

**TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE
IN THE ASPECT OF FAITH IN VIETNAM
FROM 1990 TO PRESENT**

***Abstract:** In this paper, the author firstly examines the general situation of religious faith since the Renewal of religious policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the State of Vietnam from 1990 to the present. This section indicates the increase or decrease of those who identify themselves belonged to a religion. Next, the article analyzes religious faith through some specific religious cases. Through sociological data, it shows the general situation that whether religions with a strong institution or not they have been influenced by socio-economic changes, especially the secularization. And the attachment of believers to different religious beliefs in religious organizations. Finally, the article addresses some current trends of changing religious faith through dimensions such as religious subjects and the object of worship; the process of conversion as well as changes in diversity, integration, and pragmatism in the faith of the subjects themselves.*

***Keywords:** Transformation; faith; Catholicism; Buddhism; Protestantism.*

Introduction

As a result of historical circumstances, during the period from 1954 to 1975 in the North and the period after reunification from 1975 to 1990, people rarely expressed their religious beliefs. Since

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1945, the Constitution of Vietnam has confirmed respect the freedom of belief and religion of the people¹. However, there were differences of viewpoints between those who believed in a religion and those who followed traditional beliefs. Phenomena of folk beliefs have not flourished as well as they were considered to be superstitious. However, since the Renovation (Đổi Mới)², it seems that the repression of religious feelings and its expressions have the opportunity to manifest more strongly among the people due to the changes of the State's views and legal policies. These manifestations reflected in terms religious faith with important changes.

Religious faith is a relationship between human beings and sacred objects (God, Buddha, Allah). This relationship is determined by belief's level of the subject (humankind) with those sacred objects. It can also be regulated by the persistence or breaking of the relationship. It is also the state of perception of subjects about the properties of sacred objects at different times such as the omnipotence of God, the presentation of Buddha in the contemporary context. Based on the relationship, the changes in terms of the religious faith of certain individuals or communities can be seen. They are also the moral, ethical practices of believers through psychology, worship, and social activities. However, the sociological surveys with questionnaires and a professional way of getting information help to determine the quality or level of beliefs of an individual or a community. In this article, the author relies on data of religious organizations as well as recent sociological surveys of the Institute for Religious Studies in order to analyze the transformation of religious life in terms of belief.

1. Transformation of religious faith: A viewpoint of the general situation

The change should be viewed in comparison in terms of time. The author chose the promulgation of Resolution No.24-NQ/TW dated October 16, 1990, of the Politburo on strengthening religious

affairs in the new situation as the starting point of research because it has led to a change of awareness as well as the policy on religion. This general transformation was noted among people who claimed to belong to a religious group; the variety of beliefs in addition to traditional types and modes of expression of beliefs, such as: worshiping practices, building worship facilities.

Currently, about 25% of the Vietnamese population officially identifies themselves as belonging to a certain religious organization. On average, since Doi Moi, the number of religious followers in Vietnam has increased by about 1.87 times. The number of followers of all religions increases each year, however, the degree varies with each religion. In the period from 2000 to 2017, the number of followers increased faster than the previous period from 1990 to 2000³. And the period after 1990, the number of followers increased much faster than the period from 1975 to 1990. According to statistics of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, in 2013, the whole country had 24 million believers of all religions (2.4 times higher than 1975); 83.000 dignitaries (2.7 times compared to 1975); 25.000 worshiping establishments (1.2 times compared to 1975); 120 churches or organizations (more than 3 times, most Protestant denominations)⁴.

In 2003, there were about 17.4 million believers, accounting for 21.8% of the population, 15 state-recognized religious organizations belonging to 6 religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Caodaiism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, Islam⁵. As a result of the unrecognized religious organizations, the number of believers and dignitaries has not been fully counted.

After 10 years of implementation of Resolution No.24-NQ/TW, 23 religious organizations were recognized and registered by the State authority, the total of recognized religious organizations was 38 religious organizations and 01 sect, 14 religions such as Buddhism has the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam; Catholicism has the Catholic Church in Vietnam; Protestantism has 10

organizations or denominations; Hoa Hao Buddhism has Hoa Hao Buddhist Church; Caodaism has 10 organizations and 01 sect; Islam has 6 organizations; Cham Brahmanism has 2 organizations; Mormon has an Interim Representative Committee of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Vietnam; Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa has Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa religious organizations; Tịnh độ Cư sĩ Phật Hội Việt Nam has Tịnh độ Cư sĩ church of Vietnam; Baha'i has Baha'i Religious Council of Vietnam; Nam tông Minh Sư religion has Nam tông Minh Sư Church; Minh Lý religion- Tam Tông shrine has Minh Lý religion- Tam Tông shrine church; Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương religion does not have an administrative system, just to be recognized the Board of each pagoda⁶. By 2019, there are 16 religions, and more than 40 religious organizations were recognized or registered for activities by the State.

According to the Report on 10 years of implementation of Resolution N^o.25: “Currently, it is estimated about 95% of the country’s population has beliefs and religions. There are approximately 24.3 million religious believers, accounting for 27% of the population, an increase of 6.86 million followers (39.4%) compared to 2003; nearly 53.000 dignitaries; 133.700 assistants for dignitaries; 27.900 worship facilities. In which, the fastest increase is Buddhism with 4.7 million followers; Catholicism increased by 1.1 million followers; Protestantism increased by 350.000 followers; Caodaism increased by 275.000 followers; Hoa Hao Buddhism increased by 174.000 followers; The number of followers of other religions has gradually grown. The increase of religious followers due to the following reasons: a mechanical increase of 12.5% (the country’s population was 80 million people in 2003, over 90 million people at the present); Increased by “legalizing” of 23 newly recognized religious organizations and registered for activities, so the statistics are more complete (with over 1 million people, nearly 6%). Without the rise for mechanical

reasons and “legalizing the previous religions’ followers”, the number of followers increased by 3.7 million (about 21.2%)”⁷.

