
SOME RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS IN VIETNAM AT PRESENT

(Continuing N^o. 3-2010)

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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.*

4. Caodaism

Until to 2006 Caodaism had 2.434.432 followers among them there were 930.730 believers.

Until to 2006 Caodaism had 11.030 dignitaries; the dignitaries of the Nine Spheres Palace were 9.237; the dignitaries of the Heavenly - Union Palace were 1.793. The number of minor office-bearers was 20.866. Worshipping places were 1200, among them there were 1063 Holy Houses, Oratories and 137 shrines of worshipping of Bodhisattva

Because of the nation's conditions and the historical problems of Caodaism so Caodai believers were allowed to carry out their religious practice at home after South was liberated completely. After the Party's policy of renovation has been applied some religions including Caodaism were considered and recognized by State.

To carry out the Announcement N^o. 34/TB-TW dated November 14th, 1992 of the Secretariat of Party Central Committee on Caodai affairs in the new situation, the State has recognized the organization and activity of 8 Caodai churches:

The Ante-Creation Church (July, 1995)

The Cao Dai Dazzling Bright Church (May 1996)

The Bright Verity Way Church (August, 1996)

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The Cao Dai Missionary Church (September, 1996)

The Cao Dai of Tây Ninh province (May, 1997)

The Cao Dai Correct path Church (August, 1997)

The Cao Dai White Cloth Church (July, 1998)

The Cao Dai Verity Church (March, 2000)

The Cao Dai Prayer at the Three Door Temple Gate

Until to 2009 these churches hold the 3rd Congress of all Cao Dai churches

After legal person statuses of these churches were recognized, they have gradually consolidated their organizational machinery. All activities of churches have become stably. Caodai churches carry out their charter and laws in accordance with laws of State. For example the Cao Dai of Tây Ninh province

On September 5th, 2008 the Management Council of the Cao Dai of Tây Ninh province hold ceremony to receive *Hiến chương Đại đạo Tam kì Phổ độ Cao Đài Tây Ninh* (the Charter of the Great Way of Third Universal Salvation). This Charter has 9 chapters, 36 articles. It defines appellation, dogma, the way of religious practice, organization, headquarter..... In this ceremony Cardinal Thượng Tám Thanh said that from 1997 to 2009 after legal person status of Caodaism has been recognized by State (19976), Caodaism has consolidated 380 the management boards and ritual boards. It has restored 365 Holy Houses and 162 shrines of worshipping Bodhisattva, appointed 23 the representatives of the Management Council in 23/39 provinces/ cities where have Caodai believers. The Cao Dai of Tây Ninh province has 3000 dignitaries and 20.000 minor –office bearers. After the Charter was corrected, all affairs of church are done by the Nine Spheres Palace and Heavenly - Union Palace⁽¹⁾.

Caodai churches try their best to consolidate and develop their churches. They carry out to repair the old Holy Houses and build new Holy Houses...

After the legal person status of Caodai churches were recognized, they have observed their charter, the State laws and policies. The local governments have helped churches to carry out their motto “nation is glorious, the Way enlightens”. The dignitaries and believers are very happy and they believe in the religious policy of State and Party. They can distinguish between the right and the wrong. They have objected anyone who takes advantage of religion to destroy their social life.

5. Hòa Hảo Buddhism

¹. *People Newspaper*, N^o. 19375 dated September 7th, 2008.

To carry out the Announcement N^o. 165-TB/TW dated September 4th, 1998 of the Standing Committee of Politburo, local regions where have Hòa Hảo Buddhist believers held the Congress of Hòa Hảo Buddhist delegates on May 25th - 26th, 1999 in An Giang province with 210 formal delegates of 9 provinces/cities and over 400 guests. The Congress elected the Representative Board of Hòa Hảo Buddhism with the term 1999-2004. This Board had 11 members and Mr. Nguyen Van Ton was the chief. The Congress brought out Hòa Hảo Buddhist Statutes. The orientation of Hòa Hảo Buddhism has been “Service of religion- love of Homeland and attachment of Nation”. The second Congress (2004- 2009) was organized in June, 2004. The third Congress (2009-2014) convened on May 21st, 2009. In this Congresses Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tôn was elected to be the chief of the Central Management Council.

