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A CAPTIVE CHURCH CATHOLICISM AND REPRESSION IN VIETNAM

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Secretary-General Nguyen Van Linh promised at the Sixth VCP Congress in late 1986 to take measures to respect religious freedom and to improve relations with the Catholic Church. But recent developments suggest otherwise. Persecutions have continued. Two most recent trials involved the members of the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix, who were severely sentenced in May 1987 for "activities damaging the national security" — a case which provoked much indignation in Vietnam — and a group of seminarians from the Dong Cong monastery, who were tried in October 1987 for "propaganda against the socialist system, sabotage against the policy of solidarity, disturbance of public security, and terrorism". The Vatican's canonization of 117 Vietnamese saints on 19 June has further strained Church-State relations. While the Pope considered the canonization as destined to "reinforce the faith of the Vietnamese Catholics and to provide the Catholic Church in Vietnam with examples to follow", the communist authorities launched a campaign to smear the Catholic movement and its history. Multiple pressures were exerted on Cardinal Trinh Van Can, archbishop of Hanoi, to send a delegation to the Vatican to propose that the canonization be postponed. A day before the canonization the Hanoi authorities announced the death of Archbishop Nguyen Kinh Dien of Hue, who spent his last four years under house arrest for defying communist attempts to control the Catholic Church. Although Archbishop Dién was the most prominent advocate of religious freedom in Vietnam, he was barred from priestly work. According to Catholic sources, some 300 priests out of a total of 1,900 still remain in reeducation camps. Human rights organizations note that Catholics, ethnic minorities and those with families in the West report continuing and pervasive discrimination. It is in this context of "religious terrorism" that the Catholic Church strives to survive in socialist Vietnam. Father JEAN MAIS, who spent most of his life in Vietnam before 1975, explains in this essay how the Church is kept captive by the communist regime. ■

Introduction

The life of every church is marked not only by the culture and the traditions of its members but also, and perhaps most of all, by its place in history. In considering the thirteen years in which the Catholic Church has existed in reunited Socialist Vietnam, and the way its face has been altered during this period, it seems that there is no better approach to study the Church than to review its relations with the state. This approach is not the result of excessive attention to the political dimensions of Christian life or of any aggressiveness towards a political regime. Rather it is due above all to the omnipresence of state power in the civilian society of Vietnam today.

This is not the first time in its history that the Catholic Church is confronted by temporal powers. At the end of the 17th century, Catholicism was prohibited by the Trinh Lords in the North, and persecuted in the South by the Nguyens. In the 19th century, the faith was again savagely suppressed by the rulers: 90,000 Christians met their death during this period. The period of French colonization, which lasted until 1954, was not without its risks for the church. The freedom which it then enjoyed was accompanied by temptations to make compromises with the occupying power, temptations that also presented themselves during the time of the second Vietnam war.

But never before in their history have the 3 million Vietnamese Catholics had to mingle so closely with the state as during the past thirteen years. The encounter between the Christian life and the imperatives of state power takes place at all levels. The Vietnamese who identifies himself as a Catholic on his identity card or his curriculum vitae knows that the authorities will not let it pass unnoticed. Likewise, when Catholic bishops proclaim their fundamental choice, namely, "*Live the Gospel among the Vietnamese people*", they too know that the Communist Party want to know the nature of these "Vietnamese people", so as to discover whether they are the authentic representatives.

Part I: The Revolutionary Scheme of The State on Matters of Religion

As often reiterated in legislative documents,¹ the objective of the state is to manage (*quan ly*) the development of Vietnamese society as a whole as well as the individuals who comprise it. It would be a mistake to regard this task as similar to that of other states. In Vietnam the state is not content with administering the nation's affairs; it is engaged in an overall program which it calls "*the socialist transformation*." No sector of the civilian population is exempted from this revolutionary objective including the religious sector. Before the Democratic Republic of Vietnam came into being first in the North in 1954 and later in May 1975 in the South the different religious institutions had considerable influence. Religions have played an important role in Vietnamese tradition.² Ancestor worship, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity which have all deep historical roots, and new religions founded at the turn of the century, such as Caodaism and the Hoa Hao Sect have shaped Vietnamese society. But before we discuss the concrete policies of the state towards these religions, it is necessary to first view the state's attitude towards the issue of religion.

