

APPLYING HỒ CHÍ MINH ON RELIGION TO BUILD NATIONAL UNITED BLOC IN VIETNAMESE REVOLUTION

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When leading Vietnamese revolution to carry out the struggle for national independence, building, and defending our nation, our Party and State always promote the role of religions in the national united bloc. After the August Revolution 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, our Party and State had to resolve many important problems to fulfill national democratic revolution but our Party and State were interested in applying Hồ Chí Minh's view regarding religions to build national united bloc. It was considered one of many important duties of Vietnamese revolution. From the August Revolution 1945 to now, applying Hồ Chí Minh's view on religion in building national united bloc has been manifested in policies, guideline of our Party and State, in methods of Vietnamese Fatherland Front in order to propaganda, mobilize and gather and lead religions to live "for better secular and religious life" .

1- From the view that religion is a form of social sense, moreover, it is an entity in cultural and spiritual life of a part of people, Vietnamese Communist Party always respects religions during revolutionary process in Vietnam. On this base, guidelines and policies of our Party and State regarding religions are more and more perfected.

The policy on "*mobilizing of religious believers and "expanding of national salvation organizations of Catholic believers". Transforming of believer of Buddhism and Caodaism*"² which was dealt with in the Leading Resolution of the August General uprising contributed to bring out the force of national united bloc, unite people forces and lead the success of the August Revolution in 1945. During the stage of the National Liberation Revolution and the People's Democratic Revolution, our Party and State have resolved religious problems timely. On religious problems, our Party and State have promulgated many instructions, such as: the Instruction on *Mobilizing Hoa Hao believers* dated on 7th April, 1953 of the Central Committee for South Vietnam; the Instruction No 39/KD dated on 15th January, 1953 of Eastern interzone on *Policy*

¹ Ma. The Central Committee of Vietnamese Fatherland Front

² Vietnamese Communist Party: *Complete Documents of Party*. Vol 7 National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, 2000 p. 423- 433

for Caodaism in new condition; The Instruction No 94 –CT/TU dated on 21st September, 1954 on *Implementing religious policy in liberated area*. It was signed by Truong Chinh; the Instruction No 29- CT/TU dated on 27th June, 1955 of Secretariat of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party on *Implementing new decree on religion* (Decree No 234-Sl. It was signed by the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 14th June, 1955); The Instruction No 22-CT/TU dated on 5th July, 1961 of the Secretariat of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party on *Policy and affairs regarding Catholicism in the North*; The Instruction No 161- CT/TU dated on 17th June, 1963 of Secretariat of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party on mobilizing Buddhist, Cao dai, Protestant believers in new condition; The Instruction No 63/CT dated on 17th June, 1963 on *reflecting new schemes of enemy which take advantage of religion to destroy the revolution in the South*; the Instruction No 48-CT/TU dated on 3rd March, 1971 on *actively correcting mistakes in Catholic region and resolutely defending order and security against all enemy's actions of sabotage*; the Instruction No 66-CT/TU dated on 26th November, 1990 of Secretariat of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party on *implementing the Resolution No 24 NQ/TU dated on 16th October, 1990 of the Politburo on “Strengthening Religious Affairs in New Condition”*; The Instruction No 37-CY/TU dated on 2nd July, 1998 on *Religious Affairs in New Condition*...

We find that there are many resolutions regarding religions, such as: the resolution of the 15 Conference of the Central Committee *on the revolutionary policy in the South* dealt with *Religious affairs*; the Resolution No 40 –ND/TU dated on 1st January, 1981 of the Secretariat of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party on *Religious Affairs in New Condition*; the Resolution No 24 NQ/TU dated on 16th October, 1981 of the Politburo on *Religious Affairs in new Condition*. The Resolution No 25 -NQ/TU dated on 12 March 2003 of the 9th Conference of the Central Committee on *Religious Affairs*.

Many standpoints and guidelines regarding religions have been brought out in the National Congresses of Party representatives. Since the 6th Congress, the policies of Party for religions have been clearly. Specially, the Platform for National Construction during the Transitional Period toward Socialism (Platform for short) is a strategic document of Vietnamese revolution after the period of renewal. On religious problem, this document written “*Belief and*

*religion are spiritual needs of a part of people. There is consistent implementation of the policy to respect and guarantee the right to freedom of belief, simultaneously, it is prohibited to take advantage of belief to damage the interests of Homeland and people*³.

