

A HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE (C&MA) AND THE VIETNAM EVANGELICAL CHURCH

Abstract: *Protestantism was introduced into Vietnam by the missionaries of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) with the first missionary headquarters in Da Nang (Tourane) for over 100 years. In 1927, the missionary established the French Protestant Church of the East that was the forerunner of the Vietnamese Evangelical Church. The historical relationship between the two organizations from the beginning until 1975, the missionaries withdrew from Vietnam, directly affected the process of evangelizing and left a deep imprint to the Protestant community in Vietnam. Researching on this special relationship helps to clarify many issues related to the missionary history and to have a better understanding of the doctrine characteristics, church organization, ritual and lifestyle of the Vietnam Protestant community. Basing on the historical data and using the method of historical and religious studies, it examines and analyses the relationship between those two organizations from the beginning to 1975. However, due to limited sources of bibliography, documentation and an article scale, it certainly could not mention every issue.*

Keywords: *C&MA; Protestantism; relationship; evangelization; Vietnam.*

Introduction

As an accidental event, in the early twenty century, Chief Pastor of C&MA - A. B. Simpson and his colleagues discovered the French Indochina that still did not have any Protestant missionaries operating there. Hence, in 1911, three pastors of C&MA who are R. A. Jaffray,

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P. M. Hosler and M. Hughes were sent to Da Nang to establish a missionary headquarter. After learning Vietnamese, preaching, translating and publishing Bible by Vietnamese, these pastors established the French Protestant Church of the East that was the forerunner of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, and now that is Vietnamese Evangelical Church (South) and Vietnamese Evangelical Church (North).

The historical relationship between those two organizations (C&MA and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam) from the beginning until 1975 consisted of many issues closely related to the process of evangelizing in Vietnam and left numerous influences and impacts on the Vietnamese Protestant community until today.

1. The policy “Local Church” of C&MA

In the time of establishment of the Missionary Alliance in 1887, A. B. Simpson had to pose basic issues: where is finance for missionaries and how is policy of establishment of Local Church?

A. B. Simpson learned lots of organizing experiences from missionaries in Europe and America in which he particularly admired the Continent Chinese Missionary Society of Hudson Taylor (found in 1865).

Due to capacity of newly established organization is very limited, so in the first Declaration had some regulations as below:

- C&MA aims towards the missionary areas that were ignored all over the world.
- Both secular believers and pastors of the Protestant denominations will be sent to propagandize if they have enough some criteria.
- Pastors have to believe in God who meets all requirements via money that Christians devote and have to live in a saving way in the missionary areas where they cannot be assured amount of certain food.
- The purpose of C&MA establishes and fosters the “Local Church” in the missionary areas and leave them self-organizing and administering everything, but their methods need to fit into Bible in some primarily characteristics¹.

The policy of “Local Church” was approved by A. B. Simpson and was accepted as an essential principle in the foreign missionary areas. This policy is also called as the principle “Three-self”: self-support, self-government, and self-propagation².

Accordingly, self-government was explained that “Local Churches were established their own organization in accordance with New Testament, and native assistant pastors must be supported and encouraged and must be charged with the responsibility when they can afford. Thereafter, foreigner missionaries have to withdraw from Vietnam in caring for believers.

Self-support means that after self-governing, believers and native pastors need to have responsibility for devoting in order to foster and meet the requirements of Church, including the construction of churches and other welfare projects.

Self-propagation is that when local churches have enough capacity of people and materials, they have to evangelize for their people.

The above principles are regulated in the Charter of C&MA, but in fact in the local church, what level to apply these regulations is another matter. For pastors, C&MA initially advocated them doing the “self-support” by producing and trading in the Phillipines, India, Congo, etc., but they do not obtain any significant results. From the earlier twenty century, the pastors are received “substance allowance” from C&MA, including housing costs, food, clothes, mean of transportations, and education costs for their children³.

How the policy of Local Church applies and performs in Vietnam? This just can be clarified after we study each of periods of collaboration of two organizations.

