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**AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIO-HISTORY THROUGH CHURCH  
MOVEMENT OF THREE PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN  
DENOMINATIONS OFFICIALLY RECOGNISED BY THE  
VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE OF  
RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN THE EARLY OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY**

***Abstract:** In the history of Vietnam, religion served both to integrate the Vietnamese people into a cohesive society and to reinforce its' importance of embracing one's religion, including Protestant Christianity in Vietnam. This study concentrated on the socio-history through church movement of a few significant Protestant Christian denominations that have been officially recognised by the Vietnamese Government Committee of Religious Affairs (GCRA) in the early millennium period. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam, Vietnam Mennonite Church and Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace-Southern) were among the eleven Protestant Christian denominations which have been selected specifically for this study. Interviews, collecting information through designed questionnaires, conference papers and reliable published works were rationale methods in assisting this study. Instability and uncertainties due to foreign colonisations, internal revolutions and war torn in the late 19th century had lost the "period of time" in documenting the chronicle history of Protestant Christianity in Vietnam. It is essential to conserve the different period embarks on socio-history through church movement individually as they are the intangible heritage in the history of Vietnam today.*

***Keywords:** Protestantism, recognition, Vietnam.*

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### **Introduction**

Protestant Christianity has spread across the seven continents around the globe through missionary activity and now has members or disciples from almost every country, language, culture and ethnicity including Vietnam, which belongs to the Asia continent. In this paper, three significant Protestant Christian denominations that gained recognition officially by the Vietnamese Government Committee of Religious Affairs (GCRA) in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century have been specifically studied in the approach of socio-history through church movement. Socio-history in the aspect of unfolded the past in connection with the present, brought them closer together through church movement to study the progression of these chosen three denominations: Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam, Vietnam Mennonite Church and Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace-Southern) until their denominations made history which have received official status from the state government before the year 2010 respectively.

Protestant Christianity is a religious minority in Vietnam, where it is the country's fastest growing religion, growing at a rate of 600% since the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. The study was essential for gaining more insights on Protestant Christianity, which it is currently among one of the six religions that has been officially recognised in Vietnam<sup>2</sup>. A realisation in the present day, religion still affects and influences the lives of ordinary Vietnamese people in different layers, where it provides people with religious ethical values; gives meaning to their worth of existence and to the world they inhabiting; and gives them solace and hope for the future. Through centuries, religion was capable to inspire the Vietnamese people to built new communities that embodied their vision of the perfect world in the most desolate places, including Protestant Christianity.

Hence, after more than a century of missionary work, the Protestant Christian denominations today in Vietnam has become a religious community with rapid development, diversity in organisations and denominations, which has made significant contributions to preservation and development of social moral values, and active

participation in humanitarian and socio-cultural activities (Nguyễn Xuân Hùng 2011, p.104). It was also essential when more than a hundred years old since the official birthed of Protestant Christianity took place in Vietnam, there were few or none documented resources in the account on the socio-history through church movements particularly on the Protestant Christian denominations that have obtained legal status from the state government. The conservation of the writings is crucial for archive purposes, preserving a collective religion history of all time in Vietnam as there are insufficient of local Christian scholars and academic scholars in the area of research on Protestant Christianity, especially topics on history and church growth through socio-history of Protestant Christian denominations. Before the existence of this paper, it is officially known that the Vietnamese Government Committee of Religious Affairs (GCRA) has given legal registration license or legal recognition to eleven Protestant Christianity organizations in Vietnam today, yet there is no specific focus study on the socio-history through church movement in relation to the main root and development of each denomination till present day. And so, this led to further study on the topic.

This study will benefit and enable us to comprehend with the selected three significant Protestant Christian denominations accordingly: firstly, each significant denomination had a more complete timeline of its socio-history through the church movement from the time of early roots of its' establishment until today, where it does not only preserve its' historical background but it provides and create availability resources to widen the mind knowledge for those who are interested in Protestant Christianity - a reference material for future research work. As in the present day, Protestant Christianity resources are limited in both public and private libraries as well as in the retail bookstores. Secondly, Protestant churches of different denominations are able to learn the strengths and weaknesses of each selected denomination through socio-history of its' church movement to emulate and contextualise those strengths, apply them into their church growth and development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The church is not perfect. Church still learns its' way to be good stewardship and

submission to their God, while assimilating into the context of Vietnamese traditional culture and religious belief.

The study began with face-to-face interview with designed questionnaires, where a systematic approach to gathering and measuring information sources from three significant Protestant Christian denominations' key leaders in getting a complete and accurate picture related to the topic. Conference papers and reliable published works of both local academic scholars and Protestant Christian writers also contributed much in the writing of this paper. In addition, some internet articles and e-news were the reference sources provided the way of analysing into the discoveries of the topic respectively.

### **Socio-History Through Church Movement**

#### ***1. Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam (SDAVN)***

Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam (SDAVN) began in the early years between 1915 and 1927, where the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist in Malaysia have sent missionaries to preach the Gospel and distributed Seventh-Day Adventist materials in South East Asia region. An evangelist named Tan Kia Ou hailed from Guangdong, China, arrived Vietnam for evangelism work and established a Sabbath school in Saigon-Chợ Lớn for the Vietnamese Chinese ethnic people. He was the first Evangelist who succeeded in spreading the Gospel in Vietnam for the denomination. In 1927, the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist in Malaysia invited and sent missionaries R. H. Wentland and his family, and Fred Lloyd Pickett to Saigon for missions' work. They learnt the Vietnamese language from Jean Fabre, a Vietnamese French language teacher. Two years later in December 1929, R. H. Wentland and Fred Lloyd Pickett have officially established the first Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Saigon. From 1928, the missions' base of Vietnam was transferred to the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist in Malaysia with the headquarter office located in Singapore. Meanwhile, the first General Council office was established in Saigon too.

