

# **A CHANGE TENDENCY OF PROTESTANTISM WITHIN ETHNIC COMPATRIOTS IN THE NORTHERN MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS OF VIETNAM**

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At present society is interested in the situation of Protestantism within ethnic compatriots the Northern mountainous regions of Vietnam. Forecast of the change tendency of Protestantism in the Northern mountainous regions of Vietnam should help managers to take the initiative of managing this religion. Basing on Protestant situation, especially in Hmong and Dzao peoples in the past and at present; economic, cultural and social characteristics of two peoples; change and developing tendencies of our country and the world, we initially generalize some change tendencies of Protestantism as follows.

## **1- Protestantism gradually operates stably and observes the laws**

Although carrying out Instruction no 01/2005/ CT-TTg of the Prime Minister on some tasks regarding Protestantism in the Northern mountainous regions of Vietnam is more difficult than in the Central Highlands, it achieves satisfactory results in some regions as Lào Cai, Cao Bằng, Bắc Kạn. Instruction no 01/2005/CT-TTg is realized well in some other regions. At present 200 Protestant groups with 40.000 followers are granted registration certificates for their religious activities according to Instruction no 01/2005/CT-TTg. Provinces in the Northern mountainous regions continue to investigate Protestant condition to grant a registration certificate to Protestant groups. Carrying out Instruction no 01/2005/Ct-TTg is strengthened in most Northern provinces. The quantity of Protestant groups which are granted registration certificate is increasing more and more. In 2007- 2009 Bắc Cạn province granted registration certificates to 15 Ma. The Center for Religious and Belief studies. Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration

Protestant groups with 1267 followers. From April, 2009 to March, 2010, 7 Protestant groups in Cao Bằng province were granted registration certificates. Following this trend many Protestant groups will be granted registration certificates so a new picture on Protestantism is created in Northern mountainous regions of Vietnam.

In fact, after Protestant groups in Northern mountainous regions are granted registration certificates for religious activities, their followers feel assured and inspired so religious activities are gradually stabilized.

After investigating two Protestant groups, one group is in Chu Lìn 1 hamlet (Chung Chải village, Sa Pa district, Lào Cai province) and another group is in Mỏ Phìn hamlet (Chiến Phố village, Hoàng Su Phì district, Hà Giang province) we believe the stable tendency of Protestant activities in accordance with Instruction 01/2005/Ct-TTg. We find that Hmong people inspiredly take part in religious activities so we can affirm that they follow Protestantism for their spiritual and religious needs.

The stable activity of Protestantism is normalization of religious activities in Northern mountainous regions. After all Protestant groups are granted registration certificates; the leaders of mountainous provinces of Northern Vietnam will solve other problems as building worshipping places, training dignitaries, publishing Bible... to satisfy religious activities. According to us these concrete works will influence Protestant situation in Northern mountainous regions of Vietnam, because religious activities in general and Protestant activities in particular are solved by many incorporated elements. This tendency depends on objective and subjective elements to become a reality. If we want Protestant activities to become stable, the levels of administration should realize consistently the spirit of Instruction no 01/2005/Ct-TTg.

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## **2- Protestantism continues to develop in quality and reinforce in quantity.**

Almost governments of Northern mountainous provinces forecast that Protestantism will develop and have new changes in the future. So Protestant churches inside and outside country will be strengthened and developed in ethnic people in Northern mountainous provinces. The Vietnam General Protestant Church (Northern region), the Christian Fellow Church of Vietnam, the Gospel Pentecostal church and Protestant churches in foreign countries (by traveling, charitable activities ...) will develop missionary work in ethnic peoples, especially in Hmong and Dzao people

Thanks to active mobilization of key Protestant believers the number of Protestant believers in Hmong, Dzao peoples and other peoples is increasing more and more.

Protestantism makes a part of followers have deep faith in Protestantism so religious activities are reinforced, many Protestant societies, groups and branches are established and many management boards are established. Protestant churches relate to each other. The illegal training and nomination of pastors as well as illegal consecration of land for building chapels are developed.

The missionary work is strengthened to attract many people. In some regions, missionary work may create many complicated matters. Some reactionaries take advantage of belief and religion to divide national united bloc, create political security instability.