The 11th Congress of our party summarized 20 year implementation of the Platform in 1991

In the 11th Congress, our Party supplements and develops Vietnamese revolutionary lines and policies in new condition. On religious problem, our Party affirms “ *The Party and State respects and guarantees people's right to freedom of belief and religion and the right to freedom not to follow any belief according to the law. All actions that violate the right to freedom of belief and religion and take advantage of belief and religion to damage the interests of Homeland and people will be forbidden and punished*”⁴.

All policies of our Party on religion have concretized the application of Hồ Chí Minh's views regarding religion to build national united bloc.

From 1945 up to now, our State has promulgated many policies, laws and institutionalized lines and policies of Party regarding religion. Our State has gradually perfected policies regarding religious activities and organization.

The first legal document regarding religious affairs was the Decree No 65 dated on 23rd November 1945. It was signed by President Hồ Chí Minh on “preserving ancient monuments in Vietnam”. The notable legal documents on religion were: the Document No 315- TTG dated on 4th October, 1953 signed by Deputy Prime Minister Pham Van Dong on *Religious policy*; Decree No 197/SL dated on 19th December, 1953 signed by President Hồ Chí Minh on the *Law of Land Reform* (Chapter III of this Decree dealt with land of religion); Decree No 234 SL dated on 14th June, 1955 signed by President of Democratic Republic of Vietnam on *Religious Problem*; Resolution No 297-CP dated on 11th November, 1977 of Cabinet Council on Some policies regarding religion; Decree No 69/HDBT dated on 21st March, 1991 of Council of Ministers on *Defining religion activities*; Decree No 26/1999/ND-CP dated on 19th April, 1999 of Government on *Religious activities, Ordinance on Belief and Religion*. This Decree was adopted

³ Website Vietnamese Communist Party. *The Platform for National Construction during the transitional period towards socialism*

⁴ Website Vietnamese Communist Party. *The Platform for National Construction during the Transitional period towards socialism, (Supplemented and developed in 2011)*

by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly on 18th June, 2004 and carried out from 15th November 2004. Government promulgated Decree on *Guidance for Implementation of a number of Articles of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion*.

Beside these above documents, Government has promulgated many circulars, instructions, decrees, resolutions regarding religion, especially Constitution in 1992. The article 70 of Constitution affirms “*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 beliefs 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 and religion in order to abuse the laws and policies of the State*”⁵. The contents and solutions of these above documents regarding religion are more and more plentiful and perfect. Before many legal documents regarding religion were promulgated under the forms of Decree, Resolution, Instruction... but now many Codes, Laws, Ordinances, Decisions regarding religious affairs are promulgated.

The contents of legal documents on religion have been corrected, supplemented, perfected in accordance with reality. These documents affirm consistent policy of our Party and State to respect and guarantee the citizen's right to freedom of belief and religion; to prohibit all actions that take advantage of religion to destroy the national united bloc and resist the revolutionary cause. During the period of renovation, the law on religion has important contributions to consolidate solidarity and uphold national force in developing economy and holding social stableness. On this base, religious management of State is more and more perfected.

3- Vietnamese Fatherland Front is typical image of national united bloc. Consistently before and after, Vietnamese Fatherland Front has defined that religious people are an important part of the national united bloc. It has consistently implemented its policy of respect and guarantee for people's right to freedom of religion and belief; it has gathered more and more religious organizations and encouraged typical dignitaries, believers to take part in Vietnamese Fatherland Front. It has petitioned our Party and State for

⁵ *The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*, in 1992, Hanoi 1992. p. 36

implement of policies in order to promote the religious role in the national united bloc and in the cause of building and defending our country.

Among 10 policies that were carried out by Viet Minh, there was one policy on religion. That was the 5th policy. It promulgated people's rights such as : human right, ownership, civil rights, the vote, the right to democratic liberation (freedom of belief, freedom of speech), and equality of rights⁶. In process of building and defending our country, Vietnamese Fatherland Front has defined correctly its right in religious affairs and building national united bloc.

4-Because of applying Hồ Chí Minh's view to building and carrying out lines and policies of our Party and State, Vietnamese Fatherland Front has changed our awareness on religion. The mobilizing work of Fatherland Front has made religious organizations more closely to national united bloc.