(A) How the State Views Religion

If the strategy of the Communist Party of Vietnam (VCP) in religious matters is often secretive,³ known only to cadres specializing in the religious question, the theoretical concepts on religion are, by contrast, widely known. They are dealt with in some of the many theoretical works published in North Vietnam since 1954. These books are quite often translations and adaptations of works published by fraternal parties (such as the official publications of the French Communist Party). In the beginning the sources were mainly French and Chinese, as these two languages were the best known to the militants during that time. In recent years, however, more translations of Soviet authors have appeared.

For Marx, religion is an intoxicant which makes the slaves of capital lose all their human dignity

The religious theory of the Party was of course taught in the training schools of its cadres, as noted in the chapter "Religion" (pp. 287 -296) in the manual entitled "*The Marxist-Leninist Philosophy: Historical Materialism*" (of the Party School of Higher Studies).⁴ But the Marxist-Leninist teaching on religion is also part of the secondary school curriculum, aimed at all young Vietnamese, believers and non-believers alike. Thus, in a manual which is used in Vietnamese high schools or lycees, called *Chu Nghia Xa Hoi Khoa Hoc* (*Scientific Socialism*),⁵ there is a chapter on "Socialism and Religion" (pp. 188 - 200).

The theory of religion that is taught in Vietnam is, on the whole, similar to that prevailing in other socialist regimes with variations according to the existing situation and the peculiar traditions of Vietnam.

Karl Marx defined religion as "*the image of real suffering*" (of the people) and at the same time as the protest against such real suffering. Recent commentators have stressed the second aspect of this Marxist analysis. Following Lenin and other Soviet and Chinese interpretations of Marxist classics, the Vietnamese works stress this image theory. The voluntarism of the Vietnamese leadership, moreover, tends to consider this image as a misleading camouflage that conceal hostile forces. One of the manuals mentioned above comments at length on this sentence of Engels: "*Every religion is only the deceptive image in the brain of man of manipulative forces that direct daily lives (of the people) ...*". The article is supported by the two elements, image and illusion. As image, religion has no truth in itself; it is entirely within the social forces which gave it birth. Furthermore, it is illusory and, therefore, false — a falsehood that is all the more pernicious in that, it is systematically exploited by reactionary forces. Deprived of its claim to truth, as pointed out by Marx, it is nothing more than an instrument for enslavement: "*It is an intoxicant which makes the slaves of Capital lose all their human dignity and makes them forget all that they require to lead lives fit, in however small a way, for human beings.*"

The originality of the Vietnamese communist doctrine on religion lies perhaps in its refusal to consider religious phenomena as anything but a mere camouflage. Religion is, thus, by definition something other than what it claims to be. Seeing it as only a pretence, the communist ideology considers it crucial to recognize the forces that use it for their benefit. The manuals referred to earlier adopt this totally negative judgment by Lenin: "*Marxism considers religion, its churches and all religious institutions as the organs of reactionary capitalist forces for the defense of the rule of oppression and intoxication of the working class.*"

This concept of religion as a political instrument has strongly marked the religious policy of the Vietnamese Communist Party in the past few years. In the opening portion of the document of the VCP devoted to the Catholic religion⁶ the Vatican is introduced as an organization of exploitation on a grand scale, which has always been tied to anti-revolutionary and anti-communist capitalism. In the various trials which, since

Although the state proclaims that religion is the citizen's private affair, in practice, however, it prohibits freedom of worship

1975, have brought priests and nuns before revolutionary tribunals in Ho Chi Minh City, the accused are always described in the complaints as dangerous revolutionaries. This concept is also spread by official publications. Novelists recognized and honored by the regime, such as Chu Van and Nguyen Van Khai, who devoted portions of their writings to descriptions of Catholic circles in North Vietnam, are fond of describing the priests and their flock as double-faced creatures who, behind their rites and distinctive vestments pursue programs which are no different from those of imperialism and international reactionary forces.