2. The relationship between C&MA and the French Protestant Church of the East in the period of 1911 to 1954

It was the first time three pastors of C&MA had came to Vietnam in 1911; however, they still belonged to the missionary branch of the Chinese Missionary Society. In 1914, C&MA officially opened a missionary branch in Vietnam. According to the regulation, the

pastors in Vietnam are gathered in the organization that its leadership is an Executive Committee was elected.

In the period of initiation, all activities and costs are implemented by C&MA, for example, learning languages, preaching, buying and hiring office, translating Bible, establishing Protestant Printing house, opening Bible College to train Vietnamese pastors and missionaries.

Until 1927, with the pastors' efforts and Vietnamese missionaries' assistance, C&MA established 74 branches with 4,326 believers⁴. Also in 1927, the pastors promoted the establishment of local church by holding the first Council and drafting a Charter for the church organization.

2.1. Surrounding the establishment event of the French Protestant Church of the East and its first Charter

The first Plenum that delegates from many local churches participating in Da Nang in 1927 established the French Protestant Church of the East - the first local Protestant church of Protestantism in Vietnam.

After the Plenum, a Committee drafting Charter was established with 05 pastors of C&MA, including Cadman, Irwin, Jeffrey, Olsen, and Stebbins. One of them wrote in his diary: "Two commissioners in the Committee emphasized that the Charter of C&MA ought to have been translated, but the other three commissioners argued it should not be and lack of many essential conditions, etc.. However, the Committee studied the Charter of other large denominations beside the Charter of C&MA. Sometimes, the discussions was also quite intense, and it was not too hard to understand its reasons. We all were pastors of C&MA, but each pastor belonged to a different denomination. Eventually, pursuant to the vote of three votes in favor, two votes against, the Committee decided to draft another more detailed Charter than the Charter of C&MA"⁵.

This detail shows a lot: The Charter of the CMA profile which is only used to compromise among members of the same sect to missionary proved too simple, not detailed enough to build the original foundation of an indigenous church. As a result, the first

Charter of Vietnamese Protestants compiled by foreign pastors has many elements in common with worldly Protestant denominations. The Charter is very detailed; it contains all the terms of the organizational structure and fabric of organization and the doctrinal, and theological regulations of local church organization.

The relationship between Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) and the French Protestant Church of the East (Hội Tin Lành Đông Pháp) are shown in article 1, chapter 4 of the Charter:

a) The French Protestant Church of the East (FPCE) considers C&MA as a mother of the church. FPCE are made the decision by the grace of God with all hearts and mind follow the Good News and the spiritual truths as Missionary Society have evangelized.

b) C&MA admits FPCE as an independent and autonomous Church that has a separation organization from C&MA and has right to be self-controlled, not depend on the mother of the church.

c) The two organizations are separate and categorical and are not dependent on each other, but both identify themselves as one in Jesus Christ. However, both are recognized as one of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, under the power of God, these organizations help each other in all issues related to evangelize Gospel across the Indochina. However, in terms of administration of FPCE, C&MA acts as an adviser⁶.

Nevertheless, it is the term of “adviser” that is understood in a different way by both organizations, and the fact that C&MA still gains the executive authority and control the most key issues of common work, as follows:

The supervisor rights of C&MA are performed under the mechanism of the Common Committee (also called Vietnamese - American Committee) with the structure of 5-5 members of the Executive Board of the Council for both sides. Moreover, there are some pastors who consider as envoys in charge in the local church or missionary areas. The core thing is that most of local churches of FPCE (later is the Vietnamese Evangelical Church; hereinafter referred to as VEC) are very poor. They cannot be self-supported, and

still receive aid from C&MA. As a result, C&MA has right to determine the plans and staff in all local churches.

Printing house is property of C&MA, and pastors have entirely right to determine its operation; VEC cannot be interfered in it.

C&MA manages and controls the Bible College to train pastors and preachers. VEC has to commit that they do not be opened any other School.

These above regulations have made many local pastors and preachers suspect the “policy of local church” of C&MA.

