

NEW POINTS IN THE 11th VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS REGARDING RELIGION

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Since its establishment (1930 -2011) Vietnamese Communist party has held 11 Congresses. In all congresses our Party has dealt with religious problem. Some Party's views are consistent and constant in all congresses but there are developmental and supplemental views. In the 11th Congress, our party has dealt with some new standpoints

In the 11th congress, the religious problem is mentioned in two important documents: *the Platform for national construction during the transitional period toward socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011)* and *Political Report in the 11th Congress of National Representatives*.

The Platform has written that "State respects and guarantees the people's right to freedom of belief and religion and not to follow any belief and religion according to the law. All actions that violate the right to freedom of belief and religion and take advantages of belief and religion to damage the interests of State and people will be punished"². The Political Report in the 11th Congress of National Representatives affirms that "The policy, law on belief and religions are continuously perfected in accordance with Party's view. The cultural values and good ethics of religions are brought into play; the religious organizations, dignitaries and believers are encouraged to live "for better secular and religious life" and take in the cause of building and defending homeland. The religious organizations are created good conditions to carry out their activities under the charters and regulations of religious organization which have been recognized by State in accordance with the law. Any action that takes advantage of belief and religion to undermine the cause of national unity will be prevented"³.

In documents of the 11th Congress, our Party states basic standpoints regarding religion and religious affairs as follows

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² Vietnamese Communist Party. Document of the 9th National Congress. National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, 2011. p. 81

³ Vietnamese Communist Party Document of the 11th National Congress. National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, 2011. p.245

Firstly our Party respects and guarantees the people's right to freedom of belief and religion and not to follow belief and religion according to the law.

Secondly, our Party inactively prevents and resolutely struggles against any action that takes advantage of belief and religion to fascinate, divide and destroy the cause of the great national unity.

Thirdly, our Party respects and brings into play the cultural values and good ethics of religions.

Fourthly, our Party encourages the religious organizations, dignitaries and believers to live "for better secular and religious life" and take in the cause of building and defending homeland.

Fifthly, our Party cares for and creates good conditions for religious organizations to carry out their activities under the charters and regulations of religious organization which have been recognized by State in accordance with the law.

Sixthly, our Party continuously perfects policies and law regarding religion and belief in accordance with Party's standpoints in new stage of our country.

We can find that in the 11th Congress, our Party not only continuously affirms some old standpoints that were stated in previous Congresses but also supplements some new standpoints. The writer would like to deal with some new standpoints regarding religions in the 11th Congress.

The first problem is to respect and guarantee the people's right to freedom of belief and religion and not to follow belief and religion according to the regulations of the law

This is consistent standpoint of Vietnamese Communist Part. This standpoint had been quoted and affirmed many times in the Congresses of our Party. Up to now, our Party has held 11 congresses. If we study our Party's standpoints in the Congresses we find that this standpoint has some new points. For example, from the 8th Congress to the past Congresses, documents of those Congresses only said that "State *respects* people's right to freedom belief and religion and not to follow belief and religion according to the regulations of the law". But the documents of three following Congresses (the 9th, 10th and 11th) stated that "State *respects and guarantees* the people's right to freedom of belief and religion and not to follow belief and religion". In order to guarantee this right

completely, we have to change our awareness and grasp thoroughly new standpoint of our Party regarding religion.

We need to add that in the 2nd Congress (1951) our Party said that “ State respects and defends the right to freedom of belief”⁴. According to me, the concept of “defend” does not identify with the concept of “guarantee”. The first chapter of Order No 234/ SL was signed by Hồ Chí Minh to state that “The Government guarantees the right to freedom of belief and freedom to worship of people”. The word “guarantee” was mentioned in Order of the Government but at that time this word was not mentioned in the documents of Party’s Congress

In the 11th Congress the concept of belief is distinguished from the concept of religion so we have a sentence “Freedom of belief, religion and freedom of not to follow belief, religion of people”⁵. The 9th Congress stated that “The Party consistently implements the policy of respect and guarantees people’s right to freedom of belief , the right of citizen to follow or not to follow any religion, the right to take part in normal religious activities according to the law”⁶. The 10th Congress stated that “ The Party consistently implements the policy of respect and guarantees people’s right to freedom of belief , the right of citizen to follow or not to follow any religion, the right to take part in normal religious activities according to the law”⁷.

