

## HỘI AN IN PROCESS OF CATHOLIC PREACHING IN VIETNAM

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***Abstract:** Hội An is known as an ancient town in Vietnam. This place used to be an international trading port at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but few people know that it was the first place for Catholic presence in South Vietnam. When conducting research on the process of Catholic missionaries in Vietnam, the author found out five noteworthy points about the role of Hội An. Those were the first established parish and becoming base for developing of Catholic in South Vietnam; the first destination of foreign clergymen then they preached in other regions; a safe shelter for priests to avoid hunting and arresting when Nguyễn dynasty forbid religion; the first Council of South (the second in Vietnam) and the first South Bishop Palace were established in Hội An; the last resting-place of foreign priests.*

Hội An is one of old undamaged cities in Vietnam. In the past this region called Faifoo. The origin of this name was explained in many different ways. Some people think that this name might be caused by “Hải Phố” or the name of a hamlet of Chinese was Phaiphao to be changed Hai Phao by Vietnamese and Phaiphao by Portuguese. Because Hội An is located in the mouth of Hoài Giang river so it called Hoài Phố by Chinese then Haifo by Latin writing. Its name was regularly changed into Faifoo<sup>1</sup>.

From the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Nguyễn Lord had organized administrative divisions, promulgated import and export duties and expanded commercial relations with foreign countries. Then Hội An became a famous market to attract the attentions of many foreign traders, among them there were many Chinese and Japanese traders.

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At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hội An had become an international harbor in Vietnam. Chinese, English, Japanese and Portuguese traders had carried on their business in Hội An. Hội An had become a commercial port and the largest market in South Vietnam. When explaining why Hội An had become the largest markets by then Phan Khoang said that “Hội An had such role because Quảng Nam is rich region, most of valuable products were produced in this region. Quảng Nam is near Chiêm Thành, Quy Nhơn so it is easily to collect products for the need of foreign traders. There is a political reason: our country expanded commercial relations with China in pre-Lê, Lý, Trần then Late Lê dynasty. For fear of foreigners pretend to be traders for spying on our situation so our court only allows foreign traders to concentrate in given spot for commerce; the foreign traders are strictly banned to go to capital city. (...) in Nam Hà, Nguyễn Lord also applies this policy to Chinese and foreign traders because Hội An is far away from Phú Xuân so it becomes the region for the foreign traders’ concentration...”<sup>2</sup>.

When speaking of the process of Catholic preaching in South Vietnam we could not help dealing with the event happened in Japan in 1613. At the moment xenophobic movement was developing in Japan, but one of its aims was directed toward European preachers. In 1614-1615, Japan - the first Asian country to be propagated Catholicism. In Japan there were many catholic believers (about 1.800.000 followers) by then. For fear of this phenomena should influence politics-society of country so Catholicism was forbidden and suppressed violently in Japan.

In February 14, 1614 Daifusana, Japanese king promulgated imperial edict to expel catholic missionaries from Japan. Faced with this situation, the missionaries of Jesuit order had to take refuge in neighboring countries; Hội An became a location where missionaries of Jesuit order took refuge. It was the reason why two priests F. Buzomi (Italian), J. Carvalho (Portuguese) and two lay brothers Giuse and Phalo were sent to Hội An. These clergymen came to Hội An for taking refuge and preaching. Formerly, Ferdinand da Costa, a Portuguese trader informed missionaries of Jesuit order in Macao about “*good future of conversion in this realm*”<sup>3</sup>.

Hội An was destination of missionaries of Jesuit order in Vietnam because Hội An was a busy market in South Vietnam. In Hội An there were many Japanese catholic traders. In the first days they helped clergymen both matter and spirit. They

were interpreters of clergymen. They helped clergymen in contact with inhabitants. In other words, Hội An was located in comfortable position for going to the other regions in South Vietnam. Hội An was located on route to Macao, Vietnam and Malacca... It was proved that clergymen of Jesuit order in Japan had studied carefully their trip, thus “Clergymen left Catholic Church and cultural constructions and language to be reduced in Japan. Instead of the serious losses, missionaries of Jesuit order found a promised land which had two regions under the leadership of Nguyễn Hoàng”<sup>4</sup>.