Through three Congresses, the Hòa Hảo Buddhist Congregation has consolidated its organization step by step. In the first term, the top administrative organization of the Hòa Hảo Buddhist Congregation was Representative Board. From the 2nd term the Hòa Hảo Buddhist Congregation is administered by a two level system of management committees, at the top of which is the Central Management Council; at the grassroots level of which is the Commune (Ward, Town) Management Council.

Until to 2008, Hòa Hảo Buddhism had 300 the Provincial, District Management Councils, 1750 dignitaries and Minor Office Bearers; 1232; 570 believers and 104 worshipping places.

The operations of Hòa Hảo Buddhism have gradually become stably. The 2nd Congress adopted Charter. This Charter consists of 7 chapters and 31 articles. According to the Resolution no 320/QĐ-UB dated March 6th, 2003 of People ‘s Committee of An Giang province, The Hòa Hảo Buddhist Representative Council were allowed to set up the 1st dogma –training class for 100 students on March 31st, 2003. After graduating these students will be active members in propagating dogma of Hòa Hảo Buddhism.

The ceremony for the founding of Hòa Hảo Buddhism is annually held on May 18th (lunar calendar).

Under the leadership of the Management Council (the Central Management Council and the Local Management Council) Hòa Hảo Buddhist believers keep their mind on their religious practice and life. They are glad to carry out the orientation of the Hòa Hảo Buddhist Congregation “For Dharma, for the Nation”.

6. Islam

Islam in Vietnam is practiced mostly by Cham ethnic - minority people. There were many different stages in the history and development of Islam in Cham people. In the medieval period, the Cham people familiarized themselves with Islam then Islam was gradually Chamized. Islam was governed by culture and traditional belief of Cham people then it became Cham Bani.

Cham Bani is different from Islam in term of religious practice, scriptures, dogma and worshipping place. The believers of this religion do not relate to the Islamic world.

Clerics of Cham Bani are divided into 4 levels: Char, Khotip, Imam and Po Gru. Po Gru is the top level. Every village or mosque has a Po Gru. He has a right to determine time of worship or important affairs of village. He can manage rituals and combine with other cleric in special ceremony as ceremony of praying for rain, ceremony of establishing new mosque, village. All affairs in the Cham village are cared by the leadership of mosque. All affairs of Cham Bani are cared Po Gru Council.

Although the Cham Bani is very old but it has still developed in Cham community.

Although the Cham Bani is different from the Islam and it does not relate to the Islamic world but Cham Bani believers still worship Allah and Muhammad and use Qur'an. They carry out fasting during the month of Ramadan. In Vietnam, the Cham Bani is also branch of Islam. In 2007 Po Gru Council of Ninh Thuận province was granted certification of religious practice. Until to 2008 the Cham Bani had 43.996 believers, 399 dignitaries and 17 worshipping places.

Islam influences Cham people in South and Hồ Chí Minh city because many the Cham emigrated to these regions in the past In the middle of 18th century many Cham people who had lived in Kampuchea emigrated to Châu Đốc (An Giang province now) and Tây Ninh province.

In 1963 - 1975 many Cham Muslims emigrated to Sai Gon so the Cham community has gradually been established in Hồ Chí Minh city.

There are three Cham Muslim Communities in three regions: Hồ Chí Minh city, An Giang province and Tây Ninh province. Because of subjective and objective conditions three communities can not unite with each other to become the general community although they follow Islam and relate to the Islamic world. They have been granted certification of their religious practice turn by turn.

The Hồ Chí Minh city Muslim Community Representative Committee was granted certification in 1992.

An Giang province Muslim Community Representative Committee was granted certification in 2004.

Tây Ninh province Muslim Community Representative Committee was granted certification in 2008.

Until to 2008 Islam had 28.736 Muslims, 300 dignitaries, 40 mosques and 22 small mosques. Some new mosques are built by Muslims' money or the aid of the international Islamic organizations. For example Cham Muslims in Quốc Thái village, An Phú district, An Giang province began to build Jaminl mosque on April 11th, 2008 with the help of The Red Crescent Society.

7. Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa (*four kinds of gratitude and dutifulness*)

Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa was born in 1867. It proceeded to Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương movement. The founder was called Ngô Tự Lợi or Ngô Viện, but he was honored as Đức Bổn sư (Buddha). The process of preaching and developing this religion was connected with reclamation of waste land. Believers of this religion must carry out 12 articles of dutifulness and four kinds of gratitude. The dutifulness and four kinds of gratitude are connected with each other.

Four kinds of gratitude are:

To express their deep gratitude to ancestor and parents

To express their deep gratitude to homeland

To express their deep gratitude to Triratna

To express their deep gratitude to compatriot and mankind

Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa stresses dutiful element. In the past this religion was called *Đạo ông bà* (the *Ancestor- religion*), then it changed into Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa.

In September, 2006 Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa was granted certification of their religious practice by Government. Until to 2008 Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa had 70.899 believers, 476 dignitaries and 78 worshipping places.

8. Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương

Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương was established in 1849. At that time there was a new religious movement in An Giang province, all people who had taken part in this movement were given a yellow or red slip of paper having 4 words: Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương so this religious movement was called Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương.

There are many different explanations on the name of this movement.

The founder of this movement was Mr. Đoàn Văn Huyền (1807- 1856). The process of establishment and development of this movement was connected with the process of reclaiming waste land.

It is necessary to say that Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương was social and ideological source for establishment of new religions as Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa and Hòa Hảo Buddhism.

Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương has not prayers but it has prophecies, they were written as poems in order to advise believers how to behave themselves. Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương's catechism stresses to cultivate virtue and morals.

In 2008 Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương was granted the certification of his religious practice. At that time Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương had 15184 believers, 90 dignitaries and Minor office bearers and 19 worshipping places.

9. The Pure Land Buddhist Home - Practice Association

Carrying out the plan N^o. 08/KH-TGCP in September, 2006 the Government Committee for Religious Affairs granted certification of religious practice of the Pure land Buddhist Home –practice Association. The Pure land Buddhist Home –practice Association has been a religious organization of people who want to become monks or nuns staying at home. This organization was founded by Nguyễn Văn Bồng in 1934. The aim of this organization is “*to become a monk practices charity for nation and compatriots*”. This organization consists of three levels: Central, provincial and district. At present the Central Management Council consists of 12 members and Mr. Nguyễn Phương Hiếu is chief. The Pure land Buddhist Home -practice Association has 1.450.000 believers in 21 provinces and cities from Cà Mau to Khánh Hòa, 4800 dignitaries, 868 physicians, 35000 believers, 206 pagodas.

Since it was recognized by State, activities of the Pure land Buddhist Home - practice Association become more effervescently specially sharing of medicine with the poor. In 2009 the Pure land Buddhist Home –practice Association set up the refresher course on the way of religion and law knowledge for his dignitaries.

10. Baha’i Faith

The Government Committee for Religious Affairs granted certificate of religious operation of Baha’i Community in Vietnam on March 20th, 2007 in Hồ Chí Minh city. At that time the representative committee of Baha’i community in Vietnam presented himself before the public. The headquarter of this committee has been based on 153/12/3 Nguyễn Thông street, Hồ Chí Minh city.

Baha’i was founded in Iran in 1844. Baha’i faith came into Vietnam in 1954 with arrival of Indian traders. Before 1975 Baha’i community was not developed in Vietnam.

On July 14th, 2008 Baha'i community in Vietnam was recognized as religious organization by Vietnam State with the Resolution no 150/QĐ-TGCP of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs. Baha'i community realizes its motto "to observe the laws of country where he lives, to consider other religions as brothers in one family, to create the unity; to do his best for humankind".

After the legal person status of Baha'i community was recognized, the 2nd National Congress of delegates of Baha'i Spiritual Assembly with the term 2009-2010 was held on May 1st - 2nd, 2009. Mr. Nguyen Thuc was elected to be president of Assembly. This community set up his Website in that year. This community has established Baha'i Local Spiritual Assemblies. At present Baha'i community has 73 provisional representative committees in localities.

Until to 2008 Baha'i community had 7000 believers in 44 Vietnamese provinces and cities and 849 dignitaries.

Although Baha'i community is small community Vietnamese State is interested in it and creates good condition for it to operate as other religions. On September 12th, 2009 Deputy Prime Trương Vĩnh Trọng received dignitaries of Baha'i Spiritual Assembly and president of Assembly, Mr. Nguyễn Thức in the Office of Government.

