

THE PROCESS OF FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTRUCTION 01/2005/CT-TTG OF PRIME MINISTER ON PROTESTANTISM IN VIETNAM

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1-Background

We can say that the Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg of Prime Minister of Democratic Republic of Vietnam *on some tasks regarding Protestantism* (Instruction -for short) is *unprecedented legal step for any religion in Vietnam*. Why? In fact in the history of building Socialist country in Vietnam, State has not ever Instruction which directly deals with any religion. We need to consider four following organic aspects to know why Instruction was born:

- *Quick development of Protestantism in recent decade;*
- *Taking advantage of religious belief and the seeds of breakaway*
- *Having attachment to the process of rule of law, institutionalization of strategy and vision of development of Vietnam in general and religion in particular.*
- *Carrying out commitment and responsibility to international community on human right and religious freedom of Vietnamese Government*

2-The quick development of Protestantism in recent decade

In fact, introduction and expansion of Protestantism in Vietnam can be outlined as follows

Protestantism was brought to Vietnam in the late 19th century by Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA). In 1911 the first Protestant missionary base was built in Tourane (Đà Nẵng). In general, Protestantism developed slowly in Vietnam at that time. In 1945, Protestantism in Vietnam had about 50.000 Protestants. In 1975 Protestantism in Vietnam had 200.000 Protestants with 10 denominations concentrating Southern provinces.

In recent decade, Protestantism has developed quickly in urban areas and in ethnic minority areas in the Central Highlands, in

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Northwest regions and in West of Southern region (in Northwest region, Protestantism develops mainly in the Hmongs under the name of Vàng Chử, in the Dzaos under the name of Thin Hung). At present, Protestantism has about 1 million Protestants

On the other hand, in the Central Highlands, Central coastal region, and in Southern Trường Sơn region there are many Protestants who are ethnic people. These regions have 400.000 Protestants. Northern west region has 100.000 the Hmongs and Dzaos to follow Protestantism. These above regions are essential regions in our country on both politics and economy and purpose for firm and long development of Vietnam/

The quick development of Protestant believers and the geographical, political, cultural importance of regions where have a lot of Protestants is first aspect that we should take into account when considering the background of the birth of Instruction

3- - Taking advantage of religious belief and the seeds of breakaway

Can the development of Protestant believers be normal phenomenon if not to say that there are contradictions and conflicts? In particular, this development happens in delicate regions in our country . This problem need to study and analyze continuously.

It is said that Protestantism contradicts Vietnamese traditional culture, especially the worship of ancestor. The quantity of Protestant believers is increasing so the needs of religious documents and places of worship also are increasing. These needs are no longer daily needs but they become spiritual needs of region. When these needs combines with the needs of ethnic people (extreme nationalism, land, emigration) to make many difficulties in resolving needs. Some people think that, the development of quantity of believers does not mean that the quality of faith is improving. In fact this development is the same as psychological contagion in ethnic people. Of course the managers are interested in these phenomena. Government should have concrete solution to resolve the needs of Protestant believers .

Incompletely, in 2001- 2004 in the Central Highlands there were some political uprisings with the help of organization “Dega Protestantism” (which is actually an organization of FULRO reactionaries) and phenomena as “xung vua” (to proclaim oneself king)

and “thế lực siêu nhiên” (supernatural power) which are dealt with in Instruction. To oblige ethnic people follow Protestantism is one of reasons to make Government have settlement in accordance with Vietnamese laws .

Many foreign elements impact on development of Protestant believers such as means of communications, internet and Korean missionaries whose missionary methods are not recognized by the laws. Many Vietnamese people have settled in foreign countries to follow Protestantism. Some Western politicians often enhance problems of religious development, of freedom of religion, democratic policy. They often put these problems in policy and treatment for Vietnam. When facing these impacts, managers should have settlements at state level.