2.2. The developments in relationship between these two organizations from 1927 to 1954

It is objectively said that the reasons why the pastors apply the policy of local church in Indochina derive from the following issues:

C&MA is a small Missionary Society, limited resources, and depends on the money contributed by believers of old country of C&MA; moreover, this resource is unstable so that C&MA has policy of local church in order to share the assistance expenses.

The policy of high property tax on Alien’s assets of French colonialist state is also a factor that C&MA desires to establish and give right to control to local churches. With the Lord, however, the pastors desire to maintain their maximum impact on local churches.

The missionary issue to ethnic minorities is taken by foreign pastors. Taking advantage of regulation colonialism, they establish the “Highlands/Plateau Pastoral Council”. Although Vietnamese pastors are gathered in the Missionary of Vietnamese Protestant Union (1942), they still have to perform as foreign pastors, within the framework of foreign pastors’ plan and are paid salary and all other costs by them.

The common circumstance is that the pastors open the missionary areas, and the Vietnamese pastors assist them in evangelizing when the local churches reach enough believers. When the local churches have grown and have enough certain believers, they are encouraged devoting 1/10 their income in order to meet the costs of the churches.

If the local churches can do that, it is called the independent churches, and their believers have right to invite master pastors and have the constituent in the Plenum meeting.

The new churches and old churches that have poor believers and cannot foster themselves have to depend on aid of C&MA (salary of pastors and preachers, even material facilities).

In the end of the 1930s, there are a few of independent churches; therefore, it is easy to understand why the administered rights are hold by pastors of C&MA.

The world economic crisis and then the World War 2 broke out impacted strongly on “autonomy and independence” of the new local churches. Due to the economic crisis, then the trade was cut off by war, so the source of money of C&MA was reduced very much. Not only Vietnamese pastors encountered the bad circumstances, but also pastors of C&MA experienced extremely difficult situation.

In the end of this period, a happened upheaval made a change thoroughly the regulation of relationship between C&MA and VEC. When the Japan - America war broke out in 1943, the Japanese army in Indochina arrested all C&MA pastors for detaining in one peninsula in Mỹ Tho. From this moment, the aid and the connection with the Federation of C&MA was entirely ended.

The Vietnamese Protestant Church is suddenly self-supported and self-governed although they do not prepare for it. Printing house of C&MA in Hanoi has to sell its machines for fostering the pastors. Then, this printing house have transferred to Da Lat and the Bible College has to close its operation.

The above difficulties, especially the starvation in 1945 made more than 80% of local churches of VEC in the North and the Central of Vietnam have to close their operation. More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of pastors and preachers have to leave their churches.

After more than seven years of war, the activity of both C&MA and VEC almost deferred. The foreign pastors just returned in the beginning of 1950s with the more plentiful support of staff and finance from the mother country that meets the expectation of

Vietnamese Protestant pastors who is being exhausted by war. However, this situation has had many changes.

In 1950, the 21st Plenum of VEC was hold in Da Nang and promulgated a Resolve:

“Name: Using the name “Vietnamese Evangelical Church” instead of using the letters “Eastern France” and “An Nam”. The term “Local” changes to “Việt Nam”, and the term “mother of church” changes to “American Missionary Society”⁷.

The national spirit and awareness of autonomy and independence of VEC organization have spread into Vietnamese pastors and preachers. Henceforth, there have been many changes in relationship between C&MA and VEC.

In the new Charter of VEC that was edited in 1952, 1957, and 1958, the organization officially proclaimed its administered right about the Bible College: “Da Nang Bible College is under control of VEC... The School Director has to be Vietnamese”⁸.

In the 22nd Plenum convened in Saigon in 1952, the delegates agreed: “From now, the Resolutions of C&MA related to VEC need to be accepted by VEC”⁹.

3. The relationship between C&MA and VEC in the period of 1954 to 1975

After G  neva Agreements, the socio-political situations in South Vietnam had many changes, following the presence of American citizens and armies, the American Protestant organization of missionary, society, and charity began appearing more increasingly in Vietnam.

