

**VIEWS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM ON
RELIGION IN THE DOCUMENTS OF THE 13TH NATIONAL
PARTY CONGRESS**

Abstract: From January 25 to February 1, 2021, the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam was successfully held. The 13th National Party Congress has important significance in the evaluation and summary of the 12th term (2016-2020), indicating the direction and tasks of the 13th term (2021-2026) and the next years. Besides, Congress also evaluated 35 years of the renovation policy, 10 years of the Political Platform, 10 years of the socio-economic development strategy of 2011-2020. It can be said that the documents of the 13th National Party Congress have many new points that reflect the new perception, thinking, approaches of the Party to many important issues of the country. These documents are the crystallization of wisdom and enthusiasm of the Party and people, the result of researching, creating theory, summarizing the practice, especially the great achievements that have been achieved in the past 35 years of renewal. These documents also demonstrated the country's aspiration to rise. The Party's viewpoints are expected to make a breakthrough in the cause of building and defending the socialist nation in the coming years. Religion is an important content of the documents, mentioned in many contents of the documents such as the Political report, the report on socio-economic development strategy. Besides

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affirming the Party's core views on religions and beliefs, there are new points of view. The article presents the Party's views on religions and beliefs, as well as, focuses on analyzing the Party's new perspectives on religions and beliefs.

Keywords: Documents; 13th National Party Congress; views; religions; beliefs.

Introduction

Religions are always mentioned in the Documents of the National Party Congresses. These are the views and policies of the Party on religions and religious affairs, especially the State management of religion. These views, on the one hand, reflect the Party's perception of religion, and on the other hand, reflect the Party's religious policy and leadership in religious affairs. On the basis of these views, the agencies in the political system according to their assigned functions and tasks, concretize them into laws, and into specific regulations to apply to religious life and religious affairs. Studying the Party's views on religion during the Party congresses shows the Party's cognitive progress on religion and religious affairs, the inheritance as well as new points in the Party's perception of religion and religious affairs.

Research on the documents of the National congresses of the Party in recent terms shows that the 13th National Party Congress mentioned more content on religion, religious affairs than in previous congresses. The Party's views on religion in the Document of the 13th Congress can be generalized into the following contents: 1) The Party's views and judgments on the situation of religion and religious affairs in the past period; 2) Perspectives on guiding religious affairs; 3) The view of *religious resources and the promotion of religious resources* - a new point of the Party's perception of religion.

1. The Party's views and judgments on the situation of religion and religious affairs in the past period

The document of the 13th Party Congress did not only provide views and policies on religion and religious affairs, but it also indicated general judgments and assessments about the situation of religion and religious affairs in Vietnam in the past. Specifically, the document of the 13th Party Congress pointed out: “The religious situation was stable; the majority of dignitaries and believers had peace of mind, trusted in the leadership of the Party, attached to the nation, contributed to the struggle, and oppose slander the government that violated human rights and religious freedom”¹. This statement accurately reflected the reality of religious life in Vietnam today. It can be said that although our country has a relatively high degree of religious diversity² compared to many countries in the world, however, the religious situation is always stable, the needs of religious activities of believers, the masses of the people, and the demands for religious activities of religious organizations are guaranteed, and the right of belief and religion freedom is increasingly guaranteed and enhanced. In the relationship with the State, all religions have determined the course of action to accompany the nation and the cause of building socialism. Religious organizations, dignitaries, and followers of religions have always actively participated in patriotic emulation movements, making many contributions to the cause of national construction and defense. Especially, there is no conflict among religions. Besides, religions often exchange, dialogue, and share in order to enhance mutual understanding.

In addition to the general assessments on the religious situation, the document of the 13th Party Congress pointed out the limitations of the current Vietnamese religious life. These limitations are as follows: “There is a phenomenon of commercialization of belief and religious activities in some places”³ and “negative manifestations, superstition”⁴. In recent

years, in addition to positive manifestations, religious life in Vietnam has faced many limitations and shortcomings that need attention in order to have solutions to overcome. The phenomenon of commercialization, abuse of religions, and beliefs for profit is on the rise, superstitions are becoming topical issues that the public is concerned about.