The aforementioned figures have reflected the fact that the number of people identifying themselves as believers of religion has been increased, especially since 1990. This means that the proportion of people who have religious faith has also risen over time. That reality shows that religious life has taken a remarkable place for the Vietnamese although in modern society with the rapid growth of the economy. Religious faith has not disappeared or declined, it still exists with vivid manifestations in social life.

The increase of religious faith in contemporary society by some of the following reasons:

Firstly, it is the comprehensive reform of the Party and the State of Vietnam in socio-economic policies, including renewing the perception of religion in terms of theory, and law. It has created favorable conditions for religious organizations to develop better than in the previous period. Since 1990, many religions and religious organizations have been recognized and registered for activities by the State of Vietnam. The previous, stable and qualified religious organizations have carried out legal procedures for registration and recognition of their legal status; elaborated and revised the organizational charter towards attachment to the nation. The diversity of structures and activities of religious organizations has met the need for religious faith.

Secondly, in the period after 1975, as a result of subjective and objective reasons, some religious organizations did not operate as before 1975, some activities were limited⁸. At that time, the religious organizations’ activities were mostly carried out internally with a few interactive, social-oriented activities. However, the period after 1990, with the renewal of the Party and the State, many religious activities were normalized, then the activities became officially and religious faith was openly expressed. The policies of

the Party and the State of Vietnam always respect freedom of beliefs and religion of the people. Therefore, people openly declared their faith and affiliation to a religion.

This situation shows that the religious need among the majority of the population is a fact that must be respected. It is one of the human rights. Being recognized and protected by law, they openly admitted their religion and faith. It also created positive social effects such as links and sharing social responsibility among different religious groups. Recently, the 2013 Constitution has specially emphasized and affirmed the freedom of religion as a legitimate right of people.

Thirdly, in contemporary society, there are many intertwined relationships, as well as, many broken relationships. Therefore, religious faith is still a necessary fulcrum for many people. For an individual, religious faith also addresses many other existential needs, or answers basic questions that the material aspects of modern life sometimes cannot answer. Religious faith creates common moral communities that can resist to the negative aspects of the market economy, depression of morality, as well as negative secular norm. Simultaneously, it also contributes to preserving the traditional values against the challenges. Thus, religious faith is necessary for many individuals and religious organizations among other secular values. In other words, religions with faith in sacred objects still have a crucial status in contemporary human society.

To understand religious faith, it is necessary to observe the religious activities of believers, although in many cases, religious activities are not necessarily proportional to the quality of faith and religious morality. Since the Renovation of Policy on Religion (1990), religious activities have rapidly increased: “Two sociological surveys of the Institute for Religious Studies (Viện Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo) showed that religious behavior of an

individual was 3.21 in the non-Christian community; 2.07 in the Christian community (it was 1.8 in Japan)”⁹.

For believers of non-institutionalized religion, how does the transformation of religious faith work? How about their spiritual life? Are there any absolute atheists? In fact, the majority of Vietnamese people worship their ancestors. This proportion accounts for more than 70% of the population. However, there are significant changes in the aspect of the religious mentality of the majority of the Vietnamese in comparison to the previous period. These changes can be seen in the following dimensions:

First, a spiritual life expansion manifested through the restoration of genealogy along with the building of the family’s temple across the country.

Second, the religious facilities were restored, embellished, rebuilt such as pagodas, temples, and shrines. In many villages, villagers contributed to constructing their pagoda although they were not completely Buddhists.

Third, people generally follow a certain religion when they are old or retired. For the majority of the Vietnamese, their consciousness is often towards Buddhism. Therefore, the number of people who have feelings for Buddhism or the mentality of Buddhism can be several tens of millions of people (according to official statistics, there are about 14 million of Buddhists in Vietnam). According to Đỗ Quang Hưng: “It seems that Buddhism has never promoted its role in society as it is doing since 1975: The number of Upasaka (laymen) has increased, especially middle-aged women, retired people who are ‘happy at the Buddhist temple’, especially the association of Buddhists to participate in social charity; the trend of secularization, Buddhism goes into life and vice versa, when “religious consciousness returns” people come to the Buddhist temple. In Vietnamese houses, besides the altar of ancestors, there is an altar of Buddha. Although the rise of

Buddhism in a popular way, its influence on society was very diverse, quite profound. Buddhist associations, Buddhist families (adolescents and the youth) have a status in society. Moreover, the “religious awakening”, the recovery and development of the religious system, and the return of religious and spiritual consciousness have led to fundamental changes in spiritual life in recent years”¹⁰.

Fourth, there are new religious movements, superstitions, taking advantage of religion. Besides its negative characteristics, it reflects that the Vietnamese’s religious life is diverse. The rate of people worships deities is very high. Many of them overly believe in the supernatural that has led to the abuse of religion.

In general, some comments on the religious faith of the Vietnamese since the Renovation can be indicated as follows:

1) The relationship between the Vietnamese people and sacred objects has increased in comparison to the period before 1990. This relationship is diverse in the aspect of content, form, meaning as well as expressions. It also reflects the fact that religions in Vietnam are undergoing a dramatic transformation. On the one hand, they are preserving the traditional belief values, on the other hand, they are constantly adapting to modern life in order to spread and express beliefs in society.

2) The feeling, or sentiment of religion, belief of the Vietnamese has been manifested through the construction, repair, and restoration of worship facilities, such as mausoleums, temples, shrines, cemeteries. However, this situation is also posing many different issues about culture, lifestyle, devotion to the divine. It requires research to acknowledge the evolutions of the Vietnamese spiritual life at present in order to have appropriate management policies.

