

## THE VALUES OF PROTESTANTISM AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN VIETNAMESE ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS AT PRESENT

**Abstract:** *The landmark of conscious renovation of the Vietnamese Communist Party on religion has manifested in the content of Resolution No 24/TW on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1990. This Resolution asserted that belief and religion are spiritual needs of a segment of the population and religious ethics has some points in accordance with the cause of building new society. The Instruction No 37/TW in 1998, the Resolution No 25/TU of the Politburo of the IX Congress insisted on promoting and encouraging the good cultural and moral values of religion. The Protestant values exist under many forms from Bible to philosophy. These values express clearly in motto: worship of God, love of nation, equality and humanity. These values are standard values, many generations of Vietnamese people try themselves to implement these values. When analyzing the impacts of Protestant values in ethnic minority areas, we find that these values are contributing to teaching people how to become good people. Protestant values also contribute to building good families and avoiding social evils. These values should be promoted to stabilize life in ethnic minority areas at present.*

**Keywords:** *Protestantism; Value; Ethnic Minorrrity; Vietnam.*

### Introduction

Protestantism is one of the large religions with many believers. Its sphere of activity is very broad. Protestantism has great influence on social-political life, psychology, lifestyle, customs of many countries.

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Protestantism is the dynamic religion because its rites and style life are very simple. Protestantism has dignified personal role, democratic spirit so it has not only agreed with psychology and lifestyle of industrial society but also adapted himself to ethnic minority communities.

Recently, Protestantism has developed more quickly, especially in Vietnamese ethnic minority areas.

This article only concentrates on analyzing the Protestant values and their influence in ethnic minority areas in Vietnam at present.

### **1. The concepts of religious value and Protestant value in Vietnam<sup>1</sup>**

Religious value is intrinsic and universal value so it not only creates and absorbs but also promotes the general values of society. Religious value is very important one in comparison with other values. Religious value is “sacred value”. It has manifested clearly in awareness of life and in world out view of each religion. It also has manifested in ritual practice and in belief of believers. No one can explain “sacred value” by materialized and positive views.

Religious values still have been in commandments which have decided what believers to do or not to do. The decision is based on the reason and faith of believer <sup>2</sup>.

#### ***1.1. The true values of Protestantism***

The true value is the essential value of religion. The stableness of religions in history affirms the truth value of religions. The truth value makes people believe in the Divinity. The theology of Protestantism has manifested clearly in Bible: “Only God”, “Only Bible “ and “Only Grace”<sup>3</sup>. Protestantism dignifies Bible. Bible is accepted as the supreme standard of morality. Protestants try their best to follow God’s teachings. All Protestants of different denominations believe that Bible has supreme authority. In other words the true value of Protestantism is Bible – Bible is inspired by God. Jesus is manifestation of God. Jesus told himself “*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me*” (John 14: 6). Jesus is the key of faith.

### ***1.2 The moral values of Protestantism***

The moral values of Protestantism found on the operation of faith. Thanks to faith, beings can make their hope and dream true. Faith relates to human sentiment and reason. On one can becomes honest, humane man without faith

Because of faith, Protestants find spiritual tie then they realize the words of God on morality and lifestyle .They take part in social organizations and charitable activities.

The standard values of morality of Protestants concentrate in 10 commandments. Although these commandments were promulgated long time ago, their values still have been applied to life. Basing on the moral foundation that has been prescribed in Bible we have following remarks:

Firstly, Protestant morality is founded on love or in other words, love is the essential value of Christianity in general and of Protestantism in particular. The love in Protestant morality is in accordance with Vietnamese tradition “love other as myself”

Secondly, Protestant ethics stresses on personal morality and responsibility. Protestants manifest their faith through their behavior and their mind service.

Protestants have responsibility to their society. They consider the responsibility as mission that has been given to them by God. Max Weber summarized the conception of morality of Calvin denomination as follows “The only way of living acceptably to God was ... solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling”<sup>4</sup>

The behaviour and simple lifestyle as well as responsibility of Protestants are in accordance with modern society and the views of our State and Party in the cause of building and developing country.

