

**PROTESTANTISM IN THE NORTH VIETNAM
ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
CHARACTERISTICS**

***Abstract:** Protestantism has a history of introduction, existence, and development in Vietnam for more than 100 years. In the beginning, Hanoi and Hai Phong were the first cities chosen by Protestant missionaries for their evangelization to the Northern region. As a result, until the 90s of the 20th century, the Protestant community in the North did not expand. Recently, Protestantism has developed rapidly in ethnic minority areas of the northern mountainous provinces, the plains, and urban areas. The article shows the history of propagating Protestantism in North Vietnam from the beginning to the present.*

***Keywords:** Characteristics; Protestantism; Northern Vietnam; Missionary; denominations.*

Introduction

Protestant missionaries promoted their evangelization to the world in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. Various evangelical societies as London Missionary Baptist Church (1792), American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (A.B.C.F.M, 1810), Berlin Missionary Society (1824), China Inland Mission (C.I.M, 1865), Africa Inland Mission (A.I.M, 1895) were established.

The event that three missionaries of the Christian and Missionary Alliance¹ (CMA) coming to Turane (Danang, Vietnam)

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in 1911 to establish the first headquarters in Indochina is considered an inevitable consequence of the Protestant missionary process. CMA is a small-scale, multi-sectarian missionary organization based in New York. Entering Indochina, due to restrictions imposed by the French authorities, CMA only started operating shortcomings in Danang (Turane), Hai Phong, Hanoi, and Cochinchina (operating under colonial regulations). Thus, right from the beginning when Protestantism came to Vietnam, the missionaries chose Hanoi and Hai Phong in Northern Vietnam as the center of the mission.

1. Protestantism in Northern Vietnam: from the beginning to 1990

1.1. The period before 1954

In this period, the missionaries mainly learned the local language, translated the Bible, and opened the first missions. They established the missions in Mỹ Tho, Vĩnh Long, Sa Đéc, Cần Thơ, Rạch Giá, Biên Hòa, Sài Gòn, Nha Trang, Đà Nẵng, Vinh, Thanh Hóa, Hanoi, and Hải Phòng from 1921 to 1927. By 1927, the mission centers were 87 in total.

In 1921, the Alliance Evangelical Divinity School in Đà Nẵng trained native pastors and missionaries. In 1927, the General Assembly meeting in Đà Nẵng established the local church organization named the Eastern French Protestant Association - the forerunner of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam. The number of believers and the mission centers in 1927 was 4,236 people and 74 branches. By 1934, Protestantism had developed 38 mission centers in Tonkin, 34 in Central, and 47 in Cochinchina. However, there was a big difference in the ratio between the number of official mission centers and the number of official believers (Baptism) in three areas. In Tonkin (the data of 1934), the baptized people were 134 out of a total of 1,000 sympathizers while in the Centre was 346/576 people, and in the Cochinchina was 722/1,069. The CMA missionaries said that "due to the tough and arrogant attitude of the

Tonkin People", but the core of the problem was the clash of cultures in the missionary process. Such issues as the prohibition of ancestor worshiping, the personal belief, and the extremeness in abandoning old customs have met with opposition in the sustainable village and clan tradition areas and communities in the North of Vietnam, but, to the contrary, this cohesion was not tight in the Centre and the South of Vietnam. Thus, Protestantism propagated easier. Another factor that affected missionary results was the economic life of believers and their congregation. The C.M.A missionaries took the following path: Help only at first, then encourage (financial) independence. The mission centers in the South and Central of Vietnam, in general, had a stabler financial background than in the North, so they are more settled (see: Table 1).

During the period of resistance against the French colonial, the preach stopped in the North; many Protestant branches disbanded, while in the Central and Southern regions, Protestant activities were less affected. In 1954, Protestantism had an official community of more than 13,000 people, of which about 2,000 were from ethnic minorities in the South. Since the Geneva Agreement, according to accurate data, 1,054 Protestants - 50% of the total number of believers in the North migrated to the South.

Thus, at the end of the initial missionary period (1911 - 1954), Protestantism had rather a stable congregation of indigenous believers and dignitaries, mainly in the Central and South regions. In the North, the Protestant community was small, with about 1,000 followers.

1.2. The Period between 1955 and 1990

In 1955, after the restoration of peace, according to the wishes of many Protestant dignitaries and believers, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam allowed the establishment of a new ecclesiastical agency to serve the needs of worship and practices of this community. In Hanoi from April 10 to 12, 1955, the first General Assembly of the Protestant community in the North took place. The

General Assembly voted to establish the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North). In 1963, the official Constitution of this Church, marking a new step of a completely autonomous and independent Protestant church in the North, was approved.

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) has affirmed its purpose as follows:

"The purpose of the Evangelical Church is a gathering of the Vietnamese people who devote to God and have confidence in the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to form a single church." The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) follows a principle that includes two points:

- 1) Should wholehearted devotion to the Triune God.
- 2) Should love the Fatherland, protect the peace, and practice justice, charity, freedom, equality, and labor.

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) also clearly states its attitude towards society as follows: "The Church has to educate believers in patriotism, civic duty, a sense of respect for the people's administration and the law of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) unites with the whole people to build a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, and wealthy Vietnamese Fatherland².

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) consisted of only two levels: General Chapter and Chapter.

Due to the difficulties of the resistant war, the situation of the Protestant community in Hanoi and the North as well faced many challenges. The facilities of the Protestant churches were partly destroyed and damaged during the resistant war against the French colonial. Then one church had to close due to the lack of followers and insufficient funds to maintain. The life of believers was difficult. In Hanoi, there are 4 branches: Ngõ Trăm, Bạch Mai, Gia Lâm, and Sở Thượng, but up to this time, only the main branch of Ngõ Trăm and the branch of Sở Thượng can be maintained. The

situation was similar in all churches in other provinces, causing the number of branches to decrease from 20 to 14.

