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# The Journal of CESNUR



Volume 6, Issue 2  
March–April 2022

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⊗ The Journal of CESNUR ⊗

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**ISSN: 2532-2990**

*The Journal of CESNUR* is published bi-monthly by CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions), Via Confienza 19, 10121 Torino, Italy.

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## Cardiognosis and Archeosophy: Mystical Asceticism Within the Struggles of Modern Life

Daniele Corradetti

*Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal*

d.corradetti@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** Cardiognosis, from the Greek *kardia*, heart, and *gnōsis*, knowledge, is considered by Tommaso Palamidessi (1915–1983), the founder of Archeosophy, to be the most important key to inner transmutation. Palamidessi devoted more than thirty years of study to Cardiognosis as an ascetic and mystical way. The result is an objectively new path: Christo-Sophianic, sapiential, and Archeosophical, having as its objective the *theosis* (deification), and as its spiritual and operative center the invocation within the heart of the Names of Jesus and Sophia. This article revisits the main themes and moments of Palamidessi’s reflection, starting from the first alchemical writings up to his last texts on the “Perennial Wakefulness,” and will also present a few unpublished documents from the author’s archive.

**KEYWORDS:** Cardiognosis, Mystical Asceticism, Archeosophy, Tommaso Palamidessi, Inner Transmutation, Western Esotericism, Theosis.

### *Introduction*

Cardiognosis, from the Greek *kardia* heart and *gnōsis* knowledge, or knowledge of the heart “in a metaphysical, mystical and Archeosophical sense” is considered by Tommaso Palamidessi (1915–1983), the founder of Archeosofia (Archeosophy) and the Archeosofica school, to be one of the most important and effective keys to inner transmutation (Palamidessi 1975a, 136). It constitutes an indispensable passage and even a complete ascetic path for those capable of working within it with “great intensity” and “competence” (Palamidessi 1975a, 136).

The central role of the metaphysical heart and of the “prayer of the heart,” although already present in Palamidessi’s first writings dedicated to alchemy, blossoms in the period he devoted to the hesychasm, that is to say, mainly from 1952 to 1960. To his hesychastic studies, and to his research and in-depth study of Origenian and Alexandrian Christianity, Palamidessi also added a profound background in the theology and spirituality of Sophia, which he developed between 1971 and 1975.

The result of this “cardio-gnoseological” reflection of thirty years is an original ascetic and mystical Christo-Sophianic way, which has as its center the invocation in the heart of the Names of Jesus Christ and Sophia. In this article, I will revisit the themes and the main moments of Palamidessi’s path to Cardiognosis, starting from his first works up to those published posthumously, passing through some public conferences and with the help of some unpublished documents from the author’s archive.

### *Spiritual Alchemy and Cardiognosis*

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a large number of esotericists, thinkers, and academics devoted themselves to the interpretation of the alchemical language (Hanegraaff 2006, 54). Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, at the same time when the Paracelsian corpus spread, a kind of spiritual alchemy flourished that can be defined as “theosophical.” In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a widespread interest in spiritual alchemy within the context of Victorian occultism was probably triggered by the writings of Mary Ann Atwood (1817–1910: Atwood 1850).

Most relevant to Palamidessi’s studies, such spiritual interpretation of alchemy was presented by Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810–1875) in his *Dogme et rituel de la Haute Magie* (Lévi 2011 [1861]), and developed by Stanislas de Guaita (1861–1897) in *Le serpent de la Genèse* (de Guaita 1897). In Italy it took a form of its own in the works of Giuliano Kremmerz (Ciro Formisano, 1861–1930), was divulged in the journal *UR*, and was finally codified by Julius Evola (1898–1974) in *La Tradizione Ermetica* (Evola 1931).

The *UR* journal was particularly important to Palamidessi because it appeared among the primary sources of his *L’Alchimia come via allo Spirito* (Palamidessi

1949). This volume followed an article published in 1947 in the journal *Atanòr* entitled “Per la conquista della pietra filosofale” (Palamidessi 1947), and was strongly influenced by the *UR* journal. We note, for example, the choice of commenting the *Turba philosophorum*, as well as that of quoting *De Pharmaco Catholico*, attributed to Johann de Monte-Snyder (Johannes Mondschnieder, 1625?–1670?). Of particular interest to Palamidessi were the articles in *UR* by Ercole Quadrelli (1879–1948), a disciple of Kremmerz who wrote under the pseudonym of Abraxa, whose excerpts are often quoted in full in *L’Alchimia come via allo Spirito*.

The descent of the “sense of the I” into the “heart” is a recurring theme in the *UR* journal, especially in the articles by Abraxa and Luce, the latter a pseudonym of Giulio Parise (1902–1969). In particular, Palamidessi took up a significant passage by Luce from “Opus Magicum: il Fuoco” (Luce 1927) on the symbolism of the heart (Palamidessi 1949, 97). In Luce’s article, reference is made to a meditative technique aimed at the descent of the “spirit” into the “heart” through the use of a respiratory rhythm (Luce 1927, 38–9). An interesting passage exemplifying the hesychast prayer technique is quoted by Palamidessi in a footnote from “an ancient codex of the monastery of Mount Athos, due to Abbot Xerocarca” (Palamidessi 1949, 97).

Apart from the *UR* journal, the most important author who influenced *L’Alchimia come via allo Spirito* was certainly Gino Testi (1892–1951), a friend of Palamidessi, known as the author of *La Materia Pensante* (Testi 1946), of a text on Paracelsus (Theophrastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541: Testi 1942), and finally of a *Dizionario di Alchimia e di chimica antiquaria* (Testi 1950). In 1945, Testi, a Freemason and a frequent collaborator of the publishing house *Atanòr*, had been one of the founders, together with the future Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy, Giordano Gamberini (1915–2003), of the Gnostic Church of Italy (Moramarco 2006, 73), to which, however, I do not believe Palamidessi ever belonged.

Testi and Palamidessi had a frequent exchange of correspondence, of which unfortunately only one letter remains (see Annex A). In it, Testi shows himself happy to host in the journal *Chimica* an article by Palamidessi “against the use of artificial fertilizers in agriculture,” suggesting to quote excerpts and the bibliographical reference of an article by Pico Boggiano (1873–1965).

Palamidessi had been studying the use of fertilizers in agriculture since 1942 when, as editor and probably author, he published *I segreti della radiestesia in agricoltura* (Canavesio 1942) with the publishing house Tommaso Palamidessi Editore. There are many reasons to attribute the authorship of the book to Palamidessi, including linguistic, thematic and bibliographic elements common to his first works, the fact that Palamidessi frequently used pseudonyms in his publications of the time and, finally, the circumstance that a book on dowsing in agriculture was already being planned by the publishing house in May 1941, but the author was listed as “Agostino Martinucci” (Annex B). In any case, Testi’s letter tells us that Palamidessi’s interest in agriculture did not end in 1942, but continued at least until 1948, the year of the letter.

In the letter, Testi was also pleased with Palamidessi’s appreciation of his introduction and notes to the Atanòr Italian edition as *Massoneria occulta ed iniziazione ermetica* of Jean-Marie Ragon’s (1781–1862) *De la maçonnerie occulte et de l’initiation hermétique* (Ragon 1948 [1853]), which had just been published.

Testi had previously been the editor of the “Ermetica” series of the Casa Editrice Toscana of San Gimignano. The series included *Lettera di Giovanni Pontano sul “Fuoco Filosofico”* (Mazzoni 1930), which Palamidessi repeatedly quotes in his text as including “very important directives” on the lighting of the “Sacred Fire” in the “heart.”

In Mazzoni’s publication of *Lettera di Giovanni Pontano sul “Fuoco Filosofico”* (Philosophical Fire), p. 28, there are very important guidelines on the regime of fire, accompanied by a woodcut depicting a heart with a burning flame in the center. [...]

#### FOR THE EXERCISE

Interpret: Sun – Gold – Sulphur – Soul – Heart

First, become the absolute master of your passions, your vices, your virtues. You must be the ruler of your body and thoughts, then (note that to obtain what I have said in a few lines, it takes many months, if not years and years!) light, or rather awaken in your “heart,” by means of imagination, the center of the “fire”; try to feel a warmth, slight at first, then stronger. Fix this sensation in your “heart.”

At first, it will seem difficult to you. The sensation will escape you; but try to keep it in your “heart”; recall it, enlarge it, diminish it at will; submit it to your power; fix it and recall it at will.

Try and try again. Master this force and you will know the “Sacred or Philosophical Fire” (Palamidessi 1949, 104).

We know that Palamidessi had been aware of techniques involving a constant attention towards the cardiac region facilitated by a prolonged visualization of a flaming heart since at least 1945. He refers to it in passing already in his first yoga text (Palamidessi 1945, 74), stating that “other methods of Tantric Yoga suggest to mono-ideate, that is, to represent in imagination a glowing heart surrounded by flames” (Palamidessi 1945, 74). In *La tecnica sessuale dello yoga tantrico indotibetano* he noted that “[t]he Christ, if you observe the paintings reproducing the effigy of the Divine Master, has been described by the Saints with a flaming Heart and radiating a dazzling light” (Palamidessi 1948, 163).

However, while in Palamidessi’s works on yoga the action on the cardiac center does not play a preponderant role compared to the work on the other psychic centers, in *L’Alchimia come via allo Spirito* the “heart” becomes the center of spiritual operations and exercises, so much so that it is identified as the alchemists’ “stove” itself or Athanòr.

To conclude this reference to the Athanòr, I would like to say that Alchemists should carry out the Great Work in the Athanòr, or in their inner selves, in their being, in their will, animated by the fire of faith and love, a lamp fire because it is constant and always at the same degree. Could one not identify the heart, for example, with the Stove, where the fire of the spirit, the fire of the I, descends by virtue of concentration, visualization and silence?

The translation of the sense of self, that is, of the fire-flame-spirit-consciousness, into a first connection with the subtle and elementary aspect of our physical and bodily reality, especially when rhythmic breathing (fire-breathing) comes into play, makes me think precisely of the Athanòr, where the fire is fed by the bellows that project the feeding air into it like a breath (Palamidessi 1949, 111).

The descent of the “fire of the spirit” into the heart and the transformation of the “sense of self” through the use of “rhythmic breathing” are typical themes of the hesychasm and, later, of the meditative techniques involved in the Cardiognosis suggested by Palamidessi in his Archeosophical writings. Although the doctrinal context was very different in the Palamidessi of the 1940s, we can nevertheless see that the core of his meditative techniques was already present at this stage, ready to be grasped and developed later in an openly Christian and Archeosophical doctrinal context.

*Hesychasm, “Christian Yoga,” and the Journey to Mount Athos and Kalambaka*

Considering Palamidessi’s writings on yoga and then on spiritual alchemy, we cannot fail to notice a progressive rapprochement to Christianity. In this context, it is necessary to start by noting that Christ and the Virgin were mentioned as the highest examples of perfection already in the first yoga books (Palamidessi 1945, 62–63 and 85). A strong leaning towards Christianity was already noticeable in 1945, when in his treatise on yoga he included Francis of Assisi (1181 or 1882–1226), Johannes Tauler (1300–1361), Meister Eckhart (Eckhart von Hochheim, 1260–1328), Ruysbroeck the Admirable (John van Ruysbroeck, 1293 or 1294–1381), John of the Cross (1542–1591), together with Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), Mary Magdalene de’ Pazzi (1566–1607), Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), and Gemma Galgani (1878–1903), as exponents of the “purest expression of Christian yoga” (Palamidessi 1945, 13).

The concept of “Christian yoga” was therefore already explicit in the Palamidessi of 1945, but it was undoubtedly strengthened in the following years. References to Christian spirituality multiplied, and the latter was credited with an affinity, if not identity, of intentions with yoga and spiritual alchemy.

Now, reader friend, if by chance you had a certain reticence towards us, if by chance you were a Priest of Christ, of that Christ whom I love as you love him, know that the Alchemical Art is a very similar science, if not identical, to Oriental Yoga, which must turn each and every one to the Christ (Palamidessi 1949, 191).

Palamidessi’s reflection is not distant from the contemporary European esoteric scene, in which doctrines and ascetic practices typical of hesychasm circulate, often presented as a form of “Christian yoga,” thus arousing considerable interest and bringing about a certain intellectual ferment.

Hesychasm, as is well known, is an Eastern Christian ascetic method whose objective is *theosis*, a Greek concept for “deification” on which Palamidessi reflected at length (Palamidessi 1978). He understood it as an effective union with God and participation in his nature through the glorified humanity of Christ. This ascetic method is based on the constant and fervent invocation of the Name of Jesus, and the “descent of the spirit into the heart.” It is achieved through a “psychophysical technique” that emerged in its most elaborate form in the writings of some Athonite monks of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries such as Nicephorus the Hesychast (d. 1340), the Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian,

Gregory of Sinai (between 1255 and 1260–1346), and Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) (Toti 2012, 1).

In 1943, the first edition in the West of the *Tales of a Russian Pilgrim* (Gauvain 1943) aroused the curiosity of some esoteric circles such as those around Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), who called it an expression of the “most unaltered heritage of primitive Christian spirituality” (Schuon 1948, 155). René Guénon (1886–1951) noted the “truly initiatory” character of the hesychasm described in the book (Guenon 1954 [1949], 38).

However, it was only in 1953, with the second French edition of the *Tales* by the Éditions du Seuil, and the publication of the *Petite Philocalie* (Gouillard 1953) by the Éditions des Cahiers du Sud, that the prayer of the heart spread outside the original Orthodox circles. In that same year, the article dedicated to the subtle centers in the Orthodox tradition *L'hesychasme: Yoga chrétien?* by hieromonk Anthony Bloom (1914–2003: Masui 1953) was published, which Palamidessi probably already knew in the French version, but certainly read in the Italian Rocco edition of 1955 (Bloom 1955).

It is important here to emphasize how hazardous the definition of hesychasm as “Christian yoga” is. The ascetic technique of hesychasm does, in fact, have points of contact with yoga and with many themes of the *dhikr Allah* of Islamic Sufism in relation to the use of a respiratory rhythm, sometimes coordinated with heartbeats, and of “centers of concentration” towards which meditation is directed. Nevertheless, hesychasm clearly distinguishes itself from both yoga and *dhikr* by its profoundly and indispensable Christocentric orientation. The Name of Jesus is not just one “of many possible mantras” (Toti 2012, 5). Palamidessi was very clear about the distinction. Since he embraced a Christian doctrine and orientation, he repeatedly and extensively pointed out in his writings and lectures that hermeticism, alchemy, and yoga are “good” for their “techniques” and as “methods of awakening,” but “off the mark” if not “disastrous” in their doctrinal, philosophical and religious approaches (see e.g. Baroni 2011, 85–6; Palamidessi n.d. [1952–1979]; Palamidessi 1971; Palamidessi 2012 [1967], 55).

In the period between 1952 and 1955, Palamidessi broke off from his previous publications to turn his “prow [...] towards that lighthouse perpetually lit for eternal salvation, which is Christ” (Palamidessi 1975c, 6). Considering that in 1955 he was already working on a treatise on Christian asceticism that was to

“mark a significant development in the field of mysticism” (Baroni 2011, 87), his decision to personally go to Mount Athos and Kalambaka in 1957 appears as logic. Palamidessi did not provide the timing and details of his stay there, but he described it as “fruitful,” and referred to it on several occasions in his writings and lectures (see Corradetti and Lullo 2020).

We know that during his stay he had the opportunity to consult “some rare works, learning various information about the psychic centers,” was introduced to the prayer of the heart by an Orthodox monk named Father Bissarion (Baroni 2011, 87), and participated in some rituals that he described in 1964 as part of “true Christian Gnosticism” (Palamidessi 2020 [1964]).

After returning from his “expedition” to Greece, Palamidessi devoted himself to a period of intense experimentation made up of retreats, meditations and mystical experiences (Palamidessi 2009, 20). It was also during this period that he began his novitiate in preparation for entering the Franciscan Third Order, which he did in March 1960 (Baroni 2011, 88).

Although there is no direct confirmation, several clues point to the fact that the nucleus of the technical corpus relating to Cardiognosis was elaborated in the period between 1953 and 1960.

### *Archeosophy, the New Didaskaleion of Alexandria*

Starting from at least 1961, Palamidessi was thinking of using his philosophical, religious, and scientific knowledge to create a Christian movement. An unpublished fragment allows us to date in a very specific way the moment in which these ideas emerged in Palamidessi’s mind. The fragment, surprisingly, demonstrates that these ideas preceded the foundation of “Archeosofica” by almost a decade.

Castelnuovo di P. 9-6-61

#### *Advent of a New World*

All of my philosophical-religious-scientific culture leads me to plan the advent, through the work of the Messiah of a new world, a world of Christian fulfilment, a world of freedom, which will be reached through the activity of that “Kingdom of the Spirit”: the “Third Kingdom” (transcription of Annex C, italics indicate the use of red ink).

We note in this unpublished excerpt the reference to philosophy, religion, and science coming together, and driving Palamidessi to undertake a project of coherent change based on the triptych reason-faith-science, which correspond respectively to philosophical, religious, and scientific knowledge. The reference to the “Kingdom of the Spirit” or “Third Kingdom” is clearly to Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202) and his “Kingdom of the Holy Spirit,” and has clear eschatological features. The Kingdom of the Holy Spirit will be, in the words of Joachim of Fiore, a “kingdom of freedom,” “of love,” and “brotherhood” (Moltmann 1981, 149), words that closely resemble Palamidessi’s spirit in the unpublished fragment.

Palamidessi’s reflections in this period constituted the substratum for the foundation of the Archeosofica school. This also emerges from his handwritten notes in the later pages of the notebook related to Basil of Caesarea’s (330–379) *Treatise on the Holy Spirit* (Palamidessi 1968a, 5), quoted in the first booklet of Archeosophy, and a list of biblical quotations among which stands out, repeated twice, the reference to the *First Letter to the Corinthians* 2:6–8 (Annex D), regarded by Palamidessi as “a refined statement” of Apostle Paul’s (ca. 5–65 CE) own Archeosophy (Palamidessi 1968a, B).

Palamidessi had developed the conviction of being the reincarnation of Origen (ca. 184–253), following his parapsychological recollections of past lives in the 1940s, between 1953 and 1958, and finally in the mid-1960s (Baroni 2009, 148). In 1966, following these events, Palamidessi personally went to Caesarea of Palestine “to see the ruins in the sands of what was once a center of Christian initiation” (Palamidessi 1969b, 14), and find confirmation of his memories. The foundation of the Scuola Archeosofica (see Cresti 2020) was seen by Palamidessi as the logical continuation of the apostolic and evangelical work begun in previous lives. On several occasions, Palamidessi referred to Archeosofica as the “new Didaskaleion” (Palamidessi 1969a, 6), which continued the work of Pantaenus the Philosopher (d. ca. 200), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–210), and Origen, according to a mentality adapted to modern times (Palamidessi n.d., 26, 44 and 61; Lullo 2020, 19).

For these reasons, it is interesting to note the founding program attributed by Palamidessi to the Didaskaleion of Alexandria, where, in the sixth place, the continuous prayer appears.

The fundamental arguments of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and their predecessors, which reflect the Archeosophical thought, can be stated as follows:

- 1)-Eternity of creation.
- 2)-Pre-existence.
- 3)-Apocatastasis.
- 4)-Way of explaining the resurrection and the thousand years of the Apocalypse.
- 5)-Trinitarian and Christological definitions.
- 6)-Continuous prayer and ascetical methods.
- 7)-Scriptural allegory.
- 8)-Significance of the Virgin Mary mother of Jesus, vehicle of the incarnation of the Messiah.
- 9)-Justification of the Theotokos (Our Lady) (Palamidessi n.d., 68).

According to Palamidessi, Cardiognosis and the continuous prayer were an integral part of the catechetical teaching of the early Christians, and also constitute the core of the Archeosophical teaching.

The effective instrument of this careful concentration is the prayer to Jesus, the true key to open the gates of Paradise: a prayer taught by Jesus himself and technically explained by Origen, the Instructor of the two esoteric Christian schools of Alexandria and Caesarea of Palestine (Palamidessi 1969b, 10).

Palamidessi dated the method of Cardiognosis back even to a pre-Christian period. He believed it was known to the Prophets before the Apostles and prepared another experience typical of Jewish mysticism: the experience of the Merkabah or “Chariot of Fire” (Scholem 1965).

Those who succeed in immersing themselves in the splendor of Christ settled in their heart are transfigured by this Light of Eternal Love, which is the Holy Spirit; it is as if they were bathing in the Sun. The method for achieving this is ancient. It goes back to the Prophets, to the first Apostles, to the Christian Fathers of the Greek, Russian, and Asia Minor deserts. It is the prayer of Origen, Gregory Palamas, Gregory of Nyssa [ca. 335–395], Gregory the Wonderworker [ca. 213–270], John Climacus [ca. 579–649]; it is the preparation for Ezekiel’s Merkabah (Palamidessi 1969b, 10).

It is not surprising, therefore, that *L’asceti mistica e la meditazione sul cuore* (Mystical Asceticism and Meditation on the Heart) was among the first booklets made available by Palamidessi to his disciples as early as November 1969.

*Mystical Asceticism and Meditation on the Heart* (1969)

The eleventh booklet of Archeosophy, published in 1969, is entitled *L'ascesi mistica e la meditazione sul cuore*, and constitutes a compendium to present “what must be done immediately to experience the initial edifying encounters with the ‘Inner Light’ and the first true dialogue in the secret of one’s heart with the Master of Compassion, Jesus” (Palamidessi 1969b, 1).

From the very first page, the practical and experiential character of the writing is evident, especially when, a few pages later, Palamidessi deals more extensively with the “Inner Light” as an experience that in this case is not ecstatic, but obtained through a form of entasis.

[...] Allow us not to define for now what the “Inner Light” is, you will know it through experience: a particular experience, because you will not have it outside your body, but in the blood flowing in your heart as a physiological and meta-physiological experience. The blood, as it passes through the capillaries of the lungs, becomes oxygenated, becomes red and vigorous, freeing itself of toxins and poisonous gases and of the vital energy that has become anti-vital. Verily, we tell you, having experienced it ourselves, the blood passing through the heart in the state of prolonged Enlightenment undergoes a similar process of regeneration due to the Light of the Christ (Palamidessi 1969b, 9).

The experience of the “Inner Light” is incommunicable, and can only be understood through direct experience of the phenomenon as “an embrace of Light.”

It is arduous to describe what the experience of possessing God in the heart is, when the heavy sensations of bodily gravity are suspended, and as if transfixed in Paradise. In the splendor and beauty of Paradise, God gives himself in an embrace of Light, in a burst of Love that burns, transmutes, deifies (Palamidessi 1969b, 8).

The mystical experience is described in this phase as only temporary “because on resuming the common waking consciousness everything disappears.” The volatility of the mystical experience of the early stages is in contrast with the advanced stage of the spiritual journey described by Palamidessi in *Il labirinto dei sogni e la veglia perenne* (Palamidessi 1978), which instead has a character of fixity and continuity. Although the experience of the “Inner Light” is temporary, nevertheless “the benefit of the bath of Light will remain” (Palamidessi 1969b, 9), with its associated psychic and spiritual benefits.

The experience of the “Inner Light” is not a natural experience, but an experience of the personal God who gives Himself to the mystic through Christ:

The “Inner Light” is the intimate embrace with the Christ-Light, the Christ’s absolute perfection, absolute Wisdom, absolute Love, totality of all perfections; a Christ-vibration, welding with God (Palamidessi 1969b, 8).

Palamidessi refers to a “welding” between the practitioner and Christ, emphasizing that “no one is God, and no one can identify with or substitute Him” (Palamidessi 1969b, 6). The mystical state described enables “the Eucharistic presence” in the heart by an experience of the “Adamic state before the separation of the spirit from the heart, that is, before the separation of the spirit from the soul” (Palamidessi 1969b, 7).

The advancement of the mystical state brings *theosis*, or “deification” as a result of prayer (Toti 2012, 5; see also Toti 2006), which is understood by Palamidessi as a “conscious participation in the Holy Spirit in the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ” (Palamidessi 1979a [1968], 22). It consists of a personal communion with God, who “while remaining in an inaccessible transcendence,” manifests himself in Christ “to make us participate in His energy, in His glory, in His Spirit” (Palamidessi 1979a [1968], 22). In *theosis*, the mystical experience becomes transcendent, “supernatural or infused,” which is proper to the state of “perennial wakefulness” (Palamidessi 1979a [1968], 34).

The “perennial wakefulness” is an extraordinary spiritual and, at the same time, supernatural state, consisting in the attainment of an inner wakefulness with all that is eternal and immortal in us by the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, in view of the permanent transforming union of Love with the Holy Trinity (Palamidessi 1978, 1).

Apart from the mystical experience in itself, “marvelous and sublime,” in which “God gives himself in an embrace of Light, in a burst of Love that burns, transmutes, deifies,” for Palamidessi the encounters with the “Inner Light” are also fundamental for eschatological purposes. In fact,

[...] such experiences will be useful when we die and we must repeat this experience in order not to go astray. The dying person must know how to recognize the Clear Light, the Uncreated Light, but if we do not experienced it before, it will be difficult to recognize it after our death (Palamidessi 1969b, 9).

### *The Technique of Cardiognosis*

Although not bound to a technique, Cardiognosis is facilitated by the ascetic method for which, according to Palamidessi, one must prepare preliminarily with a “daily and unceasing prayer polarized in the region of the heart.”

Therefore, the exercise must be continuous, starting with 300 invocations a day and increasing them as much as possible. In the beginning, it is we who do the praying, then it will be the praying that makes itself spontaneously in the heart, in all the serious and ordinary activities, while awake and in sleep: a sleep that will be spiritual “insomnia” (Palamidessi 1969b, 7).

Clearly, the reference is to the hesychastic “continuous prayer,” which, according to Palamidessi, must be “short,” but done “with impetus, joy and hope” according to a traditional formula. The two formulas suggested in the booklet are “Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” and “Lord Jesus, Thy Kingdom come!” However, any formula can be adopted as long as it contains the “Name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Palamidessi 1978, 38).