Thirdly, Protestantism has proposed the standard of family life. Family is the cell of human society. It has the important role in education of human morals.

The 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> commandments are to forbid acts that damage family<sup>5</sup>

This prohibition is in accordance with the regulation of Vietnamese law<sup>6</sup>

### ***1.3. The aesthetic values of Protestantism***

As already analyzed, the true value of Protestantism is Bible. Protestants have accepted this truth because they believe in God.

Protestants manifest their faith through their lifestyle and behavior.

According to Bible, believers are saved by faith but is not act of charity. But their charitable acts prove their faith. Doing charitable acts is not foundation of Protestant ethics but Protestants can perfect their faith by charitable acts. The true faith should be manifested by real acts because “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17)

### ***1.4. The values of Protestant ideology.***

The values of Protestant ideology is examined under the view of world outlook of Protestants. World outlook of Protestants is the comprehensive concept of human origin, the relation between humankind and nature and the foundation of natural world.

#### ***- The Protestant ideology on the foundation of natural world***

For Protestants, the view on the foundation of natural world bases on Genesis. Genesis denotes that God creates the heaven and the earth. He is God Almighty<sup>7</sup>

#### ***- The Protestant ideology on human origin***

Protestants think that: God creates human kind - corruption creates sin - the grace of God means the love saves human being .

Protestants think that human kind is original creation of God. This creation is different from other creation because God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him and he may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle and over all the earth.

*- The Protestant ideology on the relation between human kind and society and nature*

On this relation, Protestants think that God creates natural world and human kind. God created man in his own image, in the image of God and human kind has the right to rule over all the earth. Bible , however, teaches that human kind should use natural product for himself “ *to work it and take care of it*” ( Genesis 2: 15) not to destroy product.

Bible mentions the relation between man and another, man and family, man and community.

In the relation between being and another, Bible stresses on the equality, love and tolerance.

In the relation man and family, Protestants always esteem their family. According to the define of Bible, marry is a covenant, a sacred bond between a man and a women. The first marriage of human being was the marriage of Adam and Eva. Bible teaches the responsibility of parents to their children. Protestants hope their children love God and behave kindly to others in accordance with teachings of Bible.

In the relation between man and his community. Bible teaches that all beings are the children of God so they should love each other. They often help each other, so their solidarity is very strong.

***The ideology on the Protestant reformation***

M. Luther and other thinkers as Zwingli, J. Calvin were Protestant reformers. Their thought opposed the important rules of medieval Church: the spiritual authority is over secular one; Pope is the true explainer of Bible; Only Pope has the right to call community.

According to Hans Kung, the theological view of Luther creates new form of theology and church. He set up the another structure of theology. It broke the view of medieval theology. It helped people to have another understanding that Church is a “body of believers” but is not a “apparatus of power”.

In short, Protestant values have existed in many forms. These values are not strange or opposite to general values of Vietnamese nation.

## **2. The influence of Protestant values in ethnic minority areas in Vietnam at present**

### ***2.1. The influence of Protestant values on individual.***

As already said, according the Protestant conception, individual or being is created by God, he is created in the image of God so he must live so as to deserve what God grants.

Because of the true values the Protestant values influence strongly on Protestant believers in the ethnic minority areas. According to the figures of survey of research topic “*The values and function of Protestantism in ethnic minority areas in Vietnam at present (2016)*” was carried out by the Institute for Religious Studies, we find almost Protestants believe in God.

