

**THE CHALLENGE TO CATHOLICISM  
THROUGH THE “CHARISMATIC RENEWAL”  
PHENOMENON AND HÀ MÒN RELIGION IN THE  
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AT PRESENT**

**Abstract:** *Globalization along with the development of the information technology and the migration wave has led to the trend of religious diversity, especially, the emergence of many new religious movements. These movements have challenged the institutional religions, including Catholicism. Catholicism in the Central Highlands is facing with the phenomenon of “Charismatic renewal” and Hà Môn religion.*

**Keywords:** *“Charismatic renewal”, Hà Môn religion, new religious movements, Catholicism, Central Highlands, Vietnam.*

**1. Reality of the Charismatic Renewal and Hà Môn religion in the Central Highlands at present**

***1.1. From the Charismatic renewal movement to the Charismatic renewal in the Central Highlands***

The Catholic Charismatic renewal is a spiritual movement to enhance the role of the Holy Spirit in experiencing of the Christian faith through activities such as prayer, chanting, speaking in tongues, faith healing (spiritual healing). The origin of this movement appeared in the heart of the early Christian communities which was mentioned in the Book “Acts of the Apostles”. From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the charisma of the Holy Spirit movement appeared along with the emergence of the Pentecostal denomination in the United States of America<sup>1</sup>.

For Catholicism, the enhancement the role of the Holy Spirit in the religious faith life which began in the early of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Pope Leo XIII consecrated the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the Holy Spirit in the ceremony on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1900. In 1905, the appearance of many spiritual

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awakening groups, highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit in praying, religious activities. However, after the Second Vatican Council, the Charismatic Renewal officially became a movement of the Catholic Church. The Pope John XXIII called pray to the Holy Spirit for the success of the Second Vatican Council on 25<sup>th</sup> December, 1961. The Council recognized the special Grace of the Holy Spirit in the Christian faith life. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* on the Church (*Lumen Gentium* begins with the confession that Christ is the light to the Gentiles) asserted: “The Holy Spirit does not only sanctify and guide the Christians by the sacraments, furnish the ministries with the virtue, but Heals confers the special grace on each rank of the believers, grants favors to each person as He will”. It also confirmed that “To receive this Charisma, from the most glorious grace to ordinary grace that many people receive with gratitude and consolation, because these graces bring benefit and appropriateness for the needs of the Church. However, it is not for this reason that desperately appealed the special grace and it is not also proud that the apostle has effectiveness”<sup>2</sup>.

From this recommendation, Catholics started studying on the Charisma of the Holy Spirit. They studied the Bible, especially, the Book “Acts of the Apostles” and practiced the faith as the early Christian communities. Therefore, it gradually formed the Charismatic renewal movement within the Catholic church. This movement was remarked by the event on February 1967, some professors and students of the Duquesne University, Pennsylvania, USA attended the meditation on “the Beatitudes”, but with new experiences. They prayed and chanted with strong feelings and action such as raising hands, stomping, screaming, crying, clapping, tumbling, especially, speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing as described the Pentecost in the Book “Acts of the Apostles”<sup>3</sup>. The experience has brought a new vitality in the life of the Christian faith and it attracted a large number of Catholics, especially, the youths. Since then, the movement has spread throughout the country and has spilled all over the Europe, especially in France. From the youth, the movement has spread to all parts of the Church, from clergy to believers, from the elderly to young people, from intellectuals to workers, from whites to blacks, from conservatives to progressives. Generally, it became a special phenomenon in the life of the Catholic faith.

The period from 1967 to 1975, the Charismatic Renewal movement flourished with the emergence of thousands of local prayer group under the guidance of ecclesiastical authority. In France and the other European countries, there was an appearance of the new composite charismatic group with the participation of Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox.

From 1976 to 1988, the Charismatic Renewal movement flourished in France and in Europe with 1,800 prayer groups (average 15 people/group) named of the Pentecostal Fraternity (regional groups) were held by clerics under the control of the Catholic Bishops' Conference. On the Feast of Pentecost in 1988, there were 20,000 people participating in the meeting of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in Bourget. They did not only pray, the groups began to engage in the pastoral activities such as liturgy, chaplaincy; the humanitarian activities such as solidarity with the third world, welcoming the poor, AIDS patients; training as evangelical schools; media like radio, publishers, Internet; art performing and healing. They appreciated the intimate relationship between personal and Christ, the Charismatic Renewal movement emphasized the conformity between reason and soul, the search for holiness and fraternal life while engaged in reconciliation and ecumenism among the Catholicism, the Protestantism and the Orthodox Church (the Eastern Orthodox Church). Thus, the Pope Paul VI considered it as the joy and new fortune of the Church.

