

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE RELIGIOUS LIFE IN VIETNAM NOWADAYS

VŨ VĂN HẬU

The writer seeks to use his studies to clarify the impact of globalization on Vietnam's social life in general and religious life in particular, underlining prevailing trends of religious life in Vietnam, including religious secularization, religious modernization, emergence of a neo-religious phenomenon, religious diversification, ways new religions are formed, and characteristics of the neo-religious phenomenon. Subsequently, the writer affirms the need for both theoretical and practical research on religions, in order to contribute to the improvement of policies of the Communist Party and the State of Vietnam regarding religions.

Although the concept of globalization is widely used in the social arena, there are still disagreements on its connotation. In terms of content, it is commonly agreed that globalization is the expansion of the social space all around the globe. If so defined, globalization started in the 15th century when Christopher Columbus arrived in America and developed European countries were making their mass conquest of the rest of the world. Later, since the mid-19th century, European nations would continue their conquest of Asian countries, turning this vast resourceful land into their colonies and markets.

After World War II, the collapse of colonialism, the national and political independence of a number of Asian, African, and Latin American countries, the formation of the system of socialist countries (led by the Soviet Union), and

the formation of the system of capitalist countries (led by the USA and West-European countries) were the manifestations of the third stage of globalization.

Today, however, globalization is taking place in every aspect of society. It is a result of the development of production forces, or, more specifically, the science and technology evolution and the market economy. Globalization is the inevitable effect of civilization. Following that unavoidable trend, each country, regardless of level of development, has to integrate and find a position in the flow of history.

Vietnam is located in the meeting place of East and West and by the side of the two great civilizations of India and China. So it has quickly received international impact and has its own features in the international integration process.

Nowadays, Vietnam has to withstand the considerable impact of globalization in every aspect of society, including the religious life. In fact, the evolution and changes of the religious life in Vietnam are firmly attached to the changes of social existence and globalization, which is shown in the following prevailing trends.

First, secularization

Religious secularization is closely attached to the development and advancement of society. Nowadays it is the prevailing trend that rules over the religious life in Vietnam and in the whole world. Scientists have agreed on the basic content of secularization. It is the entry into the life of any religion through participation in non-religious activities including social, ethnic, educational, and medical causes, all to help the community. Secularization is realized in the struggles of radical members of each religion to abolish out-of-date tenets and severe regulations and to attain solidarity between religious and non-religious people. Secularization is also popular in industrialized countries, where religions are losing their significant roles among urban citizens and the youth. Each person's life depends on himself rather than on super-nature. Secularization can also be found in the tendency for people to seemingly escape from certain religion, or to have only a vague sense of religion (1, p. 189-191).

Secularization with the content discussed above has been taking place in Vietnam for a long time, but it has only been seen clearly for a few years now. However, due to historical conditions and the changing socioeconomic situation, secularization in Vietnam is different from that in other countries, especially Western ones.

While in the West secularization can be

seen from the fact that fewer people go to church though they still believe in God or a Supreme Being and still see themselves as being religious, in Vietnam, more and more people are participating in religious activities. If in the West, people seem to part from their religions, Vietnamese people are likely to be growing attached to a particular religion. While Western people pay more attention to religious tenets to analyze conservative and out-of-date ideas, to improve them, or meditate on new theological ideas based on personal experience, the Vietnamese tend to simplify theoretical issues and concentrate on practice and the application of theory into life. Moreover, secularization in Vietnam is also realized in the fact that religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Muslim, etc. are not only involved in religious but also in social affairs including political, healthcare, and educational activities and the eradication of poverty.

Second, religious modernization

According to Marxist theory, religions are the reflection of social existence. The religious world is the reflection of the real world. When the economic foundation of the society changes, religions sooner or later will change too. "Each religion will change in accordance with each period of economic development of the nation which follows that religion." (2, Vol.3, p.17)

Modernization is a historical process that originated in Europe. It started with the industrial evolution and expanded to other areas to become a common trend of the world. To adapt to the modernization process, religions have also changed. The most remarkable change was the

emergence of Protestantism. With radical tenets, rituals, and organization and more flexible regulations, the existence and development of Protestantism proves that it is adaptable to the development of modern capitalism. Under such conditions, other religions have also changed.

As the features and the development of different religions vary, the methods, content, and levels of modernization are different. However, there are common points as follows:

- Modernize internal matters related to the content of religious tenets and their explanation, religious regulations, rituals and religious practice, the organization and activities of the Church.
- Modernize external matters related to the social theory and the relation and attitude of religions towards social issues and relations with other religions and non-religious people, etc.
- Modernize means for carrying on missionary work and religious organization, etc.