It is, therefore, not surprising that at the end of this theoretical analysis, the religious phenomenon appears as the very negation of the revolutionary aims pursued by the ruling ideology: *"The ends, the ideological content, the concept of the world, and the solution of social problems advanced by religion are totally opposed to the scientific revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism"*. It is, therefore, as its direct adversary that this ideology regards religion. The theoretical works make no attempt to hide this: *"Today, religion is looking for every means to oppose the revolutionary task of the working class and the popular, democratic and progressive forces of society"*. The long-range project of "socialist reform", aims at liberating *"the masses from religious influence"*. This liberation is defined as *"an objective necessity, in conformity with the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and of the working people"*.

Nevertheless the leaders of Vietnam, in their struggle for the liberation of the masses, are not content with *"prohibiting religion in the socialist society"*, or with *"overtly declaring war against it"*. The VCP policy on religion holds that religious "vestiges" can be overcome only through a *"socialist revolution"*, which will transform society as well as the conscience of man.

While awaiting the realization of such transformation, the regime will commence with the Leninist policy which states that *"from the viewpoint of the State, religion is the citizen's private affair"*, which in practice leads to giving the *"freedom to believe or not believe"* to every citizen in principle.

It is nevertheless necessary to understand that this is the *"viewpoint of the State"*. It is not in any way the point of view of the party. Here again, VCP writings quote Lenin: *"We stress that, from the point of view of the State, religion shall be a private matter. But where it concerns our Party, it is absolutely out of the question to consider religion as a private affair"*. Thus, a party member is forbidden from belonging to any religion. On the contrary, the duty and mission of the party is to disseminate scientific atheism among the masses.

Anyone who is familiar with the functions of the political institutions in Vietnam today would know that the party is the state. Party authorities also hold government positions. As such, the distinctions in points of view between the two are purely formal under a regime that is completely controlled by the party. Still, this double viewpoint enables one to understand the two-faced policy and the contradictions of VCP politics where religious repression is often carried out in the name of the freedom of belief or non-belief. In particular, it helps us to decipher statements of the type: *"The Vietnamese Communist Party propagates scientific atheism within the reality of concrete, historical conditions of Vietnam today, by means of its policy of freedom of belief or non-belief"*.⁷ This sentence is enigmatic only to those who do not know the double-viewpoint theory. The state, which considers religion as a private affair, cannot approach it except through the policy of freedom of worship. However, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the state becomes the instrument of the party. Since the latter is atheistic, the state policy has to be the instrument for the propagation of atheism. This is, of course, a sophism. It nevertheless makes a deep impression on the actual policy of the state and explains the apparent incoherence of official speeches and the measures adopted in the domain of religion.

(B) Rewriting the History of the Catholic Church

The foregoing analysis of the revolutionary project of the socialist regime as applied to religion isolates the theory and sets aside history. We must now lift the veil and consider the viewpoint which the communist leaders impose on the history of the Vietnamese people, particularly those who belong to the Catholic Church. The official ideology believes its present action is legitimized by history and that its revolution is the direct result of the tradition of independence which, according to it, is the principal thread of the whole history of Vietnam. Where is the place of the Vietnamese Catholic community in this revolutionary framework of history?

After taking over power in the South in 1975, government officials from the North found themselves among strangers in many aspects. For 21 years (1954-1975), South Vietnam had been separated from the North. During this time, the South had developed a culture and a way of life of its own, which was profoundly different from that of the "*first democratic republic in South East Asia*", North Vietnam. This is why in the initial post-reunification years, official theoreticians and historians undertook extensive research into the cultural development of the South. This led to a systematic "*re-writing*" of the history of South Vietnam through, naturally, the communists' ideological lens.