2. Transformation of religious faith: some specific cases

The transformation of religious faith will be presented through

the examination of the change of the object of worship (the sacredness), the status of the sacred object for believers as well as in their perception, and the change between the level of faith and moral, ethical practices to preserve, to express that faith.

2.1. Catholicism¹¹

In general, Christianity and Islam are closely organized religions with doctrine, and a long-standing morality, so the sacred objects of these religions are always protected, respected, and supremacy. Because the fundamental dogma of religion is almost unchanged. And the dogmatic core remains the same. The dogmatic change often leads to conflicts, divisions, even new religions, for example, the emergence of Protestantism in the 16th century. The Catholic theology and teachings always consider God as the origin of all things as well as man, Jesus himself as the embodiment of the perfect One, the absolute model of the values of Truth, Goodness, and Aesthetics. This perception still prevails over the centuries. However, the perceptions of believers can change, because they live in different cultural, geographical, economic spaces, customs.

In reality, although there are many changes in the socio-economic situation compared to the past, the Vietnamese Catholics generally have a steady faith in Catholic truth and believe in the Revelations. Before the secularization, the image of God still has an important position in the hearts of many believers. The survey's results of the Institute for Religious Studies in 2013 in 5 the Central Highlands' provinces with 399 questionnaires of Catholics, initially showed that the basic faith of this religion has been credited with a high rate of respondents, such as: 98.7% of respondents believed that humans were born of God; the Eucharist for communion with God was believed by 100% of the respondents; the respondents believed that there are demons (94%); Original sin (97.2%); Life in Heaven (97.7%); Marian Apparitions (97.5%); a miracle (96.2%)¹².

There were 92.2% of Catholics in the survey sample conducted in the Central Highlands who regularly participated in catechesis. This religious lifestyle has had a strong impact on children in Catholic families. As a result, 92.7% of the Catholic families' children participated fully in catechism classes.

Through the survey sample, the number of Catholics answered to attend church regularly 97.7% (because of religious faith 96.0%), 86.5% recite prayers regularly at home. Compare with other religions: 82.8% of Buddhist respondents answered that they regularly go to the Buddhist temples, 16.4% sometimes go to the Buddhist temples. 89.6% of Protestant respondents answered to attend the meeting and worshipping God every week, 10.4% sometimes attended the meeting, worshipping God¹³.

In the 2017 survey of the research on Hoạt động tín ngưỡng, tôn giáo trong gia đình Việt Nam hiện nay [Religious activities of the Vietnamese families at present], 299 Catholics were asked the question: Do you practice religious teachings? 291 respondents answered that they followed the teachings, accounting for 97.3%¹⁴.

Catholicism with its strict organization, the doctrine has created a community cohesion of believers. If a Catholic makes misperceptions about the belief that they have proclaimed, they will immediately be warned by relatives such as parents, brothers, and then dignitaries. Moreover, they are urged by conscience to confess. In addition to the family, members of the Catholic community are also the observers who control their communities' individuals. In particular, the community is closely tied to the relatives and traditional Vietnamese villages. In recent years, marriages with people of different religions must be accepted by all family and community members in some Catholic regions in the Northern Delta. Without the consent of the priest, no one attended the marriage, except for relatives. It means that marriages have been boycotted by the community. It is also a highly controlling

institution because many people think that marriages may lead Catholics to lose tradition, fade, or change their faith.

However, despite its well-organized structure, as a result of the rise of the secular values, the Catholic Church did not seem to create control, or a perfect institution to maintain believers' faith. Faith can be changed in a new context. Faith fading has happened in the past and at the present. "Faith fading" is a folk term to refer to a situation in which an individual or a group no longer enthusiastically or firmly maintains their belief in the sacred object and religious practices to express that belief. Faith fading is also the removal or reduction of God's influence on the daily activities of believers. In the past, it seemed that believers lived in a Christian environment with homogeneous patterns. Freedom of conscience and the right to choose moral values outside of Christianity was rarely mentioned¹⁵. At that time, religious life was associated with religious practices, so there were many martyrs in the past. It was a consequence of the religious restrictions of various political institutions, however, it also showed that protecting faith was appreciated. Religious life was associated with the maintenance patterns of faith as well as the practices of Catholicism. In the stable village structure by belief and kinship, it is also difficult for Catholics to escape from a cultural and religious context. Then, with the progress of science and technology as well as the trend of secularization, the reference of life to God gradually lost its place. J. Baubérot stated that: "God was a conviction of society in the past, God becomes the personal conviction at present"¹⁶. He indicated that: The decision to believe or not to believe depends on personal preferences. In France as in any free society, competition becomes the rule and many hobbies called alternative religions everywhere such as health worship, sports passion, enthusiastic in political struggle¹⁷. The elimination of the importance of God led some Catholics to no longer uphold the moral values of their religion, some of them converted to other religions. Therefore, the

evangelization of the Vietnamese Catholic Church today focuses on faith fading people in addition to missionary to those who do not believe in God.

Besides a decline in sacredness, there is a recession in God's role in personal life. Faith fading often happens among young believers. In some places, the number of young believers who go to church has also declined dramatically. Some young believers attend church because they keep the family tradition. A Catholic cloisterer described the current situation of faith fading: "Many young people today have a superficial faith life. Having had the opportunity to interact with young people studying marriage seminary, it was unbelievable that the majority did not know anything about the basic doctrine, even the daily recitations. They are believers (originated from their family) they seem to follow the religion that mainly makes their parents happy, they do not aware that they are Christians. A young person said: Going to church, praying, and reciting is just a habit as well as pressure from family members. Thus, at present, the faith of the youth is declining sharply. In some parishes, the number of young people attending catechism gradually decreases. Young people are no longer attending the weekly Mass. And if they do "they sit like a motorbike driver" or gather in groups to talk, smoke until the Mass finishes. A mother said: "I have to warn my son when attending Mass, he replied: "Why do you go to church? It needs to believe in God, it is enough. Do you know, my friends don't go to church but their families are rich"¹⁸.