The years between 1929 and 1941 were the years of development of church through missions' and evangelism work, where the Gospel

had been spread profusely by both the Seventh-Day Adventist foreign missionaries and Vietnamese people who were the first believers of the Seventh-Day Adventist in Saigon. From Saigon, the Gospel was preached to the West South region such as Cần Thơ, Long Xuyên and Ô Môn; and also to the Central region: Đà Nẵng and Đại Lộc. During this period of time, the French government also has divided Vietnam into three three regions: Northern, Central and Southern regions in April 1932. With the support of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist in Malaysia, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church founded the first General Council on March 1937 in Đà Nẵng, with Fred Lloyd Pickett as the President together with a few missionaries and Vietnamese people as local staff in the General Council. One year later, missionary R. H. Howlett replaced Fred Lloyd Pickett as the President of the General Council. During this period of time, the Seventh-Day Adventist churches grew extensively throughout the Northern, Central and Southern Regions. Church buildings have been built in Vàm Nhon, Đà Nẵng, Đức Mỹ, Đại Lộc, Hà Nội and Di Linh. At the same time, primary schools have been built in Vàm Nhon, Long Xuyên, Chợ Lớn and Đà Nẵng and a medical care in Cần Thơ. The first Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary was opened in Gia Định, Saigon; and Thời Triệu Printing House was founded at the same time in September 1939.

The years of the World War II between 1942 and 1946 were difficult period for the General Council and the Seventh-Day Adventist Churches throughout the regions in Vietnam. With the Japanese occupations in both countries of Malaysia and Singapore where the headquarter offices were located, communication and networking systems have been severely cut off between Vietnam and both countries, as well as among the local district churches and the General Council within the country. During this period, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church went through a transitioning in the church leadership. Although a French missionary, Robert Bentz was elected as the President, but Trần Ngọc Tế was the one who headed the church conduct work in the council. During this time, activities were restricted only within Saigon-Chợ Lớn vicinity. Despite the lost of

churches, missionaries and some church leaders, the medical department of the General Council in Vietnam was able to establish a maternity hospital called as Kiện Khương Maternity Hospital at Chợ Lớn in 1942.

Through these years between 1947 and 1954 were the periods of independence from the World War II. After it ended, the churches were restored; all missionaries were redeployed and led normal life again. This was a period that the General Council of Seventh-Day Adventist in Vietnam did a lot of restoration and rebuilding churches that have been damaged and burnt in the war, gathering the believers again, and also they bought some lands to build new buildings and bought premises for missions' work. Lands have been purchased to build new churches between the years of 1948 and 1953 in these places: Đà Lạt, Bàn Cờ in Đà Lạt, Đa Kao and Sài Gòn, and renovated the Đà Nẵng Church too. During this period, Christian Primary Schools were opened in Gia Định, Phú Nhuận and Chợ Lớn. A Christian Training Centre was established in Phú Nhuận. A radio missionary programme called as "The Voice of Hope," was established in 1947. By early 1950s, the programme was broadcasted by ten radio stations in big cities such as Sài Gòn, Nha Trang, Đà Lạt, Đà Nẵng and Huế. "The Voice of Hope" has two divisions: Bible Correspondence and Radio Talk-show programmes. In the early 1960s, The Voice of Hope was a success and received great responses on radio every week.

The years between 1954 and 1975 was known as the Resistance War Against America (Kháng chiến chống Mỹ)<sup>3</sup>. After the Geneva Agreement in 1954, Vietnam was divided by a demarcation line known as "Vietnam Demilitarised Zone (DMZ)"<sup>4</sup>. For that reason, Seventh-Day Adventist denomination was divided, where the church in the Northern region was isolated from the church in the Southern region. After 1954, the Seventh-Day Adventist denomination in Vietnam was officially known as Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam, and became a part of the South East Asia Alliance in an international global structure of the Adventists, where the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam was only able to carry out their

missionary work in the Southern region only. A first three-storey Seventh-Day Adventist Hospital was opened at the corner of the intersection street of Phú Nhuận in May 1955. One year later in 1956, a Nursing Training School was opened to train more nurses for the hospital, which in 1983, the organisation was renamed as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)<sup>5</sup> to better reflect its missions and activities. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam continued focusing on restoring the ruined churches, primary schools, hospital, charitable agencies, printing house, and especially the theological schools in the South and Central regions during these period of time.

After the Resistance War Against America, between the years of 1975 and 1999 were the phases of reunification of the nation of Vietnam. Vietnam suffered another time internal repression and isolation from the international community. Therefore, almost all pastors and church leaders left the country, leaving much difficulties for the General Council and the Church to survive. After the reunification day, the Committee of the Phú Nhuận Church and all the churches of Seventh-Day Adventist in Vietnam were called and agreed in organising a General Assembly to elect committee members for an Executive Board in continuing missions' work in Vietnam, where the church in Southern region was not able to reunite as one denomination with the church in Northern region. Therefore, during this period, each church had its' own programme and activities, and have their council meeting in their own areas. Meanwhile, there were churches that have planned to construct church buildings but yet to be done; damaged and ruined churches yet to be either restored or repaired.

The new millennium of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a new beginning to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam. From the year 2000 onwards till present, the denomination has grown and developed rapidly nationwide. Five churches across the nation have been restored and repaired such as Vàm Nhon Church, Phú Nhuận Church (2007), Cần Thơ Church (2005), Sa Đéc Church and Phước Bình Church. During this period, the denominations has ten new locations for home

groups. During this period of time, the partnership between Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam and ADRA seek to build the vulnerable communities and people with special needs nationwide. In order to help improve their quality of life, these are the five sectors of humanitarian work, which currently the denomination is doing: Health, Education, Sustainable Livelihood, Water and Sanitation, and Climate Change and Emergency Management.

