

The Relationship Between Vietnamese Communists and Christians During the Vietnam War

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I . Thematic Introduction

Vietnam is a multi-religious country. Vietnamese are well-known religious tolerant people. There is no religious war in its history. But nowhere in East Asia the relationship between Christian Churches and native authorities is so problematical than in Vietnam. The Christian persecutions under the Nguyen dynasty in 19th century were even more severe than the Christian persecutions under Choson dynasty in Korea; Christian massacres at the beginning of French colony which caused thousand victims; the exodus of North Vietnamese in the South after Geneva agreement in 1954, a majority among them are Christians, etc. are examples illustrating that complicated relationship.

In April 30th 1975 while millions Vietnamese were very happy with unification of their country and the end of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese Catholics worried about what happen with them in future. Why the distance

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between Christians and non-Christians in Vietnam is so problematical? There are the questions which our lecture tries to make clear with the analysis the situation in *North Vietnam* in period 1954-1975.

To clarify the role of Christian community in Vietnam in this period our analysis should be taken from an *external* perspective, also between Christian community and native authorities as well between Christians and non-Christians rather than from an *internal* perspective inside Christian community. Unlike the case of Korea, the Vietnamese Protestants have been on the rise only since 1990s and they do not focus on political life in this country in period of Vietnam War because they were at that time even less than one percent of the Vietnamese population.

II. The Historical context and Christian mission before 1954

As Korea and many other countries in region, Vietnam has a long history. According to the legends about kings of Hung as a successor of Dragon the first Vietnamese state named *Van Lang* was founded in 2880 BC. The worship of the Hung's kings (March 10th according to the Chinese Lunar calendar) becomes popular now in Vietnam.¹⁾ There are many indigenous religions and beliefs, mainly shamanism and animism. From 257 to 207 BC was the state of Au Lac with the king of An Duong Vuong. Its citadel was in Co Loa, about 20 km from Hanoi. After the fall of the kingdom Au Lac there was a thousand year of Chinese colony (207 BC - 938 AD).

There were many resistances of Vietnamese against Chinese for independence during that period. Buddhism (from China and India), Confucianism and Taoism were widespread in first centuries of Christian era.

In the year of 938 Vietnam gained its independence. From 938 to 1009 under

¹⁾ According to those legends the kings of Hung existed for hundred of years and there were their eighteen generations. Since last years the worship of the Hung kings becomes a national festival and holiday. But in reality the first state of Vietnam might be founded only in first millennium B.C.

the Ngo and the Pre-Le dynasties Buddhism had played a very important role relatively similar situation that we see in Korea in Unified Silla period. From eleven to fourteen centuries Buddhism was a state religion under the Ly and Tran dynasties. King Tran Nhan Tong became a founder of a Vietnamese Zen Buddhism which is so called as Zen Buddhism of the *Truc Lam Yen Tu*. From fifteen to nineteen centuries under the Le and the Nguyen dynasties the role of a state religion was displaced by Confucianism. But generally the syncretism of the 'three teachings', also Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism is spiritual basis of most Vietnamese. From the cultural-religious point of view they are polytheists. On opinion of Homer Hubert, a traditional Korean would most often have been "*a Confucian when in society, a Buddhist when he philosophizes, and a spirit worshiper when he is in trouble*" and "*to learn what religion a man really believes, we must look at what he does when he finds himself in trouble*".²⁾ It could be relative the same when we talk about Vietnamese spiritual life.

But not the same as in Korea, the regional differences in Vietnam are relative great. In North Vietnam Mahayana Buddhism is widespread while Theravada Buddhism is a main religion in South Vietnam. North Vietnam is under influences rather of Chinese culture (Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism) than of Indian culture as that is in South Vietnam (Champa culture is in central coast and Khmer culture in Mekong delta).

The Christian mission in Vietnam began in 1533. Main missionary orders are Jesuits, Mission Etrangères de Paris and Dominican. From the beginning there was a gap between Christian and non-Christian communities because of the so-called 'ritual question' which is from differences between Christian and Vietnamese traditional world outlooks and values. It was very serious when Christian mission closed with colonialism since the end of eighteen century. The Christian persecution under the Nguyen dynasty in 19th century was very

²⁾ Hulbert Homer, *The Passing of Korea*, New York, 1906, pp. 403-404. Cited in: Biernatzki, S.J., Jin-chang Im Luke and Min K. Anselm, *Korean Catholicism in the 1970s. A Christian Community Comes of Age*, New York, 1975, p. 17.

hard. Main Christian persecutions were carried out very hard in 1833, 1835, 1847, 1851, 1854, 1857, 1859 and in 1861. A contrary between Confucianism and Christianity, on the one side, and a closed relationship between Christian mission and colonialism which was very clear since end of eighteen century, on the other side, are the reasons caused those Christian persecutions.

