

LOOKING BACK ON 45 YEARS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

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45 years ago on December 8th, 1965 the Second Vatican Council had ended after four scattered sessions. The Council opened on October 11th, 1962 after 45 months of preparation by decision of Pope John XXIII was dated on 25th January, 1959 (his secular name was Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli). It was meeting of senior bishops of Roman Catholic Church. The Second Council was held in Vatican. The first council was held from 8th December, 1869 to 18th July, 1870. It was convoked by Pope Pie IX (his secular name was Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti). Its best known decision was definition of papal infallibility⁽¹⁾. The Second Vatican Council was convoked in the period of crisis of Roman Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council Church sought to escape from social crisis and helped Church to adapt itself to changing condition by renovating religious doctrine especially social doctrine. Because meeting lasted long (4 years), the Second Vatican Council experienced two Pope's regimes. Pope John XIII convoked Council when he was 78 years old, so he did not pursue the way of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul VI (his secular name was Giovanni Battista Montini) succeeded him to chair the remaining sessions of Council. When the Second Vatican Council took place, Catholic Church had about 500 million believers. Now this number increases threefold, it is about 1,5 billion believers⁽²⁾. 2,940 popes and invited guests were summoned to attend the Second Vatican Council. In fact, 2,449 representatives participated in the meetings. In the second meeting there were 2,188 representatives. The third meeting there were 2,466 representatives and the last meeting there were 2,624 representatives. The author Mai Thanh Hải has detailed statistics on the geographical origin of participants, the number of clergymen who stated in the meetings of Council, the number of deaths

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¹ See: Mai Thanh Hải. *The Dictionary of Religious Faiths in the World and in Vietnam*, Culture and Information Publishing House, 2006, p. 159; *Vietnamese Encyclopedia*, Vol 1, Hanoi, 1995, p. 582.

² According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

during the meetings of the Council, including Pope John. He died in June 1963 before Council ended 2,5 years⁽³⁾.

Council ended after adopting 16 documents including 4 Constitutions, 9 Decrees and 3 Declarations⁽⁴⁾. The general spirit of documents was to reject the commitments and disdainful attitude towards non-Catholics, to remove the binding and old-fashioned style and open soft, gentle ways that pleased everyone. According to remarks of researcher Mai Thanh Hải, the Second Vatican Council was an important turning point in history of Catholic Church. Many issues were changed, for example, Latin was no longer liturgical language of Roman Rite⁽⁵⁾.

45 years have passed and we now have time to look back and evaluate what Roman Catholic Church has done and analyze the causes “of unfinished works” from which to predict the next steps in order to carry out what the Second Vatican Council has outlined. In his writing, researcher Mai Thanh Hải analyzed concretely “10 unfinished works” of the Second Vatican Council⁽⁶⁾.

It was easy to notice that during those years in the Second Vatican Council there was a fierce debate about the role and position of the Roman Catholic Church in the world today. All those who participated in debate derived from principle “Christ today, always and forever is just one” but they had separate interpretations of the mission of the religious structure. Their interpretations were different from each other. Pope John XXIII called “*Aggiornamento*” - it meant that he called that when renewing Roman Catholic Church paid attention to the changes taking place in the world throughout centuries. He explained that “This does not mean to change the Gospel. It means that we begin to understand the Gospel better. All those who had the opportunity to study different cultures and different traditions are aware that it is time for us to understand the characteristics of age and acknowledge beyond”⁽⁷⁾.

³ See: Mai Thanh Hải. *40 years of the Second Vatican Council - 10 unfinished works*, Religious Studies Review, No. 4/2005, p. 65.

⁴ The main contents of 16 documents in *40 years of the Second Vatican Council - 10 Unfinished Works*, Religious Studies Review, No. 4/2005, pp. 66 -68

⁵ See: Mai Thanh Hải. *40 years of the Second Vatican Council - 10 Unfinished Works*, Religious Studies Review, No. 4/2005, pp. 159-160.

⁶ See: Mai Thanh Hải. *40 years of the Second Vatican Council - 10 Unfinished Works*, Religious Studies Review, No. 4/2005, pp.. 53-56

⁷ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

Pope John XXIII was the first man in history to declare that the dialogues of Catholics with the contemporary world were necessary. The first dialogue was the dialogue between Catholics with other religions (Anglican Church, Protestantism, Orthodox Church- NVD). The last dialogue was the dialogue of Catholics with non-believers and those who oppressed Church. He called for such dialogues until the end of his life.