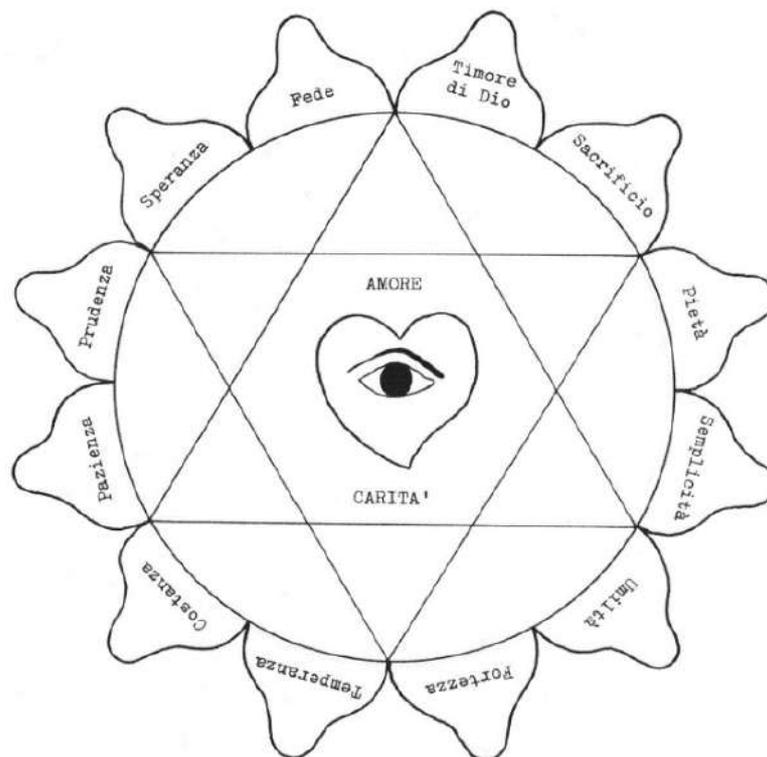
The continuous prayer prepares the Archeosophist for the actual process of Cardiognosis, which, to be carried out correctly, requires a number of measures concerning in particular the duration of the experience.

Summary of what is needed:

- 1)-Personal life pure in thought, words and deeds, according to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.
- 2)-Active social life, in the charitable sense.
- 3)-Intellectual life absorbed in continuous alternation of the comparative reading of the Gospels, the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, the Apocalypse, the Bible, the Quran, the Bhagavad Gîtâ, the Corpus Hermeticum, the Zohar, the Zend-Avesta.
- 4)-Life of the Sacraments. Therefore, we must go to Mass, receive the Communion.
- 5)-Observation and reflection on the Icon or diagram of the Heart.
- 6)- Correct position of the body and orientation during the prayer according to the first formula (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!), towards the direction of Jerusalem (East-South-East with respect to Rome, with the help of the compass); orientation towards the North, again with respect to Rome, when the second formula is used (Lord Jesus, Thy Kingdom come!), because the Grail is up north.
- 7)-Respiratory discipline or rhythmic breathing during the prayer.
- 8)-Abstraction or withdrawal of the senses.

- 9)-Attention and concentration in one point only: the heart.
- 10)-Invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ.
- 11)-Meditation or prolonged concentration on Christ.
- 12)-Meditation on the diagram or icon of the internalized heart.
- 13)-Contemplation of the Taboric Light in the heart (Palamidessi 1969b, 16).

Thus, Cardiognosis requires moral, social, intellectual and religious requirements, combined with physical and spiritual orientations and disciplines. Of particular importance are the diagrams to be “observed,” “meditated upon” and “internalized,” an example of which is given (Fig. 1), and prolonged meditation or concentration on Christ, for which an operational method is subsequently provided.



**Figure 1.** Diagram for “meditating on the virtues of the cardiac center.” In the petals of the lotus flower we read the 12 “virtues of a pure heart”: Faith, Hope, Prudence, Patience, Constancy, Temperance, Fortitude, Humility, Simplicity, Piety, Sacrifice, Awe of God (Palamidessi 1969b, 24).

The actual meditative practice proposed in the booklet consists in descending the intellect into the heart, aided by an invocation, and exercising breathing

control with long apnea. Although in other writings Palamidessi suggests less rigorous breathing rhythms, in this context he is very specific. One technique begins with five breaths according to the rhythm 1:4:2:4, staring at the image of the “lotus flower with 12 petals of flaming gold color with the sacred face of the glorious Christ in the center” positioned on the wall directly in front of the person who meditates. This is followed by breathing at first with a normal but deep rhythm, and then according to the rhythm 1:4:2. During this latter breathing rhythm, meditation proceeds by invocation and by fixing the mind in the heart with attention and will:

You will do exactly this: inhale gently so as not to disperse the thought and mentally call upon the Lord, while inhaling the air and volitionally forcing the intelligence down into the heart to nail it into the formula (*Matthew* 7:21):

LORD JESUS

THY KINGDOM COME!

You will hold your breath completing the call. Then, expel the air from your lungs, exhaling gently. Then again, concentrate your will and attention in your forehead and direct the forced descent into your heart, repeating the same invocation:

LORD JESUS

THY KINGDOM COME!

Maintain a breathing rhythm of inhalation, stopping the air in the lungs and exhalation as follows: inhale for 1 time, hold your breath for 4 times, exhale for 2 times (Palamidessi 1969b, 21).

We note that the invocation for this meditation in the second edition is changed to “SOPHIA, I LOVE YOU! LORD JESUS, I LOVE YOU!” (Palamidessi 2008, 25–6). The result of a good meditation will be the perception of the “Inner Light,” identified by Palamidessi with the “Taboric Light” experienced in this center after its awakening (Palamidessi 1975a, 137).

### *Sophia and the Sapiential Cardiognosis*

Three very important Sophianic experiences characterized Palamidessi’s mature age, catalyzing his production (Palamidessi 1975b, 69). These experiences brought Palamidessi close to those thinkers and mystics that he himself would define as “Sophianic” in his treatise *Le basi della teologia sofianica*: Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605),

Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), Father Basil Zenkovsky (1881–1962), Nicholas Lossky (1870–1965), Pavel Florensky (Florenskij, 1882–1937), and Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944).

Palamidessi's first Sophianic "encounter," particularly related to Cardiognosis, is described in a poem entitled *La Donna del Trimundio* (The Woman of the "Three Worlds"), of which I quote a few significant lines.

Of heaven illuminated  
queen of space  
primordial  
between earth and cosmos  
you stretched out, gentle, imposing, austere,  
full of mystery.  
Even at that time it was dawning.  
Maybe I was dreaming, or  
not!  
I saw your eyes  
the color of sapphire  
with the pupils of  
prophecy?  
I cannot say  
too far away  
is that twenty-fourth of April  
one thousand nine hundred and seventy-one [...] (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 51).

The date given in the poem is of extreme interest, as it is the same date found in the forty-ninth Archeosophical booklet, entitled *La trasmutazione del cuore nei santi dell'Ekklesia*. The booklet was written by Palamidessi for a conference held in Prato on April 24, 1971, on the occasion of the solemn celebrations in the city Basilica devoted to the Catholic saints Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419) and Catherine de' Ricci (1522–1590) in honor of the eighth centenary of the birth of another saint, Dominic de Guzmán (1170–1221). The conference was held in the presence of the Bishop of Prato, Pietro Fiordelli (1916–2004). It was followed the next day by another conference on "The Function of Archeosofica in the

World” (Palamidessi 1971) with the participation of Renzo Bernardini (1923–1973) and Father Guglielmo di Agresti (1930–2001) who, at the time, was editing the *Collana Ricciana* for the Olschki publishing house.

Palamidessi was in the habit, on the occasion of some important conferences, of drafting a written text that would reflect the topic of the lecture. Many Archeosophy booklets were born in this fashion, among them: *Esperienza misterica del Santo Graal*, *Le basi dell’Astrologia Iniziatica Personale* and, indeed, *La trasmutazione del cuore nei santi dell’Ekklesia*.

This Sophianic experience was followed by two other experiences in May 1974. In this period, Palamidessi, in conjunction with some special planetary transits explained in his text *Le basi dell’Astrologia Iniziatica Personale* (Palamidessi 1975b, 69), decided to go on a retreat for several days, which led to the experiences described in poetic form in his treatise *Le basi della teologia sofianica* (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 58-83), as well as to numerous “imminent” insights and inspirations.

In fact, immediately following the experiences of 1974, he began drafting *Le basi della teologia sofianica* (Palamidessi 1986 [1974]), which was published posthumously, where the features of Archeosophical wisdom are outlined. Here, Palamidessi specifies three orders of Wisdom: Essential Wisdom, Personal Generated Wisdom or Word, and finally Created Wisdom, properly referred to as Sophia.

While analyzing the Scripture, if one is not vigilant the word “Wisdom” lends itself to different interpretations. In a general sense, Wisdom includes:

- (a) *Essential Wisdom*, common to the three divine persons: Father, Word, and Spirit of God.
- (b) *Personal Generated Wisdom*, which is the Word, the Son of the Father.
- (c) *Created Wisdom*, communicated by God to intelligent creatures and personified in Sophia.

[...] So we have a *divine Sophia* and a *created Sophia*: the first is *supratemporal*, the second is *lived out in temporal becoming*. The Sophia is only one, and it is the essential Wisdom of God, but for the practical purposes of the salvation of humanity and the world, it has taken on the appearance of Created Wisdom in order to reach us and help us to ascend (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 18).

Sophia, according to Archeosophical doctrine, is not a fourth hypostasis, as Florensky suggests in his *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (Florenskij 1998 [1914], 411), nor is she identified with the Soul of the world. She is the World Soul's archetype, and at the same time its guardian angel, helping Christ and the Holy Spirit in their salvific action and evolution of humanity. The action of Sophia or Created Wisdom is also closely linked to the action of Mary, the mother of the Redeemer, who as the "New Eve" is part of the salvific economy "by a precise divine decree."

As Christ is the Mediator between Humanity and the Eternal Father, so Mary is the Mediator between the evolving World Soul and the archetype of this World Soul as the demiurge of creation, Sophia, assisted by the Holy Spirit (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 85).

It is important to note that for Palamidessi Sophia is a metaphysical creature, with whom it is possible to come into contact and even to engage in a "Sophianic ascetic" (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 93). The latter should probably be identified, at least in part, with the "sapiential ascesis" (Palamidessi 1968a, 17), one of the seven Archeosophical asceses enumerated in *Tradizione Arcaica e fondamenti dell'Iniziazione Archeosofica*. The main instrument of Sophianic asceticism is the "sapiential Cardiognosis."

In the text *Le basi della teologia sofianica*, while remaining identical in essence, the technique or method suggested for Cardiognosis varies slightly, focusing on the Sophianic aspect. The icon with the twelve petals indicating the virtues of a pure heart is replaced with "a picture depicting in color, and symbolic colors, the Virgin Sophia, Jesus Christ, Mary, and St. John the Baptist." The preliminary breathing rhythm 1:4:2:4 is replaced with the square breathing rhythm 4:4:4:4, accompanied by the fiery visualization of the Hebrew letters of the "logo-dynamis" AUM positioned in the frontal center. Finally, the actual invocation to be performed during the descent into the heart has no specific breathing rhythms and is entirely dedicated to Sophia.

During this inner operation you will cry out from the heart and spirit within you:

O SOPHIA,  
WISDOM OF GOD,  
MY SOUL BURNS FOR YOU!

You must say these words as you inhale, holding the air in your lungs until the end of the formula. The longer the lungs remain still, the more effective the exercise will be (Palamidessi 1986, 104).

The result of such ascesis will be the “phenomena of light due to the uncreated energy of God,” or a manifestation of Christ, Sophia, or Our Lady “suitable to the development you have obtained” (Palamidessi 1986, 105).

### *The Second Edition of Mystical Asceticism and Meditation on the Heart*

In the process of drafting his own writings, Palamidessi used carbon paper to enable him to work in duplicate. Small manual corrections were then made on one of these copies using pencils, and then given to his wife Rosa Bordino (1916–1999) to be retyped and printed. Further alterations were then made over time to the remaining copy of the writing in anticipation of a new edition.

After Palamidessi’s death, his wife Rosa and daughter Silvestra Palamidessi (1948–1996) founded the publishing house Archeosofica and later another publishing house, Arkeios, through which they published some of Palamidessi’s posthumous works such as *Il libro cristiano dei morti*, *L’icona la pittura l’ascesi artistica*, *Le basi della teologia sofianica*, and the entire collection of *Quaderni*, grouped in five volumes under the title *Archeosofia*. In 2005, after Silvestra’s death, the entire collection of Palamidessi’s writings was given to Alessandro Benassai, president of the Associazione Archeosofica, and slowly the unpublished texts, often unfinished, together with new editions of the *Quaderni di Archeosofia*, with the modifications made by Palamidessi, were published in private editions reserved to members. Benassai’s editorial choice, given the private nature of the editions, was to leave the unfinished works as they were, often enclosing reproductions of the autograph notes that should have completed the works.

The new editions of the *Quaderni*, compared with the corrections made to the first edition by Palamidessi, do not differ substantially from the first editions except for a few phrases and references. The second edition of *L’ascesi mistica e la meditazione sul cuore* constitutes a notable exception to this rule, containing widespread changes in the text, all consistently oriented towards a greater emphasis on Sophia.

In the new edition, the figure of Jesus is always placed side by side with that of Sophia, and the two are often identified collectively by the term “Wisdom” (Palamidessi 2008, 1, 7, 9, 18, and 19). The term “prayer to Jesus” is, in fact, replaced with “prayer to Wisdom” (Palamidessi 2008, 7) and specified to consist in “invoking the Names of Jesus Christ and Sophia” (Palamidessi 2008, 23). The most significant change in the text, however, concerns the actual invocation to be used in the meditation on the heart which, instead of being “Lord Jesus, Thy Kingdom come!” becomes

SOPHIA I LOVE YOU

LORD JESUS I LOVE YOU (Palamidessi 2008, 26).

The invocation “Lord Jesus, Thy Kingdom come!” remains in the text as the traditional formula to be used in the prayer (Palamidessi 2008, 21 and 28), but is replaced in the version for the meditation on the heart.

It is plausible that Palamidessi’s choice of formula was connected with the idea of creating a balance between the masculine and feminine aspects of Wisdom. We can trace this idea at least as far back as 1982 in an autograph writing (Annex E), which was later published and edited in *Archeosofia, Vol. II* (Palamidessi 1989, 255). In Palamidessi’s autograph, we read how the invocation of the Cardiognosis specified in the text was originally supposed to contain the invocation “Holy Spirit!” that preceded “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Thy Kingdom come!,” and was later shortened by Palamidessi himself into “Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Kingdom come!” The simplification of the formula was probably connected with Palamidessi’s statement derived from Lev Gillet’s (1893–1980) *The Jesus Prayer* (Un monaco della Chiesa d’Oriente 1964 [1951], 50) that “no one can say that Jesus is Lord without a special intervention of the Holy Spirit” (Palamidessi 2009, 29).

It is significant, however, that in the new edition of the booklet Jesus Christ is joined in the cardiac invocation by a female sapiential figure, Sophia, something that seems to be a unicum in the history of Christian Cardiognosis.

### *Cardiognosis, Spiritual Transmutation, and Theosis*

The objective of Cardiognosis and, more generally, of asceticism was indicated by Palamidessi with a word typical of the hesychastic doctrine, *theosis*.

Palamidessi devoted a long and reasoned definition to it in his *Dizionario enciclopedico di Archeosofia*:

*THEOSIS*: indicates the deification, but does not make one God himself. Do not fall into the trap of certain occultists, or of certain Indian philosophies, which make the man God. *Theosis* is the conscious participation in the Holy Spirit to the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ, who comes to us in the mysteries of the invisible Church, and especially in the Eucharist. God, though remaining in an inaccessible transcendence, comes to us in Christ, so we can participate in his energy, his glory, his “life-giving” Spirit. Deification or *theosis* is therefore the content, according to ontology, of a personal communion (Palamidessi 1979a [1968], 22).

For Palamidessi, *theosis* is the conscious participation in the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ, which is fulfilled by aggregation to the Body of Christ with the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Palamidessi 1985, 24). It is experienced as the “supratemporal and supra-spatial consciousness of a god in God” (Palamidessi 1979b, 36). In this sense, humans can attain *theosis* “because God wants it,” and this is realized through “Pure Knowledge” and the “transmutation of the ‘intelligible matter’ that is the human spiritual essence” (Palamidessi 1975b, 48). In other words, “God is God and we are images of God, mere creatures participating in *theosis*” (Palamidessi 1970a, 26).

Given these premises, the importance of Cardiognosis within Palamidessi’s system cannot be overestimated. In the occult constitution outlined by Palamidessi, the essence of humans is composed of three principles that are interdependent, but unconnected in the usual state: Spirit, Emotional Soul, and Eros-dynamic Soul. In the usual state, humans find themselves unable to love God “with all their mind, with all their heart, and with all their strength” (*Mark* 12:28–34), according to the “commandment of charity” expressed in the Gospels, and therefore unable to fulfil the “conditions” for “conquering the Kingdom of God” (Palamidessi 1972, 11).

The coming together of these principles, which are re-established “by the will of the Great Architect of the Universe” and through ascesis, is a process that necessarily passes through Cardiognosis and Sexognosis, the latter being the “knowledge of the energy of generation aimed at sublimating and directing it” (Palamidessi 1970a, 3). However, even if the sublimation of the sexual force is for Palamidessi “the key to Freedom” and to *theosis* or deification (Palamidessi 1968b, 32), a direct action on the sexual sphere is considered very dangerous

and discouraged in favor of perfecting the Cardiognosis, which allows to realize the awakening without resorting to the artifice of “awakening the kundalini” (Palamidessi 1970b, 10).

For Palamidessi, Cardiognosis constitutes an alternative and complete way to *theosis*, which leads directly to the “Perennial Wakefulness” or rather “to the last degree of perfection attainable in this life, prelude to a more advanced preparation for the blessed life of ‘glory’ according to the ‘Mystery of the Eighth Day’” (Palamidessi 1978, 3).

### *Conclusions*

I have reviewed here the fundamental moments in the development of Palamidessi’s Archeosophical Cardiognosis. They bring together the author’s experiences in spiritual alchemy and hesychasm, yoga techniques reinterpreted in the light of Christian theology and Archeosophical wisdom, and personal experiences achieved in more than thirty years of ascetic activity. The result is an ascetic and mystical path that is objectively new, Christ-like, sapiential, and Archeosophical, with *theosis* as its goal and the invocation of the Names of Jesus and Sophia in the heart as its spiritual and operational center.

It is perhaps useful to add that such mystical asceticism is currently practiced by a substantial number of Archeosophists, who privately and collectively practice the techniques offered by Palamidessi in his writings and especially in *L’ascesi mistica e la meditazione sul cuore*.

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Caro Palamidessi,

grazie della risposta gentile, ero un po' mortificato e tenuto di aver perduto l'amicizia. Sarei molto contento se, con un tuo articolo, potrei far riprendere un po' di attività all'argomento contro la commissione chimica antifisica che sta torturando l'umanità peggio delle piume e dei parati politici.

Le congratuliamo le cartine statistiche recentemente pubblicate dal Sereno con grande successo dei concorsi, e innumerevolmente impressionati!

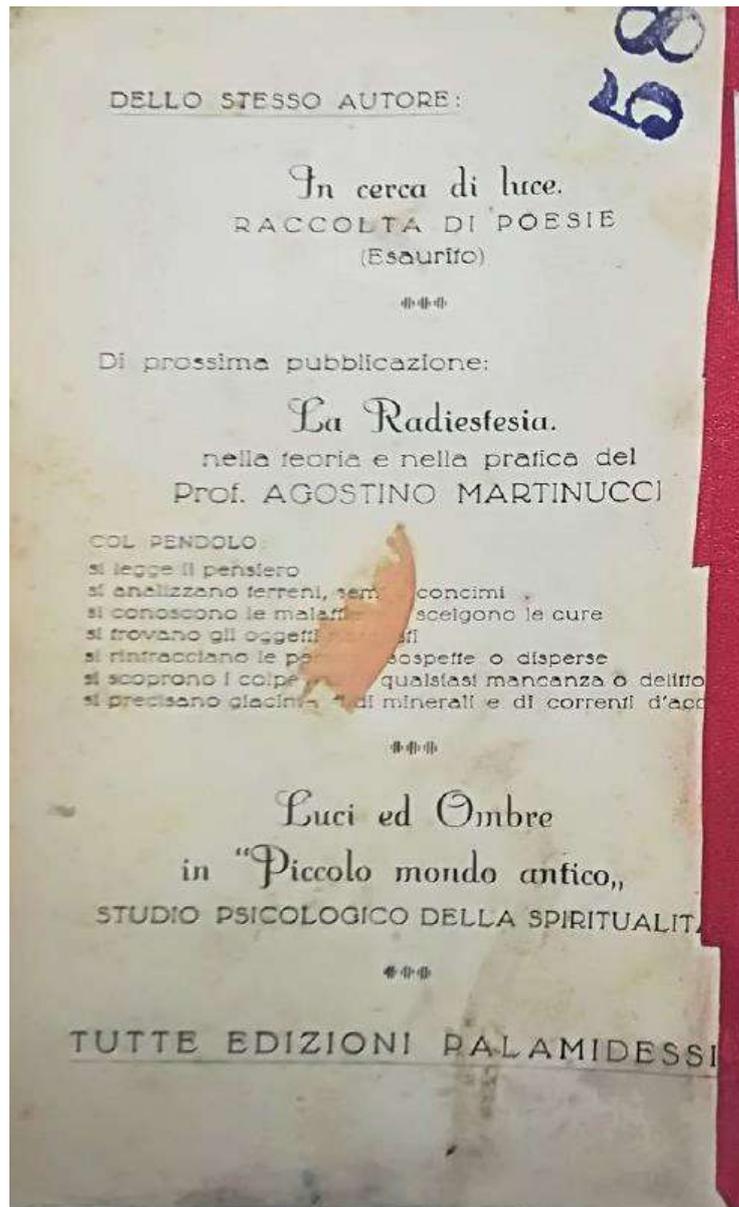
Si manda a parte il recente articolo di Boggiani Pio nel quale ho segnato in rosso ciò che ritengo più importante e la Lottigaglia e consiglio di riportare integralmente.

Per cancellare il materiale già iniziato ti prego di cancellare il nome "Dott. Jergu" che è bene non nominare per varie ragioni. Le credi, potresti mandargli in visione l'articolo.

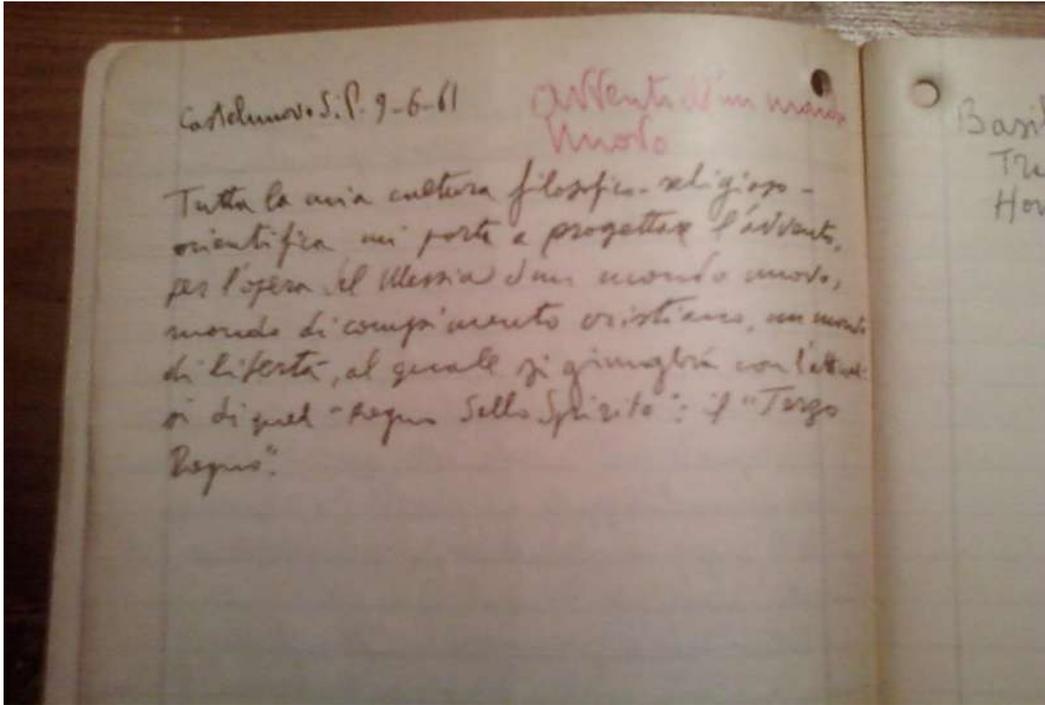
Sono contento che ti sia presentata la prefazione e le note del Pragon. Le giunte "Mancos" e "Le due delle sprille" sono "inutilizzate".

Un cordiale saluto!  
dal tuo aff. amico,  
Gino Testi.

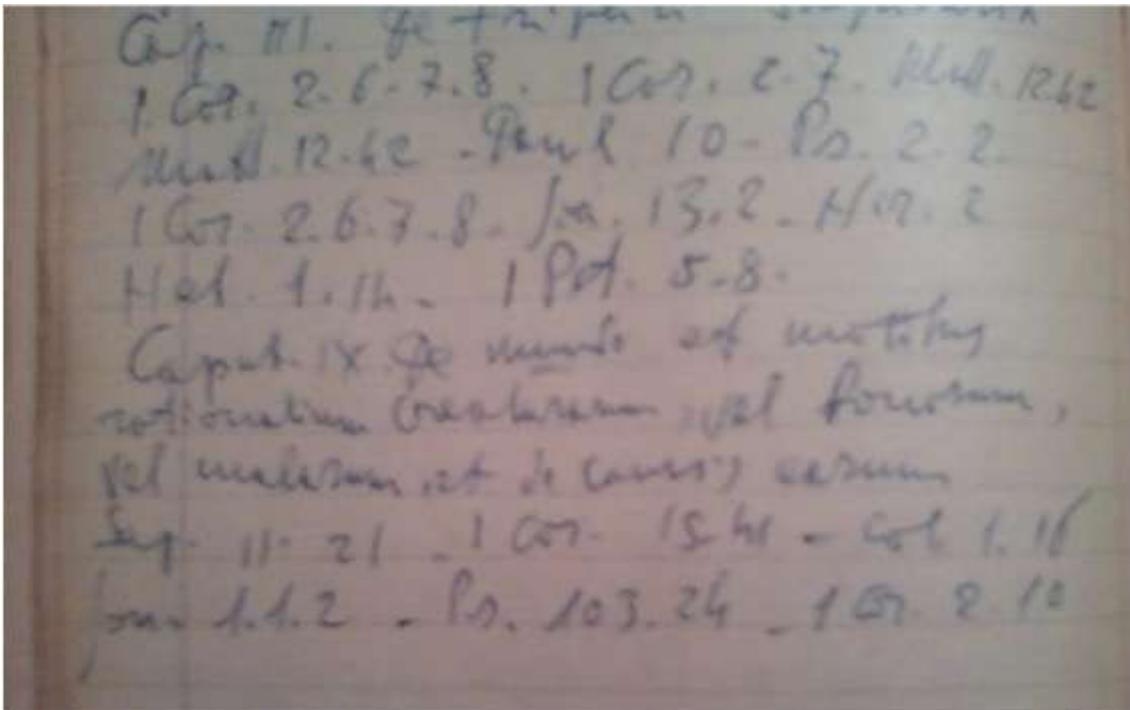
Annex A. Letter from Gino Testi to Tommaso Palamidessi dated May 27, 1948. Photo from the personal archive of the author.