From 1858 to 1945 Vietnam became a French colony. There were Christian massacres at the beginning of French colony by the movements to kill both Frenchmen and Christians (*Binh Tay sat ta*) under the leadership of Confucians. There were about 100.000-130.000 Christian victims both of Christian persecution by the Nguyen dynasty and those massacres. Catholic Church in Vietnam today has 117 Saint - martyrs (11 French, 10 Spanish missionaries and 96 Vietnamese).³⁾

<Table 1> Christians and non-Christians in scope

Traditional non-Christians	Christians
Under influences of traditional East Asian Confucian culture	Under influences of Christian-European culture
Loyal to emperor (<i>trung quan</i>) above all	Loyal to emperor, but Christ comes first
Patriarchy: male conducted ancestor veneration and property inheritance	Gender equality: Woman is emancipated; monogamy.
Parents-children: piety with ancestor veneration	Parents - children: piety but without ancestor veneration
Cultural-religious life: polytheism, not devout to any religion	Cultural-religious life: monotheism, devout
Religiously inclusive and tolerant	Religiously exclusive
Religious activities: private, without church organization	Religious activities: collective, with church organization
Relationship with God: a relative distance	Relationship with God: an absolute distance
Hierarchy: by age and social position	Hierarchy: by church position

The Protestant mission began in Vietnam with Christian Alliance Missionary (CMA) from United States only in 1889, also more than three centuries later

³⁾ Meanwhile the Korean Catholic Church has 103 Saints-martyrs.

than Catholic mission. Now there are some other Protestant branches such as Methodists, Presbyterian, etc. From the cultural-religious point of view the differences between Christian and non-Christian as following.

The religion situation today in Vietnam is as follows. Although Buddhists consist only more than ten millions, but it could be say most Vietnamese population is under Buddhist influence and Vietnam is a Buddhist country like some other countries in the region. Christianity is the second religion only after Buddhism.

<Table 2> Religions in Vietnam today

Religions	Adherents (million)
Buddhists	about 11
Catholics	more than 6
Cao Dai, most in Mekong delta	2,5
Hoa Hao, most in Mekong delta	1,5
Protestants	about 1

See: Ban Ton giao Chinh phu, *Sach trang ve ton giao va chinh sach ton giao o Viet Nam* (White Book on religions and state policies regards religious affairs in Vietnam), Hanoi, 2007.

In terms of the religious followers, the number of Buddhists in Vietnam now, Buddhist Church says that it has about fifty million believers meanwhile the authorities give a number of eleven million. There are Muslims in Vietnam, too, mainly among Cham ethnic group. The Muslims are increasing in last time because of improving relationship between Vietnam and Arabian countries. But they are less than one hundred thousand Muslims in Vietnam today. Beside of above religions, in fact most of three fourth of Vietnamese population write as 'none' in their curriculum vitae, but they are no atheists. They follow ancestor worship and are under influence of Buddhist culture.

Communists and Christians in Vietnam before 1954

After the Russian revolution in 1917, especially after establishment of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in 1930 the colonial authorities and

Christian church in Vietnam talked about the danger of communism and atheist materialism. "The prime antidote to Communism in Vietnam, however, was to be the rapid expansion of the Catholic Church - after all, had not history demonstrated that in times of trouble, 'Only one nation, the Christian nation, only one official, the Pope, only one organization, the worldwide Catholic Church, was able to maintain discipline and stand firm forever'?"⁴⁾ Since then there was a more closed co-operation between Christian Church in Vietnam and colonial authorities in the struggle national movements which since 1930s dominated by the communists. Christian media such as *Vi Chua* (For the God's sake), *Da Minh* (Dominican) etc. propagated on danger of communism. Christian Church had talked on danger of communism before Vietnamese communists had the works of C. Marx and V.I. Lenin in their hand.

