

**THE SOLUTION TO RELIGIOUS ISSUE:
FROM THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
TO THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM**

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Abstract: The article deals with efforts of Vietnamese State on building and perfecting the religious policy. The author raises historical experiences in carrying out the religious policy. In the first part of article, the author sets forth the religious problems before the August Revolution, 1945. They were the conceptions, analysis on religion by Vietnamese Communist Party in Political thesis (October, 1930), and the political program (February 3rd, 1930) by the veteran revolutionaries as Nguyễn Ái Quốc, Nguyễn Văn Cừ, Lê Hồng Phong. In the second part the writer speaks of the achievements of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in solving religious problems. The first achievement, Vietnamese state defined the important position of religious policy; the second one, the state recognized the importance of propagation and educating the religious policy for the masses and made the masses aware of the importance of religious unity; the third, the government had much initiative in establishing patriotic organization accordance with religious dignitaries and believers; the fourth, the religious problem was solved well in the war of resistance against the French colonialists; the last, policies in resolving the religious problems were suitably issued in the years 1954 - 1976 when Vietnam was divided into two parts. In the 3rd part, the writer sets forth the religious policy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. He analyses the need of renovating the religious policy and the process of the renovation course. He also analyses the results and the problems that it is needed to study and resolve in the future. He concludes that the religious policy needs to have been carried out because it corresponds to the juridical socialist state.

Introduction

After the August Revolution the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has dealt with many great problems of politics, society, and culture in the process of building and developing and in the framework of national renovation. Vietnam from the salve - country became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the country's position has been grown in the world...

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One of many problems which have been resolved is religious problems. Of course, religious policy has been recognized as public policy. Because whole the people had to take part in the struggle for protection and maintenance of national sovereignty, religious policy was occasionally carried out in special point of time of the nation.

In this article, on the one hand, we try the best to deal with the great efforts of the state in setting up and perfecting the religious policy with many tendencies (from the model of secular state, the system of laws on religion, the concrete policies regulate the activities of religion and belief to political, social and cultural policies attract religious communities to take part in the cause of building the country). On the other hand, we also try the best to summarize historical experiences of this process, especially in 20 years of renovation of carrying out religious line and policy.

We think that in many great achievements of Vietnamese State, we can not but speak of the achievements of implementation of religious policy. Although acknowledgments of religion are different from each other, religion has been special reality of society and culture, and more or less decides the nature of national culture as well as the development of a country. The results of religious policy might not be set off on mass means as political, social and cultural levels of our country for 65 years, but it can not be overlooked.

1. The religion problem before the August Revolution

Noticeably, since being born Vietnamese Communist Party has propagated the lines of national liberation of Vietnamese revolution as revolutionary way, Brief Political Program, Political Thesis (October, 1930) and political documents of our Party in the campaign of the August Revolution. These documents have showed that religious problem always have existed in the consciousness of leaders.

On the one hand, the communist and international worker movements had been influenced deeply by leftist ideology on religious problem, so Vietnamese Marxists had been limited in the approaching to religious problem. We have just promulgated the rare document relating to Lê Hồng Phong's views that criticized leftist ideology of Southern Party Committee on religious problem. Besides criticizing unilateral ideology of Southern Party Committee, in *The roots of religion* Lê Hồng Phong commented and criticized the views on political religion: although there were few Catholics in the South (ĐQH), most of them followed imperialism and "if we do not annihilate religion in the masses revolution can not win victory". When introducing Lê Hồng Phong's precious document, we have stressed that before 1945 Vietnamese

revolutionaries were interested in the struggle for national independence and ant-colonialism, but there were some leaders of Vietnamese Communist Party had right opinions on religion. At that time not that all Communist Parties had these opinions”⁽¹⁾

On the other hand, there is no doubt that Vietnamese Communist Party had correct realization on politics and ideology. He found the difference of ideology, consciousness and religion. He found clearly the harmfulness of scheme that took advantage of religion of colonialists and lackeys. At the same time he found the role of Catholics in revolution.

