

# The Vietnamese State and the Communist Party's Views and Policies on Religions during 1975 - 2015

Nguyen Hong Duong \*

**Abstract:** The article mentions the Communist Party and State of Vietnam renovation process views and policies regarding religion for the past 40 years (1975 - 2015). With diachronic approach, the author has analyzed the innovation process in two phases: 1975 - 1990 and 1990 - 2015. The author argues that due to historical conditions, some State and Communist Party guidelines and policies towards religion revealed shortcomings before “Đổi mới” (Renovation, 1986). The second period is considered the breakthrough stage in the "rediscovery of religion" with the view of Resolution No. 24-NQ / TW "Religion is a long time issue. Belief and religion are the spiritual needs of a majority of people. Religious morality is much consistent with the building of a new society". Additionally, the article is a study in innovation policy with "some peculiar religion" such as Protestant, Muslim, and Buddhist Theravada Khmer. Based on study results, the author reviews achievements and lessons from innovation process.

**Key words:** Innovation, Policy, Views, Communist Party, State, Religion.

## 1. Introduction

“Regarding religious affairs in the new situation” of the Resolution 25-NQ / TW of the Party Central Committee issued on 12.03.2003 states at the preamble: Over periods of the revolution, the Party and State have determined on religious affairs is a matter of strategy is very important [5]. This shows that the Communist Party and State of Vietnam highly appreciate the role and position of religious affairs in the revolutionary process.

There are many religions in Vietnam. The majority of people have religious beliefs, and a big part of population is religious believers. Historically, the monarchies from Dinh Dynasty (Đinh), Early Le Dynasty (Tiền Lê), Ly Dynasty (Lý), Tran Dynasty (Trần) to Later Le Dynasty (Hậu Lê), Nguyen Dynasty (Nguyễn) had an appropriate vision in promoting religion role in the national independence struggle,

defense and construction.

Right from establishment, the Communist Party of Vietnam had a proper standpoint and policy to gather dignitaries and religious believers in national unity bloc, creating strength to fulfill the mission of liberating the country and building socialism. The views and religious policy of the Communist Party of Vietnam inherited first from the tradition and lessons from ancestors' dealing with religious issues, and the creative application of Marxism Leninism theory on religion in Vietnam revolutionary practice. President Ho Chi Minh policy of religion freedom and solidarity in the democratic revolution has contributions to the huge victory of national independence and unification struggle [5]."

On 30/4/1975, Vietnam united and

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(\*) Assoc. Prof., Institute for Religious Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

entered a new era of national constructing and defending socialism. Under new context in the first decade after reunification, the Communist Party and State of Vietnam implemented comprehensive reforms including innovation of perspectives and policies towards religion. This article summarizes the religious perspectives and policies of the Communist Party and the State (1975 - 2015) in the following three issues:

(1) The views and policies regarding religion of the Communist Party, the State of Vietnam through the Party Congress documents, Platform for national development, resolutions and directives.

(2) The change of policy for a number of special religions.

(3) Achievements and lessons learned from the Party and State of Vietnam process of innovating religion perspectives and policies towards it.

### **1. The views and policies of the Party regarding religion through the Party Congress Documents, Platform for national development, the Party and State resolutions and directives**

#### ***1.1. The views and policies of the Communist Party and the State of Vietnam regarding religion before Renovation (1975 - 1990)***

##### *1.1.1. The views and policies toward religion over 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congresses' documents*

Đổi mới (Renovation) started in the 6<sup>th</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam Congress (1986), hence 1986 is seen as the starting point of the reforms. Regarding religion, Politburo issued Resolution 24/NQ-TW "Consolidating religion activities in the new situation" dated 16/10/1990 - four years after the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress. The Party 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Congresses documents did not reveal innovation policies towards religion. The content of Religion section in the Congress document was structured as follows:

- The State respects the religious freedom of the people, respects the rights to follow or not to follow a religion of all citizens, and all religions are equal in law.

- It unifies religions to build and develop the country.

- State care and help religion followers build a new life.

- It is aware, resolutely fight against any conspiracy timely undermining national religion and socialism [8, p.451].

Political Report of 4<sup>th</sup> Congress (1976) by the first Congress after reunification should emphasize religious party in the South, take care of the material life and spiritual ethnic of religion followers and non-religion followers in the new liberated areas, educate and advocate people love the motherland, resolutely fight the propaganda of hostile forces regarding religion.

##### *1.1.2. Resolution 40-NQ/TW on religion*

The "Resolution of the Secretariat on the work for religion in the new situation" dated 01/10/1981. These are resolutions to previous mark Renewal. The layout of the Resolution consists of 3 parts: Part One: Situation of religion and religious work in recent years. Part Two: The policies of the Party for religion in the new situation. Part Three: On leadership and direct the implementation.

