

Changes of Catholicism and Their Impacts on Sustainable Development in Vietnam at Present

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Abstract: In Vietnam, Catholicism is a religion that is very sensitive to the national and international situations. The changes made by Catholicism itself or caused by the situation in Vietnam and the world have impacted more or less on the current sustainable development in Vietnam. This paper focuses on the changes of Catholicism taking place since 2004, when the Standing Committee of the 11th National Assembly enacted the Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions on the 18th of June of the year. In addition to a number of resolutions and instructions, such as Resolution No.24-NQ/TW on strengthening religious affairs in the new situation dated 16 October 1990 and Resolution No.25-NQ/TW on religious affairs dated 12 March 2003, the promulgation of the ordinance on beliefs and religions is seen as an important factor affecting changes of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. In this paper, the changes of Catholicism are reviewed in the political, cultural, environmental, and socio-economic aspects. Both positive and negative impacts caused by the changes on sustainable development in Vietnam are analysed.

Keywords: Change, impacts, sustainable development, Catholic.

Subject classification: Religious studies

1. Introduction

For the recent years, the improvement made by the Party and the government in the awareness of religious affairs has resulted in changes in the activities of religions, including Catholicism. Particularly, the Catholic Church has reviewed its own activities and made important strides in applying its openness to the world, leading to certain changes in religious activities and

consequently causing significant impacts on the Catholic Church in Vietnam in the general direction of “living the Gospel in the heart of the nation” (Vietnamese: *Sống phúc âm giữa lòng dân tộc*). This has enabled parishioners feel better in thinking and practising their beliefs. The recent changes of Catholicism in Vietnam are assessed from some aspects, including: beliefs, practice, and community, which are shown through merely religious

practice and socially targeted practice that have exerted influence on cultural and human development for the purpose of satisfying the requirements of sustainable development in Vietnam at present. Bearing national cultural values and conforming to national ethical standards, religions and their ethical norms have contributed to transmitting and handing over the national ethical values from generation to generation, taking part in preserving, educating, and promoting the traditional ethical standards of Vietnamese nation. The Catholic cultural and ethical values always cause impacts on social activities. It shows the direction of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, which is to accompany closely the nation and conform strictly to all the guidelines, policies, and legal regulations promulgated by the Party and the government of Vietnam. The spirit of “dialogue and cooperation” plays the key role. Vietnamese Catholics are aware of their origin as follows: “A good Catholic must be also a good citizen”. This paper³, therefore, focuses on analysing the changes of Catholicism that have affected the national development in the political, cultural, environmental, and socio-economic aspects, which are described respectively in the following parts.

2. In the political aspect

In this paper, the influence of the Catholicism in Vietnam on the national sustainable development has been studied for a period from 1980 up to now. A Catholic meeting was held in Hanoi by

Catholic bishops from 24 to 30 June 1980 and, as a result, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (abbreviated as CBCV; Vietnamese: *Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam*) was founded.

At the end of the meeting on 1 May 1980, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam sent a pastoral letter, often called “Pastoral Letter 1980”, to all priests, deacons, and Catholic lay people in the whole country. In the section entitled “Pastoral Direction”, it is said that the way designed for the entire Church in Vietnam is “to live the Gospel in the heart of the nation to serve the welfare of the people”.

In terms of the formality, based on Pastoral Letter 1980, all leaders of the Catholic dioceses and parishes in Vietnam affirmed the Catholic political direction. It was the beginning of a new stage named “Catholics and Nation”. As stated by Vietnamese Catholics, “for the past 30 years (1980 - 2010), in reality, Pastoral Letter 1980 has been considered as the lodestar guiding the Catholic Church in Vietnam in keeping the consistent loyalty to the beliefs and carrying out activities for the sake of the beloved nation and people” [3, p.171].

The period from 1980, when the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam promulgated Pastoral Letter 1980, to 2010, when the Catholic Church in Vietnam held the Holy Year (also called Jubilee), was marked with Catholic drastic changes in the political aspect. On the one hand, Pastoral Letter 1980 and other pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference were attached to the activities of the Catholic Church in the world generally and

the Catholic Church in Vietnam specifically. On the other hand, they were also related closely to the political situations in the country. Although there were some turns, the red thread of all Catholic activities complied with the key sense of Pastoral Letter 1980, which was “to live the Gospel in the heart of the nation to serve the welfare of the people”.