In 1945 after the August Revolution the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), a secular communist state following the Soviet model, was founded. Although Ho Chi Minh was active to call to solidarity of Christian and non-Christians for the struggle for national independence, but the distance between two communities was not improved. The *Viet Minh* (United Front of Vietnamese Nationalists) officially carried out policy for religious freedom and for solidarity all Christians and non-Christians. In the first months after August revolution Vietnamese Christians were welcomed with the independence of their country and the end of colonial period. All four Vietnamese bishops at that time had a common letter to the Holy See to call a support independence of their country. That means that many Catholics were nationalists and patriots.

But it is so pity, the 'sweet moment' between Christians and DRV was very short. In October 28th, 1945 in Phat Diem Bishop Le Huu Tu had received information about the communist position in Ho Chi Minh's government! There was beginning of un-trust between two parties. French troops occupied Cochinchina, Hai Phong and wanted to re-establish colonial authorities in whole

4) J.M. Thich, *Van de cong san* (Question of communism), Quy Nhon, 1927, tr. 36. Cited in: David Marr, *Vietnamese tradition on trial, 1920-1945*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1981, p. 86

Vietnamese territory as it was before Second World War. From 1946 to 1949 Catholics in Phat Diem and Bui Chu dioceses carried out a 'neutral policy': against both *Viet Minh* and French troops. There are two events in October 1949 caused an open conflict between Catholics and communists in Vietnam during the First Indochina War: French parachute troops came to Phat Diem diocese to end the 'neutral' conception of Vietnamese Catholics and the victory of communists in China.

Because of the fear of communism in P.R. China and Vietnam since 1950 the Holy See openly began to support the escalation of the First Indochina War and French troops. Since then First Indochina War had international character: United States, England and many Western countries supported France, meanwhile former Soviet Union and China supported Ho Chi Minh's government. In this situation Vietnamese Catholics had openly co-operation with French troops in struggle against Viet Minh's resistants which dominated by the communists. Bishops Conference of Indochina in November 1951 gave a Common Letter: any co-operation between Catholics and Viet Minh was prohibited. This common letter could be considered as a Declaration of the Vietnamese Catholic Church against CPV.

Also, there was already a gap between Vietnamese communists and Catholics during the First Indochina War. Because of fear of communism the socio-political standpoint of Catholics changed from a 'neutral position against both Viet Minh and French troops' to openly co-operation with French troops against Viet Minh!

III. Vietnamese Communists and Christians (1954-1975)

Exodus of North Vietnamese into the South - increasing the gap between Christian Church and communist authorities

According to the Geneva agreement in 1954 Vietnam was divided. North Vietnam was under a communist regime following Stalin's and Mao Zedong's

models meanwhile South Vietnam followed United States. At first we would like to say that the disputed parties, including DRV, had to accept exodus. According to the Geneva agreement article 14 (d): *"From the date of entry into force of the present Agreement until the movement of troops is completed, any civilians residing in a district controlled by one party who wish to go and live in the zone assigned to the other party shall be permitted and helped to do so by the authorities in that district".*⁵⁾

But it was unusually. Meanwhile DRV calls for the solidarity of all people for the building a new society but within 300 days over 860,000 people escaped from north to the south! Comparison: Vietnamese population in 1954 was only about twenty five million, among them fourteen million in North Vietnam and eleven million in South Vietnam. Meanwhile DRV talks on its policy for religious freedom, but Christians really consists two third of the refugees. Nearly a half of Christians in comparison with less than 2% non-Christian population in North Vietnam at that time escaped in the South.

Concerned to standpoint of disputed parties we could to say that the DRV had an ambivalent policy towards the exodus. On the one hand, DRV will not violate the Geneva Agreement with the hope that all its demands could be respected by American, French and Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, among them a general election to be held within two years. However, DRV will not lose its prestige in the international community. In September 1954 Ho Chi Minh visited Bishop Trinh Nhu Khue, Hanoi diocese. Here the president of DRV was sure to carry out a policy for solidarity Christians and non-Christians. He called the bishop to stop the exodus. The bishop kept silence toward Ho Chi Minh's demand. But on the other hand, the leaders of DRV had un-trust on the motivations of the United States, France and Ngo Dinh Diem regime which did all to mobilize the exodus in any price. A large part of non-Christian refugees were anti-communists. In many cases the communist militia did all to limit the exodus such as propaganda on worship freedom policy of the DRV

⁵⁾ Cameron, Allan W., *Viet Nam Crisis, A documentary history*, Vol. I: 1940-1956, Cornell University Press, Ithaca/London, 1971, p. 293.

or arrest all people who call the exodus, etc.