On 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008, in behalf of the Vietnamese Prime Minister, the Vietnam Government Committee for Religious Affairs implemented the Resolution 235/QĐ-TGCP to acknowledged the organisation of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam that was headed by the late Pastor Trần Công Tấn, located at the headquarter office at No. 224, Phan Đăng Lưu Street, Ho Chi Minh City. The motto statement of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam in this new era is: “Worship the eternity Trinity, Love fellow human beings, Respect for God, Love Him and Serve the Homeland”.

According to the annual report of Vietnam Adventist Missions for South East Asia Union Missions Year End Meeting in 2014 by Trần Thanh Truyền (the acting President of Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam effective end of 2015), reported that currently the denomination has a total size of 15,000 members (Census in 2014) which comprises of 15 churches officially recognised by the Vietnamese Government Committee of Religious Affairs, 15 ordained pastors, and 150 companies (small group = nhóm nhỏ), 155 missionaries, 7 office workers and 49 volunteer missionaries throughout Vietnam. In between, on October 2014, a company (nhóm nhỏ) in Phú Quốc Island has been approved and certified by the local authority for church activities. The denomination is also applying to the local government authority to have permit licenses for places of worship in Điện Biên, Quảng Ngãi, Kon Tum, Đắk Lắk and Đồng Tháp provinces.

## ***2. Vietnam Mennonite Church (VMC)***

Vietnam Mennonite Church (VMC) began its' denominational birth when Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)<sup>6</sup> first arrived Vietnam just immediately after the signing of Geneva Accords on July



1954 which ended which ended the French-Indochina War, with the provisional division of Northern and Southern regions at the 17th Parallel. MCC offered and provided a programme of relief services for all Vietnamese people regardless of their religious affiliation, ethnic background or ideology. During this time, MCC partnership and worked closely with the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN), together with its' missions parent, the Christian Missions Alliance (CMA), which established its' missions work locally in 1911. In the early 1954, MCC Executive Secretary, Orie. O. Miller implemented a programme of relief services, where a Mennonite Brethren graduate, Delbert Wiens and J. Lawrence Buckholder, a Mennonite who was a MCC missionary in China also came to Saigon for a short assignment with Church World Services (CWS)<sup>7</sup>. Besides working with CWS in relief services work in this period of time, MCC also worked closely with the relief services committee of ECVN. The first relief service assignment of MCC was to help refugees coming from the Northern region to down Southern region providing food, clothing, bedding and mosquito nets.

In 1957, through an invitation from MCC and ECVN, the Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM)<sup>8</sup> responded by sending the first two Mennonites missionary couples in the same year, James and Arlene Stauffer first arrived in Saigon on May 1957, later in November 1957, missionaries, Everett and Margaret Metzler came and joined the Stauffers in Saigon, to established Vietnam Mennonite Missions (VNMM). The Mennonite missionaries began missionary work among the local Vietnamese people and soon, a Vietnamese young adult was the first local Mennonite Christian believer and had water baptism in 1961. In 1960, the Vietnam Mennonite Missions (VNMM) headquarters office and a Saigon Student Centre were first established on the main street opposite of Bình Dân Hospital in Saigon. In September 1964, the Gia Định Community Centre (now known as Bình Thạnh District, Ho Chi Minh City) was established with Day Care Nursery which evolved from kindergarten into a primary school known as Rạng Đông (Dawn) Primary School<sup>9</sup>. By 1970 Rạng Đông Primary School had a total of 600 students registered in half-day

classes with the educational sponsorship programme from MCC, the school had been able to provide tuitions for 150 children.

The property of Gia Định Community Centre was located on the edge of Đồng Ông Cộ, a public cemetery area that became a slum place for the Vietnamese countryside people, who were fleeing from the war. Many marginalised and one-parent families, where some women have lost their soldier husbands in the war while some others have been left abandoned. The slum place began to fill with sickness and tuberculosis disease. Therefore, a Family and Educational Programme was developed by three Vietnamese women, where MCC also supported this programme financially, which enables dozens of young people from poor families to learn trades, such as motorbike repair, air-conditioning repair and sewing clothes. A small business loan programme was a part of rebuilding family programme, have helped hundreds of Vietnamese families to do business and earn a living.

It was not until 1974, a significant Christian community formed at the Saigon Student Centre, a dynamic Christian youth group that grew spiritually who continued witnessing and evangelising throughout the revolutionary era of 1975. As for the Gia Định Community Centre, within a few months, the birth of a Mennonite congregation was established, where several adults and youths became Christians and were baptised, and soon those from the Saigon Student Centre became part of the Gia Định Community Centre. VNMM missionaries and the congregation of the Gia Định Community Centre ordained Trần Xuân Quang as a pastor in March 1969, with two assistants to assist him in ministry work: Nguyễn Hữu Lâm, a Bible School graduate and a member of Bình Thạnh Church, and the other assistant was Nguyễn Quang Trung, a staff member of the student reading room since 1965. In May 1969, a Bible School was opened to teach church members on Bible and theological subjects.