According to written language, the concept “freedom of belief” includes the freedom of religion. The freedom of belief and worship means to guarantee the right to freedom of religious practice; right to follow or not to follow any religion; the right to freedom of preaching in religious bases; the right to publish biblical books and educate dignitaries. Freedom of belief not only means freedom of thought or choice of faith but also respect of religious activities. In order to avoid misunderstanding, the 11th Congress states clearly that we not only respect and guarantee religious faith but also religious activities to manifest religious faith. According to *Ordinance of Belief, Religion*, religious activity means the dissemination and practice of religious

⁴ ibid

⁵ ibid

⁶ Vietnamese Communist Party: Document of the 9th National Congress. National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, 2011. p.128

⁷ See the Political Report of the 9th Central Committee in the 10th National Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party, on 10th April, 2006

dogmas, cannon laws, religious rites and organizational administration of religions.

The second problem is to take the initiative of preventing actions that take advantage of belief, religion to fascinate , divide and destroy the great national unity.

To combat the abuse of religion is a problem that is often mentioned in all Congresses of our Party. The 11th Congress put forward two noticeable points of this problem

The first point is “to take the initiative of preventing actions that take advantage of belief and religion but not “to fight passively” fire or “to solve situation”. In the previous Congresses, our Party pointed out that we needed to struggle against anyone who takes advantage of religion with different expressions. The 2nd Congress said “to punish severely actions that take advantage of belief and religion”. The 3rd Congress said that “State needs to punish actions that take advantage of belief and religion”. The 4th Congress said “to resist actions that take advantage of belief and religion”. The 5th Congress said “to punish severely actions that take advantage of belief and religion”. The 6th Congress said “to increase redouble our vigilance and determinedly and timely resist actions that take advantage of belief and religion”. The 7th Congress said that “strictly forbid and prevent actions that take advantage of belief and religion”. The 8th and 9th Congresses said that “to strictly forbid actions that take advantage of belief and religion”. The 11th Congress said that “to struggle and strictly handle actions that take advantage of belief and religion to damage the interests of Homeland and people “(supplemental platform). The Political Report points out that “to take the initiative of preventing actions that take advantage of belief, religion to fascinate , divide and destroy the great national unity”. We can find that “to take the initiative of preventing” is new point that is mentioned in the 11th Congress. We need “to take the initiative of preventing so nobody can take advantage of religion. This action is better than solution of religious problems. The best preventive method is interested in material and spiritual needs of religious people and we must have new views and comprehensive policies regarding religions.

The second point is “actions that take advantage of religion to fascinate, divide and destroy the great national unity.

The Political Report of the 10th Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party affirmed that “we struggle and prevent *superstitious activities* and actions that take advantage of religion to harm the common interests of nation, violate people’s right to freedom of religion”⁸. The phrase “*superstitious activities*” in the Political Report of the 11th Congress was replaced by the phrase “*to fascinate, divide and destroy the great national unity*”. The concept of “superstition” is different from the concept of “fascinate”.

The third problem is to respect the cultural values and good religious ethics.

In the Resolution No 24- NQ/TW of Politburo, our Party recognized that “religious ethics have much in accordance with the cause of building new society” The Instruction No 37 – NQ/TW of Politburo in 1988 recognized that “the cultural values and good religious ethics are respected and promoted”. The 5th Congress of the 8th Central Committee dealt with “the cultural policy regarding religion” In the Political Report of the 9th Congress, our Party formally affirmed “to promote cultural values and good ethics of religions”⁹. In the 10th Congress our Party repeated this standpoint: “to promote cultural values and good ethics of religions”.

In the 11th Congress, the Platform of Party not only affirms “to promote cultural values and good ethics of religions” but also “to respect these values”. So the word “to respect” is new view in the Platform of our Party. We only see this view in the first principle of the Instruction No 37 NQ/TW of Politburo in 1998: “the cultural values and good religious ethics are respected and promoted”. If we want to promote cultural values and good ethics of religions, first of all we need to respect them. We need to respect heads of religions, dignitaries, believers, and religious organizations, places of worship, biblical books and religious activities.

