

SOME FEATURES ON CATHOLIC RESEARCH IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: Many issues, aspects of Vietnamese Catholicism have become research topics of social scientists internal and external Vietnam. From the findings are not many overall articles on researching Catholicism in Vietnam and found that it is essential for a research topic, in this paper, the author have collected and classified the books and magazine resources writing about Vietnamese Catholicism; making general comments, identify characteristics and trends research Catholicism in Vietnam.

I. Overview

As social sciences and human field, religious research in general and Catholic research in particular has attracted attention of researchers at home and abroad for a long time ⁽¹⁾. Many problems of Catholic research were opened. Many study works on this problem are valued well. Many researchers give their mind to study Vietnamese Catholicism. However, we had had not yet many articles or scientific works which deal with on situation of Catholic research in Vietnam. In other words, Vietnamese researchers leave the identification of characteristics and tendency on Catholic research in Vietnam open.

Because of shape and size of writing, we only deal with study works of Vietnamese researchers and works written by Vietnamese language (books and reviews).

Catholicism was introduced into Vietnam at the beginning of the 16th century ⁽²⁾ when international background had been considerably enlarged with many great

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¹ Different terms for example, *Đạo Dạtô, đạo Cơ đốc, Hoa lang đạo, Kitô giáo, Thiên chúa giáo...* was appeared in old documents in Vietnam. Many terms were mixed. In this article we use Công giáo term (Catholicism)

² See: Khâm định Việt sử Thông giám cương mục.

discoveries. In propagating Catholicism in New World, many missionaries visited foreign lands to called Far East or East India. Hội An, Phố Hiến were the big commercial ports of Vietnam which joined two great markets of South China and Southeast Asia. Asian merchant ships often made landfall in these two ports. This connection created comfortable condition for missionaries to enter China or Japan. According to Westerners, these countries were belonged to East Indian zone.

It was difficult to define landmark of the beginning of Evangelical preach in Vietnam, namely location, name of clergyman, and so fourth. However, on the way to China and Japan, many missionaries met inhabitants in Southeast Asia including Vietnamese. Thanks to historical documents we know that Vietnam received Catholicism in special society. The first great product of changeable time had been Vietnamese Roman alphabet. In the 18th and the 19th centuries, many researchers paid attention to French - Vietnamese contact in particular and Vietnamese - Western contact in general.

During two wars of resistance against French colonialists and American imperialists, the dialogues of researchers on religious history and religious culture were limited. At that time many research works on Catholicism in general and on Catholic phenomenon in particular were appeared in South.

We must see that in two wars of resistance, Southern students and intellectuals had condition to contact and read books on religion, theology, religious ethnology, religious sociology, etc. These books were published in oversea countries. Many research works written by foreign languages were translated and popularized in Vietnam at that moment. These works influenced too many South readers. After national reunification these works became the important materials for North researchers. Many institutes, centers and departments which research and teach Catholicism are established. This establishment has an important significance in developing Catholic research in Vietnam.

For last decades, hundreds of research works of Vietnamese scientists have been published (some of them have been research works on religion in general) then we precariously classify these works as follows:

On Introduced History

Hồng Lam: *The History of Vietnamese Catholicism*, Đại Việt Publishing House, Huế, 1943; Trần Anh Dũng: *Annals of Vietnamese Catholic Church*, Orlando, 1986; Hồng Nhuệ Nguyễn Khắc Xuyên: *The History of Hà Nội Diocese 1692-1954*, Paris, 1994; Nguyễn Văn Kiêm: *The Introduction of Catholicism in Vietnam from the 17th Century to the 19th Century*, Scientific organization of Vietnamese History, 2001; Đỗ Quang Chính: *Jesuits in Đại Việt Society, 1615-1773*, Anto and Đuốc Sáng, 2007; *Two First Priests in Vietnam*; Anto and Đuốc Sáng; *Congregation of Holy Cross Lovers*, Religion Publishing House, Anto and Đuốc Sáng (republishation), etc.