11. Nam Tông Minh sư Faith (Minh Sư Faith)

Minh Sư đạo came into Vietnam in 1863 but is did not develop. Basing on the Ordinance on belief and Religion, the State allowed Minh Sư đạo to hold the Congress of delegates on June 1st - 2nd, 2008 in Hồ Chí Minh city. The Congress adopted Charter and elected the Central Management Council 2008-2013 with 19 members. Mr. Trần Tích Địch was elected the chief of the Central Management Council and Mr. Lê Văn Sách was elected the secretary general of the Central Management Council. The headquarter of the Central Management Council is in Hồ Chí Minh city. The Congress affirms its orientation: Dharma and Nation. Minh Sư Faith combines quintessence of three religions Buddhism - Confucianism and Taoism with mercifulness, service of humankind.

The Charter of Minh Sư Faith has 10 chapters and 54 articles to define canon law, catechism, the system of organization, Congress, the management board...

On October 18th, 2008 the Government Committee for Religious Affairs granted Resolution to recognize the organization of Phật đường Nam tông Minh sư Faith.

Until to 2008 Minh Sư Faith had 10.000 believers belonging to three sects Đức tế, Hoàng tế and Phổ tế, 250 cloisters, 52 Buddhist temples in 18 provinces and cities.

12. Minh Lý đạo Tam Tông miếu (Minh Lý Faith)

Minh Lý Faith was born in 1924 in Vietnam; its dogma is the combination of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian dogmas. On October 17th, 2008 Minh Lý Faith was recognized by the Resolution of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs. At present, Minh Lý Faith had 1058 believers and 4 places of worship in three provinces Long An, Bà Rịa - Vũng Tàu and Hồ Chí Minh city. General Director of Holy Council is Mr. Trương Định.

We above mentioned the situation of 12 religions recognized by State. Many documents of newspapers help us to write this article. Although we do our best to collect documents on Vietnamese religions, we are unable to collect completely documents on Vietnamese religions.

After analyzing the situation of Vietnamese religions we can draw characters of Vietnamese religions at present as follows.

1. Religious appearance has elementary changes

12 religions and 32 religious associations which have recognized by the State show the change of religious appearance in Vietnam. The dignitaries, believers and religious organizations to be recognized are very happy. They believe in the religious policy of our State and Party. We can find that our state has also recognized small religious organizations which have about one thousand believers as Minh Lý đạo Tam Tông miếu organization, because our state has carried out seriously the 16th article of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion.

1- An organization shall be recognized as a religious organization if it meets all following conditions:

a- Being an organization of people sharing the same religious belief, of which the religious dogmas canon laws and rites are not contrary to the fine customs and habits and the interests of nation;

b- Having a charter and/or statutes depicting the goal, objectives and action orientation that are in close association with the nation and not contrary to the provisions of law.

c- Having its religious activities registered and conducted on stable basic.

d- Having a lawful office, organization and representative.

e- Having an appellation not duplicating that of nay other religious organization that has been recognized by the competent State authority.

2nd item, 8th article of Decree N^o. 22/2005/NĐ-CP *On Guidance for Implementation of a Number of Articles of Ordinance on Belief and Religion* defines *Recognition of Religious organization* as follows:

g- Certificate of stable religious activity granted by the provincial State governance body for religious affairs where the organizations' main office is located. The duration of stable religious operation shall be counted from the date of the organization's registration for activity and shall be stipulated as follows:

- 20 years for organizations established in Vietnam after the effective date of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion

- One year for organizations established in Vietnam 20 or more years before the effective date of the Ordinance on belief and Religion.

For organizations established in Vietnam less than 20 years by the effective date of the ordinance on belief and Religion, the duration of stable religious activity shall be composed of the time from the organization's establishment to the effective date of the ordinance on belief and Religion, plus the time from the organization's registration to the achievement of 20 years.

With the above regulations and guidance we hope that Vietnamese religions and religious organizations get more and more increasing.

2. The restoration of religious belief

Before *Đổi mới* (renovation era) the "khô đạo, nhạt đạo" concept was applied to some Catholics (it means to denote Catholics who did not believe their god). But this condition has been overcome elementarily. According to social investigation of the Institute of Religious Studies (The Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences) carried out in 2005, 23007 and 2008 we find that 95% Catholics affirmed their religious belief, they believe catechism, dogma and carry out religious rites.