However, the activities of the Protestant branches maintain regularly at the churches on Sunday mornings, in some places on Wednesday nights. Believers still focus on praying, studying the Bible; pastors and preachers still periodically evangelize with the help of congregation deacons.

Thus, until 1975, the Protestant community in the North had only 01 ecclesiastical organization - the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) with 14 affiliated chapters, 14 pastors, preachers, 11 churches (02 churches had no churches, and 01 church was destroyed by war). The number of followers was a mechanical population increase, but only about 2,000 people. Besides the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North), no other Protestant organizations existed.

Meanwhile, in the South, the organization with the same CMA) as the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) is the Evangelical Church of Vietnam due to the favorable socio-political context, with the help of the United States Protestantism and the world's Protestantism had grown to a powerful church organization with more than 500 dignitaries, missionaries, about 160,000 followers, 386 churches and 41 institutions of culture, society, and charity in many provinces³.

From 1954 to 1975, the composition of churches and sects of Protestantism had many changes in the South. In addition to the Evangelical Church of Vietnam and CMA, several other Protestant denominations and organizations appeared, such as Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonites, Christ Church, and Christian Evangelical Association that split from the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, etc.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the socio-economic situation of Vietnam had many changes. In the general context of the recovery of beliefs

and religions, Protestantism in the South in general and the Central Highlands, in particular, began to recover and promote activities.

For the Protestant community in the North, the decade after April 30, 1975, was still a difficult time, despite the beginning of the recovery process. The socio-economic situation in the post-war period made the living standard of dignitaries and believers poor. The branches were only concerned with maintaining their religion and did not develop much.

However, during this time, with the favor of the authorities, the high-ranking dignitaries of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) gradually resumed international relationships, initially receiving help from the outside evangelical community. The relationships with the World Church Council (WCC), Bread for the World, the National Church Council of the United States, the Evangelical Church of the Federal Republic of Germany... have provided valuable assistance for the restoration of the Church's material facilities and religious activities. Regarding this, the Northern Protestant official recorded the following: "With their responsibilities, Pastor Hoang Kim Phuc, Pastor Vu Dan Chinh, especially Pastor Bui Hoanh Thu have taken advantage of many relationships to call for aid to the Northern Churches, the Bible School, and at the same time contribute to the construction and repair of churches in Nam Định, Hải Phòng, and Hanoi"⁴.

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) received much supports at that time in which the largest source of support came from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and affiliated German Protestant churches. "The WCC alone gave the Church US\$ 695,509 in aid from February 17, 1981, to September 9, 1988. The West German Evangelical Church directly donated to the Church some building materials worth more than US\$ 200,000. The Protestant Churches of the Federal Republic of Germany donated to the Church 20,000 Bibles and 20 hymn books, not to mention many other goods and supplies"⁵.

The source of Bibles and hymn books (printed from the traditional translation of the previous Bible Society) came to the Northern Protestant community at a very precious time because of many years without additional sources. The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) also shared Protestant branches in the South.

2. Protestantism in North Vietnam from 1990 up to now

2.1. The situation of Protestant community in the whole country and effects on Protestantism in the North

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the socio-economic situation had changed. Protestantism in the South, in general, and the Central Highlands, in particular, began to recover and promote activities. As the most powerful ecclesiastical organization, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the South) played a key role in the Protestant community in the South. According to Protestant officials, "from 1985, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the South) adapted to the new phase and continued to grow. Despite many objective obstacles, the Church has flexibly developed in each locality, and directed to the principles of the growth of the First Apostolic Society and seizing every opportunity to evangelize during the past 25 years."⁶

The missionary movement in ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands broke out to the top from 1988, 1989 to the end 1990s. Missionary activities were widespread. For more than ten years, facing favorable conditions because ethnic minorities are in a difficult situation of life, a crisis of culture, religion, traditional beliefs, etc., Protestantism has acquired quantities of significant followers. After the largest ecclesiastical organization as the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the South), there has been a revival and the emergence of new Protestant groups and sects (denominations) very remarkable in the South.

Adventism: This sect was introduced to Vietnam in 1929, only after the C.M.A). By the early 1990s, Adventists had resumed their activities in many localities, especially in the southern provinces.

The Christian Missionary Society (often called Missionary Christianity) was led by the missionary G.H. Smith, who was a member of the C.M.A, founded in 1956. Since the early 1990s, the denomination has revived and promoted missionary activity.

Vietnamese Baptist General Association - Southern: Entered the South in 1959 by the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States. The Baptist denomination follows a completely free ecclesiastical organization, with the right to independence and absolute autonomy given to the chapters (public justice). The national and regional ecclesiastical institutions are only loosely united.

Jehovah's Witnesses: Entering Vietnam from 1969-1970, Jehovah's Witnesses are a rather special sect with many different doctrines compared to pure Protestant denominations, originating in the United States. Since 1990, relationships and support of the Global General Association have been resumed, this denomination has increased its activities to strengthen the organization and develop the religion.

New Protestant groups appeared and operated in the form of a "house church":

Starting 1988-1989, the Protestant community in the South appeared many new groups, sects. The Protestant official called the "house church movement." There are several possible explanations for this phenomenon:

From 1988 to 1989, there was an expansion of international exchanges and democratization of social life. International Protestant organizations and denominations, through many ways, contacted and sponsored individuals and groups of Protestants.

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the South) - the only large church organization then - was in a state of interruption in terms of organization and personnel. Those were one of the reasons leading to the separation, division, appearance of many Protestant sects

within the community of dignitaries and followers of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the South).

The house church movement was growing fast with their freedom and dynamism. They are vital evangelists in an under-legal context. Some of them have become strong denominations, for example, Pastor Đinh Thiên Tứ's Christian Fellowship. Due to the worldwide spread of Protestantism, most of them got influenced by the Pentecostal tendency to believe and practice the gift of the Holy Spirit to varying degrees.

