

## SOME RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS IN VIETNAM

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**Abstract:** *After raising the situation of Vietnamese religions at present, the writer generalized some religious problems in Vietnam. They are as follow: Vietnamese religions have many basic changes; up to now, Vietnamese state has recognized 12 religions and 32 religious organizations; Religious beliefs of believers have returned; Religions and religious organizations have been reinforced and developed; Religions organization and staff have been strengthened. Religions have connected more closely with nation and gone together nation. Religions have still many negative elements baring character of small farmer. The national communities and new religions have appeared, and the phenomena of new religions have unfolded complexly.*

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When we entered renovation era initiated by the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party in December, 1986, especially when Vietnam has integrated to the world, the Party and Vietnamese State have paid attention more concretely to religious problems to meet the requirements of new period. This is reflected clearly in following views of the Resolution N<sup>o</sup>. 24/TW dated October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1990 of Politburo of the Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party on *Strengthening Religious Affairs in the New Situation*: “Religious problem has existed for long time. Belief and religion are spiritual needs of a part of people. Religious morals have corresponded with the cause of building new society”.

For church and religious organizations, Resolution N<sup>o</sup>. 24/TW has showed obviously “All churches and religious organizations which have religious orientations relating to nation, regulations and guidelines corresponding to law and good staff ensuring both the temporary and the spiritual will be considered and recognized by the State”.

The Resolution N<sup>o</sup>. 24 has become a basis for the Communist Party of Vietnam continues to develop the view on freedom of belief and religion. This has been reflected clearly in the following documents: “the Platform for National Construction in 1991; Political Reports of Vietnamese Communist Party in the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>

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Congresses; Instruction N<sup>o</sup>. 37 of the Politburo dated July, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998 *on Religious Affairs in the New Situation*; Resolution N<sup>o</sup>. 25 NQ/TW dated March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003 of the Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party *on Religious Affairs*.

Basing on the documents of Vietnamese Communist Party on freedom of belief and religion, State promulgates and carries out concrete policies. First of all, we have to mention the *Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1992*: “Citizens have the right to freedom of belief and religion, to follow or not to follow any religion. All religions are equal before the law. Places of worship belonging to belief and religions are protected by the law. No one is allowed to encroach on the freedom of belief and religion or to take advantage of belief or religions in order to abuse the laws and policies of the State”<sup>1</sup>. The Decree, Resolution, Instruction and Ordinance *on Belief and Religion* are promulgated. The Decree N<sup>o</sup>. 69 dated March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1991 of the Council of Minister regulates *Religious Activities*; Government Decree N<sup>o</sup>. 26/1999/NĐ-CP dated April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1999 *on Religious Activities*; Ordinance N<sup>o</sup>. 21/2004/PL-UBTVQH 11 dated June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2004 of The Standing Committee of the National Assembly *on Belief and Religion (Ordinance of Belief and Religion)*; Instruction of the Prime Minister N<sup>o</sup>. 01/2005/CT-TTG dated February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005 *on Some Tasks Regarding to Protestantism*; Government Decree N<sup>o</sup>. 22/2005/NĐ-CP dated March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005 *on Guidance for Implementation of a Number of Article of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion*; Instruction no 1940 of the Prime- Minister *on House and Land Related to Religion*

The views of Vietnamese Communist Party and the policy of Vietnamese State impact profoundly Vietnamese religious appearance. Formerly, Vietnam had 6 religions. Now, Vietnamese State has accepted 12 religions and 32 religious organizations (up to 2009). They are as follow:

- 1- Buddhism
- 2- Catholicism
- 3- Protestantism
- 4- Caodaism
- 5- Hòa Hảo Buddhism
- 6- Islam

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<sup>1</sup>. The *Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1992*, Hanoi, 1992, p. 36.

- 7- Four Kinds of Gratitude (Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa)
- 8- The Pure land Buddhist Home-Practice Association
- 9- Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Faith
- 10- Baha'i
- 11- Church of Phật đường Nam Tông Minh sư đạo (Ming Shi Faith)
- 12- Minh Lý đạo Tam tông miếu (Minh Lý Faith)

The change of religious appearance has impacted on religious life in Vietnam: “the achievements of renovation era including renewal of religious affairs have enlarged the block of ethnic national unity. Believers of religions who are ensured belief, religion and the right of religious activities according to the law have participated actively in the cause of renovation, building and defense of the Homeland”<sup>2</sup>.

We shall deal with the situation of 12 religions in Vietnam at present.

### **1. Buddhism**

National reunification creates good condition for Vietnamese Buddhism to realize his wish to unify all Buddhist sects into one common organization. In November 1981, the Congress of delegates of Buddhist Unification was organized in Quán Sứ pagoda Ha Noi capital. The representatives of 9 different sects participated in Congress and established Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha. Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha is currently organized into two levels: the central level is the Buddhist Sangha Patronage Council and Dharma Executive Council at the level, departments, the Institute for Buddhist study and some associations of oversea Buddhists... Under the central level are the Provincial/ City Executive Boards, District Representative Boards, and Village Representative. Grassroots units of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha are pagodas, temples, monasteries and nunneries.