Besides many correct and profound realizations of Hồ Chí Minh, Nguyễn Văn Cừ, Lê Hồng Phong on religion, many opinions of Trường Chinh, Nguyễn Văn Nguyễn and the Party’s documents in the campaign of the August Revolution also paid attention to religion, especially attitude of the Party toward religion in policy of establishing Vietnam Front.

The victory of the August Revolution was actual uprising of the whole people including religious compatriots. When Tân Trào National Congress opened in Việt Bắc revolutionary base with 60 delegates of political parties, national salvation unions from the North to the South, among them there were some delegates of ethnic groups and religions.⁽²⁾

The religious people also showed their cheerful attitudes towards the victory of revolution. In the first days of the August General Uprising, there were some articles in *Đa Minh* newspapers (Catholicism) and in *Tiếng chuông sớm* news papers (Buddhism) that were sympathies with nation and revolution.

We can draw following remark: from national and religious angles, the August Revolution in Vietnam seemed to have active developments and “religious problem is settled and uncomplicated in the process of seizing and maintenance of government”. We need to say more that Hồ Chí Minh played the important role in this problem.

2. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and religious problem

2.1. The first achievement: Hồ Chí Minh government early defined the role of religion. Government raised 6 urgent matters, the sixth of which was religious problem as Hồ Chí Minh proclaimed: “the colonialists and feudalists realized

¹. See *Some Opinions of Lê Hồng Phong on the Religious Problem* in Studying religion, personality and event. Hồ Chí Minh Publishing House, 1st republication 2010, p. 56.

². The History of Vietnamese National Assembly, 1946 - 1960, National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, 1994, p. 19.

division of Catholics and non Catholics to rule our compatriots. I proposed Government to declare that freedom of belief and unity of Catholics and non Catholics”⁽³⁾.

In September, 1945 Provisional Government had to face many challenges but many meeting of Government dealt with religious policy more concretely. The meeting’s minutes on September 20th 1945 was noted that “the right to freedom of belief is the principle of regime’s democratic republic, Government orders: *the first article* people must respect and not violate temples pagodas, mausoleums, churches and all places which have religious characteristics of every religion”⁽⁴⁾.

2.2. *Vietnamese Communist Party found that propagation* and education of religious policy as well as rising of people’s consciousness on the unity of Catholics and non-Catholics were urgent tasks, so many Party leaders and Government had important writings timely. These writings puzzled out worries of people and disclosed the scheme of enemy that took advantage of religion.

Trường Chinh wrote an important article in the Truth newspaper, volume 30 (April 6th, 1946), its name was to overthrow error tendency, not to violate the belief of people. He not only criticized “children’s disease” on religion that was expressed in Hanoi surroundings but also forecasted that religious problem was a thorny problem that government needed to care for it⁽⁵⁾. It is said that religious problems was the most complicated one at that time. In order to reject slander Communists on religious problem, Trường Chinh wrote a fine political comment under the title Communism and Catholicism. It was printed in the Truth newspaper, volume 105 (December 25th, 1948).

At that time Hồ Chí Minh had many writings and letters to send to exemplary dignitaries and religious followers of religions. They have been studied by many researchers and readers.

2.3. *The other original achievements:* the Government had many initiatives in establishing the patriotic organizations in accordance with dignitaries and followers of different religions and attracted many typical persons of religions to take part in political and powerful organizations of the August Revolution.

The August Revolution and Hồ Chí Minh attracted many typical intellectuals and dignitaries of religions to take part in government as Ngô Tử Hạ, Deputy Minister for War Invalids, Doctor Vũ Đình Tụng, Minister for War Invalids (at the end of the resistance against French), lawyer Nguyễn Thành Vinh, the director of Southern

³. Hồ Chí Minh Complete Works, National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, 1995, volume 4, pp. 7-8.

⁴. National Centre of Archives. *The Decree of Vietnamese President in 1945-1946*.

⁵. See *Truth* newspaper on April 6th, 1946, p. 5.

Finance; Trần Công Chính, Redemptorists in Hanoi, the Secretary of the Central National Salvation of Catholics; lawyer Thái Văn Lung, the member of National Assembly, deputy commander of the 7th military zone, he was sacrificed in the first days of the anti French resistance in the South.