Basically, cadres, Party members and people have overcome preconceived ideas regarding religion. We have considered religion to be spiritual need of a part of people. We have respected and guaranteed the people's choice. The relation between the levels of administration and religion organizations is more and more improving. Religion organizations are created good condition to practice their activities.

In the war of resistance against the French colonialists, many monks, nuns and Buddhist believers took part in movement of production increase, movement of mass education. Buddhist National Salvation associations were established. Many monks and nuns took part in Viet Minh front and National league of Vietnam. Many young monks took part in Buddhist National Salvation movement such as Thích Trí Quang, Thích Minh, Thích Trí Nguyên. 400 Buddhist monks and believers laid down their lives for homeland. Many bonzes followed revolution such as bonze Mật Thể, superior Buddhist monk Thiện Chiếu, laity Lê Đình Thám.

In the anti- American resistance war, Buddhist believers continuously promoted tradition of "the Dharma and the Nation". They made active contributions in national struggle. Many pagodas in enemy -occupied area sheltered revolutionary fighters. Many Buddhist believers sacrificed their whole lives for defending "the Dharma and the Nation". Many Vietnamese

⁶ Vietnamese Communist Party. *The Complete Documents of Party* Vol. 7 p. 560

Heroic Mothers have been Buddhist believers. After 1975, 9 Buddhist sects unified into the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha⁷. The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has been active member of Vietnamese Fatherland Front. The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha has tried its best to implement its orientation “The Dharma- the Nation- Socialism”.

After the August Revolution, many Catholic dignitaries and believers actively took part in the task of building our country.

When French colonialist invaded our country again, many Catholic dignitaries and believers took part in anti- French resistance war to defend revolution such as Nguyễn Bá Luật, Lê Đình Hiến, Hồ Thành Biên, Võ Thành Trinh, Lương Minh Ký....After Geneva Agreement, 500 Catholic priests and believers went to the North, the remainders continuously took part in the anti American resistance war⁸. The Conference of Catholic representative in the whole country convened in 1955 with 91 representative 46 priests, 8 sisters and 137 Catholic believers. They established Liaison Committee of Patriotic Catholics then it changed into Vietnam Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics.

In the meeting in Hàm Long parish in 1956, Ngô Tử Hà, the president of Liaison Committee of Catholics in Hanoi stated that “Some ten thousands of Catholics in the North will actively take part in the struggle against the enemy. Although the scheme of American imperialists and lackeys are very wicked, it cannot divide Vietnamese Catholics from Vietnamese people. This scheme can not shake the Catholics’ faith in Hồ Chí Minh”⁹. In the anti – American resistance war as well as in the peace, international forces and Catholic reactionaries have tried their best to influence Vietnamese Catholics to destroy the cause of building and defending country but Vietnamese patriotic Catholics have still gone with nation. They have taken part in many revolutionary organizations such as Vietnamese Fatherland Front, National

⁷ Vietnamese United Buddhist Association; 2 Vietnamese United Buddhist Sangha; 3- Vietnamese Traditional Buddhist Sangha, 4- The Hà ChÝ Minh City Buddhist Liaison Committee; 5-The Vietnamese Original Buddhist Sangha; 6- The Vietnamese Mendicant Monks Buddhist Sangha; 7-The T’ien-t’ai School Sangha; 8- The Southwestern patriotic Clergy Solidarity Association ; 9- The Vietnamese Buddhist Study Association

⁸ Priest Tran Tam Tinh: *Christ and Empire* p. 94

⁹ *National Salvation Newspaper* on 8th April, 1966

Front for the liberation of South Vietnam. Their present in these organizations have expressed their spirit on “Worship of God and love of country”.

Although Protestant dignitaries and believers are fewer than the Catholic or Buddhist dignitaries and believers, they have contributed much to the common cause of nation.

Cao dai dignitaries and believers contributed to the struggle for independence and freedom. Some dignitaries took part in revolutionary organizations, such as Nguyễn Văn Ngội, he was a member of Committee of National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam; Huỳnh Thanh Mừng was a member of advisory board of Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. In two resistance wars, many Cao Dai sects were rewarded two Resistance War Medals by the State. In the cause of building our country, many Cao dai sects have taken part in charitable works and social activities. All Cao Dai believers have responded the movement of patriotic emulation and taken part in building new cultural life.