The history of the Catholic Church based on these re-writings, therefore, could not be disseminated. Numerous articles and books published between 1975 and 1981 contain one or several chapters on the life and role of Catholicism in the old South Vietnamese society.⁸ These re-writings of the history of the Church, albeit extremely biased, however, help us understand the relations between the Church and the state during the past thirteen years. One can even say, that to a great extent, it has determined the current attitude of the Vietnamese State towards Catholic circles.

Many official works tend to focus on the role of Christianity in relation to the Vietnamese revolutionary tradition. They place emphasis on the liaison between Christianity and the foreign and anti-national forces. Thus, the first Portuguese missionaries who arrived in Vietnam in the sixteenth century were depicted as "*effacious companions and auxiliaries of European capitalism*". The early successes of the Jesuits and later those of the Paris Foreign Mission priests are explained solely by historical circumstances: the lot of the Vietnamese peasant was so miserable that "*the image of the martyred Christ*" that the foreign priests brandished before them would have naturally aroused deep sympathetic responses; also the missionaries were said to have skillfully exploited the rivalries and disputes among feudal clans of the era.

Any act by the missionaries that could be constructed as preparation for French colonialism was also blown up in the revised history of Christianity. Any assistance asked of the French authorities (for example, the intercession of Msgr Pigneau de Behaine with the King of France) was portrayed as a prelude to interference. Any report on the country (Msgr Pallu's memorandum or that of Saint-Phalles) was projected as an invitation to France to take possession of Vietnam. Although the historians of the regime conceded that the persecutions, which in the nineteenth century took the lives of tens of thousands of Christians, were "*stupid and cruel*", they nevertheless maintained that the "*martyrs of the faith*" paid for the interferences of the missionaries in the affairs of their country.

"The apostolic fathers [sic] would have fulfilled 'their mission' by preparing France's conquest and sowing the seeds of division among the Vietnamese people". That is why, according to this revised version of the history of Vietnamese Catholicism, French colonialism when implanting itself in Vietnam at the end of the nineteenth century would not make official the secret collusion between the Vietnamese Church and the foreign power. In

In rewriting the history of Catholicism in Vietnam, the VCP has converted the missionaries and all Catholics into agents of imperialism

the 1930s when the Communist Party of Vietnam led the movement for independence, the Church supported the colonial forces. It "will channel the popular hatred and direct it against communism". It would try to make the French war in Vietnam a holy, anti-revolutionary war. Communist historians untiringly cite all anti-communist movements with a Catholic background such as the "Catholic League" of Colonel Leroy and the self-defence militia of Msgr Le Huu Tu and Father Hoang Quynh. The official Church of Vietnam cannot deny having been opposed to the independence movement because, according to the regime's official history, the bishops had in 1951 signed a letter entitled, *"The Letter of the Bishops of all Indochina"*, which forbade all Catholics from joining communist organizations or supporting them in any manner. Only a fringe of Catholicism is favored by the present regime: those few individuals, who had participated since the beginning of French colonialism in rebel movements, and the priests and lay people who since 1945 have been actively or otherwise involved in patriotic associations dependent on the Vietminh. But, it must be noted, these persons were disapproved of or rejected by the mainstream Church hierarchy.

(C) The Church during the time of Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu.

The Geneva agreement of 1954 created two Vietnams: North Vietnam was put under the authority of the Vietminh and, therefore, under the Workers Party (the name of the communist party at that time); South Vietnam, which was to come under the rule of Ngo Dinh Diem, was considered to be in the sphere of the "Free World" and was under increasing influence of the United States. The great event which marked the beginning of this separation was the exodus to the South of almost 1 million North Vietnamese, of whom 75-80% were Catholics. These refugees were pressured by both these camps, but the pressure was stronger in the North, where police and other law and order-enforcing forces were already in place.