On the History of Vietnamese Catholic Church

Phan Phát Huồn: *The History of Vietnamese Catholicism, vol. 1 (1533-1933), vol. 2 (1933-1960)*, Cứu Thế tùng thư Publishing House, Sài Gòn. 1965; Võ Long Tê: *The History of Vietnamese Catholic Literature, Vol. 1*, Tư Duy Publishing House, Sài Gòn, 1965; Social Sciences Commission, The Government Committee for Religious Affairs: *Some Problems on Catholic History in Vietnamese History*, Hồ Chí Minh Publishing House, 1988; Đỗ Quang Hưng: *Some Problems on Catholic History in Vietnam*, Hanoi University, 1991; Trương Bá Cần: *Catholicism of the South in the time of Priest Pigneau (1771-1799)*, Tủ sách Đại Đoàn Kết, Hồ Chí Minh City, 1992; Trương Bá Cần (Chief author): *Vietnamese Catholicism after 50 years (1945-1995)* Catholicism and Nation Newspaper, Hanoi, 1994; Nguyễn Thế Thoại: *Catholicism in Vietnamese Native Land* (for private circulation), Volume 1, 2001; Mai Thanh Hải: *Religions in the World and in Vietnam*, three volumes, Cultural Information Publishing House, 2006; Nguyễn Quang Hưng: *Vietnamese Catholicism in the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1883)* Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, 2007; Đỗ Quang Hưng (Chief editor): *Đào Duy Anh, Nguyễn Văn Nguyễn discuss on Religion: Study, Collection and Explanation*. Politics-Administration Publishing House, Hanoi, 2008.

Catholicism with the resistances of national salvation and revolution in Vietnam

The Position of Catholicism in the War of Resistance in the South, Propagation and Training Section, 1950; *Catholicism in the War of Resistance*, Bình Nguyên Publishing House, 1950; Nguyễn Chí Thanh: *Union of Catholics and non-Catholics*,

Propagation and Training Bureau (documents for study and research), Hanoi, 1950; Quang Toàn, Nguyễn Hoài: *The Activities of Reactionaries in Guise of Catholicism in the Period of Resistance 1945-1954*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1965; Nguyễn Hồng Dương: *Religious and Political Activities of Catholicism in the South in the Period of Americans and their Puppets (1954-1975)*, Hồ Chí Minh City, 1988; Cao Huy Thuần: *The Clergymen of Mission Society and Colonial Policy of France in Vietnam (1875-1914)*, Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003; Đỗ Quang Hưng: *Religious Problems in Vietnamese Revolution: Theory and Practice* (for private circulation), National Politics State Publishing House, Hanoi, 2005.

On the Problems of Vietnamese Catholic Church: Organizations, Activities, and Rites

Catholicism of Hồ Chí Minh City in 10 years, Vol. 1: on the occasion of anniversary of 10 years national liberation (30/4/1975-30/4/1985); Vol. 2: on the occasion of anniversary of 11 years national liberation (30/4/1975-30/4/1986) Catholic Patriotic Solidarity Committee, Hồ Chí Minh City, 1986; Trần Cao Sơn (Chief editor): *Catholic Compatriots with the Policy of Population and Family Planning: the Investigative Results in a Zone*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1998; Nguyễn Công Huyền: *Vitality in a Catholic Province*, 2005; Catholic Solidarity Committee: *The Written Texts on Organization and the Way of Religious Practices in Vietnam*, Religion Publishing House, Hanoi; Hà Huy Tú: *Studying Fine Features of Catholic Culture*, Institute of Culture and Cultural Information, Hanoi, 2002; Phạm Thế Hưng: *Understanding on Catholicism in Vietnam*, Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, 2005; *Phát Diệm Church*, Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, 2001; Nguyễn Hồng Dương: *Lưu Phương Catholic Village (Ninh Bình): from 1829 to 1945*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1997; Nguyễn Hồng Dương: *Rites and Catholic Life-style in Vietnamese Culture*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2001; Nguyễn Hồng Dương: *Vietnamese Catholic Church*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003; Nguyễn Hồng Dương: *Vietnamese Catholicism - Some Research Problems*, Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, 2008; Religious Studies Review: *On Religions and Vietnamese Religions*, Political State Publishing House, Hanoi, 2004; Hồ Tường (Chief editor), Lê Đình Tấn, Ngô Hỷ: *Catholic Church in Hồ Chí Minh City*, Youth Publishing House, Hồ Chí Minh City,