For Buddhism, religious beliefs not only return to peasants but also to townsmen, worker, officials, the retired, demobees and some party members. In villages of Northern delta some demobees, Party members take part in repairing pagodas. They also take part in organizing festivals. The retirings have free time so they participate in rites in their pagodas and spiritual travels.

Protestant believers, specially the Protestant believers in the Northern mountain regions, have just adopted Protestantism when they have lost their belief, they reconvert to their traditional belief.

When the other religions and religious organizations have been allowed to operate by State, their believers have condition to take part in religious rites and consolidate

their religious belief. Many prayer- books have been printed to serve believers, among them are translated into ethnic languages to serve ethnic believers.

3. Religions are more and more consolidating and developing

First of all we find that religions consolidate and strengthen their religious administrative system.

Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has 6 Congresses and it has grown up and developed step by step. The members of the Sangha Patronage Council and the Dharma Executive Council are increasing. The number of the Management Committees is increased by half. For Catholicism, in the first Congress of Vietnamese Episcopal Conference there were three committees but in the 10th congress there were 15 committees. The administrative system of Catholicism has been consolidated and strengthened. In 2005 Bà Rịa diocese (Bà Rịa - Vũng Tàu) was established. Hundreds of new parishes and sub-parishes have been established.

After Caodaism, Hòa Hảo Buddhism were granted certification for their religious practice, they organized Congresses and consolidated their religious administrative system. Before 1975, Caodaism had 4 or 5 levels, now it has two levels; central level and local one. In the past Hòa Hảo Buddhism had only believers conducted mainly at home. Now Hòa Hảo Buddhism is administered by the Central Management Council, the Provincial Representative Council and the District Management Council.

Protestantism consolidates its organization and carries out to unite Vietnamese general Protestant Church (Northern region)) with Vietnamese Federal Protestant Church (Southern region). Protestant sects in Western Highlands carry out to set up local churches.

The Pure land Buddhist Home –Practice Association is administered by three level systems: Central level, provincial and district level.

The other religions and religious organizations also consolidate and strengthen their administrative systems.

4. Religions strengthen their administrative system, their staff and organize Congress

Religions and religious associations organize their Congress. Vietnamese Episcopal Conference convened the 10th Congress; Vietnamese Buddhism Sangha organized the 6th Congress (2008 - 2012). Vietnamese Federal Protestant Church (Southern region) organized the 3rd Congress (the 45th Congress according to history's church). Vietnamese General Protestant Church (Northern region) organized the 33rd Congress on February 24th - 25th, 2009 in Hoàn Nhị church (Nam Định province)... Caodaism organized the 3rd Congress of sects. The 3rd Congress of

Hòa Hảo Buddhism was organized on May 21st, 2009; Baha'i organized the 2nd Congress (2000 - 2010).

The recapitulative report on religious management of state in 2007 -2008 of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs shows that "Provinces/cities have advised local governments, they guide, consider and resolve requirements of religious organizations when organizing Congress at local levels as the Congress of Provincial Buddhism, when electing Protestant provincial Representative Board; the management Council of Cao Dai of Tây Ninh province. The strengthening of the Management Board of Hòa Hảo Buddhism and division of Catholic dioceses and parishes have been helped by provinces/ cities"

On the staffs: almost Catholic parishes have priests. In the first term Buddhist Sangha Patronage Council had 50 members but in the 6th term it has 98 members. The number of the Dharma Executive Council has increased from 49 members (1st term) to 147 members (7th term).

Religions pay attention to educate and train dignitaries and monks: The educational organization of Buddhism has been divided into three levels: primary Buddhist school, the secondary Buddhist school and Buddhist academy. In 2007 a secondary Buddhist school was set up in Tiền Giang province. In same year Theravada Buddhist Academy was set up in Cần Thơ province. Catholicism has 6 major seminaries; two major seminaries have the second training base. Protestantism has Biblical Theology Academy in Hồ Chí Minh city. At present, hundreds Buddhist and Catholic dignitaries and believers are learning in the foreign countries.

Caodaism, Hòa Hảo Buddhism have not condition to set up training schools but they have set up training classes on catechism for dignitaries and minor office bearers.

