

**THE PROCESS OF AWARENESS OF VIETNAMESE
COMMUNIST PARTY ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES,
AFFAIRS AND POLICIES THROUGH POLITICAL
PROGRAMMES, DOCUMENTS AND
RESOLUTIONS FROM RENEWAL UP TO NOW**

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During its leadership of the revolution as well as governing of society and country, our Party and State always have defined that religious work is strategic matter and it has an important significance”² The view of party inherits and develops experienced lessons of our forefathers. Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism were brought to Vietnam and they gradually became traditional religions in Vietnam. They integrated into Vietnamese culture and contributed in creation of Vietnamese cultural identity. Buddhism and Confucianism provided idea of governing a country for Dai Viet monarchical State. At the same time, many believers, dignitaries and the religiouses

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² The Central Executive Committee of Party. Resolution no 25. Resolution of the 7th Congress of the 10th Central Executive Community on religious affairs.

were an important force in the struggle for national independence and building, developing our country.

Though Vietnamese feudal state either considered Buddhism (in the Dinh, the Pre-le, Ly Tran dynasties) or Confucianism (in the Le and the Nguyen dynasties) main religion. Vietnamese feudal state had suitable views and policies for unity of religions according to principle “three religions go together” so that state was in harmony with religions and promoted religious force. The feudal history of Vietnam showed whenever our state carried out above matter well; our country was stable and prosperous.

Catholicism entered Vietnam in the 17th century, introducing Vietnamese to monotheistic religion. It was propagated and developed in part of Vietnamese inhabitants. It disordered the religious life of Vietnamese. Vietnamese traditional religions were considered heresy by Catholicism. Vietnamese traditional beliefs, customs were rejected by Catholicism. The French colonialists took advantage of missionary activities to incite clergymen, believers against national benefits. Before national danger, Kings of the Nguyễn dynasty as Minh Mạng, Thiệu Trị

and Tự Đức promulgated the Catholic forbidden policy. Nowadays we find that the Catholic forbidden policy of the Nguyễn had “sensible factors”. On the one hand the Catholic forbidden policy made the major part of clergymen and Catholics in opposition to nation. On the other hand, the French colonialists took advantage this policy to destroy national united bloc which was an important factor for preserving and developing our country. Consequently, the Nguyen dynasty was weakened. It had not enough force to defeat the French colonialists. Vietnamese nation was depended on French colonialists. The Catholic forbidden policy of the Nguyen dynasty created the antagonism between non Catholics and Catholics. The harmful effects of this policy has still existed. The Catholics forbidden policy of the Nguyen dynasty may be a negative lesson on the view and policy toward religions in Vietnam. Nowadays this lesson has still burning value.

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Vietnamese Communist Party was born on February 3rd, 1930. It has led our people in fighting for independence

and building socialism in Vietnam. Our Party has based on ideal foundation of Marxism and Leninism but is has not opposed to religious ideas. President Hồ Chí Minh has been a talent leader of our Party and a bright example. He not only knew ideas of religions but also inherited the advanced ideas of religions. He wrote that:

“Confucian theory had its good point. That is to cultivate individual morals

Christianity had its good point. That is charity.

Marxism had its good point. That is dialectic method

The principle of Sun Yat-sen had its good point. Its policy corresponds to the condition of our country.

Might Confucius, Jesus, Mark, Sun Yat-sen have the common points. They wanted to pursue happiness for humanity and seek welfare for society. If they still live in the world and live in the same place I think that they would coexist peacefully”³

There is Hồ Chí Minh idea on religion. The essences of this idea are to apply and develop the good cultural values of religions; to respect the people’s right to freedom

³ *The Stories of Hồ Chí Minh*. Tam Lien Publishing House, Thuong hai, 1949

of belief and religion, to unite religions and build national united bloc.

On September 3rd, 1945, the day after the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, President Hồ Chí Minh chaired the first meeting of Government Council. During this meeting Hồ Chí Minh raised *urgent duties of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam* with some matters. The third matter : All Vietnamese people, boys and girls who are 18 years old have right to stand for election and to vote regardless the rich, the poor, belief and race”; the 6th matter: Feudal- colonialists separated Catholics from no Catholics to rule our people easily; I propose Government to declare: Freedom of religion, unity of non Catholics and Catholics”⁴

Thanks to the correct guidelines of our Party and suitable policies of State, our Party has promoted “religious force” to fight against the French colonialists for national independence. Our party has led our people in the cause of building socialism in the North, liberating the South and unifying our country.