**Table 1: Protestants believe in God**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 188    | 95.4 |
| No     | 9      | 4.6  |
| Total  | 197    | 100% |

The great number of Protestants who worship only God 98% and implement Sunday observance 98,5%

**Table 2: Worshipping only God**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 193    | 98%  |
| No     | 4      | 2%   |
| Total  | 197    | 100% |

**Table 3: To implement Sunday observance**

| Answer | Number | %     |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Yes    | 193    | 98,5% |
| No     | 3      | 1,5%  |
| Total  | 196    | 100%  |

**Table 4: The reason of going to the church service: Protestants believe in salvation and grace**

| Answer | Number | %     |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Yes    | 179    | 90.9% |
| No     | 18     | 9.1%  |
| Total  | 197    | 100%  |

Protestantism is interested in ethics and individual duties. Almost answerers think that Protestantism teaches human beings how to practise and moral self-improve.

**Table 5: Protestantism teaches human beings how to practise and moral self-improve**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 160    | 81.2 |
| No     | 37     | 18.8 |
| Total  | 197    | 100% |

Through spiritual service and good behaviour, Protestant manifest their faith. Because of faith in God, Protestants in ethnic minority areas implement values of ethics which are regulated in 10 commandments. Protestants obey Bible, they consider their body as temple of God so they have the sense of keeping their body. According to the figure of survey, we find that 98,5% answerers do not smoke, 93.9% answerers do not drink; 99% answerers do not gamble; 100% answerers do not use drug; 97.5% answerers do not quarrel with other or battle with other; 99,5% answerers live hygienically and 97, 5% answerers do not violate laws.

## ***2.2 The influence of Protestant values on family***

Family has the important role in education of human morals. Protestant implement the words of God, they believe that their marriage is created by God so they cannot separate. Bible stresses on constancy of marriage. One of commandments is “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20: 14) and “*You shall not covet the neighbor’s wife, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his ass or anything that is the neighbor’s*” (Exodus 20: 17).

The Protestants in the ethnic minority areas implements commandments more seriously. According to the figure of research topic “*The values and function of Protestantism in ethnic minority areas in Vietnam at present*”(2016), we find that 98% answerers do not covet wife or husband of others.

According to Mr. Ly Hong Chuong, officer in Sung Chang village, Yen Minh district, Ha Giang province: *Protestants execute law fairly good, especially marriage notice. While the child marriage is more popular phenomenon in Hmong ethnic people, 100% Hmong Protestants register their marriage before wedding ceremony.*

According to Chang A Cang, the header of a group of Christian Alliance church in Ta Phin village, Sapa district, Lao Cai province: *the marriage of Hmong people has changed. Now they do not carry out pulling wife custom, boy and girl love each other then they carry out wedding ceremony.*

The filial piety is dignified in family relation, children have to give evidence of their gratitude to their parents. Bible teaches that “*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you*”.

**Table 6: Honor your parents**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 189    | 96.4 |
| No     | 7      | 6.6  |
| Total  | 196    | 100% |

Family is the important factor in educating children to become good citizens. Almost Protestant families teach Bible and 10 commandments their children.

### ***3.3 The influence of Protestant values to community***

Protestantism has been propagated when ethnic minority people are changing their awareness. They are seeking new way. At the same time Protestantism is the modern religions in accordance with market economy. Protestantism has satisfied to some extent spiritual need of ethnic minority people so they accept it easily. It becomes moral support of Protestant believers.



**Table 7: Moral support**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 162    | 82.2 |
| No     | 35     | 17.8 |
| Total  | 197    | 100% |

Almost Protestants think that Protestantism teaches them to live harmoniously and love each other

**Table 8: Protestantism teaches its believers to live harmoniously and love each other**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 180    | 91.4 |
| No     | 17     | 8.6  |
| Total  | 197    | 100  |

When visiting Protestants in ethnic minority areas, we can find the active influence of Protestantism. When propagating in the ethnic minority areas, most missionaries advise people to reject backward customs. They also advise people to implement civilized lifestyle. According to the advice of missionaries, people go to hospital when they are ill, they do not drink, gamble and use drug. They dignify monogamy. Missionaries teach people to practice economy, to regulate their time...