Religious dignitaries and believers not only take part in training schools and classes but they also carry out religious activities. Catholics make a retreat. Protestant believers take part in summer retreat. Buddhist believers take part in short training course on propagating Dharma... Religious dignitaries and the religiousness have condition to study and learn knowledge of religions.

5. Religions are deeply attached to nation and going with nation

When Vietnam has been united (1975) and the Renewal policies have been implemented, Vietnam has achieved many good results. These results constitute great motive forces that make religions relate to nation and go with nation. Religions going with nation consist of many contents, but two most salient contents are: (1) Religious churches define their orientation that they are attached to nation for the goal of a prosperous people, a strong nation, and a society that is equitable,

democratic and cultured. (2) Religious culture has integrated strongly in national culture to contribute to building an advance culture deeply imbued with its national identity.

Religions are attached deeply with nation for national interests and with the goal of a prosperous people, a strong nation, and a society that is equitable, democratic and cultured. In the 1st Congress, Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha promoted a motto for action: The Dharma - The nation - Socialism. Although this orientation was established on historical foundation of Buddhism, it was not easy to affirm by itself. When socialism in USSR and East Europe had been collapsed, rival forces schemed to divide unity of Buddhism. Before “period change” Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has maintained its way “Religious life attaches to secular life. The patriotic tradition and great national unity have been developed. Buddhism goes with the development of nation towards building a propertied, cultured and modern life”⁽²⁾.

Living the Gospel within the nation for the happiness of people has been the orientation of going with nation of Vietnamese Catholic Church. This orientation has been reflected in the Common Letter 1980 of Vietnamese Episcopal Council. Catholicism came into Vietnam for over 300 years, but it is the first time Vietnamese Catholic Church declares “church attaches to nation and Homeland”. Because “Church is in the heart of Vietnamese nation, we decide to attach to homeland’s fate and follow national tradition to mix with the present life of country”⁽³⁾. This orientation has been manifested in two contents. The first content is to *contribute national construction of the Homeland, national defense and peacekeeping*.

After Protestantism, Caodaism and Hòa Hảo Buddhism... have been recognized by State, they show clearly their orientations.

The orientation of Protestantism is “Living *the Gospel, worshipping God and serving the Homeland and the nation*”. The orientations of some Protestant sects in their charters can be enlarged. For example, the Charter of Vietnamese Baptist church defines “*Living the Gospel, worshipping God, serving the Homeland and the nation and observing laws*”⁽⁴⁾

Caodaism has adopted the following motto “*The nation is glorious, the Way enlightens*”. After the legal person status of Caodaism was recognized, Caodai sects have observed Charter and executed well the policy and law of State.

The orientation of Hòa Hảo Buddhism is “*Worshipping Dharma, loving the Homeland and attaching to the nation*”.

². Venerable Thích Thanh Tứ. *Vietnamese Buddhism in the cause of building and defending homeland at present in Buddhism and Vietnamese culture - society in industrialization and modernization*; Nguyễn Hồng Dương, Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn (co-editor), Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 2008, p. 14.

³. *The Common Letter of Vietnamese Episcopal Council*.

⁴. *Nhân dân* newspaper dated October 14th, 2008.

6. *Religious culture integrates in national culture more strongly and, contributes to the building an advance culture deeply imbued with its national identity*

In the past Buddhist culture integrated in national culture and contributed to building a national culture. After *Đổi mới* Buddhist culture has many conditions to integrate in the national culture. When dealing with this problem Venerable Thích Thanh Tứ, Vice president of the Dharma Executive Council of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha wrote “The cultural affairs and propagation of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha have achieved many worthy results. Many pagodas and temples have been built, repaired. Many old pagodas relating to Buddhist history have become the centers for teaching Buddhist dogmas and religious practice in order to keep cultural identity of the nation”⁽⁵⁾.

Buddhist festivals consist of village festivals, regional festivals and national festivals. In the festival of village there are many activities as singing, games, dancing... All of them aim to arouse traditional culture of the nation. At present our country is in the condition of globalization, the evil foreign culture may influences our culture so these festivals are necessary.

