

The Globalization Impact on the National and Religious Relationship of Vietnam in the Present stage

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ABSTRACT: The author questions that in the global context, how the relationship between nation and religions expressed is. He answers the question by indicating and discussing on three main tendencies. In the conclusion, the author argues that in the present situations, on account of influences of the market economy, of the globalization, relationships between religions and the nation in Vietnam have points different from the past. These differences are the basis of social research to amend the theory on religion and on the implementation of the politics on the religious management so as to ensure the righteous religious freedom in strict accordance with the constitution and the law.

Through the development of history since the appearance of the nation, socio-political community with its state and territory, the relationships between the nation and religions sometimes have undergone a tortuous stage (sometimes they have been adapted to the common aim and interest, sometimes they have been contradictory) under the impact of non-religious factors. Despite consistency of conflicts, in a certain part, the society still moves along its own laws. One of the issues in the logic of the present society is the globalization tendency. In the global context, how is the relationship between nation and religions expressed?

Although the concept of globalization is largely used in the social life, the unity of its content is a still problematic. Regarding the content, the majority accepts that it is "an enlargement of social space over all the planet". This interpretation of globalization began since the 15th century, after the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, the developed countries in Europe conducted a massive conquest of the remaining parts of the world. Then, from the middle of the 19th

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century, European countries conquered many countries in Asia and transformed large lands with rich natural resources into colonies and profitable markets.

After the Second World War, in the collapse of colonialism step by step, many Asian, African, Latin American countries have gained national, political independence and have participated in international political life to form the system of socialist countries with the Soviet Union at the leading position. At the same time, there appeared capitalist countries led by the United States and West European countries. This is the expression of the third stage in the globalization period.

Thus, in their scale and character, all the three stages of the globalization have been linked with the aggressive wars and colonial policies in all the spheres, and at the same time, they have been the direct result of wars.

Vietnam locates in the region of Western–Eastern relationships, in the neighborhood of two great Indian and Chinese civilizations. Its globalization process was therefore earlier than the world and had typical characteristics.

The first stage was in the first century with the invasion of the Northern Empire together with the introduction a cultural system and religions (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, etc.) The next stage was in the 16th century with the invasion of French colonialism together with the introduction of the Western civilization into Vietnam with notable religious and national conflicts. At present, Vietnam is facing a new globalization process which may be called the present globalization process to differentiate with the earlier ones.

Different from what had taken place and had been solved in history, the present globalization process is happening in all spheres of the social life. In its essence, it is the result of development of production forces, especially of the scientific and technological revolution of the market economy. With the essence, one may say that the globalization process is the inevitable result of the civilization of humanity. But this development has been preserved and manipulated by the capitalist power, and its expressions are therefore quite different from its nature.

Before this inevitable tendency, each country of high or low level of development has to integrate, to find its own place in the worldwide historical current. Vietnam has therefore been experiencing great influence of the global tendency on every aspect of the social life, especially in the national and religious relationship. This relation has been expressed in the following main tendencies.

First, the Unity between Religions and the Nation Remains the Prevailing Tendency

In the present condition, the unity of religions and nation remains the major current, starting from the historical and cultural tradition. In the general view over many historical millenaries, the salient issues have ever been the patriotism, and the unity of the community. This spirit has been the life style, the life philosophy of the Vietnamese. This unity spirit has become the spirit of undaunted struggles of the Vietnamese nation against enemies. The history of Vietnam has witnessed the fights for national independence after a millenary of Chinese domination. Trần dynasty had defeated three invasions of the Yuan–Mongols, Lê dynasty had defeated the Ming invaders, and Quang Trung had defeated the Chins. This unity spirit has been tested through the war of resistance against the French and the American, to become now the invincible force in the building of socialism.

On the basis of unity, in answering the renovation policies of the Party and the Government, in the present stage, religions are actively participating into the national unity. The clearest expression is that religions have determined their line adapted to the nation, in line with common aims. Religious believers and dignitaries are actively participating into socio-political activities, to the building of the administration at different levels. The religious believers actively take part in the election of national Assembly and of People's Committees at different levels. "From the data of 44/46 provinces/cities in the whole country, about 779 dignitaries have been delegates of the People's Committees at the three levels, 39 persons at the province level, 186 persons at the district level and 554 persons at the commune level."¹

On the cultural viewpoint, religions have actively participated into and responded to the building of the cultural life at the basis, to build cultural villages, communes and families. One should say that, on the moral aspect, religious compatriots have effectively contributed to restrain the moral regression coming from negative influence of market institutions. Side by side with this agreement, in recent years, the religious policies of the Party and the Government have step by step answered the religious need of religious compatriots and popular mass. Tthis is an important basis to promote the unity spirit in the new period.