⁴ *Hồ Chí Minh Collected Work* Volume 3 Truth Publishing House, Hanoi, 1984 p. 7

When Vietnam began to implement its policy of reform and renewal for developing our country. The Vietnamese Communist Party renovated its policy regarding religion through Resolution No 24 – NQ/ TW “*Strengthening Religion Affairs in the New Situation*”. Resolution defines: “Religious problem has existed for long time. Belief and religion are spiritual needs of a part of people. Religious morals have corresponded with the cause of building new society”.

The programme on building our country in transitional period advancing up socialism (programme in 1991) of Vietnamese Communist Party (the document of the 7th National Conference of Vietnamese Communist Party) defined that “Belief and religion are spiritual needs of a part of people. There is consistent implementation of policy to respect and guarantee the people’s right to freedom of belief. On one is allowed to encroach on the freedom of belief and religion or to take advantage of the freedom of

belief in order to damage the benefit of our country will be punished”⁵.

After summarizing achievements and shortcomings in the stage of carrying out NQ 24/TW and Programme 1992, the 9th Central Communist Party of Vietnam has a meeting – the 7th Conference regarding *Religious Affairs* (Resolution No 25/TW on March 12th, 2003). Resolution required “Executive committees, party’s organizations, all levels of government should unify their awareness on following views and policies.

1-Belief and religion are spiritual needs of a part of people. Those needs currently exist and will continue to co-exist with nation during the process of building socialism in Vietnam. Followers of different religions are a part of national united bloc.

There is consistent implementation of policy to respect and guarantee the people’s right to freedom of belief, the right to follow or not to follow any religion and the right to take part in normal religious activities according to the law.

⁵ Vietnamese Communist Party. *The Collected documents*. The National Political Publishing House, Hanoi 2006. p.51

Religious activities must be in accordance with the legal framework. All religions are equal before the law

2- Our Party and State consistently implement the policy of great national unity.

Our party and State promote the unity of followers of different religions and unity between believers and non believers. The positive values in the tradition of worshipping ancestors and honoring those who have made great contributions to the nation and the people should be maintained and developed. Discrimination in treatment of citizens on the grounds belief or religion is prohibited. Simultaneously, it is prohibited to take advantage of belief or religion to engage in superstitious activities, in activities that are illegal or contrary to national policy, in activities that encourage dissidence among the people or between ethnic groups or that disturb public order or encroach upon national security”⁶ .

The 10th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam hold when our country overcame 20 years to

⁶ Vietnamese Communist Party. The Collected Documents of Party. The National Political Publishing House. Hanoi. 2006 p.51

implement policy of Reform and Renewal including renovation of views and policies regarding religion. Documents from the 10th National Congress of the Communist Party affirm: “Followers of different religions are an important part of Vietnam great national united bloc. The Party consistently implements policies of respect and guarantees the people’s right to freedom of belief, the right of citizens to follow or not to follow a religion, the right to take part in normal religious activities according to the law. The Party promotes unity of followers from different religions and the unity of followers with non –followers. It encourages development of cultural values and strong ethnics of religions and encourages religious followers and religious dignitaries to live ‘For better secular and religious life’”. Lawful religious organizations must abide by the law and are protected by the law. Constructive programme in socio-economic development should be implemented to improve the material and cultural lives of religious followers; Training and upgrading of cadre dealing with religious affairs should be enhanced; superstitious activities and behaviors that take advantage of belief and religion in

order to the common welfare of country or to violate the citizens' freedom of religion should be prevented”⁷

The views of Party regarding religion still present in two documents to report in the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

The first document: *Draft platform for national construction in the transitional period toward socialism* (which is supplemented and developed in 2011). For religious part, draft writes that “The people’s right to freedom of belief and of religion is respected and guaranteed; belief and religion are spiritual needs of a part of people. Every action that violates the right to freedom of belief and religion, that takes advantage of belief and religion to harm common welfare of our country and our people should be prevent”⁶.

The second document: *to continue enhancing the Party’s leadership capacity and combativeness, promoting the comprehensive strength of the entire people stepping up the renovation process, creating the foundation for Vietnam*

⁷ Vietnamese Communist Party. *The document of the 7th Congress of the 9th Central Executive Committee of Party*. The National Political Publishing House. Hanoi.. 2006 p.45-46

⁶ Vietnamese Communist Party. *The document of 9th National Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party*. The National Political Publishing House. Hanoi. 2006. p.122-123

*to basically become a modern industrial country by 2020 (the document of the 11 National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam). The view of Party regarding religion and religious policies “to continue perfecting policies and laws regarding belief and religion in accordance with the view of party in new stage of our country; cultural values and strong ethnics of religions are respected; religious followers and religious dignitaries are encouraged to live “For better secular and religious life” and to take part in the task of building and defending our country”*⁸.