In contrary to DRV, the United States, France and Ngo Dinh Diem's regime did all to mobilize all refugees, especially the Christians to the exodus in any prices. The Central Intelligence Agency gave propaganda about possibility of atom bomb in North Vietnam. Especially the Catholic peasants were under strongly influences of the rumours such as "God gone to the South", "Virgin gone to the South". The initiative of such rumors could be the Central Intelligence Agency which sent a special group to South Vietnam under leadership of Edward Lansdale and other group to mobilize exodus under leadership of Lucien Conein. That was why the United States, France and Ngo Dinh Diem's regime called to exodus meanwhile the DRV tried to hinder it.

The standpoint of the Holy Sea towards the exodus was not clear. On the one hand, the Vatican did not support a Vietnamese dividing which causes a dividing of Vietnamese Catholic Church. But on the other hand, the Holy Sea under Pope Pio XII had no compromise with all communist regimes.

In any case, the exodus was not the initiative of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. In fact the Geneva agreement was a shock for some church leaders. Vietnamese Catholic peasants were a play-ball in a power struggle between national and international antagonistic political forces. A conflict between Catholics and communist militia was unavoidable. There were many incidents of Ba Lang (Thanh Hoa province), of Tra Ly (Nghe An province), Tam Toa (Quang Binh province) and some others. There were thousand victims such as hunger, epidemic, traffic accidents by the way to exodus, etc. Six among eight bishops and 809 among 1,127 priests gone to the south! It is clear that the exodus could not be carried out without a closed co-operation of many bishops and priests. The percentage of escaped bishops and priests was higher than that of Catholic believers as we see in following table.

According to many authors the number of refugees could be around 1.5 million if the DRV did not all to limit the exodus. In reality the DRV was not successful to hinder the exodus. Concerned to reasons for the exodus we would like to say two of them, also most Catholics has the fear of a

communist regime and a psychological war of the Central Intelligence Agency (communist revenge against people who had cooperated with colonial authorities, God and Virgin go to the South, US. atom bomb, etc.).

<Table 3> Situation of Catholic Church in North Vietnam before and after exodus*

Diocese	Before exodus		Escape in the south			
	believers	priest	believers	%	priests	%
Hanoi	200,000	168	50,000	25%	115	68%
Bac Ninh	74,000	64	38,000	52%	56	86%
Bui Chu	330,000	200	165,000	50%	170	85%
Hai Phong	120,000	87	61,000	51%	79	91%
Hung Hoa	78,000	54	7,000	9%	24	45%
Lang Son	5,000	18	2,500	50%	13	72%
Phat Diem	139,000	168	80,000	58%	143	85%
Thai Binh	160,000	92	80,000	50%	79	86%
Thanh Hoa	65,000	88	18,000	28%	62	70%
Vinh	219,000	188	42,000	20%	68	36%
Total	1,390,000	1,127	543,500	40%	809	72%

Source: Tran Tam Tinh, *Thap gia va luoi guom* (Croix and sword), 1990, tr. 113

* The Protestant refugees were about two thousand five hundred. According to other sources, the number of Christian refugees could be higher

Conflict between communists and Christians during the land reform in North Vietnam

The Land reform in North Vietnam has rather a political than economical character. For building a new society so called as 'paradise in this world' the communist regime wanted to liquidate landlords and all political opponents in countryside. There was a discussion on the event. In 1960-1970s some authors considered land reform in North Vietnam in 1955-1957 was a blood bad (Hoang Van Chi, J. Buttinger and R. Nixon).⁶⁾ But new researches (E. Moise;

⁶⁾ See: Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism: A Case History of North Vietnam*, Preager, New York, 1964; Buttinger Joseph, *Vietnam, A political history*, Preager Publishers, New York/Washington, 1969; Nixon Richard, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, New York, 1978

Christine White and Pham Quang Minh) gave arguments that total about 14-16,000 people killed during the land reform, including of Catholics and there is no blood bad.⁷⁾ Concerned to Catholics about 2,500 - 3,000 Catholics were killed during land reform, among them some priests. Alone the victims of the event in Quynh Luu in 1956 alone were about one thousand. *"DRV had an official policy of freedom of worship. However, even when local officials obeyed this policy (which they often did not obeyed), there was conflict. Catholicism was not simple a religious institution; it was system of political, economic, and paramilitary power. The communists were not willing to let the Catholic Church retain large amounts of land or any strong influence over local administrations, much less local militias".⁸⁾*

