



Address by Professor
Eric J. Sharpe at
The 5th Caodaist
Convention in
Australia

(This address was given by Professor Eric J. Sharpe to the 5th Caodaist Convention in Australia, held at Women's College, University of Sydney, 28th December 1989)

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, and friends.

It has just been said that Vietnam has been a meeting place of religions and cultures due to its very special history. Sydney is another meeting place of religions and cultures, due to its special history. Here in Sydney we are busy learning the meaning of the words "culture" and "religion". We talk about multiculturalism, and that is a principle that we are very proud and happy to try to put into operation, though how successful we shall be, only the future will tell.



The University of Sydney, one might say is a meeting place of meeting places. We are delighted that Caodaist Association of Australia should be holding its conference here on the campus of the University of Sydney; and on behalf of my colleagues from the Department of Religious Studies, and myself, it is a great pleasure to welcome you here to the University.

The Department which my colleague Professor Trompf and I represent, has now been in existence for thirteen years, since 1977. There are certain principles which we attempt to put into operation. Sometimes we are more successful than at other times, but when we are at our best we try to show accuracy in observation, sympathy in judgment and courtesy in dialogue. Behind all three is the conviction that it is necessary first of all to take religion seriously. It has been said that there are three types of people in the world: those who are for religion, those who are against it, and those who take it seriously. But being for religion often means being for your own religion and against everybody else's - so that religion, while being a great force for peace in the world, is also a great source of conflict in the world. We do not need to be reminded of this, but it is something that we need to attempt to grasp and understand; and it is one of the things the University, and the Department of Religious Studies, stands for. It is not necessary constantly to be waging wars, although there are plenty of wars within universities (we all know that as well as those outside), but we are committed to a quest for understanding.

How, though, can we understand one another if we do not meet one another? Our principle, then, of accuracy in investigation extends very quickly to the personal principles of sympathy in judgment and, above all, courtesy and respect in dialogue. What we are doing in the university setting is part of the great dialogue of religions and peoples and cultures which is more than ever necessary in the kind of world we live in today.

We know how difficult the world has become. This has been a very difficult decade for the whole world. We are now coming to the end of the eighties, as we are all being reminded. When we have to sum the decade up, we shall have first of all to count the cost in conflict, in human lives lost, and in misery; but there will also be the hope and the light - a stretching out toward the future in gatherings like this. As well as the conflict there is the understanding; as well as the trouble there is the hope; as well as the fear and the suffering which you and your families must know only too well. There is the light that comes from the Father of all lights.

The University when it is at its best serves as a meeting place of peoples and cultures and ideas. We are proud and happy to represent the University to you, to welcome you here, and to trust that your Convention will be a successful and happy one.

Thank you very much indeed.

Eric J. Sharpe

(Foundation Professor of School of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney)



A gathering of guests and believers at the 5th Caodaist Convention in Australia.



At the opening of the 5th Caodaist Convention in Australia, guests and believers stand in prayer.