

THE ETHICAL VALUES OF PROTESTANTISM TO BUILD THE MORALITY AND LIFESTYLE OF THE CONTEMPORARY VIETNAMESE

Abstract: *Based on analyzing the ethical values of Protestantism in some aspects such as faith towards the goodness, perfecting personality, devotion, individual responsibility, taking part in charitable organizations, enthusiasm in labor, pure way of life, respect parents, faithful marriage, etc. This article puts forward some proposals for promote the ethical values of Protestantism to build the Vietnamese morality and lifestyle et present.*

Keywords: *Ethical values, Protestantism, Bible, Vietnamese.*

Vietnam has a diversity in the system of religion and belief. In 2013, there were 13 religions and 40 religious organizations recognized and licensed by the State. Religions are an important part that constructs the traditional culture of Vietnam and it also preserves the ethical and humane values. Religious philosophy has affected to thinking, cognition, thought of many Vietnamese generations. In addition, religion is one of the crucial factors which create social values especially moral value.

Researching the relationship between religion and morality, religious influence on residential communities, the majority of researchers confirmed that religious ethic contributes to stable social order and maintains nationally traditional morality. Nguyễn Tài Thư stated that “the fact showed that religious ethical views include the typical values in order to protect religious belief and they also have moral norms of humanity such as filial to parents, honesty, kindness, towards beneficence, avoiding evil, etc. Furthermore, religions have rules, regulations, commandments and prohibitions with punishments or faith in invisible hope and fear. These are reasons to explain why there are not many society’s vices such as theft, gambling, quarrel, etc. in the regions where have a majority of religious believers in comparison with other regions. These religious characteristics prevent bad behaviors that help to stabilize social life”¹.

* PhD., Institute for Religious Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

Like other religions, beside some limitations are regulated by the essence of Protestantism, its moral values are suitable for contemporary society which need to be promoted in the progress of construction the present-day Vietnamese society.

The theological view of Protestantism manifests in three basic points such as “just God”, “just Scripture”, “just Grace”². This religion appreciates the status of the Scripture and it is the most important to believers’ faith and moral norm. The Scripture has the supreme power in determining people’s beliefs and their way of life. Thus, the Scripture has the highest authority for all Protestants.

The morality of the Scripture focus on ten commandments which were granted by the God for the Jews in order to preserve and guarantee a secure environment of people in society. Along the history, the commandments’ values were proved and they have positive effects until today.

There are some comments for this question as:

Firstly, the Protestant Ethic was formed on the basis of faith. According to the Protestants, faith has a supreme power which can transform believers hope and desire to become true in reality. The faith is related to human sensibility and will, so it is the origins of success. Nobody will become honesty and kindness if they don’t have the faith towards goodness. Protestants believe in God and Scripture. They think that all believers can directly obtain the Grace through their faith. The Bible has a sentence: “an integrity person lives by the faith” (Roma 1:17). Among ten commandments, the four primary articles relate to the God:

1/ I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

2/ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

3/ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

4/ Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work, you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed Sabbath day and consecrated it. (Edipto 20:1-11)

Protestants find out a spiritual tie from their faith. Thereby, they voluntarily comply the God's commandments in keeping their morality, way of life or participation in charitable organizations. The godly Protestants' conscience inspired them to apply the commandments in life.

Protestants head to the God with the goal of changing life. According to Max Weber, Protestants live morally in order to seek a harmony, homogeneity between human desire in the life at present and the God's will for the life in the future. The ethical life is positive and dynamic towards the future. Because the moral theology of Martin Luther and George Calvin emphasized the subject of ethical action was a human being who had to have a spiritual transformation in order to construct a sustainable happiness³. The protestants trust and follow an equitable and honest life according to the God's norm towards the perfection themselves, dedication to others, nurture the love and a peaceful world.

Secondly, the Protestant Ethic was formed on the basis of love. In other words, the love has been a fundamental value of the Christianity in general, the Protestantism in particular. The Jesus Christ summarized the God's commandments in two articles such as "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'" (Matthew 22: 37-40).

According to the Protestant Ethic, first humankind has to love the God then love itself and its neighbor. The love has to manifest by specific actions. The Bible declares that "Faith without action is a dead faith" (Jacob 2:17).

Perhaps, the love in the Protestant Ethics is suitable for Vietnamese tradition as a proverb that "love people like loving yourself". However, Vietnamese is suffered many pressures from the market economy, so the

relationship among humankind is changing, the insensitivity is increasing more and more. Thus, the love is a real value that needed to promote and expand.

Thirdly, Protestantism emphasizes the ethic and individual responsibility. Protestants express their faith through behavior in practical life according to the Bible's commandments. The principle regulates the individual behavior in the relationship among people that were declared in the Bible from the fifth to tenth commandments.

5/ Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

6/ You shall not murder.

7/ You shall not commit adultery.

8/ You shall not steal.

9/ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

10/ You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

These are the principles and ethical norms in order to preserve a traditional society and they are also ethical norms in contemporary society.

Each Protestant has to have the social responsibility as the God's mission. Max Weber summarizes the Calvin branch's view on Ethic that "the unique way to have the God pleasant do not pass over the moral norm of secular life by keep an ascetic life in monastery..."⁴.

According to Max Weber, this was one of the factors that constitute the spirit of capitalism. In the spirit of individual responsibility, protestants show their dynamic in order to bring the usefulness to society with their enthusiasm in labor and their pure way of life. Their characteristics are suitable for the contemporary society, especially, for the Party and the State's point of view in the process of constructing the nation so they are needed to promote and encourage.