The fourth problem is to encourage the religious organizations, dignitaries and believers to live “for better secular and religious life” and take in the cause of building and defending homeland

Documents of the 8th National Congress of Party (1996) affirmed “Religious followers and dignitaries are responsible to implement each duty of citizens

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Vietnamese Communist Party: Document of the 9th National Congress. National Politics Publishing House, Hanoi, 2011. p. 128

and live “for better secular and religious life”¹⁰. Documents of the 9th National Congress of Party also affirmed that “Religious followers and dignitaries are responsible to implement each duty of citizens and live “for better secular and religious life”. Documents of the 10th National Congress of Party stressed on the responsibilities of our Party, government, Vietnamese Fatherland Front and people’s organization regarding religions: “ to encourage and help religious followers and dignitaries to live “ for better secular and religious life” The 10 Congress defined clearly subject of religious affairs but mains objects are only religious followers and dignitaries. The 11th Congress affirms the above standpoint and supplements another object. It is “ religious organizations that which are officially recognized by the Sate” The religious organization means a grouping of people who believe in one and the same system of religious dogmas, canon laws and religious rites which is organized according to a given structure recognized by the State. Before the Ordinance on Belief and Religion came into the world, Our State recognized 16 religious organizations of 6 religions. Since Ordinance on Belief and Religion came into the world, our State has considered and recognized 17 more religious organizations of 7 religions. Until June, 2011 in Vietnam there are 33 religious organizations of 13 religions to be recognized by the State.

Religious organizations have important roles in leading religious followers to carry out their religious orientations. Catholic organizations lead Catholics to “live for good secular and religious life” or “to live the Gospel within the nation for the happiness of countrymen”. The Buddhist organizations lead Buddhist believers to carry out orientation: “ the Dharma, the Nation and Socialism”. Protestant organizations advise Protestant believers to “worship of God and love of Nation”. Thanks to helps of our Party and Sate, the number of recognized religious organizations is increasing more and more. These organizations carry out their religion orientations correctly: Beneficial to country and religions. There are many dignitaries and believers who fulfill religious duties and responsibilities of citizen. Religious believers ardently take part in social activities to contribute to the cause of national construction and defense. Our State encourages, helps and creates good condition for

¹⁰ Vietnamese Communist Party: Document of the 8th National Congress, Truth Publishing House, Hanoi, 1996 p. 126

religious believers to take part in economic, cultural, social, humanitarian and charitable activities.

The fifth problem is to care for and create good conditions for religious organization to carry out their activities under the charters and regulations of religious organizations which have been recognized by State in accordance with the law

On religious organizations, the 10th Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party affirmed that “lawful religious organizations must abide by the law and are protected by the law”¹¹. The Political Report of the 11th Congress affirms “to care for and create good conditions for religious organization to carry out their activities under the charters and regulations of religious organizations which have been recognized by State in accordance with the law”¹²

Our State not only recognizes and protects but also cares and creates good condition for religious organizations to carry out their activities under the charters and regulations of religious organizations which have been recognized by State in accordance with the law. This sentence manifests new acceptance of our Party towards legal religious organizations.

The sixth problem is to continuously perfect policies, law regarding belief, religion in accordance with Party's standpoints in new stage of country

When our Party proposes its new standpoints regarding religion, State timely institutionalizes these standpoints in legal documents for these standpoints can go down in life. For example, Politburo promulgated Resolution No 24- NQ/ TW on 16th October, 1990 then Prime Minister issued Decree No 69 in 1991. Politburo promulgated Instruction No 26 on 12th March, 2003 then the 7th Congress of the 9th Central Committee issued Resolution No 25- NQ/TW on Religious Affairs then on 29th June, 2004 President Trần Đức Lương signed the Order to issue Ordinance on Belief and Religion. This Ordinance was adopted by the 9th Standing Committee of the National Assembly on 18th June, 2004. On 1st March, 2005 Government issued Decree No 22/2005/ND-CP On Guidance for Implementation of number of Articles of Ordinance on Belief and Religion.

¹¹ See the Political Report of the 9th Central Committee in the 10th National Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party, on 10th April, 2006

¹² Vietnamese Communist Party: Document of the 11th National Congress. National –Politics Publishing House, Hanoi 2011 p. 81

The 9th Congress affirmed “to gradually perfect the law on religion and belief” The 10th Congress affirmed “to *continuously* perfect the law and policies on belief and religion”. This view is very important. It shows dialectic thought of our Party on religion and belief.

From reality of revolution our Party has complemented its documents with new standpoints on religions.

Religious problem is proposed in the Political Report of the 11th Congress to show renewal of our Party’ thought on religion. Through documents of Congresses we find that some standpoints are reaffirmed or supplemented but some new standpoints are proposed. /.