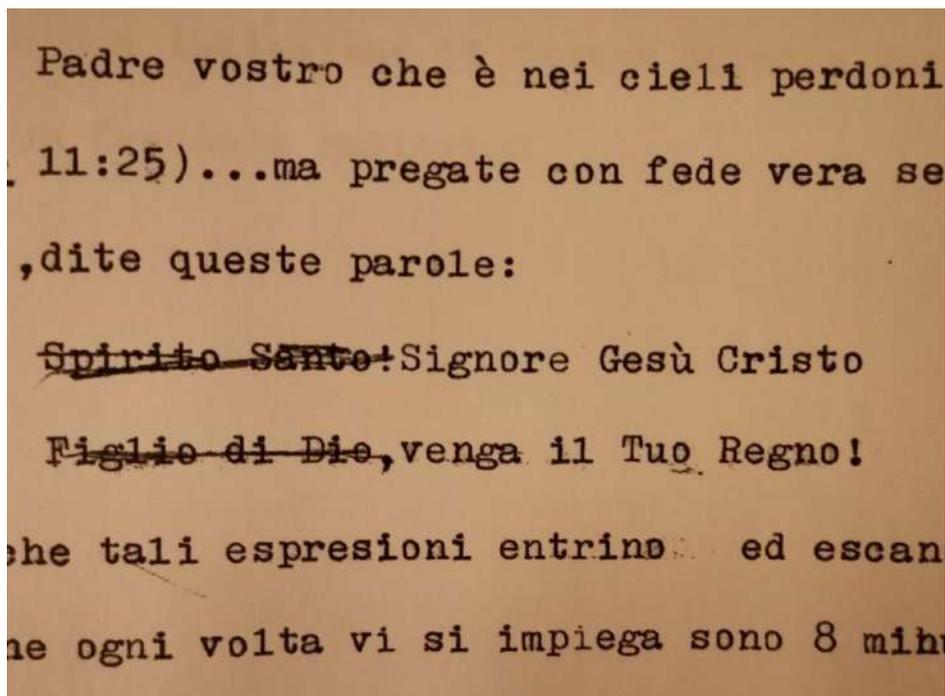
Annex B. Back cover of *Fitto Mistero*, published by Palamidessi and dated May 1941.



**Annex C.** Handwritten notes by Tommaso Palamidessi dated June 9, 1961. Photo from the personal archive of the author, original in the Riva archive.



**Annex D.** Handwritten notes by Tommaso Palamidessi undated but dating in fact to 1961. Photo from the personal archive of the author.



Annex E. Photograph of an anastatic copy of Palamidessi's autograph notes undated, but dating back to 1982. Photograph by the author of a document in the Benassai archive.

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**Tommaso Palamidessi's *The Christian Book of the Dead*:  
A Book for the Living**

Francesco Cresti

*Attorney, Rome*

francescocresti13@gmail.com

Daniele Corradetti

*Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal*

d.corradetti@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** *The Christian Book of the Dead* by the founder of Archeosophy, Tommaso Palamidessi (1915–1983), is a treatise and a liturgical breviary aimed at helping those dying by teaching them appropriate prayers, and at accompanying the souls of the deceased in their immediate path after death. The text, which remained unfinished, was posthumously edited and published by Palamidessi's daughter in 1985. It was edited again, and privately published, by Palamidessi's disciple Alessandro Benassai in 2010, after a comparison with the original manuscript. In this article, we present the most important ritual elements and doctrines of *The Christian Book of the Dead*, together with some unpublished autograph documents by Palamidessi that allow to better understand the book's structure and references.

**KEYWORDS:** Tommaso Palamidessi, Archeosophy, Archeosofica School, *The Christian Book of the Dead* (Palamidessi), Death and Dying.

*Introduction*

In 1967, Italian Christian esotericist Tommaso Palamidessi (1915–1983), founder of the Archeosofica School, began drafting *The Christian Book of the Dead* (Baroni 2010). It was intended as a treatise dedicated to the destiny of the soul after death, and at the same time as a liturgical breviary to assist the dying. The text remained unfinished at his death in 1983, and was published

posthumously by his daughter Silvestra Palamidessi (1948–1996) in 1985. In 2010, after a comparison with the original manuscript, it was re-edited by Palamidessi's disciple Alessandro Benassai and published in a private edition.

The title and the argument of the text refer to both the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. The latter was a text Palamidessi knew well, both through his frequent visits to the Egyptian Museum of Turin, which hosts the original papyrus on which the first Western translations were based, and because he wrote an “Esoteric Comment” about it (Lullo 2020, 11).

Following the experimental approach typical of the whole work of Palamidessi (Corradetti and Lullo 2020), *The Christian Book of the Dead* is far from being a mere compilation of existing texts and doctrines. It is an original work based on spiritual experiences that Palamidessi reported and analyzed (Palamidessi 2010, 119). Of particular relevance, indeed the true key to understand the whole text, is the experience lived, and meticulously described, by Palamidessi on October 24, 1967, which persuaded him to start drafting the book.

In this article, we will discuss the two editions of the text and its documentary sources. We will then present the experiences identified by Palamidessi himself as the most significant for the book. Finally, we will analyze the fundamental themes of *The Christian Book of the Dead* with reference to both the help to the dying and the phenomenology of the post-mortem states, which Palamidessi proposed as a help on the path the deceased should confront immediately after death.

### The Christian Book of the Dead (1967)

On October 24, 1967, in the day of the Christian feast of Saint Raphael the Archangel, and in connection with a spiritual experience described in the text, Palamidessi started drafting *The Christian Book of the Dead*. Although the text was originally conceived as no. 47 in a series of booklets on Archeosophy, its first publication was in fact in 1985, after the author's death, as a monographic volume edited by his daughter Silvestra (Palamidessi 1985). For more than twenty years, this remained the only edition available, until a second edition was privately published in 2010, after Alessandro Benassai had acquired the original manuscript of Palamidessi and had edited again the text.

Unlike other posthumously edited writings of Palamidessi, *The Christian Book of the Dead* was already almost complete. His daughter Silvestra finished her editing and published the book only two years after the death of her father. However, when compared with the original manuscripts now in possession of Alessandro Benassai, which one of the authors has examined (we present some photographs as Annexes A, B, and C), the first edition of the text appears to differ from these in various points, especially in the liturgical part of the prayers to be performed to help the deceased in the post-mortal path. In the first edition of 1985, for example, a series of prayers, to be conducted on different days and weeks (see Annex B), were merged into a single prayer to be repeated in the same way up until the forty-ninth day after the death of the person in need of help. The prayer included in the 1985 edition, thus, brings together in a reduced form the individual daily prayers mentioned in the original manuscripts.

We do not know whether the prayers presented in the first edition were the fruit of a posthumous editorial process aimed at making the use of the text easier, or transcribed original texts by Palamidessi that are now lost. In general, the 2010 edition is more complete, and includes the full text of the 1985 edition, with the exception of the chapter “Outlines of an Esoteric Theology” (Palamidessi 1985, 22). Several chapters are more extensive in the 2010 edition, particularly with regard to the “Archeosophical Cosmography,” the importance of the Golgotha, and the doctrine of the “breaking of the levels,” together with the description of some personal experiences of Palamidessi (Palamidessi 2010, 152 and 246), which were completely omitted in the 1985 edition. A significant number of ritual details and instructions for those who guide the deceased in the journey of the post-mortem stage (see an example in Annex C) are also absent in the first edition but included in the second.

Apart from these not negligible differences, the two editions maintain the same structure. In the first more theoretical part, the phenomenology of the death and the states of agonal consciousness are described. The problem of death is addressed in both scientific and Archeosophical terms, and reincarnation is presented as compatible with the doctrine of the Christian Church Fathers. The book also offers an analysis of the times when the prayers and liturgical rites should be conducted; the description of some personal experiences of the author; and finally a detailed description of the “Archeosophical Cosmography,” which includes the analysis of the six purgatorial kingdoms of the “Fiery Wheel of Life”

or “closed existential circuit,” and a description of the Kingdom of God. The first part of the book closes with an analysis of the “Particular Judgment” of the soul after death, a reference to the “Body of Resurrection” and to the “Guardians of the Thresholds,” and the Sophianic theme relating to the “archetype of the World Soul” (Palamidessi 1985, 211: “Sophianic” means here connected with the biblical and theological Sophia).

The second part of the book, which has a liturgical and ritual character, includes the instructions and prayers to help the dying and the deceased. In the case of the dying, the action of the helper takes place through prayers and suggestions, which in the agonal travail must allow the dying person to cast out the demonic temptations and embrace the angelic inspirations. The latter are classified by Palamidessi in six different typologies: Faith, Hope, Patience, Humility, Detachment and Altruism, and Perennial Wakefulness (Palamidessi 1985, 233–53).

After a reading, preferably at the exact moment of the passing away, the “spiritual guides” find themselves at the most delicate task of helping a soul in the post-mortem stage. Here, the book is less rigid, and its instructions should be adapted to the circumstances, and to the spiritual evolution and travails of each soul. In the Archeosophical conception of the post-mortem stage, the soul undergoes a period of swooning called “reviving sleep” immediately after the passing away. After a variable time, in general about three days, follows the awakening of the deceased in the hereafter and the beginning of oneiric phenomena that can be guided and helped through certain prayers. These are prescribed for the first seven days, and may be repeated for seven weeks. The text concludes with a prayer aimed at helping the deceased during the “Particular Judgment” that, according to mainline Christian theology, awaits them immediately after death.

### *The Sources of The Christian Book of the Dead*

The interest in the post-mortem stages for Palamidessi goes back at least to his years in Turin in the early 1940s. In 1943, he met Ernesto Scamuzzi (1899–1974), the director of the Egyptian Museum of Turin, under whose guidance he began his study of the Egyptian language. The meticulousness of Palamidessi and his already advanced interest in astrology allowed him to remember the exact date

and hour when he began these studies, which according to what he noted on the first page of his notebook happened on December 23, 1943, at 11 a.m. As a result of this work, Palamidessi drew up, but never published, a “*Commento Esoterico al Libro Egiziano dei Morti*” (Esoteric Comment to the Egyptian Book of the Dead: see Palamidessi 1949, 41), the manuscript of which still exists in the Benassai collection. Palamidessi reported that he made in that “*Commento*” specific comparisons between the phenomenology of the post-mortem stage in Egypt and Tibet. This was a sign that his first studies of the Tibetan doctrines started before this period, and were probably facilitated by the publication of the 1933 French edition by Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup (1868–1923) of the version by American anthropologist and Theosophist Walter Evans-Wentz (1878–1965) of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup 1933a).

In 1949, Palamidessi published *Lo yoga per non morire* (A Yoga to Not Die: Palamidessi 1949), whose drafting was probably catalyzed by the new Italian edition of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* as *Il libro tibetano dei morti* by Indologist and Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984) for the publishing house Fratelli Bocca (Tucci 1949). *Lo yoga per non morire* deals specifically with one of the six doctrines of the Indian Buddhist Master Naropa (1016–1100), that is, the *pho-wa*, the “transfer of the consciousness” (see Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup 1933b). In the esoteric sense, this doctrine deals with three typologies of transfer, the most elevated being that of consciousness, which at the moment of death is transferred from the samsaric state to the Dharma-Kâya, the first stage of the Bardo, the “Clear Light” (Palamidessi 1949, 85). The theme of the transfer of the consciousness into the “Clear Light” (which for Palamidessi is the “Clear Light of Christ”) will become a main subject matter of *The Christian Book of the Dead*, as the ultimate goal of the liturgical action and the ascetic effort suggested in the book.

The doctrines of the post-mortem stage, and its overcoming through the Divine Grace and the individual ascetic effort, were already present in their essential features in the writings of Palamidessi of 1949. However, the most important source for the drafting of *The Christian Book of the Dead* came to him through a metaphysical and spiritual experience, which he reported happened precisely on October 24, 1967, from midnight to 3 a.m. (Palamidessi 1985, 123). Following this experience, Palamidessi synthesized twenty-four points which would form the cornerstone of the book and allow the beginning of its drafting.

### *Palamidessi's Personal Experiences*

The method utilized by Palamidessi for the composition of his treatise on death is the same used for the major part of the Archeosophy booklets. Each doctrinal thesis presented is supported by traditional theological teachings but is also corroborated by a personal experience of the author. Archeosophy, according to Palamidessi, is in fact an “a posteriori philosophy” (Corradetti and Lullo 2020), which

springs from the experience, because it rests on the practical and positive principles of the methodical experimentation so as to know the superior worlds, ourselves, and God through the development of new senses we call spiritual (Palamidessi 1979 [1968], 10).

Not surprisingly the same experimental method offers the foundation for *The Christian Book of the Dead*. Through his experiences, Palamidessi hoped to achieve a sapiential growth. He tried to obtain information on spiritual realities, then double-check to make sure that the event was genuine, and finally provide reports to his readers and students based on the principles of scientific positivism transposed in a spiritual key.

In several booklets of the Archeosofica collection, Palamidessi had already discussed the theme of death based on experiences that had occurred to him during the course of his life and in particular states of consciousness (Palamidessi 1969a, 1969 b, 1969c). He included in his works his personal experiences not in a casual manner but for an illustrative and pedagogical purpose.

In the sixth booklet of the Archeosofica collection, entitled *Come viaggiare nei mondi soprasensibili* (How to Travel in the Worlds Beyond Consciousness), Palamidessi examined out-of-body experiences (OBE), where the consciousness is separated from the physical body to explore other dimensions, including the “etheric,” “astral,” and “mental” realms. After practical instructions on how to disassociate the “solid part” (physical body) from the “subtle systems” (the energetic bodies and the consciousness) (Palamidessi 1969a, 4), the author reported a personal experience he went through on January 28, 1946, at the moment of the death of his father.

The author has experienced many phenomena of spontaneous OBE, and others instead obtained with the exercise: authentic experiences, controlled by third parties. Among these experiences were visits to houses and places that those present did not know, or of which they ignored certain particulars, confirmed as authentic by a successive control.

But a case of OBE that has for me an emotional significance is this one: “Carlo Palamidessi [1878–1946], my father, was lying dead in the funeral chamber, on the evening of January 28, 1946. Different friends were present, and, feeling ready for the OBE, I laid down on an easy chair. Slightly later, I experienced the usual symptoms of the exteriorization, and went out of my body in the presence of the dead body of my dad. He was at a certain height from his body, still tenuously linked to it by a dimly lit cord, of a gray-purplish color. It looked like silk, candy floss, silk filament. All around, there was a glacial, whitish landscape, with gray trees that looked as if they were petrified. Then I saw my father going away slowly, like a balloon in a grossly human shape. On the head, I saw a yellow-white radiance, like a small flame, and in the rest of the ghost there was much gray with long pink stripes. He climbed towards a mountain, always slowly. I called him, I urged him not to sleep, to look at the Light of the Lord. In vain, I waited for a change of luminosity, a change of color in his aura. He had already entered into the unconsciousness and could not hear me. I insisted, and I believe I saw the brightness of his head becoming more intense. Then, I lost him in the mist of that mysterious world that ravenously swallows the passed away.” This happened in Turin, Via San Francesco da Paola 10, on the third floor, when the author was 31 (Palamidessi 1969a, 25–6).

This incident shows a particular experience of OBE, which refers to a death and the process of the departure of the soul into the world of the hereafter. The story highlights how the subtle bodies of the deceased remain tenuously bound to the physical body by a kind of energetic wire, and then go into slow disintegration until the complete detachment that determines the setting off into the world of the dead. Similar to the precedent experience is a parapsychological and clairvoyant phenomenon reported by Palamidessi in *The Christian Book of the Dead*, in which he describes the ascent to heaven of Renzo Bernardini (1923–1973), an Archeosophical friend and initiate of Palamidessi’s Order of the Loto+Croce (Lotus+Cross), who had just died.

[...] But going along that long street, uneven with puddles, as if it had just rained, I suddenly found myself emerging into a very white light, with a very wide and never-ending staircase, which from the ground rose towards the heaven, and in the background a glow of gilded light. The marble staircase, which was not marble-like so white it was, had a coming and going of people in white mantles, who went up and came down at the edges of that staircase, which had banisters. Also, they did not speak to each other but were self-absorbed and seemed to skim along the steps. They did not have wings, only white tunics and mantles. Unexpectedly, I saw at the beginning of the staircase, perhaps on the seventh or ninth step, Renzo, who ascended very slowly, step after step, with great weariness, I saw him from behind; he had black shoes, and to his ankles hung the white woolen cloak and the habit, also white, of the Loto+Croce. I raised my eyes and with astonishment saw the rest of the figure, very transparent as to look as if was made of

crystal, so transparent that I saw the diverse steps of the long staircase, which made me think of the stairway to paradise. I was so amazed that I could not speak, my look went now to his feet, to the shoes, to the heavy steps, to the tunic, and to the mantle, which had the right side out, whilst in the coffin it had been placed with the red silk inside out.

I realized that he was walking on the way of God, that he had recognized the Light and ascended in an ever-more absorbed, humble prayer. I shrank back and the vision, which was so alive and unforgettable, liquefied, became deformed, and ceased to be. "We can go, I said to my confreres, the vigil has been fruitful" (Palamidessi 2010, 111).

There is another experience Palamidessi reported both in *Come viaggiare nei mondi soprasensibili* and in *The Christian Book of the Dead* (Palamidessi 2010, 115), a sign that he attached to it a considerable pedagogical importance.

The story is centered on Palamidessi's meeting on the spiritual plane with Master Alexander (d. 251 CE), who was Bishop of Jerusalem in the third century, and was in touch with the Didaskaleion School of Alexandria in Egypt and with its leader Origen (184–253). In an experience of memory of past lives, Palamidessi had in fact discovered that he had been Origen in a previous incarnation.

From that meeting, which happened in the "third heaven of the Paradise" and in a phase of OBE, Palamidessi drew significant insights on the world of the dead and the journey of the souls in the hereafter. The account of the incident ends with a list of twenty-four points, summarized by Palamidessi on the basis of the indications he reportedly received from Bishop Alexander. They describe the passing away of the individual observed from a spiritual point: namely, the journey of the soul in the hereafter; its sojourn in various subtle worlds; the necessity of traversing the pitfalls to be met so as to unite with God, or, in the case of failure to achieve that transforming union, of returning to a new physical life through reincarnation.

We will now mention in full the twenty-four points, as they offer an experiential synthesis of the journey of the deceased in the hereafter.

1st) The dead pass, during the pre-agonal travail, through the summarizing memory of all the events of their existence. As is usually said, they have a panoramic vision of all the good and the evil they did during their sojourn on the earth. It is the vision of the mirror.

2nd) The dead are unaware, for some time varying from individual to individual, of being dead. This unawareness, in some souls, lasts for a long time, as does the suffering caused by wanting to perform certain acts and not being able to do so, or, by not being able to be heard, lacking a body.

3rd) The departed are seen in human shape, and they all confirm to have found themselves in such a shape, except those of the high heavens.

4th) At the moment of the separation from the body, they are received by their relatives and friends who have died before them. Such a welcome had already started some days before the death, and intermittently during the vicissitudes of the agonal crisis.

5th) They pass, for the most part, through a phase of reviving sleep, more or less long. Real swoons of three, three and a half days, and even more.

6th) The deceased who lived in accordance with the moral teachings of Jesus Christ find themselves in a comfortable, spiritual, radiant milieu, among songs, music, gentle colors, in the company of like-minded souls. The depraved and unprepared find themselves in an oppressive and dark milieu.

7th) They find a milieu analogous to the one they knew on earth, but it looks like a spiritualized dream.

8th) The deceased, that is, the disincarnated souls, learn that thought in the spiritual world is a creating force, with which the spirits dwelling in the plane of astral energy can reproduce around them the places of their memories. They learn through personal experience, or through the explanations of helping relatives and spirits. As soon as they think of something, it appears and is materialized. This phenomenon is dangerous, because of the illusions and the tricks of the creative power of the mind. The saints are subject to this game for little or no time, because during their earthly life they have learned to empty themselves of everything that is not God.

9th) The dead realize, very early, that talking through words is an illusion, because they understand that the language among them is spiritual, i.e., is the transmission of the thought.

10th) They find that the faculty of the spiritual vision places them in the condition of simultaneously perceiving and seeing the objects in their innerness, through them and from every side. It is the phenomenon of the dimensions superior to the third, which is that of the living on earth. The moribund can see in the agonal state realities that are both close and far away; they can see what happens in the next room or in another city many kilometers away. The same happens to them when they have already passed away. The living experience a similar phenomenon in the OBE.

11th) They discover that they themselves, or other spirits, can transfer themselves instantly from one state to another, from one condition to another, or from one place to another, regardless of the distance. All this, through an act of will. This allows them to move in their spiritual milieu and also to fly at short or long distance, from the fluidic ground, which could also be, depending on the case, the earth.

12th) The deceased learn to gravitate, fatally and automatically, like the other companions who live in their world, towards the spiritual sphere appropriate for them, through the inescapable force of the law of affinity. For this, the wicked reunite with the

wicked, and experience the disgust and terror of the presence of the demons. Vice versa, the best ones, or “perfetti,” are drawn into the sphere appropriate to them, where they find friendly, likable people, in the company of the angels, of the saints, of the patron saint they had invoked in life, the holy good guiding spirit, and so on. Those who are more advanced enjoy the presence of the Virgin, the Christ, the Apostles, the Archangels. In the state after death, the features assumed by the face and the body mirror the beauty of the soul, and its virtues, and give joy to the other souls. In the worlds of the severe purifying and atoning trials, the souls assume monstrous, disgusting, frightening features, due to the instability or fluidic elasticity of their bodies, which suffer all the emotions, regrets, and agonizing states produced by the sight of the place, of the other deceased similar to them, and of the satanic hierarchies. It is certain, as Master Alexander told me, and as I saw in this and other otherworldly journeys, that the Catholic Church, in affirming the existence of the limbo, the purgatory, the hell and the paradise, has spoken the truth.

13th) The deceased are met by the spirits of their relatives and friends, who are present to guide the new arrivals before the reviving sleep begins, the period of unconsciousness. It is the compassion towards the newly deceased that the Master Jesus and other character will show, assisted by the elect, in the most necessary moments. The help of the relatives and friends will be proportionally stronger as the deceased is remembered in the prayers and in the Masses of intercession. This is the law of the compensation, according to the expression of Saint Paul (*Galatians* 6:8): “Who sows for the Spirit will reap life.”

14th) The relatives and friends one has offended, or the enemies who have not yet reached the inner peace, and do not know how to love those who made them suffer, come and meet the deceased with the purpose of attacking them and pushing them towards oppressive conditions, assisted by the Guardian Angel of Iniquity. This happens before the sleep arrives, but begins again after it.

15th) The deceased see their own bodies in the house, or on the deathbed, and can also see the condensation of their ethereal bodies above the physical bodies. This has been confirmed by clairvoyants who were at the bedside of the dying.

16th) They know that there cannot exist disincarnate individualities so identical as to be able to find themselves in the same spiritual situation or to follow together the same way. Also, in the hereafter, the twin souls, who were connected on earth, are separated in the spiritual world, even though God allows them to meet again whenever they want to. They remain together if they have a mission to complete, and if together they exert themselves to attain the same level of spiritual elevation. It is true therefore what the Church affirms regarding the possible meeting with dear ones, but the permanence of their being together depends on their keeping the same moral, spiritual, and religious rhythm. The guarantee of staying together is connected with the nature of the twinning.

17th) The spirits of the disincarnated, as we have already said, are able to create, with the force of their thoughts, more or less good, what they wish and have need of; but when it

comes to complicated or very important creations, such a faculty is entrusted to the ranks of spirits specialized in this regard.

18th) The disincarnated affirm that in their spiritual world, as a general or permanent condition, the inferior souls, in the sense of the hierarchy of the moral values and of the powers, cannot see the entities of those who are superior to them. This is due to the different types of vibration of their ethereal bodies. To be able to feel and see a syntony is needed, or a design of God.

19th) Those who are dominated by the human passions remain bound to the milieu in which they lived, and this happens for a period sometimes short and sometimes long. Being deprived of the reviving sleep, they continue in the suggestion or illusion of believing themselves to be men or women (according to the sex) still dwelling among the living, thus falling prey to a nightmare, to a curious oppressive dream that can convert them into disturbing and infesting spirits.

20th) The soul of the deceased suffers unspeakably at the sight of the torment of the dear ones whom they leave around their deathbeds. The soul remains as if magnetized, and is prevented from entering into contact with those who have already been for some time in the other condition. A great effort will have to be made to liberate the soul from this harmful attraction.

21st) In the world beyond the living, at a certain moment colors appear with a precise meaning: white, yellow, red, green, turquoise. Lacking the light of the day, the sun, the moon, and the stars, the kingdom of the dead is a kingdom of crepuscular, leaden, grayish light, which changes shade, little by little, in accordance with the changes of the states of consciousness.

22nd) When gripped by uncertainty, loneliness and perplexity, confusion, for whatever reason, a spirit is desperate, then it hears a voice from afar, that gives advice on how to exit from that situation; a voice coming from a relative, a friend, the good guardian angel, the patron saint, or the voice itself of the priest who celebrates the Mass and prays for the dead. Those who perceive the thoughts of the departed ones should hurry to help them, following the impulse of the universal charity.