2.2. Shifts of the North Protestant Community

The process of renewal, opening up to the world, democratizing society has brought about favorable conditions for the reactivation of religious activities, including Protestantism. Resolution 24/NQ-TW dated October 16, 1990, marked views and policies on religion with the affirmation: "Religion is an imperishable issue. Beliefs and religions are spiritual needs of a part of the people. Religious ethics has many things suitable for the construction of a new society". Thanks to the government's open policy, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) has promoted international co-religion relationships and has begun to receive substantial material and spiritual support.

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, a movement of evangelization emerged in the ethnic minority areas in the northern mountainous provinces, specifically in the Mieu people. It was noteworthy that the Mieu people converted Protestantism through Far East Broadcasting Company - F.E.B.C (Manila, Philippines) that distributed were hymns, testimonies, and Bible classes (through sending letters and replies) to preach, it caused significant effects among the Mieu people. The process of evangelization for the Mieu people was divided into three stages: Stage 1: (from the end of 1987 to 1990) abandoning polytheistic beliefs and ancestral altars, and following "Vàng Chử"; Stage 2: (1990 - 1992) came to Catholicism; Stage 3: From 1993 to present, follow Protestantism.

The localities having Protestants have applied administrative and advocacy measures. According to the authorities, there were 60,000 Mieu Protestants in 8 northern mountainous provinces in 1998 but 105,000 in 12 provinces in 2002.

Life in difficulties and degrading traditional beliefs forced the Mieu people towards change and searching for new things. The Propagating of Protestantism spread in the Mieu people in the northern mountainous provinces and followed the immigrant groups into the Central Highlands provinces.

The formation of a new community of Protestants, still unspoiled in faith and practices, not belonging to any ecclesiastical organizations in the northern provinces, has led this community to seek help in all aspects and legal support. Then, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) was the only organization with legal status in the North and as a result, was chosen by the Mieu Protestants.

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North), despite its small capacity with a team of humble dignitaries and followers, was initially passive before this incident, but then decided to seize this unique opportunity to develop its force and organization.

Subsequent events marked the upheaval and movement of church organizations and denominations in the Northern Protestant community. The impact of the policy of Innovation and open-door integration has created opportunities for foreigners to come to Vietnam to do business and live more, including Korean Protestants. In 1994, the Korean Evangelical Church appeared in Hanoi. Because the provisions of the law related to the establishment of religious activities of foreigners have not been completed yet, the church of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) located at No. 2 Ngõ Trăm street was the only place for Korean followers to attend religious activities. They were the first international Protestant communities to appear, and their presence, as well as the cost of renting the church... has helped the

Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North), the Hanoi branch, a valuable fund, and much other material and spiritual supports.

The next event relating to the change in the composition of churches and denominations in the North was the first appearance of Pentecostal groups from the South to the North. Beginning in the 1990 and 1991, these Pentecostal groups stirred up religious activity in the chapters of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) by fasting, praying, “speaking in tongues,” prophesying, and “rebaptizing by the Holy Spirit”, causing division in some branches, especially in Hải Phòng, Khả Cảnh, Hoàn Nhì, Duy Tiên, and Nam Định.

Indeed, it was only at this time that Northern Protestants knew about the diversity of denominations and theology in the “Christian family” that they were about to receive because of their separation from the Protestant world for quite a while. Until that time Pentecostal denomination and Pentecostal movement were popular in Protestant circles, even the C.M.A did not label Pentecost as heresy, only they did not seek and practice "gifts" like Pentecost⁷.

By the time of 2005, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) had changed and innovated such as resumption and increase of international co-religion relationships, along with valuable and necessary assistance to rebuild the physical facilities of the church. The number of followers has skyrocketed due to the joining of the Mieu community; some branches have added new followers from overseas Vietnamese returning home and returning refugees, although the number of existing branches was still only 14 in 10 provinces. However, the appearance of Pentecost with a vibrant, flexible, and attractive way of religious life signaled a competition for mission territory. Soon, not only Pentecostal groups but also "house Protestant" groups, new sects and groups emerging in the South all sent personnel to the North to conduct missionary activities, such as the Christian Fellowship, the Evangelical

Missionary League, the Presbyterian Church, Pentecostalism, the Full Gospel Church, etc.

The picture of the composition of Protestant churches and denominations in the North has begun to change towards more diversity and complexity.

The period from 2005 to now

The Communist Party of Vietnam and State of Vietnam's New Policies on Protestantism

Facing the complicated development of the outbreak of evangelization, especially in ethnic minority areas, the Communist Party of Vietnam and the State of Vietnam have adopted new policies to solve the problem.

Implementing Notice 160-TB/TW dated November 15, 2004, of the Secretariat of the Party Central Committee and the Ordinance on Beliefs and Religions, considering the proposal of functional agencies, on February 4, 2005, the Prime Minister issued Directive No. 01/2005/CT-TTg on some work towards Protestantism (hereafter called Directive 01). This was a landmark text, leading to concrete changes to stabilize the Protestant problem.

Directive 01 has made specific adjustments related to Protestantism in the North, and mountainous areas where the ethnic minorities follow Protestantism. That was # 3: "Instructing, helping the General Association of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) and the General Confederation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the South) in carrying out religious activities under the Church's Constitution, Charter and keeping the law". Next was # 5: "For the number of the ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region who have just converted to Protestantism, it is necessary to base on their religious needs to have an appropriate policy in the following direction: For those who have had time to follow Protestants and have real religious needs, should guide them to practice at home, or to register for religious activities at

appropriate places. When all conditions are met, it should create the favor for people to conduct normal religious activities according to the provisions of law. For those who have converted to religion and now have the need to return to their traditional beliefs, it is necessary to create conditions and help them to fulfill that wish".

In the spirit of Directive 01, the Prime Minister recognizes and authorizes the Government Committee for Religion Affairs to recognize 7 Protestant organizations that are eligible under the provisions of law, including the Vietnam Christian Mission Association, the General Association of Vietnamese Baptists (Grace - Southern), the Vietnam Baptist Church (Nam Phuong), the Vietnam Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Vietnam Presbyterian Church, the Vietnam Mennonite Church, the Vietnam Christian Union Church and 01 organization granted the operation registration by the Government Committee for Religious Affairs is the Vietnam Pentecostal Gospel Church.