On the basis of considering religious belief as the spiritual need of a part of the people, that religious virtues having many points necessary to the building of the human beings and the new society, different levels of the Party and the Government, together with the Front and organizations, have created favorable conditions to religious compatriots to follow their religious beliefs. In the past, many religious

organization belonging to the 6 main religions of the country (Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islamism, Caodaism, Hòa Hảo Buddhism) have been recognized. Ordinance on belief and religion has been issued, creating a legal basis for religious activities. Everywhere, the places of worship have been restored to be more magnificent to respond the desire of millions of people in their daily life towards the religious belief. Many Caodaists, Hòa Hảo Buddhists have been really moved to express their joy when their churches have been active again with the re-opening of congresses. The State and the Government have understood the legitimate desire of dignitaries, believers of different religions and take care of their both material and spiritual needs. Canonical books have been republished, important religious ceremonies have been organized in safety, order and solemnity, schools for training religion have been enlarged in size, the ordination has become more regularly and religious life has been more adapted to the religious laws. Believers and religious dignitaries have enlarged their relations, learned and participated into activities of their international religionists. As the belief life has been responded to, the material life has also been ameliorated step by step. The aspect of many villages has changed. Houses with tiled roofs, clean village roads, new schools, commune dispensaries have appeared together with the unity of human beings in mutual aid while religious believers are living in safety, order and joy. This is the foundation for the unity of compatriots of different religions and with non-religious persons as well as with persons who do not follow any religions in the same territory.

Second, the Unity between Religions and Nation before the Globalization Tendency

In the Vietnamese national history, the religious element has been the union line between human beings in the national community expressed by the family-village-country relationship, owing to the blood relationship in the cultural of ancestors. Ancestors are considered as the fate of the line, the family. The village worships persons who had done great services to community. They have been tutelary spirits, the fate spirits of the community. These spirits come from different origins: they are spirits of rivers, of land; many spirits were trees, stones, etc. sometimes for a certain reason they had an unexpected a relationship of sacred character with the village, with the community; some were initiators of different professions, creator of village, persons of high merit. The whole country worships Hùng King. A social characteristic feature of the Eastern society, including Vietnam, is the veneration of individuals considered as representing the national community. This person is often a king-spirit is not only concerned with the economy, politics, culture, society in the

actual society, but still controls the invisible world with spirits, ghosts, souls of the deads as well as earthly affairs under the direction of a king. These expression of the cultural and national relationships have been created the cultural identity, the basis for the acceptance of exogenous religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Confucianism was introduced in the first year of Era with the coming of the Northern ruling classes, at first it was a coercion but later became a conscious choice of the ruling classes to build a unified and centralized country.

On the basis of precise facts we may affirm that Confucianism is a socio-political doctrine, and only after its integration into Vietnam had born a religious character. As a doctrine of deep religious character, the problem was the change of Confucianism to agree with the mentality of native religions, especially with the "common life" and the "refraction" in its relationship with the national culture.

Like Confucianism, Buddhism as an exogenous religion had been also "nationalized" to have special features of Vietnamese Buddhism. When entering Vietnam, Buddhism had been in contact with traditional religious beliefs, blended with them to create the system of Buddhist temples venerating "The Four elements" (the "Four elements" in the popular tradition had been the cultural of spirits in the natural phenomena: cloud, rain, thunder, lighting and stones); Buddhas in India were men but after the integration in Vietnam they became women, the God of Mercy (Kuan Yin) had been transformed into Sahasrabhuja-sahasranetra-Avalokitesvara (thousand-eye and thousand-arm Avalokitesvara), etc.

Chinese Taoism has been fairly early introduced into Vietnam and had combined with local elements to become the Vietnamese Taoism. The aim of Taoism was quite different from other religions: with its illusion of life in the Nirvana to build a society enjoying both material and spiritual prosperity. This element had compensated the shortage of Confucianism, Buddhism in building a complete face of Vietnamese religion.