The causes of faith fading are focused on the following reasons:

First, young people are living in a world of diverse cognition and sources of information. Thus, they may realize that Catholicism is not the unique value system that provides people salvation as well as the dynamics of life and the way to understand the world and human life. Besides, there are other values and theories that are

equally attractive to young people. The Church has always warned about the dangers of secularization that can attract the young, lead to losing their religious character, such as hedonism, materialism; disbelief in sacredness.

Second, they are always contradicted between their livelihoods and their religious identity. Obviously, the teaching of religious traditions has declined in many Vietnamese Catholic families compared to decades ago. For example, many families no longer teach catechism to their children, or morning and evening praying is also less important. In addition to the decrease of family tradition and the rise of personal freedom, working for livelihood has led to an interruption in the transmission of Catholic values among generations.

Third, as mentioned above, teaching catechesis at the church as well as liturgical rites is less creative, obedient to the rules, does not create an attraction for young people. When participation as an obligation, the sacredness of religion diminished. And the church (the presence of God, the house of God) is no longer attracted them.

However, the aforementioned comment is just one trend in the faith transformation of Catholics. In fact, the fading of the relationship between human beings and the Sacredness did not only happen among Catholics, it also occurred with believers of other religions. The impacts such as science, technology, and secularization did not only affect a particular religion. Differences are different effects in each religion because each religious organization has its own institutions and ways to maintain the faith of believers. In fact, despite faith fading, Catholics rarely change their religion or convert to another religion. They are different from believers of traditional beliefs, as well as of some Protestant denominations¹⁹.

2.2. Protestantism, Buddhism, Islam

As mentioned above, this article uses the data of the 2013 survey

of Catholicism, Protestantism in the Central Highlands. The data of the survey as follows:

The majority of Protestants in the survey confirmed their deep faith in the basics of this religion. They believed in God Almighty who created the universe, and mankind (99.0%); Heaven and Hell of Fire (97.1%); demons are real and still exist (83.3%); God returns and there are signs that the day is coming (93.0%); miracles still happen every day (64.85%); the Bible was inspired by God and infallible (95.0%).

Protestants may do not understand doctrine in depth under a theological perspective, especially for new followers. However, most of them still keep the basic principles of religious practice and the moral rules of their religion. For example, they did not worship deities (polytheism), they were faithful to their God. They regularly read, study the Bible, and apply what they understand through its teachings and the dignitaries' explanations to their activities and work. In general, for many Protestant minorities, Protestantism has led them to significantly transform their way of life, to adopt a different form of religious cultural activities from their own traditional religion and culture. Protestants who converted for a long time rarely came back to traditional beliefs, or to other religions such as Catholicism or Buddhism, although they switched from one denomination to another. In general, the Protestants' faith is relatively stable towards God.

According to the 2017 survey by the Institute for Religious Studies, for the question: "Do you practice the teachings at home?" 251/267 Protestants answered that they followed the Protestant doctrine, accounting for 94% of the respondents²⁰.

In the 2013 survey by the Institute for Religious Studies in the Central Highlands for Buddhism (Mahayana), 82.3% of the Buddhists said that Buddha is an enlightened one; 72.5% thought that Buddha is the one who saves human beings. In addition, the

Buddhist faith in the Central Highlands manifested through the purpose of Buddhism. The greatest desire of the majority of Buddhist ethnic minorities is perfecting their personal morality. It shows that Buddhist ethical values have had a positive impact on social life. According to the survey's result, pragmatic purposes such as praying for fortune, success was rarely practiced by Buddhists. The majority of Buddhists in the Central Highlands have had a correct understanding of Buddha: an enlightened one, a savior. Listening to Dharma was also one of the main activities of Buddhists in the Central Highlands. It helped to affirm that the deep and correct faith of the Buddhist followers. Most Buddhists in the Central Highlands participates in this activity (listening to Dharma), 71.7% regularly participated²¹.

According to the 2017 survey of the Institute for Religious Research for Buddhism (Mahayana), for the question "Do you practice the teachings at home?", 277/315 Buddhists answered that they practiced the teachings, accounting for 87.9% of the respondents²².

In general, most Buddhists who were questioned have had a basic understanding of their religion. However, Buddhism was acculturated with traditional beliefs such as Mother Goddess worship, deities worship in the process of propagation and development in Vietnam. As a result, although Buddhists have had an understanding of the basic teachings, many of them have had a polytheistic mind, they did not absolutely believe in one God like Muslims or Protestants. It caused the burning of too much votive paper, superstition in some festivals and activities of Buddhists.

For the case of Islam, the results of the sociological survey on Activities of beliefs and religions in the Vietnamese family at present/ Hoạt động tín ngưỡng, tôn giáo trong gia đình Việt Nam hiện nay conducted in 2017 showed that Muslims adhered to the

daily prayers. Over 93% of respondents practiced 5 rites of praying a day. The rite can take place at a mosque or a private house. A person could not practice 5 rites of praying a day because of illness, hospitalization or traveling²³.

Based on the survey results, 57/57 Muslims (100%) practiced according to the Qu'ran²⁴.

In general, Muslims have a strong confession of faith with Allah. They absolutely adhere to the practices according to the Qu'ran. Perhaps the Cham Muslims in Vietnam rarely renounce their religion through marriage. In contrast, all non-Muslims have to convert to Islam when they married the Cham Muslims.