In National Assembly there were many famous Catholics as: Professor, doctor Nguyễn Tấn Gi Trọng (the full member of Standing Committee of National Assembly); Ngô Tử Hạ, president of the first meeting of National Assembly (in 2nd morning of March, 1946); priest Phạm Bá Trục, Deputy Chief of Standing Committee of National Assembly from December, 1946; Cao Triều Phát (a member of Standing Committee of National Assembly) and his contributions were acknowledged.

Two other well-known persons were Lê Hữu Từ and Hồ Ngọc Cẩn; they were bishops and supreme advisers of our Government. Vietnamese Revolutionary history valued clearly their actions and positions.

2.4. The resolution of religious problem in the war of resistance against the French colonialists in following years was the other important contribution of our State.

2.4.1. The characteristic of religious problem in this stage was that colonialists and imperialists had bribed a part of religion to confront Hồ Chí Minh government. Therefore, the religious policy had suitable changes.

Step by step the Party and State gradually changed religious policy. From macroscopic policy Vietnamese Communist Party had concrete policy as the policy of Catholic mobilizing, Caodaism's mobilizing, Hòa Hảo's mobilizing...

The key of these policies were to suppress resolutely armed actions of hostile forces. We should have more research works of this problem, so that we can find clearly the contributions of the Party and State in resolving schemes of enemy towards religious problem in the cold war and in creating miraculous victories in two great wars.

2.4.2. On the other hand, we should continuously study the contributions of patriotic dignitaries and religious followers of Buddhism, Caodaism, Hòa Hảo Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Very few people knew the contributions of Southern Protestants in the war of resistance against French colonialists⁽⁶⁾.

⁶. See article *Revolution and Religion*. It is the first time we issue some document regarding Protestant church in the Southern resistance (8/1948) in *Studying Religion, Personality and Event*; *ibid*, pp. 282 - 283.

Hồ Chí Minh convoked *Conference of religious followers taking part in resistance* in 1952 in Việt Bắc; it was an important event to affirm the rightness of policy of unity of nation and religion.

2.4.3. Hồ Chí Minh Government had not by pass any achievement of religious policy in the war of resistance against the French colonialists; he has had right determinations relating to religious communities when promulgating policies on politics, society, economy, culture. We have taken care of this matter when studying the Decree on *Tax exemption of land and farm production of religious organizations* (1949), *the Law of land reform* (1952). At that time, it was rare to see a socialist country that had the flexible and effective policy of religion; especially religion was in principled levels as the problem of landlord and land.

2.4.4. Although religious policy was carried out the war of resistance against the French colonialists, Hồ Chí Minh government had made steady advances in forming and realizing this policy to contribute to the victory of Điện Biên Phủ and Geneva Agreement (7/1954).

We have not yet condition to summary the experiences of carrying out religious policy in localities, especially in interzones; every region had different contributions.

2.5. *On the progress of religious policy in 1954 - 1976*

When the North carried out reformed task and built socialism, religious policy had many new progresses.

We think that Decree N^o. 243/SL was signed by Hồ Chí Minh was the legal written text to contribute to setting up religious laws in Vietnam.

Five chapters of this text not only dealt with the most important matters as *Guarantee of the right to freedom of belief and religion* but also was main regulations *on the right to freedom of religion* according to Vietnam's view⁽⁷⁾. Moreover, this text also has defined the model of secular state in Vietnam. Now we continuously perfect this model.

We should talk about Circular Letter N^o. 60/TTg (June 11th, 1964) and Decision no 297-CP (November 11th, 1977) on some policies regarding to Religion signed by Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng. On the above Decree, these documents raised 5 general principles on freedom of religion and belief and 6 concrete policies on religious activities of Government. These documents have showed clearly Hồ Chí Minh's thought on religion and belief.

⁷. The written text of this Decree was in Official Gazette of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam November, 1955.

In 1976 Vietnam has been reunification; her name was changed, so the historical stage of establishing and developing of religious policy in Vietnam was also closed in order to enter on new stage.

3. The religious policy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

3.1. The requirement of regulation of religious policy

Before 1990 the Social Republic of Vietnam had to face many new challenges which required regulating religious policy step by step.