After more than 15 years with the implementation of new guidelines and policies of the State, along with the mobilization of the Protestant authorities at all levels, the situation of Protestantism in the northern provinces of Vietnam, especially the northern mountainous provinces, where mainly missionary activities, has gradually stabilized. The specific situation of the northern Protestant community, its characteristics, distribution, and the presence of organizations, denominations, etc., has gradually become clear.

2.3.2. Reality of Protestantism in the Northern Provinces of Vietnam

2.3.2.1. Organizational composition, Protestant denominations and distribution in the northern provinces of Vietnam today

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North)

From 2004 to 2017, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) focused on amending the Charter in 4 consecutive congresses (the 32nd, 33th, 34th, and 35th congresses). That was

because the development of the church requires the Church to reform, change its regulations accordingly, adjust the system of organization and religious activities, and expand the network of branches and meeting points, along with that is the focus on training pastors and missionaries.

Currently, according to the data of the authorities, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) is the largest organization in the North with 156,807 followers (including nearly 150,000 ethnic minorities followers), 692 dignitaries, 884 positions, up to 247 grassroots churches, and 1,689 group points, 12 churches, 41 chapels and 932 places of religious activities.

The Christian Union Church of Vietnam

The Christian Union Church of Vietnam operates in the guideline: “Being faithful to the truth of the Bible, accompanying the nation, and abiding by the Constitution and the law”. During the period from 1995 to 1996, the first officers of the Catholic Union Church went to Hanoi and the northern provinces to propagate and quickly reach out to the newly converted Mieu community. “Local churches are scattered in 60 provinces, of which about 50% are ethnic minorities, including the Mieu, Yao, Thai,... ethnic groups and mainly in the northern mountainous provinces such as Lào Cai, Sơn La, Lai Châu, Điện Biên, Hà Giang, Cao Bằng”⁸.

According to the data of the authorities, the Vietnam Christian Union Church has more than 43,000 followers; the number of ethnic minority believers accounts for a high percentage of them.

The Vietnam Good News Mission Church

Starting as just a social organization of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam before 1975 specializing in receiving aid and assistance from world Protestant organizations to support missionary activities, today the Vietnam Good News Mission Church has become a potential Protestant denomination. In 2007, this organization officially announced the establishment of a national

"church", becoming a denomination specializing in missionary activities, although so far it has not been an officially registered religious organization. Also since 2007, the Vietnam Good News Mission Church has reached out to operate in the Northern provinces, especially in the region where the Mieu people follow Protestantism. This sect has been present in Hà Giang, Cao Bằng, Sơn La, Điện Biên, Lai Châu, Bắc Kạn, Tuyên Quang, Lào Cai, etc. and has gained a number of more than 15,000 Mieu followers.

The Vietnam Seventh-day Adventist Church

This is a powerful and global sect. The Church is present in 205 countries and territories with 4 levels of organization from District, Union, General, and Global General Assembly. The Church organization in Vietnam was granted the decision on recognition of religious organization No. 235/QĐ-TGCP issued by the Government Committee for Religious Affairs authorized by the Prime Minister on December 4, 2008. The Church held the Third General Assembly for the 2015-2020 term.

The Church currently has churches and meeting points in 33 provinces and cities across the country from Điện Biên, Sơn La to Phú Quốc, Cà Mau with 16 churches and 191 meeting points. The presence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Northern provinces is a reconnection because they were present before 1954. Although Adventists went to the North to build their base relatively late, in return they have made solid strides in terms of direction, financial and human capacity. The Adventist's meeting points in Sơn La, Điện Biên, and Hanoi are small but very organized. According to Church data, they only have about 1,000 official followers in the northern provinces.

The Vietnam Pentecostal Holiness Church and other Pentecostal denominations and groups

The Pentecostal denomination that arose in the early 20th century emphasized the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit,

"speaking in tongues" to demonstrate that they were "full of the Spirit". Typical church organizations are often named such as Assemblies of God, The Pentecostal Holiness Church, Full Gospel.

The gift movement is used to describe a movement like the second wave of Pentecost that emerged in the 1950s. The third wave was in the early 1960s. The gifters claim that they are different from the classical Pentecostal Holiness Church in that it no longer emphasizes speaking in tongues as an experiential element of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, but rather includes the practice of many other God-given gifts. This can be seen as the New Pentecostal wave, spreading and influencing many denominations around the globe, including the Catholic Church.

According to Vietnamese Pentecostals, in November 1988, the missionary Roland Cosnard went to Vietnam to travel and preach the Pentecostal, sparking a movement of the Gift of the Holy Spirit that attracted Pentecostals formerly and members of some other Protestant organizations.

In 1989, the Pentecostal became active again with the appearance of many different organizations, such as Assemblies of God, Pentecostal Holiness, Full Gospel, Faith Evangelical Church, Missionary Union Evangelical Church, Grace Hope Evangelical Church,... of which the Pentecostal Holiness Church is the greatest.

On September 24, 2009, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs issued a Certificate of registration of religious activities to the Vietnam Pentecostal Holiness Church. According to the data of the authorities as of April 2019, the followers of the Pentecostal Holiness denomination were more than 11,000 people. In the northern provinces, this denomination is present in many small groups scattered throughout the midland and lowland provinces, although the number is still modest. Particularly in mountainous provinces such as Cao Bằng, Thái Nguyên, and Lào Cai, this denomination has nearly 2,000 followers of the Mieu people.