The first part consists of two aspects: (1) outlook on the situation of each specific religion; (2) achievement and the shortcomings of the party committees and political sectors tasked with religious affairs. Assessment on the situation of each religion is suitable and specific, it acknowledged the positive factors of dignitaries, monks, followers of the country. The resolution also point out the worst negative point presented in each specific religion. For example, the Resolution emphasizes the Catholics in the South: "The level of enlightenment lay low, awareness of

socialism and the enemy conspiracy for religious abuse are more ambiguous because of the ideological "anti - communist" poisoned long day.

Referring to "Achievements and shortcomings of the party committees and the involved institutions", the Congress document pointed out some achievements and shortcomings in propagandizing and managing religion activities. Specifically, it states: "there appear trends to subjectively erase religion by administrative measures resulting in violations of religious policies, some are very serious". The Resolution stressed the cause of the shortcomings: "Staff at all levels and sectors have not been acutely aware of the position and the importance of religious affairs, the conspiracy of imperialism and religion reactionaries". And "ministries, unions have not promoted responsibility towards religion activities. Religious apparatus from the central to grassroots are too weak to assess situation and consult the Party committees".

On observing and evaluating religion in general and each religion in particular, the Resolution set out general policies and guidelines both short term and long term for each religion to meet the actual situation requirement.

In general, the State grants normal religious activities conducted under State regulations; Dignitaries and monks can perform religious activities within their responsibility; New economic zones with big parishioners are allowed to build a church and get priests pray for the laity; The religious institutions are respected, and any borrowings must have religious persuasion. Any assets that the religious institutions voluntarily donate to governments must be used for public purposes; State agrees to open religious schools who specialize in religious activities; Respect for foreign affairs of the religion, such as the

relationship between Vietnam and the Vatican Catholic.

Regarding specific policy, the State proposed An Quang denominations "to help Vietnam Buddhists established a common organization for Buddhists people nationalism and socialism". State has policy for Catholic toward religious orders, the associations to attach it with ethnicity and nation. Cao Dai sects were not unified, it was combating and suppressing disintegration of Cao Dai sect in Tay Ninh. Hoa Hao Buddhism "exists at local, respect the rights of believers to worship in each family", etc.

### *1.1.3. The views and policies of the State towards religion through Decree 297-CP of the Government Council*

Two years after the reunification, the Council of Ministers issued Resolution No. 279-CP "On some policies toward religion" dated 11/11/1977 [11]. Later, the Resolution was changed to Decree by the context it posed. Preamble of the decree outlined five basic principles of religious policy. The contents of the 5 basic principles reflect the views and policies of the Party set in the Political Report, religion part. The new point of the Decree revealed in 6 specific policies for religious affairs. First, it was the decentralization of religious activity management in order to create favorable conditions for religious activities regarding religious economic policy, culture, education and society. This was the period that land played a very important role in religion, because monks and religious activities were based primarily on revenue from land yields. Thus, the Decree clearly defined to facilitate religions having higher incomes and stability. The renovation of industrial, capitalist enterprises in the South, especially in Ho Chi Minh City had to consider "religious condescension". It was because in the South before 1975, some religions had capitalist - oriented businesses.

One specific characteristic of Vietnam religions is that they have relationship with religious organizations abroad. After reunification, foreign relations including religion became busy. Thus, the Decree spent the 6<sup>th</sup> policy regulating international relations of religions.

Although the provisions in Decree 297 - CP was not fully comprehensive, some provisions were too vague, it initiated the basis for state management of religious activities by law, which led to the subsequent decrees. Decree came into effect for many years and later it was replaced by Decree 69 - HDBT "Regulations on religious activities", dated 21/03/1991 of the Council of Ministers (now the Government).

Overall before Renovation, the Communist Party and State's views and policies in the period 1975 - 1990 did not have a "breakthrough". From a dialectical perspective on the actual situation, the Communist Party and State of Vietnam promptly guideline and issued policies toward religion in general and specific policies for each religion in particular. Thanks to such implementation, religion in Southern quickly stabilized, religious activities took place normally. The State did not "revenge religion" as traitors' rhetoric propaganda before and after 1975, instead it gradually cared religious activities and socio-economic, cultural issues. The religions in Vietnam established their relations with the Communist Party and State in the united front towards a national unity bloc. The anti-revolutionary activities under religious issues were smashed to make the country sovereignty and security maintained.