Vietnam, facing religious modernization in the world and its impact as well as economic and social changes, has seen a gradual modernization of religions at different levels, to conform to the current situation. Modernization of different religions in Vietnam not only differs in the content, methods, and levels of modernization, but also varies in different areas, or even in different parts of one religion. Although religious modernization did not start at the same time, it took place mainly in the last few decades when the country was changing

from a bureaucratic central economy to a market economy.

In the time of a market economy, a noticeable point in religious modernization is the application of scientific achievements and modern technology, including some scientific theories and means for carrying on missionary work. Some religious officials have taken advantage of new scientific theories to prove their tenets or found new explanations for their religious viewpoint to suit modern sciences. Many modern media such as electric lights, loudspeakers, amplifiers, television, video, cine-projectors, etc. have been used to improve the efficiency of missionary work and religious organization.

Religious modernization of religions is the response of religions to current changes. It is not until recently that religious modernization has taken place. In fact, each religion has changed itself to conform to changes of the society. The market economy and globalization only hasten the modernization of each religion. Particularly, modern technology has been used to serve missionary work and religious organization. It has now become an indispensable part of religious modernization in our country.

Third, religious diversification

It can be said that religious diversification is an unavoidable effect of globalization. As globalization is the gradual expansion of territory, people are in touch with not only the religions of their nation but also acquire other religions actively and critically. Religious diversification results in the replacement of a traditional religion if it does not meet the requirement of the

masses (due to limitations of the tenets and rituals, etc.). During this period, people's faith is fading, and in some cases, one person may follow many religions at the same time. History witnessed the split of Protestantism from Roman Catholicism in the 16th century. Protestantism was then divided into smaller and smaller sects, some of which are quite different from their early roots. This trend explains why at present there are a considerable number of Buddhist followers in Europe. It is a manifestation of religious diversification.

In Vietnam, due to geographic conditions, the features of religions are different from those in Europe. Polytheism seems to be very popular here. In the religious life, deification of the gods of stone, tree, river, and water and angels is prominent. Personification of natural factors is not only found in the name of the gods, such as Cao Son, Tan Vien, Cao Lo, Phu Dong and Thach Quang, but also in the worshipping of stones in the temple of tutelary gods of villages. Many gods originate from waters such as Long Do, Linh Lang, Hoang Le Mat, Truong Hong and Truong Hat. Gods whose home is in a banyan tree or cotton tree are often found in the Northern delta.

Apart from the existing bloodline communities (clans), the development of agriculture led to the formation of politico-social communities (territories) such as village, commune, country, etc. Ancestral worship emerged, and the gods who had helped the family, clan, village, and country, were worshipped according to agricultural production cycle. The ideas of the God of the Sky and the Earth also

appeared. God is the one who seems to be aloft but close, who can punish or reward and save people from dangers and difficulties.

Besides those various forms of the religious life, there are many other primary religions of the peoples in the national community, such as Totem and magic.

Vietnam also owes its religious diversification to the import of major religions like Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. These three religions were introduced to Vietnam very early and have been living together in peace for over 2,000 years, becoming an essential element in the Vietnamese culture that is known as the phenomenon of "Three religions". It was the combination of these religions that created the characteristics of the Vietnamese. In each Vietnamese man, there is rationality of Confucianism, the spirit of Buddhism, and the sacred quietness of Taoism. The combination and supplementation of these three religions have enriched the rituals, tenets, and worshipping practice of each other. This was the cultural assets when Vietnam came into contact with the Western civilization and when Christianity was introduced into Vietnam. Once Christianity entered Vietnam, it had to change itself through the cultural integration of the Vatican community II to conform to the religious diversification in Vietnam.

Religious diversification can be seen most clearly in religious practice. One follower of a religion can take part in various religious activities. Many people who are considered to be monotheistic also

participate in religious practice of other religions. They believe that besides the God they worship, other supernatural factors can also bring them luck. The combination of religions in religious teachings and practice derives from agricultural dwellers' simple conception that if you worship gods, you will be protected.

Therefore, it can be said that religious diversification is a prominent trend in Vietnam nowadays. On one hand, as social space is expanding, cultural contact, including religious contact, is on the rise. On the other hand, religious diversification, which is a result of a tolerant culture and the diversification of races, is an existing feature of the nation's culture. It is this feature that creates religious diversification in Vietnam nowadays.