In addition to the Vietnam Pentecostal Holiness Church, led by Pastor Duong Thanh Lam as General Manager, which has been registered to operate, there are also some Pentecostal denominations born from this movement, not to mention a few dozen small-scale groups, including:

The Full Gospel Church began to split with Pastor Vo Van Lac to lead and develop meeting points in Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding areas. From the beginning of 1990, he started his mission in Hanoi, then went to Nam Định and Hải Phòng. At the end of 1995, this denomination started its mission to Phong Châu, Vĩnh Phú (now Lâm Thao, Phú Thọ). In February 1996, the Full Gospel Church of Vietnam formed a group in Thanh Hóa. In June 1996, from Phong Châu, Vĩnh Phú, he evangelized and established meeting points for the Mieu people in Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Hà Tây, Hải Dương, and Thái Bình. From 2000 to 2010, the church expanded to other provinces such as Bắc Giang, Bắc Ninh, Hòa Bình, Tuyên Quang, Quảng Ninh, Hà Nam, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Ngãi, Hậu Giang, Sóc Trăng, even Laos. In the northern mountainous provinces, the denomination established meeting points in Hà Giang, Tuyên Quang, Lào Cai, Thái Nguyên with the believers approximately 3,000 people.

On September 11, 2018, in Ho Chi Minh City, the Full Gospel Church of Vietnam held a ceremony to receive the Certificate of registration of religious activities issued by the Government Committee for Religion. This is the first organization to be granted a certificate of registration of religious activities after the Law on Beliefs and Religions took effect.

According to the declaration, the Vietnam Full Gospel Church is a Pentecostal Protestant organization, established in the country in 1990. As of June 2018, Vietnam Full Gospel Church has about 7,000 followers and religious activities at 201 group sites in 38 provinces and centrally-run cities nationwide.

The Vietnamese Missionary Union Evangelical Church is also a branch that branched out from the Pentecostal movement in the 1990s, influenced by the "gift movement", although the leadership of this denomination did not emphasize "speaking the language", "strange," or perform any special Pentecostal rituals. Established its organization in 1997 and is very active in evangelization, attracting followers, and reporting leaders of the denomination: As of October 2018, the Church has 8,400 followers, conducting religious activities in 191 group points in 37 provinces and cities.

The Vietnamese Missionary Union Evangelical Church is considered by Protestant officials to be one of the few capable and relatively successful denominations (among other organizations and denominations) when it comes to traditional activities. religion in Kinh areas in plains and urban areas. In the North, this sect appears only rarely in the Mong ethnic group in Lao Cai with about 800 followers, but their groups are very popular in the midlands and northern delta provinces. although the number is small and not impressive.

On December 14, 2018, in Ho Chi Minh City. In Ho Chi Minh City, the Evangelical Church of the Vietnam Missionary Union held a ceremony to receive the Certificate of registration of religious activities issued by the Government Committee for Religious Affairs.

The Vietnam Presbyterian Evangelical Church entered the South in 1968 and was granted a license to operate in 1972. After 1975, it stopped operating in terms of organization. In 1989, the Vietnamese Presbyterian Church in the United States sent Pastor Nguyen Xuan Bao to Vietnam to take care of charity work and develop believers. On December 4, 2008, the head of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs issued a decision to recognize the organization for the Vietnam Presbyterian Evangelical Church. On May 15, 2014, in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City held the 2nd Congress of the Vietnam Presbyterian

Church for the 2014-2018 term. According to the testimony before the congress, up to that time, Vietnam Presbyterian Church had about 17,000 followers living in 22 provinces and cities.

This is a Protestant denomination with legal status from quite early (2008). In terms of mission, Vietnam Presbyterian Church sent its members to the northern mountainous provinces quite early and built up a certain number of meeting points. In Thai Nguyen, Lai Chau, Son La, Thanh Hoa (Muong Lat), this denomination has more than 3,000 Protestant followers of the Mong ethnic group.

According to statistics from the authorities, by April 2019, this sect had a total of 16,783 followers. This is an impressive number among Protestant organizations and denominations.

Baptist Church of Vietnam, General Baptist Association of Vietnam, and other Baptist groups

Entered the South in 1959 by the Southern Baptist Convention of America. Baptists are a Protestant denomination with a long history (from the 17th century) and growing with more than 70 million followers around the world. The Baptist denomination follows a completely free ecclesiastical organization, with the right to independence and absolute autonomy given to the branches (political justice). The national and regional ecclesiastical institutions are only loosely united. Baptist churches are affiliated with one another but are independent of each other.

From the 1990s onwards, many Baptist groups appeared, in addition to the orthodox organization, the General Association of Vietnamese Baptists (Southern Grace), the Baptist Church of Vietnam, led by the pastor. Nguyen Thong was the President at the beginning, the address was in Binh Thanh District, City. Ho Chi Minh.

From August 8-10, 2008 in Ho Chi Minh City, the Baptist Church of Vietnam (Nam Phuong) held the first General Assembly (7th time according to church history). The Congress approved the

Constitution with 10 chapters and 74 articles, reflected in the principles, purposes, and directions of operation, attachment to the nation, loyalty to the Fatherland, and observance of the law: "Living the gospel, serving God, serving the Fatherland, sticking to the Nation and obeying the law". On October 3, 2008, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs issued a decision to recognize a religious organization for the Vietnamese Baptist Church (Nam Phuong). The last General Assembly, the 3rd (the IXth according to the history of the Church) of the Baptist Church of Vietnam (Nam Phuong) – changed its official name, Pastor Nguyen Vo Khanh Giam was elected as the President of the Church. Assembly for the 2016-2020 term.

This is a Baptist sect, although born late, but has the power and ability to evangelize and build organizations quickly. Especially noticed the expansion of activities, the establishment of "districts" in the North in both the delta provinces and ethnic minority areas in recent years.

General Baptist Association of Vietnam (former name Baptist Church of Grace - Southern)

In 1959, the Southern Baptist Missionary Association (USA) sent missionaries to Saigon to preach and founded the Baptist Church of Grace on November 18, 1962, in Saigon (now at 161 Nguyen Street). Van Troi, Ho Chi Minh City). This is the only organization of the Southern Baptist Missionary Association with continuous religious activities from before 1975 to the present.