Before Renewal period (1975 - 1990), a number of guidelines and policies of the Party, the State of Vietnam on religions had shortcomings. Party's view of religion under "historical context" focused more on backward political reactionary in religion

(as expressed in Resolution No. 40 dated October 1<sup>st</sup> 1981). State policies regarding religion describing in Decree 297-CP dated 11/11/1977 were still too simple to cover all complex religious activities. Religious activities were not carefully, radically and comprehensively treated as it should. Many religious incidents were resolved by one-off methods. That is one of the reasons forcing the Communist Party and State innovate religious policies and views to fit reality.

### ***1.2. The viewpoints and policies of the State of Vietnam and Communist Party regarding religion from Innovation (1990) to date***

Renovation process was comprehensively initiated by Communist Party of Vietnam at the National Party 6<sup>th</sup> Congress (1986). Innovating policy reasoning, thinking, expanding democracy within the Party and the whole society led to socio- economic development. Upon initial success, Communist Party of Vietnam innovated viewpoints and policies toward religion, first by Resolution No. 24-NQ / TW of the Politburo "About strengthening religion activity in the new situation" by the Secretary General Nguyen Van Linh signed on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1990 (hereafter referred to as Resolution 24).

#### ***1.2.1. Breakthrough in attitudes, policies towards religion of Communist Party of Vietnam expressed in Resolution 24***

In line with innovating national theory framework, thinking, socio - economic development, Communist Party of Vietnam recognized that religion could not be an outsider. For Vietnam, religions had a very important role and position in the national development and protection. Despite some significant achievements of religious work in the period 1975 - 1990, it revealed several shortcomings, firstly in terms of reasoning. Therefore religious innovation on viewpoint, policy must start from re - awareness of religion. This was shown in

the Resolution: "Religion is a long term issue. Religions are to meet spiritual needs of a part of the population. Religious morality is much consistent with the building of a new society [2]". Depth analysis shows that:

*First*, the Communist Party of Vietnam recognizes the survival of religion by asserting that religion is a long - term issue, it sees the conditions for religions still exist. Recognizing that religion exists for long implies that it is reasonable to get mass followers and support. Simultaneously, the Party must have appropriate policies to cooperate with religion for positive social welfare benefits instead of "shortsighted and narrow - minded attitudes, discriminatory prejudices to religion and followers."

*Second*, the Party recognized the spiritual needs of religion followers which means that part of the population (religious beliefs are spiritual needs of one part of the population). Human created religions thanks to spiritual needs, like people plant, livestock for feeding themselves. The issue seemed very clear, but religion was so long considered to be eliminated that spiritual needs of a part of people were ignored. Once seen as the needs of a part of people, it should also receive appropriate policy response.

*Third*, the Party recognized the role of religion, seeing it is consistent with the building of a new society. Earlier, religious morality was not appreciated, considered something unrealistic. Thus, the Communist Party determined religion, specifically religious morality, had a role in the building of socialism in Vietnam.

The Communist Party of Vietnam reasserted the nature, role and position of religion towards Vietnam revolution in the new period, essentially fix bias viewpoint against religion under political, prejudice, hard thinking. Communist Party of Vietnam

approach religion was a multi-dimensional, sharp, intellectual innovation.

Renewal of viewpoint coincides with innovation in religion policy. Religions and sects having religious practices attached to ethnicity, proposing principles, goals, charter consistent with state law, organizing apparatus qualified for good behaviors shall be considered by the State in each specific case to operate. The reason for such policy was that there existed many religions in Vietnam then, with only some were officially recognized while other religious sects also existed as such the Protestant, the Cao Dai sects, etc. It was very necessary to license the recognized religions, cults, sects officially.

The content of Resolution 24 was a breakthrough that led to mixed responses, but gradually its correctness value has been proved to date. Resolution 24 can be seen as the turning point in the innovation perspectives, policies towards religion of Communist Party of Vietnam.

The Council of Ministers (now the Government) issued Decree 69-HDBT 21/03/1991 "*Regulations on religious activities*" to replace Decree 297-CP dated 11.11.1977. Decree 69-HDBT mastered the spirit of innovation in epistemology of Resolution 24 in time to meet the needs of religious management, cleared many unresolved hot issues, bad legacy. Thus, the Decree quickly came into effect creating a new face of religious life in Vietnam. It brings religion management of Vietnam gradually integrate with the world's and regions religious laws, ensuring people freedom of following a religion or not. When people's religious life got the green light, dignitaries and followers believed more in the Renovation process and actively performed citizens' obligations for a better life. Furthermore, the counter - revolutionary forces no longer have "base" to fight

against Vietnam revolution, it thereby contributed significantly to stabilize the political situation in an extremely sensitive moment in the early 1990s.