According to the remarks of Nguyen Van Thang: *Protestantism dignifies progression so it can help Hmong people to easily reject backwardness and accept progression. We can find the fact that the rejection of traditional faith of Hmong people influences actively on economic development of Hmong. The proof is Protestant Hmong reject backward custom and encourage their children to go to school. They carry out family planning very well. They reject social evils*<sup>8</sup>.

When we carry out research survey, we find that most Protestants in Dac Lac, Lam Dong, Lang Son do not invite magician when their relative is ill.

**Table 9: Protestants go to hospital when they are ill**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 181    | 92.3 |
| No     | 15     | 7.7  |
| Total  | 196    | 100  |

Missionaries not only propagate Bible but also teach social knowledge in order to enhance Protestants' awareness. Effectively, some ethnic minority people become dynamic after they follow Protestantism. They approach the progression of modern society easily. They are ready to reject the old customs which are not in accordance with their situation.

Hoang Thi Thao remarks that: *After following Protestantism, the life of Hmong people have changed . They reject the old customs and habits which check their development. They know to practice economy (worship of many spirits is costly). When their children are ill, they bring their children to hospital (instead of inviting sorcerer). Hmong men who follow Protestantism do not drink. Hmong people who follow Protestantism know to sing hymn and play piano. We can say that civilized life of Hmong communities following Protestantism in the North of Vietnam has been gradually established*<sup>9</sup> .

When commenting on the Protestant influence, the researchers who take part in research topic "*Protestantism and stable development of ethnic minority people in Lam Dong province*" write that: In fact some ethnic minority areas in Lam Dong where their people follow Protestantism have changed actively on cultural and social aspects. Protestantism advise their children to go to school. This advice is one of important factors to encourage people to reject backward habits and customs and to build new cultural life. In certain respect, what Protestantism propagate are in accordance with family planning policy and with economic life. Protestants do not drink, smoke. Protestantism teach its believers to implement sanitation rules"<sup>10</sup>

With the love is mentioned in Bible "*Love your neighbor as yourself*" (Mathew 22: 39), "*Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the*

same” (Luke 3:10). The Protestants in ethnic minorities care about charitable activities in their communities.

**Table 10: Do Your church carries out charitable activities ?**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 179    | 90.9 |
| No     | 18     | 9.1  |
| Total  | 197    | 100  |

**Table 11: Do you help poor people**

| Answer | Number | %    |
|--------|--------|------|
| Yes    | 171    | 87.2 |
| No     | 25     | 12.8 |
| Total  | 196    | 100  |

Recently, some missionaries encourage Protestants to preserve the values of their cultural heritage and maintain their cultural identity. Some missionaries care about organizing cultural life and promoting special values of nation. They advise believers to wear traditional clothes. They encourage believers to restore activities of community<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, Protestantism contributes to maintain writing of ethnic minorities through learning Bible in ethnic minority language.

Dogmas which take shape theory and model of moral economy of Protestantism have influence directly on business of believers. On this problem, Nguyen Van Minh writes that: *For Protestantism, labor is duty to God. Protestants are advised to work hard. To waste time is a sin. If Protestant who is lazy do not carry out commandments of God. Anyone is not willing, let him not eat. At the same time, Protestantism advises Protestants should practise economy, not to gamble and not be drunk. So Protestant ethics and law have brought out new way of looking at human value and human economic activity on high level*<sup>12</sup>

Protestantism actively propagandizes and enhances awareness of a part of believers. It contributes to train believers to have good habits in productive labor.

Because of the presence of Protestantism in the ethnic minority areas, Protestants gather to live stably in some regions so that their

religious activities are favourable. Thanks to stable life, their economic life gradually improves. The stable life has restricted custom of shifting cultivation of wandering hilltribes and deforestation. Where churches are built solidly, Protestants live concentratively and stabilize production.<sup>13</sup>

After analyzing data of investigations carrying out by the Institute for Religious Studies, we find that Protestant believers and dignitaries are interested in economic problem than believers of other religions. In compare with dignitaries of other religions, Protestant dignitaries often guide believers in business.