However, there is no exception, despite the strong connection between ethnicity and religion, some young Muslims who do not regularly come to mosques to pray on solemnities. Some employees in enterprises also cannot practice rites because of their work²⁵. Although it is a very strict religion, it can be said that there are still "faith fading" followers.

3. Some trends of religious faith transformation at present

As mentioned above, the relationship between human beings and sacred objects has been manifested fundamentally through religious faith. Faith is expressed through religious practices and the application of faith values to living activities. Thus, it can be said that faith is closely related to subjectivity (believers). Some trends of changing religious faith under the aspect of believers will be presented. However, I just highlight some fundamental trends.

3.1. The trend of converting religious faith

This trend indicates the conversion of believers. They believed in a sacred object, then gave up that belief and converted to another sacred object. This conversion of religious faith often leads to many changes in religious activities, behaviors, lifestyle. The cosmology

and worldview of believers are referenced by the sacred object that believers have just accepted. It is also dictated by religious traditions. This trend is clearly seen through the typical cases presented below.

The Hmong, Dao, and some other ethnic minorities have abandoned their traditional beliefs to become Catholics, Protestants. This is no exception for Kinh people, many people have also renounced their traditional beliefs to follow Protestantism or Catholicism.

Some people switched from one Protestant denomination to another Protestant denomination. In fact, they still believe in God, they have changed to other organizations and activities.

The phenomenon of the Cham Bà ni have changed to practice Islam²⁶.

Although some Kinh people follow the ancestral worship, they take refuge in the Three Jewels, become Buddhists when they get old or retire. In this case, it is not necessary to give up traditional beliefs, they worship their ancestors as well as to be Buddhists²⁷.

Some marriages between Kinh people and the Cham Muslims, Kinh people and Catholics, or Protestants force them to join the religion of their wife (or husband). They have to participate in the religious practices of their spouse. Despite converting their beliefs, practicing new religious rituals, however, it seems that only Muslims can keep these new believers due to the regulations on their ethnic and religious characteristics²⁸.

Muslims rarely converted. In fact, many people are believers of Catholicism and Protestantism, they still have parallel beliefs (the mind of worshiping ancestors, gods, and Buddha). It can be said that they have plural religious beliefs. In some cases, even though they are registered as a specific religious believer (through marriage), as a result of their pluralistic consciousness, they tend to

have other religious beliefs, many of them become a “faith fading” believer, they even give up religion.

The transformation, mixing, and integration of a number of beliefs to create a new belief system, it has led to the formation of new religions in Vietnam since 1990.

The tendency of converting religious beliefs showed the reality of religious diversity. There has been a missionary competition among different religious organizations. Then, it has created religious zones or markets in which each religion wants to spread its beliefs to those who have not yet accepted their religious truths. Simultaneously, the tendency of converting religious beliefs also reflects people’s religious needs. In fact, many of the structures and philosophies of longstanding religions do not always provide the right and necessary philosophies for their lives and their spiritual lives in the new contexts with a drastic change. Therefore, they converted to new beliefs with more suitable expressions of doctrine, practices, and religious lifestyles. In general, in the process of propagation, some religions pay attention to promoting a new way of life, a new morality before introducing theology or truth values. A new way of life, a new culture through new forms of worship, practices does not only bring spiritual values but also real-life values, it attracts different individuals or groups of people to convert or to join a religious organization.

3.2. The trend of holding faith without religious practices

Generally, people just realize a believer as a subject of faith through their religious activities. It means that a person who possesses a deep belief in the sacred object has religious practices, the strict adherence to the regulations of the religious organization. This is logically true in the current context for many religions, such as Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism which are religions of strict rituals and activities. However, in addition to these common

proportional associations between belief and practice, there has been a tendency to remain faith in an object of worship but that is not necessarily tied to religious activities. This trend is not favored by strict institutions religion, it comes from a secularized context. Modernity has increased individual contacts and interests, it led people to the busyness. Therefore, believers tend to seek an expression of faith that is suitable to their situation. They think that their behavior is not deviating from church regulations, it is a way to manifest their belief or live a religious life that is closest to the religious meaning or value they pursue. This phenomenon can be seen in the case of Catholicism.

The 1999 survey in France on French values correlated with the previous survey in 1981 showed a low proportion of religious practices or participating in activities of religious organizations in France (a neutral secular European country-Laïcité). For example, 3.9% of French respondents participated in activities of religious organizations or parishes in 1981. This rate was 4.2% in 1999. The proportion of respondents who answered that they practiced once a month was 18% in 1981 and 12% in 1999. Particularly for young people from 18 to 29 years old, the practice rate was even lower, 11% in 1981 and 5% in 1999. However, the question “Do you believe in God?”, the results showed that: 62% of the respondents believed in God in 1981 and 56% in 1999. The proportion of young people aged 18-29 believed in God was lower, 46% in 1981 and 48% in 1999²⁹.

This figure shows that there is a difference between faith in Truth (God) and expressing faith. It is also the transformation of religious values in the secularized context in Europe. Religion seems to be a personal issue. A person can believe in a God or the truth of a religion, but it does not need a regular link between this person with an institution or rituals, religious practices.

In Vietnam, there is an opinion that Catholicism is a religion of

religious practices/ Công giáo là đạo sinh hoạt³⁰, it means that Catholicism focuses on the form of worship according to the Church's liturgical calendar. Based on a religious life with formality, many people have identified their beliefs with regular church attendance. Many people think that a person who often attends Mass has a deep faith. This is not wrong, because faith manifests through sacraments and practices. Personal faith is attached to the ecclesial institution, so when a person leaves his/her parish it is very difficult to judge his/her faith because he/she has little activities with the religious community.