*1.2.2. Directive 37 and Resolution 25-NQ / TW: Transitions, inheritance and development*

*1.2.2.1. Directive 37: Transitions*

On 02/7/1998, the Politburo issued Directive “Regarding religious affairs in the new situation [3]. While Resolution 24 clarifies the views of the Communist Party of Vietnam on acknowledging and recognizing religions, religious affairs, the Directive 37 specifically implementing it by proposing six principles, policies and seven missions of religious affairs.

The six principles outlined in the Directive were basically extracted from previous documents that the Party and State had issued towards religion. They were the Party control with more clarified, concise, succinct guidelines for the State implement through codifying policy or legislation. In the six principles, the 4<sup>th</sup> was significant: The religious activities benefiting people in accordance with the aspirations and legitimate interests of believers were legally guaranteed. These good cultural and moral values of religion were respected and promoted. The Communist Party implicitly identified good cultural, moral values of religion for its role in the new era.

In seven missions, the second and third tasks were significant. Task 2 guided religions to promote its fine cultural and ethical values integrating national cultural traditions and social life, attaching religions to the nation, uniting religions in harmony for national building and defending. Task 3 ruled that Government issues additional decrees on religious activities, draft the Ordinance on Religious Works for Standing Committee of the National Assembly enacted as the basis for the management of

the State, enabling the normal religious activities perform under law.

Government specifically regulated and guided the activities of religious orders, congregations, fund and financial operations, humanitarian activities, charity, religious art activities, external relations, the use of land, the remodeling construction worshipping places, training religious leaders and clergy, and all other activities consistent with religion policies and laws”. On the basis of the Directive 37, the Government issued Decree 26/1999/ND-CP dated 19.04.1999 “Regarding religious activities”, especially the drafting of the Ordinance on religion.

On the whole, Directive 37 was the implementation of Resolution 24 rather than a breakthrough to overcome the inadequacies in the previous time. The Directive recast matters set by the Party and State from central to local demand to make practices. It is assumed that Directive 37 is a transitional text of Resolution 24 and Resolution 25.

*1.2.2.2. Resolution 25 - Succession and Development*

On 03/12/2003, the Central Steering Committee issued Resolution No.25-NQ / TW “Regarding religion in the new situation” (hereinafter referred to as Resolution 25). Resolution came into being as the result of the 7<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Party Central Committee 9<sup>th</sup> - a specialized conference on the issue of ethnicity and religion. The Resolution had five specific contents (1) The situation of religion and religious affairs; (2) The views and policies on religion; (3) The task of religious affairs; (4) The main measures; (5) Implementation [6].

The Resolution raised premises for viewpoint and issuing policies: religious activities and religious affairs must strengthen solidarity among religions in the bloc of national unity, promoting the synergy of the entire nation to successfully

implement industrialization and modernization, construct and firmly protect the Fatherland for the target of “rich people, strong country, social justice, democracy and civilization”.

Resolution sets five viewpoints and policies toward religion.

*First*, it sees belief and religion the spiritual needs of a part of people that have been existing with the nation in the process of building socialism. The Resolution 24 states that religion is a long - term matter, and Resolution 25 inherits and considers “religion currently exists, and will exist with the nation in the process of building socialism”. It means that the Communist Party clearly, specifically recognizes the long term existing of religion. The implication was to respect the facts to meet the spiritual needs religion followers and avoid subjective, impatient measures.

*Second*, the Party and State consistently implement policies for ethnic unity. Bearing this in mind, the Party continues to affirm the big role of religion in the bloc of ethnic unity in the new period. Ethnic unity bloc also includes approximately 4 million Vietnamese expatriates with a division of dignitaries, religious believers.

*Third*, the core content of religious affairs is mobilizing the masses. Succeeding the views of Resolution 24, Resolution 25 reiterated and tested its content through time. The Resolution specifically indicated how to mobilize the religious masses: "People should be motivated to uphold the spirit of patriotism, sense of protecting independence and national reunification. It should be made through the successful implementation of socio - economic policies, security and defense, ensuring the material and spiritual interests of people including religious followers."

*Fourth*, it rules that religion affair is the responsibility of the entire political system. This viewpoint reinstates third part of

Resolution 24. After 13 years implementing Resolution 24, it proves correct and needs to continue performing.

*Fifth*, it raises the issue of following a religion and missionary. This view stems from religion reality, significantly the Protestants in the Central Highlands and the Northwest. It is through this perspective that issues of following a religion and missionary have gradually been resolved, especially to Protestants. The hostile forces no longer have grounds for slandering Vietnam violate religious freedom.

Five perspectives and policies toward religion set in Resolution 25 inherit Resolution 24 (viewpoint 3 and 4), further clarify and develop (viewpoint 1 and 2). The fifth viewpoints are based on urgent issue of some religions, notably Protestants.

Regarding religion work, the Resolution proposed six directives, significantly:

- Creating conditions for religious activities perform normally under law and policy of the State.