Although the Vietnamese Tet 1968<sup>10</sup> (Tết Mậu Thân 1968) launched in January 1968 have brought destruction to the cities and destroyed hundreds of residential houses around the Gia Định Community Centre yet, the Vietnam Mennonite Church was birthed, grew and expanded. Therefore, Vietnam Christian Service (VNCS)<sup>11</sup>

was formed in 1966 to feed and clothed hundreds of displaced civilian wars and refugees. Between the years of 1966 and 1975, with the increasingly tension of the resistance war against America, VNCS extended their refugee and relief services in the Central region provinces such as Quảng Ngãi, Tam Kỳ and Huế, and the Central Highlands region. After the Vietnamese Tet 1968, the Christian community in Gia Định continued to grow in number. In 1973, the church first became autonomous and was called as the Evangelical Church, Mennonite Denomination (Hội Thánh Tin Lành, hệ phái Mennonite). A five-member Church Administrative Committee was established for overseeing the development of the church.

The period between mid-1975 and 1986 were the years of uncertainties. In April 1975, all the missionaries and families left except for four MCC men missionaries still remained in the city and they were Max Ediger, Yoshihiro Ichikawa, Earl Martin and James Klassen, who came to Vietnam between 1969 and 1973, where the last MCC man left was in October 1976<sup>12</sup>. During this time, Pastor Trần Xuân Quang, the lead pastor of the Mennonite Church, went to the North America for an Annual EMM Missionary Conference and so, he was left stranded in North America. Therefore, the entire Mennonite Church in Vietnam elected Nguyễn Quang Trung as the lead pastor of the church, replacing Pastor Quang, with Nguyễn Hữu Lâm as the assistant to Pastor Nguyễn Quang Trung. At the same time, Rạng Đông Primary School was closed, yet the community services programmes and medical clinic still carry on for the time being. In October 1975, Rạng Đông Primary School had reopened as a public school with two levels - Grades from 1 to 5; and grades from 6 to 12.

From the period between 1986 and 1999 were the years of hope and opportunities. In 1986, the government began to implement a market economy widely known as Đổi Mới<sup>13</sup> throughout the country, which slowly led to improve economic as well as social freedom for the nation. In 1988, the Mennonite Church grew and most of them living in Bình Thạnh District, Ho Chi Minh City. Since the ECVN Bible Institute in Nha Trang had closed down in 1976, therefore there were only visiting foreign pastors came to provide teaching seminars

to equipped the local pastors and church leaders for ministry work. In early 1998, the President of NAVMF<sup>14</sup>, Pastor Phâm Hữu Nhiên, visited Vietnam, met some church leaders and invited them to work with NAVMF.

From the year 2000 onwards till today were the years of expansion and developments of the Vietnam Mennonite Church. Pastor Nguyễn Quang Trung (Bình Thạnh Church) and Pastor Nguyễn Hồng Quang (District 2 Church) met and called for the convening of a general conference of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam. The conference was attended by all Mennonite delegates from both Kinh Vietnamese and ethnic minority pastors and church leaders nationwide, a few invited international Mennonite leaders: two representatives from NAVMF, Đặng Hồng Châu and Châu Văn Hòa and EMM representatives, Luke Martin and Gerry Keener. The formation of the Vietnam Mennonite Church was declared officially in the conference with a provisional church leadership board: Pastor Nguyễn Quang Trung was chosen as the President, and Pastor Nguyễn Hồng Quang as the Vice-President and General Secretary. Following the conference, the churches belong to Vietnam Mennonite Church were arranged and divided into six geographical districts: Western District, Saigon District, Southeast District, Highlands District, Central District and Northern District. When Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN - Southern Region) had successfully registered and was officially recognised by the Vietnamese Government Committee of Religious Affairs in 2001, Pastor Trung realised that the registration of the church denomination is a primary task. Yet, Pastor Quang and the leaders in District 2 Church gave greater priority to ministry work. This resulted in the Church Leadership Board respected the rights of the District 2 Church leaders to make this decision and volunteered to separate from Bình Thạnh Church.

In July 2004, Pastor Trung was ordained as a minister in Lancaster Mennonite Conference in Philadelphia. In January 2006, Vietnam Mennonite Church established the first Mennonite Ministry Training Centre that offered a three-year curriculum of Mennonite theological training programme for pastors, apprentice pastors, and evangelists for Bình Thạnh Church, Ho Chi Minh City; and later established a two-

year Mennonite theological training programme to train church workers in a few areas: Cần Đức Mennonite Church in Long An province and Vĩnh Long Mennonite Church in Southwest region; Tân Hiệp Mennonite Church in Đồng Nai province in Southeast region; Minh An Mennonite Church in Hội An in the Central region.

On 11 February 2009, the Chairman of the National Religious Affairs Committee, Mr. Nguyễn Thế Doanh, on behalf of the Vietnamese Prime Minister, presented the official certificate, according to the implementation of the Ordinance on Belief and Religions dated 5 February 2009, adopted the Decision number of 12/QĐ-TGCP to acknowledge the Vietnam Mennonite Church headed by Pastor Nguyễn Quang Trung, the President of Vietnam Mennonite Church, located at the headquarter office at 67/107, Bùi Đình Túy Street, Bình Thạnh District, Ho Chi Minh City, as a legal religious organisation. The motto statement of the Vietnam Mennonite Church in this new era is: “Worship the Trinity, Love everyone as God’s teachings in the Bible, Live the Gospel, Serve God and the Fatherland, and be with the Nation”. In July 2009, the 15<sup>th</sup> Mennonite World Conference Assembly held in Paraguay. The Mennonite World Conference Assembly accepted Vietnam Mennonite Church as an official member of Mennonite World Conference body.

As in July 2015, a current report by the Mennonite World Conference 2015 stated that the Vietnam Mennonite Church has 6,200 members (Approximately 5,000 are ethnic minority people groups; there are 64 pastors and apprentice pastors; and 93 small groups. Currently, VMC has five legal worship buildings and one registered branch which is the Bình Thạnh Church and its’ headquarter office. The Vietnam Mennonite Church also have established and expanded their community services: student ministry, physical challenged ministry, poor and welfare ministry, medical care and services, and relief and emergency services.

