

## THE FIRST TIME OF PROTESTANTISM IN VIETNAM

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Until 2011, Protestantism has been in Vietnam for 100 years. With its first missionary base in Đà Nẵng (Tourane), Protestantism has gradually become the great religion in Vietnam. When studying on Protestantism in Đà Nẵng, we found somethings of the first time of Protestant missionary work in Vietnam.

1. The first pastors came and carried out missionary work in the central Vietnam by sailing boat. In 1898, James and Lawrence intended to do missionary work in Vietnam. They were English and members of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). They traveled from Shanghai (China) to the central Vietnam by boat to examine possibility of doing missionary work.

In Vietnam, James and Lawrence had sailed along the coast, entered to many regions distribute Evangelical books to indigenous people. The missionaries of BFBS sailed the sea in Đà Nẵng to carry out their purposes.

Because these missionaries were neither good at Vietnamese language nor versed in geography climate and culture of regions in central Vietnam in particular and in Vietnam in general, they were expelled from Vietnam, less than two years living. Their missionary work did not get any result. However, they were considered as the first men to carry out the missionary work in 'new land' before CMA arrived in Đà Nẵng. Moreover, they left many good memories of using of sailing boat for evangelization.

2. The first Protestant base in Vietnam (the base of Christian and Missionary Alliance - CMA) was the base of another Protestant organization under the name of *Thánh Thơ Công Hội*.

Protestantism had been in Đà Nẵng before CMA brought it to Đà Nẵng. This matter seems to be reasonless. In fact, before CMA sent three clergymen, Jaffray, Paul M. Hosler and G. Lloyd Hughes to Đà Nẵng, some BFBS members had arrived in Đà Nẵng to distribute Biblical books to people. Among them, there was Mr. Bonnet. He was a French (actually, Mr. Bonnet had been appointed to carry out missionary work in Sài Gòn, but he could not carry out his work so he was appointed to Đà Nẵng). The missionaries of CMA lived in Bonnet's

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house. After that, they bought back the base of BFBS at the corner of in Khải Định and Nguyễn Hoàng streets. Then, this base became the first base of Protestantism in Vietnam. The first house for preaching was built on March 1913. This house was made by rudimental materials, so it was collapsed by a storm in September 1914.

3. The first house for preaching in Hội An was the house of a Chinese. The first house for preaching in Hội An was established after all activities of Protestant base in Đà Nẵng were stable. Then, missionaries wanted to have another base in Quảng Nam; they arrived in Hội An to look for a new base. They found a large desert house near by Cầu Chùa. They rented this house. It became the second Protestant base. This base was collapsed. The Protestant church in Hội An was built in another place. It is managed by Nguyễn Công Tâm Thiện.

4. The names of the some Protestant bases in the first time were written by Vietnamese script. When surveying we found the names of the first Protestantism bases in Đà Nẵng:

*Thích Thị Đường* was the name of Bible school. Thích Thị Đường means the base for preaching.

*Thanh tu* was the place where believers could self- improve.

*An Lạc* was the place where missionaries, pastors had rest after preaching.

*Tĩnh Tâm* was the place where believers and pastors share their thoughts and anxieties before God (in evening).

*Lễ Đường* was big hall in Bible school. This place was reserved for meetings.

5. In different regions, Protestantism was called by many different names.

In the North, Protestantism was called as *đạo rổi*. People used this name to censure Protestantism because they thought that Protestantism was not good (it disturbed normal life).

In the South, Protestantism was called *Đạo Hoa Kỳ* (American religion) because people found that many clergymen were American.

In the Central Vietnam, Protestantism was called *Đạo Gia tô*, because Jesus Christ was translated into Sino - Vietnamese as Gia tô Cơ đốc.

Protestantism in some other regions was called as *đạo mới* (new religion) because Protestantism had been brought to Vietnam. The different names of Protestantism showed the different attitudes of people.