In any case there was a gap between central and local authorities, a gap between policy of CPV towards land reform as well towards religious affairs in theory and practice. Because of social, regional and cultural-religious reasons, the Vietnamese traditional village in Red River delta is relative closed and there is a relative independence of from central authorities: Following a motto: *"The king's rule of behavior comes after the village's customs"* (*Phep vua thua le lang*). At the central level (land reform in theory) Central Committee of CPV would like to carry out different policies towards patriotic, 'normal' and anti-governmental landlords; land confiscation and liquidation, but allowance every church or temple to own it's an amount land enough for the religious activities. There was no qualification priest to landlord; no publicly denouncement against priests; any priest's arrest or killing could be only with

⁷⁾ See: E. Moise, Land reform in China and North Vietnam, Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level, the university of North Carolina press, Chapel Hill/London, 1983; White K.P. Christine, Agrarian reform and national liberation in the Vietnamese revolution: 1920-1957, A thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University in partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1981; Pham Quang Minh, Zwischen Theorie und Praxis. Agrapolitik in Vietnam seit 1945, Verlag Logos, Berlin, 2002

⁸⁾ E. Moise, Land reform in China and North Vietnam, Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level, the university of North Carolina press, Chapel Hill/London, 1983, p. 193.

consultation and approval of central committee.

But at the periphery level (land reform in practice) local authorities in many cases did not obey the wishes of land reform Central committee (*Uy ban cai cach ruong dat trung uong*). There was a chaos by carrying out land reform because of false landlord classification in many cases. Many communists were arrested, even arrest of some members of the National Assembly without informing to National Assembly, etc. Thousand communists were falsely classified as landlords and without evaluating of their role in struggle for national independence many of them were killed.

Concerned to Catholics in many cases there were liquidation not only land, but some religious texts, pictures, etc as well as liquidation almost all land in church and temple. There were classification priests publicly denouncement as landlords. Sometimes there was priest's arrest and killing without consultation and approval of central authorities.

The situation was not radical improved in process of the 'mistakes correction' (*sua sai*) by the authorities. Many Catholic peasants did not obey demands to property compensation. Because of many reasons land reform process in Christian villages had more difficult than in other villages. Differ from many non-Christian villages Catholic peasants did not obey governmental 'mistakes correction'.

<Table 4> Property compensation in Catholic regions (July 1956)

	Thanh Hoa	Nghe An	Ha Tinh	Quang Binh
Number of Catholic villages	182	168	90	62
Completed compensation	2	2	1	2
Not jet result	180	166	89	60

Source: Government archives. *Bao cao tinh hình công tác sửa sai trong tháng 7/1956* (report on mistake correction work) Prime Minister residence. Act No. 2153

The analysis of land reform in village of Phung Khoang could be an

example. Although Phung Khoang is a Catholic village very near to Hanoi, but not all demands of land reform Central committee were obeyed by the local authorities. There was no priest arrest and no classification priest to landlord, but there was priest publicly denouncement (*dau to*) by a core Christian woman despite the fact that it was not allowed by central authorities! Although this priest was dead in 1957 when he was nearly 70 years old, but most Christians considered that land reform caused direct or indirect his death. Two people were classified as landlords (both of them Catholics) and killed, among them one is in question (that might be a false classification). Some cadres were arrested, among them one named Tran Van Thanh. He was an active communist who took part into struggle against French troops and secretary of communist cell. He was released from prison only after 'mistake correction'. In 1960s he became a secretary of communist cell in Hoai Duc district.

<Table 5> The ownership situation of cultivated land in 1945 in 3,653
xa in North Vietnam where there was land reform

	Percentage of Population (%)	Land ownership (ha)	Land ownership (%)	Land ownership /per person (ha)
Colonial authorities		15,952	1	
Catholic Church		23,928	1.5	
Landlord	3.2	390,825	24.5	1.136
Rich peasant		113,259	7.1	0.468
Middle peasant	31	462,609	29	0.169
Poor peasant		159,520	10	0.068
Land worker		17,547	1.1	0.025
Others		12,761	0.8	0.028
Communal and partly collective ownership		398,801	25	
Total		1,595,202		

Source: Tran Phuon (ed.), *Cach mang ruong dat o Viet Nam* (land revolution in Vietnam), NXB Khoa hoc Xa hoi, Ha Noi, 1968, tr. 14.