When entering in Vietnam, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism had been changed or refracted by native cultural elements to form cultural identity. This is a main element creating national power to struggle against Chinese domination, to secure independence for nation.

The development of production forces had led to the formation of capitalism, with its consequences in the world-wide occupation, exploitation of colonies. In this context, Vietnam fell under French colonialism. With the conscious or "unconscious"

union between French colonialism and Catholicism a contradiction was set forth between the nation and invaders together with the conflict between two civilizations. This conflict had been dealt when the national independence was affirmed.

In the Vietnamese history, religious element has been a part of culture, deeply engaged with the nation in fights against the scheme of national assimilation and abolishment of identity. In the present globalization tendency how the unity tendency between religions and the nation should be realized? It remains the unity tendency between religions and the nation which has been the essence of Vietnamese culture, but this unity is performed in a quite new form. That is “religions have had the tendency to change and adapt to the life and to society in the new conditions of the open door integration and in preserving the socialist character”². In my opinion, this expression emerges from the globalization context which includes also the religious globalization. In the general aspect, religions in Vietnam at present on the one hand are changing to adapt the great tendency of the time, and other hand they have to preserve the "essence" of the national culture and to adapt the life of a civilized society. This statement is expressed in the following viewpoints:

- Regarding the side of religious believers, in the rapid development of sciences and technology as well as of the market economy, the life of the people has had notable improvements, the education level has been improved day by day. Religious believers have therefore a “double obligation” as a religious believer and a Vietnamese citizen, and each individual has the conditions to reflect on his own religious living. “The ancient style of life has been in fact greatly improved by individual experiences. If believers in the past were more concerned with the salvation and besought salvation, the present generation of believers is more and more concerned with the cultural and psychological aspect for they need a balance in their thought before the naked tension of the market economy and the consumption civilization which are introduced into our society.”³

- Regarding the side of the churches, we may say that in the recent time, under the pressure of integrated elements, religion are more conscious of a “religious reorganization” in the tendency of going together with the nation and with the new system in a closer way. It was the renovation tendency of Catholicism to renew, and modernize its theology and ritual activities to serve and integrate with indigenous culture; the tendency of Buddhism to enter into life, to modernize and follow the socialist, national doctrine; the tendency of Caodaism to enjoy a glorious country, a living religion; the tendency of Hòa Hảo Buddhism to serve the country in close relationship with the nation. And with Protestantism – a religion was characterized

by "its dynamism" and its complexity in the religious process, the aim is to follow a life in accordance with Gospel to serve God, the Fatherland and nation.

We may therefore affirm that, before the globalization, the unity of religions and the nation to create the cultural identity remains the basic trend, but in this process religions have to transform themselves to exist and to develop and adapt social tendency with rapid development in the industrialization and modernization process. This tendency is conform to the spirit of Vietnamese Catholic Episcopal Council, to the awareness that we are Lạc-Hồng descendants and the genuine masters of the country. Everybody wants his country, his fatherland to be free from poverty, backwardness in the integration into the whole world with a bright identity card. In the Common letter of The Vietnamese Catholic Episcopal Council in 1980, there was a paragraph which read: "As a holy organization in the national community of Vietnam, we are resolved to live in a strict link with the fate of our native land, to follow the national tradition, to integrate ourselves into the present life of the country. The holy organization must advance in common with the hole humanity and share his life with the world. We must advance with the nation and share our life with our nation for this native land is the place we have been called by God to live and become his native children. This land is the mother who has helped us in the process of performing the task of being children of God. This nation is the community that God gives us to serve as citizens as well as member of a people of God"⁴.

Third, Hostile Forces Making use of Religions, Ethnic groups to Disrupt the Block of Great National Unity

Making use of religious issues for political intention has ever been the inherent, unchanged essence of hostile forces towards Vietnam. In the present stage, however under the influence of globalization, the use of religious issue by antagonist forces has a new content and a much more complex character. In the present time, the rapid development of Protestantism in the mountainous provinces of North Vietnam has created a religious life in this area with features and positive aspects that we can not deny. But this development has also led to decrease and decline of culture and traditional beliefs in these regions. The special fact is that the antagonist forces have benefited from this development in the ethnic and cultural problems of a number of ethnic minorities to create the so called "the father of Mong" in close relationship with the Protestant Vàng Trứ to dissociate themselves from the Vietnamese fatherland. In these places, the state of dissidence, disunion sometimes has become

hot points influencing greatly on the regional life which are disadvantageous to the policies of the Party and the Government. The case of what has been called "independent Dega State" in the Central Highlands has been also a religious, ethnical problem to break the great national unity block.