In the 1990s and back, Baptist churches in Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Can Tho, Ninh Thuan, Khanh Hoa, Binh Dinh, Da Nang, etc. have voluntarily joined the Baptist Church of Grace. , forming the General Baptist Association of Vietnam (Grace - Nam Phuong). The reason is that in the past, the Baptist branches (church) were completely independent, then because of their legal status, they were united.

Vietnam Baptist General Association (Grace - Southern) operates under the direction of "Living according to the gospel, serving God, serving the Fatherland and the nation". On May 7, 2008, the Vietnam Baptist General Association (Grace - Nam Phuong) was issued a decision by the Government Committee for Religion to recognize a religious organization under the authorization of the Prime Minister. The 3rd General Assembly of this organization took place on November 9-10, 2016, and continued to elect Pastor Le Quoc Huy - Rector of the Baptist Church of Grace as the President of the General Assembly.

According to the data of the authorities, currently, the General Baptist Association of Vietnam has about 4,649 followers. In the North, this organization has established a few branches, mainly concentrated in cities and towns, with little missionary activities to ethnic minority areas.

In addition to these two Baptist organizations, which already have legal status, there are also a variety of smaller Baptist groups and denominations, which are very active, conduct evangelism, and gather followers from the returnees. , laborers come from all over the Northern localities and ethnic minority areas. Among these can be mentioned denominations and groups such as The Baptist Union has more than 3,570 believers; United Baptists have 2,073 members; Independent Baptist, Charity Baptist, Christ Baptist, etc.

Protestant denominations and groups followed in the footsteps of repatriated communities and were imported into the northern provinces.

Denomination "Vietnam Word of Life Church". Starting from the period from 1991 to 1995, when the Soviet Union collapsed, political and social institutions had many changes. Vietnamese people here face many difficulties and deadlocks. Many people have broken faith, lost direction... at the same time they met Protestant missionaries and organizations from Europe, America,

and Korea, so they converted and followed this religion. The Word of Life Church is in this trend. In 2002, some of the core of the Word of Life returned to Vietnam to "build up the church". In 2004, the first meeting place of this sect was established in Dong Anh, a suburb of Hanoi. The denomination declared a missionary vision throughout the country and in Indochina. This is the only denomination that has the opposite direction to other Vietnamese Protestant denominations, that is: Headquartered in Hanoi but "going south" to mission in the Mekong Delta and Cambodia. The Word of Life Church (English transaction name is World of Life Church) is a denomination of the Pentecostal movement. The denomination claims to have been present in more than 40 provinces and cities, the number of their followers according to the new authorities is just over 2,000 people. In addition to the midland and lowland provinces, Word of Life also has a missionary presence in Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen, Nghe An with an estimated number of 650 followers.

Vietnamese Missionary Evangelical Church. Also a few religious individuals from Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union returned to build the organization. This is a Pentecostal Protestant group that gathers many new converts, tends to be free in practice and faith expression. According to the data of the authorities, the Vietnam Missionary Evangelical Church currently has more than 2,000 followers, mainly in the provinces around Hanoi, Nghe An, and ethnic minority areas with a few small groups.

In addition to the two sects with a relatively large number of followers mentioned above, following individuals and groups returning from Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia, and Hong Kong who have converted to Christianity are also quite popular.

Evangelical Communities of Foreigners

Following the pace of opening up, economic exchange, and development, the ex-pat community coming to the North and Hanoi to live, work and do business is increasing, among them there are

Protestants. Currently in Hanoi, there are 14 groups of foreign believers engaged in religious activities concentrated in the city, of which the Protestant community is about 4,000 people. activities in 09 independent groups, which are:

Korean Protestant Community

In the city, there are about 3000 Koreans practicing Protestantism in 7 groups, of which there are 04 groups registered for concentrated religious activities according to the provisions of the Law on Belief and Religion. It is not clear the theological trend, although it is possible to know by the name some groups of which are Pentecostal theology.

Hanoi International Fellowship (HIF)

In addition to the Korean Protestant community, the Protestant expatriate community has about 1,000 foreigners of nearly 50 different nationalities working at international organizations in Hanoi. named the Hanoi International Evangelical Church (*Hanoi International Fellowship* - HIF). The organization was established in 1995. Currently operating in 02 locations.

The International Evangelical Fellowship, as usual, aims not only to be a community of foreign believers away from home who meet to care and serve each other but also to carry out a mission of "becoming a light" to the people. Hanoians and beyond for all Vietnamese people.

Newly introduced Protestant denominations and groups have activities that cause social and cultural disturbance and instability such as the Church of God the Mother, some groups practice mysterious rituals, closed organizations tend to extreme

Church of God the Mother: In 2018, the organization of the Church of God (Church of God the Mother) carried out illegal missionary activities in many localities, causing instability in families and social communities. Extreme activities of followers of this religion, such as: smashing ancestral altars, defaming other

beliefs and religions, disrespecting parents, alienating relatives and family, dropping out of school, quitting work... was strongly criticized by the press and public opinion. Currently, this religious organization is no longer allowed to conduct religious activities in the localities, but its members still live at home.

Salvation Sect: Originating from Korea, this sect is also known as "Saving Grace" or "Eternal Salvation". According to information from leaders of some legal Protestant denominations, the personnel of this sect is fighting for followers and building an organization in the Protestant community from the North to the South. The doctrine of this sect focuses (and differs from that of the orthodox) on three parts: Salvation, the Church, and the Apocalypse. This sect is quietly growing among Protestant denominations from the North to the South, into the Hmong Protestant community in Lao Cai, Thanh Hoa, and Dien Bien, and is in danger of disrupting the organization and causing division. separation from within the Protestant community.

In addition, a few new sects are appearing in the Mieu Protestants, such as The Church of Jesus; The Lady and the Bridegroom; The monk ke ke tho (red cloth cross), etc., are considered by orthodox Protestant authorities to propagate theological ideas that are out of sync with the Bible, causing divisions in the church in many places.