23rd) The dying see the glimmer of the Perpetual Light, but for a few moments. Rare are those who recognize and fix themselves on this clear Light of God. Blessed are those who recognize and fix themselves on it! Then, they will see it as a second glimmer, which does not have the meaning of the first, but it is still a privilege if one dies fixed on it.

24th) I remember that, during my OBE, the Bishop Saint Alexander said to me: “Those who die as true Initiated Christians, and appear at the Judgment after having attained the perfection of the major and minor Mysteries, can pass through the heavens of the atonement like a thunderbolt, and find themselves immediately in the third, in the fourth, in the fifth, in the sixth, and in the seventh heaven.” Among the Mysteries that the Christian must experiment, whilst still incarnate, there is precisely the “dormition or

initiativ death.” After death, there is no remedy. Once passing away unworthily, there is but one possibility: to suffer in the purgatory, the inferno, and then to escape towards a new reincarnation, to prepare oneself, with the thoughts, the words, and the works, for a better passing away next time (Palamidessi 2010, 119).

*“Psychomachia”: Helping the Dying at the Moment of Passing Away*

*The Christian Book of the Dead* is a treatise and a liturgical breviary addressed both to the deceased and the dying—and to the living as well, so as to let them know what they will find in the post-mortem stage. It includes suggestions to help the dying at the moment of passing away and point out the path they should walk to reach the Light of God. In fact, the journey in the hereafter is presented as steeped in dangers and temptations that try to divert the soul from reaching the “safe haven” that is God.

Following the indications of the book, the living can help the dying by directing them through the various pitfalls, guiding them as if they had in their hand the map where the paths are marked that would allow them to avoid the dangers and snares. The living should place themselves next to the dying, and read to them the various passages of the breviary. They are an aid for the wandering soul who enters the hereafter and does not know which path to follow.

The text should be read both to the dying persons before they pass away, and to the dead immediately thereafter. Those who have just died can still hear the words. Useful, even if it is not mandatory, is also a “telepathic link” established with the deceased to guide them.

The various passages of the soul at the moment of death are summarized by Palamidessi in different stages: pre-agonal stage, agonal stage, passing away stage, immediate post-mortem stage, seven-day stage, forty-nine-day stage.

For each of these stages, the book offers instructions, prayers, and exhortations, all aimed at guiding the soul and avoiding that it may remain stranded in the infernal or purgatorial state and have to experience a reincarnation to try yet again another earthly experience.

Of particular interest is the “psychomachia” (Palamidessi 2010, 29 and 273–97), i.e., the struggle the soul of the deceased is engaged in immediately after the

passing away against certain temptations of the demons, which are balanced by the good inspirations of the angels.

The theme of the struggle between the angels and the demons that takes place during the life in the soul of the individual, that is, between the good inspired by the “Spirit of Equity” and the evil suggested by the “Spirit of Iniquity,” had already been dealt with by Palamidessi in his tenth Archeosophy booklet called *I guardiani delle soglie e il cammino evolutivo* (The Guardians of the Thresholds and the Evolutionary Path”: Palamidessi 1969c). Reported here is an ancient Iranian tradition, also mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which foresaw the assignation of two Spirits to each individual: one of good or “of Equity,” and one of evil or “of Iniquity,” which symbolically stand the first on the right and the second on the left of the human being.

From the God of knowledge comes all that is and all that will be. Before humans existed, He established a Plan for them. And they exist in accordance with His Laws and in accordance with His glorious design, they fulfill their task and nothing can be changed. In His hands are the Laws of All that He sustains in all the events. He created humans to rule on the world, and assigned them two spirits which they must continue with until the time of His visitation: these are the Spirit of Equity and the Spirit of Iniquity (Palamidessi 1969c, 16).

By means of the Spirits of Equity and of Iniquity can be manifested the inspirations and temptations of numerous angels and demons, who will therefore reveal themselves to the consciousness of the dying. According to Palamidessi, humans can choose between good and evil by accepting either the angelic inspirations or the demonic temptations. If therefore the life is defined through this choice, the same happens in a focused and instantaneous manner at the moment of death. The soul of the deceased will therefore have to fight to avoid succumbing to the temptations of the demons, and instead should listen to the inspirations of the angels.

Below is a table summarizing the struggle of the soul, or psychomachia, between the temptations and inspirations, and the main features of the demons and the inspiring angels.

TEMPTATIONS-DEMONS	INSPIRATIONS-ANGELS
<p><b>Temptations of the Demon Against the Faith.</b> The Demon Against the Faith tempts the soul of the deceased by making them believe that there does not exist anything spiritual, that everything is matter, that hell does not exist and that therefore one can behave without following any moral or spiritual precept (Palamidessi 2010, 273).</p>	<p><b>Inspirations of the good Angel of Faith.</b> The Angel of Faith exhorts the soul to have faith, to believe in the divine mercy, to fix its attention on God and on His light. The reading of the “Credo” of the Christian Catholic religion is expected (Palamidessi 2010, 275).</p>
<p><b>Temptations of the Demon of Desperation.</b> The demon seeks to drive to despair the souls, suggesting that there is nothing more to be done, that they cannot be saved, that their sins have been so serious that the only outcome can be damnation. It is an attack against hope (Palamidessi 2010, 277).</p>	<p><b>Inspirations of the good Angel of Hope.</b> In contrast, the good angel suggests cultivating hope, that the divine mercy is at work, that with the repentance there will be salvation notwithstanding the sins committed, that God is always ready to forgive those who repent and welcome them in His own light (Palamidessi 2010, 279).</p>
<p><b>Temptations of the Demon of Impatience.</b> The demon on the left tries to make the deceased lose their temper by making them believe that nobody cares about them, that their sufferings should have ended instantaneously and that if it was not so, then they are entitled to rage and blasphemy (Palamidessi 2010, 281).</p>	<p><b>Inspirations of the good Angel of Patience.</b> The angel reminds the dying that patience is the virtue of the strong, that patience helps to face the trials in a more serene way, that they must imitate Jesus in the patience demonstrated by Him in His Passion (Palamidessi 2010, 283).</p>
<p><b>Temptations of the Demon of Vainglory.</b> The Demon of Vainglory tempts the soul of the deceased with the weapon of the “complacency in yourself and spiritual self-conceit.” It will suggest thoughts of superiority over others, contrary to Christian humility (Palamidessi 2010, 285).</p>	<p><b>Inspirations of the good Angel of Humility.</b> The angel recalls that whoever is exalted will be humbled, that self-conceit is the father of every vice, and that humility helps to empty the humanity of itself, so as to be filled with the divinity, which can then descend into the humans (Palamidessi 2010, 287).</p>
<p><b>Temptations of the Demon of Avarice.</b> This demon makes one regret having to leave material things, suggesting an attachment to earthly things so that the soul does not draw</p>	<p><b>Inspirations of the good Angel against avarice, the Promoter of Detachment.</b> The angel suggests breaking away from earthly things, to remain poor in spirit, so as to</p>

<p>close to God, preventing it from being free of material goods (Palamidessi 2010, 289).</p>	<p>achieve liberty from the world and be able to head towards the Kingdom of Heaven (Palamidessi 2010, 291).</p>
<p><b>Temptations of the Demon of Sleep at the moment of the death.</b> This demon instills the desire to sleep in such a way as to make the deceased lose consciousness. It seeks to plunge the deceased into nightmares. It suggests they sink into the unconscious so that they are not able to pray and stay awake in the quest for the Light of the Christ (Palamidessi 2010, 293).</p>	<p><b>Inspirations of the good Angel of Perennial Wakefulness.</b> The Angel of Perennial Wakefulness reminds the deceased of the exhortations of Jesus Christ to the disciples: “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation.” He reminds them not to sleep and not to become distracted in order to be awake and strive to meet the Perpetual Light (Palamidessi 2010, 295).</p>

As mentioned earlier, humans are continuously confronted during the course of their earthly lives with the choice between good and evil. They should decide whether to embrace the suggestions of the good angel, or “Spirit of Equity,” or accept those of the “Spirit of Iniquity.” Such choices determine, in some way, the spiritual destiny of the individual.

For Archeosophy, the objective of all humans is reaching God, reviving in themselves, through thoughts, words, and deeds, the image and likeness of the Divine Being. Such an objective can be achieved by means of the choice, operated with free will, to accept the “Spirit of Equity.”

The Archeosophical doctrine picks up a concept already expressed by Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), the founders respectively of Theosophy and Anthroposophy: humans in the course of their reincarnations have the power to create entities constituted of elemental, etheric, astral, and mental matter, known as “Guardians of the Threshold.” Such entities are created on the basis of the embrace of the Angel of Good or the Angel of Evil.

The two Angels are spiritual and must not be confused with the Guardians, even though they are connected. Guardians are able to contain the charges sensitive to the action of the two Angels, charges that explode when you least expect their reaction (Palamidessi 1969c, 13).

The Guardian of the Threshold, an entity that all humans have in themselves, constitutes the synthesis of the good and the evil that each individual has performed, and therefore denotes the evolutive state. As entities created by humans, the Guardians of the Threshold concentrate the charges or the

tendencies towards which their creators are inclined, be they good or evil. The same Guardians may or may not operate as sources of inspiration.

The Guardian, in different times in our life, at the point of death, when we are about to go into the hereafter or when we re-enter like astronauts on the earth for a new reincarnation, makes itself felt and, sometimes, seen, sometimes with the clothing, the expression, and the words of the Devil tempting against the Faith, sometimes with the inspirations of the good Angel of Faith; sometimes, with the temptations of the Devil of Desperation, sometimes, with the inspirations of the good Angel of Hope; sometimes, with the insinuations of the Devil of Impatience, sometimes, with the wise inspirations of the good Angel of Patience; sometimes, with the thoughts of the Devil of Vainglory, sometimes, with the holy inspirations of the good Angel of Humility; sometimes, with the new temptations of the Devil of Greed, afterwards, with the inspirations of the good Angel of Detachment. Lastly, with the bad advice and maneuvers of the Devil of Sleep or with the healthy stimuli of the good Angel of Perennial Wakefulness. And it is always the same Guardian of the Threshold, animated by the human, strengthened or weakened by the vices and the virtues, inclined to yield to the pressures of the real custodians appointed by God: the Angel of Equity and the Angel of Iniquity (Palamidessi 1969c, 18).

For Palamidessi, an important objective for all humans is that of transmuting, namely changing the bad tendencies (vices) into the good tendencies (virtues) that reverberate on the semblance of the Guardian of the Threshold, which at the end of the evolution will have to appear to every woman and man as an angel of Light. The importance of the transmutation of the Guardian of the Threshold is closely connected to the so-called “Body of Resurrection,” the body which will serve individuals in the future terrestrial evolution, of which the Guardian of the Threshold is an archetype.

### *Eschatological Christology and the “Clear Light of Christ”*

The goal of the ascetic struggle and of the liturgical practices of *The Christian Book of the Dead* is the transfer of the consciousness of the deceased into the “Perpetual Light,” as indicated by Bishop Alexander in the twenty-third point summarized by Palamidessi on the morning of October 24, 1967:

23rd) The dying see the glimmer of the Perpetual Light, but for a few moments. Rare are those who recognize and fix themselves on this clear Light of God. Blessed are those who recognize and fix themselves on it! Then, they will see it as a second glimmer, which does not have the meaning of the first, but it is still a privilege if one dies fixed on it (Palamidessi 1985, 130).

In the Archeosophical Christology, the “Clear Light” is the “Light of Christ.” It is a light that can be perceived in life as the “Light of the Transfiguration” or “Taboric Light,” and at the moment of death appears as the “Light of the Resurrection of Christ” (Palamidessi 2010, 299). The transfer of the deceased into the “Clear Light” of the Resurrection corresponds to their assimilation to the divinity-humanity of Christ and to the consequent liberation from the phenomenal world. For this reason many of the prayers suggested by the book are aimed at the fixation of this Light, and at reaching a consubstantiation with it.

Christian brother do not sleep! Do not be distracted. Pray and fix your spiritual eyes on the Light of Christ, enter into this Light, consubstantiate with this Light (Palamidessi 2010, 262).

In the Archeosophical eschatology, the moment of passing away is the very special occasion in which it is possible to contemplate the Light “that only the saints can see and, for a short moment, the dying” (Palamidessi 2010, 231). Recognizing this Light, however, is not easy. It will be difficult for the deceased to know how to recognize the “Uncreated Light” after the passing away if they have not previously experimented the same Light in life through mystical experiences (Palamidessi 1969b, 9) and the meditation on the heart (Palamidessi 1969b; 2008; 2010, 299).

To facilitate the recognition and the transfer of the consciousness into the Light of Christ, the “Spiritual Guide” helps the dying persons by preparing them for the vision.

The moment of entering into the Eternal Life has arrived for you. Your breathing is about to cease. I put you in front of the Clear Light of Christ. You will know it now in its reality, in the passing away in which all the things appear as free and transparent like the clear sky, and where the intelligence without stain, the pure intelligence, has neither circumference nor center [...]

Son/Daughter of the Light (Name and Surname)! Do not pay attention to anything but the perpetual Clear Light that will appear to you in the dim crepuscular light of the hereafter. Recognize it as the perennial Light of Christ, enter into it, walk in it, do not look back, do not think of anything but of this Light, with Faith, Hope, and Love (Palamidessi 2010, 263–66).

If the deceased are able to recognize the Clear Perpetual Light of Christ and fix themselves on it, then the transfer will be completed and the chains of the phenomenal existence will be broken. Conversely, the deceased will lose consciousness and enter into the “reviving sleep,” triggering oneiric phenomena,

from which however they will still have the possibility of freeing themselves, even if with great difficulties.

In fact, at the twenty-third point of the indications annotated by Palamidessi, Bishop Alexander highlighted two distinct luminous manifestations that appear to the deceased in different moments of their experience. The first is the vision of the Clear Light at the moment of passing away, the second is the Light that can appear to the deceased days after death. The first is transcendent, without form, and is the expression of the Divinity of Christ, the second uses an image and for this can be referred to the Humanity of Christ (Palamidessi 2010, 231). The transfer into the first “Perpetual Clear Light” guarantees liberation. In the same way, when the consciousness is not fixed in the “Perpetual Clear Light,” there will still be the possibility of fixing themselves in the luminous manifestations that can happen in the days immediately following the death and still guarantee an access to the Kingdom of God.

#### *The Journey of the Soul in the Post-Mortem Stage According to Archeosophy*

If the dying had not been able to recognize the “Clear Light” and fix themselves on it at the moment of their passing away, then their consciousness collapses into a sleep of varying duration, with swooning spells of three days or even more (Palamidessi 2010, 119). At the end of the “reviving sleep,” the deceased enter into the “crepuscular state,” that is, into a transitory state characterized by mental confusion and a shrinkage of consciousness, in which they nevertheless conserve a certain coordinated activity. In this state, the departed experiment forty-nine days of wandering life with tests of various kinds, which are in their own way a first “Judgment.”

In the crepuscular state, everything that the deceased had thought or done in life will be objectified by their imagination: friends, enemies, relatives, objects, localities, bad actions, good actions, all composing a panoramic vision of great effect. From the heart spring benevolent visions, and from the brain malevolent and aggressive ones (Palamidessi 2010, 91). At the end of these first forty-nine days in the crepuscular state, the deceased will be directed into the state of consciousness or the “kingdom of existence” more appropriate for them, and helping them will become more difficult (Palamidessi 2010, 319).

Of the preliminary forty-nine days, the first seven are the most important; and it is in these days that the most intense prayers and works of the prompter should take place to open the mind of the deceased to the salvific action of the Christ. In these first seven days from the awakening in the post-mortem stage, the “Clear Light” or “Primordial Wisdom” is revealed in five distinct forms, five “Orders of Wisdom” (Palamidessi 2010, 347), i.e., five luminous forms, whose active contemplation leads to the union with God, “the Quintessence of the Wisdom” (Annex E).

The five Orders of Wisdom are implicitly described in the liturgical and ritual part of the Christian Book of the Dead, which can be integrated with the unpublished and unfortunately incomplete passages that we reproduce in Annexes E, F and G:

— *Wisdom of the Universal Law*, the antidote to the illusion (Palamidessi 2010, 159), which manifests itself on the first day with a sparkling white-azure light, “gleaming and dazzling.” It is also called the Light of the “Eternal Wisdom” (Palamidessi 2010, 320). In its feminine aspect, it is the pure void of space, whilst in its masculine aspect it is the pure light, the Illuminator of the heaven (Annex F).

— *Absolute Wisdom, similar to the mirror*, which manifests itself on the second day of the awakening in the post-mortem stage with a clear and bright light, “sparkling and transparent” (Palamidessi 2010, 327). It is identified with the state in which things are liberated from their objectivity, from their isolation, but without being deprived of their form; stripped of their materiality without being dissolved (Annex F). The consciousness of this wisdom reflects the form of all realities without becoming attached to it, and without being touched or moved (Annex G).

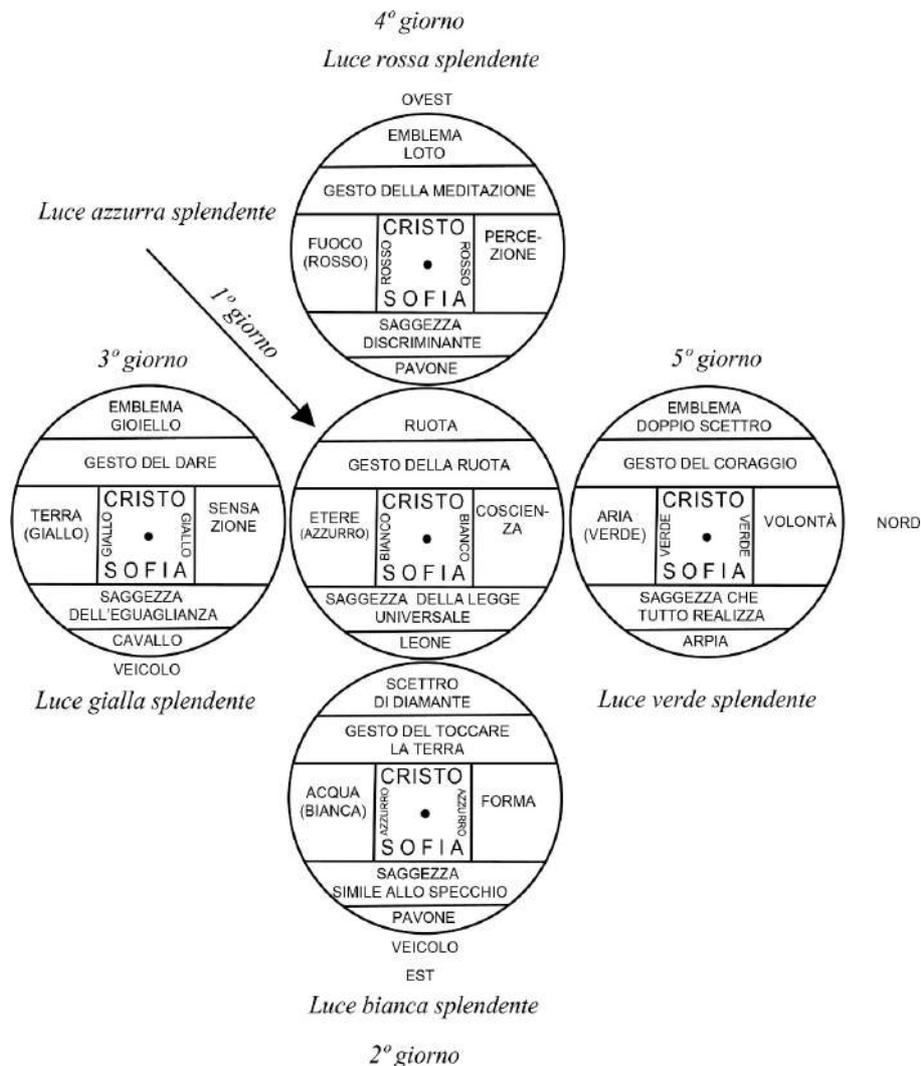
— *Wisdom of the Equality*, which appears to the departed on the third day with a “shining yellow light.” This is also called the “Wisdom of solidarity among all beings” (Palamidessi 2010, 332). It is the knowledge of the fundamental unity of all beings, with feelings of compassion for all living beings. The pure principle of the sentiment is transformed into love and pity for all living beings, into a feeling of identity (Annex F).

— *Wisdom of the Discernment*: typical of the fourth day, and which manifests itself with a shining red light. It is also called “Wisdom of the Perfect Charity”

(Palamidessi 2010, 342), which combats the egoism. We may identify it with the Wisdom that supplies an individual character to every being. The consciousness of such wisdom distinguishes the inner vision (Annex G).

— *Wisdom of All Fulfillments*: also called “Uncreated Eternal Wisdom, which fulfills everything.” It appears on the fifth day as a green light “shining and dazzling,” “sparkling and terrifying,” “iridescent and with luminous circlets” (Palamidessi 2010, 344). This Light, which combats jealousy, is “knowledge of the act” (Palamidessi 2010, 343), i.e., it allows us to fulfill the acts of perfection. It is the natural power of the personal wisdom bestowed by God. It is the “Inner Creative Vision that leads to the ultimate realization of the perfection” (Annex G).

In the first seven days of the awakening in the post-mortem state, the luminous manifestation of Wisdom may appear to the deceased in one of the forms discussed above, associated with a color and an expression corresponding in its masculine aspect to Jesus Christ and in its feminine aspect to Sophia or the Divine Mother. To each Order of Wisdom is associated a spatial direction, a vice to overcome, and a virtue to affirm, a “kingdom of existence,” an animal symbol, some figures typical of the religious tradition of the dying, and one or more liturgical instruments. An autograph scheme by Tommaso Palamidessi (Annex D), is reproduced in Figure 1, and synthetically illustrates the correspondences for each Order of the Wisdom.



**Figure 1.** Synthetic scheme of the journey of the soul in the post-mortem stage. From an autographed note of Palamidessi, see Annex D.

The ritual text highlights how the luminous manifestations of Wisdom manifest an extraordinary intensity and luminosity, with a disorienting and sometimes even terrifying effect on the deceased, who can be pushed to flee from them. Catalyzed by the luminous vision of the Wisdom, other opaque lights manifest themselves to the consciousness of the deceased, corresponding to a vice to which the deceased were subject and towards which they may have a certain affinity. To these opaque lights correspond the states of the phenomenal consciousness. If the deceased were to embrace the vision of these opaque lights they would find themselves directed towards a specific state of existence, and a rebirth with consequent features. The action of the “Spiritual Guide” consists in helping the deceased, through prayers and invocations, in the production and recognition of the bright

and shiny Divine Light, and at the same time in preventing the consciousness' embrace of the opaque light.

After the fifth day of permanence in the hereafter, the visions of the "intermediate state" become progressively less divine. The soul of the departed precipitates at a rapid pace into the ocean of hallucinations of the phenomenal world. The good irradiations of the superior nature vanish, to be substituted by lights of an inferior nature (Palamidessi 2010, 342). The prayers of the first seven days can however be repeated in the successive seven weeks, intensifying their action in each period of seven days.

After forty-nine days have passed, the destiny of the deceased should be considered as already oriented. The prayers can be suspended, and conducted only on special occasions. The deceased begin the process of purgatorial atonement, due to the "Law of the contrapasso," with the sojourn in a "kingdom of existence" akin to them. At the end of the sojourn there, the mechanism of the incarnation will be triggered, carrying the soul of the deceased to take a new body of flesh and begin a new spin on the "fiery wheel of life" (Palamidessi 2010, 160).

### The Christian Book of the Dead, *a Useful Book for the Living*

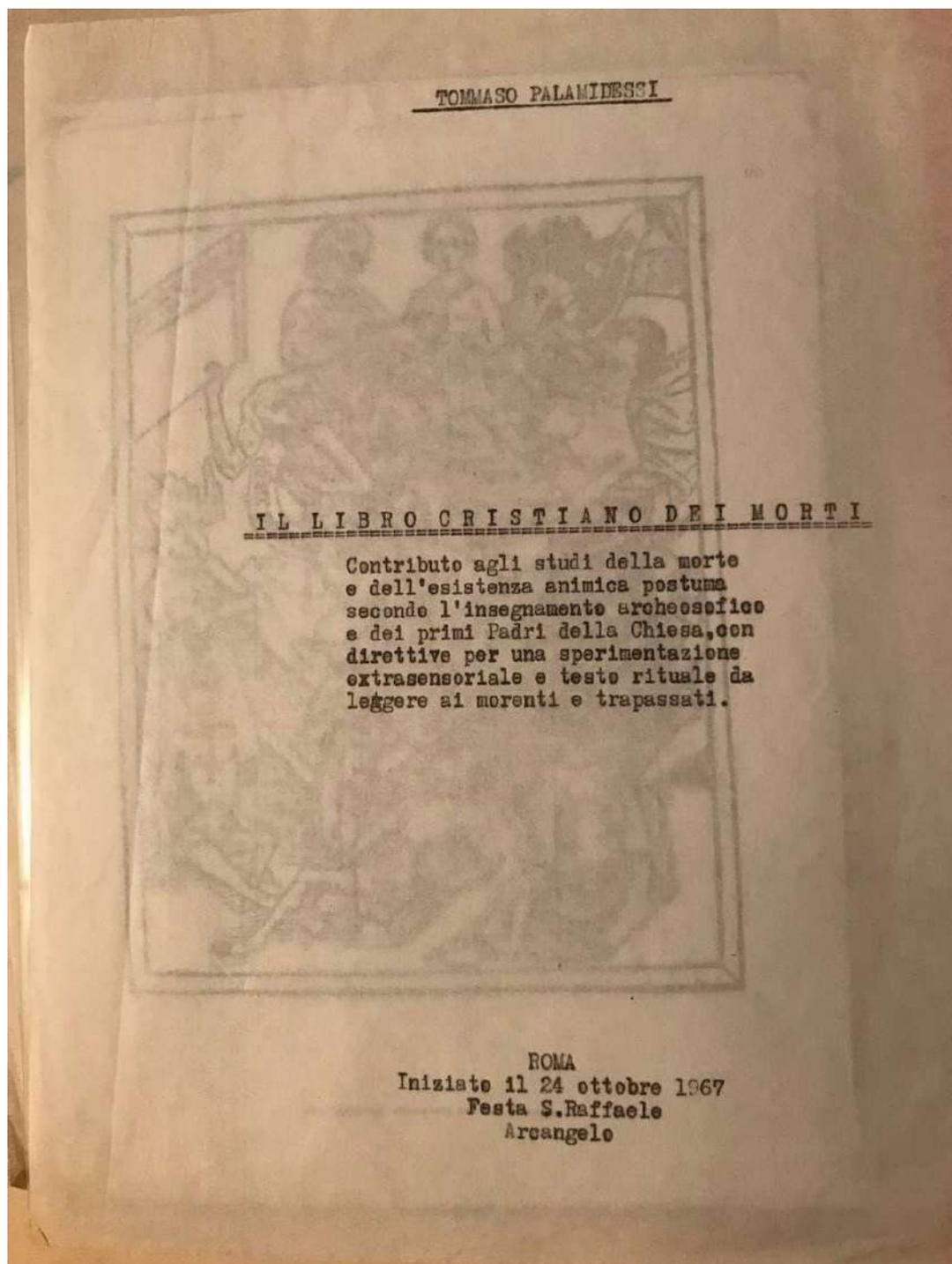
Palamidessi believed that his work was useful both for the dead and for the living. In fact in his own words, "the Christian Book of the Dead is first of all a book for the living, with valid instructions for the living" (Palamidessi 2010, 107). In fact, for the living the book constitutes a preparatory manual for the important and inevitable encounter with death. The Archeosophical doctrine stresses the need in the course of life to practice ascetical exercises that can refine the consciousness with the objective of achieving the transforming union with God. Among the preparatory exercises stands out the Cardiognosis, a mystical practice through which the Archeosophist reaches the "Inner Light," that is,

the intimate embrace with the Christ-Light, the Christ absolute perfection, absolute Wisdom, absolute Love, totality of all perfections; a Christ-vibration, welding with God (Palamidessi 1969b, 10).