In 2008 Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha organized the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress (2008-2012). After 5 national congresses, Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has developed and grown up step by step.

*On the administrative structure:* In the first term, the Buddhist Sangha Patronage Council had 50 members but in the 6<sup>th</sup> term it had 98 members. The members of the

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<sup>2</sup>. *The Report on the Religious Affairs in the New Situation* (the Report of the Politburo in the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of The Central Executive Committee).

Dharma Executive Council also increase from 49 members in the first term to 147 members in the 6<sup>th</sup> term. The members of provincial/City Executive boards have also increased quickly from 28 members in the first term to 54 members in the 6<sup>th</sup> term. There are only 9 provinces without Executive board because they are in mountainous regions or they have very few Buddhists.

The administrative structure has developed and grown up step by step. Vietnamese Buddhism is helped by our Government and Party to set up training schools or open additional classes for monks and nuns in centre and in regions. In the first and the Second terms there were two Buddhist high schools, one in Hanoi, another in Hồ Chí Minh city. But in the third term these schools turned into the academies. In Huế there was an additional academy. All activities of three academies are maintained well.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> term the Buddhist Academy IV was established in Cần Thơ city; it was named Theravada Buddhist Academy.

Some provinces have Buddhist intermediate schools. From the second term to the 6<sup>th</sup> term the number of Buddhist schools has increased or reduced according to the number of students: 17, 25, 25, 30 and 28. The Executive Boards of provinces or cities also establish primary Buddhist classes to teach monks and nuns some basic problems of Dharma.

The Northern Buddhism had only the Central Buddhist School before 1981, but now the system of Buddhist training develops quickly. The monks and nuns not only learn in Buddhist school in country but they can learn in the Buddhist schools in foreign countries. The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has about 40.000 monks and nuns in 2007. Thanks to the crowd staff of monks and nuns the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha develops both in width and depth.

The following statistical table of worship places through the terms of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha helps us to know the development of Vietnamese Buddhism.

Term	The total of monasteries	Monasteries of Northern ch'an school	Monasteries of Southern ch'an school	Mendicant monasteries
1 <sup>st</sup> term	unstated			

(1981-1986)				
2 <sup>nd</sup> term (1987- 1992)	unstated			
3 <sup>rd</sup> term (1993-1997)	8.463	7658	563	242
4 <sup>th</sup> term (1998- 2002)	14.046	10.383	469	516
5 <sup>th</sup> term (2003- 2017)	14.321	12.036	539	518
6 <sup>th</sup> term (2008- 2012)	14.775	13.665	570	540

Almost villages in the North Delta have pagodas. Some villages have two pagodas. The monks carry out Dharma in pagoda. Vietnamese people not only realize their religious belief but also some traditional customs in pagoda. The villagers often carry out their cultural activities to satisfy their spiritual life in pagoda.

Because the Buddhist believers develop quickly, so we can not have the concrete number of believers. They think that there are two categories of the Buddhist believers: devout believers and normal ones. The devout believers take refuge in the Buddha and observe moral precepts. The normal believers feel sympathy with Buddhism, so they go to pagoda to repeat the Buddha's name on the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> days. This concept is accepted by many people. According to data of the government offices, the number of devout believers is over 11 millions in 2008.

At present the Buddhist believer is various. In the past many Buddhist believers were peasants and few believers were citizens. But now some party members are Buddhist believers. They also take part in services. The Buddhist family has attracted the youth.

In the past when speaking of the Buddhist believers, it was often thought that they were Kinh people, but now more and more ethnic people take part in Buddhism. On April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009 The Buddhist Executive Board of Kon Tum province combined with the subcommittee of ethnic Buddhists of the Central Guiding Buddhist Committee organized Buddhist Initiation ceremony for 4.000 ethnic people in High Land.

Buddhist festivals play important roles in religious life. Buddhist festivals are organized regularly. Buddha's Birthday and Vesak Day celebration were organized in Hanoi in 2008. Vesak Day celebration was organized on the international scale. In this celebration there were many scientific workshops on Dharma and Buddhist affairs.

The Avolikesvara, Vu Lan, Côn Sơn - Kiếp Bạc and Yên Tử festivals... are annually carried out to attract ten thousands of believers and pilgrims. The festival of Hương Pagoda is the greatest festival; it lasts three months in spring. In 2009 there was 1,4 million people to take part in this festival<sup>3</sup>.

Vietnamese State is also interested in the festivals of Southern ch'an school of Khmers. Dolta festival is one of three traditional festivals of Khmers. In this festival Khmers always memorize their ancestor, parents. This festival is organized annually and ten thousands of people take part this festival in Khmer pagodas.

From October 26<sup>th</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 Ok Om Bok festival was organized in Sóc Trăng city. In this festival there was a trade fair. Many trades were presented at this trade fair. In festival the traditional boat race was organized<sup>4</sup>.