After spending 12 days to cross the ocean four missionaries made landfall in Hội An in January 18, 1621. They did not meet any difficulties of South authorities by then (Sai Vuong was the leader of government). Because “Sai Vuong is interested in strengthening military power, he does not pay attention to religion so Fathers freely preach Catholicism and they are respected by all”<sup>5</sup>... So Hội An was the first region for Catholic presence in South Vietnam. Because of being important position Hội An had an important role in long process of catholic preaching and developing in Vietnam. From above points we have following remarks:

**1- Hội An was the first established parish and becoming base for developing of Catholicism in South Vietnam.**

By the appearance of missionaries of Jesuit order, many preparative activities were carried out in South Vietnam. Many churches (actually, these churches were chapels) were built in South. The first parishes were established in Hội An and Thanh Chiêm.

After entering in Hội An, priest Buzomi and his colleagues built a momentary chapel for Japanese and Portuguese residents to carry out their religious rites. This chapel was also the first headquarters where the priests carried out to preach Vietnamese believers living around regions. In another document, priest Buzomi built another church to be called Kean that was Kê Han. This place –name was noted down in the famous map of Alexandre de Rhodes.

The process of Catholic preaching was carried out immediately with clear assignment “priest Carvalho and two lay brothers preach Japanese Catholic residents in Hải Phố; priest Buzomi learns Vietnamese language and preaches Vietnamese.

Quảng Nam inhabitants like to listen to Buzomi preaching in Vietnamese...”<sup>6</sup> The first results were passable good. Ten Vietnamese were baptized in Easter 1615. Among them there was a young man, his name was Autinh, he volunteered to help priest. Then he became the first member of preacher organization in South (*so that the first South preachers were trained in Hội An*). Because the first parishes were established in Hội An so clergymen could preach in round regions and whole South Vietnam as well as neighboring countries.

After stabilizing the situation, in July, 1615 priest Buzomi began to enlarge sphere of action. Thanks to local inhabitants priest Buzomi preached in Quảng Nam. In Quảng Nam local mandarins not only treated priest Buzomi well but also contrived place of worship so preaching was rather favorable in Quảng Nam. At the end of 1615, Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên (1613- 1635) allowed Buzomi to build two churches: one in Hội An, one in Quảng Nam. Priest Buzomi preached in contiguous area, in the first years 300 inhabitants became believers.

More and more Japanese traders came to Hội An. The number was estimated at around 1000 traders. In 1619 priest Marquez baptized 40 neophytes and built a private chapel for Japanese residents. The results of the process of Catholic preaching in South seemed to be successful and created a strong base for permanent process of Catholic preaching. Thus priest Buzomi was the first clergyman of Jesuit order coming to Vietnam and establishing South church.

## **2- Hội An was the first destination of foreign clergymen then they preached in other regions.**

After Hội An was chose to be destination of clergymen, the superior of Jesuit order continuously sent clergymen to Hội An. During the first years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, many priests followed merchant ships coming Hội An then they carried out preaching in contiguous areas. In 1617 the superior of Jesuit order in Macao sent two clergymen: Fr. Pina (Italian) and Fr. Barreto (Portuguese) along with lay brother Diaz (Portuguese) to help priest Buzomi (clergyman. Barreto lived in Vietnam some months then he and Fernandez came to Chân Lạp). Clergyman Pina and two Japanese neophytes stayed in Hội An. After accepting an invitation of mandarin

priest Buzomi and two lay brothers Diaz and Autinh came to Bình Định. In 1618 two clergymen P. Marquez (Portuguese) and Borri (Italian) came to Hội An. In 1622 the Superior of Jesuit order in Macao sent additionally 4 clergymen Hội An. They were Emmanoel Fernandes, Emmanoel Borges (Portuguese), Giovannidi leira (Italian) and Romano Niti (Japanese). Clergyman Emmanoel Fernandes replaced priest Marques to preach Japanese residents in commercial region. Priest Marques was expert in Vietnamese language and custom so he was sent to collaborate with clergyman De Pina priest in Quảng Nam.

Hội An affirmed his role in the process of catholic preaching in South Vietnam. The contemporary priests wrote that “In 1620, 1621 and 1622 the Jesuit order continuously sends new laborers to make vineyard more beautiful. This vineyard is enlarged. Father Emmanuel Porgez also comes here. For fear of long winded, I do not tell other fathers’ names. Many of them have preserved in preaching and establishing congregations”<sup>7</sup>. Here, activities of clergymen were divided as follows: Fenandez preached in Quảng Nam and Quảng Ngãi; Borges and Luis preached in Quy Nhơn and Phú Yên; Machi preached in Hội An; Macvhina preached in Cửa Hàn; Buzomi, Majorica and Fontes preached in Chiêm Thành then in Chân Lạp. In 1634, Buzomi came back Macao and died here.