### ***3. Vietnam Baptist Convention (VBC) (Grace-Southern)***

Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace-Southern) began to birth in these early years between November 1959 and November 1962 where the Southern Baptist missionaries from the US arrived in Vietnam.

Herman and Dottie Hayes were the first Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)<sup>15</sup> missionaries from Foreign Mission Board<sup>16</sup>, who arrived Saigon in November 1959 (the first city to began their missions' work). In February 1960, they began to organised fellowship group and gave Bible study in English to the US military personnels, aid personnels and Vietnamese people who were interested in Protestant Christianity. In March 1960, a Baptist missionary couple, Bill and Audrey Roberson arrived Saigon and they opened their house for fellowship group at house No. 217, Công Lý Street (Now known as Nguyễn Văn Trỗi Street) because it was more spacious. The Roberson couple began English language classes for the Vietnamese people and have worship service on every Sunday afternoon. In August of the same year, Lewis and Tony Myers came to Vietnam and settled in Đà Lạt, which it was the second city that the Baptist missions' work was established. In April 1961, the Roberson's house became the meeting point and activities of the Vietnam Baptist as well as for the American congregation in Saigon, which was known as Saigon Baptist Chapel. At the same time, Lê Quốc Chánh believed Jesus, and later, he became the first Vietnamese Baptist ordained minister engaged in pastoral ministry in Vietnam. In July of the same year, the Baptist Ministry Publishing was established where Lewis Myers was the first director of the Baptist Press. In early March 1962, the first water baptism was officiated by Herman Hayes where he baptised the first seventeen Baptist believers in Vietnam. In April 1962, Bill and Audrey Roberson moved from Saigon to Nha Trang, and it was the third city that the Baptist missionaries were located. And so, the house at No. 217 in Công Lý Street in Saigon was turned into the first Baptist Church in Vietnam. The Baptist Church is the centre based that was utilised by both congregations of the US and the local Vietnamese people. While in June of the same year, Baptist Missionary Board rented a four-storey building in Gia Long Street (Now known as Lý Tự Trọng), near the Saigon Market (Now known as Chợ Bến Thành) as missions office. On 18 November 1962, Grace Baptist Church was officially established at Công Lý Street in Saigon with thirty-three Vietnamese Baptist believers who became church members of the church. Herman Hayes took the ministerial position as

the first pastor of Grace Baptist Church. Previously, the Calvary Baptist Church in Bangkok city was the “mother church” that was responsible for the group of Baptist believers until the church was organised in Saigon.

The period between 1963 and 1975 were the years of church growth and ministry development for the Baptist denomination. In May 1964, a Baptist theological programme was commenced for the Vietnamese Baptist believers who were appointed for ministerial work where seven men registered for the theological programme: Lê Quốc Chánh, Đỗ Vĩnh Thành, Đỗ Lâm Quế, Lê Quốc Trung, Nguyễn Sơn, Lê Văn Hòa and Bùi Đức Anh Tuấn. These men were studying while doing ministry in different areas. In April 1965, the Saigon Baptist Chapel became a sovereign church with the name of Trinity Baptist Church (Hội Thánh Báp Tít Ba Ngôi), to served the English-speaking congregation which they had their worship services in the house No. 217, Công Lý Street, with Sam Longbottom as their first lead pastor, who also served as the Treasurer and Missions Manager of Baptist Missions Board. In August 1965, Lewis Myers and his family moved to Danang which it became the fourth city, where the Baptist denomination expanded its’ missions work. In April 1966, a Baptist missionary couple who served in China, Ronald and Margaret Fuller moved to Vietnam, and worked among the Chinese community in Chợ Lớn, Saigon. Two years later in 1968, the first Chinese Baptist church was founded, and was called as Bình Tiên Baptist Church. In July 1966, Grace Baptist Church was officially recognised as a legal religious organisation and was able to purchase and owned the property to build a church building. In August 1966, the Baptist missionary couple, Jim and Mary Humphries with three children arrived Saigon, and became the English-speaking lead pastor for Trinity Baptist Church, where the church was catered to serve the increasing number of military personnel, the embassy employees, the American officers and as well as for the English-speaking people in the community.

In September 1967, the Vietnam Baptist Theological Institute was officially established at Thủ Đức in the northern part of Saigon. Sam

James was the institute director and the institute has a boarding programme called as “Stay and Study Programme” to accommodate the full-time theological students. In October of the same year, the first Baptist Christian Community Services was established by Rachel James, a trained medical nurse, along with Captain Leo Record, a military medical doctor from North Carolina. Medical care and treatment was held once a week in chapels and churches around the vicinity of Saigon city. In May 1968, two Vietnamese Baptist pastors are ordained for the first time for serving in the local churches: Lê Quốc Chánh of Phú Thọ Hóa Church and Đỗ Vĩnh Thành of Faith Baptist Church (Hội Thánh Báp Tít Đức Tin) in Ngô Tùng Châu Street, Gò Vấp (Now, it is known as Nguyễn Văn Đậu, Bình Thạnh District, Ho Chi Minh City). In April 1969, the first Baptist Gospel Hymn Book was compiled and completed by Betty Merrell with the assistance of Trần Bửu Đức. Two months later, in June 1969, Grace Baptist Church had purchased a property at house No. 209, Cách Mạng Street (Now known as Nguyễn Văn Trỗi Street), Phú Nhuận District, Saigon, renovated and it was used as a church building. The property and renovations were contributed financially by the Foreign Mission Board (Currently known as International Mission Board) and some faithful Baptist Christians. During this time, Cần Thơ was the fifth city that the Baptist denomination had expanded its’ missions work by Herman and Dottie Hayes. Work in Cần Thơ expanded throughout Southwest areas in the Southern region of Vietnam. In the meantime, also, the Vietnam Baptist Theological Institute had purchased a property as a theological base at Nguyễn Văn Trương Street, Gia Định in Saigon. In July 1969, Quy Nhơn was the sixth city which the Baptist denomination had enlarged its’ missions work, where missionaries Bob and Priscilla Compher were located to work among the refugees’ resettlement villages. Before the year end in 1969, the mass media pastoral programme by Peyton Moore, a small recording studio was built in his home was moved and located in Vietnam Baptist Theological Institute campus.