In the early of 1990s, the Charismatic Renewal movement was in a crisis in the Europe, the members of prayer groups gradually declined. However, in the North of America, this movement was maintained and the third wave appeared with a new experience. On January 1994, a Charismatic Renewal group included Protestants and Catholics in Toronto, Canada, held a religious ceremony with new experiences. They did not only pray, chant in languages and tears, but they also did actions caused prolonged laughter, shaking, jerky movements in waves, chattering until lethargy. Many people also performed faith healing by speaking in tongues, praying or putting their hands with conviction in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Those people of the third wave thought that because the Charismatic Renewal movement was too separated from the spiritual and the earthly reality, so it needed to have a new experience more realistic. Since then, the appearance campaign prayed for Paris (campaign Marche pour Jésus) and for France (campaign Alléluia France). Those people of

the third wave committed the faith must be strong, therefore, it must be manifested by signs and wonders that lead to a theology of prosperity and common interests with a look of joy in the world. Under the influence of the third wave, the new Charismatic Renewal groups were formed and they attracted the participation of hundreds of young people in the USA, Brazil, France, Austria, Switzerland.

Currently, the Charismatic Renewal movement has developed in more than 130 countries, attracting more than 100 million Catholics, including tens of thousands of clerics (cardinals, bishops, priests) and cloisterers around the world. The enhancement the role of the Holy Spirit in the experience of Christian faith, the Charismatic Renewal became a broad movement by bringing the Word of God in the midst of the society by living experience.

The Charismatic Renewal movement enhanced the role of the Holy Spirit because of as The Third Person has the sacralization function, so the Holy Spirit is considered the source the life of faith. Therefore, they often used the name as the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, and the Third Person to indicate the Holy Spirit. They prayed the deification of the Holy Spirit for the change and the grace of religious life and be worthy of God's children.

One of the most prominent characteristics of the Charismatic Renewal movement was that the participants had to manifest strong feelings and actions in praying and chanting in order to deepen the faith life as it was mentioned. They thought that such actions were caused by the special grace of the Holy Spirit endowed human being. Because, according to them, human kind always has the deepest area that never touched, sometimes human being makes the Holy Spirit sad by the incompatible attitudes with the Gospel. Thus, humankind needs to be given the Charisma by the Holy Spirit to live an authentic faith. Only through this, human being understands more deeply about life of Christian faith.

In Vietnam, the Charismatic Renewal movement emerged in the 1990s, especially in the southern provinces such as Cần Thơ diocese, the diocese of Ho Chi Minh City. However, this movement was under leading of the local religious organizations.

In the Central Highlands, in 2004, the appearance of a group of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in Đắk Mĩ district, Đắk Nông province,

but it was not organized by religious authorities, it was formed by a Catholic named Võ Quốc Khánh. He was born in 1953, native Hương Khê district, Hà Tĩnh province. He migrated to the south along with his family in 1954. Before the year 1975, he joined to the army of the Republic of Vietnam, served as a platoon leader with local troops, the rank of second lieutenant, stationed in An Giang province. After the liberation of the South Vietnam, he moved to Đắk Mil district, Đắk Nông province. In 1991, he and his wife and their children came Ho Chi Minh City to work as a real estate broker, but he did not have success. At this time, he might join or understood a little about the Charismatic Renewal movement. Therefore, in 2004, he returned to Đắk Mil district, Đắk Nông province and formed the Charismatic Renewal group.

Võ Quốc Khánh propagated that to receive the God's grace, believers did not need to go to the church Mass, did not receive the sacraments, they only prayed properly the Holy Spirit such as raising hand, speaking in tongues. In particular, in order to attract followers, he said that the Charismatic Renewal had a faith healing (believers did not need to take drugs, did not go to the hospital for treatment, they just prayed and blessed all their diseases will be going away). According to this method, the patient was rubbed on the head or drunk a few drops of "holy oil" and focused on praying.