Father A.de. Rhodes came to Vietnam in December, 1624. Place of his preaching was very large from South to North. After coming Hội An he was treated well by Sai Vuong lord. He converted a woman kindred with Lord to Catholicism. Her Christian name was Maria Madeleine. She persuaded her acquaintances to follow Catholicism. She protected and helped clergymen. A chapel was built in her residential area. The end of January, 1642 Father A. de Rhode came back South Vietnam then went to Hải Van mountain pass, to Kim Long. He made Thượng lord a present of watch and stayed in palace.

### **3- Hội An was a safe shelter for priests to avoid hunting and arresting when Nguyễn dynasty forbade religion.**

Looking back our history we find that peacefulness and good relation between Catholicism and government were remained a period of time. Because of objective

and subjective reasons, many conflictions and contradictions happened so that Nguyễn lords boycotted and expelled the missionaries of Jesuit order from South Vietnam. In such condition Hội An became a place for priests living before expelling from Vietnam.

In December 1625 Sãi lord ordered to concentrate preachers in Hội An. Alexandre de Rhodes related: “In 1625 Lord prevented us and punished followers. He ordered priests to leave the established congregations and withdrew secretly into Hội An with a reason for defending our life and our preaching”.<sup>8</sup>

Alexandre de Rhodes not only came Hội An in 1625 but also many times, he lurked and preached in Hội An. He wrote “before carrying out my aims I hid in Hội An where many Japanese traders were living”.<sup>9</sup> In 1645 “when the foreign trips left I celebrated Easter in Quảng Nam. Many believers carried out their duties in holy days. Then I came back a city called Hội An by Japanese”.<sup>10</sup> Another document reported that “during 22 days to be arrested in Hải Phố, A. de Rhodes baptized 92 persons”.<sup>11</sup>

The other clergymen were the same. In 1650 two clergymen, Saccano and Della Rocca hid and preached secretly in Hội An and Cửa Hàn then two regions became a place for religious practice. “On the occasion of feast days from remote villages believers move to meet priests for receiving sacrament then they come back and advise their relatives and villagers to convert”.<sup>12</sup>

In 1656 -1657 “Fathers had not right to go out Cửa Hàn and Hải Phố. Father Rivas had to live in Hải Phố and Father Marques had to live in Cửa Hàn. In 1656 father Rivas organized ceremonial Christmas in Hải Phố”.<sup>13</sup>

After 100 years Hội An was still a concentration of clergymen who were arrested and expelled. In 1750 Võ Vương lord promulgated imperial decree to arrest priests in South so many priests were arrested and expelled. “In January 1750, Võ Vương order to extradite priests to Hải Phố. They were expelled from South in August 26, 1750”.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4- The first Council of South (the second in Vietnam) and the first South bishop palace were established in Hội An.**

The first Council of South (after Nam Định council) was established in Hội An. It expressed Hội An's role in Vietnamese Catholic history. Priest Lambert de la Motte priest founded this council. He was the priest of Holy See and Paris Foreign Missions Society. After Paris Foreign Missions Society was established, Lambert de la Motte was appointed to be the first Apostolic Vicar in South in 1659. After going on an inspection tour in South, Lambert de la Motte established the Lover of Holy Cross in Quảng Ngãi then he came back Hội An in January 1672. In Hội An he summoned council, examined religious affairs, called upon harmony in church and informed the content of Nam Định council. In the book *Vietnam Catholic Church*, the writer Bùi Đức Sinh related this event as follows: "In January 1672 Father went to Hải Phố and lived in a remote island to study the religious condition. In February 19 Father met council. In the meeting there were 6 missionaries, 4 Vietnamese priests and some teachers. The fathers of Jesuit order were invited but nobody came. Father tried his best to unite communities of believers. Father propagated the decree of Holy See. Father gave Vietnamese priests and teachers a decision of Dinh Hiến council in North with private instructions"<sup>15</sup>.

Basing Nam Định and Hội An councils, Lambert strengthened French missionaries, priests and native teachers and helped local priests to develop religion. In 1682 the second council of South Diocese was established in Hội An. Bishop Laneau came Hội An and took himself the decree of Holy See that appointed him to be a administrator of South Diocese and clergy Guillaume Mahot to be Apostolic Vicar. The ordination was organized in Hội An. In October 26 1682 Laneau and Guillaume Mahot summoned and presided over the second Council of South Diocese. Theirs aims were to resolve the organical problems and religious activities in South.