In addition to the celebration of the Holy Year, the Catholic Church in Vietnam convoked its Congress of God’s People from 21 to 25 November 2010. According to the message sent by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam to the community of God’s people in Vietnam for the 11th Congress (Term 2010-2013), “The goal of the congress is to appeal all members of the people of God to closely collaborate with one another in building the Church of Christ inside the beloved country. The Church must be really a sign and a means of communion between human beings and Christ as well as the communion among human beings. It is necessary to make every effort to undertake the mission of Christ and take the Gospel in the new context of the country and the world at present.” [14]

The content of the Congress of God’s People is shown in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The very section entitled “Introduction” and all the following chapters show clearly the continuity of the guideline mentioned in Pastoral Letter 1980. As written in Introduction No.1, “As Pastoral Letter 1980 set up an orientation for all Catholic believers over a historical period from the day of the country

unification in 1975, the Congress of God’s People is convoked in the hope of setting a direction for the Catholic Church in Vietnam during a new period in a rapidly changing country and the incessantly changing world”. In another section, it is affirmed: “The Church accompanies Vietnamese people in all the ups and downs in history as well as all the feelings in life”; and, “The Catholic Church in Vietnam has realised that the home country is the very cradle, where Christians and believers live in the spirit of accompanying all other people in the national community. Our companion shows the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In the companion, we must be actual members of the national community, but not strangers”. (Article 9, Chapter 1, *Instrumentum Laboris*)

Pastoral Letter in 2011, which was entitled “Together cultivating a civilisation of love and life” and issued on 1 May 2011, mentions the continuity of the direction from Pastoral Letter 1980. This is also shown in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the believers’ community and particularly the message sent by Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholic Church in Vietnam on the occasion of the ceremony of the Holy Year in 2010 and the Instruction sent to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in Vietnam on 27 June 2009 during an *ad limina* visit in June 2009. “As citizens in the country, Vietnamese Catholics have the duty of loving and building the country. At the same time, we accomplish this duty with the spirit of the Gospel, which means doing the prophetic mission with sincerity and responsibility, loving in truth and

living out of the truth in love”. With such a spirit, Pope Benedict XVI advised Vietnamese believers as follows: “Lay Catholics for their part must show by their life, which is based on charity, honesty and love for the common good, that a good Catholic is also a good citizen”.

Owing to the ceremony of the Holy Year in 2010 in the spirit of penance, renovation, and negotiation as well as the message and advice from Pope Benedict XVI, the success of the Congress of God’s People, and the direction mentioned in Pastoral Letter in 2011, Catholic dioceses and parishes simultaneously followed the advice of Pope Benedict XVI: “a good Catholic is also a good citizen”. The Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics, which is an organisation of Vietnamese Catholics, was in the vanguard by holding a scientific conference entitled “A Good Catholic is Also a Good Citizen”. Meanwhile, the Central Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics launched a campaign with the above-mentioned slogan so that the local Committees for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics at the city and provincial level could carry out corresponding activities.

In talking about the changes of Catholicism in the political aspect that caused impacts on sustainable development in Vietnam, one of the events that cannot be omitted is the paper presented by Archbishop Paul Bui Van Doc, Bishop of the diocese of My Tho, at the 10th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABA) held in Xuan Loc Episcopal See on 11 December

2012⁴. The theme of the assembly is “FABC at Forty Years - Responding to the Challenges of Asia: The New Evangelisation”. Participating at the assembly were four delegates from Vietnam, including: (1) Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man, Cardinal Priest and Archbishop of the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City; (2) Pierre Nguyen Van Nhon, Archbishop of the archdiocese of Hanoi and President of CBCV; (3) Pierre Nguyen Van De, Bishop of the diocese of Thai Binh; and (4) Paul Bui Van Doc, Bishop of the diocese of My Tho. Bishop Bui Van Doc presented a paper on the dialogue development of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, switching from the “triple dialogue” paradigm to the “four dialogue” one, consisting of: the dialogue with religions, the dialogue with local culture, the dialogue with the poor in Asia, and the dialogue with the communists.