In a short time, the Charismatic Renewal group has attracted about 300 believers, mostly Catholics and it has formed an organization separated from the Catholic Church. This organization was divided into large groups and small groups. Each large group had a leader, a deputy leader, a secretary, a treasurer, a board of guardian, the meeting was organized on every Saturday from 7 pm to 9 pm at Võ Quốc Khánh's home. Each small group had a leader, a deputy leader, the meeting was organized in discretionary time and it did not coincide with the large group's activities.

Võ Quốc Khánh also opened the "change" classes with 18 lessons in the book "Preparing to receive Jesus" (unknown origin, priced from 15,000 to 20,000 VND)<sup>4</sup>. People who joined this organization had to raise money for Võ Quốc Khánh, called "sealed bag" on every Saturday night. The prayer service was held by raising hands and then fell down into unconsciousness, speaking in tongues, healing by praying and used cooking oil to anoint or to drink.

To enhance its prestige, the Charismatic Renewal group also condemned the Catholic Church that it did not appreciate the Word of God. They explained the Word of God for themselves, did not go to the church Mass, did not receive the sacraments, did not let their children learn the Catholic doctrine.

### ***1.2. Hà Mòn religion***

Hà Mòn religion was formed by Ms. Y Gyin, Ba Na race, residence in the Kơ Tu village, Hà Mòn commune, Đăk Hà district, in the end of the year 1999. Ms. Y Gyin was born in 1942, illiterate, used to be a Catholic, devoted to the Our Lady. In 1999, she propagated that, at 12 o'clock the night of the 20 December 1999, she saw the Our Lady appeared luminously on the roof (called the Lady Pluk). She was chosen by Mary as a messenger to speak a message to humankind that the Earth would be in doomsday, who believe in and mind of Mary their soul will go to Heaven, and if someone does not believe, he/she will be in Hell with untold pain due to diabolical torture. People who believe in Mary need to read *the Hail Mary*, often attend the flower offering ceremonies and contribute money to decorate the places of worship, services and religious activities.

To propagate Hà Mòn religion, Gyin and the other leaders of this religion collected and compiled documents or books like the Our Lady's message, the Message of Marian apparition; chose the Bible, used the tapes of the Catholicism, translated the document on The Marian apparition; they also compiled the Teachings of Mary to entice believers. Gyin was illiterate so she asked some people such as Y Klách, A Níp wrote in Ba Na and Việt letter to entice "believers". They propagated that if someone follows the Our Lady, she/he will be erased debt, does not need to work hard, but she/he has a happy life, liberty and his/her disease will be cured. If the believers have a sin, they pray of repentance and contribute as much money as their sins will be deleted. Mary will give worshipers with holy water for drinking, then the blind's eyes can see, the paralyzed people will walk normally, the dumb people can speak, religious people do not abandon their religion<sup>5</sup>.

Generally, Hà Mòn was a new religious phenomenon and it has originated from Catholicism. It has based on *the Marian devotion*, especially *the Marian apparition*, and it was an extreme way of a part of

Catholics. Although, its doctrine has been superstitious and fabricated, but it has developed rapidly in the ethnic minority Catholics in Kon Tum and some provinces in the Centre Highlands. In particular, since 2003, the State has constructed the irrigation dam and hydroelectric power plant in the area of Kon Tum province. The Kơ Tu village, Hà Mòn commune, Đắc Hà district was located in the reservoir zone, so people have had to relocate, resettle. Some people have not wanted to move, so they have heard a rumor that the Marian apparition to save the people to Jesus. They also incited Catholics to hold their land.

On July 2008, the number of believers approximately 1,421 people, they lived in the Kon Tum city, Đăk Tô district and Kon Rẫy district. Through the mobilization of local government, the number of believers decreased to 1,248 in 2009<sup>6</sup>. On November 2010, Kon Tum province had 6/9 of districts, cities; 10/97 communes, wards and towns; 18/831 villages, population groups with 2,072 believers of Hà Mòn religion. Believers lived mainly in Hơ Moong commune, Sa Thầy District; Sa Loong commune and Plây Cản town, Ngọc Hồi district; Đăk Tô Re and Đăk Ruồng communes, Kon Rẫy district; Ngọc Vang commune, Đắc Hà district; Diên Bình commune, Đăk Tô district and Kon Tum city. Hà Mòn religion also enticed some village officers, Women Association Chief, Veterans Association, Commune People's Council<sup>7</sup>.