2007; Phạm Văn Quyết: *Religion and its Change: From the Case of Catholicism in Bùi Chu-Nam Định Diocese*, Hanoi University, Hanoi, 2007.

Catholicism and Nation at Present

Institute of Religious Study: *Some Religious Problems at Present*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1994; Bùi Thị Kim Quỳ: *The Relation between Nation and Religions*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002; Nguyễn Hồng Dương: *Religions in the Relation of Culture and Development in Vietnam*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2004; Vietnamese Catholic Solidarity Committee, *A Half of Century Vietnamese Catholics together with Nation, The Summary Record of Seminar, Hanoi, on December, 20th-22nd, 2004*, Religion Publishing House, 2005.

During 10 years we have many research works, books, articles to discuss on Catholicism but we have not yet the second generation of Catholic researchers. The old researchers (their ages are from 50 years old to 60 years old) undertake heavy responsibilities in religious study but the knowledge of younger researcher (their ages are from 30 years old to 40 years old) is less than the old researchers. In research works, some scientists try their best to give theoretical problems and new approach in order to achieve more profound and more all-round perception of their investigative subjects.

II. Catholic Research in Vietnam through some Scientific Magazines (in the North)

Exclusive of above books, many scientific reviews make articles and research results on Catholicism in public. The scientific reviews become forum for researchers discuss each other.

In the past, the articles were printed in Historical review, Ethnologic Review, Sociological Review. In 1999 *Religious Studies Review* of Institute of Religious Studies, the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences was born so the process of research on religion has new developments. This review has attracted many researchers and method of religious research is set model⁽³⁾.

³ Some reviews which expert in religion; for example, Catholicism and Nation Review; Vietnamese Catholics Review or Religious Affair Review, only disseminate news on religion. These reviews are not reviews of religious specialty.

With uncompleted statistic and analytic data in scientific reviews as *Historical Studies Review*, *Religious Studies Review*, *Old and Present Review*, *Folk Cultural Studies Review* and some other reviews, we have precariously classified and collect statistics on the condition of Catholic research in Vietnam as follows:

Total number of writings: 19 writings.

We divide into 8 problems:

- 1- Vietnamese Catholicism before the French colonialism invaded Vietnam (C 1) 18 articles;
- 2- Vietnamese Catholicism in the war of resistance against French colonialists: (C 2): 11 articles;
- 3- Vietnamese Catholicism in the war of resistance against American imperialists (C 3): 4 articles;
- 4- Vietnamese Catholicism at present (C P): 12 articles;
- 5- Catholic personalities - historical personalities who had relation with Catholicism (P-C): 7 articles;
- 6- Some problems on organizations, activities, rites Catholic base (PC): 18 articles;
- 7- State - Catholicism - Nation (S-C-N): 13 articles;
- 8- The other problems (OP): 8 articles.

We find that these problems have different percentages: C 1 and P-C is 20 percent; S-C-N is 16 percent; CP is 15 percent; C 2 is 13 percent; OP is 10 percent; P-C is 8 percent; C3 is 5 percent.