Responding to the Chinese illegal placement of the oil rig HY981 in the exclusive economic zone of Vietnam in May 2014, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam raised a proposal entitled “On the East Sea (i.e. South China Sea) situation” signed by Paul Bui Van Doc, who was the archbishop of the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City and the president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam at that time, which showed clearly the standpoint of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. At the same time, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam made an appeal: “For Vietnamese Catholics, it is time to express fully our patriotism according to the advice of Pope Benedict

XVI that a good Catholic is also a good citizen. The patriotism is shown by the fact that we cannot be indifferent to the situation of the country at present and in future as well. We have to pray diligently for the home country with our heart and conscience, while taking part proactively in activities for national defence and being prepared to respond to the call for national salvation” (Article 3).

Thus, a fundamental change of the Catholic Church in the political aspect is to attach closely with and accompany the nation, while complying with the guideline and policy of the Party and the government in Vietnam. Most of the Catholic dignitaries, priests, and believers put their trust in the leadership of the Party. They have also taken part in the activities of national building and protection, depending on specific responsibilities and positions. The spirit of “dialogue and cooperation” is considered as the key and Vietnamese Catholics are aware clearly that good Catholics also mean good citizens.

3. In the cultural aspect

Turning to the 21st century, Vietnamese Catholics continue the direction of Pastoral Letter 1980 in the cultural aspect: “Building in Church a way of life and expression of faith in accordance with national tradition”. The direction is manifested deeply in many spheres.

It is to continue integrating the Christian culture with Vietnamese culture in the spirit

of evangelism and dialogue. It is also to evangelise the popular piety, preserving the cultural values of Christians and other ethnic groups in the local area, where Catholics live.

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Cultural evangelisation is understood in two dimensions. In the first one, the “Good News” should be spread into the local culture in the areas, where Catholics live. In the second one, the Christian culture should be merged with the local culture. This is shown in the *Redemptoris Missio* (Article 52) of Pope John Paul as follows: “Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within”.

After issuing Pastoral Letter 1980, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam also promulgated some other pastoral letters, continuing to mention and clarify the cultural integration.

In Article 9 of Pastoral Letter of 1992, it is stated: “Building a way of life and expression of faith more appropriately to the national tradition”.

In the pastoral care message in 2000, the cultural integration was further specified: “Living, Testifying, and Spreading the Gospel in the Vietnamese manner”.

According to Pope John Paul II, the evangelisation also means converting the

Christian faith into culture. In the letter on the foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, he wrote: "A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not faithfully lived out".

Going back in time, we can see that the "local theology" was already heightened at the meeting of Asian bishops held in November 1970 in Manila by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, based on an in-depth assessment of Catholicism in Asian countries. "We bitterly regret acknowledging that we have had a limitation. We have not manifested a Christian life and have not made the Church incarnate into every particular culture with an example way. As a result, the Church still remains foreign in our nations".

Based the above-mentioned awareness, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences asserted: "We also pledged ourselves to develop an indigenous theology and to do what we can so that the life and message of the Gospel may be ever more incarnate in the rich historic cultures of Asia, so that in the necessary process of modernisation and development, Asian Christianity may help to promote all that is authentically human in these cultures" (Resolution 13) [9, p.36].

At the Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, a three dialogue paradigm was suggested, including: the dialogue with Asian religions; the dialogue with indigenous cultures; and, the dialogue with the poor in Asia. The three dialogue paradigm is still maintained at present by the Federation of

Asian Bishops' Conferences. It was also mentioned at the 10th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences held in December 2012 with the title "FABC at Forty Years - Responding to the Challenges of Asia"⁵.

Overall, the evangelisation, the conversion of faith into culture, and the dialogue with local culture are different dimensions of the cultural integration. Each of the dimensions, however, has its particular content. In regard to the cultural integration, the evangelisation, and the conversion of faith into culture, which were described above, we are now presenting how the Catholic dialogue with Vietnamese culture has taken place.

Dialogue, first and foremost, does not mean confrontation or exclusion. Before the foundation of the Second Vatican Council (1961-1965), Catholicism implemented the exclusion; i.e. it existed out of Vietnamese culture. It was an important reason for the ban on religions under the Le dynasty and especially under the reigns of kings Minh Mang and Tu Duc of the Nguyen dynasty.

Dialogue with Vietnamese culture means listening attentively, understanding thoroughly, and respecting sincerely Vietnamese culture. This is the ground for dialogue.

Dialogue with the local culture also means acquiring and adopting the local cultural values, aiming at enriching the Christian culture and resulting in new cultural values, based on the interaction and the combination of the local and the Christian cultures.

With the three above-mentioned directions, it can be said that the dialogue

with Vietnamese culture has been carried out to a higher extent, compared with the direction on cultural integration, evangelisation, and conversion of faith into culture. That is why the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences has persistently maintained the direction for the past nearly 50 years.