Almost believers of Hà Mòn religion were women and young people who had a low level of awareness, did not participate in the activities of village organizations and the religious activities of the Catholic Church. They focused on praying, chanting, offering flowers, going on a pilgrimage. They gathered from 4 am to 7 am and from 6 pm to 8 pm on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> monthly, even some activities were organized everyday both in the morning and in the evening. On the night of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> monthly, many believers went to Pô Kô river banks towards the two villages Đăk Wót and Hà Tu (Hà Mòn commune) to pray. They also founded the organization with the leader, secretary, treasurer, in which the leader could do the sacrament of marriage to believers in his group, used the Catholic chapel as a place of activities<sup>8</sup>.

Deriving from Kon Tum, Hà Mòn religion expanded to Xơ Đăng, Ba Na, Gia Rai Catholics in the provinces of Gia Lai, Đăk Lăk, Đăk Nông. Since 2005, Hà Mòn religion has propagated in the Xơ Đăng Catholics

area in Kon Ma Har and Kon Nak villages, Hà Đông commune, Đắk Đoa district, Gia Lai province. Since 2009, Hà Môn religion has continued development in ethnic minority Catholics in the Chư Pah, Mang Yang, Đắk Pơ districts, Gia Lai province<sup>9</sup>. On May 2006, Hà Môn religion's leader group has enticed Akin, a Catholic catechist of the Quảng Nhiên parish, resided at Hring hamlet, Ea Hding commune, Cư Mgar district, Đắk Lắk province. Then, Hà Môn religion has developed in Xơ Đăng Catholics in Đắk Lắk province such as Cư Mgar district, Buôn Hồ town, Krông Pách district.

According to the data of the Central Highlands Steering Committee, on May 2012, the Central Highlands area had 679 households with 2,159 Hà Môn religion's believers. They mainly lived in 30 villages of 18 communes, 11 districts of Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Đắk Lắk provinces. In the early of 2013, there were 935 households with more than 3,300 believers of Ba Na, Gia Rai and Xơ Đăng races, in 34 villages, 17 communes and 11 districts in the provinces like Kon Tum, Gia Lai và Đắk Lắk who were manipulated.

Since 2008, the FULRO, exiled in the US, led by Ksor Kok, has abused Hà Môn religion to entice and provoke the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands region. It has taken advantage of religious and ethnic issues to entice people, gather forces, prepare to establish its own State, four provinces was expected, such as Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Đắk Lắk và Lâm Đồng (the Capital will be located at Plei Ku). Thus, on 28 May 2013, the People's Court of Gia Lai province has conducted the trial of eight defendants (believers of Hà Môn religion) for the crime of sabotage the policy of solidarity under Article 87 of the Criminal Code, sentenced a total of 63 years in prison.

## **2. The challenge to the Catholic Church in the Central Highlands**

The emergence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal group, especially, Hà Môn religion with superstitious practices caused to disunity within the communities, was abused by the hostile forces, as well as had behavior against the tradition of mainstream religion which did not only raised the issues to the authorities, but they also were a challenge to the Catholic Church in the Central Highlands.

As presenting, the Charismatic Renewal movement within the Catholic Church appeared after the Second Vatican Council and was



admitted by church authorities, even was encouraged but under the management of religious authority. However, the appearance of the Charismatic Renewal group in the Central Highlands led by Võ Quốc Khánh which was strongly reacted by the church authority. The priests in Đắk Mil district, Đắk Nông province as well as the righteous Catholics in the province did not agree with the Charismatic Renewal group of Võ Quốc Khánh and they requested termination the activities of this organization. The parish Council of Vinh An, Thổ Hoàng stated that the activities of Võ Quốc Khánh were contrary the directions of the Catholic Church, caused disunity within the Catholics believers and bad effects on the local security.