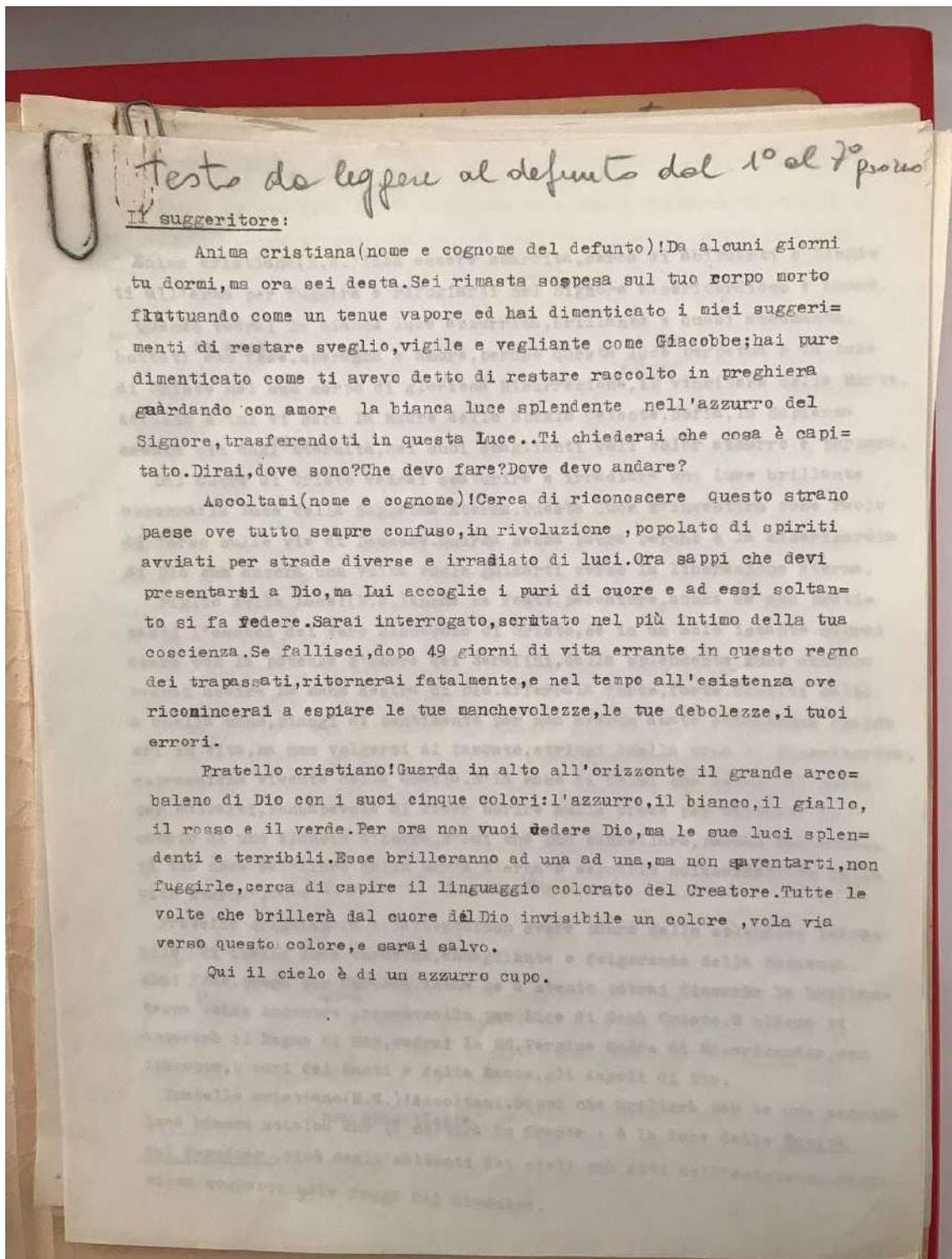
In addition to its preparatory role, *The Christian Book of the Dead* is also a guide for those who assist the dying or want to help the deceased through the use of ritual prayers. In this sense, Palamidessi's intention was of "filling a gap" in the Christian liturgy, providing an instrument that may be used by Archeosophists

and non-Archeosophists to help their loved ones during one of the most delicate moments of existence.

**Annexes: Manuscript pages and notes by Tommaso Palamidessi**



**Annex A**



Testo da leggere al defunto dal 1° al 7° giorno

Il suggeritore:

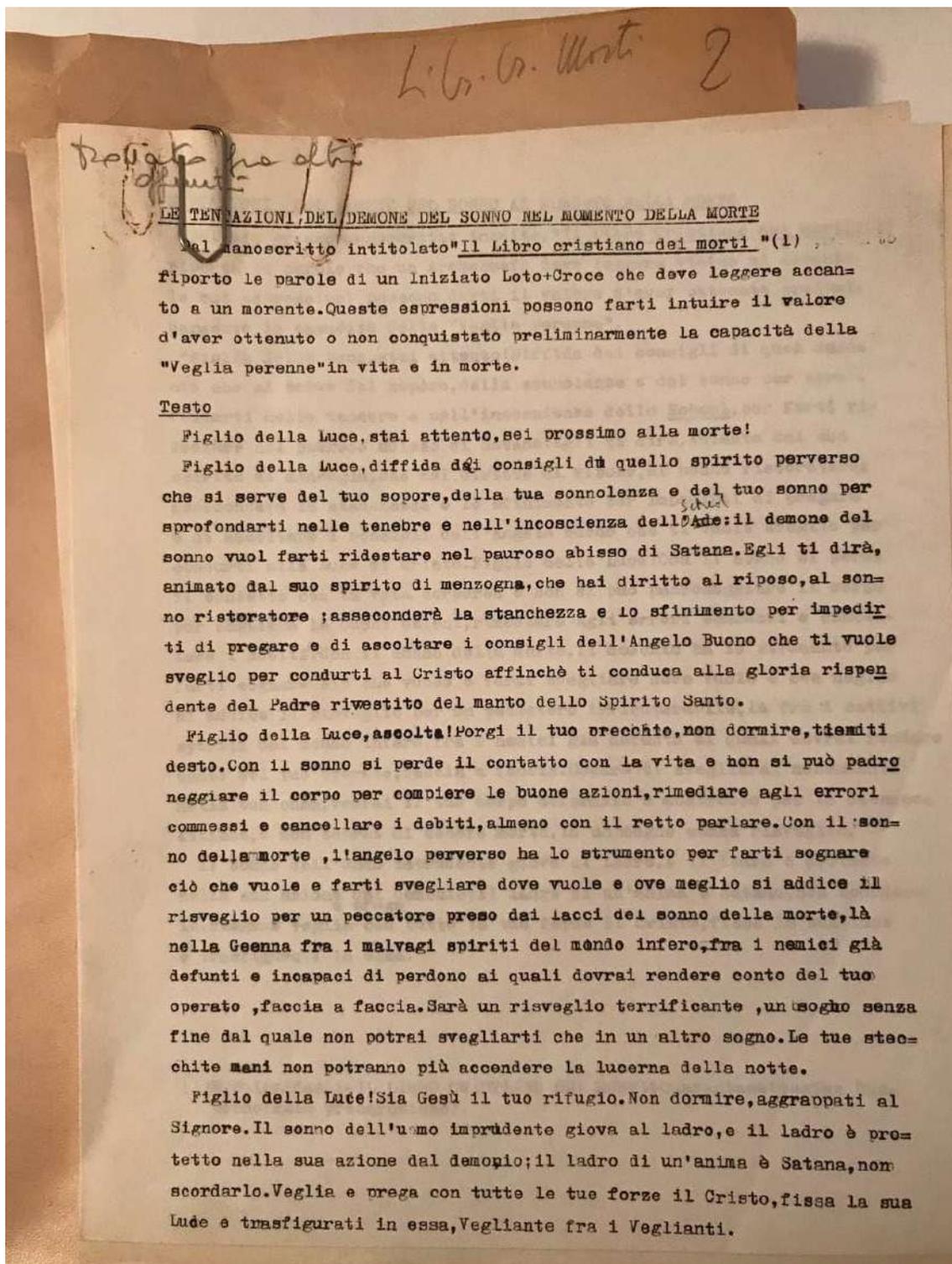
Anima cristiana (nome e cognome del defunto)! Da alcuni giorni tu dormi, ma ora sei desta. Sei rimasta sospesa sul tuo corpo morto fluttuando come un tenue vapore ed hai dimenticato i miei suggerimenti di restare sveglio, vigile e vegliante come Giacobbe; hai pure dimenticato come ti avevo detto di restare raccolto in preghiera guardando con amore la bianca luce splendente nell'azzurro del Signore, trasferendoti in questa Luce..Ti chiederai che cosa è capitato. Dirai, dove sono? Che devo fare? Dove devo andare?

Ascoltami (nome e cognome)! Cerca di riconoscere questo strano paese ove tutto sempre confuso, in rivoluzione, popolato di spiriti avviati per strade diverse e irradiato di luci. Ora sappi che devi presentarti a Dio, ma Lui accoglie i puri di cuore e ad essi soltanto si fa federe. Sarai interrogato, scrutato nel più intimo della tua coscienza. Se fallisci, dopo 49 giorni di vita errante in questo regno dei trapassati, ritornerai fatalmente, e nel tempo all'esistenza ove riconincerai a espiare le tue manchevolezze, le tue debolezze, i tuoi errori.

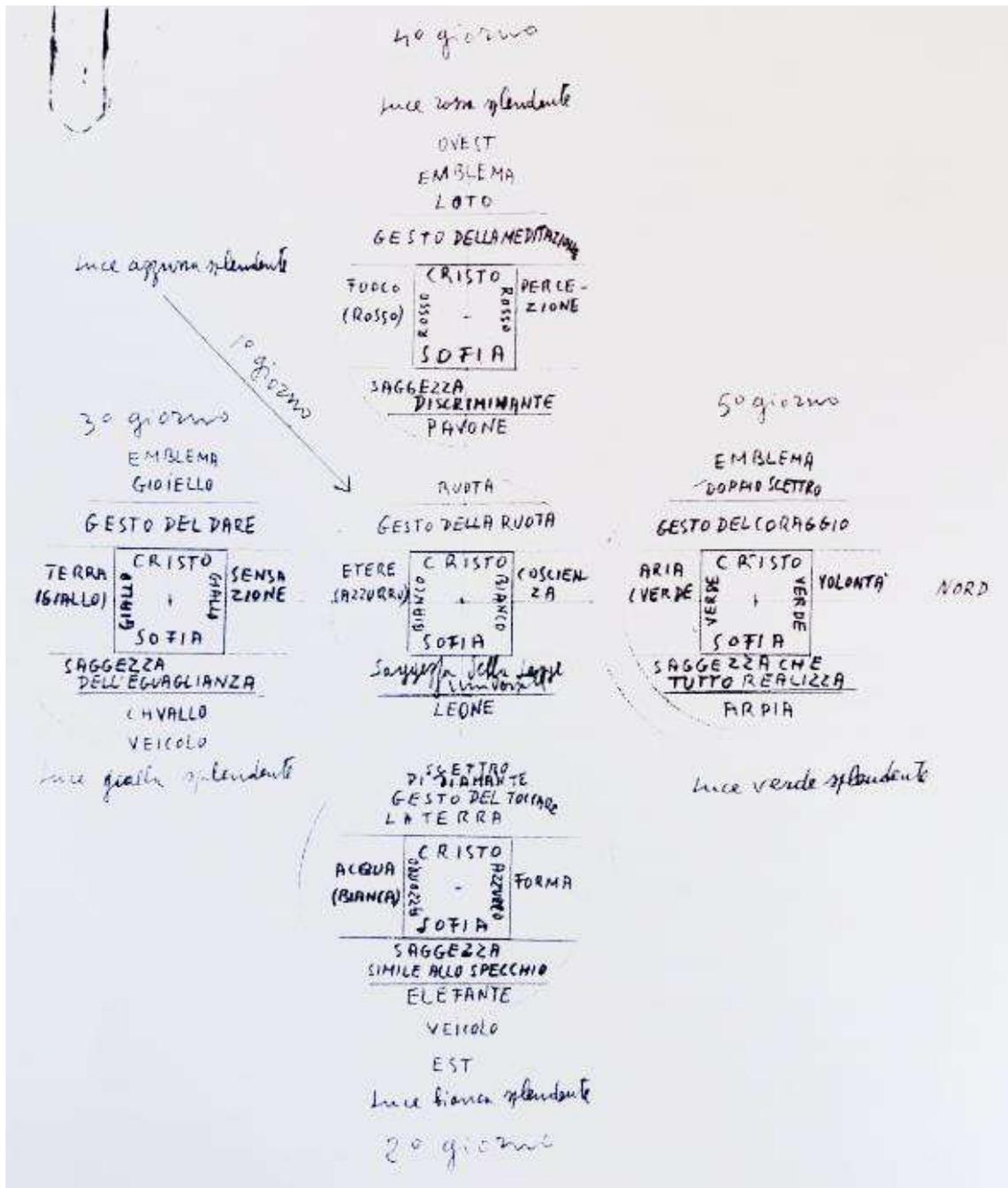
Fratello cristiano! Guarda in alto all'orizzonte il grande arcobaleno di Dio con i suoi cinque colori: l'azzurro, il bianco, il giallo, il rosso e il verde. Per ora non vuoi federe Dio, ma le sue luci splendenti e terribili. Esse brilleranno ad una ad una, ma non saventarti, non fuggirle, cerca di capire il linguaggio colorato del Creatore. Tutte le volte che brillerà dal cuore del Dio invisibile un colore, vola via verso questo colore, e sarai salvo.

Qui il cielo è di un azzurro cupo.

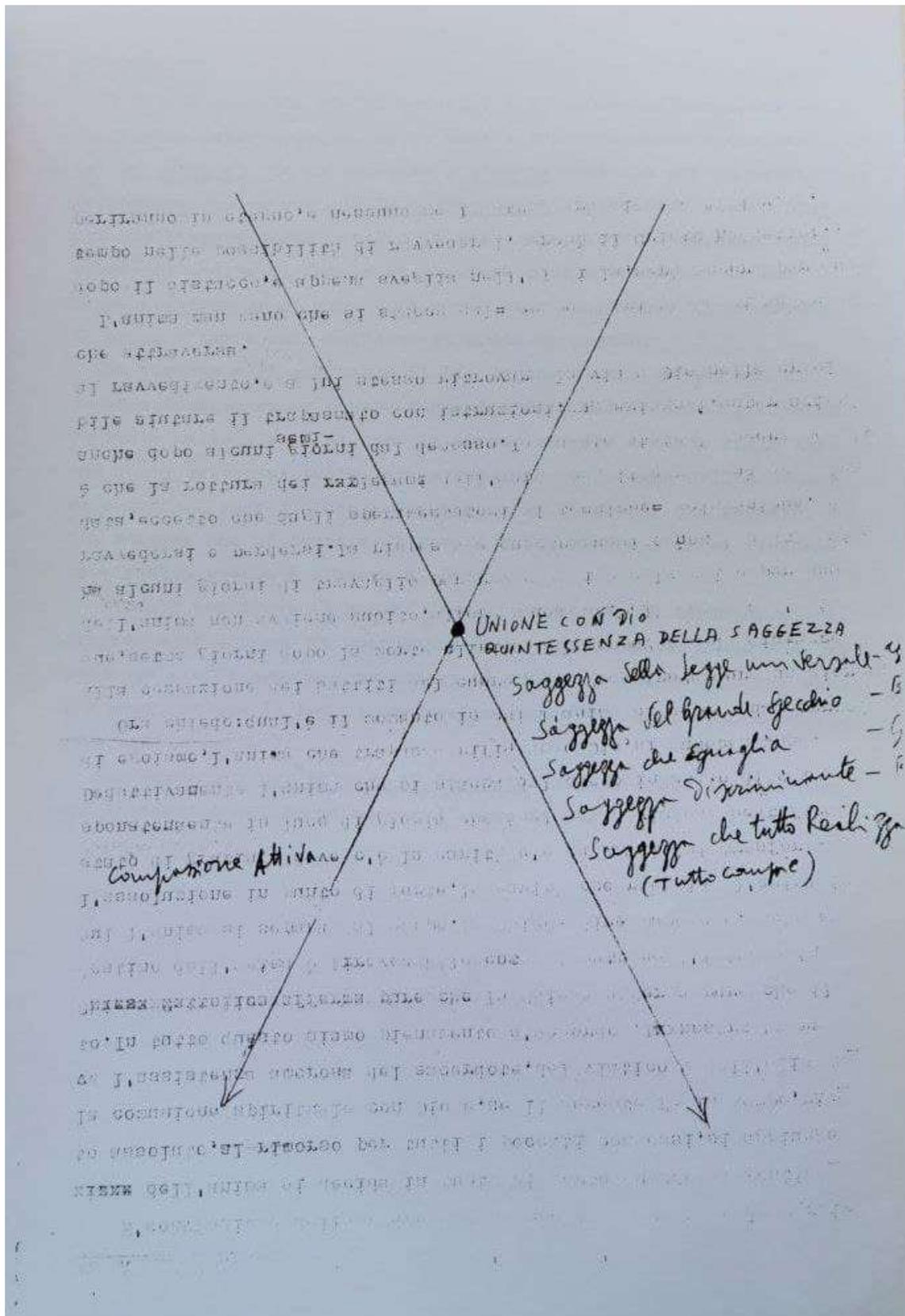
Annex B



Annex C



Annex D



Annex E

3 SAGGEZZA DELL'EGUAGLIANZA: è la conoscenza della fondamentale unità di tutti gli esseri; pietà per tutto ciò che vive. Il puro principio del sentimento è trasformato in amore e pietà per tutti gli esseri viventi, nel sentimento dell'identità.  
Il colore giallo splendente, quando scaturisce dal cuore è la luce dorata del sale secondo la Sapienza dell'Eguaglianza.  
Sul piano elementare vi è la Terra.

2 SAGGEZZA SIMILE ALLO SPECCHIO: è quando le cose sono liberate dall'oggettività, dal loro isolamento, ma senza essere private della loro forma; in altri termini spogliate dalla loro materialità, senza essere dissolte, poichè viene riconosciuto come parte attiva della Coscienza di Riserva, il principio creativo della mente, che è ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> cima a ogni forma e materialità. Il principio creativo della mente è come uno specchio <sup>oceanico</sup> sulla cui superficie le forme sorgono e scompaiono: se è in tempesta federe i cavalloni e gli spruzzi, se è calma, riflette il puro vuoto dello spazio (la Sapienza della Legge Universale <sup>incarnata</sup> nel suo aspetto femminile) e la pura luce (nel suo aspetto di Sapienza Universale maschile, Illuminatrice del cielo).

## Annex F

I CINQUE VELENI VIRULENTI SONO: lussuria, odio, stupidità, orgoglio, egoismo, gelosia.

I TRE PRECIPIZI DELL'AL DI LA': collera, cupidigia e stupidità.

NON MEDITAZIONE, DISTRAZIONE: il defunto non deve meditare, ma distrarsi nel senso che si deve concentrare mentalmente senza lasciare entrare alcun pensiero come quello della meditazione. E' lo stato di estasi, se si pensa e si medita, questo solo pensiero è già di impedimento alla meditazione.

COSCIENZA DELLA SAGGEZZA SIMILE ALLO SPECCHIO: riflette la forma di tutte le cose senza attaccarsi ad essa e senza esserne toccato o mosso.

COSCIENZA DELLA SAGGEZZA DELL'EGUAGLIANZA: pietà per tutto ciò che vive, *è la conoscenza della funzione vitale unita a tutti gli esseri*  
il sentimento egocentrico si trasforma in sentimento per <sup>gli</sup> altri.

*è il punto principio del sentimento*  
COSCIENZA DELLA SAGGEZZA DISCRIMINANTE *o che distingue la visione interiore*

COSCIENZA DELLA SAGGEZZA CHE TUTTO REALIZZA: Redenzione. E' la Saggiamente della Visione Interiore Creativa che porta alla realizzazione ultima della perfezione.

DELLA SAGGEZZA  
COSCIENZA DELLA LEGGE UNIVERSALE *(colore azzurro profondo)*  
*luce della Transcendente Sapienza*

*elemento-spazio come un punto blu -*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *colore giallo*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *bianco*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *rosso*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *verde*

*meta a 5 raggi (Humus)*

Annex G

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## **The Universal Peace Federation: Moon Front or Respected NGO?**

Alessandro Amicarelli

*FOB (European Federation for Freedom of Belief)*

alessandro.amicarelli@gmail.com

Willy Fautré

*Human Rights Without Frontiers*

w.fautre@hrwf.org

Holly Folk

*Western Washington University*

holly.folk@wwu.edu

Massimo Introvigne

*CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions)*

maxintrovigne@gmail.com

Marco Respinti

*Bitter Winter*

marco.respinti@bitterwinter.org

Bernadette Rigal-Cellard

*Université Bordeaux Montaigne*

brcellard@gmail.com

Rosita Šorytė

*FOB (European Federation for Freedom of Belief)*

rosita\_soryte@hotmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** Donald Trump’s participation (via video) in a 2021 event called “Think Tank 2022 Rally of Hope” organized in Seoul by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), which was founded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon and his wife, led to media reactions in several countries denouncing the UPF as a “Moon front” and a pro-Trump organization. Based on a study of the history and evolution of the UPF, the paper argues that the 2021 media reactions were based on accounts of Reverend Moon’s political activities dating back to the Cold War era. In fact, Socialist and other left-wing politicians have also attended the activities of the UPF, which does not promote a specific political ideology. It is also not a proselytization tool for Mrs. Moon’s Unification Church, whose attitudes to world politics are different from the movement’s anti-Communist campaigns of the 1970s the media were familiar with.

**KEYWORDS:** Universal Peace Federation, UPF, Unification Movement, Unification Church, Sun Myung Moon, Hak Ja Han Moon.

### *Introduction*

On September 12, 2021, an event called “Think Tank 2022 Rally of Hope” was organized in South Korea. Due to the COVID-19 situation, it was a virtual event, live-streamed throughout the world. Because of the different time zones, the morning of September 12 in South Korea corresponded to the late afternoon or evening of September 11 in different parts of the United States. One of the (virtual) speakers at the event, which focused on the situation of world peace and the possibility of a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula, was former American President Donald J. Trump.

The organizer of the event in South Korea was the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), an entity founded by Reverend Sun Myung Moon (1920–2012) and his wife Hak Ja Han Moon. Trump was criticized in the United States as he did not attend the official commemoration of the victims of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, as if he regarded the Korean event as more important. In fact, the Rally of Hope’s date was September 12, and the day had been picked up as the anniversary of the UPF foundation in 2005, although it was broadcasted in the U.S. on September 11. According to the UPF, Trump had recorded his speech in August, two weeks before the event.

Media criticism quickly became international. It escalated to a campaign putting together two groups not exactly popular with most media, Trump and his followers and “cults,” as the founders of the UPF were also the founders of the Unification Church, one of the main targets of the anti-cult movement.

In the UK, *The Independent* wrote that Trump had spoken at “an event linked to [a] controversial religious ‘cult’” (Woodward 2021). The word “cult” was also used in an article in *The Huffington Post*, which even gave voice to a political activist named Jim Stewartson, who insisted the UPF was connected with a “christofascist cult”—whatever this may mean (Papenfuss 2021). Other media outlets used the same language.

Kahina Sekkai wrote in the online edition of the French *Paris Match* under the title “Donald Trump Speaks at a Moon Cult Conference.” The Korean event was described as “a conference of the Unification Church, the official name of the Moon cult,” and Trump was criticized for having applauded the “work for peace” of both Reverend and Mrs. Moon. The article also mentioned that

two sons of Reverend Moon had formed a new pro-weapon congregation. Hyung Jin Sean Moon was at the Capitol the day of the insurrection, January 6, and his organization had even organized a transportation system to bring his devotees to the protest (Sekkai 2021).

The article, like the others we mentioned, is a textbook example of stereotypes, which when it comes to “cults” are more frequent in France than elsewhere. Everything is there: the ghost of the “secte Moon,” the use of the derogatory word “Moonie” for the members of the Unification Movement (a word banned by *The New York Times* and other leading English-speaking media as offensive), the confusion between the Unification Church led by Mrs. Moon (now operating in many countries as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, FFWPU) and the Sanctuary Church in Newfoundland, Pennsylvania, led by Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon.