Due to C&MA is a small organization with limited fundings, they just focus on evangelizing, not to deploy the education, healthcare, and charity programs as other denominations. Meanwhile, this is a dream of VEC with target that grasps the chance, taking advantage of foreign sources of staff and finance in order to develop the material facilities and enhance the standard of living of pastors and believers.

However, this causes the contradiction between two organizations.

Under the agreement, VEC considers C&MA as a founder and have to consult C&MA about “cooperation objects” and considers their doctrine whether or not similarity to cooperate (in order to avoid falling into heresy organizations). Nonetheless, in terms of mentality and benefits, the C&MA does not want to stimulate this trends of VEC.

In the 23rd Plenum convened in Gia Định in 1955, the delegates of VEC agreed:

“Should unionize other Missionary Societies with the same doctrine in order to support each other in serving God.

Should require C&MA to introduce other Missionary Societies with the same doctrine in order to VEC may unionize them”¹⁰.

In order to respond, at the same time, C&MA established an Investigation Council into performing the policy of “Local Church” in missionary areas, including Vietnam. C&MA’s report states that the policy have applied falsely in many missionary areas that take public funds out of C&MA to build churches excessively and to pay salary for lots of local pastors instead of leaving them doing independently. “Many local people are ready to live under the foreigner’s invasion but they consider it as living on velvet”¹¹.

C&MA immediately implemented the policy of funding cuts of 20% per year for 5 years, starting in 1956. Until 1960, the local churches have to be entirely independent.

After deploying the policy, VPEC met many difficulties in its operating fundings.

Officially, these two organizations still maintain a cooperation in accordance with the agreement with the Common Committee (the former of Vietnamese - American Committee). However, the relationship between the foreign pastor and Vietnamese pastors and preachers has many contradictions: “The tension and dissidence continue to ruin the relation between personal foreign pastors and local pastors or Christians in many regions. The main reasons are that they do not understand each other and failure to admit the differences of basic culture, clash of personality, etc. Some local preachers worry about the existence and administration of the Common Committee.

According to them, the Common Committee is so conservative, and it is unable to exist in an independent Church”¹².

Not for a long time, the Federation of C&MA repealed the above policy, and from 1965 onwards, C&MA continues to sponsor the sources of finance and staff, but it appeared a gap between these two organizations.

In the period of 1955 to 1975, VEC had cooperated and got helps and supports from more than other 50 Protestant denominations in order to promote its operation, in which World Vision plays the most important role.

4. Surrounding the compromise of Vietnamese Evangelical Church and the Christian and Missionary Alliance in 1972

In the last ten years of the Vietnam War (1965-1975), C&MA was still the biggest missionary organization in the South Vietnam with the amount of 40 - 50 pastors. The missionary program continues to spread out, especially in the Highlands - Southern Annamite Mountain (Tây Nguyên - Nam Trường Sơn).

The relationship between C&MA and VEC still follows the old mechanism. C&MA maintain the activities, grants to new opened churches, the Bible College as well as Bible courses, etc.

The tension problem between these two organizations and between foreign pastors and Vietnamese pastors or preachers still exist constantly. At that time, the political situation has signs that cause C&MA to worry about it. Predicting that have to leave the missionary area, the branch of C&MA in Vietnam prepared a new project.

On 27 June 1972 in Saigon, C&MA and VEC had signed “the original compromise of Vietnamese Protestant Church and the Christian and Missionary Alliance”¹³.

The Document has 5 main items: 1). The Staff; 2). The Administration; 3). The Finance; 4). The resolutions to deal with heresy and other Christian denominations and organizations; 5). The Communication with the world C&MA.

Each of items has many details, but there are some remarkable notes:

On the Staff: Provision on the mission of foreign pastors in Vietnam, the foreign pastors' rules to Vietnam, the pastors' doctrine and godliness. In particular, Article 2: The foreign pastors' rules to Vietnam specify: "The foreign pastors not only master local languages, but also deeply understand the customs and mentality of local people as well as the regulations of VEC".

