

# การปฏิบัติขันติธรรมทางศาสนาเพื่อสันติภาพ ของชาวคาಥอลิกในเวียดนาม

Action of Religious Tolerance for Peace  
of The Catholicism in Vietnam



เหจียน พง เทียน

Nguyen Phung Thien

คณะกรรมการสนับสนุนพัฒนาเขตปกครองโอดจิมินีชิตี้, ประเทศไทยเวียดนาม

Member of the Interfaith Dialogue Commission of

Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

## บทคัดย่อ

ขันติธรรมทางศาสนาเป็นรากฐานจำเป็นสำหรับสันติภาพและความกลมกลืน ต้องการเปิดใจและยินดีที่จะยอมรับศาสนาของศาสนาต่างๆ ช่วยให้ผู้อื่นเข้าใจในความเชื่อทางศาสนาที่แตกต่างจากของตนเอง และเคารพในศรัทธาความเชื่อของบุคคลอื่น ในการประชุมนี้อาจจะเติมเต็มด้วยความรักและสันติภาพ จากภูมิปัญญาและจิตวิญญาณจากสิ่งที่ผู้นำศาสนาได้ร่วมกันนำเสนอเพื่อความสุขสงบที่เกิดขึ้นจากความเชื่อของคุณมีความสุขในความเชื่อของคุณ เป็นเกียรติอย่างยิ่งที่ได้รับเชิญไปนำเสนอผลงานการประชุม ซึ่งมีรายละเอียดจะได้นำเสนอต่อไป

**คำสำคัญ:** ขันติธรรมทางศาสนา, สันติภาพ, ชาวคาಥอลิก

## Abstract

Religious tolerance is a necessary foundation for harmony and peace. It requires an open heart and a willingness to accept followers of various religions, allowing others to hold religious beliefs that are different from yours and respecting those people and their beliefs. May this meeting be filled with love and

peace. May the wisdom and the spirit from what the religious leaders have shared spread everywhere to your followers. May you be blessed in your faith. It's a great honor to be invited to this meaningful and peaceful meeting.

**Keyword:** Religious Tolerance, Peace, Catholicism

## I. Introduction

From very early in the history of Vietnam, the colonization of this country by China lasted more than 1000 years. As a result of this, Confucianism has deeply influenced the spiritual and moral life of all Vietnamese people. Confucianism and Taoism are more like philosophies than religions but they are a strong base of Vietnamese culture. On the other hand, Vietnam (named Giao Chí in the early centuries AD) was part of Indo-China and on all the trade routes. Vietnam was a popular place visited by many Indian traders with Indian Buddhist monks. Buddhism became the main religion and is still the dominant spiritual influence on Vietnamese culture. (Hoang Thi Tho, online)

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a small number of European missionaries came to Vietnam and Roman Catholicism began in this country. Small groups of Islam, Hindus and Baha'i were also introduced to Vietnam through foreign missionaries during late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1911, Protestantism was officially recognized. During this time, two new native religions were established in Vietnam: Caodaism (1926) and Hoahaoism (1939). These religions enriched the religious and spiritual consciousness in Vietnamese people though it is probably true to say that most people in Vietnam now have no religion.

From French colonization to the end of the American war, religion became very mixed with political struggles and very bad things happened. Although the Catholics were still a very small minority, they were associated with the power of French and later with America. The Buddhists were treated unjustly and that history was like a wound in the relationship between the Buddhists and Catholics. We are sorry about this and ashamed.

After the Geneva Conference in 1954, most of the Catholics from the North moved to the South and gathered in a few localities (like my hometown, in Đồng Nai province). From the end of the war, the communist government had many difficulties to overcome to unite the nation. Although communism doesn't promote religion, and most Vietnamese now are atheists, there has been a development of quite good working relationships between the government and different religious groups and the different religious groups with each other.

In this context, up till now, Catholics have been a minority, often living in large numbers in certain areas and we feel that our religion is seen as foreign, connected even with the enemy. So we have been defensive to protect our faith, and not so open to others, though now we are trying to change this.

## II. Cultural context: Harmony

The traditional culture of Vietnam is very much influenced by a mix of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. A happy family is built on trust, respect, loyalty and love. The traditional Vietnamese family has handed on those values in a large, multi-generational unit (including ancestors). From this culture of the family, Vietnamese people have also been taught to value good order in society, duty, good morals, discipline and respect for authority.

Although different and sometimes opposite, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism converge on a common and dominant core: the sense of harmony (To Thi Anh, 1994 : 32). Confucianism is about the person in harmonious relationship with society. Other elements in Vietnamese culture come from Buddhism and Taoism, especially the idea of simple and compassionate life, in harmony with nature and with others. This is very easily seen in the Vietnamese desire to please others and be at peace with them.