In any case, the official version presents this exodus as a "transfer of population" entirely organized by the high clergy of the Church and the Diem government obeying orders coming from the United States. The Church was supposed to have not only relayed the campaign of systematic slanders organized by the government of the South against the regime of the North, but also, in addition, had made it an obligation to the conscience of illiterate Catholics of North Vietnam to go to the South. The revised history also draws attention to the widespread hue and cry at that time that *"the Blessed Virgin had migrated to the South"*.

The communist regime's historians have stressed three characteristics of the Church in South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem: its triumph, its total subjugation to the regime and the reinforcement of its anti-communist ideology. It is hardly necessary to elaborate on the first two points. Reinforced by the influx of Catholics from the North, the Church at this time appeared to have a very strong social standing. It had established two universities, a great number of secondary schools, hospitals, orphanages, infirmaries and dispensaries.

All these were possible only with the support of the state to which the Church had subjugated itself. It was the church, for example, that furnished the majority of the officers and militants of the ruling party, the Can Lao.

But the third characteristic is that which the Communist historians have especially stressed, and that is the reinforcement of anti-communist ideology within the Catholic Church. In 1960, the Assembly of bishops of the South went even further than the letter of 1951 by threatening, with excommunication, all Catholics suspected of belonging to or being closely associated with the Communist Party. The communist

historians highlight the anti-revolutionary themes written each week in the press of that time, the use of the religious practices with regard to the Blessed Virgin and in particular the pilgrimages to Notre-Dame of La Vang for unconcealed political ends. However, the main target of criticism in this official history of the Church are the many clergymen and Christian militants who played a part in the formation of a "personalist" movement, which was very remotely inspired by the thinking of the French philosopher, Mounier. According to President Diem, the movement was formed in order to counter the Marxist-Leninist ideology of North Vietnam.

Pham Van Dong believes that the teachings of Jesus Christ conform to socialism

The revised history gives very little information on the real life of catholics during that painful period of struggle. Nevertheless, it is instructive for anyone who wishes to know the attitude of the state towards the Church. It does not speak of the faith and the religious experience of the Christian community at all. Its concept of the Church is essentially political, that is, it perceives the Church only in terms of its attitude towards the revolution and the communist party. The first letter of the bishops of Vietnam in 1980 asked Christians not to feel inferior when they thought of their Church's past. The past, said the letter, was made up of shadows and light like all human reality. But the "*new history of Vietnam*" portrayed the four centuries of Christianity only as an immense shadow overhanging the revolutionary tradition of the Vietnamese people.

(D) The Triple Talk Language of the Authorities since 1975

As we have seen in the foregoing, the concept of religion for the Vietnamese communist leaders does have a certain coherence, even if it is difficult to deduce exactly the practical consequences. Even the discourses, which since 1975, the authorities have kept only for use within Catholic communities, are not clear. In reality there are several types of religious languages. The language adopted varies considerably according to the circumstances and the audience. One can classify official declarations on this question under three categories according to three types of language: the language of tolerance, legislative language, and pragmatic language.

(i) Language of Tolerance

It has been called, elsewhere and at other times, the attitude of the "*open arm*". It speaks about the ideas of liberty, faith, and the possible co-existence of two ideologies, Marxist-Leninist and Theist. It does not deny the fundamental conflict between these two concepts, but it questions the utility of discussing the subject: "*The future will tell who was right*". For the moment, the urgency to solve problems demands the efforts of one and all. Both, Christians and communists agree on certain ideals, (for example, generosity, virtue, patriotism, and altruism, and on certain tasks, (for example, the reconstruction of the country.

This was evidently the language of the party when it was in opposition. But, contrary to what one would think, it was not abandoned after the party's takeover of power. It appeared again at some euphoric moments when addressing privileged groups, namely, the bishops, and priests. Former Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, when receiving Msgr. Nguyen Van Binh, on 22 September 1976 said to him: "*I read a lot of the Gospel. I find that the teachings of Jesus conform to socialism, for example, taking care of the poor so that everybody is happy ... On the philosophical level, there are differences, but it matters little whether one speaks or does not speak of philosophical problems*".