6. The first Vietnamese Protestant believer was Dương. When he served in French army, he read and listened to Bible. He had followed Protestantism before Protestantism took root in Đà Nẵng, Vietnam.

Mr. Dương was an exceptive case; the first man who converted to Protestantism in Đà Nẵng was Mr. Nguyễn Văn Phúc. He was baptized by pastor Paul Hosler in 1912

7. In 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Congress was held in March 1927. The concept of General Confederation of Evangelical Churches was born in this Congress. During three consecutive years 1924, 1925 and 1926 CMA organized congregational prayer meetings. The 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Congress officially elected Central Management Board of General Confederation of Evangelical Churches and drafted the Regulations of Church. This Board consisted of 7 members. They were appointed to visit and submit the regulations of Church to Bảo Đại king. What a pity, we have not yet found any documents of this visit. Since 1928, the Regulations of Church was translated into three languages: Vietnamese, French and Chinese. The regulations of Church were promulgated and applied widely in Church.

8. The first bible class was organized in 1919 in the carport behind Church. In the first time, Protestant preaching met many difficulties in both materials and staff. The foreign pastors discovered a special form of preaching. They used the vacant carport for preaching.

In 1921, the first Bible school was officially established in Đà Nẵng. With its role, Đà Nẵng Bible school gradually developed missionary work in Vietnam and surrounding countries such as Laos and Cambodia. Many foreign missionaries arrived in Đà Nẵng to carry out missionary work. They wanted to change Đà Nẵng into missionary centre of Evangelical Church. The students of the first course were graduated in 1927. The Bible school carried out theological program in five years. The first class had only selected men, but following classes selected both women and men.

9. The first teacher who taught Vietnamese believers how to sing hymn was Mrs. Jeffery.

When Bible classes were established, pastors began to carry out missionary work. Pastor D. I. Jeffery undertook to teach Bible. Mrs. Jeffery practiced pupils

how to sing hymns. On hymn, we try our best to investigate what hymns pupils learnt. It is sure that those hymns are not the current hymns. At that, time pastors used pianos or accordions in rites.

10. Anyone who would like to be baptized had to take part in the course of dogmas. The name of this course was *Phước âm yếu chỉ*. This course was implemented in 12 weeks. Anyone who was absent from class had to repeat a course. After learning, students had to take part in oral examination. Then, they were baptized. Although Protestantism met many difficulties in the first time, it gave hard principles.

11. Before becoming Protestant believer, Pastor Lê Văn Thái disliked Protestantism. He had no sympathy for foreign pastors. He and some his friends argued with pastors. Many their debates were severe. Lê Văn Thái and his friends threw stones at foreign pastors.

Lê Văn Thái converted to Protestantism and became pastor. He deserved credit for propagation of Protestantism in Vietnam. His life is interesting story.

12. Another pastor who deserved credit for propagation of Protestantism in Vietnam was Pastor Hoàng Trọng Thừa. He converted to Protestantism in 1920s. Because Hoàng Trọng Thừa was good at Chinese, so he was sent to learn Bible school in China. Because foreign pastor were not good at Vietnamese, he helped them to write lectures on Bible and he became the first Vietnamese pastor. Many people attended his lectures.

Pastor Hoàng Trọng Thừa was considered as “pioneer” in carrying out missionary work in many regions. In 1920 Hoàng Trọng Thừa and Pastors Đoàn Văn Khánh, Nguyễn Hữu Đình went to Sài Gòn to teach about Bible. In 1930 Pastor Hoàng Trọng Thừa carried out missionary work and built new Protestant base in Huế. Pastor Hoàng Trọng Thừa also carried out missionary work in Đà Nẵng mountainous regions. According to some documents, 33 ethnic people followed Protestantism. Many present documents speak of Pastor Hoàng Trọng Thừa who had credits in the first time of preaching and enlarging Protestant bases in Vietnamese.

