

RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES OF CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IN THE RED RIVER THROUGH VILLAGE CUSTOMARY

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Abstract: Hương ước (Conventions or Village customary) is a feature of the Vietnamese villages in the Red River Delta, Vietnam. It can be found in the conventions of the provisions relating to economic, political, cultural, moral and spiritual, etc. of a village. Catholics have contributed to creating a new type of village in the Red River Delta, which is the Catholics village. Because of being established on the basis of Vietnamese village, Catholics villages also have their own conventions. Besides the general regulations, conventions of Catholics villages have its own regulations concerning religious life of Catholics. This article, first, points out some features of Catholics villages and Catholics villages conventions in the Red River Delta, and then presented the terms related to the spiritual life of Catholics; for example, religious life, the practice of rituals, marriage, funeral, etc. through the study of the Catholics villages conventions in the Red River Delta from 1921 to 1944 period.

The Village Customary has been an original cultural production to connect closely with Vietnamese villages in general and the villages in the Red River Delta in special. Village Customary has regulations to correct some aspects of village life such as economy, politics, society, education, morals and spiritual culture, etc. These regulations become the cultural activities in Vietnamese villages.

According to time, the regulations in village customs may be corrected and supplemented in accordance with social changes. Village customs have both general regulations and private regulations in accordance with customs, beliefs, and religions of every village. These regulations make the customs of Vietnamese villages in general and Catholic villages in special in the Red River delta diversified and plentiful.

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The village customaries in the Red River delta have three kinds correspondent to three stages: the stage before rural reform (these village customaries were named the old village customaries, they were written by Chinese-Ancient Vietnamese script); the stage of rural reform (these village customaries were named the reformed village customaries, they were written by national, Chinese and French languages); the stage after rural reform (these village customaries were named new village customaries, they were written by national language). The documents are used in this article to be the reformed village customaries (1921-1944) of Catholic villages in the Red River delta. ⁽¹⁾

When comparing customaries of Vietnamese villages with customaries of Catholic villages we find that Catholic village customaries have some specific characteristics. These village customaries have the articles on Mass, mainly solemnities and other rites such as funeral, marriage, canonization, and morals, union of Non Catholics and Catholics and common fields (these fields serve God).

1. Some features on Catholic villages and Catholic village customaries in the Red River delta.

The Red River delta has been a cradle of Vietnamese culture. Long ago this delta has borne the stamp of cultures of Buddhism, of Confucianism and of Taoism, then Catholicism were introduced into this delta in the 17th century. Because of the presence of these religions so the village customaries in the Red River delta have some regulations on practice of religious rites. The content of these village customaries somewhat reflect variety in religious life of every Vietnamese village.

Some researchers on Catholic history maintained that the point of time when Catholicism was preached in Vietnam in 1533 ⁽²⁾. From then on, the history of preaching and developing of Catholicism in Vietnam had experienced the rise and fall of history. However, it had a position in nation and presented clearly in cultural, art aspects and life-style.

The life-style of Vietnamese Catholics has presented clearly through rites. Rites of funeral, marriage of Catholics in the Red River delta have intermixtures of rites of Roman Catholic Church and the traditional rites of Vietnamese nation. The life-style

¹ Now, the written texts of reformed village customaries are kept in Vietnamese Institute of social sciences Information. It is easy for you to keep track of this article we preserve the old names of villages but the names of provinces following now list. Following Statistical Yearbook in 2006 p. 21, the Red River Delta has 11 provinces: Hà Nội, Vĩnh Phúc, Bắc Ninh, Hà Tây, Hải Phòng, Hải Dương, Hưng Yên, Thái Bình, Hà Nam, Nam Định and Ninh Bình

² Nguyễn Thanh Xuân. *Some Religions in Viet Nam*. Religion Publishing House. Hanoi 2007, p. 204.

of Catholics has presents clearly in the relations of laity and dignity, of non-Catholics and Catholics.