The community of more than 200,000 Mieu followers in the northern mountainous provinces is a complex place of group activities, sects because followers have not long been followers, lack dignitaries, scriptures, and understanding of doctrine and canon law. simple, easily manipulated, excited. Meanwhile, many Protestant groups and sects, including in the overseas Hmong community, have been and will continue to carry out missionary work to build influence in this community. Therefore, these are only the initial manifestations of the situation.

2.3.2.2. Characteristics of the Protestant community and the position of Protestant organizations and denominations in the Northern provinces

Community features

The new policy on Protestantism has been in existence for 15 years (since Directive 01 was issued in 2005), solving many problems and gradually bringing Protestant activities into a normal state. . Most recently, after the Law on Belief and Religion came into life, the direction of institutionalizing the guarantee of freedom to live and practice the faith of religions in general and the Protestant community, in particular, has been increasingly promoted. confirm.

Up to now, almost all major ecclesiastical organizations and Protestant denominations have been recognized as legal entities. Denominations and small groups gradually register for religious activities at the grassroots level of government. Thus, these undertakings and policies initially contributed to creating a stable and consistent legal corridor to ensure the exercise of the people's right to freedom of belief and religion.

According to the data of the management agency: "After 2 years of implementing the Law on Belief and Religion, by April 2019, the whole country had more than 1.12 million Protestants, including over 855,000 people of more than There are 40 ethnic minorities, the largest ethnic groups are Mong (270,000 people), Ede (124,000 people), Giarai (99,000 people), K'ho (67,000 people), S'Tieng (60,000 people). There are 9 Protestant organizations with legal entities and 1 Representative Board, 2 organizations with the registration of religious activities (including about 70 other Protestant organizations and groups registered by the commune level); 2,253 dignitaries, 6,851 positions, 757 affiliated religious organizations, 576 churches, 5,456 group points. There are also about 8,500 foreigners doing religious activities at 49 group sites....in 13 provinces in the northern mountainous region

(including Thanh Hoa and Nghe An), from where Protestantism developed "stealthy" ", "secretly, "unusually disguised" among the Mong and Dao people, have been approved and put into legal management by the issuance of centralized registration of religious activities for 797 out of a total of 1,631 meeting points, accounting for 48.8%. The number of hot spots and lawsuits against Protestantism is much lower than before, and the phenomenon of disunity in the village between believers and non-believers has been resolved. The phenomenon of free migration among the Mong people has decreased. The group sites have an open and cooperative attitude with local authorities."⁹

According to newly updated data, the Northern provinces from Nghe An onwards now have about 254,469 Protestants, of which 233,855 are ethnic minorities, 559 dignitaries, 772 positions jobs, 28 affiliated religious organizations, 15 churches, 01 dignitaries training institution, 2,049 group points (918 group points have been granted registration for concentrated religious activities). Particularly in the northern mountainous area, there are more than 235,635 people, of which 233,619 are ethnic minorities (97% are Hmong, followed by Dao people), 389 dignitaries, 525 positions, 09 branches, 02 churches; 1,631 group points (797 group points have been granted registration for concentrated religious activities), accounting for 21.01% of believers, 17.3% of dignitaries, 7.7% of positions, 0.3% of Protestant worship establishments nationwide.¹⁰

Compared with 2015 according to the summary data of 10 years of implementing Directive No. 01, Protestantism among ethnic minorities has 199,675 followers, of which 181,717 people, 545 dignitaries, 600 positions, 16 religious organizations directly belonging, 14 churches, 01 dignitaries training institution, 1,704 group points (584 group points have been granted registration for concentrated religious activities), up to now (2020) the number of Protestants from Nghe An onwards out increased 54,933 followers;

the number of dignitaries increased by more than 15 people; the number of group points increased by about 345 points.¹¹

According to the statistics of the authorities: As of April 2019, the number of Protestants in the country was 1.12 million (rounded up, actually 1,115,571 people). Calculating according to the proportion of our country's population as of April 1, 2019, is 96,208,984 people, Protestants account for 1.16% of the population.

From Nghe An, Thanh Hoa onwards, the 2019 census has 43,583,797 people, including 253,797 Protestants, accounting for 0.58% of the population in this area and accounting for 22.75% of the total of evangelicals nationwide. That shows that in the northern provinces of Vietnam, the degree of Protestantism is lower than that of the whole country in general.

According to the authorities, out of 1.12 million Protestants in 2019 statistics, 850,000 are ethnic minorities, accounting for 76.2% of the believer population. In the northern provinces of Vietnam, out of 253,797 believers, 233,855 people are ethnic minorities, accounting for 92% of believers. Thus, ethnic minority Protestants in the northern provinces account for a higher percentage than the national average. Out of 233,855 ethnic Protestants, there are only about 5,000 Dao followers along with a few hundred followers of other ethnic groups, the remaining 228,000 followers are the Mieu people, accounting for 97.4% of Protestants. ethnic. This data says many things: Protestantism is almost exclusively responded to by the Mieu people and shows that it is suitable for their psychology, culture, and lifestyle, so they follow the religion. Other ethnic groups, especially Thai, Muong... traditional culture and beliefs are still stable, so they are not very responsive to the Protestant mission.

According to the data of the authorities, by April 2019, the number of Mong people following the religion has reached 270,000 people (including the Hmong community who migrated to the Central Highlands to follow the religion), taking the No. on the

number of followers for other ethnic groups. Compared to the Hmong population in Vietnam at that time, which was 1,393,547 people, Protestants accounted for 19.4% of the population of this ethnic group.

In a period of 4 years (from 2015 to 2019), according to the data of the authorities, the number of Protestants from Nghe An and beyond has increased by 54,533 people, most of which is the growth in the Mieu people. That shows that the process of converting and converting the Mong people is still going on and happening at a fairly fast pace¹².