*The missionary work is strengthened*

In the last period, Protestant churches strengthened missionary work in the mountainous regions of Northern Vietnam. Many missionary methods were carried out (from simple methods to modern methods). Some Ma. The Center for Religious and Belief studies. Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration

missionary methods do not observe the laws. Some Hmongs and Dzao are isolated so they reluctantly followed Protestantism. In the forthcoming period social and legal environment becomes more favorable, Protestant churches will strengthen missionary works, especially the modern missionary methods are applied to attract ethnic people. Protestantism will compete with other religions in missionary works so Protestant organizations will be reinforced and the material life of believers will be supported.

*The number of believers is increasing*

After studying the Protestant situation in Northern provinces we find that the amount of Protestant followers increases in the forthcoming period although this increase is not as high as in the past. At present people do not stormily follow Protestantism. Our findings are originated from following elements. At present the social environment and the laws are more favorable for development of religions in general and Protestantism in particular. Our country is renovating and integrating into the world especially our country joined WTO in 2006. In recent years many new policies regarding Protestantism are published as *Ordinance on Belief and Religion, Instruction no 01/2005/CT-TTg...* so religious organizations in general and Protestant churches in particular will develop. From abroad, many religious organizations use missionary modern methods to realize missionary works in our country.

According to statistics of Lai Châu province, the amount of Protestant believers in Lai Châu province is increasing more and more, in 2006 there are 13.076 believers but in 2009 there are 18.372 believers. In three years the amount of believers increases 5296 believers and makes up 40, 5%. The situation of religious activities in 2009 is more complicated. The illegal

missionary works and building chapels take place in some districts in Lai Châu province.

In Bắc Kạn, the number of Protestant believers of groups which are granted registration certificates is increasing. Comparing to 2007 the number of Protestants increases by more than 14 Dao people and 7 in 2009. Because some households were wavering between following or not following Protestantism in the past but now they decide to follow Protestantism. In 2009 Baptist church is present in Bắc Cạn province.

*The training of Protestant dignitaries is strengthened*

Pastors and preachers play an important role in stabilizing Protestant activities. However, Northern mountainous province in Vietnam lacks pastors and preachers who can manage religious bases and lead believers in religious activities. Protestant churches realize it so many Hmong and Dzao people are trained to become dignitaries. In 2009 6 persons (Lao Cai province has one person, Cao Bằng province has one person and Bắc Cạn has 4 persons) are selected and trained to become dignitaries by the Vietnam General Protestant Church (Northern region). Protestant churches continue to promote the training of pastors and preachers. In the forthcoming period Northern mountainous provinces have many pastors and preachers (almost of them are young); they gradually stabilize Protestant activities in these provinces.

The Vietnam General Protestant Church (Northern region) opens many refresher courses for Protestant group leaders of Hmong and Dzao people in Northern mountainous provinces. In 2009 there are 14 Protestant group leaders take part in refresher course in Cao Bằng province.

Mr. Sùng Quảng Sinh (the leader of Protestant group in Mỏ Phìn hamlet, Chiến Phố village, Hoàng Su Phì district, Hà Giàng province), Mr. Ma. The Center for Religious and Belief studies. Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration

Sùng A Chinh (the representative of Protestant group in Tòng Già hamlet, Phong Hải town, Bảo Thắng district, Lào Cai province), Mr. Hồ A Tòng (Huổi Chỏn hamlet, Ấng Tở village, Tuần Giáo district, Điện Biên province).. regularly participate in refresher courses.

*The repair and building of chapels or places of worship are strengthened*

In last period, many Protestant groups wanted to be granted registration certificates for their religious activities so they had to borrow houses of believers or houses of leaders to realize their religious activities. Such places did not meet the need of religious activities of believers. At present our state has not yet concrete policy regarding building of churches, chapels or places of religious activities in Northern mountainous provinces. In fact some Protestant groups build new chapels without permission of local administration. In the forthcoming period our party and State will have concrete policies on building places of worship to satisfy religious need of ethnic people so issuance of building and repairing places of worship for Protestant believers in Northern mountainous provinces will be more favorable.

*-Some Protestant groups are divided into many smaller groups and these groups compete one another for believers*

This phenomenon is happening in Northern mountainous provinces. It helps us to know that Protestantism easily establishes new Protestant groups. Firstly, the administration of Mai Long village (Nguyễn Bình district, Cao Bằng province) allowed to establish two Protestant groups. They were Năm Giang (Hmong people) and Đặng Vài (Dzao people). According to requests of believers, leaders of group and the opinion of the Vietnam General

Protestant Church (Northern region), only Sáng Lìn Protestant group was established. After one year this group was divided into some smaller groups.