First of all, it was the requirement of building the Juridical State. Although the model of the secular state was affirmed, the system of law on religion was limited. We should carry out the people's right to freedom of belief which was built in Constitution and concrete regulations in Vietnamese law. In the past the management of religious life only met political requirement, it means we guaranteed the political, social stability and struggled against the enemy's schemes in taking advantage of religion. Now legal requirements of religious life (including following, practice and preaching) are higher and more all - round.⁽⁸⁾

As has been said, in perfecting the model of the secular state, resolving of legal factor of religion (both the right to freedom of individual and the legal person's right) has been brought out.

From religious life: we have realized the restoration and development of religion at the end of 20th century. We find that Vietnamese religions have been stable and developmental. As world religions, Vietnamese religions also take part in the process of modernization, the international integration, secularization.... Among them there is appearance of the relation between religion and State.

- When we have integrated in the world we should carry out the world integration on religious law first of all International Conventions, new interrelations in the globalization's tendency and the religious life in the world at present.

- In 1986 the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam began to implement its policy of Reform and Renewal, its policies regarding religion was renovated, especially from 1990 up to now.

⁸. In fact Decree 234 selected the third model among present models of secular state. This model corresponded with a multi religion country as Vietnam. In 2005 our state recognized 6 religions as: Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Caodaism, and Hòa Hảo Buddhism. At present Vietnam recognizes 12 religions and 32 religious organizations. 6 religions which have been just recognized are new religions as Baha'i, the Pure Land Buddhist Home Practice Association, Tứ Ân Hiếu nghĩa... In the world there are other models of the secular state as: the model of religious state and nation (the first model); the model of civil religion (the second model) and the model of the neutral secular state (the fourth model).

3.2. *The night before Renewal: the policy and awareness of religion*

Our religious policy has been influenced by Political Programmer in 1991, concretely Resolution N^o. 24-NQ/TW on October 16th 1990 of the Politburo on “Strengthen Religious Affairs in the New Situation”. It was great landmark in development of awareness.

That was the first time, Vietnamese Communist Party, in the document of Politburo, recognized that religion is the objective need of a part of people and it exists and will continue to co exist with socialism; religion has cultural and ethnic values in accordance with new regime. It was the first time our Party raised new principles in treatment and management of religion and considered religion to be affair of political system.

After that many years, Vietnamese Communist Party still has had other documents as Instruction N^o. 37 (1998); Resolution of the 7th Congress of the Communist Party (2003) on the religious problem but Resolution N^o. 24 NQ/TW still plays an important role.

3.3. *Renovation of religious policy: achievements, results and matters that are set up*

3.3.1. The system of law regarding religion is continuously perfected

Decree N^o. 69/ HDBT on March 21st, 1991 of Council of Ministers on Religious Activities was the initial document. In 1993 Government issued Decree regarding duty, authority and organizational framework of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs. Then many documents regarding religion were born as on April 19th, 1999 Government issued Decree N^o. 26/NĐ-CP “On religious activities”. On June 18th, 2003 Prime Minister issued Resolution N^o. 125/2003 on Approval of action program of Government in carrying out the Resolution of the 7th Central Conference on Religious Affairs...

Especially, public opinions inside and outside of the country were interested in *the Ordinance on Belief and Religion*. It was adopted and issued by the Standing Committee of National Assembly in July, 2004 and the Government Decree *On Guidance for Implementation of a number of Articles of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion* (March, 2005). Macroscopically, the strong change of religious policy was originated from the Resolution N^o. 24. In this Resolution, religious affairs were anti-exploitation of enemy but now it is mobilization of the masses (belonging to public relations). Its important subject is “Essentially, religious affairs are the mobilization of the masses”.

The above documents have showed new following advances in laws regarding religion.