As in all religions, there have been schisms in the Unification Church both before and after the death of Reverend Moon in 2012. The Sanctuary Church’s political activities are certainly controversial. Whether they did anything illegal on January 6 is a different question: being near the Capitol on “the day of the insurrection” and participating in the attack are two different things, and as far as we know no member of Sean Moon’s group has been accused of any crime in connection with the protests. Be it as it may be, the Sanctuary Church is certainly not part of the movement led by Mrs. Moon. The two organizations are separated by harsh criticism and even court cases (Chryssides 2017). Using the activities of the Sanctuary Church to slander Mrs. Moon’s organization is just bad journalism.

Just as it is highly questionable to use the widespread political opposition to ex-President Trump as a weapon against the Unification movement.

However, the main problem of the article is that it calls a rally organized by the UPF “a conference of the Unification Church.” Is this correct? Are the Universal Peace Federation and the Unification Church, derogatorily called in France “la secte Moon,” one and the same? The purpose of this White Paper is to clarify the issue, which has broader implications going beyond the Unification Movement.

### *A Hermeneutics of Suspicion*

In 1965, French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) published *De l'Interprétation* (Ricœur 1965), translated into English in 1970 as *Freud and Philosophy* (Ricœur 1970). He coined there the expression “school of suspicion” (école du soupçon: Ricœur 1965, 40) and described a hermeneutics of suspicion created by three “masters of suspicion”: Karl Marx (1818–1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) (Ricœur 1965, 40). Because of the widespread influence of these three ideologists, many came to believe that beyond philosophy, culture, and the arts there are always “hidden” and unconfessed motivations connected to class (Marx), power (Nietzsche), or sexuality (Freud). Philosophers, poets, and artists can claim that their aim is to seek the truth or produce beauty, but in fact we may suspect that these claims are false and they are directly or indirectly producing propaganda for the social class they belong to, seeking power, or trying to satisfy their sexual desires.

Ricœur was a Protestant Christian. He believed that the hermeneutics of suspicion was primarily aimed at the “destruction of religion” (Ricœur 1965, 41), by reducing it to “something else” (autre chose) and accusing religionists of “dissimulation” (Ricœur 1965, 17). What many regard as the charitable works of religions, the “masters of suspicion” argued, in fact “dissimulate” “something else,” i.e., their leaders’ and members’ quest for hegemony, power, and sometimes illicit sex.

William Sargant (1907–1988), a leading British psychiatrist, was the scholar who tried to offer scientific evidence that religions’ charitable works disguised motivations of manipulation and power. The notion of “brainwashing” had been

originally coined by American propaganda to explain how the Soviets and the Chinese were able to “convert” jailed opponents and prisoners of war to Communism (Anthony 1996; Introvigne 2022). In his 1957 book *The Battle for the Mind*, Sargant used it to argue that while pretending to promote charity and work for peace all religions were subtly manipulating their devotees and recruiting new converts (Sargant 1957).

Sargant, who disliked organized religion (saving only ancient paganism), claimed that all religions dissimulated ulterior motives behind their charitable work: indeed, his main examples were Roman Catholicism and Methodism. Although influential in some psychiatric circles, not surprisingly Sargant’s work met with the strong opposition of religionists and a good part of the public opinion, which in the late 1950s was not prepared to accept that mainline Christian organizations were not sincere.

Sargant’s work was, however, brought to fruition in the United States by a clinical psychologist, Margaret Thaler Singer (1921–2003), who claimed that the hermeneutics of suspicion presented in *The Battle for the Mind* did not apply to all religious organizations but only to some she labeled as “cults.” Religions are sincere in their endeavors, Singer argued, including when they promote peace and charitable activities. “Cults” are manipulative groups, and their organizations allegedly promoting peace, culture, or charity are just “fronts” whose aim is to recruit new members for the “cultic” groups (Singer and Lalich 1995).

Singer’s preferred example of a “cult” whose cultural and public welfare organizations were in fact dishonest “fronts” was the Unification Church, and in fact she worked as an expert witness against that church in most court cases involving Reverend Moon’s organization.

Singer’s theories were debunked by scholars of new religious movements, who convincingly argued that the criteria she proposed for distinguishing between sincere religions and “cults” were vague, and dissimulated a judgement on beliefs (Introvigne 2022). Religions whose beliefs were not part of the mainline, or disapproved of by the anti-cult movement with which Singer was closely aligned, including the Unification Church, were labeled as “cults.” As one of Singer’s main critics, American sociologist David Bromley, wrote, when one group is labeled a “cult,” its “civic projects are deemed public relations stunts, and organizational affiliates are derisively labeled front groups” (Bromley 1998, 42).

Eventually, American courts of law realized that Singer's theory of "cults" was not accepted by most scholars of new religious movements as part of mainline science, and her testimony was excluded with the 1990 *Fishman* decision from cases involving new religions (United States District Court for the Northern District of California 1990). However, while defeated in American courts, Singer's ideas about manipulation by "cults" and charitable and peace organizations as "fronts" for the "cults" survived in Europe, and certainly remained popular in the media.

### *The Universal Peace Federation*

Many new (and old) religious movements are "millennialist," meaning that they believe a totally different, transfigured world will soon replace our present one. The word "millennialism" comes from the idea of a peaceful kingdom that will last on earth for one thousand years found in the Christian Bible, but has been adapted to non-Christian contexts as well.

American scholar Catherine Wessinger distinguished between two different forms of millennialism. A "catastrophic" millennialism believes that God will force the Millennium on humans through punishments and disasters. A "progressive" millennialism teaches that the Millennium will come when a sufficient number of humans will cooperate with God, seeking a better world on earth and promoting peace with sincerity (Wessinger 1997).

Most new religions that originated in Eastern Asia believe in "progressive" millennialism (although some embrace the "catastrophic" variety). Scholars note that, even when they are Christian, they are influenced by local prophecies and ideas that the world will go through a "Great Transformation" (called in Korea *gabyeok*), and that humans should cooperate and prepare this transfiguration through their good work (Baker 2008, 120).

Many founders of new religions in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have also established organizations promoting world peace and global social development. For those East Asian new religions that have a Christian origin, this is not surprising. The Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations have created dozens of larger and smaller organizations promoting peace, justice, and social welfare. Most of them include members of different religions. One would

rarely hear that Caritas Internationalis, the mammoth organization created by the Catholic Church for social development and welfare, is a “front” for Roman Catholicism.

In East Asia, both Christian and non-Christian new religions, share the idea, which is rooted in the traditional local culture, that working for peace and for the well-being of all human beings (not only one’s co-religionists) is part of personal self-cultivation. It is also the best way of preparing the advent of a transformed world, what Wessinger calls “progressive millennialism.”

The Unification Church, as a Christian new religious movement founded in Korea, derives both from the history of Christianity and from local religious traditions the idea of promoting world peace through dialogue, culture, and social development. The case of the Unification Church and the UPF is not isolated. Almost all East Asian new religions have promoted world peace organizations. And almost all these organizations have been accused of being “fronts” for what their opponents call “cults.”

Reverend Moon and his wife were hardly unique among East Asian religious leaders in establishing organizations promoting peace and dialogue. They were Koreans, and the tragedy of the Korean War had been a fundamental component of their experience. Initially, the aim of some of the organizations they promoted was to alert the world about the danger of Communism. However, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century was coming to an end, Reverend Moon and his wife recognized the changed international context, and emphasized reconciliation rather than confrontation.

In 1982, Reverend Moon founded the *Washington Times* in Washington DC as a newspaper exposing Soviet-style Communism and balancing what he saw as the leftist leanings of the *Washington Post*. With the end of the Cold War, it has become somewhat less militant, and has opened its columns to op-eds by American activists and politicians of different persuasions, while maintaining an emphasis on traditional family values and religious liberty that continues to make it a conservative daily.

On April 16, 1990, Reverend and Mrs. Moon met Russian President Gorbachev, and Reverend Moon embraced Gorbachev in front of the photographers. In December 1991, they visited North Korea and met President Kim Il-sung (1912–1994). To fully understand the significance of this meeting,

one should remember that Reverend Moon had been imprisoned and tortured under Kim's regime between 1946 and 1950.

The meaning of the meetings with Gorbachev and Kim was not merely political. Reverend Moon's theology assumed that the Biblical pairs of Cain and Abel and Esau and Jacob were complementary, in the sense that both members of each pair had a role to play. Meeting Kim and Gorbachev symbolically represented the unification of the Cain and Abel sides, which ended with a reconciliation, interpreted as the reunion between Esau and Jacob. On the other hand, while theology supplied the deeper motivations of such meetings, the Moons also expected that they would advance the cause of world peace.

In a way, Reverend Moon believed that by returning in 1991 to the same place in North Korea where he had started his work in 1951, he could now conclude his mission and pass the torch to his wife. She would soon found the Women's Federation for World Peace, and proclaim the beginning of an "era of women's liberation" (see Introvigne 2000, 19).

However, this did not mean that women activities became the sole, nor the main, focus of the Moons' peace activities. Several other organizations continued to operate, and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) was founded in 2005, followed among others by the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace, in 2017. The UPF inaugural tour started in 2005 and reached 120 cities around the world.

Large UPF conferences gathered former (and sometimes current) presidents and prime ministers of different countries, as well as religious and cultural leaders. These gatherings included the Continental Africa Peace Summit 2018, inaugurated in Dakar, Senegal on January 18, 2018; the South-East Europe Peace Summit, opened in Tirana, Albania, on October 26, 2019; the Asia Pacific Summit, which started in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on November 19, 2019; the Africa Continental Summit Niger 2019, whose opening ceremony was held in Niamey, Niger, on November 28, 2019; the World Summit 2019 in Seoul, South Korea, on February 7–9, 2019; the World Summit 2020, which also took place in Seoul on February 3–8, 2020. Regional meetings were also organized, including the recent Balkans Leadership Conference, organized in Tirana, Albania, on November 20–21, 2021, which led to the signature of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the UPF and the Podgorica Club, an

organization established in 2019 by former presidents of Southeast European countries.

The UPF is active through a number of specialized organizations, each of which holds its own events:

- The International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP)
- The International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP)
- The International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP)
- The Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD)
- The International Media Association for Peace (IMAP)
- The International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP)
- The International Association for Peace and Economic Development (IAED)

The International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) was launched on February 15, 2016, at the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea. It gathers parliamentarians from all around the world, and organizes forums promoting peace and democracy, and fighting corruption. National meetings of IAPP members have been organized in such diverse locations as Manila, London, Rome and Asunción, and the association has emerged as one of the largest and most active branches of the UPF. In the United States, the inaugural meeting was hosted by then pro tempore President of the Senate, Orrin Hatch.

The Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) has been launched on November 13, 2017, in Seoul, as a partner association of IAPP. More than 60,000 attended the event at the Seoul World Cup Stadium. The idea behind IAPD is that the aims pursued by the IAPP parliamentarians, and by UPF in general, also have a spiritual dimension, and that dialogue between religions is a necessary pre-condition for peace. Regional meetings have gathered representatives of most major religions.

The International Summit Council for Peace (ISCP) was launched on February 8, 2019, during the UPF 2019 World Summit in Seoul. Its purpose is to gather together current and former heads of state and government. At the inaugural meeting, former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and former U.S. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich were the keynote speakers. Among those present were the former President of Paraguay, Luis Federico Franco Gómez, the former

President of Albania, Alfred Moisiu, the former President of Ghana, Jerry John Rawlings (1947–2020), and the current President of São Tomé and Príncipe, Evaristo Carvalho. A second assembly was organized on February 4, 2020, in Seoul.

The International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP) was launched on February 5, 2020, at the UPF World Summit 2020 in Seoul, in partnership with the Women’s Federation for World Peace. Among those who spoke at the inaugural event were Fionnuala Kenny, wife of the former prime minister of Ireland, Sujata Koirala, former deputy prime minister and foreign minister of Nepal, and the former first ladies of Nigeria, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, as well as the current first ladies of Nauru and Palau.

The UPF World Summit 2020 was also the opportunity to launch the International Media Association for Peace (IMAP), on February 2, 2020, the International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP) on February 5, 2020, and, at the same date, the International Association for Peace and Economic Development (IAED). They cater to three communities UPF identifies as equally important for its aims: journalists, academics, and business leaders.

There are several other initiatives and organizations that are also part of the UPF network. Some of them continue projects that Reverend Moon and his wife had started before the foundation of UPF in 2005. Moon and some of his co-workers had a long-lasting interest in soccer, and programs such as the “Peace Cup” and “Football for Peace” look at sport as a tool to promote international dialogue and friendship. Other projects pursue charitable and ecological endeavors, including cleaning and development projects around Lake Baikal and other areas in Russia. At the UK Parliament, a “UPF Young Achievers Award” has been organized since 2010 as an annual event, where the youth involved receive their awards from their own parliamentarians.

The “Peace Road” is an old visionary project by Reverend Moon, who dreamed about connecting Eurasia and America by land through a tunnel in Alaska, and Japan and Korea through another tunnel. Beyond these difficult projects, the World Peace Road Foundation’s idea of an “international highway” maintains that making the world more connected through tunnels, bridges, highways, and railways, is one of the ways of making it more peaceful. Parenthetically, these projects constantly insist on the equal dignity and rights of all women and men, and make accusations of “racism” sometimes directed by anti-cultists against the Unification Church leaders involved in the UPF ludicrous.

The Sunhak Peace Prize Foundation awards, normally every two years, \$1 million to laureates who contributed to the creation of peace for future generations. In its first edition, in 2015, the prize went to Kiribati's President and international environmental activist Anote Tong and Indian biologist Modadugu Bijai Gupta, whose research and activities are regarded as crucial for addressing the problem of world hunger.

The main engine making the UPF projects work is the impressive network of Ambassadors for Peace, more than 100,000 volunteers from 160 countries who work to promote the different UPF events and organizations. They come from all religions, and the vast majority of the Ambassadors of Peace are not part of the Unification Church.

#### *A Case Study: The UPF World Summit 2020*

To illustrate how the UPF and its network of organizations work in practice, an analysis of the UPF World Summit 2020 may offer an interesting case study. The event was held in Seoul on February 3–5, 2020, a few weeks before the COVID crisis made traveling and large gatherings impossible. Some participants, however, did cancel their participation at the last minute due to the epidemic, including President Macky Sall of Senegal, who sent a video and was awarded one of the Sunhak Peace Prizes. Some 6,000 delegates from 170 countries were nonetheless able to attend the inaugural ceremony. Some 2,500 participated in the following plenary sessions and breakouts, where more than 300 presented papers or responses (“World Summit 2020 Executive Summary 2020”, 14).

The event featured plenary sessions and sessions of the different organizations of the UPF network. Among the main speakers were the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon (who was also awarded a Sunhak Peace Prize), the President of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen, the Mexican scientist Mario J. Molina, who was a co-recipient of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his role in discovering the threat to the Earth's ozone layer from chlorofluorocarbon, the Vice President of the Philippines Maria Leonor Robredo, the Prime Minister of Niger, Brigi Rafini, the former President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso (and several former European Presidents and Prime Ministers), the Mayor of Seoul, Park Won-soon (1995–

2020), the Vice President of Myanmar, Henry Van Thio. Interestingly, North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un sent a large floral arrangement with his greetings. President and Mrs. Trump also sent a greeting message.

In analyzing the event, four comments are important for the purpose of this White Paper. First, there was no attempt to hide or downplay the fact that the UPF was founded by Reverend and Mrs. Moon, and the leading role Mrs. Moon still plays in it. On the contrary, the official program of the conference featured a banquet to introduce Mrs. Moon's autobiography (*Moon 2020*), all the material introducing the event insisted on the fact that the Moons were the founders of the UPF, and the Summit's official declaration

acknowledge[d] respectfully the leadership of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon and her late husband, Rev. Sun Myung Moon [...], and their great vision of peace of one family under God, an idea they strove to achieve throughout their lives ("World Summit 2020 Peace Declaration," 16).

Indeed, many of the luminaries who spoke at the Summit mentioned and thanked Reverend and Mrs. Moon. Any claim that they were "misled" and participated in a "front" event of the Unification Church without knowing it is, thus, totally unfounded.

Second, except for the speeches of those UPF leaders who are also members of the Unification Church, some of them part of the Moon family, references to the theology of Reverend Moon and his wife were surprisingly scarce. Clearly, the event did not have among its purposes to advertise or promote the Unificationist theology, or proselytize for the Unification Church, which would have been both difficult and inappropriate considering how many leaders of different religions participated in the Summit, including Bishop Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation, as well as Orthodox bishops and distinguished Catholic priests and theologians.

Third, there was no intention to promote a particular political position or ideology. President Trump sent his greetings, but so did North Korea's Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un. Jimmy Morales from Guatemala and Newt Gingrich are conservative politicians, but Cambodia's Hun Sen and former Prime Minister of Portugal and President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso represent different incarnations of Socialism. None of them presented their respective ideologies at the Summit. They all understood the rules of the game, and presented papers on subjects of general interest such as the threats of climate

change and terrorism, interreligious dialogue, and the role and possible reform of the United Nations—the latter a theme on which UPF’s original contribution has been often acknowledged by scholars and politicians alike.

A conference with several hundred papers cannot avoid differences in quality, and an event on world peace always includes a certain dose of rhetoric and self-congratulation. The World Summit 2020 was no exception, yet many papers were valuable by both political and academic standards. For its richness of diverse perspectives and deep analysis of the issues in a good number of papers, the World Summit 2020 compared favorably to many other similar conferences, including those organized by the United Nations and other international bodies.

Fourth, the event introduced and emphasized in several sessions the theme of the peaceful unification of Korea. It was clear that the issue was in the minds and hearts of the organizers. It was also clear that the adjective “peaceful” was not included in vain, and that aggressive attitudes against North Korea were carefully avoided. Korean unification is a tricky theme. Most papers avoided rhetoric and proposed common sense approaches many could agree with.

### *Conclusion: Why Do They Do It?*

The UPF is a huge network, and the Ambassadors for Peace come from very different nations, cultures, and religions. Those who have studied such organizations know that it is difficult, if not impossible, to gather a large number of diverse people under the flag of a common ideology.

Yet, if there is no full-blown ideology, there are certainly values proposed by the UPF. A basic idea is that world peace comes through dialogue, cooperation, service to others, and actions guided by morality. Obviously, the UPF is aware of the fact that in our pluralistic society very different ideas of morality coexist. The UPF tries to promote the general principle that morality has a spiritual dimension, and we are all part of “one human family under God.” This may in fact displease atheists, although dialogue with humanists and atheists is not excluded from the scope of UPF activities.

The formula “one human family under God” is part of Reverend Moon’s legacy, as is an emphasis on the family as the school where love and peace can be learned. However, the formula can be interpreted differently by Unificationists

and non-Unificationists. Members of the Unification Church conceive the “one family” as a community acknowledging Reverend and Mrs. Moon as the True Parents, with a messianic role for our era. On the other hand, acknowledging the messianic role of the Moons is not necessary to believe that we are all part of one human family and should behave as such. This is an ideal that may appeal to women and men of all faiths.

One should not confuse the motivations of those promoting certain charitable and peace activities with the nature and effects of those activities. To use again an example we mentioned previously, the Vatican executives and Catholic priests who launched and lead Caritas Internationalis were and are motivated by a Christian idea of responsibility toward the poor, whom they consider as daughters and sons of God who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. We may also speculate that those Catholic bishops and priests who work today for Caritas hope that their good deeds would benefit the image of the Catholic Church, which has received its good share of negative publicity on other issues. On the other hand, the rules of Caritas Internationalis strictly stipulate that the delivery of humanitarian aid should not be used as a proselytization tool for converting non-Catholics to Catholicism, many who are not Catholics work with Caritas, and its activities are generally praised as highly effective.

Similarly, those Unificationists who lead UPF, work for UPF, and donate to UPF (for which contributions by private donors, both members and non-members of the Unification Movement, are important) are certainly motivated by Reverend and Mrs. Moon’s spiritual ideas. They do not hide it, as our analysis of the 2020 event demonstrated. They are also aware that the UPF events benefit the image of Mrs. Moon as a leader with valuable ideas about international issues, which can be appreciated also by many who do not share her theology. On the other hand, it is also true that most of the UPF volunteers and Ambassadors for Peace are not members of the Unification Church, and that the UPF is not intended nor used by its Unificationist members as a tool for proselytism.

Nor is UPF used to promote partisan political ideologies or parties. The expression “*reductio ad Hitlerum*” is widely used to indicate that to discredit certain movements or politicians their opponents try to associate them, rightly or wrongly, with Nazism. Today it may appear sometimes that there is also a “*reductio ad Trump*.” The former American President is so unpopular among many mainline media that it seems that to disqualify an organization it is enough

to associate it with Trump. This is what happened to UPF after the 2021 Rally of Hope. Attacks based on Trump's video participation in the event were either misinformed or malicious. Politicians of all political persuasions participated in this and other UPF events. And, whatever the opinion one may have of Trump, in a conference discussing the relationships between other countries and North Korea, inviting a former American President who had been very much involved in Korean issues should not have been surprising.

In the end, we are left with two irreconcilable narratives about UPF. One is that it is an NGO and think tank whose events are attended by prestigious leaders such as Ban Ki-moon and José Manuel Barroso, and which offers interesting position papers, lectures, and documents on international peace and development issues, including on the relations between North and South Korea. As many other similar organizations, it has been promoted and is led by religionists who do not hide their religious motivations. However, it includes many who do not share their religious beliefs, and is not used as a tool for proselytization. For purposes of converting others to Unificationist theology, the UPF would be a very ineffective tool. Those invited to the UPF activities are mostly political, religious and civil society leaders with well-established ideas and worldviews. They are as far away as possible from the ideal type of the “seeker” looking for a new religion.

This narrative is shared by two organizations unlikely to be engaged in the promotion of “fronts” for “cults”: the United Nations and the Vatican. Many new religious movements created charitable and peace-promoting organizations. If they are active enough, and no member state of the United Nations decides to oppose them, they can achieve a Special Consultative Status at the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) of the U.N. As of January 7, 2022, there were 5,003 organizations with special consultative status at the ECOSOC. However, there were only 140 NGOs with general consultative status (ECOSOC 2022).

General consultative status is reserved, according to the ECOSOC, to “fairly large, established international NGOs with a broad geographical reach,” which have offered “substantive and sustained contributions” to the aims of the United Nations in “several fields.” In 2018, the UPF was granted general consultative status at the ECOSOC, a position that certainly is not allowed lightly and without a long and accurate observation and evaluation.

Leaders of NGOs and even of new religious movements routinely ask to be received in the Vatican, and have a photo opportunity with the Pope. If they have

sponsors the Vatican wants to accommodate, they are normally invited to participate in the general audiences, where the Pope meets collectively hundreds of people (and may take pictures with some of them).

Private audiences are an entirely different matter, and go through a very complicated process of screening. The Vatican is aware that some organizations may use meetings and pictures for publicity purposes. When a meeting is approved by the Vatican's Secretariat of State, and by the Pope himself, that it happened is publicized through the daily bulletin of the Holy See. The Holy See bulletin for July 1, 2019, duly reported that Pope Francis had met in a private audience "Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, President of the Universal Peace Federation" (Ufficio Stampa della Santa Sede 2019).

Both at the United Nations and in the Vatican, the UPF passed the highest level of screening tests. It would be unconceivable that the skilled U.N. and Vatican diplomats involved were not aware of the connection of the UPF with Reverend and Mrs. Moon. Yet, they concluded, in our opinion correctly, that the UPF was not a proselytizing or publicity arm of the Unification Church but a respected NGO that had proved its usefulness and quality throughout the years.

The second narrative, of which *Paris Match* offered an example, is that the UPF is not what it claims to be but is just a "front" for the "Moon cult" (secte Moon), which hides proselytizing and advertising aims under a façade of care for international issues and humanitarian aid.

This White Paper should have persuaded our readers that the second narrative is both unfair and factually false. It is unfair because similar peace and cultural activities by mainline religions do not receive the same criticism. It is taken for granted that their activities on behalf of peace, dialogue, and social welfare are promoted in good faith, out of a sincere desire for a better world, rather than for self-promotion or proselytization purposes. Only the activities of new religious movements are accused of dissimulating hidden motivations.

Thus, a vicious circle is created. If new religious movements only spend their time in missionary and religious activities, it is objected that this is typical of "cults," while "real" religions care for larger issues and help fellow human beings. If they engage in charitable, social, or cultural activities, it is argued that these are only "fronts" for proselytization and publicity.

The theory that the UPF organizes its activities for proselytization purposes on behalf of the Unification Church is also factually false, and open to empirical disconfirmation. To the best of our knowledge none of the presidents, prime ministers, Nobel Prize laureates, religious leaders, and other participants in the UPF activities converted to the Unification Church. Not only is this theoretically unlikely. It simply did not happen in practice. It would also be difficult to argue that, because of the UPF activities, those who accuse the Unification Church of being “a cult” became less aggressive, and indeed the contrary may well be true.

The conclusion seems to us unescapable. The UPF is an organization that has been founded by Reverend and Mrs. Moon and maintains members of the Unification Church among its leaders, but is supported by the volunteer work of tens of thousands who in their majority are not Unificationists. Its purpose is not to convert others to the Unification Church, nor to support any partisan political perspective, but to promote high-level discussions about issues connected with world peace, and support in different ways charitable and humanitarian initiatives.

The quality of its work has been recognized, inter alia by the United Nations and the Vatican. To regard the world leaders who participate in its conferences and the more than 100,000 Ambassadors for Peace as “puppets” of a “cult” is more than offensive. It is a ridiculous theory, the fruit of the very bigotry and prejudices international organizations and friends of peace and dialogue should work tirelessly to eliminate.

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Note: We have also consulted the collections of the magazine *UPF Today: Innovative Approaches to Peace*, and of the journal *Dialogue & Alliance: A Journal of the Universal Peace Federation*, as well as leaflets and flyers issued by the UPF. We also relied on interviews with UPF volunteers in New York, Paris, and Seoul; and some of us attended UPF events in various countries.