However, the question is "Does a person who often attends Mass have a deep faith?" Although many people do not regularly attend Mass, they have an interactive behavior with the Christian spirit more than those who diligently pray. They manifest their "Catholic nature" in life through interactions. They may be busy with businesses, and do not have time to go to church regularly, they still have a deep faith in God. That is a current phenomenon in society, a form of a mature faith that does not dependent on canonical law, Catholic characteristics exist in individual acts external religious space.

This situation usually appears in some classes of Catholic intellectuals, businessmen that are new classes forming in the market economic period. They are busy, their work takes up quite a lot of time of religious activities. They are living their religious faith with the work of daily life. They try to be faithful to the Gospel by establishing moral Catholic behaviors in their relationships with others. Obviously, there is a gap between faith and the Church's regulation. They do not give up their faith, they show their relationship with God through actions and ways of thinking that do not need the church or community verification. They have a strong experience with the Holy One without institutions of the church.

The above situation occurs to individual believers, not to dignitaries, whose functions are dedicated to the priesthood. The Church can condemn these forms of belief as a solitary one, even if it is Christian. The Church still wants the individual's faith according to the Church's models, the sacraments and community are indispensable, it is difficult to call the Christian faith without this dimension.

The phenomenon of faith without a link to the Church as an individual dimension also appeared in migrant groups as analyzed above. When Catholics migrated to new areas, a lack of spaces for religious activities, such as no visiting of priests, no churches. This situation can be seen in many industrial zones where business owners have yet to take into account the religious diversity of the workers they have employed. In the case of Protestantism, there are common places of prayer for Protestant workers because the business owners who are also followers of the religion. For Catholics, believers have to find the closest church to practice. If there are no churches, believers pray to have religious activities in small groups at home. The belief that belief is still a need but in this situation, it was not identical to the practice.

In addition to migration, secularization leads to the decline of the sacredness and appreciation of secular cultural values. Secularization weakens the strength of the Catholic institution, even fades identity and characteristics. Church, community are no longer attractive to them. Instead, they pay more attention to their personal dimension, living a religious life in a secular life rather than in institutional habits. There is a comment that When losing the social dimension, the Church emphasizes the individual decision. A Christian must show his/her faith and express the originality of the Gospel in an indifferent secular world. Faith becomes an act of self-expression, a document of self-writing, it is not a brand/ label acquired through family traditions or social imposition. According to this worldview, the clergy no longer

affects social events much and loses their unique status. Meanwhile, laypeople find a better place through integrating their lives in the heart of this new society³¹. Moreover, the change of space and religious structure has led to the aforementioned situation. For example, a church in an urban area is too cramped, queuing, and finding appropriate time attendance can also reduce the presence of dynamic and successful Catholics.

3.3. The trend of placing religious faith in secular goals

This trend is reflected in two main aspects: The goal of religious faith does not only looking forward to the afterlife, it also aims to current life. And religious faith is not only devotion, love, voluntary dedication, it sometimes shows individual pragmatism when expressing their beliefs with the sacred object they worship. This phenomenon can be seen through the annual praying for luck, fortune, and the successful career of many Vietnamese people.

Currently, in addition to believing in the divine to free them from sin, suffering, and death, believers also expect the sacred object helps them in real-world matters. It means that faith becomes more real, aiming to reality first and then to religious function after death. For some believers, the religious function is not only in the afterlife, it is also a service to serve the real needs of people. These are beliefs that expect the grace of the sacred object with follower's conditions. According to the survey results of a topic, the Catholics' faith is also closely related to issues of welfare and life. The topic "Transformation of Catholicism in sustainable development in Vietnam at present" conducted in 2008 with 269 people were asked the question: "What benefits do you have for yourself since entering the religion?" 240/269 of respondents believe that peace of mind; 189/269 of respondents felt spiritual help and sharing, 159/269 of respondents felt to have peace of mind in life after death. The survey results showed that the benefit of life after death is not the highest percentage compared to those of real life.

In fact, when traveling on business in Ho Chi Minh City and the southwestern provinces, we saw the image of priest Francis Xavier Truong Buu Diep has been revered and hung in the car, or workplace of Catholics. Through interviews with some drivers, they said that the priest is very sacred and is considered as a “god of wealth” by many people in the area who bring much good luck in business to those who respect him. Thus, in addition to the faith in God, Mary, these people also choose for themselves a sacred figure, entrust trading activities, and various occupations.

The tendency of placing faith in secular goals is also one of the reasons that lead to the birth of religious “services”. In some cases, people have taken advantage of religion, and have had misleading the nature of religion, or negative affect traditions. However, it also reflects the fact that the spiritual needs of people in modern society, secular services sometimes can’t help them.

3.4. The trend of non- absolutization of a belief

Currently, there is a transformation of various sacred objects in a Buddhist temple. Some Buddhist temples sometimes have statues of gods, deities, or Uncle HỒ. It means that sacred objects outside of Buddhist history and tradition. In fact, it is also a form of polytheism that have existed for a long time in the Vietnamese cultural tradition. It can’t be seen in Muslim mosques, Catholic, and Protestant churches. It is clear that the emergence of a variety of beliefs can take place within a place of worship, or with each believer. These believers have different religious beliefs besides mainstream faith. This trend is often seen in followers of folk beliefs, Buddhism, and some Catholics. However, through practical surveys in Muslim Cham regions, the worship of only one God is still strictly observed³². However, through surveys on the Cham Muslims, the worship of God is strictly observed.

Protestantism is relatively cautious with traditional beliefs. Protestants who converted for a long time with a firm conviction do not worship deities, they only worship their God.

For Catholics, morality forces them to worship only God, to be faithful to God, and do not worship any other divine, which is recorded in the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me”. If anyone does not believe they will commit a serious sin. Therefore, the Church gingerly displayed images for a long time, feared falling into heresy, idolatry as the records in the Old Testaments.