When preaching, the clergymen brought the organizational system of Church in organizational system of Vietnamese villages then parishes- the organization of basic Catholic Church were set up. According Nguyễn Phú Lợi, the process of taking shape of the different parishes took place differently. In the first stage when Catholicism newly appeared in Vietnam, some areas had “Catholic points”. The initial Catholic points were often in the coastal villages. Every Catholic point had only a few families. When Catholic believers were crowded they set up *nha giao* or *ho giao* to teach new believers bible. Basing on *nha giao* or *ho giao*, parishes were born ⁽³⁾. In process of preaching, clergymen gradually established parishes then Catholic villages were set up ⁽⁴⁾.

When dealing with the above problem, Đặng Chí San remarked that “when Catholicism occurred in Vietnam it integrated into Vietnamese culture. When Catholicism was not punished, Vietnamese Catholics gathered together to found the Catholic villages. Vietnamese Catholic Church consists of Catholic villages. Furthermore, many village elements were strengthened more firmly in Catholic villages... the communal house in the village became church. Tutelary god became patron saint” ⁽⁵⁾.

The clergymen created *làng toàn tông* (parish) (all villagers of these villages follow Catholicism) because they want to help Catholic believers to maintain their religion but the most important for them to set up Catholic units. If they had condition they would catholicize all Vietnamese people then turned Vietnamese villages into their communes. On this problem, Trần Tam Tinh wrote that: “Except for the groups of houses in city, people lived mutually but Catholics lived in separate villages apart from non Catholics. Catholics lived around their churches which were built following Western style. They were trained by clergymen and they became an awe force. They were ready to rise for defense of their beliefs and church. The system of oasis divorced most of Catholics from their compatriots, that system made Catholics refuse and boycott whatever was not accepted formally by Church” ⁽⁶⁾.

³ Nguyễn Phú Lợi. *Studying the Organization of Basic Catholic Church in Phát Diệm Diocese, Ninh Bình Province* (Ma. Essay), Hanoi, 2001, p. 14.

⁴ Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *Rite and Catholic Lifestyle in Vietnamese Culture*. Social Sciences Pub., Hanoi, 1997, p. 214.

⁵ Đặng Chí San. “Some Features on Village and Village Parish”, *Catholicism and Nation* monthly magazine, N°. 42, 1998 p.50.

⁶ Trần Tam Tinh. *Cross and Sword*, Youth Publishing House, 1975, p. 54.

Thus, Catholic villages were the production of Catholic propagation in Vietnam. This production had 2 elements; *village element* and *religious element*. Village element consisted of political, economic, cultural institutions. The main religious elements were Catholicism and Western culture but these elements changed in accordance with culture and feeling of Vietnamese people ⁽⁷⁾.

In Vietnam there were two kinds of Catholic villages: *làng Công giáo toàn tòng* and *làng lương-giáo* (it means that villagers were both non-Catholics and Catholics residing in a village). The Catholic villages were set up on Vietnamese villages so the customaries of Catholic villages have the same regulations as customaries of Vietnamese villages. The Catholic village customaries have two main parts: political part (village administrative business) and the part of customs (Post-worship feast) ⁽⁸⁾. The part of customs in Catholic village customaries reflects the rites of Catholics which are taken place in year but the ministration in the daily life of believers is very important.

As Vietnamese traditional villages, the Catholic villages composed customaries to teach parishioners to have cultural life and adjust their actions. *Sa Châu Village Customary* stipulates that “The customary is a book which is written regulations of village as well as of country. The progression or the depravation of village is resulted from good customs or bad customs so every village needs to have customary in order to adjust his customs. The good customs are maintained and bad customs are rejected. When customary is set up, whole villagers have to obey. Every year, villagers has meeting and village council reads Village Customary so all villagers remember and carry out regulations ⁽⁹⁾.

Catholic Village Customary reflects the system worship and ministration of parishioners in village. Since then we can find that the worship of saint and gods in village festivities of Catholic villages meets villagers’ spiritual need and socio-economy purposes of village- institutions. The village festivals make non-Catholics and Catholics live in harmony. The village festivals make tradition and modern are in agreement. If the village has non-Catholics and Catholics, rituals of non-Catholics are prepared by non-Catholics and rites of Catholics are prepared by Catholics. This affair has been defined in Village Customary. Some articles (from the 19th article to

⁷ Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *Lưu Phương Catholic Village (Ninh Bình) from 1892 to 1945*, Social Sciences publishing House, 1997, p. 214.