In contrast to the northern mountainous provinces and where the Mieu people follow the religion, in the plains, the percentage of followers and the development of followers is very low, specifically as follows: Statistics of Protestants in the plains and urban areas The North as of 2019 was only 18,973 people, minus 4,000 Korean and international believers and 236 ethnic minority believers in the provinces, there were only 14,700 Kinh followers, accounting for 5.8% of the total number of believers. Protestant in the area and accounts for only 0.034% of the population of the area. This shows that Protestantism is not highly responsive in the traditional spiritual and cultural environment of the Kinh people in the delta.

Distribution and location of Protestant organizations and denominations

Thus, according to the statistics of the authorities in 2019, in the northern mountainous provinces, the province has the largest number of Protestants with the majority being the Mieu followers, ranked in order from highest to low: Dien Bien ranked first with 63,100 people; Next is Lai Chau with 46,892 people; Lao Cai has 31,644; Ha Giang 21,693; Cao Bang 16,895; Son La 16,495; Bac Kan 14,952; Tuyen Quang 8,509; Thai Nguyen 5,831; Thanh Hoa 4,960; finally Nghe An has 327 followers.

In the delta and urban areas: Hanoi capital occupies first place with about 10,000 followers; Hai Phong 2,640; Hai Duong 2,268; Quang Ninh 1,082; Nam Dinh 981; finally Ninh Binh has 33 followers.¹³

Regarding the position of organizations and denominations: According to the data of the authorities, the Vietnam TTLVN (MB) has a total of 156,807 followers, of which there are only about 7,000 Kinh followers. According to our incomplete statistics, there are 147,450 followers in 13 mountainous provinces and cities alone, so this organization occupies the number one position of Northern Protestants. In second place is the Inter-Christian Church with the number of followers in the northern mountainous provinces alone reaching at least 32,000. In third place is the Evangelical Church with about 15,000 followers. The Vietnam Missionary Federation and the Vietnam Presbyterian Church, the Full Gospel Church, and the Baptist Fellowship are next in line.

However, it is ranked by several believers and most of them are in ethnic minority areas. In the plains and urban areas, the sects ranked high in the highlands sometimes do not play a significant role in the mission of the Kinh people. Here, the number one position is still the VNLVN (MB), followed by the Missionary Union Church in terms of the number of followers and the method of evangelization.

Conclusion

Protestantism has entered Vietnam for more than 100 years. From the very beginning, Hanoi, Hai Phong, and the provinces in the North have been chosen by missionaries as mission sites. However, the results of evangelization in the North of Protestantism were not very impressive, until the 1990s, the Protestant community here was small and did not play a prominent role in socio-cultural life. . The situation began to change in the early 1990s with the fast-growing new Mongol

community of Hmong followers, followed by Protestant denominations and groups coming out from the South to work and reap missionary results. , expand the force. The composition of the sects here is gradually changing in the direction of more diversity and complexity. HTTVN (MB) inherently holds a unique position, but despite its limited capacity, it has met a favorable opportunity to receive the Hmong followers, becoming the church with the largest number of followers. Next are the Protestant denominations and groups active from the South, mostly with Pentecostal and Baptist theology trends emerging from the "Household Church" movement. Then there are Protestant groups following the Vietnamese communities returning home. Recently, according to the pace of opening up, international economic integration, the foreign Protestant community is also present more and more, especially from Korea, a country with a fairly developed Protestant religion.

The distinct difference and contrast between a large number of Mieu followers in the mountainous provinces and the lowland and urban areas with a small number of followers is a clear feature of Protestantism in the northern provinces today. now. Attached to those two areas is the activity of several relatively large Protestant denominations, with strengths interwoven with groups and small Protestant sects operating independently, at times and at times. The appearance of many groups and factions with extremist activities, propagating doctrines that deviate from religious and social ethics... have been posing many problems for the management of religion and society.

It is a diverse picture of the Protestant community in the northern provinces of Vietnam today./.

NOTES:

- 1 The Vietnamese Protestant missionaries translate it into Vietnamese as Hội Truyền giáo Phúc Âm Liên hiệp.
- 2 The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North)' s Charter in 1963, p.3
- 3 Nguyễn Xuân Hùng, Ngô Quốc Đông (2015), *Protestantism in Vietnam: Reality, some Problems, and Solutions*, the Subject of level Ministry (the Vietnamese text), Institute for Religious Studies, VASS.
- 4 The Evangelical Church of Hanoi (2016), *An Outline History of the Establishment and Development of the Evangelical Church of Hanoi (1916-2016)*, Yearbook for the 100th anniversary of Hanoi branch, p. 40. (the Vietnamese text).
- 5 Thiều Thị Hương (2014), *The Establishment and Development of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) - Problems for the Religious Affairs to Protestantism at Present*, MA. Thesis, Hanoi, p. 42. (the Vietnamese text).
- 6 Lê Văn Thiện (2001), *The Church's Line of Development*, internal document, p. 25.
- 7 Nguyễn Xuân Hùng (1992), Pentecost "speaking in tongues", in *Religions and Beliefs in Hanoi*, archived Institute for Religious Studies, VASS (the Vietnamese text).
- 8 Đỗ Mạnh Cường (2016), *An Outline History of the Establishment and Development of the Evangelical Church of Hanoi (1916-2016)*, Yearbook for the 100th anniversary of Hanoi branch, p. 46. (the Vietnamese text).
- 9 Nguyễn Ngọc Bảo, *Đảm bảo quyền tự do tôn giáo: Bước chuyển tích cực* (To Guarantee the Rights of Religious Freedom: a Possitive Shift), <http://btgcp.gov.vn>, access December 7, 2019.
- 10 The Government Committee of Religious Affairs (2020), *Protestantism in the northern provinces of Vietnam: Problems for the Management*, Special report, Hanoi.
- 11 The Government Committee of Religious Affairs (2020), *Protestantism in the northern provinces of Vietnam: Problems for the Management*, *ibid*.
- 12 Data was used from census sources in 2019 and the Government Committee for Religious Affairs.
- 13 The data were collected from provincé and cities reports by the author.

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