1. Research Characteristics

a. On writers

According to my statistic data, I can divide writers into two groups: the writers are Catholics; the writers are non Catholics. Not all writers are authorities on Catholic research; the numbers of articles which study deeply Catholicism are few. Basing on the numbers of articles in reviews and publications, we can say that there are about 20 Catholic researchers in Vietnam. We have two tendencies which specialize in Vietnamese Catholicism with two main problems:

Studying on history - Culture of Catholicism: Trương Bá Cần, Cao Huy Thuần, Nguyễn Văn Kiệm, Nguyễn Hồng Dương, Phạm Thế Dương, Phạm Văn Quyết, Nguyễn Nghi, Nguyễn Phú Lợi, Nguyễn Quang Hưng, Ngô Quốc Đông...

Studying on theory of State - Catholicism - Nation and Catholic problems: Đỗ Quang Hưng, Mai Thanh Hải, Phạm Thế Hưng, Nguyễn Đức Lữ, Phạm Huy Thông...

Here, we do not deliberate upon quality of articles and publications, we only count upon the numbers of articles of each writer in scientific reviews:

The numbers of writers have 5 written papers: 3 writers make up 15 percent; The numbers of writers have from 2 to 5 written papers: 6 writers make up 30%; The numbers of writers have one written papers: 11 writers make up 55 %⁽⁴⁾.

The numbers of writers having one written papers make a large rate while the numbers of writers having 5 written papers are not many. The numbers of writers having more than 10 written papers are few. So we can see two problems. First, the numbers of written papers of writers are very unequal; Second, research level of writers is unequal. The disparities manifest in the orientation and study problems. From the past until now, few researchers deliberate on Catholicism. Many writers are not authorities on Catholicism.

b. On written papers

According to statistic data, we find the first written papers on Vietnamese Catholicism which was printed in *Historical Studies Review* was *American-Diem take advantage of Catholicism Church to suppress revolutionary movement in 1963*, its author was Cao Văn Lược. In 1988, *Historical Studies Review* printed 12 written papers on Catholicism in Vietnam⁽⁵⁾. At the moment many articles paid attention to

⁴ Our statistic data is relative. It is difficult for us to define writers who are expert in Catholic study. According to us the numbers of writers who are expert in Catholic study are few so we can know the condition of study in our country

⁵ Văn Tạo: “*Catholic Church confronts national history*”; Vũ Huy Phúc: “*Some worth attention books on Vietnamese Catholic history*”; Phan Minh Tấn: “*Eliminating political elements from canonization for Church continuously attaches to nation, and carries out union of non-Catholics and Catholics*”; Phương Hiền: “*Vatican Council II (1962- 1965) and Vietnamese Church. From the Common Letter in 1951 to the Common Letter in 1980*”; Nguyễn Quang Huy: “*It is necessary to eliminate political elements so canonization becomes religious activity*”; Chương Thâu: “*Vietnamese Catholic examples in the cause of building and defense of our country in modern time*”; Nguyễn Hữu Tâm: “*The first step to study the penetration and development of Catholicism in Vietnam through annuals (XVI-*

Catholicism, Catholicism and Vietnamese revolution and Catholicism and the wars of resistance in Vietnam.

Institute of Religious Studies was established in 1991 and Religious Studies Review was born in 1999. This review has been the organ of public opinion of Institute of Religious Studies in particular and Catholicism research world in general. We have precariously classified two stages of research as follows:

Before 1999: 31 written papers make up 34%;

From 1999 to 2008: 60 written papers make up 66%.

Following historical, cultural process of nation, the written papers are divided: on Catholicism in history and now (45 written papers); the other problems of Catholicism (46 written papers).

In fact, the research on Catholicism has spent for 10 years (1999- 2008). In this period, research of Catholicism has developed and contributed to the research on social sciences and human in Vietnam.

2. The tendency of study

Many articles study deeply Catholicism (37 articles make up 40%) so we can see Vietnamese researchers concentrate to study more deeply Catholicism. According to statistic data, we can classify research objects as follows: on history, 15 articles (40%); on culture: 6 articles (16%); on organization and theory: 16 article (44%).

The numbers of articles on culture of Vietnamese Catholicism are few.