Firstly, the relations between State and religions, more concretely the religious organizations (Church, Protestant Church, the Management Committee, and Parish Council) have been improved in accordance with the model of the Juridical State. The model of Marxist secular State is the atheistic secular state by nature. It was established by Hồ Chí Minh. Since Decree 234 (1955) the model of the atheistic secular state has been showed clearly. It corresponds to religious life in Vietnam and it is welcomed by religious followers and people and accepted by the world. In the Instruction N^o. 01 in 2005, Vietnamese State has made an advance in perfecting the model of the secular state, “priority is given to variety of religions” overcoming the stage “only recognition of 6 main religions”. We have recognized many religious organizations and new religious organizations.

Secondly, the relation between “religious activities” and “religious affairs” has been resolved better. Formerly this relation was not simple because “religious activities” was vital benefit of religious organizations while “religious affairs” were the matters of state control.

The State finds clearly the old lesson when “religious activities” contradicted “religious affairs”, then they conflicted and annulled each other. In recent decades the relation between “religious activities” and “religious affairs” gradually has followed the direction of the juridical state, civilian society.

Thirdly, because of applying the experiences of national and international histories on religious law, our country has initial international integration on religion. The Ordinance on Belief and Religion in 2004 has been symbol example. It was the first time the Ordinance has one chapter on the international activities of religions as well as the institutionalization of jurisdiction of religious organizations.

This is new characteristic of religious policy in our country at present. It has made religious dignitaries and followers happy.

3.3.2. Perfection of the model of secular state is an important achievement of religious policy at present. It is also the great problem in the world although the realizable model of secular state had many achievements 100 years ago we have still many arguments including the relation with other model of “religious state”.

In these achievements we should speak of Instruction N^o. 01 on Protestant problem in 2005. It is an important landmark. It contribute to solve urgent matters of religious organizations, especially of Protestant churches as well as “new religious

phenomenon” (strange religions) in our country and open up new situation of religious system in Vietnam. It contributes to drive back the strategy on “religion - human rights” of our hostile forces.

3.3.3. Religious policy requires resolving the concrete needs of religious life of every religion.

In the past years, especially before and after the *Ordinance on Belief and Religion* in 2004, the Central to locality authorities carry out renovated policy on property and land belonging to religion and open regulations on registration of religious activities of religious organizations, especially the regulations on training and transfer of dignitaries. These regulations have made religious communities cheerful.

Religious newspaper and communication have made an advance. Many Bibles, religious books, and religious documents have been regularly published. When coming to Vietnam, many foreigners recognize that the religious life is so lively in Vietnam.

The international activities of religions are also the noticeable achievement in recent years. The important advances in establishing of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Vatican in recent years has been an important manifestation. We should recognize that the international activities of religions are going effervescently.

In general, the religious life in Vietnam in the years of Reform and Renewal has changed well. The orientation “traveling with nation” of religion has been carried out. Many religions may adapt themselves to socialism. They are important results of the renovation of religious policy in Vietnam.

However, in the last years the people confronted new challenges in the problem of religious and national unity. In the early 2001, the first time we had to confront political revolt of hostile forces in the Central Highlands. The hostile forces took advantage of religion and national problem to set up “Dega State, Dega Protestantism”. It is clearly that Vietnam is one of many countries which has to confront new scheme of “Religion and Human right” strategy.

3.3.4. The renovation of religious policy has had many important achievements for two decades. The religious communities have accepted these achievements cheerfully. Here we should speak of the role of the management apparatus of state on religion. In the last years the management experience of this apparatus has developed. Recently, the Government has issued the important decision to all the Government Committee for Religious Affairs to establish the school for training of religious management officers and the Institute of Religious Policy Studies.

Nevertheless, the perfection of religious policy surely have to resolve many matters as building of theoretical base, perfecting of context, the compiling of written text, the management of religious policy, etc.

3.4. The problems should be set up in renovation and perfecting of religious policy

It is noted that from the 7th Congress to the 10th Congress of Communist Party of Vietnam, renovation of religious policy that was dealt with in Resolution 24-NQ/TW was carried out. Although we have some results, we need to new advance both in thinking and in practice.

First of all these are following matters:

Firstly, we have recognized that religion has been social reality; even it can go with nation and socialism. So we should create good condition for religion to have ability and legal rights so that religion can take part in some social levels and it can contribute to building and developing our country while it meets the needs of religions.