## Research Notes

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### ISA RC-22 Vilnius Conference Papers on New Religious and Spiritual Movements in Taiwan, Transitional Justice, and the Tai Ji Men Case

*The Research Committee on Sociology of Religion (RC-22) of the International Sociological Association (ISA) held on November 11–14, 2021, in Vilnius, Lithuania, its mid-term conference, on the theme “Religion, Politics, and Uncertainty: Shifting Boundaries.” Session 4 of the conference was devoted to “Religion and Politics in China and Taiwan.” Besides including an unrelated paper by Lithuanian scholar Tadas Snuiškis, from Vilnius University, on the Consciousness-Only school of Buddhism in China, the session presented four papers related to the question of new religions and spiritual movements in Taiwan, transitional justice, and the Tai Ji Men case. The session was chaired and introduced by Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson, from Vilnius University. We publish the texts of Massimo Introvigne, Chen Yi-Jing, Rosita Šorytė, and Tsai Cheng-An.*

### The Anti-Xie-Jiao Tradition, Taiwanese Governments, and Minority Religions

Massimo Introvigne

*Center for Studies on New Religions*

maxintrovigne@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** Scholars are familiar with the expression *xie jiao* (“heterodox teachings,” sometimes translated as “evil cults”) in contemporary Mainland China, where it identifies religious movements banned and heavily persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party. However, the notion of *xie jiao* dates back to the Middle Ages, was codified in legal texts of late Ming era, and was adopted by Nationalist China before Mao’s victory in the Civil War. It passed also to Taiwan, where some religious movements labeled *xie jiao* were persecuted until the end of the Martial Law period in 1987 and beyond. In fact, a crackdown against several new religious and spiritual movements happened in 1996, during the post-authoritarian period. Its consequences are still at work, as one of the cases deriving from the 1996 events, the Tai Ji Men case, is not solved to this date.

**KEYWORDS:** *Xie Jiao*, *Xie Jiao* in Taiwan, Anti-Cult Movement, Anti-Cult Movement in Taiwan, New Religions in Taiwan, Tai Ji Men.

On September 30, 1949, the day before he started his 27-year term as the first Premier of Communist China, Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) led the 3,000 delegates of the First Conference of Chinese Political Consultation to Tiananmen Square, where they broke ground for the Monument to the People’s Heroes. After Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong (1893–1976) himself spoke. He described the eight bas-reliefs to be constructed for the monument, honoring eight Chinese revolutions (Zhang 2009). The second was to celebrate the Jintian Uprising of 1851, when Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864) started what will become the Taiping Rebellion.

In the following years, Mao personally ordered to celebrate Hong and the Taiping through monuments, museums, novels, and theatrical plays, soon to be supplemented by television series (Weller 1987; Boer 2016b). The celebration of the Taiping has been continued by all Mao’s successors, including President Xi Jinping (Boer 2016a; Boer 2019, 183–99).

That Mao and the Chinese Communist Party celebrate Hong contrasts with how the founder of the Taiping movement was seen in Imperial China and by 19<sup>th</sup> century Western politicians and scholars, including Karl Marx (1818–1883: Little 2009; Thakur 2020). Unlike Mao, Marx moved from an initial sympathy (Marx 1853) to a very negative view of the Taiping (Marx 1862).

Hong proclaimed himself the younger brother of Jesus, married eighty-eight wives, and had those of them who displeased him or forgot they should constantly smile beheaded. The war to eradicate the Heavenly Kingdom he managed to establish costed China between 30 and 70 million deaths (Michael and Chang 1966–71; Spence 1996). Although some Western historians have re-evaluated Hong’s religious creativity (Kilcourse 2016), in modern journalistic jargon he would be the quintessential “cult” leader. In Imperial China, the Taiping were considered a stereotypical example of a *xie jiao*, a word often translated in English as “evil cult” but whose exact meaning is the subject matter of this paper.

Mao, who launched the first great campaign to eradicate the *xie jiao* in Communist China, arresting in the 1950s more than 13 million members of Yiguandao and other religious movements (Shao 1997, 452–55), regarded the Taiping as a patriotic proto-Communist movement. Indeed, calling the Taiping a *xie jiao* remains forbidden in contemporary Mainland China. For different reasons, considering them good Han Chinese rebelling against the foreign Manchu Qing dynasty, Chinese nationalists, from Sun Yat-Sen (1886–1925),

who even nicknamed himself “Hong Xiuquan the second,” to Chiang Kai-Shek (1887–1975), also considered the Taiping a legitimate patriotic movement rather than a *xie jiao* (Bohr 2009, 16).

The same contrasting judgments have been formulated for the xenophobic and anti-Christian movement of the Boxers, exterminated by the foreign forces of the Eight-Nation Alliance in 1900 and 1901 after it had killed some 30,000 missionaries and Chinese Christians. In 2021, a controversial book calling the Boxers a *xie jiao* written by Chinese dissident Liu Qikun and published in Taiwan (Liu 2021) was banned in Hong Kong. The new National Security Law was quoted, and the fact that offending the Boxers, regarded as good patriots, and labeling them a *xie jiao* is forbidden in Mainland China (Kwok and Ye 2021).

By mentioning these examples, I am not suggesting any conclusion about either the Taiping or the Boxers. My point here is to show that the label *xie jiao* has a strong political content, something that is important for understanding the anti-xie-jiao campaigns both in Mainland China and in Taiwan.

In 2020, Zhang Xinzhang, a professor at the School of Marxism of Zhejiang University, published an article on the meaning of *xie jiao*, which he said originated from conversations with the undersigned after he had read some of my articles on the issue and had visited me in Italy. Zhang stated that it is a mistake to translate *xie jiao* as “cults” or “evil cults.” To him, these translations are misleading. He recommended not to translate *xie jiao*, and to simply transliterate it, as scholars normally do for *qigong* or *kung fu* (Zhang 2020, 93–4).

The main argument used by Zhang was political. He noted that the core feature of the *xie jiao* in China is to be perceived as hostile to the government and dangerous for social stability and harmony, which is not necessarily part of the meaning of the word “cult” in English. I believe that another strong argument in support of his idea not to translate *xie jiao* comes from history, as evidenced by the studies of Wu Junqing (Wu 2016, 2017).

Translating *xie jiao* as “cults” is anachronistic. *Jiao* means “teachings” and *xie* means “twisted,” “bent,” and when applied to ideas “incorrect” or “wrong.” This application predates the Christian era. However, the compound *xie jiao* was first used by an identifiable historical figure, Fu Yi (555–639), a Taoist intellectual and Tang courtier. Fu was persuaded that Buddhism was a mortal threat for China and should be eradicated altogether, if necessary by exterminating Chinese

Buddhists. In two texts written in 621 and 624, he explained why this was necessary and Buddhism was a *xie jiao*, a newly coined term indicating “heterodox teachings” (Wu 2016, 8–9; Wright 1951).

Already in the first use of the term by Fu Yi, we may see that theological criticism of Buddhism was secondary. For Fu, the two key features of a *xie jiao* are not theological. First, a *xie jiao* does not recognize the absolute authority of the Emperor and does not support the state. Second, *xie jiao* are expression of a “barbarian wizardry” which is not part of the great Chinese religious tradition. Fu had nothing against magic in general. In fact, he was the Great Astrologer of the Tang court. What he meant was that Buddhism was using *black* magic (Wright 1951).

While, as we all know, Buddhism was finally not eradicated in China, although it was periodically persecuted, the Medieval Song and Yuan dynasties continued to use *xie jiao* to indicate movements they planned to eliminate, including the elusive “White Lotus.” The group was frequently prohibited by Chinese Emperors but, according to Dutch scholar Barend ter Haar, may never have existed as such. “White Lotus” was rather a label affixed to different and unrelated movements the state had decided to eradicate for political reasons (ter Haar 1992). The two features of a *xie jiao* remained being perceived as anti-government and being accused of using black magic, including raising goblins and casting malevolent spells (Wu 2017).

It was during the late Ming era that the prohibition of *xie jiao*, with the death penalty for those involved in its activities, was officially legislated, and movements were officially declared *xie jiao* first at the local and then at the national scale (Wu 2017, 94–6). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they included once again the White Lotus, and Christianity as a whole. Christians were also accused of practicing black magic, including tearing out the eyes and internal organs of children and using them in alchemical rituals (Folk 2017, 101). The Qing dynasty “repeated almost verbatim” the Ming provisions against the *xie jiao* (Seiwert and Ma 2003, 457).

Later, the case of Christianity continued to prove that listing a religion as a *xie jiao* or removing it from the corresponding list largely obeyed to political motivations. The Qing listed Christianity as a *xie jiao* in 1725 but took it off the list in 1842 due to pressures by the Western powers (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 27–31).

Nationalist China, Communist Mainland China, and Taiwan did not invent the category of *xie jiao* but inherited it from a century-old tradition, which had very little to do with Western controversies about “cults” (Melton 2021). I have written extensively about the campaigns against *xie jiao* in Communist China (Introvigne 2020), and article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code, which makes it a crime punished with substantial jail penalties “using” a *xie jiao*, i.e., being active in a group included in the list of the banned movements in any capacity (Introvigne, Richardson, and Šorytė 2019). I would not deal further with the People’s Republic of China in this paper.

Rather, I would like to insist on the fact that fighting *xie jiao* was not a feature distinguishing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from its nationalist counterpart, the Kuomintang. Certainly the CCP’s struggle against the *xie jiao* cannot be compared quantitatively to the parallel struggle by the Kuomintang, if we consider the number of those arrested and executed. However, from a theoretical point of view, both Sun Yat-Sen and Chiang Kai-Shek shared with Mao the idea that *xie jiao* should be eradicated.

Chinese nationalism was born as a progressive ideology of modernization, and *xie jiao* were seen as “superstitious organizations” (*mixin jiguan*) resisting modernity and progress (Wu 2017, 132–35). Although as scholars such as David Ownby (2016, 2020) and David Palmer (2008) have noted, nationalist governments in Mainland China were consistently busy with other priorities and never managed to develop the effective anti-xie-jiao apparatus that Mao was able to build since the 1950s, their ideologists continued to call for crackdowns on the *xie jiao*, and sometimes they were heard. In 1927, for instance, one of the largest new religious movements that existed in China, Tongshanshe, was the victim of one such crackdowns (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 104).

Spirit-writing religions, i.e. groups that obtained their sacred texts from spirits through forms of automatic writing, such as Daoyuan and Wushanshe, were also persecuted (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 104).

After the Communist victory in China’s Civil War, the Kuomintang leaders moved to Taiwan, where they established the Republic of China led by Chiang Kai-Shek. In the 1950s, members of groups persecuted in Mainland China as *xie jiao*, including the spirit-writing religions (Jordan and Overmyer 1986) and the most targeted movement in that decade, Yiguandao, escaped in significant

numbers to Taiwan (Irons 2017), although they knew the Kuomintang was also hostile to them.

During the Martial Law period, i.e., between 1949 and 1987, Yiguandao was indeed subject to surveillance and periodical crackdowns in Taiwan. It was also falsely accused of practicing black magic (Laliberté 2009, 63). Other movements subjected to crackdowns in the Martial Law period were those whose headquarters were in Japan, including Tenrikyo and Soka Gakkai, as the memory of fighting the Japanese was very much alive in the Kuomintang elite (Laliberté 2009, 62–3).

It should be remembered that Chiang Kai-Shek himself had converted to Christianity, and saw American-style Protestant Christianity as both a modernizing and an anti-Communist force (Bae 2009). However, this applied to mainline Christianity only. Non-mainline Christian new religious movements were easily accused of being *xie jiao*. As Tsai Cheng-An evidenced, in 1974 a violent crackdown targeted The New Testament Church, a Pentecostal movement founded by Christian Hong Kong movie star Mui Yee (1923–1966), whose headquarters had been moved after the founder's death in 1966 to Mount Zion, near Kaohsiung, in Taiwan (Tsai 2021, 73–4).

After the Mount Zion community had been disbanded by the 1974 crackdown, a second and equally violent raid, where devotees were badly beaten and some died, targeted members of The New Testament Church around Taiwan in 1985. Only protests by American Pentecostals and the intervention of the U.S. government ended the persecution (Tsai 2021, 74).

The Kuomintang had also developed a mutually supporting relationship with BAROC, the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China, allowing the government to claim that notwithstanding the Martial Law it was a friend and patron of religion. However, the authority of BAROC was eroded by independent Buddhist masters and new movements, which often advocated democracy and social justice and were thus at least implicitly critical of the government (Laliberté 2009, 64–5).

This was one of the reasons leading to a renewed persecution of groups labeled *xie jiao* in the post-authoritarian phase of Taiwan. Martial Law was lifted in 1987, but the Kuomintang largely maintained its power, and only from 2016 has

Taiwan had both a President and a majority in the Parliament not affiliated with nor including the Kuomintang.

Taiwanese voters were first allowed to elect their President in 1996. Some leaders of religious movements believed that democracy implied that they were free to express their support for the presidential candidates who opposed the reelection of Kuomintang's President Lee Teng-Hui (1923–2020). One of these candidates was Chen Lu-An, a disciple of Master Hsing Yun, the abbot of the large Buddhist order Fo Guang Shan. The abbot openly promoted Chen as a presidential candidate, as did Master Wei Jue (1928–2016), the leader of another Buddhist order, Chung Tai Shan (Laliberté 2009, 65).

Eventually, the Kuomintang candidate Lee was reelected, and his Justice Minister Liao Zheng-Hao (1946–2022) carried out a purge against the religious movements that had not supported Lee. In addition to Fo Guang Shan and Chung Tai Shan, the crackdown on groups labeled as *xie jiao* targeted the Taiwan Zen Buddhist Association (later the Shakyamuni Buddhist Foundation), founded by Zen Master Wu Jue Miao-Tian, the *menpai* (similar to a “school”) of *qigong*, self-cultivation, and martial arts Tai Ji Men (see Chen's paper in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*), and the Sung Chi-Li Miracle Association, a new Taiwanese religion whose founder is Master Sung Chi-Li (Tsai 2021, 75–8).

All these movements were accused of being anti-government, of “religious fraud” and tax evasion, importing some rhetoric against “cults” from the West and Japan. Media also claimed they had sinister magical practices, thus continuing the traditional rhetoric against the *xie jiao*. Tai Ji Men was accused, falsely and somewhat ridiculously, of “raising goblins” (Tan, Ding, and Huang 2016, 88–97).

In the end, long prosecutions led in some cases to sentences for administrative violations, while in the case of Tai Ji Men the defendants were found innocent of all charges, but the main accusations did not hold. Even Master Sung Chi-Li, who had been sentenced to seven years in jail in 1997 and had been depicted as the quintessential “evil cult” leader defrauding his followers of large sums, had his conviction overturned by the Supreme Court in 2003 (Tsai 2021, 77).

We know that not all religious movements respect the law (Introvigne 2018). Yet, what happened in Taiwan in 1996, featuring the persecution of groups later declared totally innocent by the highest courts of the country, including Tai Ji

Men, is yet another example of the political use of the category of *xie jiao*. The label was born in the Middle Ages in China to crack down on religious groups perceived as not supporting the power that be, and has continued to be used for this purpose ever since.

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## Tai Ji Men and the Tai Ji Men Case: Politics Versus Spiritual Minorities

Chen Yi-Jing

*National Taiwan University*

yijingcherry@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** The paper presents Tai Ji Men and its activities in promoting the Movement of An Era of Conscience at the International Day of Conscience, which the United Nations eventually included in their list of days of observance in 2019. In its second part, it discusses how the Tai Ji Men program for a “culture of love and peace” fits the United Nations’ goals for sustainable development. The third part offers a short introduction to the Tai Ji Men case, i.e., to the conflict started in 1996 and still going on in Taiwan between a part of the local judicial and tax administration and Tai Ji Men.

**KEYWORDS:** Tai Ji Men, Hong Tao-Tze, Movement of An Era of Conscience, ANEOC, International Day of Conscience, Tai Ji Men Case.

Tai Ji Men is an ancient *menpai* (similar to a “school”) of *qigong*, martial arts, and self-cultivation, organized as an international non-profit cultural and spiritual organization. The culture of Tai Ji Men is deeply rooted in the wisdom of Taoism. In response to a calling to bring both physical and spiritual health to modern society, the contemporary *Zhang-men-ren* (grandmaster) of Tai Ji Men, Dr. Hong Tao-Tze, also called its *shifu*, established Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy in 1966, and successively founded academies in both Taiwan and the United States.

I will discuss in this paper three different but related issues. The first is the background of the Movement of An Era of Conscience (ANEOC) and the United Nations International Day of Conscience (April 5) promoted by Tai Ji Men. The second is Tai Ji Men’s action and mission to promote a culture of conscience for love and peace in the world. The third is the so-called “Tai Ji Men case” as a case study of problems involving freedom of religion and belief (FORB).

In 2014, Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy, the Association of World Citizens (AWC), and the Federation of World Peace and Love (FOWPAL) jointly launched the global Movement of An Era of Conscience (ANEOC).

The initiator of the movement, Dr. Hong Tao-Tze, the *Zhang-men-ren* of Tai Ji Men and president of FOWPAL, stated, “Kind intentions and good hearts are the positive energies necessary to safeguard the earth’s sustainable development” (ANEOC 2021).

In response to the United Nations SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) Four, at the 66<sup>th</sup> United Nations DPI/NGO (Department of Public Information / Non-Governmental Organizations) Conference in Gyeongju, South Korea, in 2016, Dr. Hong delivered a speech, “Hope for Global Citizens: Conscience, Education and Culture,” contending that conscience, culture and education are the three crucial elements for sustainable development. He believes that good culture enables good education; in turn, good education nurtures the culture of good virtues. When quality education and culture are nourished with conscience, true global citizens will be cultivated and a sustainable future achieved, facilitating the attainment of the 2030 Agenda (Hong 2016).

In February 2019, Dr. Hong and members of FOWPAL launched a global endorsement campaign for the Declaration of the International Day of Conscience at the United Nations in New York City. The initiative was praised by officers of the United Nations and the heads of state of several countries, and eventually led the U.N. General Assembly to proclaim April 5 as the “International Day of Conscience,” the 166<sup>th</sup> U.N. day of observance (United Nations General Assembly 2019). After years of efforts, as of April 5, 2021, which was the second International Day of Conscience, the Declaration of the International Day of Conscience has been signed and recognized by people from more than 195 countries.

Over the years, Dr. Hong and Tai Ji Men *dizi* (disciples) have visited over 300 cities in 101 countries to promote the ANEOC movement and the International Day of Conscience through multiple interactive events such as cultural exchanges, ringing their Bell of World Peace and Love, “wisdom dialogues,” participation in many U.N. events as a non-governmental organization, including the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa, and the 2012 Rio+20 U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil, forum announcements, the promotion of the Declaration of the International Day of

Conscience, and so on, which have received the support of many international heads of state and leaders.

The ANEOC movement is a lifelong education for world citizens, in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Goal 17 partnership for all (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division of Sustainable Development Goals 2022).

Through practical actions, the ANEOC movement aims to raise the conscience of citizens and develop a conscience-based culture of education for society that starts from the individual, in order to achieve a pro-ecological and spiritual environment and enhance people's spiritual health. Conscience, human rights, and sustainable development are closely connected. The core concept of sustainability is that it must provide opportunities for anyone, anywhere, at any time, to live with dignity in the society in which they live.

It is undeniable that in a turbulent international situation, people's rights are extremely vulnerable, even in democratic countries. While Tai Ji Men's *shifu* and *dizi* are committed to love and peace, they are also suffering from a 25 year-long human rights persecution involving legal and tax violence and violation of freedom of religious or belief (Tan, Ding, and Huang 2016). Taiwan is known as the country of democracy and freedom in Asia. Yet, what happened to Tai Ji Men is quite ironic and may even seem unbelievable.

The Tai Ji Men Case has been discussed at a side event of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit in Washington D.C. in July 2021. Ambassador Sam Brownback and Dr. Katrina Lantos Sweet, the co-chairs of the IRF Summit, both expressed their concerns about the Tai Ji Men case (Introvigne 2021). In the following part of my paper, I will take Tai Ji Men case as a case study of FORB problems.

On December 19, 1996, Taiwan governmental officers carried out a politically motivated crackdown on various religious movements. Prosecutor Hou Kuan-Jen led hundreds of armed police officers on an unwarranted search at all Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy branches and at private residences of several Tai Ji Men *dizi*. Subsequently, the *Zhang-men-ren* of Tai Ji Men and his wife, and two *dizi*, were detained for several months (Tan, Ding, and Huang 2016; Jacobsen 2020).

Prosecutor Hou charged the defendants with both fraud and tax evasion. The case was then forwarded to the National Tax Bureau (NTB), which issued tax bills

for the alleged tax evasion. The NTB did not carry out the investigation required by its statutory duty, nor waited for the decision of the criminal court to ascertain the nature of the income; it issued heavy tax penalties for tax evasion for years 1991–1996, simply based on the indictment (Jacobsen 2020; Chen, Huang, and Wu 2021).

Since Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy was established in 1966, the *Zhang-men-ren* of Tai Ji Men, Dr. Hong, has never been taxed by the NTB for its activities. Additionally, the Ministry of Education already explained that Tai Ji Men is not a cram school, contrary to what Prosecutor Hou argued. Why should these six years be treated differently because of the action by Prosecutor Hou?

On July 13, 2007, the Supreme Court found Tai Ji Men not guilty of fraud, nor of tax evasion or violation of tax codes. The Supreme Court also determined that the “red envelopes” given by his disciples to the *shifu* were gifts by nature and were tax-free income under the Income Tax Act (Taiwan). In 2019, although the NTB corrected five of the six years of the taxes it had assessed to zero, it still violated the principles of consistency and equality by maintaining the tax bill for the year 1992 only, treating the 1992 income as an alleged cram school tuition.

Over 25 years, Tai Ji Men has followed legal procedures to seek administrative remedy. In 2010, at a public hearing in the Legislative Yuan, the Ministry of Finance promised to revoke the tax bills and withdraw their enforcement within two months. However, the tax bills continued to be issued in violation of the promise (Jacobsen 2020; Chen, Huang, and Wu 2021).

In 2011, the Executive Yuan held an inter-ministerial meeting and resolved to revoke the tax bills if a survey among Tai Ji Men *dizi* would show that the red envelopes given to the *shifu* included gifts (rather than tuitions). After a two-month survey, even though 7,401 answers from Tai Ji Men *dizi* all confirmed that they were indeed gifts, the NTB refused to accept the survey results, and continued to issue ill-founded tax bills to Tai Ji Men (Tan, Ding, and Huang 2016, 199–209).

After that, the unjustified 1992 tax bill was transferred to the Administrative Enforcement Agency for enforcement, resulting in the auction and confiscation of sacred land belonging to Dr. Hong and Tai Ji Men by the government in August 2020.

Why did this happen, and the Tai Ji Men case lasted for more than 25 years? Why is such a contradictory taxation penalty allowed? How could the NTB forcibly take Tai Ji Men's land into national ownership?

The Tai Ji Men case has become a human rights indicator case study in freedom of religion and beliefs, and human rights in Taiwan. Many scholars from all over the world have raised their voices in support of Tai Ji Men's fight for justice, and appealed to the government for a redress of this wrongful case (*Bitter Winter* 2021).

In fact, there are two important aspects in this Tai Ji Men case. First, the protection of freedom of thought, belief, and religion. Second, taxpayers' right to a fair and transparent taxation system and procedures. Although Taiwan made the International Covenants on Human Rights part of its domestic legislation as early as 2009 (Tsai 2021, 85–6), in the Tai Ji Men case I think the Taiwanese government has clearly violated them.

Firstly, the Government has violated the principle of equality and non-discrimination. In Taiwan, no master of martial arts or religious groups has ever been taxed for accepting gifts, in any form, from disciples or followers.

Secondly, the Government has violated the freedom of thought, belief, and religion. Tai Ji Men *dizi* followed an ancient ritual and created a *shifu-dizi* relationship. Adherence to this old doctrine is part of the culture of a belief or religion, which is protected by both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and should be absolutely inviolable.

Thirdly, the Government has violated Tai Ji Men members' right to cultural engagement. Moreover, the Government has violated Tai Ji Men members' right to a fair trial. Tai Ji Men's rights were violated by the government through criminal law and tax law persecution for 25 years.

The 2021 book *Who Stole Their Youth?* recorded the difficulties faced by members of Tai Ji Men with government's and the bureaucrats' abuse of power (Chao et al. 2021). In the absence of the case, the *dizi* would have dedicated their positive energy wholeheartedly to helping the world rebuild a culture of conscience, love, and peace, and make the world a better place.

On the other hand, the Taiwan government allows the NTB officials to be rewarded with financial bonuses when they issue tax bills in cases of tax evasion, and it was suspected that some officials received bonuses for the 1992 Tai Ji Men tax bill. Therefore, the officials protected each other and were unwilling to correct their mistakes.

This shows that the democratic rule of law in Taiwan has not been truly implemented and valued. There is still room for improvement in human rights and rule of law education in Taiwan, and this highlights why the education of conscience is so important.

The Tai Ji Men case also reveals a clear international trend, and shows that the government persecution of minority spiritual and religious groups carried out by infringing on their property may occur anywhere even in democratic countries.

In conclusion, democratic governments should be very cautious and avoid any form of discrimination and violations of the FORB of religious and spiritual groups. The Tai Ji Men case, which lasted for 25 years, highlights the importance of a government that is guided by conscience, respects the law and procedural justice, and implements human rights protection. This is a lesson that modern democracies should learn from.

As Dr. Hong said, “Only with conscience can there be love, only with love can there be human rights, and only with human rights can there be real peace” (Hong 2015). A conscience-based culture can create a sustainable society of love and peace. This is not only a driving force for world peace and the restoration of the earth’s ecosystem, but also an opportunity for the sustainable survival of human beings and all living creatures.

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## The United Nations, Transitional Justice, and Religious Liberty

Rosita Šorytė

*FOB (European Federation for Freedom of Belief)*

rosita\_soryte@hotmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** The paper reviews the main United Nations documents on “transitional justice,” i.e., on how countries that move from an authoritarian to a democratic rule should deal with past injustices. The question was hotly discussed with respect to post-Communist Eastern Europe, including Lithuania, but also concerns post-authoritarian Taiwan. The paper argues that past violations of religious liberty should also be addressed by transitional justice, through revisions of the court cases, legal reforms, public acknowledgement of past wrongdoings, and compensations to the victims.

**KEYWORDS:** Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Societies, Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe, Transitional Justice in Taiwan, Tai Ji Men.

In United Nations’ jargon, “transitional justice” means “a society’s attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation” (Moon 2010, 3). This definition comes from one of the most comprehensive United Nations documents on the matter, then Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s (1938–2018) report to the Security Council on “The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies,” dated August 23, 2004 (Annan 2004).

The problem of “transitional” justice, as its name indicates, arises when a country transitions from a non-democratic regime where human rights were systematically abused to a democratic one. Justice would require that those responsible for past abuses be punished, and the victims indemnified. Achieving this “transitional justice,” however, is never easy.