Vietnamese researchers are interested in the history of Vietnamese Catholicism. In the past Vietnamese researchers only paid attention to study war of resistance or the relation between Catholicism and the war of resistance against French colonialists (1858-1954) and the war of resistance against American imperialists (1954-1975) but now Vietnamese researchers have studied more completely. We not only have general themes to inform people news but also articles which have a new

XVII”); Nguyễn Khắc Đạm: *Seamy side of Catholic preaching in Viet nam (XVI-XIX)*”; Hữu Hợp: *“Vietnamese Catholicism in the war of resistance against French colonialists (1945-1954)”*; Ngô Phương Bả: *“President Hồ Chí Minh with Catholic compatriots”*; Phạm Như Cường: *“Affirmation of orientation of living in harmony with the Gospel and the nation”*; Quỳnh Cư: *“South Vietnam Catholic Church in the war of resistance against American imperialists (1954-1975)”*. These documents are looked up in *General Index of The Historical Studies Review (1954-2004)*, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 2005.

way of looking at Catholic personality, Catholic history, Catholic problems... Many writers dealt with Catholic events and historical with different levels, they hope to present objective and complete way of looking at national history in general.

III. Some initial remarks

1- On the history and culture of Catholicism

Actually, we have not complete research works on the history of Catholicism. We have only some books on Catholic history which were published a half century ago so Catholic history should be studied. This research requires the concern of scientific researchers in general and non -Catholic researchers in particular.

2- On appreciating the value of historical persons

There are different views on the appreciation of historical persons. In fact, we have opposite ideas and different remarks. We have not objective estimation if we are governed by nationalism. Historical persons are historical production; they were influenced by objective and subjective factors. When appreciating the value of historical persons we should study historical process and background.

3- On the problem of organization and activities of Catholicism

Catholicism draws the attention of researchers but researchers only give a take examination of Catholicism or describe Catholicism. We can find two study tendencies: first, research works touch upon concrete problems of Catholicism as describing pictures, statues, festivals, and the establishment of Catholic villages... The authors of these research works are experts in the organization and activities of Catholicism (most of them are Catholics); Second, research works touch upon Catholicism generally. The authors of these research works are non-Catholic. When selecting research subject we pay attention to realizable and permanent subjects.

On the relation between state- ethnic groups and religions

This problem is always an important one. It is delicate and complicated for us to resolve the relation between state- ethnic groups and religions. Only veteran researchers can study this subject because they have a thorough grasp of theory and practice. They have a sensible method of study.

On researchers, the source of documents, studying method, cooperation and investment

Comparing with other levels, the research of Catholicism was expanded earlier. Professional make-up was took shape mainly by Catholic researchers. This development is base for later researches. Although we have tendency to study Catholicism wholly but we have few deep research works on Catholicism. Most of research works are scientific explaining. We have left some levels open. Our learning atmosphere is not exciting.

Comparing to the study of Taoism, Buddhism, Catholic study has many limits. While many other study levels have achievements and condition to expand to study, Catholic study has not become a research level to attract the attention of the world of social sciences researchers as well as centers of religious studies yet. The numbers of religious researchers in Vietnam have increased fairly for many years. The veteran researchers continuously make valuable contributions to study and training. Thanks to their helps young researcher have grown up (although the articles of young researchers are few, they make up only 10%).

It is limited for Vietnamese researcher to use foreign languages in Vietnam. In the past we only knew religions through foreign books mainly written by Chinese, Russian, French, and English. If we want to read original documents we should be good at foreign languages. We should extract thoroughly information on internet and publish the articles of foreign scholars or translate many research works of foreign researchers into Vietnamese.

As we take care of religions in general and Catholicism in particular, many research projects, investigation and publication...have expended and gained good results. The exchange of research experiences, cooperative researches of Vietnamese researchers and foreign researchers are continuously carried out. These above actions contribute to development of Catholic research in Vietnam. We have the help of Vietnamese researchers in oversea and international academies. We are expanding many plans. These plans will make considerable contributions to development of Catholic research in Vietnam at present and in the future. /.