- Guiding religions perform external relations in accordance with foreign policy of the Communist Party and State; Enhancing information and communication on the religious policy of the Communist Party and the State; Defeating external hostile forces propaganda of distorting and slandering Vietnam religious work and situation.

The last mission of the Resolution was “to sum up the implementation of the Party's Directives and Resolutions on religious affairs. Basic research, practical summaries should be strengthened to contribute scientific foundation for immediate and long term implementing guidelines and policies for religion”. The summary should indicate the causes of both achievements and shortcomings to inherit and develop methods and achievements of the Communist Party's policies on religious affairs. More scientific foundations shall be provided for

the Party issue appropriate views and policies toward religion.

The Resolution identified 4 main solutions. First, it is preserving and promoting the tradition of worshipping ancestors, honoring and gratitude those died for national pride, respecting traditional beliefs and religious followers, strengthening consensus among them, providing the foundation for the fight against superstitious activities or using religion to harm national and people interests.

The third solution consists of several proposals: Promulgating Ordinance on Religion for building a law on religion and belief; making ways for religions participating in socialized health, cultural, social, educational activities; giving guidelines for solving houses and land for religion purposes; requiring all religions get license and perform under law.

The Resolution proposed four solutions to address the urgent context, then the National Assembly issued the Ordinance on belief and religion dated 06.18.2004. The Ordinance specified provisions regarding socializing medical, cultural, social, educational activities of religious organizations. It almost solved Resolution 40 legacy of “religion association”, and the issue of housing and land use for religious purposes or related to religion was specified in the Government Directive 1940 / CT-TTg, dated 31/12/2008.

*1.2.3. The views and policies of the Party towards religion demonstrated by the Platform and the Political Report of the Party Congress*

1.2.3.1. The views and policies of the Party towards religion demonstrated by Platform Witnessing comprehensive Renovation of 6<sup>th</sup> Congress Party (1986) together with national and international landmark transformation, the Party proposed Platform for national construction in the transition to socialism (later known as the Platform 1991 [9, p.142]). In 2011, the Communist Party

of Vietnam held the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress assessing Renovation and continued to reform building socialism in Vietnam. The Communist Party proposed Platform for national construction in the transition to socialism (Supplement, developed in 2011 [12]). In both political platforms, the Party briefly mentioned religion in two aspects: (1) respecting and guaranteeing freedom of belief and religion of people; (2) combating the abuse of belief and religion freedom to harm motherland and people interests. Platform 1991 added that belief and religion was the spiritual needs of a part of people.

1.2.3.2. The views and policies of the Party towards religion demonstrated by the Political Report of the Party 6<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> Congress [7, p.105]

The Political Report of National Congress 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> contained two parts mentioned in the Platform above. These two content were consistent, and the Congress would identify the central task. The 7<sup>th</sup> Congress stressed to overcome bias attitudes, prejudice, all violations of religious freedom and discrimination towards religion believers. The 8<sup>th</sup> Congress focused that State took care of socio - economic development, culture and helped religion believers' in hunger elimination and poverty reduction, livelihoods improvement, social work and charity participation. The 9<sup>th</sup> Congress set to promote good cultural values, religious morality and gradually perfect laws on beliefs and religions. The 10<sup>th</sup> Congress stated that religious compatriots were an important part of national unity bloc. Religious organizations legally operated under law and were protected by law. The 11<sup>th</sup> Congress proposed to perfect policies and laws on belief and religion to fit the Party's viewpoint. It aims to promote cultural values, good morals of the religion, encourage religious organizations, dignitaries and believers behave well, contribute



positively to the building and defending the Fatherland. Interests and favorable conditions should get under way for religious organizations perform under the charter, regulations recognized by the State and regulated by law.

Along with confirming the general principles of the policy standpoint and sticking to sensible situation, the Party at each Congress focused on new political issues arisen to supplement additional steps for correcting perspectives, policies towards religion, caring and creating conditions for Vietnam religions adhere in building and protecting the country.

## **2. Policy renovation for some religions with specific characteristics**

The concept of "religion with specific characteristics" refers to religions with complex missionary, associated with politically sensitive elements, or spread fast in the minority peoples, namely Protestantism, Islam and Theravada Buddhism.

### **2.1. Protestants**

Since 1986, Protestant has spread quickly in the Central Highlands and Northwest of Vietnam. Protestantism separated from Catholics in the sixteenth century. In the Western countries and later in North America, the Protestant contributed social development. Protestant entered Vietnam under the French colonization. For various reasons including the absolute prohibition Protestant believers worshipping their ancestors - a beauty in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people, Protestant was not widely accepted.