⁸ Nguyễn Quế Hương. *Religious Life of Inhabitants in the Red River Delta through Customaries* (Ma. Essay), Hanoi, 2006, p. 35- 40.

⁹ *Sa Châu Village Customary* (Giao Thủy dist., Nam Định province), HU. 2021.

the 124th article) in *Thượng Lao Village Customary* (Nam Định) stipulate that “our village has 6 hamlets, 5 Catholic hamlets and one non-Catholic hamlet... Catholics have their private church, non-Catholics have their temple. Temple janitor takes care of temple, parochial administrator takes care of church. Non-Catholics go to temple in the first and fifteenth of a lunar month. Catholics go to church in holy days according to Western calendar and Catholic calendar”⁽¹⁰⁾.

After studying more than 40 village customaries we find that the numbers of customaries of *làng toàn tông* are few (16 customaries). Not all village customaries have concrete regulations on religious life of Catholicism. In the 16 customaries there is only *Hạ Linh Village Customary* (Nam Định) not to deal with the number of holidays in every year. It was written that “All our villagers follow Catholicism so priest carries out sacrifices”⁽¹¹⁾.

After studying more than 20 customaries of *làng lương-giáo*, we find that some customaries deal with solemnities in detail (*Tứ quý* or *Ngũ Quý*)... Remaining customaries only deal with expenditure or distribution of general fields. The income of these fields is served feasts. The 76th article of *Yên Đổ Village Customary* (Nam Hà) stipulates that “...Every year, the Catholic hamlets spend 20 đồng in feasts”⁽¹²⁾.

We can find that regulations on post worship feast in Catholic village customaries in the Red River delta base on the private village customs. These customs correspond with village laws and reflect the religious life of followers at the same time.

According to Nguyễn Hồng Dương, the Nguyễn dynasty applied the policy of anti-Catholicism in the 19th century. In Tự Đức regime, one of many measures of this policy was to divide Catholics. Catholics were forced to live in non Catholic villages. The aim of this policy attempted to abolish Catholic villages and kept Catholics under surveillance. During this period, Catholic villages were dispersed so many village customaries did not deal with whatever to concern with Catholicism, etc. From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century many new Catholic villages were established. At that time Catholic village customaries dealt with Catholicism⁽¹³⁾.

¹⁰ *Thượng Lao Village Customary* (Nam Trực dist., Nam Định province), HU. 2241.

¹¹ *Hạ Linh Village Customary* (Xuân Trường, Nam Định), HU. 4220.

¹² *Yên Đổ Village Customary* (Binh Lục, Hà Nam), HU. 690.

¹³ Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *Catholic Village Customaries in the Red River Delta at the First Half of the 20th Century*, *Ethnology magazine*, N°. 5, 2004, p. 19-24.

We deal with some special contents of Catholic village customs in the Red River delta.

2. The religious activities of Catholics through village customs in the Red River delta

2.1. The religious life of Catholics

The religious life of Vietnamese Catholics has general characteristics which are regulated by Roman Catholic Church and specific characteristics which are set up by Vietnamese history, culture and custom. According to Catholic dogma, religious life is not only prayer, vegetarian, receiving sacrament, mortification, etc. but also humanity. Pastoral Constitution has regulated that “Catholics’ jobs keep themselves, their families and help fellow men. This lifestyle is humanity and completion of creative work of Christ⁽¹⁴⁾. Thus, lifestyle of Catholics has to be presented by actions of every believer in daily life.

Catholicism has many holidays in year. Every holiday has its own significance. Every holiday has its own formality.

From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century Catholic villages realized the following solemnities regularly: Noel, Easter the feast of the Ascension, the feast of the Pentecost. They were four important rites relating to Trinity. Catholics called 4 rites to be *Tứ Quý*. Lately, *Tứ Quý* was supplemented by the feast of the Assumption. It was called to be *Ngũ Quý*⁽¹⁵⁾.

The religious life of Catholics in the Red River delta is very plentiful and diversified. Outside of solemnities, Catholics have to carry out some other rites as Santy rite, Rosario rite, All Souls’ Day, rite of Magi, the rite of Mary, the rite of Our Lady Immaculate, the feast of village founder-worship. These rites are divided in every month and every season in year. The feast of Saint Joseph is carried out in March, The feast of the Assumption is carried out in August, October is the month of Rosary, the feast of all saints is carried out in November, and Easter is carried out in April.