The aim of objective theory: in the setting of globalization and modernization, all religion have tendency to become “religions of society” and to adapt themselves to society. In our country there are 23 million religious followers. They live every where from plains to uplands, so real strength of religious followers is increasing more and more.

When recognizing the tendency of religion of society, theoretically we have to face two situations: On the one hand, the “religions of society” have condition to show that they are more dynamic than other religious communities. On the other hand, while religions are restored and developed, they become pressure to State.

Secondly, we should solve better the relation between State and Churches.

At present, the key problem of religious renovation is to place the relation between State and Church in the juridical state and rule by law. If we do this problem well, the religious life will be more stable; the unity of religion and nation will be stronger. Now, many religions require civil position, so when we build the model of juridical state, we should have new look about the relation between State and religious organizations.

The document of the 10th Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party has spoke of “lawful religions” and lawful religious organizations are protected by law if “they operate according to the law”.

This problem is not only important for building the juridical state but also it meets urgent requirements. If we perfect religious law we can do religious affairs well.

Today, before speaking of religious code (the documents of Politburo in the 9th term have spoken of this), we should perfect law of legal religion and other procedures regarding religion although we have the *Ordinance on Belief and Religion*. If we do that we can perfect the model of the juridical state which was selected after Geneva Agreement (1954). Getting through experiences we find that it is necessary for a country to set up law of legal factor when selecting the model of secular state. It means religious organizations and their duties and rights are recognized by law. Although Instruction N^o. 01 in 2005 has been an important legal event regarding religion, it only has resolved Protestant problem in our country so we need to have legality of religion.

Thirdly, we should stabilize religious life and create good condition for religions to contribute to building and developing the country. Hồ Chí Minh had pointed out that: we should continuously maintain and develop tendency that religions travel with Nation and Socialism; we should realize unity of nation and religions and achieve the good similarity in idea of religions and socialism; we should develop good values of religions first of all cultural and ethic values; we are vigilant over enemy scheme that takes advantage of religion to destroy the country and socialism.

Nowadays, why are we short of research works on “religions are traveling with Nation in the socialist environment”? As already said under the innovatory light of Vietnamese Communist Party, our thinking and action have important changes, but we still have many problems regarding religions to resolve.

Fourthly, in the renovation of religious policy should enlarge three levels that religions can take part in:

- Religious organizations can take part in activities of education and training in the capacity of investors. Of course, their activities are in educative law of State.
- Religious organizations can take part in health service in the capacity of investors.
- On charitable activities: religious organizations can participate in the charitable activities to enlarge social and economic activities. Such enlargement not only meets the requirement of religious organizations but also keeps pace with and adapt to international general rule.

Fifthly, because Vietnam has integrated into international and the religious system is more and more enlarged, the international relation of religion has emerged new problems, among them there is problem on the religious activities of foreigners in Vietnam. The *Ordinance on Belief and Religion* has initially resolved this problem. However, we should recognize “new religious event” more deeply and generously to have more appropriate policy.

The cause of Reform and Renewal of Vietnam has been initiated and leaded by the Party for 20 years. Vietnamese and international opinion have recognized this Renewal as the renovation of awareness and policy. In fact, the renovation of religious policy has achieved good results, at the same time we have many problems to resolve seriously and pressingly.

4 Conclusions

After the August Revolution, we have leap forward in national history. During over 65 years, Vietnamese and Vietnamese State has achieved many great achievements in all levels that contribute to change of appearance and position of Vietnam in international field.

Religious policy is one of many social policies of our country. It is also public policy in the political institution of Vietnam.

It is important that Vietnamese State know how to develop the good traditional values of nation and religion; we always base on the ideological basis of Marxism - Leninism and experiences of Hồ Chí Minh on religion to form and carry out the religious policy. That was why we overcame all difficulties to maintain the victory of revolution. The key of religious policy is to develop highest the active values and the sympathies of social ideology and patriotic and human thoughts of religion; we should restrain to take advantage of religion to carry out political schemes.

Nowadays, religious policy is advancing toward new route: a religious policy corresponds to Socialist Juridical State and civil society so we can believe in the following achievements in the future. /.