Fourthly, Protestantism showed the norms of the family life. Because a family is a cell of human society and it has an important role in orienting human character. In the Bible, there are many commandments related to family life such as the relationship between parents and children, husband and wife, etc. The fifth commandment taught that

people have to honor their parents. The Bible also indicated that a wise child is parents' happiness.

The filial piety is an important role in family relations. The filial piety and the respect for parents and grandparents are cultural norms. It is vietnamese morality that vietnamese has to learn when they are in school.

In particular, the monogamous marriage of Protestantism is similar to Vietnamese marriage and it is suitable for the Communist Party and the Vietnamese State's policy.

The seventh and the tenth commandments forbid the behavior that harm family happiness. The Charter of the Evangelical church of Vietnam (Southern), Art. 69 "Everybody has to respect marriage, fidelity to the monogamous marriage, the Evangelical church does not accept divorce (except for the case of adultery), the word of God condemns incest, sexual immorality, polygamy, etc.. These regulations are suitable for the Law on Marriage and Family of Vietnam such as "Art. 2. The basic principles of the regime of marriage and family: Marriage voluntary, progressive and monogamous, spouses equally". "Art. 4. Protection regime and family marriage: Prohibit child marriage, forced marriage, marriage hinder voluntary and progressive; ban sham marriages, cheating to marry, divorce; prohibition of forced divorce, divorce artificially; prohibit property demand for wedding. A person being a wife, a husband, but married or living together as husband and wife with another person or persons no wife, no husband, but married or living as a couple with people who are married, have a wife"⁵.

The development of the market economy in Vietnam has caused the moral deterioration of a large part of people, deviance in lifestyle, increase of vices, the insensibility in relationship among people. Therefore, it is needed to construct a morality and lifestyle of Vietnamese at present. The traditional culture values in general, the protestant values in particular are promoted to establish a morality and lifestyle of Vietnamese in order to create a social stability and a sustainable development.

In my opinion, it is needed to have the efforts of believers, dignitaries of the church and the state in order to promote the Protestant values.

For Protestant dignitaries: they do not only deeply understand the theology and the spiritual ethics of the Bible, but they also instill traditional culture of the nation, the guidelines and policies of the Party

and the State, the patriotism. Basing on these basis, they know how to expand the theology in the cultural context of Vietnam and make it is more appropriate for Vietnamese culture and the State's law and policy. In fact, religion shows its positive or negative aspects it do not only depend on its essence, but it also depend on character, virtue, religious practices purpose of religious dignitaries. They are a good example for believers. However, the dignitaries of Protestantism do not meet religious development needs because their intellectual and theological levels are not not the same, especially in ethnic minority area.

For Protestant believers: it is needed to instill the ethic of the Bible and to be equipped with cultural, social and legal knowledge in order to "Living the Gospel, serve God, serve the Fatherland and the nation". At present, the religious practice of Protestant ethnic minorities is an issue. According to survey data in the Central Highlands in 2013, many Protestant ethnic minorities did not understand the Bible.

For the authorities: it is needed to create an appropriate environment for religious practice of Protestant believers and to help them promote Protestant values; to glorify the individual or community that promote Protestant morality. In fact, Protestantism positively affects to society which depend on the State's political attitude, for instance, in China and in South Korea.

Since 1990, awaring of the need of promoting religious precious values in the process of constructing the Socialism in general and Vietnamese morality in particular, the Communist Party of Vietnam has had a new cognition on religions and beliefs. The Resolution 24/NQ-TW promulgated October 16th, 1990 declares that "Religions have cultural and ethical values appropriate to the new regime". The Resolution 25-NQ/TW promulgated March 12th, 2003 continued this point of view and emphasized that "Upholding cultural and ethical values of religions and beliefs".

The Communist Party of Vietnam's viewpoints on religions and beliefs were detailed in the "Ordinance N^o.21/2004/PL-UBTVQH11 of the National Assembly Standing Committee: Regarding religious beliefs". Article 5: The State guarantees the right to religious activities, religious activities as prescribed by law; respect for cultural values, religious morality; preserve and promote the positive values of traditional ancestor worship, commemorate and honor those who have contributed

to the country, with the community to contribute to strengthening the national unity bloc nation, meet demands the spirit of the people.

The 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam continued to affirm: “The continued refining of policies and laws on beliefs and religions in line with the Party’s viewpoints. Upholding cultural and ethical values of religions and encouraging religious organizations, dignitaries and followers to lead good secular and religious lives and to make an active contribution to national construction and defense”.

Although the Communist Party’s instrument and State’s law affirmed that “Upholding cultural and ethical values of religions”, it is not effectively implemented in reality. Therefore, the authorities at all levels should have detailed measures that are appropriate for each region in order to promote the religious values in general and the Protestant values in particular./.

NOTES:

- 1 Nguyễn Tài Thư (Chief author, 1997), *Effects of the Ideologies and Religions on the Contemporary Vietnamese* [Ảnh hưởng của các hệ tư tưởng và tôn giáo đối với con người Việt Nam hiện nay], the National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi:104.
- 2 Jean Baubérot (2006), *A History of Protestantism*, the World Publishing House, Hanoi: 9 - 22.
- 3 Max Weber (2008), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the Knowledge Publishing House, Hanoi.
- 4 Max Weber (2008), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ibid:142.
- 5 *The Law on Marriage and Family of Vietnam*, Art. 2 and 4, 2001.

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2. *The Old Testament and the New Testament*, the Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003.
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4. Nguyễn Tài Thư (Chief author, 1997), *Effects of the Ideologies and Religions on the Contemporary Vietnamese*, the National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi.
5. Trương Như Vương (2005), *Study on the Ethical Thought in the Bible*, the Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.
6. Max Weber (2008), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the Knowledge Publishing House, Hanoi.