The above Masses are carried out in three main seasons a year: the season of Lent, the season of Advent and the season of Ordinary time. The season of Lent is

¹⁴ Hà Huy Tú, *Studying Nice Features of Catholic Culture*, Cultural Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002, p. 29-32.

¹⁵ Nguyễn Hồng Dương, *The Religious Life of Catholic Believers in the Red River Delta in the Second Half of the 20th Century through Village Customs*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 46-47.

organized from the feast of Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday. The season of Lent is organized from November, 11th to Christmas (December, 25th). The season of Ordinary time is remaining time in year⁽¹⁶⁾.

Catholics have to confess and offer Mass. In the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, the Catholic village customaries have regulations on confession and feast of the Body of Jesus Christ that was called to be *date of charitable practice* or *week of charitable practice*.

The week of charitable practice goes with the feast of saint *Quan Thầy* (the saint who protects parishioners from danger) of parish. Because of lack of priest every parish only practices one or two weeks of charitable practice a year. Every priest undertakes the responsibility for many parishes because every parish has many separate parishes. In fact, the week of charitable practice only takes place two or three days. On these days priest is received by parishioners. After Mass, priest and parishioners talk with each others. Parish arranges banquets and feasts to invite priest. Every family arranges a good meal according to his condition⁽¹⁷⁾. Some Catholic village customaries deal with this custom. For example, the 8th article of *Vĩnh Trụ Catholic Village Customary* (Hà Nam) stipulates that “church service is carried out in February and August, every people comes back to do good deeds for parish. Two terms need 33 đồng (đồng is Vietnamese monetary unit). The parochial administrator uses public fund of parish to spend in church service”⁽¹⁸⁾.

The Catholic village festivals are carried out in the feast of saint *Quan thầy*. Nguyễn Hồng Dương maintains that “The feast of Saint *Quan thầy* is a model of village festival of Catholics”⁽¹⁹⁾. Many Catholic village customaries stipulate that the feast of *Quan thầy* is the solemnity. The 94th article of *Thủy Nhài Village Customary* stipulates “the feast of Saint *Quan thầy* is organized on September, 12th, the expenditure of this feast is 30 đồng”⁽²⁰⁾.

Besides the above feasts Catholic villages organize the other feasts: Farm-work initiation ceremony, Lunar Year festival, the feast of village founder-worship. People organize these feasts to hope abundant harvests.

¹⁶ The Holy week starts from Palm Sunday to Holy Saturday. In this week Catholic Church memorizes miserableness of Christ. See Nguyễn Hồng Dương: *Lưu Phương Catholic Village*, ibid, p. 171-174.

¹⁷ *Vĩnh Trụ Village Customary* (Lý Nhân dist., Hà Nam province), HU, 782.

¹⁸ Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *The Religious Life of Catholic Believers in the Red River Delta in the Second Half of the 20th Century through village customaries*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 45-69.

¹⁹ Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *Rite and Catholic Life style in Vietnamese Culture*, Ibid, p. 170.

²⁰ *Thủy Nhài Village Customary* (Giao Thủy dist., Nam Định province), HU, 2021.

On farm-work initiation ceremony, the 28th article of *Mỹ Đình Village Customary* stipulates that “on June, 29th villagers are all present at church for praying abundant harvests then they transplant rice seedlings”⁽²¹⁾.

The feast of praying for long peace and the feast of praying for good harvest express the relation of Catholic culture and Vietnamese village’s culture. According to Nguyễn Hồng Dương the feast of praying for good harvest of Catholic coastal villages is related to the feast of praying for many fishes⁽²²⁾.

The ceremony of Lunar Year festival of Vietnamese Catholics has a specific characteristic. In the Common Letter on May, 8th 1805 which was sent to Catholics of Catholic regions in the North Vietnam (including Hanoi), Diocesan Bishop dealt with Lunar Year festival of Catholics. The Common Letter showed that Tet holiday was an occasion for relatives to visit, wish to each other. This was good custom so all Catholics should carry out. Catholics in Lưư Phương parish, Phát Diệm diocese celebrate the New Year with content: In the first day they pray to Holy Father. The second day they pray to the Holy Son and the Holy Ghost. The third day they pray their ancestors⁽²³⁾. The 119th article *Phú Nhai Village Customary* (Nam Định) stipulates that “our village has an account-book for the feasts. Our village spends 5 đồng for preparing of Lunar Year or Double Five festival”⁽²⁴⁾.