**Table 12: The concern of Protestant dignitaries and believers for economic matter**

| The concern for economic matter/<br>religion | The concern of<br>believers in<br>economic level | The concern of<br>dignitaries in<br>economic level |
|--|--|--|
| Buddhism                                     | 66.2   | 32.6   |
| Catholicism                                  | 78.9   | 50.8   |
| Protestantism                                | 79   | 56.6   |
| Caodaism                                     | 60.4   | 45.3   |
| Hoa Hao                                      | 73.3   | 20   |

The results of the investigation of Protestant life in the Western Highland show that among the main considerations of Protestants, the concern for economic matter is placed 5<sup>th</sup>. Thus the concern for economy behind the concerns for religions, belief, health, happiness and environment. When learning about the concern of dignitaries for followers we find that economic matter is one of matters that dignitaries are interested. They often teach their believers how to do business well<sup>14</sup>

According to the results of the research topic “*Protestantism and stable development of ethnic minority people in Lam Dong province*” we find that the greatest part of Protestants has better life. Compare with believers of other religions, the economic life of Protestants is more stable, the number of poor family is law, because Protestants know to do business, to practise economy and to arrange their family life<sup>15</sup>.

### Conclusion

Protestantism has existed and gone parallel with Vietnamese society for 100 years. Although Protestant theology has been strange to Vietnamese culture and custom but some of its values have homogenize the main values of Vietnamese traditional moral philosophy.

The Protestant values exist under many forms from Bible to philosophy. These values express clearly in motto: worship of God, love of nation, equality and humanity. These values are standard values, many generations of Vietnamese people try themselves to implement these values

When analyzing the impacts of Protestant values in ethnic minority areas, we find that Protestantism has contributed to train Protestants to become good beings. Protestantism also has taught Protestants to love each other in society as well as in their families. Protestantism has helped Protestants to reject social evils. The Protestant values should be promoted to stabilize ethnic minority areas in Vietnam at present. So we should base on the values of traditional culture of Vietnam to promote Protestant values in ethnic minority areas. We should apply the moral values of Protestantism flexibly in the process of building people in accordance with modern life and society./.

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### NOTES:

- 1 See Vu Thi Thu Ha (2016) *The values of Protestantism*. Religious Studies Review 11- 12, 2016
- 2 See Nguyen Quoc Tuan (2016) *Promoting religious values in building and improving ethics and lifestyle of Vietnmaese people today*.
- 3 Jean Bauberot *The History of Protestantism* World Publisher, H.2006 p. 9-22
- 4 Max Weber, “ *Protestant ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. P. 142
- 5 Exodus 20: 1-7
- 6 *Law on marriage and family* (2001) article 2, 4
- 7 Genesis1: 1-31, 2: 1-3
- 8 Nguyen Van Thang: *To maintain “the old custom” or “new life”?* Social Science Publisher. H. p. 166
- 9 Hoang Thi Tho *Protestants organizations contribute in promoting cultural development*. Seminar Protestantism and Vietnamese culture. H. 2012

- 10 Policemen in Lam Dong province (2014), Topic “*Protestantism and stable development of ethnic minority people in Lam Dong province*” p. 2
- 11 Nguyen Van Nam *The process of propagating Protestantism in Western Highland and its influence on culture and life style of ethnic minority people*. Seminar on Protestantism and Vietnamese Culture, H, 2012
- 12 <sup>12</sup>Nguyen Van Minh(2009) *Religion and faith of Ve people in Vietnam*, Social Science, H. p. 61-62
- 13 Le Minh Quang (2010) *Protestantism in Lam Dong. Seminar The process of Protestant development in Vietnam from 1911 to 1975*. H. P 8
- 14 The result of the investigation of the Institute for Religious Study
- 15 Policemen in Lam Dong province (2014), Topic “*Protestantism and stable development of ethnic minority people in Lam Dong province*” p. 2.

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