Regarding complicated situation of Protestants in the Central Highlands and Northwest, the Communist Party promptly issued directives, notices that clearly defined guidelines and policies for the Protestant. On November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1998, the Politburo Standing Committee (8<sup>th</sup> Session) issued the Notice 184 / TB / TW and Notice

255/TB-TW dated 07/10/1999 of the Politburo (8<sup>th</sup> Session) "On the guideline for the Protestant in the new situation". Notice 255 / TB-TW affirmed the consistent policy of the Communist Party and State to respect citizens' freedom to follow or not follow a religion. Each Protestant having its own charter and religious practices consistent with policy and legislation will be reviewed to allow operation; The unrecognized sects may perform personal religious practices in family and registered religious institutions. The State did not intend to unify Protestant denominations.

Based on Notification No. 255-TB / TW, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 11/2000/QD-TTg dated 04/24/2000 Announcement for deploying Notification 255 / TB-TW. A steering committee named TW 184 set up programs implemented through 184A and 184B plan, and implemented Notice 255/TB-TW. By 09/08/2004, it helped conditions for the General Assembly Protestant Church (Northern region) conducted 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. In the South, the General Assembly of the General Federation of Protestant Vietnam successfully organized its election. This was the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of the Church historically. Then the State recognized the legal status of the General Federation.

For Protestants in Northern mountainous areas, the Party helped people understand and respect freedom of belief and religion, and they joined the fight for the wrongdoing, violation of fake commissioners. The Party also focused on investment for infrastructure, developing advanced manufacturing [10].

Recognizing that the issue of Protestant must be solved completely, so Prime Minister issued Directive 01/2005/CT-TTg dated 04/02/2005 "Regarding some work to Protestant". The Directive evaluated the results achieved in implementing the guidelines and policies of the Party and

State for the Protestant, and specified the necessary tasks to continue the work for the Protestant in the future. Thanks to its issue solving performance, Directive 01 quickly solved almost short term and long term issues of Protestant work.

Documents from the Government Committee for Religious Affairs revealed by the beginning of 2012, there were 184 cells and 1,284 groups registered for operation in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc (Bình Phước) Province. The equivalent number of the Northern mountainous areas was 258 registered groups. In 2012, nine denominations (10 organizations) of Protestant were officially recognized. Significantly, the issue of Protestant became normal, Protestant believers trust more in the guidelines and policies of the Party and State, they struggled with false allegations of the reactionary forces to take advantage of proselytism against the revolution.

## **2.2. Islam**

Cham people today live mainly in Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, some in Ho Chi Minh City, Tay Ninh, An Giang, etc. Cham (Chăm) people followed Brahmanism and Buddhism from the first century, then in the 15<sup>th</sup> century they were Islam believers.

Due to the complexity of ethnic and religious history, especially the some reactionary group operation after 1975 that raised serious security concerns. Additionally, life of the Cham people in Ninh Thuan (Ninh Thuận), Binh Thuan (Bình Thuận) was always difficult due to harsh climate. The issue of ethnic - religion in Cham region increasingly emerged that demanded the Party, the State had specific policies. On 26/10/1981, the Central Politburo Committee issued Directive No. 121-CT/TW "Directive regarding work towards Cham people". Directive stated the contribution of the Cham people in the resistance wars against the French and Americans, making a worthy

contribution to national independence and reunification, recognizing the important part of Cham people in national construction and defense after the reunification, and pointing out the difficulties of the Cham people's life with subjective and objective causes. On that basis, the Directive requires the industry at all levels from the central to local levels to better educate politics and ideology, increase production, improve people's lives, develop culture, education, health and social affairs, maintain political security and social order.

The Directive was strictly followed, especially in the provinces of Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan (then Thuan Hai). It could be seen that Cham people life was obvious increased. The Party Central Committee issued the Notice on 03-TT/TW dated 17/10/1991 "Regarding work towards Cham people". The Notice required matters related to land, irrigation, unity, customs, development of traditional industries be solved.

On 18/02/2004, the Government issued Directive 06/2004/CT-TTg on promoting socio - economic development and security for the Cham people in the new period. Along with paying attention to economic life, culture, religion issues in Cham communities, especially Cham Bani and Cham Muslim, the Party also advocated timely policies and monitors. On 30.09.2003, the Central Party Committee issued Document No. 119-TB / TW "Notification of the Secretariat on guidelines for Islam in the new situation". Implementing Notice No. 119-TB / TW, some provinces gradually granted religious operation license for two Muslim communities: An Giang province Muslim Community, in December 2004; Tay Ninh (Tây Ninh) Province Islam, in December 2008, (earlier in 1992 Ho Chi Minh City Islam Community was already recognized).