Life has changed, Vietnamese Catholics have received permission from the Church to honor their ancestors. Catholicism officially integrated into Vietnamese culture after hundreds of years of forbidding to remember their grandparents, parents. Beside the altar of God, an altar honoring ancestors and grandparents has satisfied the Vietnamese mind of polytheism.

However, some Catholics also have participated in fortune-telling, visited pagoda, temples. In addition to faith in God, they have “opened their hearts” to activities that are not allowed by the Church. Besides faith in God, do they need other spiritual supports that their religion itself has not yet met?

This trend exists because the cultural and religious traditions of the Vietnamese are diverse and people choose as well as experience different religions and cultures. On the other hand, it also shows a fluctuation in many people’s minds. In the changing of social life, people may face uncertain risks, so people need mental security. This creates opportunities for different religions to promote their truths, creating diversity, and pluralism in the faith life of many individuals. It is possible that for some believers, God is no longer omnipotent, so they seek other spiritual experiences.

However, this trend is just a minor indicator of religions with strict institutions and moral constraints. It also reflects a practical mentality of people who want to be free from belief patterns. It is possible the blurring or weakness of faith in the sacred Beings.

Conclusion

1. Religious faith is the essence that religious organizations and

traditions want to maintain in their communities of believers. However, in the modern and secularized context, religious faith cannot avoid influences from the outside and the renewal of religion. How to keep the hearts of the faithful believers, many religious organizations are dealing with modernity and the identity of religious beliefs.

2. Most religious organizations still strengthen their institutions and flexibly modify the rules of practices and activities in order to reinforce the faith of believers as well as promoting and introducing religious image to society. However, the context of diverse religious organizations has led to competition and expansion of many different religious beliefs in Vietnam so loyalty to a belief has been affected. It is manifested through the phenomena of conversion, faith fading, coexisting multiple beliefs of an individual as the aforementioned analysis.

3. Religious belief is always manifested through religious practices. There are two types of practices: pure religious practice and social orientation. In the current context, religious practices have given us many aspects. On the one hand, religious life is very active and people are generally interested in religious belief. It confirms the necessity of religion as an indispensable spiritual need of humans in modern society. On the other hand, there is a tendency of misleading practices that deviate from the regulations of religion, the laws of the State, and the cultural traditions of Vietnam. It reflects a current situation of leaving the religious nature, favor secular values rather than religious values. The system of faith in sacred objects is a truth that all religions preserve and promote. Fundamental faith is often supplemented and adapted, hardly changed according to the context, however, it is clear that the moral practices that express that fundamental human faith are undergoing many changes in modernization./.

Notes:

- 1 1946 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, adopted on November 9, 1946: Article 10. A Vietnamese citizen has the rights to freedoms (i) of speech; (ii) of the press; (iii) of association and meeting; (iv) of belief; (v) of residence and of travel in the country and abroad; 1959 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, adopted on January 1, 1960: Article 26. Citizens of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam enjoy freedom of religious belief; they may practice or not practice a religion; 1980 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, adopted on December 19, 1980: Article 68: Citizens have the right to religious freedom, has the right to follow any religion or to follow no religion; no one is taking advantage of religion to contravene the law and State policies.
- 2 Economic, cultural, social renovation is a period, not an event. That period has been since 1986. The renewal of religious policy has been counted since 1990 with the milestone of Resolution 24 of the Politburo.
- 3 Figures are cited by Nguyễn Thanh Xuân (2019), “Những con số liên quan đến đời sống tôn giáo ở Việt Nam thời kỳ Đổi mới/ Figures relating to religious life in Vietnam during the Doi Moi era”, *Công tác Tôn giáo*, No.6, p.6.
- 4 Figures are cited by Trần Hữu Hợp (2016), “Tôn giáo ở Nam Bộ và những xu hướng phát triển trong thời kỳ Đổi mới/ Religion in the South and development trends in the Doi Moi period”, *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No.11&12, p. 127.
- 5 In the State documents on religion, it is often stated as “Hồi giáo”. In this article, the author uses the term: “Islam”.
- 6 The Government Committee for Religious Affairs (2016), *Báo cáo tổng kết 10 năm thực hiện Nghị quyết số 25-NQ/TW của Ban Chấp hành Trung ương khóa IX về công tác tôn giáo/ Report on 10 years of implementation of Resolution No.25-NQ/TW of the IX Central Executive Committee on religious Affairs.*
- 7 The Government Committee for Religious Affairs (2016), *Báo cáo tổng kết 10 năm thực hiện Nghị quyết số 25-NQ/TW của Ban Chấp hành Trung ương khóa IX về công tác tôn giáo/ Report on 10 years of implementation of Resolution No.25-NQ/TW of the IX Central Executive Committee on religious Affairs..*
- 8 Fields of education, health, social charity.
- 9 Đỗ Quang Hưng (2013), “Tôn giáo và xã hội: Tiếp cận lý thuyết”/ Religion and society: Theoretical approach, in the Proceedings of the Workshop: *Tôn giáo trong xã hội Việt Nam/ Religion in Vietnamese society*, Pub: Tôn giáo, Hà Nội, p. 32.