One may say that there had never existed in history a "Dega State" in the Central Highlands. The so-called "the autonomous Dega State" created since 1999 outside of Vietnam was the product of antagonistic forces making use of FULRO forces in the ethnic problem of the Central Highlands to sabotage the Vietnamese Revolution. Under the leadership and direction of foreign forces, the leaders of "the autonomous "Dega State" demanded the restoration of the land in the Central Highlands. They made use of non-violent measures, passed the problem of "democracy", "human rights" in the political struggle abroad. They called for an international recognition help in combination with a propaganda in the country to draw and group a great number of persons, and in favorable conditions they will struggle and exert pressure on the power so as to transform gradually the struggle into an armed struggle and to make public the activities of "the autonomous Dega State" in the Central Highlands. Their guideline was to ask for land, for religious freedom, to come to the freedom of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands then to bring the organization structure of "the autonomous Dega State" to come and legally operate in the Central Highlands.

In this scheme, together with the political system of "the autonomous Dega State" there would exist the special religious system of the Dega, to separation of Protestantism among the highlanders from the Protestant system of South Vietnam (The General Conferderation of the Vietnam Protestant Church) and the establishment of the Sacred Dega Protestant association. The aim of establishment of the Sacred Dega Protestant association is to attract the ethnic people in Central Highlands to struggle for "the autonomous Dega State". The reactionary group among the Highlanders living in exile led by Ksor Kok through a number of Vietnamese overseas, communication means, etc. guided a number of subjects in Vietnam to attract and push a number of missionaries in the Central Highlands to create political disorders with the most typical events in 2001 and 2003.

Thus from the complex evolution of religions and ethnic groups in the region of ethnic minorities in the present stage, we remark that, in the present conditions the antagonistic forces are making use of the religious, ethnic issues as a pretext to interfere into the domestic affairs, to break the block of great national unity. In Vietnam, after 2001, when the antagonistic forces were publicly supported, they set up the so-called the Dega State, the Dega Protestantism, wanting to sow division in

the relation between the Kinhs and the highlanders, to divide and destroy the block of great national union and to separate the Central Highlands from the Vietnamese fatherland. This project has been also set up in analogues scenarios like “the Fatherland of the Monghs” in the provinces of the North, “the State of the Khmer Crom” linked to the Southern Buddhism in the west of South Vietnam.

It is clear that the so called “Fatherland of Monghs” linked to Vạng Trú Protestantism in the North West, “the Dega State” linked to Dega Protestantism in the Central Highlands, “the State of Khmer Crom” linked to the Southern Buddhism are only the use of religious, ethnical issues to break with the tradition and to “divide the territory” in a country with many ethnic groups. This is also a tendency that we must study in the relation between religion and the nations in Vietnam in the present stage.

In short, as we have pointed out, the movement, the change of relation between the religions and the nation are linked to the movements and changes in the existence of the society. In the present situations, on account of influences of the market economy, of the globalization, relationships between religions and the nation have points different from the past. These differences are the basis of our research to amend the theory on religion and on the implementation of the politics on the religious management so as to ensure the righteous religious freedom in strict accordance with the constitution and the law. At the same time we have opposed and defeated all attempts of making use of religion by antagonistic forces to destroy the block of great unity of the whole people and to create socio-political troubles in our country in the present stage.

Reference:

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- ¹. See: *Religious task after three years of implementation of 7th Central Regulation, IX Session, State Management Review*, No. 118, 2005, p. 4-8.
 - ². See: Đỗ Quang Hưng. *Religions and the Nation*, in *An ninh thế giới*, No. 56, March 3th, 2006, p. 18.
 - ³. See: Đỗ Quang Hưng. *Religions and the nation*, Ibid.; “On the Religion and Society in Vietnam at present” in *Social Sciences Review*, No. 2, 2005, p. 33-43.
 - ⁴. *Common Letter in 1980* of The Vietnamese Catholic Episcopal Council. Cited from the document on the organization and the line of performing the religion of Vietnamese religions, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002, p. 62.