### III. Building Dialogues:

#### **3.1 Desire for Dialogue:**

While in recent history, Catholicism in Vietnam has been a little bit turned in on itself for reasons given above, the Catholic Church internationally has been seriously committed to interfaith dialogue since the Second Vatican Council (1964). And the Catholic Bishops of Asia, at their conference in Taipei in 1974, committed themselves to a triple dialogue with the poor, with the local culture and with other religions. In 2010, the Catholic bishops of Vietnam in an open letter to the people proposing “heart to heart dialogue” with other religions, with the poor and with people of no religious belief. So now the Catholic Church in Vietnam is developing much more active and committed approach to interfaith relationships.

#### **3.2 Levels of Dialogue: There are four levels of dialogue:**

- a. Daily life - families, neighbourhood, co-workers, friends, marriages, funerals,...
- b. Doing charity work together with a shared goal: to help the poor.
- c. Groups committed to interfaith dialogue coming together for discussion and shared spiritual experiences.
- d. Scholarship and theological dialogue.

#### **3.3 Actions and experiences:**

##### **a. Daily life:**

In Vietnam, Catholic people are accounted for 7% of the population and in HCMC, there are about 3000 marriages in the Catholic Church per year (1/3 Catholic - Catholic, 1/3 Catholic - convert, 1/3 Catholic - non-Catholic). Taking a glance at the numbers above shows us that we do interfaith dialogue daily, in ordinary ways that we even rarely pay much attention or recognize them. However, interfaith dialogue also happen in each Vietnamese person through the ways of behavior and communication with others in various relationships.

**b. Doing charity work together with a shared goal: to help the poor**

Vietnam is a multi-religious and multi-cultural society and it is changing all the time with economic development as well as western influence. However, the gap between rich and poor is growing. All people with religious belief about helping others can work together to help these poor people.

We have some charity clinics that co-operate between religions. In the South, there are two interfaith charity clinics: one in Ho Chi Minh city (HCMC) based at Tam Tong Mieu Temple - inaugurated (2011) with 30volunteering part-time staff members (doctors and nurses), including followers of Buddhism, Catholicism, Caodaism and Minh Ly Dao using basic health care equipment; the other clinic is in the Mekong Delta. For over 20 years, this oriental clinic has welcomed and treated a great number of poor people with the harmonious co-operation of many volunteers, followers of Buddhism, Caodaism, Hoahaoism, Protestant and Catholicism. In the center of Vietnam, the Kim Long charity clinic is a private charity clinic in Hue City. It was founded in 1992 by the Sisters of The Daughters of Mary Immaculate in Hue. With physicians, nurses, staff, and volunteers of different religions (specially Catholicism and Buddhism), providing free health care services and different charitable works for the poor, as well as an HIV program in Hue and surrounding areas (with a mobile clinic).

There are also many charity visits to the remote rural areas around the country, without religious discrimination. At this time (from Aug.21 to Sep.30, 2014), members of Fund for Children with Disability9 are making a journey from the South to the North of Vietnam called “Back to Mother” to call for help and support for children with disabilities. They are visiting and giving gifts to people in aged care and disability shelters of Catholicism and Buddhism.

This experience of working together to help others leads to understanding and appreciating the other people we work beside. Understanding and seeing goodness of another person helps build tolerance and leads to harmony.

**c. Groups committed to interfaith dialogue coming together for discussion and shared spiritual experiences:**

From 2011, connecting with the spirit of the interfaith encounter in Assisi (1986-2011), the 27<sup>th</sup> of October has become a special occasion for groups committed to interfaith dialogue and all people who care about this coming together for sharing spiritual experiences and prayers for peace. It is organized by the Interfaith Dialogue Commission of Archdiocese of HCMC, called the Interfaith Encounter Day: Together We Build Peace (2011), Together We Overcome Sufferings (2012), and Together We Cultivate Harmony (2013). And this year 2014, we are preparing for the Interfaith Encounter Day with theme Together We Share Spiritual Joy.

**d. Scholarship and theological dialogue:**

Dialogue between scholars of religions is not strong in Vietnam. Nevertheless, we have been making good relationship between religions in HCMC recently. In the pastoral center of Archdiocese of HCMC, we have courses and thematic programs studying about other religions; religious and dignitaries of different religions are usually invited to come and share about their doctrines and experiences of their faith. Likewise, we are invited to go to visit temples and mosques on their special events.

## IV. Conclusion

Karl Marx said: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people”. We know this is not true. Religion is a mystery of belief. A judicious and mature belief leads us to happy life. Understanding our own faith and faith of others brings us together, understands and accepts each other, and then we can willingly show our respect to each other with open heart.

In multi-religious and multi-cultural context of Vietnam, spirit of religious tolerance is essential for Vietnamese people to live in harmony. Obviously, this

spirit strongly needs to be showed through voluntary charity co-operation for the sake of the poor. Therefore, social development with peaceful atmosphere spreads to everywhere in Vietnam as well as to other Asian countries. When starting the Interfaith Dialogue Commission of Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, we have been very happy to be part of dialogues leading to religious understanding, tolerance. With achievements in building good relationship with other religions through dialogue and charity co-operation to help the poor, we can catch up with the rest of the Church which has been seriously engaged in interfaith dialogue for 50 years and also with the Church in South East Asian through FABC.



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