- 10 Đỗ Quang Hưng (2013), “Tôn giáo và xã hội: Tiếp cận lý thuyết”/ Religion and society: Theoretical approach, *ibid*, p. 33-34.
- 11 Based on the results of the topic *Biến đổi Công giáo trong phát triển bền vững ở Việt Nam hiện nay/ Transformation of Catholicism in sustainable development in Vietnam today* conducted by Nguyễn Thị Quế Hương from 2017 to 2018.
- 12 Institute for Religious Studies (2014), “Báo cáo kết quả xử lý số liệu điều tra”/ Report on the results of data processing. The topic *Vấn đề tôn giáo trong phát triển bền vững Tây Nguyên/ Religious issues towards sustainable development in the Central Highlands*.
- 13 Institute for Religious Studies (2014), “Báo cáo kết quả xử lý số liệu điều tra”/ Report on the results of data processing. The topic *Vấn đề tôn giáo trong phát triển bền vững Tây Nguyên/ Religious issues towards sustainable development in the Central Highlands*.
- 14 Institute for Religious Studies (2017), “Báo cáo kết quả xử lý số liệu điều tra xã hội học”/ Report on the processing of sociological survey data. The topic *Hoạt động tín ngưỡng, tôn giáo trong gia đình Việt Nam hiện nay/ Activities of beliefs and religions in the Vietnamese family today*.
- 15 The Church declared the view: Outside the Church, there is no salvation. It showed its monopoly in salvation.
- 16 Many authors (2009), *Niềm tin của người Công giáo/ Faith of Catholics*, Translators: Phạm Minh Thiện, Tống Viết Hiệp, Phan Mạnh Trinh, Pub: Tôn giáo, Hà Nội, p. 42.
- 17 Many authors (2009), *Niềm tin của người Công giáo/ Faith of Catholics*, *ibid*, p.42.
- 18 Citations according to the article of the cloisterer Lorenzo Vũ Văn Trình, *Đức tin của giới trẻ trong đời sống hôm nay/ Faith in the lives of young people today*. Website of Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh city, 31/05/2011, <http://tonggiaophansaigon.com/baiviet-tintuc/20110531/10627>
- 19 Ethnic groups like the H'mong and the Dao abandon their traditional beliefs to Protestantism, or the Protestants can convert to the other denominations.
- 20 Institute for Religious Studies (2017), “Kết quả khảo sát xã hội học”/Report on the processing of sociological survey data. The topic *Hoạt động tín ngưỡng, tôn giáo trong gia đình Việt Nam hiện nay/ Activities of beliefs and religions in the Vietnamese family today*.
- 21 Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc (2014), “Niềm tin tôn giáo trong mối quan hệ với niềm tin xã hội”/ Religious faith in relationship with social belief, *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No. 12, pp. 81-82.
- 22 Institute for Religious Studies (2017), “Kết quả khảo sát xã hội học”/Report on the processing of sociological survey data. The topic

- Hoạt động tín ngưỡng, tôn giáo trong gia đình Việt Nam hiện nay/*
Activities of beliefs and religions in the Vietnamese family today.
- 23 Data from a survey of the Institute for Religious Studies in a Cham Islam community in An Giang in August 2018.
 - 24 Viện Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (2017), “Kết quả khảo sát xã hội học”/Report on the processing of sociological survey data. The topic *Hoạt động tín ngưỡng, tôn giáo trong gia đình Việt Nam hiện nay/* Activities of beliefs and religions in the Vietnamese family today.
 - 25 Data from a survey of the Institute for Religious Studies in Tây Ninh, Bình Phước, Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận in August and in September 2019.
 - 26 Data from a survey of the Institute for Religious Studies in Ninh Thuận in September 2019.
 - 27 Data from a survey of the Institute for Religious Studies in Hà Giang in April 2014 showed that many civil servants and officials converted to Buddhism and became Buddhists after retirement.
 - 28 Data from a survey in the Cham Islam in Tây Ninh, Bình Phước and Ninh Thuận in August and in September 2019 showed that the marriages of people from different religions, when husbands or wives converted to Islam, they strictly obey the doctrines, law as well as rituals of this religion.
 - 29 Pierre Bréchon (2003), *Les valeurs des Français*, Ed. Armand Colin, pp. 175-176.
 - 30 Comments by Priest Nguyễn Trọng Viễn, in the book *Những căn bệnh trầm kha trong đời sống đức tin Công giáo tại Việt Nam/* Fatal Diseases of the Catholic Faith Life in Vietnam.
 - 31 *Niềm tin của người Công giáo/* Faith of Catholics, Translators: Phạm Minh Thiện, Tổng Viết Hiệp, Phan Mạnh Trinh, Pub: Tôn giáo, Hà Nội, 2009, p.701.
 - 32 Data from a survey of the Institute for Religious Studies in Tây Ninh, Bình Phước, Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận in August and in September 2019.

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2. Survey data of the author in An Giang, Hồ Chí Minh city in August 2018 and Tây Ninh, Bình Phước, Ninh Thuận, Bình Thuận, Lai Châu in August, September, October 2019.
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4. Đỗ Quang Hưng (2013), “Tôn giáo và xã hội: Tiếp cận lý thuyết”/ Religion and society: Theoretical approach, in the Proceedings of the Workshop: *Tôn giáo trong xã hội Việt Nam/ Religion in Vietnamese society*. Pub: Tôn giáo, Hà Nội.
5. Nguyễn Thị Quế Hương (2018), *Biến đổi của Công giáo trong phát triển bền vững ở Việt Nam hiện nay/ The transformation of Catholicism in sustainable development in Vietnam at present*, Báo cáo tổng quan đề tài cấp Bộ, lưu tại Thư viện Viện Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo.
6. Pierre Bréchon (2003), *Les valeurs des Français*. Ed. Armand Colin.
7. Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc (2014), “Niềm tin tôn giáo trong mối quan hệ với niềm tin xã hội”/ Religious faith in relationship with social belief, *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, số 12.
8. Many authors (2009), *Niềm tin của người Công giáo/ Faith of Catholics*, Translators: Phạm Minh Thiện, Tống Viết Hiệp, Phan Mạnh Trinh, Pub: Tôn giáo, Hà Nội.
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