Twenty-Five

- Only those who have received a Certificate of Graduation issued by these schools shall be eligible to be nominated or appointed to the dignitary ranks (Chức Sắc) within the Religion.

CHAPTER VII

ABOUT DISCIPLINARY PENALTIES

Article Twenty-Six

- If any disciple (bổn đạo) violates the laws of the Religion (Luật Pháp) in minor matters, the head of the Religious Family (Họ) has the authority to judge the case and may impose the penalty of kneeling before the incense and reciting the Repentance Scripture (Kinh Sám Hối).

Article Twenty-Seven

- If the offense is serious or repeated, the case must be referred to the Council of Judgment (Hội Công Đồng) for judgment.
- This Council shall consist of one Cardinal (Đầu Sư) or one Archbishop (Phối Sư) of the same branch serving as the presiding officer, with two dignitaries (Chức Sắc) from the other two branches participating in the judgement. The Council possesses the authority to expel (trục xuất) the offender from the Religion.

Article Twenty-Eight

- If disciples have disputes concerning worldly matters, they must also bring the case to the head of their Religious Family (Họ) for mediation and resolution.

Article Twenty-Nine

- If any dignitary (Chức Sắc) violates the religious law, the case shall be brought before the Court of the Three Religions (Tòa Tam Giáo) for judgement.

Article Thirty

- The Court of the Three Religions (Tòa Tam Giáo) is presided over by the Pope (Giáo Tông). The three Legislative Cardinals (Chường Pháp) serve as judges. The Cardinal (Đầu Sư) of the same branch serves as the accuser by submitting the formal indictment. A dignitary from the Heavenly Union Palace (Hiệp Thiên Đài) acts as the defense advocate (trạng sư).

Article Thirty-One

- This Court has the authority to demote (giáng cấp) or expel (trục xuất) the offender.

CHAPTER VIII

ABOUT THE PROMULGATION OF LAWS

Article Thirty-Two

- Within six months from the date this Law (Luật Pháp) is promulgated, all disciples (tín đồ) must comply with its provisions.

Exceptions:

1. Those whose occupations are contrary to the prohibitions of this Law shall be granted a period of one year to abandon such professions.
 2. Dignitaries (Chức Sắc) who have not yet adopted permanent vegetarianism (trường trai) shall be granted a period of two years to practice and conform accordingly.
- For all other matters, the new regulations established by the Supreme Being (Đức Chí Tôn) must be strictly observed. Anything not specified herein shall continue to follow the previous laws and traditions.

SECULAR LAW

Those who have been admitted into the Religion (hành Đạo) must observe the following Secular Law (Thế Luật):

Article One

- Those who have received religious instruction from the same Master are like children of the same father; they must love one another, maintain mutual contact, assist one another sincerely in both the Way (Đạo) and in life.

Article Two

- After entering the Religion, one must forget all former resentments and hostilities; avoid jealousy, rivalry, and litigation; be patient and live in harmony. If disagreements arise, willingly listen to the mediation of the head of one's Religious Family (Hộ).

Article Three

- All must uphold the Three Bonds and Five Constants (Tam Cang Ngũ Thường), which are the foundation of Humanity Way (Nhơn Đạo): Men should practice filial piety, brotherly respect, loyalty, faith, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and honor. Women should follow the Three Obediences — to father, husband, and son — and cultivate the Four Virtues — domestic skills, graceful appearances, refined speech, and virtuous conduct.

Article Four

- In dealing with the society, one must practice and preserve the five virtues: gentleness, goodness, respectfulness, humility, and yielding (ôn, lương, cung, khiêm, nhượng).

Article Five

- Among fellow disciples, nurture affectionate bonds and close relations. Those who still live worldly lives must remember two sacred occasions: funerals and marriages

Article Six

- Marriage is a most important event in life. Disciples should choose their spouses from among fellow believers. Only if an outsider consents to enter the Religion (nhập môn) may a union be permitted.

Article Seven

- Eight days before the wedding ceremony (lễ Sính), the groom's family must post a public notice at the local Holy Temple (Thánh Thất) to inform fellow disciples, so that no obstacles or misunderstandings may arise later.

Article Eight

- After the lễ Sính is performed, both the bride's and groom's families must go to the Holy Temple (Thánh Thất) to offer the Marriage Witnessing Ceremony (Chứng Hôn).

Article Nine

- From the date this Law takes effect, no disciple may marry a concubine or take a secondary spouse. If one becomes widowed midway in life, remarriage is permitted.
- If the wife cannot bear a child, the Master (Thầy) may grant permission to take a concubine, but the principal wife herself must officiate the marriage ceremony.

Article Ten

- Except in cases of adultery or grave impiety toward parents, a married couple within the Religion may not divorce or abandon one another.

Article Eleven

- Every newborn child must have chosen a godfather and godmother to protect and guide them, especially in the unfortunate event of parental loss.