Vietnamese Buddhism has an important position in the world. In 2008 Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha organized Vesak Day celebration. The Sankyyadhita International Conference XI on Buddhist Women was organized in Hồ Chí Minh city in December, 2009. Over 2.500 representatives took part in this Conference. They were nuns, professors, scholars, speakers, researchers... Among them there were about 400 representatives from 37 countries. The main theme of Conference was "Eminent Buddhist women" with 80 speeches, among them there were 47 speeches of Vietnamese representatives. The speeches dealt with the global problem, the challenge of Buddhist nuns in the modern period, Buddhist education of cultures, the spiritual life, and sexual equality... Those speeches sang the praise merits of Buddhist women and helped international friends to understand the development of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha and the achievements of Vietnamese Buddhist women in Vietnamese history.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of 2010 the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha will organize the Buddhist Summit Conference VI. The preparation of this meeting is carrying out.

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<sup>3</sup>. The *An ninh thủ đô* (Security of Capital) newspaper, N<sup>o</sup>. 2534 dated January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>. The *Quân đội Nhân dân* (People's Army) newspaper, N<sup>o</sup>. 17433 dated October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>5</sup>. "*Giác ngộ*" weekly magazine, N<sup>o</sup>. 518 dated January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010.

## 2. Catholicism

*On the organization church:* In April, 1980 (from 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> day) the Vietnamese Council of Bishops was established, composed of all the bishops in Vietnam. This was the first Vietnamese Council of Bishops. It promulgated its regulation and Common Letter and elected Standing Committee, Bishop Executive Committee. From the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress (1980) to 2007 Vietnamese Council of Bishops had 10 Congresses. The number of Bishop Executive Committee is also increased; the 1<sup>st</sup> term had 3 Executive Committee, but the 10<sup>th</sup> term has 15 Executive Committee.

The Council of Bishops has been legal organization, composed of all bishops of dioceses in Vietnam. The Vietnamese Council of Bishops has the duty to encourage close connections to promote the service to God in apostolic forms and by methods that suit the times, in a spirit of bonding with the nation and the country.

After the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress the Vietnamese Council of Bishops (1980), Vietnamese Catholic Church has strengthened its administrative system step by step. In 2005 Vietnamese Catholic Church divided Xuân Lộc diocese into two dioceses - Xuân Lộc diocese in Đồng Nai province and Bà Rịa diocese in Ba Rịa - Vũng Tàu province, so there were 26 dioceses in Vietnam. Many dioceses carried out to divide parish, so many new parishes to be born. Every parish level has an organization to be elected by Catholics. This organization is led by priest.

According to the data of Vietnamese Catholic Church until to 2009 Vietnamese Catholic Church had 2.135 parishes, 6.200.000 Catholics and 3.000 diocesan priests, 770 religious priests and 15.752 the religious<sup>6</sup>. Every Vietnamese priest takes care of 1.641 Catholics. Comparing to Europe this rate is higher (1.457), but it is lower than Asian rate (2.290)<sup>7</sup>.

We shall cite the data of Hồ Chí Minh City diocese to help you to know how parishes develop following months and years:

1975: 152 parishes.

1976: 186 parishes

1989: 191+ 2 parishes

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<sup>6</sup>. The Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics: "Building a wonderful church - Communion - Mission" (for private circulation), 2010, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup>. See: Nguyễn Thành Long "At the end of Priestly Year - Some Events", *Catholicism and Nation* weekly magazine, N°. 1761 (June 11<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010).

2009: 200 + 4 parishes<sup>8</sup>

*On the hierarchy:* all 26 dioceses have bishops. In 2009 and the first half of 2010 Vietnamese Catholicism have following new bishops:

- Ban Mê Thuật diocesan bishop is Nguyễn Văn Bản who was ordained on May 12<sup>th</sup> 2009.

Phát Diệm diocesan bishop is Joseph Nguyễn Năng who was ordained on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

Thái Bình diocesan bishop is Peter Nguyễn Văn Đệ who was ordained on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009.

Phan Thiết diocesan bishop is Joseph Vũ Duy Thông who was ordained on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009.

Xuân Lộc assistant diocesan bishop is Thomas Vũ Đình Hiếu who was ordained on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

When moving into 2010 Vietnamese Catholic Church has much good news. On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in Holy See Pope Benedict XVI appointed priest John Maria Vũ Tất to be Hưng Hóa assistant diocesan bishop. On June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010 the rite of bishopric ordination was organized in Sơn Lộc church, Sơn Tây district, Hanoi.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010 the department of newspaper of Roman Holy See announced that Pope Benedict XVI accepted Vinh diocesan bishop Maria Cao Đình Nguyễn's resignation because he is too old, and appointed priest Paul Nguyễn Thái Hợp to be bishop of Vinh diocese at the same time.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010 Pope XVI Benedict accepted Hanoi archbishop Ngô Quang Kiệt's resignation because of his bad health. According to 401<sup>st</sup> article of canon law coadjutor archbishop Peter Nguyễn Văn Nhơn will be Hanoi archbishop.