On the festival of village founder-worship, the 72nd article *Lưư Phương Village Customary* stipulates that “Catholics carry out the following feasts: Eastern, Feast of All Saints; the feast of village founder-worship; the feast of Evangelist...”⁽²⁵⁾. The 26th article in *Vĩnh Trĩ Village Customary* stipulates that “Catholic village has one church and four chapels. The expenditure of the feast for village founder worship is 3 đồng and the same for the feast of *Quan thầy*”⁽²⁶⁾.

2.2. *The practice of Catholic rites*

According to the custom of every village, the practices of rites of different villages are different. In holydays every village carries its own worship in accordance with village’s customs. Holidays are the occasions for Catholics to meet each other. All expenditures in holidays are defined concretely in village customaries.

²¹ *Mỹ Đình Village Customary* (Duyên Hà dist., Thái Bình province), HU. 2879.

²² Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *Lưư Phương Catholic Village*, Ibid. p. 186.

²³ Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *Rite and Catholic Lifestyle in Vietnamese Culture*, Ibid. p. 198.

²⁴ *Phú Nhai Village Customary* (Xuân Trường dist., Nam Định province), HU. 4232.

²⁵ *Lưư Phương Village Customary* (Kim Sơn dist., Ninh Bình province), HU. 4623.

²⁶ *Vĩnh Trĩ Village Customary* (Nghĩa Hưng dist., Nam Định province), HU. 3528.

The 76th article in *Hòa Mạc Village Customary* stipulates that “On December, 3rd Catholics observe ritual for Saint *Quan Thầy* in church. The expenditure of this ritual is 7 đồng. On August, 15th Catholics celebrate Easter in church. The expenditure of this ritual is 7 đồng...”⁽²⁷⁾.

Some villages worship Mary. She is also called Holy Mother or Thánh Mẫu Phương Danh (i.e. Good Name of Holy Mother). The 19th article in *Sa Châu Village Customary* stipulates that “Our village has two churches and two temples. Villagers worship Holy Mother in temple. According to village custom, in the feast of Holy Mother, every male individual has to pay 0,1 đồng. All villagers have to go to church on Sundays. Every year, Holy Mother is invited to hold ritual in temple”⁽²⁸⁾. *Ninh Phú Village Customary* stipulates that “all our villagers are Catholics so our village has not sacrifices and prayers except the feast of invitation of Phương Danh Thánh Mẫu is organized in March, May and September. In this feast we only invite her without offerings and eating. We read our Village Customary in Easter”⁽²⁹⁾.

In some Catholic villages there are different religious zones. Every zone worships one saint *Quan Thầy*. The 92nd article in *Nam Am Village Customary* stipulates that “...Our people have four zones. Every zone has its feast day of saint *Quan Thầy*: Eastern zone worships Saint James; Southern zone worships Saint John; Middle zone worship Saint Philome; Western zone worships Saint Anna. The feast days follow Catholic calendar. In the feast day, villagers have to pay 0,5 đồng or 0,3 đồng for buying candle, cracker and organizing banquet.”⁽³⁰⁾

The 93rd article of *Thủy Nhai Village Customary* stipulates that “March, 19th is the feast day of Saint Joseph. June, 24th is the feast day of Saint Johns. August, 4th is the feast day of Saint Dominic. September 15th is the feast day of Seven Sorrows of Our Lady. The oil and candles are used in these feasts to be supplied by two families”⁽³¹⁾.

The realization of Catholic rites is also defined concretely in village customaries to educate organizational and disciplined temper of villagers in solemn places. Every villager has to fulfill his work to be assigned by village council. Any one who does not fulfill his work is punished by council village. Fine will be confiscated. Three articles (from the 125th article to the 127th article) in *Thượng Lào Village Customary*

²⁷ *Hòa Mạc Village Customary* (Duy Tiên dist., Hà Nam province), HU. 718.

²⁸ *Sa Châu Village Customary* (Nam Định province), Ibid.