Some may ask how my paper exactly fits in a session about Taiwan. It may come as a surprise to some that in Taiwan, which was once governed by an authoritarian

regime, transitional justice has become an important political and even electoral issue. Professor Tsai discusses how and why this happened in the paper presented at the same ISA-RC22 Vilnius conference session, published in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*.

In this paper, I will discuss three issues. First, I will examine some United Nations documents on the issue of transitional justice. Second, I will say a few words about the issue of transitional justice in Lithuania, not only because I am Lithuanian and this conference took place in Lithuania, but because, for reasons I will try to explain, Lithuanian cases have led to a number of significant decisions by the European Court of Human Rights on transitional justice. Third, I will comment on how principles established by the United Nations and the European Court of Human Rights may be useful to interpret and address cases in Taiwan, although Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations, nor of course of the Council of Europe.

Some can argue that transitional justice was part of the very process that led to the establishment of the United Nations, since as a way to prevent any resurgence of Nazism, Fascism, and Japanese militarism the powers that won World War II wanted to make sure that war criminals will be punished. This led to the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, where Nazi and Japanese war criminals were tried, convicted, and executed.

The United Nations themselves, on the other hand, have acknowledged that the concept of transitional justice, which goes beyond punishing war criminals, was born in the 1980s with the transition to democracy first of military regimes in Latin America, then since 1989 of countries in Eastern Europe that were once part of the Soviet bloc. U.N. documents emphasize the importance (Dykman 2007) of a decision of 1988 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights concerning Honduras. This famous case goes under the name *Velásquez Rodríguez*, which was the last name of one of many citizens of Honduras that “disappeared,” and never reappeared, at a time when Honduras was under a military dictatorship.

The Inter-American Court established that Honduras had not seriously investigated what happened to Ángel Manfredo Velásquez Rodríguez (1946–1981), which had been presumably killed, had not punished those who kidnapped him, and had not indemnified his family. The decision established four

key principles of transitional justice. First, human rights violations that happened when a non-democratic regime was in power should be investigated, and the truth should be told to the country's public opinion. Second, perpetrators should be punished. Third, victims should be indemnified. Fourth, measures should be taken to make sure that human rights violations, which unfortunately may continue to take place even in democratic countries, will not happen again (Inter-American Court of Human Rights 1988).

All the elements of transitional justice were defined by the *Velásquez Rodríguez* decision, although the words “transitional justice” were not used. These started being used by legal scholars in the 1980s. The term became common in the 1990s, until in 2001 the International Center for Transitional Justice was founded in New York by South African white Methodist ordained elder Alex Boraine (1931–2018), who had been the main architect of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa after the apartheid.

Initially, the attention of the United Nations was focused on one of the elements of transitional justice, punishing the perpetrators. This appeared urgent in light of the carnages perpetrated in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, which proved that, most unfortunately, mass violation of human rights and even genocides had not ended with the Cold War. The operative word at the United Nations was “impunity,” as something that should not be tolerated. The early 1990s saw the creation of the Office of the Special Rapporteur on the impunity of perpetrators of violations of human rights, and the institution of the U.N.-controlled International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 1993 and International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 1994.

However, the concept of traditional justice had other aspects, in addition to bringing perpetrators to justice. This was gradually recognized by the U.N., and led to Kofi Annan's report I mentioned earlier. Finally, in 2011, the Special Rapporteur on the impunity of perpetrators of violations of human rights was replaced by a Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. The change in the title meant that the Special rapporteur should deal with all dimensions of transitional justice, not preventing impunity of perpetrators only. This position still exists, and in 2018 Fabián Salvioli of Argentina, a law professor and lawyer who had studied and litigated cases of transitional justice after the fall of the military regime in his country, was appointed as Special Rapporteur. Meanwhile, the U.N. Human Rights Council

has assisted several countries, in many cases in cooperation with the independent International Center for Transitional Justice in New York, in formulating national plans for transitional justice.

I come now to my second part, transitional justice in Lithuania. The United Nations have acknowledged that an important partner for them in defining and promoting transitional justice is the European Court of Human Rights. Lithuania offers a good example both of how the European Court became very active in defining the scope and limits of transitional justice, and how the situation of post-Communist countries in Eastern Europe raised some politically sensitive and delicate issues (Milašiūtė 2021).

For readers who are not Lithuanian, let me remind them that Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939, with the acquiescence of Nazi Germany, pursuant to the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. However, when Germany went to war with Russia, Lithuania was occupied by the Germans between 1941 and 1945. As the war progressed, Germans and Russians fought for Lithuania in 1944 and 1945, and, as the Germans lost the war, Lithuania was occupied again by the Soviets, and regained its independence only in 1991.

Both the Nazis and the Soviets committed gross violations of human rights in Lithuania, and both of them had Lithuanian collaborators, although of course the Soviet occupation lasted for a much longer period.

Although, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, terms other than “transitional justice” were mostly used, after 1991 the new democratic and independent Lithuania had to confront all the typical issues of transitional justice.

One of the first to be addressed had to do with religious liberty, and it was the restitution of the communal properties belonging to the Catholic Church and other religious institutions. Churches, temples, synagogues and even cemeteries had been destroyed in Soviet times, or turned into museums, factories, and even warehouses and stables. In Vilnius, the cathedral became a picture gallery, and the historical church of Saint Casimir was converted into a Museum of Atheism. After independence, places of worship and other religious buildings were given back to the different religious organizations.

The process, regulated by a 1995 law, went up smoothly enough, except with the Jewish community, with which, according to a study by Algimantas Prazauskas (1941–2007), three problems existed. The first was who would represent the

Lithuanian Jews, most of whom had left Lithuania and lived in the United States or Israel, in negotiations with the Lithuanian government. In 2005, a Jewish Heritage of Lithuania Foundation was founded in the United States, under the aegis of the American Jewish Committee. The Committee's Director of International Jewish Affairs, Rabbi Andrew Baker, became a board member of the Foundation, and the main negotiator with Lithuania. In 2009, his position was reinforced when he was appointed as the Representative of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation with Europe) for combating anti-Semitism, a position he has maintained to this day. In 2006, the 1995 Lithuanian law was amended, and the Foundation was recognized as the sole body entitled to the restitution of Jewish religious properties in Lithuania. However, other Jewish organizations objected that this was unfair, because in their opinion the Foundation did not represent the interests of all Jews of Lithuanian origin, and perhaps not even of half of them.

A second point of contention was about the number of communal properties of the Jewish communities whose pre-World-War-II ownership could be documented. A third point concerned the direct intervention of the United States that, based on an agreement signed in 2002 on the reciprocal protection of cultural places of national concern, informed Lithuania in 2006 that some 100 synagogues and Jewish burial grounds there were of American interest because the descendants of these Jews lived in the U.S. The issue died down when Lithuania, in 2007, in turn formed a commission that listed more than 100 Lithuanian churches that had been demolished or were in a state of disrepair in the United States (Pražauskas 2007, 7–13).

The issue of Jewish properties and restitution remains politically sensitive in Lithuania, as proved by controversies concerning the Soviet Palace of Concerts and Sports in Vilnius, which is in a destitute state and was built by the Soviets in an area where an historical Jewish cemetery was once located. Lithuania planned to demolish the Soviet Palace and build there a conference center, while the Jewish community wanted it back to restore or rebuild the cemetery. It was becoming a heated issue when in August 2021 the Lithuanian government announced that plans to build a conference center had been shelved indefinitely due to how COVID-19 had changed the market for international conferences (Liphshiz 2021). After this paper was presented at the ISA RC-22 conference, Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė stated in January 2022 that the

government was considering restoring the Soviet Palace and converting it into a Jewish museum or memorial (BNS 2022).

Cases about religious properties did not reach the European Court of Human Rights; however, some cases concerning the broader issue of restituting private properties to the owners who had them confiscated by the Soviets or their descendants did. This was a more complicated issue than it may seem. After more than fifty years of war and occupation to whom exactly properties belonged was not always clear, and the process involved a good deal of administrative corruption. The law of 1990 governing the issue was amended several times, yet all versions maintained that only Lithuanian citizens should benefit of the restitution. In 2009, in the decision *Shub v. Lithuania*, the European Court of Human Rights decided that this did not create an illicit discrimination. The court explained that states that adopt a politics of restitution in furtherance of transitional justice have the right to implement it as they deem fit (European Court of Human Rights 2009).

Note, however, that in several cases the court, as recently as 2018, has sanctioned Lithuania for the excessive length of the restitution process. For instance, in the admittedly extreme case of *Beinarovič and Others* the Court found that a case properly submitted in 1991 had still not been solved after more than 25 years (European Court of Human Rights 2018b).

Another delicate situation concerned the Lithuanian citizens who had invested their money with Soviet banks, particularly in the chaotic final period of the Soviet Union, and had lost it, because these banks went bankrupted or disappeared overnight. Russia refused to compensate investors in Soviet banks, and desperate Lithuanians who had lost all their savings turned to the Lithuanian government. The latter wanted to help, and decided to compensate the defrauded investors, but only within the limit of 6,000 litas (at that time, some \$2,300 dollars) each. The unhappy investors went repeatedly to the European Court of Human Rights, only to be told, from the *Jasinskij and Others* case of 1998 (European Court of Human Rights 1998) to the case of *Petkevičiūtė* in 2018 (European Court of Human Rights 2018a) that Lithuania is not the successor of the Soviet Union and is under no obligation of repaying this money.

Perhaps more important for comparative purposes are cases involving the punishment of perpetrators of human right violations. As several other former

Communist countries (Fijalkowski 2018), Lithuania enacted in 1999 a law on so-called *lustracija* (Люстрация), excluding people who had collaborated with the KGB and other Soviet agencies responsible for violations of human rights from certain jobs and from running for office in the elections. Several of those affected by the law took their cases to the European Court of Human Rights.

The Court's reaction was very interesting. It ruled that to protect the newly born democracy a law on *lustracija* was reasonable in general, for example in the cases of *Sidabras and Džiautas* in 2004 (European Court of Human Rights 2004), and *Rainys and Gasparavičius* in 2005 (European Court of Human Rights 2005). However, it indicated two limitations. First, in the above-mentioned cases it found against Lithuania that it cannot prevent the applicants from working in the private sector. In fact, in 2015, three of the 2004–2005 applicants obtained a new decision of the European Court against Lithuania, *Sidabras and Others*, complaining they were still harassed in their private activities (European Court of Human Rights 2015a). Second, the court warned that *lustracija* laws cannot be permanent, and should last for a reasonable time only after the transition to democracy, except in special cases of persons individually responsible of atrocities or having hold leadership position in organizations (such as the KGB) guilty of gross violations of human rights.

Other cases that went to the European Court dealt with crimes against human rights committed by Soviet collaborators. A high-profile case was *Kuoletis, Bartoševičius and Burokevičius v. Lithuania*, decided in 2008. It confirmed that Lithuania had the right to punish Lithuanian citizens who had supported Soviet troops in cracking down on freedom fighters during the Bloody Sunday of January 13, 1991. The applicants had claimed that they had just been loyal to the legitimate government of that time, i.e., the Soviet Union. In fact, the Court did not explore in depth issues of transitional justice, but simply stated that on January 13, 1991, the legitimate authority in the country was the Republic of Lithuania and no longer the Soviet Union (European Court of Human Rights 2008).

It is interesting to note the difference between two cases concerning the criminal prosecution in Lithuania of former Soviet officers who were part of the repression and killing of Lithuanian partisans in the 1950s. In the case of *Vasiliauskas*, in 2015, the court found against Lithuania, accusing it of trying to apply its own laws retroactively and prosecute former Soviet soldiers for their

“participation in a genocide” without clarifying to which definition of genocide it was referring to or investigating the individual responsibility of the defendants (European Court of Human Rights 2015b). In 2019, in the *Drėlingas* case, the European Court agreed that Lithuanian judges had taken the *Vasiliauskas* case into account, and were now rendering unobjectionable decisions that specified in which specific genocidal actions or war crimes the defendants had participated (European Court of Human Rights 2019).

While the *Drėlingas* decision has confirmed that it is part of transitional justice in Lithuania to prosecute former Soviet officers or collaborators and convict them when they are guilty of specific (as opposite to generic) offenses, I would not omit to mention a sensitive political issue. Lithuanian courts and governments have been accused by legal scholars and politicians, both at home and abroad, of having applied transitional justice selectively, by punishing those responsible of atrocities during the Soviet period and ignoring those who had collaborated with the Nazis, even celebrating them when, after having been Nazi collaborators, they had become anti-Soviet partisans (see Fijalkowski 2018).

As a legal issue, it is now largely moot as almost all Nazi collaborators have now died, although Germany in 2021 started trials against a 100-year-old former concentration camp guard (*BBC News* 2021) and a 96-year-old female camp secretary (*France 24* 2021). It remains however a political and cultural issue, and many believe Lithuania as a mature democracy should now sincerely confront all its past, recognize that there were Lithuanians, including some who later fought against the Soviets, who were co-responsible for Nazi atrocities, and stop celebrating those anti-Soviet partisans who had a dark Nazi past.

In conclusion, what does all this tell us about transitional justice in Taiwan? I believe there are valid lessons in the United Nations experience and the case of Lithuania that are relevant for Taiwan as well.

First, it should be acknowledged that violations of freedom of religion or belief are among the wrongdoings of past regimes in need of being rectified. This is obviously relevant for the Tai Ji Men case. It may seem that compared to torture and killings the discrimination of spiritual minorities are minor, but in fact spirituality is an important part of individual and collective identity and violations of spiritual liberty damage a country as a whole.

Second, to preserve both justice and social stability, transitional justice should avoid the two extremes of vengeance and impunity. Punishment should be administered with restraint, although restitutions should be precise and generous. Ultimately, what many citizens in post-authoritarian societies such as Lithuania and Taiwan really want is not so much to see those who had been responsible of past injustices languish for long years in jail. What they want is a public recognition that injustices were perpetrated, an honest proclamation of the truth. In all cases where human beings were abused by authoritarian regimes, including the Tai Ji Men case in Taiwan, we should first and foremost ask for the truth.

As Jesus said, if you seek liberty, first “you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (*John* 8:32). When Tai Ji Men protest in the street and ask for the truth, they are fighting for their liberty—and ours as well.

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## Transitional Justice and Religious Liberty in Taiwan

Tsai Cheng-An

*Shih Chien University, Taipei, Taiwan*

philsai@g2.usc.edu.tw

**ABSTRACT:** The paper presents attempts by different democratic, post-authoritarian governments in Taiwan to implement transitional justice, and the relationship of these attempts with the question of religious liberty. The paper argues that the question remained long unresolved due to Taiwan's peculiar political circumstances. The two Tsai administrations somewhat improved the situation but mostly with respect to violations of human rights perpetrated before 1992. Addressing religious liberty issues would involve also confronting the violations of human rights that happened after 1992, including during the 1996 crackdown on religious minorities, which created inter alia the still unresolved Tai Ji Men Case.

**KEYWORDS:** Transitional Justice, Transitional Justice in Taiwan, Freedom of Religion or Belief in Taiwan, Tai Ji Men, Tai Ji Men Case.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (ICCPR), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950 (ECHR), and the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief 1981, all state that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. These declarations emphasize that freedom of religion or belief (FORB) is a core human right and a foundation of global governance. In 2000, the United Nations Human Rights Council established the Special Rapporteur on FORB, whose main task is to promote this human right in order to strengthen global governance.

In a speech at the Dodd Center for Human Rights on October 15, 2021, American President Joe Biden argued that the atrocities of human rights violations and persecution are not over. He said that it is time to speak up for

human rights, and warned the world that silence on human rights abuses is complicity. “No U.S. President should stand by when human rights are under attack, and maintain their legitimacy,” Biden proclaimed, stating that the defense of human rights is in the DNA of the American people (Biden 2021).

Besides the human right of FORB, another universal value is transitional justice. Transitional justice emphasizes the need to confront historical wrongs and pursue social justice, as Rosita Šorytė emphasized in the same Vilnius ISA RC-22 conference (her paper is published in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*).

Taiwan is now recognized as a democratic country under the rule of law, but it still has its flaws and is not a country that fully protects human rights. The Tai Ji Men incident in 1996 was a human rights case in which the authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) government clearly violated FORB. It was a mistake and a crime committed by the old regime. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government that succeeded in 2016 has not faced up to the legacy of history, redressed the historical injustice, or completed the democratic transformation it pursued.

Before 1987, Taiwan was an authoritarian regime with no real protection for FORB. Only on July 15, 1987, was the Martial Law finally lifted. Then, Taiwan gradually transformed from an authoritarian system to a post-authoritarian one. The KMT regime declared that citizens could enjoy FORB, but still persecuted religious groups that were seen as unfriendly to the ruling party. During the political crackdown after the 1996 presidential election, several of Taiwan’s most active religious groups were suppressed, and Tai Ji Men became one of the victims of the KMT regime’s crackdown on new religious movements (Tsai 2021). This was an unjust act of persecution of the human right of FORB by the Taiwanese government of the time.

Tai Ji Men is a spiritual group of ancient *qigong* and martial arts that extends love and peace to the world through cultural activities. In 1966, the Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy was established by law, and for 55 years there has never been a tax problem. Why was there a tax problem only in the six years from 1991 to 1996?

The Supreme Court rendered the final verdict on the Tai Ji Men case on July 13, 2007, and found no crimes, no tax evasion, no violation of tax code. All

four defendants were exonerated and received compensation from the Nation for their previous wrongful imprisonment. At that time, the tax problem derived from the criminal cases should have been dismissed according to the law. This point was clearly stated in 1999 and 2000 by a Minister of Finance, Yen Ching-Chang, and two Vice Ministers of Finance, Wang Teh-Shan and Wang Jung-Chou, that “the Tai Ji Men tax case was derived from the criminal case (...), and if the criminal case is resolved, the tax case will follow suit” (Chao et al. 2021, 94).

The central issue in the tax problem was whether the disciples’ (*dizi*) so-called red envelopes given to their master (*shifu*) included tuition for tutorial classes or voluntary gifts. A final verdict of the Supreme Court recognized that “the gifts presented by the *dizi* to their *shifu* are voluntary gifts in nature” (Chao et al. 2021, 128–29). In 2018, the Supreme Administrative Court confirmed that Tai Ji Men is a *qigong* and martial arts group and not a tutorial class (Chao et al. 2021, 147).

However, in August 2021, the media uncovered a shocking piece of evidence in which tax collector Shih Yue-Sheng (1949–2020) admitted on video that prosecutor Hou Kuan-Jen, who was the main responsible for the persecution of Tai Ji Men, had sought his perjury (Action Alliance to Redress 1219 2021).

Prosecutor Hou Kuan-Jen did not question the validity of this testimony against the defendant as the law requested, but directly cited it as the primary evidence in the tax evasion lawsuit against Tai Ji Men (Introvigne et al. 2020, 24–5). The video confirms that the prosecutor’s accusation of tax evasion against Tai Ji Men was simply the fabrication of a false case, and that Hou obviously used a criminal prosecution to violate FORB’s human rights.

According to the above verdicts, after 25 years of legal petitions, and non-violent efforts of legal and tax reform advocacy initiatives by Tai Ji Men, the Taipei National Taxation Bureau and the Central District National Tax Bureau finally recognized the nature of gifts of what Tai Ji Men *dizi* had given to their *shifu* in five tax years out of the six in dispute, leaving only tax year 1992 unchanged.

However, the National Taxation Bureau is still not correcting its errors because of its authoritarian mindset. Despite the thousands of people in Taiwan who participated in the civil disobedience on the streets, and the support of scholars and human rights experts from home and abroad, the government continues to tax and impose fines on the tax year 1992. In 2020, lands belonging

to Dr. Hong and Tai Ji Men was put on auction by the Administrative Enforcement Agency and confiscated by the state after two failed auctions (Chao et al. 2021).

Such an outcome has drawn the attention and support for Tai Ji Men of Taiwanese and international scholars and experts (*Bitter Winter* 2021). The main reason for this is that the Tai Ji Men human rights case protest has had a wide range of positive effects on Taiwan and also on the international community. There are two reasons for this. First, Tai Ji Men insists on truth, human rights, and righteousness of conscience, and is unwilling to accept the threat of compromising and paying for fake tax bills. Tai Ji Men's 25 years of non-violent activism has led the Taiwanese community to face up to the importance of taxpayer's human rights, and has led to opportunities for legal tax reform, which is a manifestation of the universal values of human rights and the transitional justice in practice.

Second, international religious freedom scholars and human rights experts have often seen cases of persecution of religious beliefs that have led to the loss of lives, but they are also worried that the tax law may be used by the ruling authorities to persecute religious groups they do not like, which is a new form of persecution of FORB.

Taiwan's subsequent democratically elected governments have delivered some results in their efforts to implement transitional justice. For example, in 2009, during the presidency of Ma Ying-Jeou, the Legislative Yuan approved the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as Taiwan domestic laws, and declared that "human rights should be established, transitional justice should be promoted, human rights protection should be strengthened, and an effective relief mechanism should be established" (Roth 2019).

In 2017, President Tsai Ing-Wen passed the Law on Promoting Transitional Justice. According to this law, by March 26, 2021, a total of 5,837 criminal cases determined by criminal verdicts during the Martial Law period were revoked, which is a specific act of revoking wrong verdicts and announcing the vindication of cases, realizing the spirit of "restoring reputation" of transitional justice. It also confirms that wrong verdicts are not unchangeable (Caldwell 2018; Shattuck 2019).

However, the DPP government has excluded the need for transitional justice for those who suffered from human rights persecution after 1992, and this is what President Tsai Ing-Wen has yet to accomplish in terms of transitional justice in Taiwan.

Any persecution of human rights by the government with state power is an authoritarian persecution. It does not matter when the persecution occurred. A persecution is a persecution, and needs to be addressed. Only by doing so can we achieve true social reconciliation and justice.

Taiwan is a country under constant threat from China and has been under authoritarian ruling for decades, and because of this historical burden, the road to democracy in Taiwan is more difficult than in the West. From the Martial Law period to the present, old habits, old ideologies, and old ways of governance from the authoritarian regime still exist, and bureaucrats with old ways of governance still occupy various positions in the liberal democratic bureaucracy.

After several changes of political parties in Taiwan, the issue of human rights being violated by the state has not been given enough attention. On the contrary, after the rulers claimed to have gained a formal democratic majority, they constructed a new argument of “democratic legitimacy,” so that the consolidation of Taiwan’s liberal democratic system has not yet been completed, but is even facing the threat of a new bureaucratic authoritarian system.

In particular, during Taiwan’s transition from an authoritarian system to a democratic system, the legal and tax bureaucratic authoritarianism constructed by the administrative courts and the financial and tax administrations from 1992 to the present has still not changed into a modern system for the purpose of protecting human rights, but remains a legacy of the authoritarian past that continues to harm basic human rights and hinder social progress.

Evidence of Taiwan’s legal and tax bureaucratic authoritarianism is as follows:

(1) The Ministry of Finance has dominated tax administration with more than 9,500 interpretation notes, which exceed the law and seriously violate the principle that taxes should remain under the law. By the end of August 2020, out of 794 interpretations by the Justices of the Taiwan Judicial Yuan, a total of 131 interpretations related to tax were issued, and 56 laws and interpretation letters were declared unconstitutional; in 17 of them, the spirit or

principle violated by those declared unconstitutional can be seen at work in the Tai Ji Men tax case.

(2) Most of the judges in the administrative courts do not have a good understanding of tax law, and render more than 93% of their rulings in favor of tax authorities. And in the limited number of cases in which the taxpayers win, the tax bill is returned to the NTB instead of being revoked directly, giving the NTB the right to issue new tax bills.

(3) The Legislative Yuan, in cooperation with the tax administration, has been giving incentive payments to tax officials to encourage aggressive taxation. The ill-intentioned incentive system has become the root of the violation of the taxpayers' human rights.

In 2012, in a report on the tax structure and government tax reform measures in Taiwan, the Taiwan Control Yuan recommended that the Ministry of Finance (MOF) should review the outdated tax interpretation notes in order to protect the rights of the public (Control Yuan 2012). However, there are still more than 9,000 interpretation notes, many of which have been in use since the authoritarian period, but no active action has been taken by the Ministry of Finance. Taiwan's tax system is still stuck in the authoritarian era.

In September 2021, item 3 in the agenda of the United Nations Human Rights Council was the "Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development." The NGO CAP-LC (Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience) told the Council that it was particularly concerned about the use of property seizures as a weapon to discriminate against minority religious and spiritual groups (Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience 2021). This is a new form of persecution of FORB's human rights by tax laws, which has happened not only in Taiwan, but also in France and other countries. Such acts are definitely not in accordance with the universal values of human rights.

The Tai Ji Men human rights case is a crime committed by the post-authoritarian government in 1996 and in the subsequent years. Now, the Taiwan government must face up to the various cases of human rights violations caused by government violence under the post-authoritarian system after the lifting of

the Martial Law in 1987, and the Tai Ji Men human rights case has already become an international landmark case.

The Tai Ji Men case involves universal values of FORB and transitional justice, which are values that must be defended by democratic leaders around the world. The persecution of FORB through tax law is not allowed by the universal human rights laws.

In 2000, the U.N. Human Rights Committee appointed an independent Special Rapporteur on FORB with the task of identifying and responding to human rights impediments to FORB worldwide. In 2004, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's (1938–2018) report to the General Assembly established four principles of transitional justice: (1) investigating abuses and pursuing the truth, (2) compensating victims, (3) punishing perpetrators, and (4) ensuring that abuses do not occur in a democratic environment (Annan 2004).

In 2012, the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed an independent International Special Rapporteur on Transitional Justice with the mandate to properly implement transitional justice. These four principles also apply to the redress of human rights cases such as the Tai Ji Men case. There should be no time limit for implementing the transitional justice and achieve social reconciliation.

I believe scholars and experts of human rights should call on President Tsai Ing-Wen, and remind her that human rights and transitional justice are the core values of her administration, and the Tai Ji Men human rights case is a key to demonstrating these core values and social justice in practice.

The Tai Ji Men case is no longer an administrative or legal issue, but an issue of FORB human rights that affects Taiwan's international reputation. Only effective action by the President of Taiwan can rectify the continuing persecution of the human right of FORB by the NTB and the Administrative Enforcement Agency, and implement the transitional justice, so that Taiwan can become a truly democratic country governed by the rule of law and respectful of human rights.

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