On the Administration: Article 1: The Committee Union; "The role of the Committee Union is communication, changing ideas, agreements with the Executive Committee of General Church and C&MA. However, the Committee Union is not an executive agency, so they do not be disseminated texts.

Article 3: The relation between foreign pastors and local Church is that "the foreign pastors are ready to cooperate with Church or pastors of local church. They are not participated in works of local churches or the General Church".

Article 4: About property transfers, "C&MA transfers all their real estate in Vietnam to VEC, which the Board of Property Administration is a receiving unit name".

On the Finance: There are four articles regulating C&MA continues sponsoring the finance for the Bible College and other training programs, for opening new local churches in cities and provinces (allowance for young preachers, 2/3 funds to build churches), and for some incurred needs and some staff training scholarships.

On the resolutions to deal with heresy and other Christian denominations and organizations: There are three relevant regulations, which emphasize VEC do not cooperate with heresies and can communicate with denominations that have same godliness. In case, if they need to relate with any Christian social organization, they have to consult with each other.

On the Communication with the world C&MA: VEC is a member of world C&MA, and they appoint representatives to attend a meeting of the organization.

The compromise is valid for 5 years from date of signing; however, when it has not expired, the foreign pastors have to withdraw from Vietnam after 30 April 1975.

This is extremely important text which show that these two organizations have tried adjusting their internal issues. It also reveals that scales as well as details that express the helps of C&MA to VEC.

5. Influences of the C&MA on VEC (instead of conclusion)

When the foreign pastors left for Vietnam in 1975, VEC was a religious community of about 200,000 believers, including 60,000 baptized believers.

Tracing back to more than 60 years of C&MA's operation in Vietnam, the pastors had accessed differently: "Some people welcome the C&MA's success bigger than other Missionary Societies, but others consider it unremarkable, not proportional to staff", time, efforts and money investments"¹⁴.

Later, a historian of VEC had assessed: The pastors of C&MA played an important role from the period of establishing the National Church in 1927; they pursued the work of reclaiming and cultivating the Church enthusiastically in many uncivilized areas. They achieved invaluable work for the Church through Bible College, literatures, and special positions. Many of these people were celebrities who provide encouragement and aspiration for pastors and believers in the challenging and grievous periods. They were not only advisors but also became companions and co-suffered for pain with Vietnamese. The successes in working in tribes during and after the war for the national independence were the results of their donations. Regretting that some of them have entirely or partially failed in their position because of unknowledgeable of cultures that they had a connection with. Few of them seemed to not master the basic principles of Christianity, so this made them believe that peripheral factors of cultural contexts and denominations are more important than their new life in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. These failures were due to unconformity between teachings and their way of life"¹⁵.

That is assessments and evaluations of the internal Protestant officials.

In terms of purely statistical quantity (quantity of believers), Vietnam is the most successful missionary country in more than 48 missionary countries and territories all around the world of C&MA. The missionary operation of C&MA has left important impacts on appearance, existence, and development of the biggest Protestant organization in Vietnam as follow:

Firstly, the C&MA pastors started evangelizing by translating Bible, establishing the initial Protestant churches, and then establishing the church organization to pastors and local believers. A church organization that has systematically organized from the General Church to the Realm and to final basis churches with principles which have been operated under the mechanism of deputies, democratic election, and candidates, etc., have become standards of the Vietnamese Evangelical Church from beginning to today.

Secondly, the C&MA pastors have left for VEC a series of doctrines, dogmas and rituals that are explained in accordance with Bible, but are embodied in the theological characteristics of C&MA.

Thirdly, the C&MA pastors have directly trained the initial Vietnamese pastors and preachers in accordance with the standards of C&MA. The religious leaders have played active roles in the process of their self-supporting and developing .

Fourthly, although there are disputations surrounding the performance of the policy of the local church, C&MA have established and left for VEC the remarkable material fertilities, including church and real estate, etc., that now it still is precious assets to Vietnam Protestant community.