²⁹ *Ninh Phú Village Customary* (Thanh Liêm dist., Hà Nam province), HU. 845.

³⁰ *Nam Am Village Customary* (Vĩnh Bảo dist., Hải Phòng province), HU. 1711.

³¹ *Thủy Nhai Village Customary* (Nam Định province), Ibid.

stipulate that “In the feast days, parochial administrator has to look after all works of parish; village official has to maintain order. When holding ceremony in church, all participators have to be in order. Anyone who does not obey village regulations has to pay a fine (from 0,3 đồng to 1 đồng). Laity only offers betel and candles”⁽³²⁾. The 76th of *Văn Giáo Village Customary* stipulates that “our village is Catholic village so all parishioners have to be corrected dressed in the feast days of saints and solemn. Nobody may be absent from the feast days...”⁽³³⁾.

In the feast days, villagers often offer steamed glutinous rice and boiled pork to saint. Steamed glutinous rice is refined and simple production of peasants in the Red Rive delta. The 120th article of *Tức Mặc Village Customary* stipulates “Lạc Giáo hamlet sells the production of 5 hectares, 1 perch and 11 meters for buying wax candles and repairing cathedral; Villagers sell the production of 2 perches and 11 meters for buying fork and steamed glutinous rice to offer Mary on September, 12th”⁽³⁴⁾. The offerings of Catholic villages are oil and candles.

All expenditures and offerings for Masses are basing on income of *general field*. If any village has not general field all expenditure and offerings apportion equally to each parish or use public funds. The 9th article of *Xuân Hòa Village Customary* stipulates that “our village has 4 hectares of general field, income of this field is used in the feast days so our villagers contribute nothing”⁽³⁵⁾. The 126th article of *Ngọc Cục Village Customary* stipulates that “we entrust two acres of Buddhist temple Mr. So. He is concerned over incense and cradles. We entrust two acres Mr. Cu and we buy two acres for spending of holy feasts in year”⁽³⁶⁾.

Clearly, some regulations in Catholic village customaries in the Red River delta stipulate practices of rites. Villagers must carry rites. Performances of rites are duty and responsibility of individuals, families as well as lines. This performance reflects long tradition of villages. This tradition presents on relative axis: family - village - state. This axis is national pride.

2.3. The maintenance of family tradition and union of Catholics and non-Catholics

³² *Thượng Lao Village Customary* (Nam Trực dist., Nam Định province), HU. 2241.

³³ *Văn Giáo Village Customary* (Nghĩa Hưng dist., Nam Định province), HU. 2367.

³⁴ *Tức Mặc Village Customary* (Mỹ Lộc dist., Nam Định province), HU. 2179.

³⁵ *Xuân Hòa Village Customary* (Tiền Lãng dist., Hải Phòng province), HU. 4072.

³⁶ *Ngọc Cục Village Customary* (Xuân Trường dist., Nam Định province), HU. 4229.

Catholics not only perform religious rites, but also maintain some contents of traditional culture as *marriage, funeral, morals and union of Catholics and non-Catholics*... Basing on the articles in Village Customary, parishioners have to correct their moral actions then the moral way of life of Catholic villages in the Red River delta is created.

On Marriage

Catholics think highly of monogamy Matrimony is one of seven sacraments. “Matrimony is recognition of God about long coexistence of a man and a woman who are baptized. Matrimony strengthens firmness and uniqueness in marriage and in family relation of Catholics”⁽³⁷⁾. So the customs of Catholic villages have clear, close regulations on marriage problem.

The specific characteristics in Catholic village customs on marriage are regulations that Catholics only have one wife or one husband, especially bridegroom must to go to church. The 14th and the 15th articles of *Đông Xuyên Ngoại Village Customary* stipulates that “when boy and girl take in marriage, they must pay 1 đồng for marriage certificate, Catholics only marry one wife or one husband”⁽³⁸⁾. The 103rd article *Vĩnh Trị Village Customary* stipulates that “Catholic is only allowed to marry one wife or one husband. If anyone has second wife, nobody sit by him in the meal of village”⁽³⁹⁾. The 67th article of *Nam An Village Customary* stipulates that “We are Catholics so we must follow religious law. Nobody is allowed to have a concubine. If illegitimate children are boy, when they are grown up they must pay a fine (5 đồng)”⁽⁴⁰⁾. The aim of these regulations is to think highly the responsibilities of husband and wife to maintain the firmness of family life.