The first time Vietnamese Catholic Church spoke of integration of Catholic culture to Vietnamese culture in the Common Letter 1980 “Building life style and expressional way of faith of Church in accordance with national tradition”

The integration of Catholic culture to Vietnamese culture has been manifested by many different forms and substances. This integration has been spoken in the Common letter 1992, the Pastoral letter 2000, the Common Letter 2001 or some lectures of Vietnamese Bishops in Synod of Asian Bishop in 1998⁽⁶⁾.

Because Caodaism, Hòa Hảo Buddhism, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa (four kinds of gratitude), and Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương attach to and integrate in Southern culture, so the traditional cultural identity of South has been preserved. Cham Bani is a variant of Islam; it plays an important role in preserving the cultural identity of the Cham.

Because religions consistently carry out their orientations, so they contribute to the cause of building and developing our country.

7. *Vietnamese religions still have negative elements*

The most negative element: the reactionary forces take advantage of preaching and developing Protestantism in ethnic minorities in the Northern mountain regions and in the Western highlands to sabotage Revolution. The reactionaries from

⁵. Venerable Thích Thanh Tứ. *Vietnamese Buddhism in the cause of building and defending homeland at present*, ibid.

⁶. See Nguyễn Hồng Dương. *Vietnamese Episcopal Council - Organizational Structure, Congresses and Pastoral Orientation*. Religious Studies Review №. 8, 2008.

FULRO established DEGA Protestantism - reactionary organization called “DEGA state” to request the autonomous right. Protestantism develops in the ethnic minorities to change their economic and social life, to create contradiction between believers and non-believers. Many traditional cultural elements as *Cồng chiêng* culture, the ancestor-worship, *múa khèn*, are abolished by Protestantism.

In general, Vietnamese religions still have elements of small peasant. Religions pay attention to build the places of worship. They waste time and money of believers in building and repairing the places of worship. Many places of worship bearing the stamp of traditional culture were abolished. They are constructed after the model of foreign architecture. Some religious festivals are organized largely for the purpose of trading than preserving cultural identity of nation.

On prayer books, catechism and ritual practice have changed slowly. The view on superiors and inferiors is cumbersome. The promotion is one of many causes to lose internal union and divide believers.

The appearance of ethnic community and new religions

32 religious associations which have been recognized change the appearance of Vietnamese religions. Before, we often thought that Vietnamese people had two parts Luong (non-Catholics) and Giáo (Catholics), in the current economic, political and social condition, religions have tendency to unite with each other to establish ethnic religious community. The Cham who follow Islam are divided into three parts: Cham Bani, Cham Islam in Hồ Chí Minh city, Cham in An Giang and Cham Brahma. Recently, there is Cham community who follows Catholicism. Hmong and Dzaio are divided into two parts one follows Protestantism, another preserves traditional belief. In the Highlands there are some similar cases. In ethnic people has many different groups, a group follows Catholicism, a group follows Protestantism but another still preserves traditional belief.

The name “the ethnic religious community” means ethnic community follows one religion. People of this community live in same place as hamlet; village mountain village... this community is organized as parish.

The appearances of the ethnic religious community makes inhabitants who are in the same ethnic community contradict one another because they follow different religions. For example, Cham Bani contradicts Cham Islam. Hmong who follow Protestantism contradict Hmong who preserve traditional belief. The problem of the ethnic religious community is complex problem in the future.

The new religious develop complicatedly

From 1990s of the 20th century until to day, our country has many new religions which have been called “heresies” by functional bodies. This name helps us to know the complex of new religions. At present we do not know how many new religions exist in our country. Perhaps, Vietnam has 50-60 new religion movements. The rites of some new religions contrary to national culture as *Chân không đạo* when its followers carry out rite, they takeoff their clothes. So this religion called “sexual religion”. Most of the new religions’ heads have low standard of knowledge so it is difficult for us to converse with them. Most believers of new religions are peasants; they are homely and credulous people. The management of new religions is difficult affair for functional bodies.

A negative religious element which should be mentioned is trade in spirit. The morals of some priests fall into decadence. Mediums are present everywhere. The private shrines are built expensively.

The renovation of view and policy of Party and the State on religions brings about the change of Vietnamese religions’ situation and character because religion is a social force so it is impacted by social changes. Religions should correct, and reform by themselves corresponding to condition of country. If they do not do that they have not positions in heart of the nation. /.