Some negative phenomena in the religious life in Vietnam in recent years can be mentioned such as the World Mission Society Church of God; the story of vengeful spirits; the phenomenon of fighting for offerings at festivals; the organization of festivals, the building of belief and religious spaces in a rampant way for commercial purposes has made the religious and spiritual life, in some places, become chaotic and countercultural; Many sacred spaces, which are places for people to get rid of greed, hatred, and delusion, find peace of mind, are turned into a bustling, pragmatic place where sellers and buyers are busy.

The lack of understanding about beliefs and religions has caused deviance among a large number of believers and people as the thinking of asking-giving, reciprocity in religious practices. The widespread burning of votive paper, which costs from several tens of millions to several hundred million for a ceremony, is becoming more and more popular. A part of religious monks pursued pragmatic interests and profited from beliefs and religions. In order to promote socio-economic development, some localities have allowed the construction and expansion of religious establishments and festivals without paying attention to the preservation and promotion of spiritual values and national traditions. They mainly aimed at the purpose of attracting a large number of tourists. These actions have led to unpredictable consequences.

Next, the document of the 13th Party Congress also made an assessment of religious affairs in general, and state management of belief and religious activities in particular. The document clearly states that “The state management of culture, art, religion, and

belief still has some limitations”⁵. It can be said that it is not the first time the Document of the Party Congress has assessed the limitations of the state management of religion. The document of the 12th National Party Congress also mentioned this issue⁶. The limitations of the state management of beliefs and religions mentioned in the documents of the two congresses showed the difficulty and complexity of this issue. Although the Party and State always pay attention to leading and directing religious affairs, promulgating many legal documents to serve as the basis for religious affairs, the reality of religious life is constantly changing, and it is the field that hostile forces always exploit to destroy the Party and State, divide national solidarity and religious unity. These are factors that make the State management of belief and religious activities still limited.

Remarkable content is that the admission of party members for religious compatriots has many achievements written in the Document of the 12th Party Congress⁷, however, in the document of the 13th Congress, the Party assessed that this work has not achieved the expected results: “The Party development in remote, border and island areas, where there are many ethnic minorities, believers of religions, rural areas and enterprises outside the State still faces many difficulties”⁸. Why did the work of developing party members among religious compatriots in the previous term achieve good results, but the last term encountered difficulties? This is also the question for the political agencies to find a solution.

2. Perspectives on guiding religious affairs

In addition to the assessments of the situation of religion and religious affairs, the Document of the 13th Congress has outlined views to guide religious affairs in the coming years. One of the first issues that religious affairs must pay attention to: “Focus on perfecting and well-implementing policies on ethnicity and religion; have specific policies to solve difficulties for ethnic minorities”⁹.

Next, religious affairs need to “well implement the goals of religious solidarity and national unity. Ensuring the right to freedom of religion and belief in accordance with the law. Promoting cultural values and ethics of religion and preserving traditional social ethics, building a cultural life in residential areas, contributing to preventing social evils”¹⁰.

It can be said that the aforementioned views are not new, they were given in the Congress documents and other documents of the Party, however, the emphasis on promoting the positive and humane factors of the religion, belief in order to contribute to improving traditional morality, building cultural life in residential areas... has shown that the Party clearly acknowledges the contributions of religious ethics and positive factors of in religions for social morality for building cultural lifestyles, maintaining social order, and minimizing social evils... Besides, the Party also requires “criticism and prevent negative manifestations, superstition”¹¹.

The Party requires religious affairs, especially the state management of religion, need to “Create conditions in favor of religious organizations to operate in accordance with the law; actively help and solve the needs of religious, belief and spiritual activities of the masses, as well as prevent and resolutely fight acts that abuse of beliefs and religions to divide, undermining the national unity. Improve capacity, the effectiveness of the State management of religious affairs”¹².

In my opinion, it is worth noting the point of “*actively helping*”. *This is a new perspective, reflecting a new approach to religious affairs under the direction of the Party.* It means that instead of managing religious activities according to administrative procedures, commanding, and asking-giving as they did, religious affairs needs to actively care, help, guide, and support to meet the needs of spiritual and religious activities. This is also the requirement to change the management thinking of considering religion and

religious activities as “objects of management”, now it is necessary to consider religion as a “partner” in order to suitable behavior.