Finally, C&MA has left for VEC a heritage that is not visible material or visible organization but is remarkable genetic identity. That is dynamic missionary identity in all social circumstances. This has clearly shown in the period of 1975 to today.

On the other hand, among the left heritage by C&MA, there are many defects, an incomplete system as well as genetic problems to VEC. They are as follow:

In terms of doctrine, theology, and ritual: Applying the Charter to a local church (VEC, for example), the simple regulations are not enough to build a perfect doctrine because C&MA just drafted the Charter which generalize common characteristics of Protestant doctrine in order to avoid conflicting among denominations. That is the reason why it is easy to understand in the 1930s, 1940s, even senior pastors also convert into other denominations, and the secessions and divisions also occur in VEC later.

The pastors of C&MA follow many denominations, so until the 1970s the regulations of rituals are not unique, and VEC has to use a simple ritual guidebook of Pastor J. D. Olsen¹⁶.

That is not to mention the pastors preach Gospel without consistency because many of them are normal believers with unknowledgeable of theology. It is unknowledgeable of theology and understanding of anthropology, and indigenous cultures in local churches so that they has made culture conflicts and resistance from people more increasingly¹⁷.

In terms of training policy of pastors and concerned social issues:

Due to C&MA is a small missionary, so they do not establish the Divinity Institutes, Universities as well as cultural and social institutions in order to support the missionary. This is a difference among Protestant denominations in other missionary lands. Specifically, the situation is totally opposite in China and Korea, where the denominations have established the system of universities and publishing houses, and have trained a team of intellectuals to build missionary groundwork.

In the training policy of local pastors, there were complaints about “colony” in the direction of C&MA. They almost focused on training intermediate pastors who are faithful missionaries but restricted training to senior pastors, even training leaders for a local church. This led to the situation that the Protestant officials lack prestigious intellectuals inside of the Church and outside of society, so the position of the Protestant church and its contribution in terms of culture show very weakly. As a consequence, the Vietnamese Evangelical Church still copy worship

words, rituals and way of life, methodology, and ways of propagandizing from European - American Churches; besides, the purpose of building their own theology is illusory.

Until now, the principles of self-support, self-government, and self-propagation are still goals that the Vietnamese Evangelical Church needs to try for a long time to reach it./.

Notes:

- 1 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *A History of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1911-1965)*, Center of Gospel Studies, Saigon: 38.
- 2 According to Lê Hoàng Phu, this principle has been applied in China and North Korea by many missionary organizations since in the 1960s.
- 3 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *A History of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1911-1965)*, *ibid*: 39-40
- 4 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *ibid*: 55.
- 5 I. R. Stebbins (2004), “41 years of serving the Lord with the Vietnamese Evangelical Church 1920-1961” (Diary), *Spiritual Light Magazine*: 150-151.
- 6 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *A History of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1911-1965)*, *ibid*: 67-68.
- 7 The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1965), *The Resolutions of the Council of General Church (from 1927 until 1963)*, Nha Trang: 31.
- 8 The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1958), *The Charter of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam in 1936* (corrected and reprinted in 1952, 1957, and 1958), Protestantism Pub., Saigon: 24.
- 9 The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1965), *The Resolutions of the Council of General Church (from 1927 until 1963)*, *ibid*: 39
- 10 The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1965), *The Resolutions of the Council of General Church (from 1927 until 1963)*, *ibid*: 40
- 11 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *A History of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1911-1965)*, *ibid*: 133.
- 12 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *ibid*: 133.
- 13 The original compromise of The Evangelical Church of Vietnam and the Christian and Missionary Alliance had published in the *Bible Monthly* (Thánh Kinh Nguyệt san), No. 398, 399, Sept. and Oct. 1972.
- 14 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *A History of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (1911-1965)*, *ibid*: 163.
- 15 Lê Hoàng Phu (1974), *ibid*: 171.
- 16 The book “Pastors’ Lodestar” (Mục sư chỉ nam) by J. D. Olsen just introduces the rituals of many denominations.
- 17 For instance, worshiping ancestor considers as idolatry worship - NXH.

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