When studying village customs we find that some customs have adjustments and many superfluous rites are rejected. The 63rd article of *Đức Trai Village Customary* stipulates that “In the past, marriage has 6 ceremonies, but now it has 3 ceremonies. Firstly, pre-engagement ceremony, that is two families meet each other. Offerings of this ceremony are betel, areca and cakes. Secondly, betrothal ceremony that is bridegroom’s family gives wedding presents to bride’s family. On that day, bridegroom goes to church. Thirdly, wedding that is bridegroom and his family meet bride and bring her home. According to rich family or poor family,

³⁷ Nguyễn Thanh Xuân. *Some Religions in Vietnam*, Ibid. p. 176-177.

³⁸ *Đông Xuyên Ngoại Village Customary* (Tiền Lãng dist., Hải Phòng province), HU. 4030.

³⁹ *Vĩnh Trị Village Customary* (Nam Định province), Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Nam An Village Customary* (Hải Phòng province), Ibid.

offering of this ceremony is about 10 đồng or 30 đồng... Two relatives in law have to report their children's marriage line to civil status"⁽⁴¹⁾.

On Funeral Problem

Catholicism thinks that human was born by God; every man is a temple to worship God. The death of Catholic in earth begins a new life in Heaven. On funeral problem, Catholics have specific rites besides traditional rites of Vietnam⁽⁴²⁾.

The Catholic village customaries have general regulations on funeral, for example, reporting the name of dead to mandarin; time-limit of burial rites of the dead (illness or normal). Besides general regulations customaries have concrete regulations in accordance with every Catholic family. The 74th article of *Văn Giáo Village Customary* stipulates that "Our village is Catholic village, when villager died, the master of funeral ceremony has to report chair of village council then inform all villagers to attend a funeral. The fee for funeral is divided three categories: the first category is 30 đồng, the second one is 20 đồng; the third is 10 đồng⁽⁴³⁾. The 69th article and the 70th article of *Đức Trai Village Customary* stipulate that "Family in mourning can do banquets and feasts to treats parents and friends who attend a funeral. Anyone who compels the family in mourning to have banquets and feast is be punished with 3 đồng. Preparing a feast on funeral depends on economic condition of every family, etc. The poor family can not prepare a feast for inviting chair of village council and villagers but neighbors and friends still attend funeral"⁽⁴⁴⁾. The 74th article of *Vĩnh Trại Village Customary* stipulates that "After three days, the dead has to be buried. Anyone died of illness to be buried at once. Fees are divided four categories: the first is 15 đồng; the second is 10 đồng; the third is 6 đồng the fourth is 3 đồng"⁽⁴⁵⁾.

The organization board of funeral is regulated concretely in Catholic village customaries. Rite of offerings to deceased person bases on sum of money which is pay. Three articles (from the 116th article to the 118th article) of *Thủy Nhài Village Customary* stipulate that "When family has the dead, village council prepares

⁴¹ *Đức Trai Village Customary* (Cẩm Giàng dist., Hải Dương province), HU. 962.

⁴² Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *Rite and Catholic Lifestyle in Vietnamese Culture*, Ibid. p. 221-227.

⁴³ *Văn Giáo Village Customary* (Nam Định province), Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Đức Trai Village Customary* (Hải Dương province), Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Vĩnh Trại Village Customary* (Hà Nam province).

mourning gifts and send men to pay respects to the deceased. Head of family receive visitors by betel, areca and water without fermented glutinous rice”⁽⁴⁶⁾.

On the Maintained of Morals

It is important for the traditional village to maintain the village morals. For Catholic villages, the maintenance of morals is necessary because it will take part in establishment of union Catholics and non Catholics. Many regulations in village customaries help villagers to control their actions and think highly of responsible life. The 94th article and the 99th article of *Xâm Bô Village Customary* stipulate that “In our village there are good men and bad men so we have two books, a yellow book and a blue book. The loyal and anyone who deserve well of village are given their names in the yellow book. The names of all those who are bad, undutiful and disloyal to be written in the blue book. Our village has custom to give presents to the olds. The 70 year olds are offered silk shirts; the cost of one shirt is 5 đồng. The 80 year olds are offered nice shirts; the cost of one shirt is 10 đồng. The 90 year olds are presented 100 đồng to buy coffin... Anyone who passes an examination of secondary school is awarded 3 đồng. Anyone who passes an examination of College is awarded 6 đồng”⁽⁴⁷⁾.