Vietnamese Catholic Church had one archbishop and 5 bishops to be ordained during one and half year. From December, 2005 to May, 2010 Vietnamese Catholic Church has 13 bishops to be appointed.

From 1980 many secular priests have been trained. In 2010 the situation of lacked priests has been resolved. In general, all dioceses and parishes in the South have

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<sup>8</sup>. The Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics: "Building a wonderful Church - Communion - Mission" (private circulation), *ibid*, p. 9.

priests. Some parishes in cities and in districts have 2 or 3 priests. All Northern dioceses have priests.

The following statistical board basing the documents of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs (2009) helps us to know that the training of seminarians in seminaries of Vietnamese Catholic Church is very good.

Major seminary		The number of Seminarians in 2007-2008	The number of Seminarians in 2009	The number of Seminarians in the future
Saint Joseph Major seminary Hanoi	40 Nhà Chung street, Hanoi		314 were divided into 6 classes	51
Vinh Thanh Major seminary	Nghi Diễn village, Nghi Lộc district, Nghệ An province		101	60
Huế Major seminary	30 Kim Long street., Huế	77	107	
Sao Bien, Major seminary in Nha Trang	60 the nine street, Phước Long precinct, Nha Trang	196	176	38
Saint Joseph. Major seminary in Hồ Chí Minh city	6 Tôn Đức Thắng street. Hồ Chí Minh city		185	38
	The second base, Xuân Lộc, Đồng Nai	184	247	

Thanh Quý Major seminary	87/1 Võ Tánh, Cái Răng, Châu Thành, Cần Thơ	184	164	208
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In 2010 Vietnamese Catholic Church has 6 major seminaries. Because of many seminarians, Vietnamese Catholic Church has many priests. In August, 2009 Vietnamese Catholic Church has 57 new priests in Đà Nẵng, Vĩnh Long, Thanh Hóa, Hưng Hóa, Quy Nhơn, Hải Phòng dioceses. In 2009 Vietnamese Catholic Church has 131 new priests and many priests who are learning in foreign countries.

Catholic orders, the religious and associations are increasing months and years. The following statistical numbers helps us to know it clearly.

Year	Male order	Female order	Total	Male religious	Female religious	Total
1975	22	33	55	956	4.977	5.933
2000				1.523	9.624	11.147
2004	29	65	94	1.833	11.421	13.254
2009						15.725

The development of orders, the religious and associations is special character of Vietnamese Catholic Church. From 1990 up to now many associations want to combine with each others at the same time they want to divide them into small communities. When they have opportunity, they found the main religious orders and develop these religious orders. Because of different reasons, many religious orders did not operate, but now they ask for operating

From 1990 the registration of persons wishing to lead a religious life gradually improves. All those who wish to lead a religious life have to register for reside provisionally to local government.

The number of religious orders and the religious in Hồ Chí Minh city dioceses increases quickly. In 1974 Hồ Chí Minh city diocese had 3.360 the religious; in 1998: 2.655 the religious; in 2009: 4.754 the religious<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup>. The Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics: "Building a wonderful Church- Communion- Mission" (private circulation), *ibid.* p. 9.

The number of the religious and religious orders is on the increase to show the open policy of Vietnamese State.

The 20<sup>th</sup> article of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion stipulates: Religious orders, monasteries and other collective practicing institutions shall be entitled to operate after they have been registered with the competent State authority.

The registration of religious orders, monasteries and other collective practicing institutions defines in paragraph 2 of article 19 of Ordinance.

The Decree N<sup>o</sup>. 22/2005/NĐ-CP dated March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005: the Government Decree on guidance for implementation of a number of articles of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion. The 12<sup>th</sup> article *on registration of religious orders, monasteries and other collective practicing institutions* defines:

1- The head of religious orders, monasteries and other collective practicing institutions shall have the responsibility to submit an application to the competent State body as paragraph 2 of article 19 of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion.

2- Within 60 days of receipt of due - form application, the competent State body stipulated in Paragraph 2 of article 19 of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion shall have the responsibility to grant a registration certificate to the religious order monasteries and other collective practicing institutions; in case of disapproval, a reply must be in writing with clearly stated reasons.

Vietnamese State allows religious orders and associations to take part in cultural and social activities. 7 women's religious congregations were allowed to establish kindergartens on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1990. Those are the Congregation of the Holy Cross lovers in Thủ Thiêm, in Tân Việt, the Congregation of Saint Paul, Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul (Bình Thạnh), Canonesses of Saint Augustine (Thủ Đức), Little Brothers of Nazareth order (Phú Nhuận). It was the first time these congregations have been granted teaching licenses<sup>10</sup> ... Teaching is special business, so all nuns who want to be teachers must have pedagogical standard and they do not preach in kindergartens. In 1995 Hồ Chí Minh City had 20 private kindergartens. According to data of Vietnamese Catholic Church in 2003 there were 799

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<sup>10</sup> The Office of Secretary General of Vietnamese Episcopal Conference. *Vietnamese Catholic Church, Yearbook 2004*, The Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, 2004, p. 221.

kindergartens in 23 dioceses; there were 167 kindergartens in Hồ Chí Minh city, Xuân Lộc: 93, and then Huế: 85<sup>11</sup>.