Although the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam have not referred directly to the phrase "Dialogue with Vietnamese culture" in its Pastoral Letter 1980 as well as other pastoral letters, the three directions have been mentioned in various forms.

In Pastoral Letter in 2001, it is written: "After the country unification, Pastoral Letter issued on 1 May 1980 set up the orientation of living the Gospel in the heart of the nation and building in Church a way of life and expression of faith in accordance with national tradition for the purpose of making it favourable for the seed of the Good News of Jesus Christ to flourish in our homeland". According to the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Congress of God's People in Vietnam in 2010, "The Church in Vietnam makes every effort to explore good values of the national culture and, at the same time, tries to manifest the values in the Catholic prayers, songs, and rites as well as in daily life, thinking and theological language" (Article 8).

It is emphasised in the *Instrumentum Laboris* that the Church in Vietnam would like to disseminate the Good News effectively. Aiming at bearing the national characteristics and carrying out cultural integration at the same time, it is necessary

to learn about the national identity in Vietnam so as to find out an appropriate way to manifest the Catholic faith. "Vietnamese culture has a lot of respectable values and can become a convenient path for the Church in Vietnam to develop its mission of announcing the Good News. Indeed, Vietnamese culture always gives prominence to the love for fellow-people, the filial piety, and the loyalty as well as the hospitality, the altruism, the kindness and especially the respect for spiritual life. This is very close to the Good News of Jesus Christ" (Article 22).

Dialogue with religions is defined by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences as a separate field. However, it can be considered as an aspect of the cultural sphere, since religions closely relate and belong to culture. The content of the dialogue with religions, in general, consists of three main directions, which are similar to those of the dialogue with Vietnamese culture, including: (1) non-confrontation; (2) listening, understanding, and respecting values of the religions; and (3), adopting and learning the values to enrich the Christian life.

The Catholic archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City plays the leading role in carrying out inter-religious activities. On 5 December 2009, the Pastoral Commission of Interfaith Dialogue that belongs to the archdiocese was founded by Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man, based on the spirit of the *Nostra aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions)⁶ and the instruction of

the Second Vatican Council on the interfaith dialogue.

The commission is responsible for undertaking five functions as follows:

1- It has to gather the Christians who are willingly interested in studying and communicating with followers of other religions according to the instructions of the Catholic Church for the purpose of performing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (Nostra Aetate).

2- It has to learn the teachings and experience of the Catholic Church on interfaith dialogue. At the same time, it is necessary to learn about the dogmas and practice of large religious communities in the same local area of the Catholic diocese.

3- It has to pay visits and exchanges to followers of other religions, aiming at building the friendship and brotherhood, strengthening the mutual understanding, and, if possible, collaborating in carrying out charity and community beneficial activities.

4- It has to organise flexibly interfaith meetings, making it favourable to share religious experience and Christian beliefs with others.

5- It has to collect and disseminate the experience lessons on holding interfaith meetings and the understanding of other religions. In addition, it is essential to announce information and provide the documents relating to interfaith dialogue.

In an interview of the newspaper *Catholics and Nation* (Vietnamese: *Công giáo và Dân tộc*), Father Francis Xavier Bao Loc, head of the Commission for Interfaith Dialogue in the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City said that interfaith

dialogue was “a journey to escape from the ego” [15]. On 27 October 2017, the 7th inter-religious meeting was held by the Commission for Interfaith Dialogue with the theme “Together Building Harmony” (Vietnamese: *Đồng tâm kiến tạo nhân hòa*) [17]. Although the archdioceses of Hanoi and Hue city have not founded their commissions for interfaith dialogue, they frequently carry out interfaith dialogue activities.

Evangelisation of popular piety

On 17 December 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments promulgated a document entitled “Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy - Principles and Guidelines” ratified by Pope John Paul II. “Popular piety is equivalent to the external expression of faith-Liturgy: it consists of the prayers and acts, which are practiced privately or together with the community, showing congratulations and pleadings to God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Mary, and saints and praying for souls. It is somewhat similar to the liturgy, but does not belong to liturgy” [13, p.11].