In 1978 and 1979, the then officer-in-charge of the Bureau of Religious Affairs of the Prime Minister Office, spoke to the priests and religious leaders of Ho Chi Minh City many times on the question of religion. "*Never, he declared would he ever force priests to become members of the party, just as the Church would never be able to force him to become a priest. He added that communism and religion were irreconcilable. But it was not the time to*

All affirmations of religious freedom are systematically destroyed by restrictions which reduce the capacity for freedom

discuss it. Later, when the reconstruction of the country had been completed, the two parties could sit down all night over tea to debate this question".

(ii) Legislative Language

What we have called the language of tolerance makes the difference between the two concepts appear confusing. The language of the legislative is articulated around a contradiction which illustrates well the co-existence of two articles in the Constitution of 1980 which only the skill of the dialectic can reconcile. In article 38, it is affirmed that "Marxism- Leninism governs the development of the Vietnamese society", and article 48 guarantees the freedom of belief. It is in some sense, the projection of an injunction and a possibility. But the power of the injunction (namely, you must obey the laws of socialism) ensures that the possibility (namely, it is permitted to believe) is reduced to the state of pure potentiality.

The decree 297/CP of 11 November 1977 on the religious question is a beautiful example of this juxtaposition of "it is possible..." and "but it is necessary...". All affirmations of religious freedom are systematically tied up to restrictions which reduces the capacity of freedom. The preamble states that the decree is published "to guarantee the freedom of faith and at the same time to prevent anti-revolutionary elements and doubtful elements from utilizing religion to obstruct the construction of our country", especially in the newly liberated region, that is, South Vietnam. The religious sentiment is in some way "kept in supervised residence" in the place of worship, the only place authorized for religious activities.

If one had doubts on the objective of this type of wording, it would suffice to just see the use they have been put to up to the present. It is not known whether they have ever served to sanction the violation of religious freedom. On the contrary, they have been used to a great extent to restrain public activities of the Catholic Church or to control its internal organization. It is in the name of this decree that seminaries have been closed, traditional pilgrimages (Notre Dame de La Vang) forbidden and catechesis restrained.

With this legislative language, differences between the two ideologies become obvious. Marxism-Leninism reveals itself not as a concept of the world which can be discussed, but as the unique way of governing men and spirits. Under such conditions, religious freedom is simply a potentiality empty of substance to which homage is paid before it is stifled.

(iii) Pragmatic Language

There is a third kind of language which is not meant for Catholic circles. It is for internal use and addressed only to officers with responsibility on the question of religion. These documents for study are very often photocopied. Paradoxically, therefore, these texts reach a wider public than the limited circle of political officers for whom they were primarily meant. This is the case, for example, of the document, entitled "Our task with regard to the Catholic Church", which was translated and published in the West.⁹

The essential task of this "pragmatic language" is to link in a new manner the two rudiments of Marxism-Leninism and religion. The idea of co-existence, which was the basis of the first discourse, and the concept of contradiction as structured in the legislative texts, now gives way to the open recognition of a fundamental opposition between the demands of the Revolution and the aim of religion. The discussion is very much inspired by the theoretical texts which were analysed above. The difference between this and the others however, is that it proposes a program of action and lays out a clear strategy. The document cited above elaborates and lays out the rudiments and

stages of this strategy of conquest the aim of which is to neutralize the Church and make her submit unconditionally to state power and ideology.

According to the document, the present position of the Church can be compromised only within the framework of her rapport with the Vietnamese Revolution. The Church's attempt to adapt to the new situation brought about by the change in regime in 1975 is described below:

"Today, because she is aware of her guilt with regard to the people and country, as a result of losing the support of American imperialism, wanting her former image to be forgotten, finding a place in the new society, and moreover, influenced by the new line of Vatican II, the Catholic Church in South Vietnam officially recommends the application of the ideas of the Council to the situation in Vietnam, adapting to the new regime in order to continue controlling the faithful and remaining alive. This explains why she is for dialogue, collaboration with the communists, reconstruction of the country, and the establishment of a new way of life where religion would continue to exist".