The document of the 13th Congress continues to emphasize the work of mass mobilization, which is considered the core of religious affairs and the work of combating the abuse of religion. “Mobilizing, uniting, and gathering religious organizations, dignitaries and believers to live “a good life and a good religion” (tốt đời, đẹp đạo) to make positive contributions to the cause of national construction and defense. To ensure that religious organizations operate in accordance with the provisions of law and their charters and charters recognized by the State. Resolutely fight and strictly handle those who abuse religion against the Party, State and the socialist regime; divide and destroy religious solidarity and national unity”¹³.

It can be said that the Party’s guiding stance on religious affairs at the 13th Congress is basically the successor to the views in previous terms, but it was added new connotations such as analyzed above. This addition, in my opinion, is a landmark in the approach to religious activities. And this is a suitable addition to religious affairs in the current period.

3. Promotion of religious resources - a new point of the Party’s perception of religion

In addition to inherited viewpoints, developing existing views on religion and religious affairs, the Document of the 13th Congress introduced a new point of view “Promoting cultural and religious values, morality and resources of religions for the cause of national development”¹⁴. Although the viewpoint of promoting religious resources has been mentioned in Directive 18-CT/TW dated January 10, 2018, the Document of the Party Congress has mentioned it for the first time.

The viewpoint of promoting religious resources in the Document of the 13th National Congress shows the development of the

Party's awareness of religion, the role, and contribution of religion. The origin of this view, in my opinion, comes from Resolution 24-NQ/TW of the Politburo dated October 16, 1990, on strengthening religious affairs in the new situation. Resolution 24-NQ/TW had an important point that "*religious morality has many things suitable for the new society*". This view played a fundamental role in the birth of the current view of *religious resources*. On the basis of Resolution 24-NQ/TW, Directive 37-CT/TW dated July 2, 1998, of the Politburo, showed a view to *promoting religious values* and this point of view was inherited, developed in Resolution 25-NQ/TW of March 12, 2003, of the IX Central Committee on religious affairs. Based on the report of 15 years of implementing Resolution 25-NQ/TW, the Politburo issued Directive 18-CT/TW on continuing to implement Resolution 25-NQ/TW, in Directive 18-CT /TW, the view of promoting religious resources has been raised for the first time in an important document of the Party. And the Document of the 13th Party Congress continuing to raise this point of view has shown the Party's affirmation of the role and contributions of religions to the cause of national construction and development.

Basically, the view point of *promoting religious resources* in the Document of the 13th Congress is not different from that in Directive 18-CT/TW, however, the point of view in the Document of the 13th Congress is concretized. The Party's viewpoint was "*to promote the resources of religion*" in Directive 18-CT/TW, then, it was "*to promote the resources of religions*" in the Document of the 13th Congress. According to this view, religious resources are considered to include different resources, such as material resources, spiritual resources, etc. In addition, the view of "*resources of religions*" also suggests that they are different religions, resources are different resources.

The recognition of religious resources and promotion of religious resources in the Document of the 13th Party Congress showed some important perceptions such as *First*, the Party

recognizes and affirms roles, contributions of religions to the cause of national construction and development. This is a powerful step forward in asserting religion as a social entity; *Second*, the Party appreciates the values of social and human resources, including religious resources. The policy that recognized the necessity to exploit and promote all resources, both material and spiritual resources in the process of national construction and development is a correct policy of the Party. In my opinion, it is appropriate to recognize the role of spiritual resources in the current national development because material resources may be exhausted, however, spiritual resources or social and human resources will not be exhausted if there is a suitable method of exploitation and promotion them; *Third*, the viewpoint of promoting religious resources for the development of the country is not a “slogan”, it is the result of a long process of cognitive development, based on scientific basis and practice of religious life in Vietnam. It is contributions of researchers in theoretical research, practical summaries for the formulation of the Party’s views; *Fourth*, the view on religious resources and promoting religious resources will lead to a dramatic change of awareness towards the religion of all levels, sectors, and the whole society in the coming time. In particular, the perception that considered religion as “illusory happiness”, a form of social consciousness be easily abused, etc., which has existed for a long time, will gradually be replaced by an awareness of the role, the contribution of religion to all spheres of social life.

