

Vietnamese government's plot to eradicate Cao Dai Religion via en masse forced conversion

Prepared by Boat People SOS

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For the past two decades, the international community, including the U.S. State Department, has mistaken an entity representing a different faith to be the Cao Dai Religion. This entity was created by the Vietnamese government in 1997 and denounced as heretic by Cao Dai Religion's highest authority.

Great Way of Third Amnesty of God, often referred to as Cao Dai Religion (an informal alias), was founded in 1926. The government of the Republic of Vietnam recognized its Charter and its Holy See located in Tay Ninh Province in 1965.

On July 20, 1978 the Vietnamese Communist Party's Fatherland Front of Tay Ninh Province issued its "verdict" accusing Cao Dai Religion of being anti-revolutionary and calling for its abolition. On December 13, 1978 the People's Council of Tay Ninh Province outlawed Cao Dai Religion and disbanded its administrative structure. Before suspending its administrative, Cao Dai Religion's Legislative Body, its highest authority, created an interim governing council to maintain contact with Cao Dai followers.

On May 27, 1996 the Communist Secretariat of Tay Ninh Province, decided to create a new organization on the following premises (based on its internal document):

- a. It must be a local sect, to be named Cao Dai Tay Ninh Religion;
- b. Spiritist séances must no longer be used;
- c. Its organizational structure must have only two levels (compared to the five-level structure of the 1926 Cao Dai Religion).

This new entity differs from the Cao Dai Religion in its name (Cao Dai Tay Ninh Religion compared to Great Way of Third Amnesty of God), its dogma (outlawing spiritist seances), its organizational structure (two levels and no role for the two highest levels in Cao Dai Religion's church organization: the Legislative Body and the Executive Body), its charter (no separation of state and church), its scope (a local sect with operations limited to Tay Ninh Province), and its requirements for ordainment of clergy members (no need for divine confirmation).

On November 16, 2015, members of the Legislative Body of the Cao Dai Religion resumed operations and denounced the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Sect as a faith heretic to Cao Dai Religion and its leader unqualified to be a Cao Dai Religion clergy member:

"The actions of the secularly appointed Brother Cardinal Thuong Tam Thanh is against God's will, against the Religion's Sacred Constitution because he was not divinely confirmed to be a clergy member of the Cao Dai Religion at the Holy See in Tay Ninh, we therefore call him by his secular name Nguyen Thanh Tam and not as Cardinal Thuong Tam Thanh..."

"Based on the above elements, the High Council concludes: The Cao Dai Tay Ninh Sect is a heretic faith..."

"Nguyen Thanh Tam seized religious facilities of our religion from the central to the local levels in order to steer the Great Way from its path, taking the people and followers of Cao Dai Religion"

onto the path of heresy, betraying our solemn pledge to the Supreme Being and turning a divine religion into a worldly one.”

Nguyen Thanh Tam (aka Thuong Tam Thanh), head of the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Sect, immediately evicted the High Council members from their rightful offices at their Holy See, thus completing the sect’s physical takeover of the Holy See of the Cao Dai Religion.

The Cao Dai Tay Ninh Sect, with the support of the government, has systematically seized or destroyed temples belonging to the Cao Dai Religion: Dinh Quan Temple in Dong Nai Province on December 27, 2009; Cao Dai Temple in Phu My District, Binh Dinh Province on September 16, 2012; Cao Dai Temple in Long Binh District, Dong Nai Province on July 3, 2013; Cao Dai Temple in An Ninh Tay, Long An Province on March 24, 2015; Cao Dai Temple in Tuy An, Phu Yen Province on April 14, 2015; Cao Dai Temple in Phu Thanh A, Dong Thap Province on March 20, 2017; and Cao Dai Temple in Nam Hoai Nhon, Binh Dinh Province on July 23, 2017 (the taking attempt failed due to strong resistance by local Cao Dai followers).

To induce their conversion to the new sect, Cao Dai followers are prohibited from conducting religious activities even in their private home unless they submit themselves to the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Sect. Burial of Cao Dai Religion followers in the cemetery set up for them on the land of their Holy See are blocked by the Cao Dai Religion. The latest incident occurred in January 2018. Followers of the Cao Dai Religion have been blocked by the police from entering the premise of their Holy See in Tay Ninh Province. Those who managed to gather there were brutally assaulted by the police and members of the 1997 Tay Ninh Sect.

To deceive foreign observers, the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Sect has used the “marks” – letterhead, seal, insignias... -- of the Cao Dai Religion in all communications, publications, and promotional materials. The international community has thus been fooled into thinking that the 1997 Tay Ninh Sect is the Cao Dai Religion, and religious activities conducted at the Tay Ninh Holy See denote greater religious freedom for Cao Dai followers.

Recommendations:

- In all communications and reports, our government should distinguish the genuine Cao Dai Religion from the 1997 Tay Ninh Sect, which is a different faith created by the government to drive the Cao Dai Religion into extinction and subjugate its 4.5 million followers.
- Our government should actively engage the members of the High Council and Popular Council of Cao Dai Religion, which recently re-established their operations.