In January 1970, Vietnam Baptist Theological Institute opened a teachers’ training centre for training kindergarten teachers and a



kindergarten. Olive Allen, a missionary who served in Thailand, became a supervisor to direct and implement programmes for the teachers' training centre and the kindergarten. The theological institute sponsored the implementation of the programmes to train teachers to help care for children in trauma due to war condition. In February 1970, Pastor Lê Quốc Chánh became the first Vietnamese lead pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Saigon. In April 1970, Peyton Moore began broadcasting a programme channel known as "The Baptist Hour," and commenced a Bible correspondence course where approximately 5,000 people enrolled to study Bible through the radio. In the same month, the first Baptist National Council was held in Dalat city where several hundreds of delegates comprised from both the Baptist churches and small groups attended.

The period of five years from 1970 to 1975 were the years of opportunities in expanding further of the missions' work, where theological centres have been expanded and established: Huế, Đà Nẵng, Quy Nhơn, Quảng Ngãi, Nha Trang, Cam Ranh, Đà Lạt and Cần Thơ, with Saigon city as the Baptist denomination headquarter. In June 1970, Huế was the seventh city where the Baptist denomination has expanded its' missions work through Bob and Ida Davis. In October of the same year, the first Baptist Bookshop was opened at Nguyễn Huệ Street, District 1, Saigon. Beginning month of 1971, David and Barbara Wigger were the first Baptist missionary couple who worked among the students in Vietnam. In January 1972, Baptist missionaries, Gene and Priscilla Tunnell, arrived Vietnam, where Gene Tunnell became the director of the Baptist Christian Community Services, while Priscilla Tunnell replaced Olive Allen as the supervisor of the teachers' training centre and the kindergarten at the Vietnam Baptist Theological Institute. In December, the Vietnam Baptist Missions Board inaugurated a new office building, which was located at No. 111, Chi Lăng Street, Gia Định. In March 1974, Peyton Moore began to operate a mobile vehicle with a signboard on the vehicle that advertised, "The Baptist Hour," and went surrounding the Southwest areas to meet and had discussion sessions with those who have been enrolled into the Bible correspondence course through the radio channel. All missions work

was successfully expanded by the Baptist denomination until end of April 1975 which the Resistance War Against America ended and the country was reformed. Saigon city was renamed as the “Ho Chi Minh City”. During this time, the theological programme in Vietnam Baptist Theological Institute was discontinued, to encouraged theological students to be involved in voluntary relief service for thousands of civilians who were evacuated to Ho Chi Minh City. With the assistance from Foreign Mission Board, food supplies were distributed to many places. At the same time, all the Baptist foreign missionaries and their families left Vietnam.

The period between 1975 and 1999 were the years of uncertainties, yet Grace Baptist Church in Ho Chi Minh City still exists and remained strong in faith and grew in both areas: spiritually and numerically. During the 1990s onwards, some small groups of Baptist Christian believers before the year 1975 gathered together, networking with Grace Baptist Church for fellowships and partnership in ministerial training.

The period between 2000 to 2009 were the years of opportunities and recognition both in the government and community levels. In March 2003, a Baptist Christian small group in Đức Trọng of Lâm Đồng province was officially formed as a church, and named Peace Baptist Church (Hội Thánh Báp Tít Bình An), where Ngô Thanh Hung was the lead pastor. In November 2005, the Grace Baptist Church held a national assembly council, which consisted of all the representatives from Baptist groups, and churches to established an Executive Committee Board for Vietnam Baptist Convention. The national assembly council was attended by Southern Baptist Convention of the United States. In May 2006, Grace Baptist Church experienced a transitioning period when the building was located on an express highway (đường cao tốc), which the government planned to develop the surrounding areas of the church was located. After 18 months of construction, the new multi-storey building topped with a Cross was inaugurated on 18 November 2007.

On 24 May 2008, the Chairman of the National Religious Affairs Committee, Mr. Nguyễn Thế Doanh, on behalf of the Vietnamese

Prime Minister, presented the official certificate, according to the implementation of the Ordinance on Belief and Religions, adopted the Decision number of 109/QĐ-TGCP to acknowledge the Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace-Southern) headed by Pastor Lê Quốc Chánh, the President of Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace-Southern), located at the headquarter office at No. 161, Nguyễn Văn Trỗi Street, Phú Nhuận District, Ho Chi Minh City, as a legal religious organisation. The motto statement of the Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace-Southern) in this new era is: “Worship the Trinity; Love people with all our hearts, soul and wisdom as taught by God; Deeply respect for God, and Love fellow human beings. Live and act for social progress, identify ourselves with the nation and Unite together for building a prosperous country”.