Conclusion

Through studying the Party’s views on religion in the Document of the 13th National Party Congress, we find that these views are quite diverse. It can be said that the content of religion in this congress was mentioned quite a lot compared to the previous congresses. It shows that the Party is more interested in religion and religious affairs. Generally, the Party’s views on religion in the

document of the XIII National Congress focus on three main contents as 1) Assessing the situation of religion, religious affairs, pointing out limitations and inadequacies in belief and religious life and in religious affairs; 2) Giving instructions and requirements for religious affairs in the new situation; 3) Giving new perspectives and awareness on religion and religious affairs. The Party's views on religion in the Document of the 13th National Party Congress are quite diverse, they reflect and represent the fundamental, and consistent views of the Party on religion and religious affairs from the past to present such as ensuring the right to freedom of religion and belief; religious solidarity and national unity; against abuse of religion to destroy the Party and the State, to divide the national unity bloc, and religious solidarity; promoting cultural, moral and humane values of religions.

Regarding religious affairs, the Document of the 13th Congress offers a number of guiding views as follows:

Firstly, perfecting the policy on religion (associated with a policy on ethnicity), improving capacity and efficiency, overcoming limitations and weaknesses in the State management of religious activities.

Secondly, creating conditions for religious organizations to operate in accordance with the law and their charters which were recognized by the State; proactively dealing with the needs of belief and religion of the masses.

Thirdly, focusing on mass mobilization work for believers of all religions; mobilizing religious organizations to live a good life, a good religion, to engage the nation.

It can be said that the Party's views on religion and religious affairs in the Document of the 13th National Congress are the inheritance and development of consistent views and policies of our Party since its founding. Besides, there are also new connotations and new views expressed the Party's new thinking and awareness on

religion. In order to continue to clarify the Party's position on religion and religious affairs in the Document of the 13th National Congress, in my opinion, it needs to focus on the following contents:

Firstly, it needs to clarify and concretize the Party's views on promoting religious resources, theoretical and practical issues of religious resources, and methods/ways of promoting religious resources for the development of the country in particular.

Secondly, it needs to clarify negative phenomena, superstition, tendency to commercialize religion, abuse religion and belief in order to propose measures and solutions to solve, prevent these phenomena.

Thirdly, it is necessary to research and perfect the system of policies and laws, to point out the limitations and inadequacies in religious affairs in general and the State management of religion in particular in order to improve the effectiveness of this work.

The aforementioned viewpoints of religion, religious affairs in the Document of the 13th Party Congress, especially new views, we hope that, in the coming time, the religious affairs in general, and the State management of belief and religious activities, in particular, will have a fundamental change, achieve many good results, contribute to ensuring the right to freedom of belief and religion, the promotion of values, ethics, humanity and religious resources for social development, social life stability, national unity and solidarity religion for the common goal of sustainable development of the country.

NOTES:

- 1 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 2, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p. 45.
- 2 Currently, the country has 16 religions and 41 religious organizations (belonged to 16 religions) recognized by the State, in addition, there are many types of beliefs, new religious phenomena, etc..

- 3 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 2, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p.73.
- 4 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 1, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p.144.
- 5 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 2, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p.73.
- 6 Xem: Chu Văn Tuấn (2016), Quan điểm của Đảng về tôn giáo trong Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XII của Đảng (*The Party's views on religion in the Document of the Twelveth National Congress of the Communist Party*), *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No.4, p.11.
- 7 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2016), *Văn kiện Đại hội Đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XII (The Document of the Twelveth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Văn phòng Trung ương Đảng xuất bản, Hà Nội, p.188.
- 8 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 2, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p.189.
- 9 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 1, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p.50.
- 10 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 1, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p.272.
- 11 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, ibid, p. 144.
- 12 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 2, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p. 141.
- 13 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 1, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p. 171.

- 14 Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 1, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia Sự Thật, Hà Nội, p. 171.

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3. Hội đồng Lý luận Trung ương (2021), *Những điểm mới trong các Văn kiện Đại hội XIII của Đảng (New points in the Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia Sự thật, Hà Nội.
4. Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2016), *Văn kiện Đại hội Đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XII (The Document of the Twelveth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Văn phòng Trung ương Đảng xuất bản, Hà Nội.
5. Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 1, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội.
6. Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam (2021), *Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XIII (The Document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party)*, Tome 2, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Sự Thật, Hà Nội.
7. Chu Văn Tuấn (2016), Quan điểm của Đảng về tôn giáo trong Văn kiện Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XII của Đảng (*The Party's views on religion in the Document of the Twelveth National Congress of the Communist Party*), *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No.4.
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