

DIVINE PATH TO ETERNAL LIFE

Sermons by His Holiness Hộ Pháp (Head of Legislative Affairs)

Recorded and compiled by the shorthand committee in Tây Ninh

Translated by Đào Công Tâm & Professor Christ Hartney

**#22.- Delivered at the Tây Ninh Holy See 15th of February 1949
(Lunar Calendar 18th Day of the 1st month, year of the Buffalo)**

The Philosophy of Civilization

Before Bần Đạo leads you all, children of the Supreme Being, along the path to eternal life, especially to enter the Cung Ngọc Hư, there is one essential point that you must know. If I don't explain this before we enter the next realm, we will not fully understand. The children of the Supreme Being have no right to gainsay anything regarding the essence of the sublime philosophy of spiritual progress, especially the methods by which we can attain our heavenly positions. There is one essential philosophy on this planet that causes souls to be trapped in the cycle of rebirth and countless sufferings. It instigates us to fight for its progress and commit myriad sins.

Civilization (Văn Minh)! Today Bần Đạo will preach about these two terms: “văn” & “minh” - the civilization of this age. What is civilization? The root of this Vietnamese term is from Chinese. Văn means “words,” or “culture” or “literature” (wen). These are “words” we learn from others or invent ourselves. Minh means “transparent,” “clear,” or “bright” (Chinese - ming). Words which are clear and transparent help us discover ways that allow us to decide the future and maintain the progress of our lives. We use words in order to pass on our language so that we can develop our progressive way of life; or the way of life of the entire society. Our writing has maintained our progress so far. This is the complete meaning. Explained generally, “văn-minh” is “civilization.”

The term civilization has three additional meanings.

Firstly, it is the total of progress regarding intellectuality, standards and means of living which humans have developed and evolved according to their ideal concepts.

Secondly, it is the synthesis of social progress, or national progress. There are things that need to be preserved and yet may be pushed aside by new ideas and new developments. These novelties stimulate them to seek their goals of life, or develop their culture or happiness. If their ideals are achieved, they will preserve them and possibly discard new ideas.

Thirdly, it means the methods we use to nurture our spirit to triumph over materialization. These methods help us avoid an animal way of life. In our mind, we know that there is a Divine nature in us which makes us worthy human beings, and not lower ourselves to be like animals.

Of these three meanings, which one is correct? If we say all three are, we need to recognize that the last meaning is the most righteous. But why? It will lead humans towards happiness. Human beings can now fly across the sky like birds, dive into the oceans using apparatuses, and hang about in the clouds. Now they don't walk across the earth but run; they don't have to fly, but float in the sky; but this is not happiness. This is the path of civilization which people imagine creates happiness for humanity. True happiness cannot be achieved by embracing, comforting or indulging their physical body; neither by giving it illusional invincibility. True happiness can only be achieved by spiritual cultivation, not physical indulgence.

Since ancient times, we have seen many kings build great nations and achieve great cause. "Tứ-Hải vi Thiên-Hạ Chi-Giáo." (?). If we examine the lives of those kings from history, it is not even certain that they gained happiness. On the other hand, we have seen the drama behind the quote "...the bigger our name, the more difficulty we must face." If any king is not satisfied in terms of their spirit, that cannot be happiness. It does not matter how wealthy and comfortable they are. If the spirit is not satisfied, there can be no happiness. Human beings always search for this sort of happiness. It is more important than their search for food or shelter. Wealth and honour can only satisfy their physical needs in a short time; such contentment can only last for several days. Physical indulgence will never bring lasting happiness, no matter how satisfying it is.

Therefore, civilization has brought a kind of fleeting happiness for humanity in terms of the physical and the temporal. This sort of happiness is no different from the dew that hangs on the grass. It is transitory, and only has face value. It cannot therefore be completely honourable.

The true sense of civilization should be to help people control their animal desires in order to moderate their survival on this planet earth.

During our temporary life on this planet, we might find ourselves satisfied, while keeping our physical desires in control. But we can only do this with spiritual virtue.

Once again, the true meaning of the term “văn minh” is righteousness (“văn”) and bright virtue (“minh”). Only when true civilization comes into being, i.e. a sublime faith is established on this planet, can we be truly happy. Only virtue can bring us true happiness.

Bần Đạo - His Holiness Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc refers to himself throughout as 'Bần Đạo' or 'poor monk'.

Cung Ngọc Hư - The Heavenly Council of Eternal Law, The Court of God, The Council of God, Divine Jade Palace.

Văn-minh – civilization.