After the first Council, Bishop's palace of the South was firmly located in Hội An. After along time Bishop's palace moved to Huế Capital city. In the time of the 4<sup>th</sup> Apostolic Vicar, Alexandro de Alexandrex (Italian) moved Bishop's palace to Huế but the Coadjutor Bishop remained in Hội An. It presented the conversion of predicator history and the important role of Hội An in Vietnam Catholic history.

### 5- Hội An was the last resting-place of foreign priests.

Hội An was not only the destination but also the last resting place of foreign priests who preached in Vietnam. Among the foreign priests to be buried in Hội An, we must talk about the 3rd Apostolic Vicar - Bishop Guillaume Mahot. He began to manage diocese in 1682, “after accepting bishopric of diocese he doubled the work. Because of enthusiasm and worry he died...”<sup>16</sup> He died in Hội An on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1684 after 18 months he was ordained Bishop.

Another well-known clergyman who was buried in Hội An was Bishop F. Peres. Bishop F. Peres was ordained Bishop, Apostolic Vicar in South in 1691. He died on the 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1728 when he was 85 years old. He managed dioceses for 37 years.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> clergyman was priest of Franciscans, priest Valere Rist. His nationality was German. He preached in large area from Đồng Nai to Phú Xuân. In 1737 he was appointed assistant bishop. His ordination was performed in church in Phú Xuân. After a little he died (on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1737) and buried in cemetery of foreigners in Hội An, his grave was brought in cathedral precinct of Hội An parish.

Nowadays if you visit Hội An and Hội An church you can see many graves of the west preachers in church precinct. Names and ages of the West preachers were written on their graves. These are evidences of history of Catholic preaching in Vietnam.

Vietnamese history has had spent many changes; so had Hội An. Its first role of commercial port had been lost.

In the final years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century “Hội An ceased to be leading body of diocese in South but it was the centre of Gospel in Nam Hà. Paris missionaries or Franciscans concentrated in Hội An then they went to Phú Xuân and the other regions for preaching”<sup>17</sup>. Hà Tiên replaced Hội An to become the first position in South of Indochina with 70.000 Catholics. In Hiền lord period, Hội An ceased to be trade centre of foreigners in South. In 1770s Sài Gòn- Hà Tiên replaced Hội An to become the main centre of South Diocese. The clergymen, however, still preached in Hội An, French clergymen stayed in Cửa Hàn, the clergymen of Franciscans stayed in Trà Kiệu.



In Gia Long dynasty, the policy of religious liberty was promulgated and carried out but few Catholics came back and lived in Hội An. Chinese residents trooped in Gia Định- Chợ Lớn. According to documents from 1800 to 1914, in Hội An there were not any churches, priests and religious activities. In 1914 a small chapel was established. Then it became Hội An Church. It was repaired in 1963.

Because of time and changes Hội An gave up its role to the other regions. Basing above analyses it can be said that Hội An was an important landmark in the process of Catholic preaching in Vietnam. /.

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### Reference:

- <sup>1</sup> For reading convenience editorial staffs call this region as Hoi An.
- <sup>2</sup> Phan Khoang. *History of South*, Pub. Van Hoc, 2001, p. 415.
- <sup>3</sup> Nguyễn Văn Kiệm. *The Introduction of Christian in Vietnam*, p.15.
- <sup>4</sup> Cao Thế Dung. *Vietnamese Catholic History*, Vol. 1p. 341-42.
- <sup>5</sup> *Catholic Church in Vietnam*, Calgary -Canada 1998, Vol. 1, p.90.
- <sup>6</sup> Bùi Đức Sinh. *Vietnamese Catholic Church*, Vol. 1, p. 358-59.
- <sup>7</sup> A. de Rhodes. *The Travels and Missions*. Committee for Solidarity of Catholics, Ho Chi Minh City, 1994, p. 54.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 59.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 90-91.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 183.
- <sup>11</sup> *Catholic Church in Vietnam*, Calgary - Canada, 1998, Vol. 1 p.285.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 207.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 209.
- <sup>14</sup> Cao Thế Dung. *Vietnamese Catholic History*, Vol. 2, p. 904.
- <sup>15</sup> *Catholic Church in Vietnam*, Calgary - Canada, 1998, Vol.1, p.285.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 298.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 298.