As of 2008, there were 28,736 Muslim worshippers, 300 dignitaries. In term of worshipping places, there were 40 Cathedrals, 22 oratories. All cathedrals had Hakiins manage religious affairs, and all were performed well. Every year, followers of Islam pilgrimage to Mecca.

For Cham Bani, Ninh Thuan Province licensed its religious council in 2007. As of 2008, Cham Bani had 43,996 followers, 399 priests, 17 places of worship.

### **2.3. Khmer Theravada Buddhism**

In the Southwest region, there are about 1.3 million ethnic Khmer, most are Theravada Buddhists. Khmer people have tied closely to Buddhism Theravada. Dealing with rising issues of religion and ethnicity, The Secretariat of the Central Committee Communist Party of Vietnam (6<sup>th</sup> Congress) issued Directive No. 68-CT / TW dated 04/18/1991 "About works in the regions of ethnic Khmer". Directive 68-CT/TW confirmed that temples and monks had a very important role in the life of the ethnic Khmer, religion and ethnic identities intertwined, therefore religion and ethnic policies should be implemented simultaneously. The Directive required reestablishing Association of compatriot monks - an organization of the Khmer people during the war against the US. In November 1981, the Khmer association of compatriot monks and eight other Buddhist sects formed the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam. By the time the Directive was enacted, only former Hau Giang (Hậu Giang) Province still maintained this organization. Directive proposed some measures such as opening senior Pali schools when to catechize the monks. Khmer cultural heritage temples should be respected, protected and promoted in combination with new cultural content.

On 03/14/2007, the Party Central Committee issued Notification 67-TB /TW: Conclusion of the Secretariat on further

implementation of the Directive 68-CT/TW of the Party Central Committee's Secretariat (6<sup>th</sup> Congress) for religious affairs in the ethnic Khmer. In the part "Review of the implementation of Directive 68-CT/TW", it concluded: "Over the past 15 years of implementation, the work of the Khmer ethnic minority areas have achieved comprehensive results on the main surface, contributing significantly to the overall development of the South West region. The masses' propaganda, mobilization were focused, ethnic Khmer trusted and actively implemented the guidelines and policies of the Party and the State to contribute to building national unity bloc, etc. Material and spiritual life of people have improved significantly. The Party and State have issued many policies and economic development policies to rapidly reduce poverty, ascend wealthier households. The preservation and promotion of national cultural identity have achieved good results, etc. Religion practices are guaranteed, the right to religious freedom of people is respected".

Implementing Directive 68-CT/TW has resulted in so far 8/9 of provinces and cities in the Southwest where Khmer people living founded the association of compatriot monks. The association becomes a core organization in the patriotic movement to associate religion with life, create a position and power for the Khmer Theravada Buddhism to accompany the country.

### **3. Achievements and lessons learned from the process of renovating perspective, policies towards religion of the Communist Party, the State of Vietnam**

#### **3.1. Achievements on the renewal of religious affairs**

The comprehensive Renovation initiated by the Communist Party of Vietnam in the 6<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress, but innovation breakthrough for religious affairs did not

start until 1990 with the introduction of Resolution 24 /TW. Resolution 24 /TW has been confirmed to be a turning point in reviewing religion and comprehensive reform regarding religion of the Party and State of Vietnam. The resolution provided foundation for more resolutions and directives of the party later, it was also the theoretical background for the State enacted policies on religion.

In the part "Religious situation and religious work" of Resolution 25-NQ/TW, the Party Central Committee (9<sup>th</sup> Congress) assessed the role and impact of Resolution 24/TW for religious affairs in Vietnam: Thanks to innovative viewpoint and policies, religious affairs has been changed dramatically. Religions compatriots have actively contributed to the cause of building and defending the Fatherland. In general, religious organizations have built religious practices, operated under the law, recognized by the State and tied to national unity, building a better material and spiritual life contributing to the national renovation".

After 5 years implementing Resolution No. 25-NQ/ TW dated 20/7/2009, the Central Party Committee assessed the results as follows: "The Resolution has created a fundamental change of staff awareness, party members in the entire political system and society towards religious, reduced religious prejudice, effectively enhanced State management on religion, increased responsibility of all levels and sectors, Fatherland Front and mass organizations for religious affairs.

Religious situation has been basically stable, with more growth in terms of followers, dignitaries, monks and religious activities. Places of worship have been built and preserved. Organization of religions has been strengthened from the central to grassroots levels, more external activities have taken place. The whole religious

believers and leaders have faith in the guideline and policies of the Party and the State, actively participate in social charity activities, residential cultural movement, traditional religious festivals to ensure safety, order and contribute to the construction and development of the country [4].

Innovation views and policies of the Party and the State regarding religion receive positively theoretical and practical results within Vietnam and worldwide. Undeniably in 2006, the United States has removed Vietnam from the list of countries of particular concern (CPC).