In this situation, on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2006, the Episcopal See of Buôn Ma Thuột made the Announcement N<sup>o</sup>.09/06, sent to the priests of the diocese stated: “At present, in some parishes within the diocese, there are some Catholics participated in the activities of the Charismatic Renewal group. These people have the abnormal spiritual activities compared with the tradition of the Church. They often gather somewhere read the Word of God, spread the word that the Catholic Church does not appreciate the Word of God. They explain the Word of God for themselves, refute the Church and the Church authority. They do not go to church or the church Mass, do not receive the sacraments, do not permit their children learn the dogma, even, go to school, cause discord and disharmony within the family and in the parish. They often gather to pray called “healing prayers”. They said that they pray to heal any illness, though it is a serious disease, do not need doctors, go to hospitals, take drugs. When praying, they create scenes of inarticulate people as receiving the charisma, speaking tongues, etc. Some people also were anointed (cooking oil) to heal. We have been known that they have very little knowledge about the doctrine”<sup>10</sup>.

The Charismatic Renewal group was criticized because it did not only separated from the control of the Catholic Church, but it also had activities against the religious authorities. The Charismatic Renewal group set up their own organization that showed the secession and the division within the Catholic Church in the Highlands. On the other hand, the condemnation the Catholic Church and authorities, denying the Mass and the sacraments showed that believers of this phenomenon desired a renewal of pastoral activities, a simple religious life. It also showed that it

needs to be changed in the executive mechanism, the pastoral activities including the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church.

While the Charismatic Renewal group directly criticized the religious authority, Hà Môn religion was different that mainly linked to the faith life of the Catholic ethnic minority. In more than 10 years of appearance, this phenomenon has enticed a significant number of the ethnic minority Catholics. Although Hà Môn religion originated from Catholicism, it turned into a superstitious phenomenon such as the founder, the executive and the followers were mostly Catholics; the content was taken from the Bible, the Catholic doctrine, canon and dogma which were compiled with the content like it did not need the church, the priests for the ceremony. That showed that the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands looked for a simplification of the Catholic activities to appropriate to their circumstances.

To sum up, the emergence of the Charismatic Renewal phenomenon and Hà Môn religion, as well as some other phenomena such as Amí Sara religion in the provinces of Đắk Lắk, Gia Lai which has posed new challenges to the Catholic Church institution in this area in the empowering the status, role of believers, the rules and rituals simplification to suit contemporary society./.

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#### NOTES:

- 1 Nguyễn Thanh Xuân (2002), *The Initial Research on Protestantism in the World and in Vietnam*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi: 229 - 231.
- 2 *The Saint Vatican Council II: The Constitution, the Decrees, the Declaration and Messages*, The Pope Pius X Institute, 1972: 164.
- 3 *The Saint Vatican Council II: The Constitution, the Decrees, the Declaration and Messages*, *ibid.*: 164 - 165.
- 4 The Book “Acts of the Apostles” stated that “In the Pentecost, people gathered in one place, a sudden noise from the sky like a strong wind blew to house where they were sitting. Then, they saw the fire crescent appeared which rested on each one. And they were all filled with the grace of the God, they began to speak in different languages, depending on the ability that the Gods granted”. (Cv 2.1-5)
- 5 The Central Committee on Public (2007), *Questions and Answers some Issues on Strange Religions in Vietnam at present*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi: 57.
- 6 Nguyễn Thị Thùy Liên (2010), “Unmasked Deception of Hà Môn Religion”, *Journal of Religion Affairs*, N<sup>o</sup>.10: 27 - 28.
- 7 The Department of the Interior of Kon Tum, *Report on Situation, Religion Affairs in 2009, Orientations and Tasks in 2010*.

- 8 Vietnam Fatherland Front of Kon Tum province (2010), *The Situation of Religious Activities and Religious Mobilization, Struggle Elimination of Hà Môn Religion in Provincial Area*.
- 9 Nguyễn Thị Thùy Liên (2010), "Unmasked Deception of Hà Môn Religion", *Journal of Religion Affairs*, N<sup>o</sup>.10: 28 - 29.
- 10 Nguyễn Thị Thùy Liên (2010), "Unmasked Deception of Hà Môn Religion", *Journal of Religion Affairs*, N<sup>o</sup>.10: 29.
- 11 The Announcement of the Episcopal See of Buôn Ma Thuột dated 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2006.

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5. The Announcement of the Episcopal See of Buôn Ma Thuột dated 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2006.
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