4-- Having attachment to the process of rule of law, institutionalization of strategy and vision of development of Vietnam in general and religion in particular

According to legal status, Protestantism in Vietnam is divided two main kinds as follows:

Protestant churches are recognized legal person status by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Protestant churches are not recognized legal person status by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. These churches consist of many denominations and groups. They are called Protestant house churches.²

Many Protestant churches are recognized their legal person status by State. Instruction was introduced to concretize the process of rule of laws and institutionalize Vietnamese policies under the leadership of Vietnamese Communist Party. We can find that since 1990 the continuous development of Vietnamese legal system is right orientation to regulate the relations on politics, economy, the civic right and responsibility, internal and foreign affairs then make the respect of the laws to become habit in society. The effect of respect of the laws is promoting more and more. Religion has been no exception. It is noted that Instruction is a part of the system legal documents and belongs to the Government authority in accordance with the law. Instruction is to

² Refer the article “On Protestant organization and churches in Vietnam at present” written by Nguyễn Xuân Hùng.

concretize Protestant activities in Vietnam after *Ordinance on Belief and Religion* came into the world in 2004.

If you are interested in the process of formation of legal documents on religion in Vietnam, you can find that from Decree in 1955 up to now we have had a process of compilation of legal documents on religion. The noticeable document is *Ordinance on Belief and Religion* (Ordinance –for short) of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly dated in 2004. Resolution no 25/TW on religion and religious affair of 8th Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party was promulgated in 2003. Resolution no 24/ TW of the Politburo of Vietnamese Communist Party was promulgated in 2003. After taking effect, Ordinance has considered religious relation with other fields such as land, publishing, information, culture, education, health as well as the relation between religious organizations with public authorities regarding religious affairs.

After Instruction was introduced many Protestant churches are granted registration certificate and recognized legal person status. In 1958 Vietnam General Protestant Church (Northern region) was recognized by State. In 2001, Vietnam Federal Protestant Church (Southern region) was recognized by State. From 1958 to 2001 the recognition of Protestant Churches took place slowly. From 2001 up to now the recognition of Protestant Churches has taken place quickly: in 2006 Vietnamese Christian Missionaries was recognized; in 2007 Vietnamese Christian Fellowship Church was recognized; in 2008 Vietnamese Seventh day Adventist Church, Presbyterian Church, Vietnam Baptist Church, Southern Baptist Church of Vietnam were recognized; in 2009 Vietnamese Mennonite Church and the Assemblies of God of Vietnam were recognized. Instruction has opened the legal way for activities of Protestant churches in Vietnam.

However, many house Protestant churches are not recognized legal person status. Leading activities of these church on the frame work is a difficult task, especially these churches are free. They take responsibility by themselves. They do not belong any Protestant church. If theses properties are pushed too far, they create extreme acts to damage propagation of faith. It is a question for managers. After Instruction, the recognition or registration took place, but these operations have not yet taken place smoothly and consistently

5-- Carrying out commitment and responsibility to international community on human right and religious freedom of Vietnamese Government

It is obviously, the birth of Instruction shows that Vietnam has carried out commitment and responsibility to international treaties. Vietnam has participated in almost International Conventions relating to human rights, the right to freedom of religion , the right to politics, society, economy and culture.

Along with economic growth, Vietnam has taken part international integration with guideline of multilateral diplomatic relations but no compromise on sovereignty. Vietnam is gradually carrying out the commitments and responsibility to freedom of religion and human rights. Instruction was introduced basing on the strategy of developing large and small communities in nation. Actually, this is a progressive, fair and objective ideal although it does not solve all problems. Instruction answers for commitments of Vietnamese Government to the questions of international communities regarding religion in general and Protestant believers in particular. This problem is acknowledged and affirmed by some Western politicians although they still complain about cases³

6. Conclusion

We do not repeat the content of Instruction because it is published in means of communications and the official website of Vietnamese government and concerned agencies.

In short, from above analyses we find that the introduction of Instruction is legal step. Instruction helps us to see prospect in resolving Protestant problem in Vietnam

³ To refer International/ Religious Freedom Report of State Department, link <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/149803.htm>