Hao Hao Buddhism also contributed to the struggle for national independence and freedom. Many Hoa Hao Buddhist believers volunteered for people's army. Many believers took part revolutionary organizations For example, Mr. Huỳnh Văn Trí was a member of advisory board of Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam; Ma. Huỳnh Thị Từ was vice president of National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam in An Giang province. In An Giang province, there are 975 war martyr families; 496 wounded soldier families and 6 Vietnamese heroic mothers. Many communes where have many Hoa Hao believers are awarded units of hero of the people's armed forces.

Religions have actively contributed to social life.

On culture and ethics: when practicing their religious activities, religious dignitaries and believers have contributed to build their cultural and moral lives. On active aspect: dogmas and teachings of religions advise believers to realize merciful and charitable works and avoid evils. In fact, in any region where religious believers carry out religious regulations rightly there are fewer social evils.

Cultural and art activities of religions as well as religious festivals have contributed national culture. The great religious festivals such as festival of

Buddha's birthday, Buddhist holiday (it is held annually on the 15th of the 7th month of the lunar calendar. The main objective of this festival is for the people to express their gratefulness and appreciation to their mother), Christmas have become common cultural activities of community and society.

The charitable and humanitarian activities of religions have contributed social security

According to data of charitable committee of Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha from 1981 to 2005, Buddhist sects built 25 Tue Tinh clinics, 655 consulting rooms, 165 compassion classes...Buddhist believers actively help people in natural calamity regions. From 1981 to 2005 Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha contributed 400 billions VND, hundreds of rice tons, productive instruments and medicine to poor peasants in remote areas.

Catholic dignitaries and believers have also taken part in charitable and humanitarian activities. They have voluntarily devoted their efforts and money to care for patient with HIV/ AIDS. They have built many house of compassion for the poor. In 2005- 2006, Xuân Lộc diocese in Đồng Nai province contributed 96 billions VND to charitable activities. Priests in Cà Mau province collected to build 54 bridges, 736 water wells. In 2007 the Social Humane Committee of Vietnamese Episcopal Conference and Catholics in abroad collected 1.120 billions VND and 68.194 \$ to support victims of natural disasters. Many Catholic dignitaries and believers in Cần Thơ, Đồng Nai, An Giang, Kiên Giang volunteered their land for building road, schools. Many sisters care for AID patients.

The active activities of religious organizations contribute to promote the movement of patriotic emulation, hold order and social security and guarantee national defense

Promoting the tradition of "defending the state and – reassuring people", Buddhist dignitaries and believers actively take part in activities that are beneficial to our country and people. Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha calls its dignitaries and believers to carry out its motto "The Dharma – the Nation and Socialism". Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha always leads and mobilizes monks, nuns and Buddhist believers to take part in the movement of patriotic emulation, specially the campaign "All the people unite to build residential areas with cultured lifestyles". This campaign was promoted by the Central

Committee of Vietnamese Fatherland Front. Many Buddhist dignitaries and believers take part in the struggle against actions that take advantage of religion to divide the unity of religions.

With the spirit of the Common Letter in 1980 and orientation “Going with nation” of Vietnamese Catholic Church in recent years, many Catholic dignitaries and believers take part in movement “All the people unite to build residential areas with cultured lifestyles and live for better secular and religious life”.

Religions more and more connect to nation, and the cause of building and defending country in new stage. The Common Letter 1980 of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference affirmed that “Because of a church in the heart of Vietnamese nation, we are determined to connect with destiny of nation. We follow national tradition and mix with the present life of our country”¹⁰.

From 21st to 25th November, 2010 the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference held Congress of God’s people and proclaimed a message to affirm that “for Catholics, loving of country and people is not only natural sentiment but also demand of Gospel”¹¹.

Applying Hồ Chí Minh’s view on religion to building the national united bloc in Vietnamese revolution has contributed to promote religious role in social life. “Religious followers have important contributions in the cause of building and defending our country. In general, religious organizations have set up their religious orientation and activities according to the laws. Religions that are recognized by the State have connected with nation, gathered many believers in national united bloc, built “a better secular and religious life” and contributed to the cause of Reform of our country”¹²

¹⁰ *The Common Letter 21980 of Vietnamese Episcopal Conference*

¹¹ *The message of God’s people in 2010*

¹² *Website Vietnamese Communist Party: The resolution No 25-NQ/TW regarding Religious Affairs of the 7th Congress of the 9th Central Committee of Party*