This is “orthodoxly” demonstrated by the fact that in 2003 the Committee on the Doctrine of the Faith under the administration of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam released a book entitled “Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines” (Vietnamese: *Hướng dẫn về lòng đạo đức bình dân và phụng vụ, nguyên tắc và định hướng*). At the same time, Priest Joseph Do Van Thuy mentioned almost all aspects of the popular piety in his work

entitled “Ways for Popular Piety Evangelisation” (Vietnamese: *Các đường lối Phúc âm hóa lòng đạo đức bình dân*). It further illustrates that the Catholic hierarchy has paid particular attention to this issue. In this work, Priest Joseph Do Van Thuy highlighted 17 ways of evangelisation, of which the 13th one was the evangelisation of popular piety.

Although the evangelisation of popular piety is not carried out so loudly as the cultural integration and the interfaith dialogue, it has been promoting and enriching the religious activities of Vietnamese Catholics in the new period.

Regarding the preservation of cultural values of the Catholics and other ethnic groups in the area, where the Catholics live, in the context of urbanisation, many villages have become urban, resulting in cultural changes in the rural villages, including also Catholic ones. Meanwhile, the secularisation has been taking place more and more vigorously. The Catholic Church in Vietnam, consequently, finds it necessary to preserve the cultural values inherited from the previous generations. Many workshops and conferences have been held on the Catholic cultural values at both two aspects: tangible and intangible⁷. For example, the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City decided to build a house of Catholic traditions. In some other dioceses, Catholic bishops submitted official letters, asking for the preservation of Catholic values. For example, Nguyen Van Sang, Bishop of the diocese of Thai Binh, requested to preserve a church of the traditional style; Nguyen Son Lam, Bishop

of the diocese of Thanh Hoa, asked for collection and preservation of Catholic Sino-Nom documents. In the diocese of Kon Tum, a quite large room is used to display the artefacts and documents, which show the culture of some ethnic groups living in the diocese, such as Bana and Jarai. In some parishes of the diocese, there are also traditional rooms for ethnic cultural preservation. In the diocese of Da Lat, similarly, both tangible and intangible cultural values of some ethnic groups such as K’ho, Cil, and Lach have been collected and preserved, owing to the instructions made by the parish priest. At the same time, many bishops and parish priests have encouraged people to preserve the traditional rites, such as the buffalo-stabbing festival, the festival of gongs, and the river wharf worshipping ceremony, etc. Instead of falling into oblivion, as a result, those cultural values have been promoted, contributing to the evangelisation of popular piety.

In the cultural aspect, in conclusion, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has made multifaceted changes, aiming at building a Vietnamese Catholic culture and contributing towards the sustainable development in Vietnam in the sphere of culture.

4. In the environmental aspect

In the 21st century, the environmental protection has become a burning issue in the world generally and Vietnam specifically. On 24 May 2015⁸, Pope Francis promulgated the encyclical entitled

“Laudato Si” (i.e. Praise be to you) on care for our common home. It consists of six chapters, of which each one mentions a specific theme. The encyclical is started with the introduction of the situation on the earth, which is our common home that “produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”. The home, however, “now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her” and “groans in travail”. Pope Francis emphasises that “we have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth. Our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters” (Article 2).

The encyclical on “care for our common home” has caused a widespread influence on not only the Catholic Church but also the whole world. A few months later, it directly affected the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Paris in December 2015. It received advocacy from followers of many religions such as Hinduism, Anglicanism, the Orthodox Church, and Judaism.

The encyclical on “care for our common home” is seen as a summary of the theological thoughts, some contents of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the declarations of the 18 regional and national bishops’ conferences, and the ideologies of several Catholic theologians... at a higher degree. “The encyclical Laudato Si’ is possibly the most read message” [11]. “With the encyclical on care for our common home, Pope Francis was a pioneer in creating a new model of Catholic social teaching, in which the

peripheries are higher appreciated by the Catholic Church” [12].

For Vietnamese Catholics, it is necessary to point out that the Catholic Church in Vietnam released a number of documents and carried out a wide range of activities on environmental protection, before the encyclical was promulgated. At the beginning of the season of Lent, on 10 February 2015, Paul Bui Van Doc, Archbishop of the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, sent “the Announcement on the Days of Fast and Prayer for Environmental Protection” (Vietnamese: *Thông báo về ngày ăn chay cầu nguyện cho việc bảo vệ môi trường*). On behalf of the archdiocese, the archbishop entered his name on the participation list of the Global Catholic Climate Movement. He agreed to carry out two specific activities, including: (1) Spending a Friday on 13 March 2015 during the season of Lent on fasting and praying for environmental protection; and (2), Spending money saved from meals and entertainment on the programmes for learning knowledge and propagandising activities for environmental protection. A training programme on environmental protection with specific applications was also carried out by Vietnam Caritas [16].