Childcare and teaching help nuns to have jobs. The economic life of nuns was very difficult because they not only contrived religious life but also economic life. They had to do many jobs. Thanks to fee and help of sponsors nuns do not contrive their economic life.

The cultural, social and charitable activities of Vietnamese Catholic Church (including religious orders) belong to socialized policy of Vietnamese State. This policy directs two purposes: firstly, to promote potentiality, intelligence and matter of religions and to mobilize dignitaries and believers giving their mind to improving the cause of culture and society. Secondly, all people, especially the poor can enjoy fruits of society.

The 33<sup>rd</sup> article of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion defines:

1. The State shall encourage and create conditions for religious organizations to take part in providing care and education for children in special situation; to give assistance to institutions caring for the health of the poor; to help develop pre-school educational establishments; and to take part in other activities for charitable and humanitarian purpose in conformity with their perspective charters and statutes in accordance with the provision of law.

2. Dignitaries and religious as citizens shall be encouraged by the State to organize educational, medical, charitable and humanitarian activities in accordance with the provision of law.

The Catholic associations are complex problems because the activities of religious associations in history exceeded religious sphere. Some associations were made use of dark political activities. When the Ordinance on Belief and Religion takes effect, the religious associations are not allowed to operate except associations those server religious rites. In fact Catholic associations exist under the form of circles; for example, men circle, women one and young one. When the Ordinance on Belief and

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<sup>11</sup>. The Office of The secretary General of Episcopal Conference. *Vietnamese Catholic Church, Yearbook 2004*, ibid p. 513.

Religion was born, the urgent and insolvable problem of religious associations are solved. The 19<sup>th</sup> article lies down:

1- A religious association shall be entitled to operate after it has been registered by the religious organization with the competent State authority.

2- The registration of religious association shall be carried out according to the following stipulations:

a- A religious association whose operations are to cover a rural district, urban district, provincial capital or city under provincial authority shall be registered with the people's committee of the district where it is to operate.

b- A religious association whose operations are to cover more than on rural district, urban district, provincial capital or city within a province or a city under central authority shall be registered with the people's committee of the province where it is to operate.

c- A religious association whose operations are to cover more than on province or city under central authority shall be registered with central State governance body for religious affairs.

According to documents of Vietnamese Catholic Church in 2010 Vietnamese Catholic Church has about 90.000 organizations<sup>12</sup>. In Hồ Chí Minh city there are 25 kinds of organizations.

*On the relation between Vietnamese State and Catholic Church.*

Moving into the course of renovation, Vietnamese State carried out open foreign policy with principle that Vietnam is friend of many countries in the world. With this spirit, Vietnam gradually improves the foreign relation with Vatican. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1990 the delegation of Holy See was led by Cardinal Etchegaray, Vice Minister of Vatican Foreign Affairs and Monsignor Barnabas Nguyễn Văn Phương visited Vietnam. This delegation established the initial exchangeable relation on the problems that both sides were interested in. The two sides brought to terms:

- Holy See will inform Vietnamese government all matters relating to Vietnamese Catholic Church. Holy See will decide to do with the agreement of

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<sup>12</sup>. The Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics: "Building a wonderful Church - Communion - Mission" *ibid.* p. 8.

Vietnamese Government. These matters are as follow: Holly See's opinion about Vietnamese Catholic Church; ordination and matters that both sides are interested.

- When having not same opinions two sides meet each other to discuss<sup>13</sup>.

Until to February, 2009 there were 16 foreign delegations of Holly See to visit Vietnam. The 16<sup>th</sup> delegation consisted of Monsignor Parolin, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Monsignor Francis Cao Minh Dung and Monsignor Barnabas Nguyễn Văn Phương. The 16<sup>th</sup> delegation and Vietnamese Government discussed and resolved many problems that Vietnamese State and Vatican were interested in. Some achievements which were dealt with above are results of these visiting.

We should speak of two visiting of Vietnamese delegations to Vatican, the Prime Minister's visiting and President's visiting. On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng visited to Vatican. He granted an audience to Pope Benedict XVI. "Pope Benedict XVI welcomes Vietnam to become an official member of the World Trade Organization. He thinks that Vietnamese economy develops fastest in Asia. In this meeting Pope speaks highly of Vietnamese religious policy and considers it as the model for ensuring freedom of religions and belief"<sup>14</sup>. "People in the world think that this visiting creates Vietnamese imprint in the world. After this meeting the formal foreign relation between Vietnam and Vatican is going to set up"<sup>15</sup>.