Since 1968, the second official Baptist Ministerial was held on 16 November 2008 at the headquarter of Vietnam Baptist Convention, also the location of Grace Baptist Church in Nguyễn Văn Trỗi Street, Phú Nhuận District, Ho Chi Minh City. The four Baptist ministers who were ordained as Baptist pastors are: Pastor Kato Biền, the lead pastor of Hope Baptist Church (HT Báp Tít Hy Vọng), Thuận Bắc, Ninh Thuận; Pastor Lê Quốc Huy, the assistant pastor of Grace Baptist Church (HT Báp Tít Ân Điền), Ho Chi Minh City - *Currently, he is the lead pastor of church*; Pastor Ngô Thanh Hưng, the lead pastor of Peace Baptist Church (HT Báp Tít Bình An), Đức Trọng, Lâm Đồng and lastly, Pastor Trần Ngọc Út, the lead pastor of Blessings Baptist Church (HT Báp Tít Phước Thiên), Cờ Đỏ, Cần Thơ. On 15 November 2009, Vietnam Baptist Convention celebrated a joyous occasion of 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Baptist missionaries from International Mission Board and Southern Baptist Convention of the United States, who first came to Vietnam for missionary work effort. The event was attended by Vietnamese Baptists Christian believers, former Baptist missionaries and visitors from the United States and Cambodia - approximately 725 people, including a number of government officials.

Since the year 2010 till present day, it has been the period of stability and continuously growing of the Vietnam Baptist

Convention denomination in Vietnam. The convention's primary objectives are to start new churches, disciple believers, train workers, develop leaders, publish materials and meet human needs through community services. Today, Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace-Southern) has more than seventy churches or house groups (small groups) in the cities and provinces throughout the country, with faithful 5,500 church members, currently are under the umbrella of the denomination. Many were either a direct outgrowth of Grace Baptist Church itself or another church planting that Grace Baptist Church founded.

### **The Effects from the Past**

The effects from the past through socio-history in church movement on these three significant Protestant Christian denominations (*like any other official religions in Vietnam*) have somehow made an impact, and contributed in shaping of Vietnam today. The existence of Protestant Christianity in Vietnam owes to the yesteryears of unsung history-makers, the apostolic missionaries who came from these four continents such as the Europe, North America, Asia and Australia / Oceania. Since the birth of each denomination that begun their missionary work in Vietnam, they were engaged in various activities such as providing aid and relief services, community services, medical and health care, educational support, vocational training and many more sectors to help built the lives of the Vietnamese people.

Thus, every Protestant Christian believes in the mission theology, that expressed in Latin: *Missio Dei* articulates the belief of God's mission, and Christians believe that they are God's instruments in that mission; and that mission is the purpose and action of God. A famous missiology quote from the late David Bosch, a South African, a renowned professor in Christian Missiology stated:

*Mission is understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It is put in the context of the Trinity (Father God, Son Jesus and Holy Spirit), not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the "Mission Dei," as God, the Father sending the Son (Jesus); and God the Father and the Son (Jesus) sending the Spirit (Holy Spirit) is*

*expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.*

*Missio Dei*, a mission theology expression that has to be understood clearly. Instead of pointing fingers to *who influence who* or *who affected who*, and what Protestant Christianity has ill-done towards Vietnamese traditional culture and religious belief, it is necessary to have a deep sense of awareness through a hermeneutics study where scientific interpretation of the Scriptures in the Protestant Christian Bible<sup>17</sup>, as to clarify the motivation of action from Protestant Christian denominations. Without hermeneutics study, it will always be a challenge for those who tries to grasp with the issue in the effects of Protestant Christianity on Vietnamese traditional culture and religious belief.

In addition, an equitable statement said, in respond to the fact that charitable *outreach* practices (*humanitarian and relief services, community public services, medical and healthcare, and social-cultural activities*) implemented by Christians individuals or organisations / denominations are likely to be mistaken for the manipulation of potential Christians, the Christian organisations need to undergo necessary adjustments to avoid misunderstandings about their motives for the operation. Through internal trainings and education, organisations / denominations are adviced to help their members realise that charitable outreach work is completely based on mutual affection attributed to the recognition of God’s love. Charitable outreach practices have no string-attached givings and the receivers / takers are committed to no requirements unrelated to the operation (Lê Quốc Huy 2011, p. 112).

The Executive General Secretary of Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Vietnam (*currently, the Acting President of the denomination effective late 2015*), Pastor Tran Thanh Truyen mentioned that the denomination seeking in sharing God’s love with marginalised community and people with physical challenged through a humanitarian organisation, ADRA and other charitable organisations throughout the regions in Vietnam - Luke 6: 20-21, “<sup>20</sup> *Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the*

*kingdom of God.* <sup>21</sup> *Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh*"<sup>18</sup>. Pastor Nguyen Quang Trung, the President of Vietnam Mennonite Church, the denomination focuses on Peace, Matthew 5:9 - "<sup>9</sup> *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*"<sup>19</sup> - where the Mennonite Christians believe in four basic core values: Peace relationship with God, Self, Humankind and Nature, which intertwined with one another, and in need to reconcile to God, the Creator. Therefore, the Mennonite Christians believe in the act of service to God regardless of race, language, culture and religion differences, especially in relief and aid services in the country. While the President of Vietnam Baptist Convention (Grace-Southern), Pastor Le Quoc Huy shares a mission statements of the denomination that stands on Great Commission of Matthew 28: 18-20<sup>20</sup> - "By spreading the Gospel, discipling believers, baptising believers in Jesus' Name throughout the cities, suburban and interior areas of the nation".