13. According to decision of Conference of Evangelical Church in 1922:

- A church that has 10 official believers must care of irregular expenditure of church;

- A church that has 15 official believers must pay salary to manager of base;
- A church that has 25 official believers must pay one quarter of salary to chairman;
- A church that has 40 official believers that must pay half salary to chairman;
- A church has 60 official believers must pay 3/4 salary to chairman;
- A church that has 80 believers has to assume all expenditure of church. This church is considered as the autonomous church”.

The concept of “autonomous church” was used by Conference in 1927.

Because of above regulations, Đà Nẵng Church became the first autonomous church in Vietnam with 115 official believers.

14. The concept of “Evangelical Church of Vietnam” was used in 1928. The origin of this name was *La Mission Evangelique*. When the heads of church submitted regulations to King Bảo Đại, they translated *Englise Evangelique du Vietnam* into *Evangelical Church of Vietnam*. It was creation of Evangelical Church of Vietnam because churches of other countries have the common name *Missionary Evangelical Union*.

It is added that Evangelical Church of Vietnam has different names such as *Evangelical Church of Indochinese France* in 1927; *Evangelical Church of Vietnam and Indochinese France* in 1936; *Evangelical Church of Vietnam* in 1945. Since 1950 up to now, this name was not changed.

15. A great missionary campaign was organized in Huế in 1933. In fact, in January 8 missionaries had taught Bible in Huế for 5 days but their works were in vain. In 1931 a chapel was built in Huế. It was managed by pastor Hoàng Trọng Thừa. In 1933 Mr. and Mrs. Pastors Ông Văn Huyền replaced Pastor Hoàng Trọng Thừa to manage this chapel. They combined with Pastor Lê Văn Thái to propagate faith animatedly for some days.

This propagation of faith aimed at well-known persons in Huế at that time such as Ứng Khoa, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, and Phan Bội Châu... The result of missionary campaign was not mentioned in any documents.

16. The “Witness movement” was developed in Vietnam in 1938 under the leadership of Doctor John Sung Shang Jie. He was born on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1901 in Hinghwa district, Fujian province. He was named as “strange man” because he made sacrifices for propagation of faith in many countries.

In 1938 Doctor John Sung visited and preached to the General Conference of Vietnamese Evangelical Church in Vinh Long province and Đà Nẵng. He gave triangular flags to members of "Witness movement". They flied flags in their houses to prove that they were active witnesses of Protestantism. In fact, Central Management Board was changed into Missionary Board in January 1977.

17. In the first time of preaching, Protestantism had a scandal. It was birth of the theory of resurrection. Pastor Trần Như Tuân in Vinh Church was initiator of this theory.

Pastor Trần Như Tuân was an young pastor. He was a man of great learning and president of Vinh Church. He studied many documents on Western theology. He combined Western theology with prophetic remarks of Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, then, he predicted that God may resurrect on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1944" His prediction was incorrect. Trần Như Tuân predicted again. This time was that "God will resurrect on 30<sup>th</sup> September". His second prediction was incorrect again. However, he still wanted to show his talent, so he predicted "God will resurrect at 1 o'clock of 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1945". The more his affirmation was forceful, the more disappointment was increasing.

In fact, many pastors, missionaries and Protestant believers in Vinh and Thanh Hóa believed in Trần Như Tuân's prediction. They sold their houses to expect God in churches. This movement also developed in many regions in the Middle and in the South Vietnam. Many believers followed this movement. The wrong predication made many believers disappointed. Therefore, they left Protestantism. Protestantism was criticized by people.

From above issues we find that the Protestant missionary work in the first time met many difficulties. Pastors and missionaries had overcome these difficulties to maintain Protestantism in Vietnam. Today, Protestantism has existed and developed for 100 years. In future, Protestantism should improve to harmonize with nation. Protestant believers should take part in cultural activities to become good believers and good citizens. Therefore, Protestantism is not the "strange religion" in Vietnam. /.