The religious renovation of Party firstly renovates theory of knowledge. Party recognizes that religion exists permanently. Belief and religion have originated social existence so we can not abolish religion by administrative measures or coercion. Belief and religion continues to coexist with nation during the process of building socialism. The goal of a prosperous people, a strong country and a society that equitable, democratic and civilized is main element to draw followers of different

⁸ The special supplement. Nhan Dan Newspaper on September 15th 2010 p.1

religions together in the cause of building and defending homeland.

That is *multi-sided recognition on religion*. This recognition overcame the last one-sided recognition. Before implementing policy of Reform and Renewal we attached special important to atheism, theism and political aspects. We paid attention to hostile forces who took advantage of religions to destroy Vietnamese revolution. We had fixed idea about a part of religious dignitaries and followers who combined colonialist and imperialist forces to harm national welfare.

Before period of Renewal we regarded religion as superstition and sale of religion from the cultural angel. But Party has recognized that “Religious morals have corresponded with the cause of building new society”. Party has recognized cultural values of religion

Resolution No 24/ TW has not only renovated on religious theory of knowledge but also has had clear view on religious affairs. Resolution wrote that “Religious affairs are the responsibility of the entire political system. under

the leadership of Party”. So Party has considered religious affairs as special political duty, a part of political way of Party. Religious affairs are realized by the entire political system under the leadership of Party. Because of special characteristics so the important point of religious affairs is: “to encourage religious followers and dignitaries living for better secular and religious life”. Resolution 25/TW has defined that “the important context of religious affairs is the affairs of mobilizing the mass”.

Instruction no 37-CT/TW of the Party Central Committee on *Religious Affairs in New Condition* was enforced on July 2nd, 1998. The view of our Party on religious affairs is cited in the 3rd item: *Some duties of religious affairs*. Instruction no 37-CT/TW is guide-document of Party on Religious affairs.

On March 12th, 2003 the 7th Congress of the 9th Central Executive Committee of Party passed Resolution no 25/NQ/TW on *Religious Affairs*. This resolution was established on the spirit of Resolution No 24/TW but it was expressed more profoundly and concretely. Resolution no

25 wrote that: *3-the essential content of religious affairs is the affairs of mobilizing mass:*

The goal of a prosperous people, a strong country and a society that equitable, democratic and civilized is main element to draw followers of different religions together in the common cause . All people regardless belief, religion have right and duty in the cause of building and defending homeland.⁹

For the affairs of mobilizing mass, religions should mobilize their followers to uphold their patriotic spirit and determination to protect the independence and unity of the Homeland; Followers are encouraged to carry out well socio-economic policies as well as public security and national defense; all people are ensured material and spiritual needs at large, including followers of religions .

4- Religious affairs are responsible of entire political system

Religious affairs are related to many spheres of society, to many levels of the administration, different branches of activity and to many regions. The

⁹ Nhan dan Newspaper on January 13th 2011

responsibility of entire political system is to do religious affairs well. Training and upgrading of carders dealing with religious affairs should be enhanced”¹⁰

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The view of Party on religious policy in Resolution no24/TW is “All churches and religious organizations which have religious orientations relating to nation, regulations and guidelines corresponding to law and good staff ensuring both the temporary and the spiritual will be considered and recognized by the State”. Resolution was promulgated when the matters of following religion and religious preaching were rising so Resolution pays attention these following matters.

5- The matters of following religion and religious preaching

Every follower has the right to practice religion at home and at legitimate places of worship as stipulated by the laws.

¹⁰ Vietnamese Communist Party. The Documents of the 10th National Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party. *ibid*

Religious organizations officially recognized by the State are entitled to conduct lawful activities and are protected by the law. These activities include: opening schools to train religious leaders and members of religious communities; publishing religious documents and books, and maintaining, repairing and building places of religious worship in accordance with legal regulations. Those engaged in religious evangelization, along with other religious activities must abide by the Constitution and the law. No one is allowed to take advantage religion to propagate heresy and superstition, to violate the regulations of the Constitution and laws”

The Political report of the 10th National Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party (4-2006) reaffirmed what were raised in Resolution No 24/TW and Resolution No 25/TW “The legal religious organizations which have lawful activities are protected by law....Superstitious activities that take advantage of belief and religion in order to harm the common welfare of the country, to violate the citizens’ freedom of religion should be prevented”

Since our Party has implemented its policy of Renewal, Party has paid attention to officers and cadres who deal with religious affairs. Resolution No 24/TW defined: to strengthen the offices which manage religious activities. Instruction No 37-CT/TW has an item dealing with this matter.