The incident in Quynh Luu (Nghe An province) in November 1956 was a disastrous consequence of the land reform. Despite the fact that Nghe An

province was well-known as a place of communist movements during the colonial time and birth place of Ho Chi Minh, but the land reform here cause a serious consequences for peasants life. As a result there was protests of thousands peasants in Quynh Luu (Nghe An province), most of them Catholics. The peasants occupied villages and town, marched to the Vinh city. The regime in Hanoi had to send the division No. 308 to establish the order. There was conflict between protesters and governmental paramilitary forces which had about one thousand victims.

The leaders of CPV saw their serious mistakes and consequences of the land reform. At that time Hanoi radio and Newspaper *Nhan Dan* (People) gave an official apology. Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap gave speeches to criticize themselves and called all Vietnamese population to support CPV. The National Assembly at the end of 1956 had sharp criticized members of land reform Central committee. Some leaders of CPV lost their positions, among them General Secretary of CPV Truong Chinh, Vice Minister for agrarian economy Ho Viet Thang, and some other high official of Central Committee of CPV.

The reasons of failure of land reform were different. One of them was a radical Marxist class struggle theory. Secondly, communists had exaggerated estimating of properties of religious organizations, especially of Catholic Church. Untill 1954 the land ownership situation was not much changed in comparison with that in 1945. That means before land reform only about 1.5 percent of the cultivated land in North Vietnam belonged to the Catholic Church (see above table). Since the beginning of 20th century many nationalists, among them Ho Chi Minh, thought that the Catholic Church is a landlord and exaggerated the land and properties of Catholic Church, for example, Ho Chi Minh in 1920s wrote that one fifth of cultivated land in Cochinchina belongs to the Catholic Church! There was rumour among population that the Catholic Church overall was as a big landlord!⁹⁾ Beside of those reasons, we would to

⁹⁾ Ho Chi Minh, *Ve van de ton giao tin nguong* (On religion and belief question), Nha xuất bản Khoa học Xã hội, Hà Nội, 1998, tr. 128. He even believed that the Catholic Church in Thailand had owned one third of the cultivated land in this country!! He did not give resources for his speculation.

say that the carrying out of land reform with the leftist Chinese communist advisers at local level caused a lot of its serious consequences.

Bernard Fall compares the incident in Quynh Luu of 1956 with that in Hungary in the same year. On my opinion, however, this comparison might be exaggerated. Land reform in North Vietnam is no blood bad, although it causes very serious heavy consequences in relationship between Catholic Church and communist regime in Hanoi as well as in building a so called 'new socialist society'. It is very pity that the regime in Hanoi did not learn those bitter experiences by the economical development in Vietnam in period 1975-1986 which caused a deep social-economical crisis. In any case, following the exodus, land reform was unproud event in Vietnamese history in 20th century.

The case of state Committee of 'Patriotic' Christians

Regime in Hanoi wanted to dissociate Catholic peasants from their bishops and priests. For that purpose Catholics were officially welcomed to take part into CPV. As a result there is a number of Catholic communists. But in reality it is not easy for a Catholics to be a member of communist cell because of their 'family curriculum vitae'. There is almost no Catholics in a relative higher position in a province or district administration apparatus. Those Catholics are not pleased from the side of the church. Also, in context of a tense relationship between authorities and church during the Vietnam War, a discrimination against those Catholic communists from both two sides, communist cells and parish was understandable.

In the middle of 1950e there was a discussion on the case of a separation state Catholic Church following that in P.R. China among the leaders of DRV. In solution a so called state Solidarity Committee of 'Patriotic Catholics' (*Uy ban doan ket Cong giao yeu nuoc*, SCPC) was established with government support.¹⁰⁾ Fifty five priests and hundred laymen presented in the First meeting of SCPC in 1955 in Hanoi. Then there is development of SCPC organization

¹⁰⁾ SCPC renamed many times, now is the Solidarity Catholic Committee (*Uy ban Doan ket Cong giao*).

networks from central to local levels with the support of communist authorities (finance, political support, etc.). Of course, SCPC had motivations to mobilize Catholics following the government purposes. But with the establishment of SCPC the authorities in North Vietnam wanted to boycott the leaders of Catholic Church. That is why both the Holy See and the leaders of Catholic Church in Vietnam were not pleased with the members of SCPC. Although the SCPC is not a church organization as a case of state church in China, but in any case the establishment of this Committee causes a deep un-trust, and sometimes the tension inside Christian community between the pro-governmental Christian and those who are following their bishops and priests.