His political testament of Pope John XXIII and Message “Pacem in Terris” were promulgated before he died two months. The heads of Roman Catholic Church sent “this message to people of good will”. He wrote that all controversies in the world needed to resolve by really reasonable talks without political conflicts. He not only called for very vague talks but also proposed concrete problems for discussing in international scale. He protested atomic weapons. He called for the end of arms race and disarmament. Basing on this formal document, Roman Catholic Church put forth on cooperation of Catholics with non-Catholics to work for the welfare of all humanity.

This standpoint of Vatican Holy See made the Western strategists to worry. Washington immediately sent his envoy, John Mc.Cone to meet Pope in order to prevent any contact of Vatican Holy See with USSR. USSR was in the head of socialist side at that time. According to Marco Ronacalli, a well-known scientist and Pope John’s cousin’s child , Pope John answered to John Mc Cone that “ the poverty, denial of human rights, racism and political rule need to abolish”⁽⁸⁾.

Since then both supporters and opponents have continuously accused Pope John XXIII that he liked Communism⁽⁹⁾. Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saint rejected the accusation when reviewing records for beatification of Pope John XXIII in 1998. At that time legal document of well-known activists of Catholic Church in Eastern Europe predominated. The late Cardinal Stefan Vyshinky, archbishop of Catholic Church in Poland left document that rejected all suspicions about credits of Pope John XXIII in defense of freedom of religion. Cardinal Stefan Vyshinky wrote

⁸ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

⁹ See: Khánh Vy. *The Relation between Vatican and Russian Federation in history and at present*. Religious Studies Review, No. 12/2009, p. 50.

that “Before they did not let us breathe. We just started to breathe under Roncalli regime”⁽¹⁰⁾.

When Pope John XXIII died, Pope Paul VI succeed him. He said he will focus all his efforts to preserve the great happiness, that is peace among nations”. He affirmed that he would continue forum which was opened earlier. In the first meeting of the Second Vatican Council, clergymen only exchanged preliminarily documents which were prepared by the Committees before the Council to be held. All final documents of the council were signed by Pope Paul II as head of Catholic Church. The second meeting of the Second Vatican Council held from September 29th to December 4th, 1963. This meeting adopted Decree on media social communication (Inter Mirifica) Decree stated that medial of social communication were applied into serving Church more and more. Council asked civic governments “to protect really the freedom of communication because it was necessary for the development of modern society”⁽¹¹⁾. In the article 1 of a document to be adopted in this meeting was Pastoral Constitution on Church in the modern world. It was called as *Gaudium et Spes* (pleasure and hope). Constitution called that “Everything should be consolidated to call the people inside the Church”. The Constitution defines that Church is friends with everyone and shares human status with everyone; Unique ambition of the Church is to serve people. The Church does not condemn any one country. All bishops who participated the Second Vatican Council determine their stance that they have to protect the right to freedom of people around the world.

The third meeting of Council held from September 14th to November 21st, 1964. In this meeting, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium* - the Light of the whole people) was approved. The Constitution affirmed that Church is the mystery of salvation of God that gives human; God’s people are the part of Church. The Constitution stressed that true disciple of Christ should have the love for God and for the relatives”. In this meeting the Decree on Eastern Church (*Orientalium Ecclesiaru*) was approved. Decree stressed on strengthening of contacts with the Eastern Churches which are called “ separated brethren”. Another document was Decree on ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio* - Restoration of Unity) was

¹⁰ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

¹¹ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

approved in this meeting. This Decree emphasized the relation of Catholic Church with other Churches “to develop the cause of Catholics in alliance with other separated brethren”⁽¹²⁾.

5 documents which were approved in the third meeting of the Second Vatican Council made up 1/3 of total documents of Council. These documents were translated into Russian and gathered into a book that was published in 1998 by Paolina Publishing House of Catholicism. Pope Paul VI opened the last meeting of Council 14 September, 1965. This meeting lasted from September 14th to December 7th, 1965. This meeting approved 11 documents. We do not deal with these documents⁽¹³⁾. We only speak of some conclusions of the Second Vatican Council then we can image Catholicism at that time. These conclusions are as follow:

Firstly, with the responsibility on developing of the unity and love between man and man and between nations, the Church first of all pays attention to people who Church is gathering;

Secondly, Church does not dismiss anything which is considered as true nature and sacredness of other religions;

Thirdly, Church respects believers of Islam and calls people to dismiss the past for mutual understanding;

Fourthly, the Second Vatican Council remembers the spiritual associations of the New Testament congregation with descendants of Abraham. Church is sorry for all the manifestations of Jewish disapprobation;

Fifthly, Religious freedom must be present everywhere and is protected by the laws;

Sixthly, personality needs to become the rule, object and purpose of all social provisions;

Seventhly, Catholic Church does not associate with any political system;

Eighthly, we welcome all those who refuse to implement the sinful orders.