## **2- The reactive tendency to Protestantism**

In fact, most of Hmong and Dzao people react to Protestantism in normal living condition without great changes (war, economic-social crisis). Protestantism and Catholicism were introduced to two peoples for long time but small part of Hmong people in Hầu Thào village (Sa Pastor district, Lao Cai province) followed Catholicism and some Dzao people in Bắc Sơn (Lạng Sơn) followed Protestantism. At present, Protestantism develops in Hmong people but Protestant believers only make up 13% of population. The percent of Dzao people following Protestantism is about 1,3%. This reactive tendency only happens in Hmong and Dao communities.

Most of Hmong and Dzao people think that Protestantism influences passively on their life. It deteriorates their traditional culture and national unity. They react against Protestantism strongly. They are civilian, Hmong, Dzao cadres and retired men.

Many Hmong and Dzao people followed Protestantism in a period of time then they themselves give up Protestantism because they find that Protestantism does not help their economy more prosperous and promises of preachers do not become reality. They have to spend much time in prayer. They also find that if they follow Protestantism they have to give up their traditional culture. From 2000 to 2005 there are 350 Dzao people giving up Protestantism in Lào Cai province.

## **3- The developing tendency of heresy**

At present there are some heretical groups in Northern mountainous provinces:

*Duong Văn Minh heretical group.*

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In March, 2010, in Bắc Cạn there are 56 Hmong households and 321 Hmong people following Dương Văn Minh heretical group. They divide into three groups in three districts of Ngân Sơn, Pác Nặm and Chợ Mới. They practise their activities stealthily.

In March, 2010 in Cao Bằng province there are 338 households and 1766 people following Dương Văn Minh heretical group. They divide into 15 groups in Bảo Lâm district (189 households and 935 people); in Hà Quảng district (36 households and 199 people); in Hòa An district (26 households and 39 people); in Trà Lĩnh (7 households and 37 people).

*Sẻ Chu Hà Ly Cha heretical group*

This heretical group was originated from China and propagated to La Hủ, Bum Tở village, Mường Tè district, Lai Châu province in 2003. On 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2007 there were 37 households and 135 people following to *Sẻ Chu Hà Ly Cha heretical group*. The headers of propagating this religion are Giàng Chà Le and Lý Ná Đô. Giàng Chà Le was born in 1972 in Tả Phìn village, Bum Tở, Mường Tè district. Lý Ná Đô was born in 1968 in Tả Phìn village.

When following *Sẻ Chu Hà Ly Cha heretical group*, believers have to give up ancestor-worship. When they are ill they must not make ceremonial offerings but they only say prayers. Prayers are said by Quang Hoa and La Hủ languages.

An other part of ethnic people in Đông Văn, Mèo Vạc and Yên Minh districts, Hà Giang province follow *San sư khệ tộ heretical group*. Their religious activities are similar to Protestant activities but this religion can not be determined to belong to any Protestant churches. In Thạch Lâm village, Bảo Lâm district, Cao Bằng province there are 35 households and 217 people follow *Cross group*.

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In Northern mountainous provinces many people leave Protestantism to convert to heretical groups. Because of weak economy and low cultural standards of people, heretical groups still develop in ethnic minorities in future.

#### **5- Strengthening of charitable activities in accordance with the characteristics of Hmong , Dzao people and ethnic minorities in Northern mountainous provinces**

It can say that the charitable activities of Protestant churches in our country and in Northern mountainous provinces were very weak in past period. Now Protestant churches find the importance of charitable activities. Protestant churches carry out charitable activities as support of clothes, beddings even treatment for Protestant believers. Hmong people in America and Thailand are supported many things by Protestantism. In the forthcoming time Protestantism will subsidize ethnic people many things. It does it because it wants to exist and develop in ethnic provinces.

In the forthcoming time we should carry out seriously Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg of the prime Minister to stabilize religious activities of Protestant believers in Northern mountainous provinces . At the same time, the Protestant situation will have many new changes. The number of believers is increasing. Missionary activities are strengthened. The organization of Protestant churches is corrected. Of course, the reality of these activities depends on objective and subjective elements so the social leaders should take initiative in applying policies of State to treat Protestant changes