Since the economic and political reforms under Đổi Mới, launched in 1986, Vietnam have spurred rapid economic growth and development; transformed from one of the world's poorest nations to a lower middle-income country. In the millennium era, Vietnam is a new emergent nation in the process of building its' economy through integrating herself into global economy and so, this will pave the way for religion transformation in the country - for political stability, economic growth and religious freedom are intertwined with each other. In an article, a Vietnamese contributor (Bùi Bầy, 2011) quoted a statement made by the late Senior Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew:

*If you look at some countries with rapid growth such as Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, there is a significant phenomenon: the rise of religious issues. The old traditions and customs such as worshipping ancestors, the Shamman be no longer fully satisfying people. It is necessary to further explain about the purpose of the existence of humankind, of the reason why we are here?*

Nevertheless, through the socio-history of the church movement of the three different Protestant Christian denominations have clearly demonstrated their dedication of lifetime, love, and contributed their

services to the nation and to God, a gratitude statement mentioned that they have paid a high price, sacrificed by working and serving in a war zone. Some even lost their lives in the wartime. Missionaries and their organisations (denominations), which have been pouring out financial aid estimated to multi-millions of US dollars, brought great help and blessings to the Vietnamese people who suffered the ravages from the war (Phan Đình Nhãn 2010, p.6)

Today, all the Protestant Christians in Vietnam shares a basic belief that is to lead “An Evangelical Life, In Service of God and Fatherland (Nation)”, which acts as the blueprint, the way to honour God on Vietnam land (Nguyễn Xuân Hùng, 2011, p.104)/.

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**NOTES:**

- 1 [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism\\_in\\_Vietnam](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism_in_Vietnam).
- 2 Main Religion In Vietnam (Year 2014) - United Nations Human Rights, “Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief” (Internet Article dated 31 July 2014, Hanoi).
- 3 Resistance War Against America was a war that occurred in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1 November 1955 to the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975.
- 4 [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese\\_Demilitarized\\_Zone](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_Demilitarized_Zone).
- 5 ADRA (The Adventist Development and Relief Agency) is a global humanitarian organisation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Through an international network, ADRA delivers relief and development assistance to individuals in more than 130 countries - regardless of their ethnicity, political affiliation, or religious association. By partnering with communities, organisations, and governments, ADRA serves people without discriminating their ethnic, political, or religious association. Priority is given to those with disabilities, children, and senior citizens. ADRA’s areas of expertise include: Education, Emergencies, Food/nutrition, HIV/AIDS, Health, Refugees and IDPs, Shelter, Training and development, Water and sanitation, Women, Children, Monitoring and Evaluation, Programme management, and Security.
- 6 Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is a relief, service, and peace agency representing fifteen Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and Amish bodies in North America. The USA headquarters are in Akron, Pennsylvania, the Canadian in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- 7 Church World Service (CWS) was founded in 1946 and is a cooperative ministry of 37 Christian denominations and communions, providing sustainable self-help, development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance around the world. The CWS mission is to eradicate hunger and poverty and to promote peace and justice at the national and international level through collaboration with partners abroad and in the US
- 8 Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), then known as the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, is a mission agency primarily supported by

- congregations of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, an area conference of Mennonite Church USA.
- 9 Rạng Đông Primary School - Founded by VNMM at Bình Thạnh Dist., HCMC in 1966 where the Gia Định Community Centre was located. Unfortunately, the Rạng Đông Primary School was closed down after 1975. Today, Rạng Đông Primary School still exists, but the Vietnamese Government owns the property.
  - 10 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968\\_in\\_the\\_Vietnam\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_in_the_Vietnam_War).
  - 11 Vietnam Christian Service (VNCS) - In 1965, MCC joined Church World Service and Lutheran World Relief to form Vietnam Christian Service (VNCS), a joint program administered by MCC as requested. MCC's work grew along with the engulfing war and the USA's entrenchment. Under VNCS, the programme moved into community development with a range of social services. Used of the military for transportation and security for work in the provinces caused constant concern, producing repeated discussions with United States and Vietnamese officials to maintain a reconciliation stance in their civil strife. After seven years MCC left VNCS to work more closely with its own purposes and identify more with the suffering. By 1974, its' main objective was defined as peace and reconciliation.
  - 12 Lawrence Journal World, *Missionaries In Vietnam Alive And Well (Mennonite – Newspaper Article – Internet sources)*, 2 May 1975.
  - 13 [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doi\\_Moi](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doi_Moi).
  - 14 After 1975, there were hundreds of Vietnamese nationalities especially from the South region of Vietnam fled, and then in the 1980s, the exodus of the “boat people,” several Vietnamese Mennonite Churches were established in Canada and the US. The Vietnamese Mennonite Churches was formed together known as North America Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship (NAVMF) with a vision statement to aim in evangelising and church development both in North America and Vietnam.
  - 15 The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is a Christian denomination based in the United States. It is the world's largest Baptist denomination and the largest Protestant body in the United States, with over 15 million members as of 2015. For further reading, please refer to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern\\_Baptist\\_Convention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Baptist_Convention).
  - 16 Foreign Mission Board - (Currently known as International Mission Board or IMB), was established in 1845, is a missionary sending agency affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) which operates in virtually every nation except the United States and Canada (these nations are serviced by the SBC's North American Mission Board). The IMB receives most of its funding through the SBC's Cooperative Program and the annual Lottie Moon Christmas Offering taken up in Southern Baptist congregations. For further reading, please refer to: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Mission\\_Board](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Mission_Board).
  - 17 Bible or Biblia (from Koine Greek, βιβλία) means Books, is the account of God's action in the world, and His purpose with all creation in the universe. The Bible is a collection of sacred texts or scriptures that Jews and Christians consider to be a product of divine inspiration and a record of the relationship between God and humankind.
  - 18 Luke 6: 20-21 – NIV , Holy Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Biblica, Inc.
  - 19 Matthew 6: 9 – NASB Copyright © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.



- 20 Matthew 28: 18-20 – 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” NIV, Holy Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Biblica, Inc.

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