Such results have changed Vietnam religions fundamentally. Before renovation, there were about 6 religions (Buddhism, Catholics, Protestantism, Islam, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhism). In 2012, there were 13 religions including Bani Muslim, Baha'i, Buu Son Ky Huong, Tu An Hieu Nghia, etc. In the future, some religions may get license for operation. Along with 13 religious, there are 40 religious organizations granted registration and accreditation [1, pp. 19 - 20].

### **3.2. Lessons of the innovation process perspective, policies towards religion of the Party, the State of Vietnam**

Achievements of religious affairs in the process of innovating perspective, policies towards religion of the Party, the State of Vietnam are valuable lessons that should be indicated.

*3.2.1. Renovating views and policies toward religion are inevitable to national comprehensive reforms. Innovation policy must be consistent with national practice and international integration. The relation of religion and ethnicity must be flexible to have national unity for construction and defense*

Since its establishment, the Communist Party of Vietnam and President Ho Chi Minh had a proper perspective on religious affairs. Along with the immutable principles

of respect for religious and belief freedom, gathering dignitaries and religious believers in entire national unity bloc, after September 1945 the Party and State of Vietnam based on actual situations to propose revolutionary views and policies of religious conformity. Innovation in religion must start from the methodology to recognize the nature, role and function of religion. It is not the complete denial of the past, rather it must rely on traditional platforms and experiences of ancestors dealing with religion, on the basis of Marxist - Leninist theory on religion, especially Ho Chi Minh thought, the views and policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam on religious affairs. Only by doing this can Renovation in religion avoid disturbance, the fault and has high dialectic characteristics.

Innovation in religion after milestone of Resolution 24 - NQ/TW should summarize, point out the achievements and shortcomings to inherit and develop. This is reflected by Directive No. 37 - CT/TW; Resolution No. 25 - NQ/TW, the Platform for national development and political reports through the Party Congresses. Thanks to that viewpoint, religious policies have generally been consistent with international conventions.

*3.2.2. Innovating views and policies toward religion must gradually tie to improve policies and laws of religion, and manage religious activity by law*

On the basis of religion innovation and recognition, the State shall promptly institutionalize legal documents. They are fundamental pillars of religious affairs. After Resolution 24-NQ/TW dated 21.03.1991, the Council of Ministers issued Decree No.69-HDBT "Provisions on religious activities". Implementing Directive 37 of the Politburo dated 19/04/1999, the Government issued Decree No. 26/1999/ND-CP "Regarding religious activities". Both Decrees had the articles and clauses covered most statutory

religious activities happening at that time, especially issues related to religious housing, land, property, international activities of the religion and the religious order. Decree 26/1999/ND-CP (Article 8, paragraph 1) regulates perspective outlined in Resolution 24-NQ/TW "Religious organizations and equivalent sects having religious practices attached to ethnicity with principles and objectives, charter consistent with the laws of the State, with appropriate organizational and personnel apparatus may be considered by State to operate in each particular case".

*3.2.3. Caring and facilitating to promote religious values and generate resources for social development*

Since Resolution 24 - NQ/TW recognizing the moral role of religion in the construction of the new society, all Party's directives, resolutions and political report later followed to recognize the religious values. Initially, Directive 37 of the Politburo, 2<sup>nd</sup> mission states: "to promote cultural and ethical values, moral teaching of religious traditions of national culture". Resolution 25-NQ/TW aimed to preserve and promote the tradition of ancestor worship, honor and gratitude to those who died for country, respect traditional beliefs of minority ethnic and religious followers. Congress 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> Political Report affirmed to promote good culture, morality values of religion. One of the solutions to religious work that the Politburo mentioned in the Directive 37 was to get religions involved in undertakings socialization of medical activities, culture, society, education, etc.

*3.2.4. Proactively preventing and resolutely fighting the misuse of religion to destroy ethnic unity, security and social order*

Due to its particular nature, Vietnam religions are vulnerable to the activities against the government. Furthermore, every major religion has its own characteristics. It

is necessary to take the initiative to prevent and fight with misconducts of reactionary forces, those want to exaggerate any minor issue into human rights, religion violence. In all documents, the Party always affirmed religious compatriots are an important part of the national unity bloc. Hostile forces often aimed at undermining ethnic unity, weakened the country through religion. For the negatives arising from religion itself, the answer is to mobilize and convince. In case any hostile force uses religion in political conspiracy, it should be fight against. Those once lured to wrongdoing should be educated to properly behave. For the conspirators, they shall recognize the sin they made and take responsibility. The four lessons shown here are fundamental issues drawn from innovation process perspective, policies towards religion of the Party, the State of Vietnam.

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