Communists and Christians from central and local analysis

At central level the communist regime was sure to respect a religious freedom and it was fixed by the constitution of 1959. But in reality it was a back step in comparison with that of 1946. After land reform there was no contact between Catholic Church in North Vietnam with the regime in Hanoi. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong was un-successful to organize a meeting with the bishops in 1958 to look for a so called 'co-operation' between authorities and Christian Church. Until the end of 1950s all foreign missionaries and clergymen, including Apostolic delegate John Dooley, had to leave North Vietnam. Almost all priest seminaries were closed. Any contact between Catholic Church in North Vietnam and outside world, even with the Holy See was not allowed. No representative of Christian Church in North in Second Vatican Council. Only in 1974, also after Paris agreement as a solution for Vietnam War first contact between Christian Church in North Vietnam and the Holy See was possible!

To improve the situation the Holy See decided in 1960 to establish church hierarchy in North and South Vietnam. Despite the fact that Pope Paul VI called to end of Vietnam War and for the peace to Vietnamese population in any price, but Pope was unsuccessful to visit both North and South Vietnam in 1970. Although the Holy See had green signal for the visiting of the leader of

world Catholic Church to improve the relationship between state and church in both North and South Vietnam, regime in Hanoi was not 'already' to meet the Pope.

At that time there is more than 90% of Vietnamese population living in countryside. There are less than 700 Catholic villages among about 6,000 villages in Red River Delta. The analysis of a case of two villages Phung Khoang and Co Nhue, Hanoi diocese could be considered as good example for the relationship between parish and local authorities. Both Phung Khoang and Co Nhue villages belong to Ha Noi County, not far from city center. Phung Khoang is a Christian village with about 45% its Christian population meanwhile Christians consist less than 15% of the population in Co Nhue.¹¹⁾

In reality there were a little contact between parish priests and local authorities. The socio-political standpoint of Catholic peasants was depended rather from their local priests than from the local authorities. We see a little Catholic participation in social organizations (communist cells, woman organization, youth organization, etc. even Fatherland National Front (*Mat tran To quoc*, FNF). Because of war escalation regime in Hanoi carried out since 1965 a youth mobilization in National People's Army (NPA) including Catholics. There were many Catholics among troops of Vietnamese National Army. During the war some churches, pagodes and temples were transformed in department stores, schools or something like that. In fact the regime wanted transform churches and temples buildings into an 'umbrella' to prevent from US bomb. But with those means they were direct or indirect destroyed during the collective movements.

Since the end of 1950s there were collective movements which mobilize peasants to collective farming production and ownership. The private ownership of all people was not respected by the state. Of course, the authorities were not pleased when Catholic peasants did not participate active into those movements which cause a lot of agrarian production decline and hunger.

¹¹⁾ Differ from Co Nhue, only Phung Khoang is Christian village because Christians play a role in economical and spiritual life of the village.

In North Vietnam during the war there was a limited religious worship. Any moving of parish priests could be only with allowance of local authorities. In fact a long-term distance between Christian and non-Christian communities was not improved. Based on my field study in Phung Khoang I see the gap between local authorities and Catholics in village of Phung Khoang was bigger than that in village of Co Nhue. The relationship between Catholic peasants and local authorities might be something more open than that at central level.

IV. Conclusion

During the Vietnam War Vietnam became a battle field of the antagonistic powers, in focus anti-communists and communists. Despite of the official policy for religious freedom of DRV, but in context of international relationship of cold war between communist block and Western there was in reality no religious freedom in North Vietnam. Although DRV called for the solidarity between Christian and non-Christian, but there was a repression communist government of DRV against Christian Church. The relationship between state and church had an antagonistic character. But in any case there was no Christian persecution that it was under the Nguyen dynasty in 19th century.

Seen from a socio-political point of view, the relationship between Christian Church and authorities at the local level might be something more open than that at central level. Where the percentage of Christian population is higher this gap might be more problematic because the authorities consider Christian Church as a challenge.

Not the closed relationship between Christian mission and colonialism as it was in the colonial time, but the fear of communism determines the socio-political standpoint of Christian Church in both North and South Vietnam in their relationship to authorities in the period from Geneva agreement to Vietnamese unification.

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