6- The offices which manage religious activities in many levels of administration and branch should be strengthened; training and upgrading of cadres dealing with religious affairs should be enhanced”

Resolution no 25 defined that “the organizations and cadres dealing with religious affairs should be enhanced and strengthened” .

Resolution dealt with 4 solutions *in the 4th part: essential measures*. The 4th solution: *strengthening of organizational affairs and cadres dealing with religious affairs*. This solution has following contents:

- The organizational apparatus dealing with religious affairs of Party, of administration, Homeland Front and organizations should be strengthened; The functions, duties, authorities of state management of religious affairs

in levels should be defined clearly. The regulations of religion affairs should be set up so that these affairs achieve good results.

-Training and upgrading of cadres dealing with religious affairs should be enhanced. The policy of cadres should be guaranteed

-The cadres dealing with religious affairs should be trained and fostered. The cadres dealing with religious affairs in ethnic minorities should be fostered and trained to understand the customs and the voice of people where they work”.

With above spirit, the Political Report of the 10th national Congress of Communist Party of Vietnam stresses “to strengthen training and upgrading of cadres dealing with religious affairs”.

Basing on the view about religious policy, some documents of Party raise duties or main solutions of religious affairs. The urgent and permanent duty is *perfecting laws regarding religion*. Resolution no 24/TW requests “Council of Ministers is necessary to promulgate legal documents to concretize Resolution”. Instruction 37-

CT/TW demands “ Government should supplement Instruction to regulate religious activities; The Ordinance on Religion should be compiled to submit to Standing Committee of the National Assembly. The Ordinance on Religion is base of State management of religious affairs. It helps religions to take part in normal religious activities according to the law” The 4th part of Resolution No 25/TW on *the main solutions* raises clearly: “ The Ordinance on Religion and documents guiding for implementation should be promulgated soon. *Laws on belief and Religion* should be prepared to establish”.

In the document of the 9th Congress of Party put forward “to perfect laws on belief and religion step by step”

The document of the 10th Congress of Party requested higher “ the Ordinance on Religion should be continuously perfected in accordance with the view of Party in the new stage of our country”

The renewal of awareness and policy on religion is the result of renewal of theory of knowledge of Party on the religious role and position in new stage. Resolution no 24

brings out a connotation on religious affairs: “Religious affairs consists of: mobilizing of believers and dignitaries; organization of statement management regarding church’s activities; realizing of foreign activities on religion. Combination of theoretical study and guideline of practical activities....” Basing on these above criteria of Resolution no 24, later documents of Party continuously makes more concretely and clearly religious affairs.

Religious affairs are responsibility of entire political system

Key content of religious affairs is mobilizing of masses

The view of Party on religious policy is more prosperous than the view of party on religious affairs. First of all, Party requires that a religious organization is allowed to practise if its religious practice, preaching and management of believers and dignitaries are carried out in accordance with the law.

The principles of religious policy as follows: Religions are managed by the law; churches and religious organization should be operated in accordance with the law; the law on religion should be perfected. Party

recognizes that religious affairs should be done well if we have state offices on religious management from the central to regions. At the same time these offices should be managed by cadres who understand profoundly real life and have ability for religious management.

In general, for some key problems on religious affairs and policy are raised by Party, we find later documents are dealt with and analyzed more carefully than the earlier documents. It reflects the process of awareness of these two problems.

After the Politburo that had been elected from the 6th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party published Resolution no 24/ TW, Party has renewed its thinking, awareness and brought out resolutions regarding religion. The Politburo and Secretariat had been elected from the 6th, the 7th and the 8th Congresses published many Instructions, Resolutions on expanding and summing up Resolution No 24/TW. Specially, the 9th Central Executive Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party had a resolution on Religious affairs. It was first time our Party has a special resolution on religion (Resolution No 25/TW).rtve

Basing on Party's renewal on awareness., the policy of State regarding management of religious activities were established through the system of legal documents. Firstly, Government issued Decree No 69/HDBT *on Religious activities*. After that Decree No 26/NDCP *on Religious Activities* was published on April 19th, 1999. The *Ordinance on Belief and Religion* was published on June 29th, 2004.

The guideline of Party and policies of State regarding religion really go into life. Religious condition in Vietnam has been gradually stabilized. Many former problems have been gradually solved including the problem of Protestantism in the Northern mountainous regions and in the Central Highlands. Most of religious dignitaries and followers believe in the leadership of our Party and they actively take part in building and defending our country according to the motto "For better secular and religious life".

For international sphere: on November 14th, 2006 America removed Vietnam from the list of "countries of particular concern" (CPC) on liberty of religion. ew hasll