The Catholic Church in Vietnam is a member of the programme entitled “Promoting the Role of Religions in Protecting the Environment and Coping with Climate Change” (Vietnamese: *Phát huy vai trò của các tôn giáo tham gia bảo vệ môi trường và ứng phó biến đổi khí hậu*) launched by the Central Committee of Vietnamese Fatherland Front (Vietnamese:

Ủy ban Trung ương Mặt trận Tổ quốc Việt Nam) in May 2016 in Thua Thien Hue.

At a meeting held by the Central Committee of Vietnamese Fatherland Front on 25 May 2017 with the aim of making annual assessments of the above-mentioned programme, Joseph Do Manh Hung, Auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, stated: “The archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City held a yearly training course entitled ‘Preservation and Protection of the Earth: Our Common Home’ for all bishops and priests in the archdiocese. We have realised clearly and have demonstrated convincingly the responsibility of the Catholic tenets for the environment, especially based on the encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* of the Pope Francis”.

In the spirit, the archdiocese carried out the programme for two years, focusing on some issues, including: (1) Pollution and waste; (2) Saving and protecting water resources; (3) Saving electricity use; and (4), Green consumption and tree planting. In addition, the video clips created by the archdiocese in cooperation with the Ho Chi Minh City University of Natural Resources and Environment were also disseminated to the laity in all parishes. All Catholic members in the archdiocese actively took part in the appeal to cope with natural calamities resulting from climate change by donating to the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund run by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam [1].

On 31 May 2018, the Central Committee of Vietnamese Fatherland Front held a conference entitled “Promoting the Role of Religions in Protecting the Environment

and Coping with Climate Change” (Vietnamese: *Phát huy vai trò của các tôn giáo Việt Nam tham gia bảo vệ môi trường và ứng phó với biến đổi khí hậu*) in Ho Chi Minh City, evaluating the programme after three years of implementation. In regard to the Catholic Church, Vietnam Caritas run by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam organised two training courses for the Caritas members in three provinces. The courses focused on designing the environmental protection plans, aiming at enhancing the awareness of protecting the common home of God.

The diocese of Hai Phong held a training course on how to deal with domestic waste at home as well as in the areas of the churches and parishes. Tien Doi and Dong Gia parishes carried out a number of activities, such as tree planting and street sweeping campaigns.

Responding to the encyclical *Laudato Si’* of Pope Francis, Stephanus Tri Buu Thien, Archbishop of the archdiocese of Can Tho, launched a programme entitled “Catholic Believers Have Appropriate Consciousness and Positive Behaviour towards Environmental Protection and Climate Change Mitigation” (Vietnamese: *Người tín hữu Công giáo có ý thức và có hành vi tích cực bảo vệ môi trường, làm giảm biến đổi khí hậu*), which was then performed in all deaneries [7].

The Catholic Church in Vietnam decided to choose 1 September annually as “The World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation”, according to the suggestion made by Pope Francis in the encyclical letter *Laudato Si’*.

5. In the socio-economic aspect

Similar to the changes in the political, cultural, and environmental aspects, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has also made changes in the socio-economic aspect, exerting impacts on the sustainable development of the country. Firstly, it is necessary to mention the guidelines of Vatican, based on which the Catholic Church in Vietnam set up its directions and targets for practical activities.

Regarding the socio-economic guidelines of Vatican, we can enumerate here some relevant documents, such as the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church [4], the encyclical letter entitled “Populorum Progressio” on the development of peoples, the encyclical letter entitled “Laudato Si” on the care for our common home (Vietnamese version) [10], and the document “Economic and Financial Affairs” released on 17 May 2018 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development [8]. The key issue mentioned in those documents is that “economics cannot be separated from human realities” and “it is supposed to be in the service of man”. Economic development “cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man” (Articles 14 and 26). Property is owned by all human beings, since “the earth truly was created to provide man with the necessities of life and the tools for his own progress, it follows that every man has the right to glean

what he needs from the earth. God intended the earth and everything in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should flow fairly to all” (Populorum Progressio, Article 22). Man has the right to work. It contributes towards the creation made by God. When work is done in common - when hope, hardship, ambition and joy are shared - it brings together and firmly unites the wills, minds and hearts of men (Populorum Progressio, Article 27). “Riches fulfil their function of service to man when they are destined to produce benefits for others and for society” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Article 329). According to the Social Doctrine of the Church, morality and economics have a necessary and intrinsic relation. They indeed interact with each other (Article 331). Meanwhile, in the encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, economics and environment are closely attached to each other. It states that environment not only consists of ecological environment but also social environment. Economic profits must be linked to human dignity. “In the meantime, economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment. Here we see how environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked” (Article 56).