¹² According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

¹³ See Mai Thanh Hải. *40 years of the Second Vatican Council - 10 Unfinished Works*, Religious Studies Review, No. 4/2005.

When commenting the results of the Second Vatican Council, Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate No. 4 March, 1966 wrote that “This is a significant advance. It expresses that Catholic Church overcomes the stagnant state and steps forward on new roads... in the years under Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI all those who maintain the tradition of Vatican have experienced many anxieties. They had to face the advanced views of their famous colleagues... 16 documents are the official heritage of the Council. It is said that the content of documents may seem to be loose and truncated much by the amendments in the debates of different tendencies of Council. This seems to be inevitable in the struggle between two tendencies”⁽¹⁴⁾. According to the writer “It is important that Pope Paul VI does not deviate from the path that Pope John XXIII pointed out. He continues to lead the church to follow that path with slow pace. Along with the Council, Pope Paul VI recognizes that rapprochement between Catholics with believes of other religions is right. Christianity begins to come close the religions which have indifferent and hostile attitude and opened the stage for dialogue with people”⁽¹⁵⁾.

However, struggle of two main tendencies of thought of modern Catholicism still continues on forum of the Second Vatican Council. The tendencies which make up majority in the Council to be called the “progressive” and “reform” tendencies but other tendencies are considered as “conservative” and “reactionary” tendencies. Today we find that arguments of “conservatives” are short of reason. The book of late Cardinal Agostino Casaroli dealt with this problem. Cardinal Agostino Casaroli was Secretary of State, he set forth and implement “Eastern Policy” of 4 generations of Pope. His book was published in 2000 when he died. According to him Pope Paul VI did not decide immediately dialogue with those who had dismissed the value of human. “New Pope continues the Universal Council without any fluctuations. He is careful in dialogue with the communist countries”⁽¹⁶⁾. Arguments of the conservatives, who resist the dialogue.

As follows “dialogues are not useful. Communism has own strategy for the church and religion. Holy See agrees to recognize the Communist regime as the dialogist so that Holy See recognizes the strength, stability and honesty of

¹⁴ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

¹⁵ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

¹⁶ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*.

communism”⁽¹⁷⁾. There were two notable points in the documents for meeting of President of USSR with Pope Paul VI. These documents were drafted by Foreign Office of USSR. 1- “It is necessary to emphasize the importance of the unity of all forces in the struggle to soothe tensions when conversing with Pope”; 2- To avoid any possible attempt of the pope if he raised the issue of Catholics in the USSR and other socialist countries and the relations between the Vatican for European socialist countries”⁽¹⁸⁾.

However, Pope Paul is very careful about his answer “yes” or “no” when the Second Vatican Council took place, he gives conclusion that it is necessary to have dialogue with “Eastern people” and with people who have anti Catholic thought. Vatican Holy See has selected January 1st, 1968 as World Peace Day. On this occasion the head of Vatican Holy See dealt with Vietnamese situation and he made clear his stance over the war in Vietnam. According to Đỗ Quang Hưng, after succeeding Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI continues to preserve the previous foreign policy of Holy See. In the past “Holy See did not encourage dignitaries of Vietnamese Church to emigrate” and then Holy See “did not satisfy all aspirations of Ngô Đình Diệm government. Sài Gòn and Vatican could not agree on diplomatic regulations. Holy See only established a consulate in Saigon and appointed bishop Nguyễn Văn Bình to be Archbishop of Saigon, not Ngô Đình Thục as Saigon government desired. “The appointment of bishop Nguyễn Văn Bình who was a native of the South expressed active and conscious attitude of Holy See”. In the period of Pope Paul VI, Vatican did not agree with the suppression of Ngô Đình Diệm’s government over Buddhist movements. Pope himself called “Ngô Đình Diệm government should have tolerant and flexible attitude towards Buddhists”. In the message was dated on August 30th, 1963 to send to Vietnamese people, Pope Paul VI expressed his concern for the bloody events because Buddhists were suppressed and he suggested that both sides, Ngô Đình Diệm government and the Buddhist Church should seek for a peaceful solution in crisis”. According to the request of the United States, Pope Paul became intermediary between the U.S. and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in solving some problems relating to the U.S. war in Vietnam. Holy See supported “the stance of peace at all costs” and believed that “peaceful