On December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009 President Nguyễn Minh Triết met Pope Benedict XVI and Prime Minister of Vatican. In the meeting President Nguyễn Minh Triết affirmed that Vietnam has constantly realized independent foreign policy. Vietnam has been ready to be good friend and reliable with countries in the international community. President Nguyễn Minh Triết spoke clearly that Vietnamese government always respects and guarantees the citizens' right to freedom of belief and religion. Vietnamese government always considers believers of religions as a part of national united bloc. President informed that Vietnamese religions are created good conditions for developing by the care of administrative power at levels. Thanks to helps of administrative power, Vietnamese Catholic Church organized successfully opening ceremony of Holy Year 2010. President Nguyễn Minh Triết stressed that

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<sup>13</sup>. *Catholicism and Nation* Weekly Magazine, N<sup>o</sup>. 952 dated April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1994.

<sup>14</sup>. *Vietnamese Catholics*, Newspaper N<sup>o</sup>. 10/2007.

<sup>15</sup>. *Vietnamese Catholics*, Newspaper N<sup>o</sup>. 10/2007.

most of Catholics have actively taken part in the cause of building and defending Homeland; all Catholics who had died in the war of resistance against the enemies for national independence have been remembered.

Pope Benedicto XVI was thankful to Vietnam State for what Vietnam State helped Vietnamese Catholic Church to organize opening ceremony of Holy See 2010 in Sở Kiện (Hà Nam). Pope also sympathized for President's opinions and proposed that Vietnamese State has continuously created good conditions for Vietnamese Catholic Church to take part in charitable, health and educational activities. Pope hoped that the relation between Vietnam and Vatican is going to develop more and more in the future<sup>16</sup>.

Both Vietnam State and Vatican are approaching to set up the complete foreign relation between two countries. The first meeting of Vietnam - Vatican joint working group was organized in February, 2009. The second meeting was organized on June 23<sup>rd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> in Vatican for discussing the great problems. On June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the Secretary of Holy See announced *the information on the second meeting of Vatican - Vietnam joint working group*. According to this information, Pope Benedicto XVI will appoint a temporary representative of Holy See in Vietnam.

### 3. Protestantism

In 1975 Protestantism in North had 5.000 believers, in South had 200.000 believers with 20 different sects and Protestant groups. During long time the activities of the Southern Protestantism were very complex on political, cultural, social religious and national levels. When we suppressed FULRO (Front Unite de lutte des Races Opprimees - United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races), we found that some leader of Protestant groups in Highlands combined with FULRO. Many weapons and leaflets of FULRO were hidden in some Protestant churches.

From the mid of 1980s, the activities of Protestantism in Highlands became very complexly, they had serious consequences to affect peace and order of ethnic people in Highlands. Depending on the helps of reactionaries from abroad, reactionaries at home had scheme to set up Dega country and Dega Protestantism at the end of 1990<sup>17</sup>. On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000, reactionaries held meeting in Biền Hồ, Pleiku city

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<sup>16</sup>. According to *Saigon Liberation* newspaper, N<sup>o</sup>. 11673 dated December, 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>17</sup>. Dega is initialed by Anak Ede Ga, it means children of forest to denote ethnic groups in Western Highlands.

to establish openly Dega country and they drew up rebellious plan. They carried out two rebellions in February, 2001 and in April, 2004. They attacked headquarters of precinct people's committees. Our security force put down two rebellions.

These rebellions affected badly social culture. They destroyed long strong community of ethnic inhabitants and separated the union of Protestant believers and non - Protestants. These rebellions damaged the national united bloc and cultural traditions.

In the mid of 1980s, Protestantism was developed extraordinarily in the Northern mountain regions. It affected the economic, social and cultural life of Hmong and Dao peoples. Protestantism changed social tradition of Hmong people. Many Hmong people who follow Protestantism not to worship their ancestors. They do not take part in their traditional festivals. In many families and villages there were contradictions between Protestant believers and non believers. Their preach seemed to have reactionary political character to threaten political security in the Northern mountain regions. This preach created serious economic consequences because reactionaries incited inhabitants to leave land for praying. Many inhabitants emigrated to other regions so their economic lives were disordered.

Although Protestantism has many complex activities, the government still respects the policy on religion and belief of people. Vietnamese Communist Party and State have distinguished clearly the true believers and persons who take advantage of title of believers. All wrong actions which violate laws were prevented timely. Vietnamese Communist Party's propagation and mobilization help Protestant believers to understand clearly the policy, so they have peace of mind to work and practice belief.

Protestantism in Vietnam has many denominations, so Vietnam State gradually considers and recognizes legal person status of every denomination. First of all State recognizes Vietnamese Protestant Church in Southern region, called as the Southern Church. On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2001 the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of the Vietnamese General Confederation of Evangelical Churches (43<sup>rd</sup> Congress according to Vietnamese Protestant history) convened in Hồ Chí Minh City with 382 delegates including pastors, evangelists and representative followers and 278 attending delegates.