Fourth, emergence of neo-religious phenomenon

Religions normally emerge in a transitional time of the society, when people's beliefs are in a crisis. In late 20th century and early 21st century, the world witnessed dramatic changes, like the move from an industrial to a post-industrial society, the collapse of the socialist pattern in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, and great achievements of the science and technology evolution. Those changes resulted in significant changes in the social life and the religious life. Beliefs that were once strongly held may have become shaky. People may have become skeptical of religious teachings. Consequently, people had to find a religion of their own. This is the basis of the emergence of new religion.

Studying the development of this trend,

researchers identify the foundation of the emergence of new religions as follows:

- New religions emerge as a consequence of the split from a major religion by understanding God and His teachings in their own way;
- New religions emerge round an existing religion in combination with elements of other religions;
- A new religion may emerge based on the ideas of the doomsday, which is a part of various religions, the Millennium day, the denial of the world or a new heaven, etc;

With that foundation, religions often have the following features.

- A religion emerges with millions of followers and is not restricted by the borders of a country. For example, the New Age movement is expanding to Christian countries; the Soka Gakkai religion, founded by Tunexabaro Makiguchi and currently led by Dikada, with 10 million followers, assets of trillions of USA and branches all over the world, is now an influential political force in Japan; and the Moon religion, founded by Sun Myung in Korea, which is an extremist Protestant sect, has about eight million followers, etc.
- A new religion is formulated with small scale and various numbers of followers. Some religions want to deny the existing world to lead an introverted, debauched, or eccentric life such as the Jim Jones (People's temple) which launched a mass suicide in Guyana in 1978 with 918 people dead, or the David religion of David Khoresh, with a mass suicide in 1993.
- New religions emerge from non-

religious activities, such as health training, yoga and Falun Gong (China), etc.

Each person may have his own explanation for the emergence of neo-religious phenomenon. Some people think that this is a negative response to the modern life. In many cases, it shows us religious conflicts, political and social disorders. Others regard this as a result of religious democracy and the discontent with the monopoly of one religion. Still others call this a serious degradation, or at least an abnormal phenomenon, of religious life. Regardless of what people think, the emergence of a neo-religious phenomenon is an existing subjective trend in religious life recently.

In Vietnam, the emergence of a neo-religious phenomenon has its own features. On one hand, in Vietnam it started much later than in the world. On the other hand, due to the undeveloped agricultural economy, this phenomenon is purely religious and takes place dispersedly. It is not a radical movement as it is in other countries. Moreover, religious groups in Vietnam do not pay attention to institutionalization, but focus on attracting as many followers as possible. Besides, the emergence of a neo-religious phenomenon in Vietnam is due to internal and external factors, the latter of which has not been properly "digested". Thus, confusion is often found in names, tenets, and rituals.

According to the statistics of some studies, in Vietnam, at present, there are about 50 new religions, eight of which were imported from other countries. The 42 remaining religions are Thanh Hai vo thuong su, Tam To thanh hien, O mo to giao, Bahai, Long Hoa Di Lac, Ngoc Phat

Ho Chi Minh, Chan tu tam kinh, Dao Chan Khong and Vo Vi phap, etc.

In conclusion, the emergence of a neo-religious phenomenon is an indispensable result of social change, such as globalization, intellectual economy, and the development of science and technology. This phenomenon exerts impact not only on religious life but also on societal life. Due to globalization and the market economy, religious life in Vietnam has new features that are completely different from those of the previous period. In such a situation, it is high time we studied the theoretical and practical issues to lay the scientific foundation for the government's activities, which help to improve the Party and the Government's policies on religious matters.

REFERENCES

1. Dang Nghiem Van. Theory of religions and religious situations in Vietnam (first publication). H.: Chinh tri quoc gia (National Political Publishing House), 2003.
2. Institute of social sciences information. Religions and the modern life. Vol. 3. H.: 1998.
3. Do Quang Hung. Emergence of neo-religious phenomenon – some theoretical and practical issues. (p. 233-258). Book: About religions and religions in Vietnam. H.: Chinh tri quoc gia (National Political Publishing House), 2004.
4. Vo Minh Tuan. Emergence of neo-religious phenomenon (p. 436-469). Book: About religions and beliefs in Vietnam nowadays. (Prof. Dang Nghiem Van, chief author). H.: Khoa hoc xa hoi (Social sciences), 1996.