¹⁷ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.*

¹⁸ According to Anatoli Krasikov. *The Second Vatican Council Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.*

talks will replace the bellicose declarations”⁽¹⁹⁾. Pope Paul VI made the best of opportunities to call peace for Vietnam.

On international aspect, the Holy See with other partners have many active activities to reduce tensions in the world because of the consequence of the cold - war. Among them there are Pope Paul VI’s brief trip to New York and his speech at the General Assembly of United States and the participation of Vatican in negotiations which prepare for the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Cardinal Agostino Casaroli on behalf of Pope signed the final document in August, 1975 in Helsinki capital, Finland. The result of “Eastern Policy” of Vatican is clear. Because of the reorganization of Vatican for stability in European border after the Second War, USSR committed to respect human right including the freedom of religions of all citizens. Because of pressure from Western countries the relation between Soviet Union and Vatican had not improved much. Until December 1989 Soviet Union and the Vatican reach agreement on the establishment of formal diplomatic relations. This was the result of meeting between head of Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev and the head of the Holy See, Pope John Paul II. After the Soviet Union collapsed, from 1991 there were several meetings between the heads of the Russian Federation with the Popes of Roman Catholic Church. At the end of 2009 the diplomatic relation between Russian Federation and Vatican was established. It is incomplete if we only mention the relation between Russian Federation and Vatican, we should mention the relation between Roman Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Church. The relationship between the two churches in history and at present there are wheeling steps, but it's getting warmer under Pope Benedict XVI⁽²⁰⁾.

We need deal with some features on the relationship between Vietnam and the Vatican both state and church after the Second Vatican Council and especially in recent years under the reign of Pope Benedict XVI.

When speaking of the relationship between Vietnam and the Vatican we should speak of an important landmark which was November 24th, 1960 when Pope John XXIII signed Decree on establishing of Vietnamese hierarchy and divided

¹⁹ See: Nguyễn Quang Hùng. *The Standpoint of Vatican towards the War in Vietna*, Religious Studies Review, No. 1/ 2006, pp. 30-38.

²⁰ See: Khánh Vy. *The Relation of Vatican and Russian Federation in History and at present*, Religious Studies Review, No. 1/2009, pp. 40-50.

Vietnamese Catholicism into three dioceses. In 2010 the Catholic Church in Vietnam with 26 dioceses in the total of 2,400 dioceses in the world celebrated the 50th anniversary of Vietnamese Hierarchy's foundation. Some Vietnamese bishops were invited to take part in the Second Vatican Council (these bishops were Southern bishops)⁽²¹⁾. In the past Vietnamese Catholic Church was managed by foreign clergymen, but now Vietnamese Catholic Church has nearly 100 bishops. Among them there are 5 bishops to be nominated as cardinals. Many Vietnamese cardinals and bishops are appointed to important position in Rome church. Vatican usually sends envoys to take part in religious activities in Vietnam. Recently Cardinal Ivan Dias has been appointed to master close ceremony of Holy Year 2010 in La Vang Holy land on January 6th, 2011⁽²²⁾. In order to further strengthen relations between the Roman Catholic Church with the Catholic Church in Vietnam, the Vatican has officially appointed archbishop Leopond Gireli to be permanent representative of the Vatican in Vietnam on January 13th, 2011 with the consent of Vietnamese government. Regarding Vietnamese Catholic Church, Vietnamese bishops visit two holy tombs of Saint Peter and Saint Paul and report the situation of Vietnamese Catholic Church to Vatican every five years. Many Vietnamese bishops take part actively in international activities of Universal Church. They take part in General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference, the International Youth Day. They also visit Churches of other countries and receive foreign bishops. They are ready to organize meetings of Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference in Vietnam in November in 2012. But relations between the Catholic Church in Vietnam with the Holy See does not always contribute to strengthening the relationship between the State of Vietnam with the Catholic Church. Apart from French Resident Superior summoned the bishops of Indochina in Hanoi to promulgate the Common Letter in 1951 to condemn Communism. The canonization of 117 Vietnamese martyrs in 1988 and appointment of personnel for the diocese of Hồ Chí Minh after the complete liberation of the South made the relationship between state and church more complex.