In Chapter 5 entitled “Lines of Approach and Action”, the encyclical

letter describes dialogues. As written in Part IV: “Politics and Economy in Dialogue for Human Fulfilment”, “politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life” (Article 189).

In a letter released on 16 April 2017, Pope Francis denounced “the global inequality” and reported that “this economy kills” [6].

Based on the spirit of the above-mentioned documents, the Catholic Church in Vietnam set up its directions, targets, and specific activities of different types. In 2001, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam released a pastoral letter entitled “Let them live and live in wealth” (Vietnamese: *Để họ được sống và sống dồi dào*), in which an important direction was “to continue accompanying the nation, sharing the national sympathies, hopes, and worries in social development and human promotion”. “We do not look at the national economic, political, social, and educational issues as outsiders, but we have to consider them as our own issues and take part proactively in dealing with those issues, making it favourable for all people to live and live in wealth. We must not be indifferent to development programmes and social evils, since we are very members of the national community with all interests and duties”.

In addition to the ceremony of the Holy Year, the Catholic Church in Vietnam held

a congress of God’s people from 21 to 25 November 2010.

Based on the congress of God’s people in 2010, the Catholic Bishops’ of Vietnam promulgated a post-congress of God’s people pastoral letter entitled “Together Cultivating a Civilisation of Love and Life” on 1 May 2011. As affirmed in Pastoral Letter, the Catholic Church must be a catalyst for a culture of life and a civilisation of love in Vietnam. Together with economic development over the past two decades, there have been many worries for the national future. Social evils, such as abortion, divorce, drug addition, prostitution, inequality, exploitation, corruption, environmental destruction, and the gap between the rich and the poor tend to be increasingly severer and become specific signs of “a culture of death”. It is convinced that the evangelisation is the yeast of freedom and progression and the source of brotherhood, tolerance, and peace. More than anyone else, therefore, Vietnamese Catholics have a mission of creating a culture of life and a civilisation of love in the country. At the same time, they willingly to have a sincere and honest dialogue and collaboration with all men and women of good will without differentiation of faiths or standpoints, aiming at obtaining integral development for all people in society, particularly the poor and the abandoned.

Thus, social and economic issues are always related closely together in the documents of Vatican and the Catholic Church in Vietnam. The reason is that human beings are the ultimate target of

social and economic development, as shown by the slogan: “Building a culture of life and a civilisation of love”. It can be seen as a major change made by the Catholic Church in Vietnam in the socio-economic aspect, which has been causing an influence on the current sustainable development in Vietnam. Based on the directions described in the documents, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has carried out specific activities in both economic and social areas.

In the economic area, the Catholic Church advocates the production of green and safe food for consumers. In Dong Nai considered as the “chief place” of pig farming, thousands households raise pigs in Long Khanh town as well as Thong Nhat and Xuan Loc districts. Most of those households are Catholic. Coping with the situation that many farmers use forbidden substances to feed pigs, the Animal Husbandry Association of Vietnam established in 2011, of which a majority of members are Catholics, carried out discussions with producers, providers, and traders of animal feed, dealing with unreasonable problems relating to animal raising. Pig breeders were encouraged to raise pigs appropriately to the spirit of the faith. The Animal Husbandry Association of Vietnam launched a campaign for combining faith and everyday life. Priests of the parishes in Thong Nhat district talked about the issue during Masses or other meetings of Catholic believers. They even came to every household, reminding the necessity of food safety and the virtue of fairness. A number of conferences on