Article Twelve

- When a child reaches one month of age, the parents must bring the infant to the local Holy Temple (Thánh Thất) for the Sacred Bath Ceremony (Tắm Thánh) and have the child's name recorded in the registry of disciples.

Article Thirteen

- Parents are obliged to send their children, from ages six to twelve, to study either secular knowledge or religious doctrine.

Article Fourteen

- When a disciple passes away, members of the same Religious Family (Họ) must gather to assist and offer condolences to the family.
- Each Religious Family should establish its own cemetery (Nghĩa Địa).

Article Fifteen

- When invited by the family in mourning, the head of the Religious Family (Họ) must join the disciples in conducting the Deliverance Ceremony (Cầu Siêu) according to the New Law (Tân Luật) and accompany the coffin to the burial site.

Article Sixteen

- In funeral arrangements, there must be no extravagance, no excessive delay, and no use of gaudy-colored paper effigies (đồ âm công). All items should be white, simple, and dignified, avoiding feasts or noise that diminish solemnity and mourning.

Article Seventeen

- In offerings to departed souls (vong linh), animal sacrifice is forbidden. Vegetarian offerings bring greater blessings. Music is not prohibited, but only ceremonial music as prescribed in the New Law may be used. Mourning garments shall remain as in ancient custom.

Article Eighteen

- For memorial services held during the nine-week mourning period (Cửu tuần), and at the Minor and Major Anniversary Ceremonies (Tiểu & Đại Tường), the rites must be performed at the local Holy Temple (Thánh Thất). Disciples of the same Religious Family (Họ), when invited, must attend and pray.

Article Nineteen

If any disciple suffers sudden misfortune or accident, fellow members of the Religious Family (Họ) must unite in compassion and contribute aid to help them through hardship.

Article Twenty

- From the day this Law is promulgated, disciples may not engage in any occupation involving the killing of living beings or harming of life; nor may they pursue trades that corrupt morals or decency. They must not write, publish, or sell books of romantic or immoral nature, nor traffic in intoxicating liquors or opium, which are harmful to human virtue.
- Those already engaged in such trades must seek a way to abandon them.

Article Twenty-One

- Disciples must dress modestly and economically, according to their means. They should prefer coarse cotton fabrics and limit the use of silk or luxurious materials.

Article Twenty-Two

- If any disciple violates one or more of the above commandments, others who become aware of it must first offer counsel and advice. If the offender refuses to listen, they must report the matter to the head of the Religious Family (Họ) so that person may offer formal guidance and warning.

Article Twenty-Three

- If the offender persists, repeatedly commits wrongdoing, or refuses to reform, they shall be expelled (trục xuất). From that moment, no member of the Religion may recognize them as a fellow disciple (đạo hữu).

Article Twenty-Four

- The Religious Council (Hội Công Đồng), composed of one Cardinal (Đầu Sư) from one branch as presiding officer and two dignitaries (Chức Sắc) from the other two branches as judges, shall deliberate and pronounce judgment on expulsion cases, based on the petition submitted by the head of the Religious Family (Họ).

The decree of expulsion shall be posted publicly at the local Holy Temple (Thánh Thất) for all disciples to know.

MEDITATION HOUSE

The Meditation House (Tịnh Thất) is a sacred place of purity where disciples may enter to cultivate their spiritual practice.

Those who wish to enter the Meditation House must comply with the following regulations:

Article One

- Among the disciples, anyone who has fulfilled their duties in Humanity Way (nhơn đạo) and has observed vegetarian abstinence (trai giới) for at least six months may request to enter the Meditation House (Tịnh Thất) for spiritual contemplation (nhập định).

Article Two

- An applicant must have one virtuous person of higher attainment to serve as introducer (người tiến dẫn), and one fellow disciple to act as guardian (người bảo hộ).

Article Three

- Correspondence or contact with outsiders is strictly prohibited, except for immediate relatives. Even then, letters must first be examined by the Meditation Supervisor (Tịnh Chủ).

Article Four

- No outsiders are permitted to enter the Meditation House (Tịnh Thất)—this includes government officials, dignitaries (Chức Sắc), and family members of disciples.

Article Five

- Conversation with outsiders is forbidden, except when parents or children visit; even in such cases, permission must first be granted by the Meditation Supervisor (Tịnh Chủ).

Article Six

- Upon entering the Meditation House (Tịnh Thất), one must completely abstain from betel, tobacco, and any food outside the regular mealtime offerings.

Article Seven

- Maintain the perispirit (chơn thần) in tranquility and avoid all disturbance of conscience. Live harmoniously without loud voices, be diligent, helpful toward one another, and assist each other in advancing along the Way (Đạo).

Article Eight

- All must obey the commands of the Meditation Supervisor (Tịnh Chủ) and follow precisely the schedule established for the daily spiritual exercises and cultivation practices.

THE END