This Congress adopted a new charter (called the 2001 Charter) of The Vietnamese Protestant Churches (Southern region) and elected a Central Management Board with 23 pastors and missionaries.

Pursuant to the Determination N<sup>o</sup>. 15/QĐ/TGCP dated March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2001 signed by Lê Quang Vịnh, the Chief of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, the legal person status of The Vietnamese Protestant Churches (Southern region) is adopted.

The motto for the religious activities of the Southern Church as follows: “*Living the Gospel, worshipping God and serving the Homeland and the nation*”.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Vietnamese General Confederation of Evangelical Churches (45<sup>th</sup> Congress according to Vietnamese Protestant history) convened in Hồ Chí Minh City with 821 formal delegates including pastors, missionaries and followers from 34 provinces and cities in South (from Quảng Trị to Cà Mau) and 500 attending delegates.

In the first day of the Congress many pastors, followers were thankful to the help of local governments and they believed that pastoral work and activities of Protestant churches from Confederation to churches develop more and more prosperously (according to Vietnamese News Agency).

On the Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern regions), from the end of 1999 State supported Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern region) to prepare 32<sup>nd</sup> Congress, but Vietnamese General Protestant Church met some difficulties, so some churches carried out annual Congress as Hanoi Protestant Church convened Congress and elected Management Board (2003-2005). Some obstructions are gradually unstopped. In March, 2004 Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern region) promulgated the draft on Rule of Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern region). This draft consists of 10 chapters, 76 articles. At that time the drafts of Regulations, Canon law and Discipline of Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern region) were promulgated. The draft of Regulations of Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern region) consists of 10 chapters and 76 articles; the draft of Canon law consists of 6 chapters and 18 articles; the draft of Discipline consists of 5 chapters and 10 articles.

When preparation for congress was completed, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 the 32<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Vietnamese General Protestant Church (Northern region) convened in Hanoi with 157 delegates including pastors, missionaries and 4.001 believers from churches of 10 provinces and cities. The Congress elected the General Management Board and adopted Rule: “Congress defines its religious operation in accordance with the Constitution and law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and educates its followers about patriotism, civic obligation, the observance of laws, the spirit of solidarity among the population in order to contribute to national construction of the Homeland”. On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005, in Protestant Church, Hanoi, Mr. Nguyễn Thanh Xuân, Vice Chief of The Government Committee of Religious Affairs gave the Prime Minister’s information on adoption of new rule and staff of The Management Board of Vietnamese General Protestant Church (Northern region) term 2004-2008 to Vietnamese General Protestant Church (Northern region)

The 33<sup>rd</sup> Congress of Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern region) was organized on February 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in Hoàn Nhị church (Nam Định). Pastor Nguyễn Hữu Mạc was elected to a chairman of Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern region). This Congress put forward 8 main tasks of Vietnamese General Protestant Church (Northern region) in term 2009-2013. In this term Vietnamese General Protestant Church (Northern region) not only consolidates its organization but also unifies Vietnamese General Protestant Church (Northern region) and Vietnamese Federal Protestant Church (Southern region). Vietnamese Protestant Church (Northern region) also prepare to organize 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vietnamese Protestantism. The Congress stressed the social activities with motto “*Loving the Homeland and defense of peace, carrying out freedom equality, humanity and working*”

After the Ordinance on Belief and Religion was promulgated, 8 churches were granted registration certificates to operating. These churches are as follow:

- Vietnamese Christian Mission;
- Vietnamese Seventh day Adventist Church;
- Vietnamese General Baptist Church;
- Vietnamese Mennonite Church;
- Christian Fellowship Assembly of Vietnam;

Presbyterian Church of Vietnam;

Vietnamese Baptist Church;

Vietnamese Assembly of God.

As you know the development of Protestantism in Western Highlands is very complex; therefore, so Western Highland provinces carry out seriously the Announcement no 184/TB-TW (1998) of The Standing Committee of Politburo; The Announcement no 255/TB-TW (1999) of The Standing Committee of Politburo; The Determination no 11/2000/QĐ-TTg (2000) of Prime Minister; The Announcement no 42TB/VPCP dated May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2001 of Deputy Primer and The Problem N<sup>o</sup>. 03-ĐA/TGCP dated July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001 of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs on Protestant affairs in Western Highlands. Through these above documents Western Highland provinces have gradually restored Protestant activities in Western Highlands. When Vietnamese Federal Protestant Church (Southern region) held the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress (2001), 58 pastors of Western Highlands took part in this Congress. Gia Lai, Đắk Lắk, Lâm Đồng provinces allowed to set up the Protestant representative boards in February, 2001. In December, 2001 a delegation including pastors, missionaries in Highlands visited the North and Hanoi capital. In September, 2002 71 pastors and missionaries took part in the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of Hierarchical Council of the Vietnamese Protestant Church (Southern region). The Protestantism in Western Highlands has gradually integrated in Vietnamese Protestant Church.