harmful effects of the use of forbidden substances in raising animals were held by the Animal Husbandry Association of Vietnam with the participation of Catholic priests. By now, the households complying with the green husbandry have accounted for a majority and the proportion of the households using forbidden substances has significantly reduced [5]. A number of vegetable safety programmes have been carried out and some kinds of environmentally friendly products with the label “Made in Catholic Religious Institutes” (Vietnamese: *Made in Dòng tu*) have appeared in the market. Vocational courses have been held in many parishes. On 1 September 2017, Hoa Binh Vocational School in Xuan Loc district (Dong Nai province) officially became the first Catholic Vocational College in Vietnam. Some dozen parish priests took part in the training courses of agricultural and fishery extension and then disseminated the knowledge to believers. Some priests practised planting vegetables and raising fish in the parishes first and then taught the experience to believers. Other priests set up a fund to grant vocational scholarships to young Catholics. In several parishes and dioceses, Caritas organised career guidance meetings for high school graduates. In many parishes in the Red River Delta, Catholic priests encouraged people to restore and develop traditional handicrafts.

In the social area, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has paid much attention to Catholic families, particularly those of young Catholics, in addition to the worries

about social evils. According to the Catholic viewpoint, a family is “a church at home”, where Catholic mission and evangelisation also take place. To strengthen Catholic families, it is necessary to start with the families of young people. In many dioceses and hundreds of parishes, there are so-called “life protection groups”, which have been carrying out activities to make young Catholic people treasure life, contacting and preventing those who have an intention of having an abortion, and collecting dead fetuses to bury.

Those are some specific activities to show the changes made by the Catholic Church in the socio-economic aspect that have impacted the current sustainable development in Vietnam.

6. Conclusion

In the Renovation period (Vietnamese: *Đổi mới*), the Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions was promulgated in 2004, exerting a strong influence on the Catholic Church in Vietnam. The Catholic Church consequently made its changes in the political, cultural, environmental, and socio-economic aspects, exerting impacts on sustainable development in Vietnam. In political terms, it appealed Vietnamese Catholics “to live the Gospel in the heart of the nation to serve the welfare of the people”. In cultural terms, it is “to build a way of life and expression of faith more appropriately to the national tradition”. Reviewing the changes in specific aspects,

we can see that the influence may vary. In the cultural and the socio-economic aspects, the changes have mainly caused positive impacts on the sustainable development in Vietnam. Meanwhile, in the political and the environmental aspects, they have caused both positive and negative ones. Thus, the changes made by Catholic Church in Vietnam have been resulting in multifaceted influence on the sustainable development in Vietnam.

Notes

^{1,2} The paper was published in Vietnamese in *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, số 3, 2018. Translated by Nguyen Tuan Sinh, edited by Etienne Mahler.

³ The paper was written within the framework of a scientific project entitled “Changes of Catholicism and Sustainable Development in Vietnam at Present” (Vietnamese: *Biến đổi của Công giáo trong phát triển bền vững ở Việt Nam hiện nay*), of which the research leader is Nguyen Thi Que Huong (Institute for Religious Studies).

^{4,5} The Assembly was opened on 11 December at the episcopal see of Xuan Loc (Dong Nai province) and closed on 16 December 2012 at the Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica of Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City.

⁶ Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions - *Nostra aetate*.

⁷ Herein, some conferences can be enumerated as follows: On the *Respect for Ancestors among Catholics* (Vietnamese: *Vấn đề tôn kính tổ tiên nơi người Công giáo*), held by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam at the episcopal see of the archdiocese of Hue in October 1999; *Some Vietnamese Catholic Cultural Issues from the Beginning to the Early 20th Century* (Vietnamese:

Một số vấn đề văn hóa Công giáo Việt Nam từ khởi thủy đến đầu thế kỷ XX) held by the Committee on the Laity (CBCV) at the episcopal see of the archdiocese of Hue in October 2000; *Looking back on 40 Years since Foundation of Second Vatican Council* (Vietnamese: *40 năm sau Vatican II nhìn lại*) held by the Committee on Culture (CBCV) in December 2002; *Experience in Christian Cultural Integration in Vietnam* (Vietnamese: *Kinh nghiệm hội nhập văn hóa Kitô giáo tại Việt Nam*) held by the Committee on Divine Worship, the Committee on Culture, the Committee on Sacred Music, and the Committee on Sacred Art (CBCV) in May 2003; *Vietnamese Way of Religious Life* (Vietnamese: *Sống đạo theo cung cách Việt Nam*), held by the Committee on the Laity in April 2004 at the episcopal see of the archdiocese of Hue. In addition, other conferences were also held by the Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics.

⁸ The full message was published in the monthly magazine *Catholics and Nation*, No. 248, August 2015.

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