Up to now State of Vietnam and Roman Catholic Church are on the way to the talks on the establishment of bilateral official relations. However, as described

²¹ See: Mai Thanh Hải. *40 years of the Second Vatican Council - 10 Unfinished Works*, Religious Studies Review, No. 4/2005, p. 65.

²² See: Phạm Huy Thông. *The Advance in the Relation of Vietnam and Vatican*.

above, since the Second Vatican Council, Vatican's attitude to Vietnam has made significant improvements. After coming to the throne, Pope Paul VI is always interested in the American war in Vietnam. When the American imperialists expanded war in Vietnam on 2nd May, 1967 Pope Paul VI issued a call to “stop bombing in the North of Vietnam”. On February 8th, 1967 Pope Paul VI send letters to President Hồ Chí Minh, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and Lydon Johnson to call for a ceasefire in the Lunar Year Festival in 1967. When meeting American President, Pope Paul VI expressed disagreement of Vatican with the escalation of U.S war and he criticized US bombing in the North. The Vatican condemned strongly US bombing in Hanoi, Hải Phòng. Pope Paul VI thought that Paris agreement on ending of the war was important opportunity to bring real peace to Vietnamese people. This agreement was signed on March 1st, 1973. The first meeting of Pope Paul VI and the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam, Minister Xuân Thủy and Minister Nguyễn Văn Hiếu took place on February 14th, 1973. On this meeting, Informations Catholiques Internationales wrote that “satisfaction of the Pope regarding meeting shows that the Common Letter in 1951 forbid Catholics to cooperate with the communists is outdated. For Government of Democratic Republic of Vietnam, this meeting was considered as a guarantee of their freedom of religion⁽²³⁾. As an American journalist, commented: “On the issue of Vietnam, the Pope is biased”⁽²⁴⁾ For example, in 1971 Nguyễn Thị Bình, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Provisional Government of the South of Vietnam came to Roma but Pope Paul VI refused to meet her while he formally welcome Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, president of Sài Gòn government.

Only after the Vietnam carried out the renovation and obtained initial success, the relation Vietnam - Vatican became prosperously. Firstly, the visit to Vietnam of Cardinal Roger Etchagaray, representative of Pope John Paul II was on July 1st, 1989. This visit lasted two weeks. Since 1990 there are many talks of Vatican and government of Socialist Republic of Vietnam. According to statistics of researcher Phạm Huy Thông, from 1990 Vatican delegation visited Vietnam 16 times, Vietnamese delegation visited Vatican three times. Many problems were discussed

²³ See: Nguyễn Quang Hưng. *The Standpoint of Vatican towards the War in Vietnam*, Religious Studies Review, No. 1/2006. p.

²⁴ See: Phạm Huy Thông. *The Advance in the Relation of Vietnam and Vatican*.

and resolved in meetings such as the appointment of personnel to Vietnamese Catholic Church, establishment of new dioceses, the study of Vietnamese priests in abroad... The peak of the Vietnam - US relations is marked by the meeting of Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng and Pope Benedict XVI on January 25th, 2007 in Roma and the meeting Pope Benedict XVI and President Nguyễn Minh Triết on December 11th, 2009 in Vatican⁽²⁵⁾.

Bilateral relations of Vietnam - Vatican have developed in a positive direction, but there are still many problems to be resolved from both sides. The biggest problem is the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the Vatican, but we may hope that all problems of Vietnam and Vatican will be resolved in the future for the benefit of not only 6 million Catholics but also for the benefit of Vietnamese nation as well as for the benefit of Vatican and the peace-loving forces in the world.

Although there are unresolved problems, relations between the Holy See and other churches, believes of other religions, countries and social-politic forces in the world, including Vietnam have become better. We again acknowledge the contributions of Roma Catholic Church as well as of the Second Vatican Council and popes as John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Holy See prepares for beatification of Pope John Paul II to show that Roma Catholic Church will respect the his contributions in development of Church. Roma Catholic Church affirms the right of his policy on dialogue of inter-religions and inter countries at present. /.

²⁵ See: Phạm Huy Thông. *The Advance in the Relation of Vietnam and Vatican*.