Western Highland provinces have allowed local Protestant churches to be established. In 2002 there were 14 local churches to be set up ( Lâm Đồng 7 churches; Gia Lai: 5 churches; Đắk Lắk: 2 churches). The local Protestant churches in Gia Lai, Đắk Lắk and Lâm Đồng provinces have been allowed to ordain pastors. In February, 2003 Western Highlands appointed 6 students to learn in the Institute of Biblical Theology ( Lâm Đồng had 2 students, Gia Lai: 2 students and Đắk Lắk: 2 students).

The Protestant problem in Western Highlands has been resolved more actively after the Announcement N<sup>o</sup>. 160/TB/TW dated November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004 of the Secretariat of the Party Central Committee and the Instruction N<sup>o</sup>. 01/2005/CT-TTg of Prime Ministers *On some tasks regarding Protestantism* “For Protestant followers in the Central Highlands, southern Truong Son region and central provinces:

To continue considering and recognizing eligible chapters of the Vietnam Federal Protestant Church (Southern region) and create favorable conditions for them to build places of worship and train and assign dignitaries who will give religious guidance to those chapters that have been recognized in keeping with stipulations by law.

For places where conditions are not yet available for the establishment and recognition for a chapter, if local followers have a need for purely religious practice and commit to observe stipulations by the law and not to activities for FULRO, or not to be involved with “Dega Protestantism” (which is actually an organization of the FULRO reactionaries), the communal or ward authorities shall create conditions for them to conduct normal religious practice at home, or permit them to register for religious practice at a suitable place in the hamlet or village”.

Until to June, 2007 the situation of the Protestantism in Highlands as followings:

82 Protestant churches of the Vietnam Protestant Church (Southern region) convened their congresses and were recognized. 849 Protestant groups registered their religious practice to local governments (Lâm Đồng has 23 chapters and 218 groups; Đắk Lắk has 9 chapters and 122 groups; Gia Lai has 35 chapters and 245 groups; Kom Tum has 1 chapter and 68 groups; Đắk Nông has 11 chapters and 84 groups; Binh Phuoc has 3 chapters and 174 groups).

The Protestant Management Board in Highlands appointed 38 students to learn in the Institute of Biblical Theology in Hồ Chí Minh City. The Vietnam Federal Protestantism church (Southern region) was allowed to set up 5 trainable theological classes for 267 students in 5 Highland provinces and Binh Phuoc province. 80 pastors were ordained so the total of pastors in provinces is 226 pastors.

*On the religious base:* 9 new churches and chapels were allowed to build. Many chapels were repaired.

The Religious Publishing House allows printing and distributing over 30.000 bibles in Bana, Giarai, Ede languages to serve ethnic believers<sup>18</sup>.

The following data board on the situation Protestant chapters in the Central Highlands.

Province	The total of	The total of	The	The number
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<sup>18</sup>. Prof. Dr. Đỗ Quang Hưng. *Protestant Problem - Today and Tomorrow in Highlands*, Scientific Theme, November, 2007.

	associations and groups	believers	associations were recognized	of believers
Kon Tum	6	12.755	1	849
Gia Lai	8	87.938	35	43.391
Đắk Lắk	11	110.117	9	6.841
Đắk Nông	5	37.785	11	5.144
Lâm Đông	15	70.829	23	23.875
All region	34	319.424	79	79.103

According to the data we find that the Vietnam Federal Protestantism Church (Southern region) had 150 chapters that have been recognized in keeping with stipulations by the law and 1.768 groups that registered their religious practices with local governments.

*On Protestantism in Northern regions:* The Instruction of the Prime Minister N<sup>o</sup>. 01/2005/CT-TTg dated February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005 *On Some Tasks Regarding to Protestantism* defines that “For people coming from Northern mountain areas who have just adopted Protestantism, proper policies shall be devised on the basis of their belief related needs, along following lines:

Protestantism followers who have practiced Protestantism for some time and have genuine belief related needs should be, for the time being, guided to practice their religion at home, or register for religious practice at a suitable place in the hamlet or village. When conditions are available, they shall be facilitated to practice their religion normally in accordance with stipulation by the law.

People who have adopted Protestantism but are now wishing to reconvert to the nation’s traditional belief, conditions should be created to help them realize their wish”.

Protestantism to be preached in Hmong community and some Dao groups in the Northern mountain regions has been a new religion. After following this religion some believers continue to practice Protestantism, but other believers wish to reconvert to the nation’s traditional belief. So the Instruction of the Prime Minister N<sup>o</sup>. 01/2005/CT- TTg corresponds with reality. On the basing of the Instruction N<sup>o</sup>. 01 and the real situation the Northern provinces, the local governments create good

conditions for people who wish to recover to the nation's traditional belief and help followers who have genuine belief related needs to register for their religious practice with the communal or ward authorities. Until to 2009 in Northern mountain regions there were 168 Protestant groups to register their religious practice.

*(To be continued)*