The problem of morals shows in filial piety and the respect for woman in Catholic villages. The 109th article and the 110th article of *Phú Nhai Village Customary* stipulate clearly that “If parents of the rich must live miserable, communal council will advise and teach the rich. If the rich does not take communal council’s advice, he is disrespectful toward his parents and he is punished. Any one who teases woman is punished from 0,5 đồng to 1 đồng.”⁽⁴⁸⁾.

The 41st article of *Mỹ Đình Village Customary* stipulates the responsibility of villager to priest “Village appoints 4 men to serve priest. They have responsibility to take priest for illness.”⁽⁴⁹⁾.

On the problem of union of Catholics and non-Catholics

Some villages have Catholics and non-Catholics so the customaries of these villages have specific regulations to create equality in community life. The 57th article of *Xâm Bô Village Customary* points out that “If non-Catholic does harm the

⁴⁶ *Thủy Nhai Village Customary* (Nam Định province).

⁴⁷ *Xâm Bô village customary* (Hải Phòng province).

⁴⁸ *Phú Nhai Village Customary* (Nam Định province).

⁴⁹ *Mỹ Đình Village Customary* (Thái Bình province).

Catholic or Catholic does, village council will draw up minutes to submit mandarin”. The 79th article stipulates that “From now on *tiền cheo* (money that a young man has to pay village when he wants to marry a girl) has to pay in public funds. Fine of Catholics and non-Catholics are divided into 4 categories: village’s young man has to pay 1 đồng; one of same canton has to pay 3 đồng; one of province has to pay 3 đồng, and one of different region has to pay 4 đồng. Fine of Catholics and non-Catholics is used for expenditure of village”⁽⁵⁰⁾.

The equality of Catholics and non-Catholics is incarnated in distribution of public fields of village. The 110th article of *Quảng Bá Village Customary* stipulates that “non-Catholics have 204 *xuất ruộng* (parts of field), the productions of 21 acres and 4 rods are spent for rites and repairing communal house of village. Catholics have 18 *xuất ruộng*, the production of 1 acre and 1 rod are spent for Catholic rites. Once 6 years village fields are divided again, two parts (Catholics and non-Catholics) are equal”⁽⁵¹⁾

Conclusion

It can be said that Catholic village customaries have outlined a lively picture on the plentiful and diversified religious life of Catholics in the Red River delta. The Catholic villages in the Red River delta were established on the base of Vietnamese villages so Catholic village customaries have both general regulations and specific regulations to reflect the religious life of Catholics.

Offerings of Catholic rites are very simple and cheap; they are only oil, candles. In holidays, expenditure for drinking and eating is economical. In marriage there are many progressive regulations. Catholics think highly of morals... Non-Catholics need to learn these matters. Besides these good matters, the religious life of Catholics in the Red River delta has reflected many shortcomings. Because of isolated temper, Catholic villages can hardly integrate in non-Catholic villages on cultural and social aspects.

The present life requires Vietnamese people to have useful contributions to society. In fact, Catholics have integrated in traditional culture of our nation. The process of building of new villages, Catholics need to inherit and develop active human values of village customaries and drive back depraved customs which

⁵⁰ *Xâm Bô Village Customary* (Hải Phòng province).

⁵¹ *Quảng Bá Village Customary* (Hà Nội).

obstruct the development of village. In order to end of the article we cite the remark of Hà Huy Tú on religious life of Vietnamese Catholics “Anyone who has correct religious life must throw himself in the service of human. He must work actively and make valuable contributions to society. He and his fellows must deal with contradictions, restlessness and requirements of daily life. He must integrate in every people with his honest sentiment and “the modest and good natured heart” of Christ”⁽⁵²⁾. /.

⁵² Hà Huy Tú. *Studying Nice Features of Catholic Culture*, Ibid. p. 33.