However, it remains explicit that the anti-communist nature of the Church has not changed and that this new orientation is first and foremost strategic. This is why all communist militants must aim for the reform of the Church:

"Transform the Church, which up to now has been an instrument of imperialism and anti-revolutionary forces, into a religion of service of the State, patriotic, close to the nation and socialism. Reform her doctrines, her organization, legislation and her ceremonies according to the path of progress".

Such a reform can be undertaken only after it is known how the Church functions. The text which we are referring to gives a meticulous description of the key sectors of the Catholic Church and lays out clearly the strategies to be launched.

The priests, according to this document, constitute the Church, and are classified thus: 1) the progressive priests, ambitious young intellectuals, 2) the craftsmen, adaptable to reality 3) the indecisive, who above all want to live in peace and, finally 4) the reactionaries, who are divided into inveterate reactionaries and camouflaged reactionaries who fear change. The document proposes refining the distinctions of the several categories: progressive category a, category b, ordinary reactionaries, dangerous, and the like. For each category an appropriate reward or punishment is planned. In this way, the progressives come under the special care of the authorities. The document even proposes to lure those wavering in the ranks of the progressives by *"means of material assistance so that they can follow us in peace"*. On the other hand, the reactionaries will be punished mercilessly. The attitude and behavior of officers with regard to the middle class are also given in detail.

The document referred to outlines the strategy to be launched in the key sectors of the Church. It discusses the bishop's residence and its prime location in the diocese, religious congregations, seminaries and parish councils. The document attaches great importance to this point and proposes reforms that includes the associations recommended for closure. Political officers are urged to infiltrate revolutionary militants into all these key sectors of the Church and to keep the authorities informed on their activities.

The constant objective of the VCP is to transform the Church into an instrument in the service of socialism

Part II: Thirteen Years of Control and Repression

When the observer reviews the actions of the authorities he is inclined to describe their actions in terms of "control" and "repression" without, however, being able to distinguish clearly between these two attitudes - "Church under control?" and "Church repressed?" One hesitates between these two terms. In fact, sometimes, by a curious tight rope gesture, a period of liberal control is followed by a period of repression. Thus, in 1980, after allowing the founding of the Episcopal Conference in Vietnam, the publication of a joint letter and the trip to Rome by most of the bishops, there was the case of the Jesuits of the Alexandre de Rhodes Centre, which ended in a law suit in 1983. More of this episode will be discussed later.

In other cases, it is difficult to distinguish between control and repression; it is up to the priest to take necessary precautions in the exercise of his functions. In certain domains, however, the State's attitude is clearer. When the authorities invite Catholics to become involved in patriotic movements, there is little doubt that they see this as a means of very effective control. It is not difficult to think that the arrests of priests and the law suits by the State are motivated by the desire to spread a "salutary fear" among Catholics. This is the primary reason why it was necessary to distinguish between control and repression. It enables us to classify a certain number of facts.

(A) Control of the Priesthood

As stated in the internal document of the VCP, in the eyes of the State, the Church is essentially made up of priests.¹⁰ The Church is, therefore, controlled by priests. During the past ten years, the ruling kept a strict vigilance in that domain. There has never been in Vietnam any decree prohibiting the training of priests or the exercise of priestly ministry. On the contrary, following other legislative texts, the decree 297/CP cited above, expressly provides for the education and existence of what they call in their jargon "specialists in religious activities". However, in providing this right, the decree determines very carefully the limits within which this right can be exercised.

Training of Priests

All stages of this training, beginning with the selection of candidates up to their ordination and parish posting, are controlled and subjected to ideological criteria. What is being controlled is not so much the freedom to become priests but the kind of priests that the regime would like to have. As Vietnamese Christians ironically put it, what the regime wants is a kind of "nationalized" priest (*quoc doanh*). The priest should be a fervent socialist as he will owe allegiance since early childhood only to the state authority. Only this allegiance, which is renewed throughout his life, will give him the right to continue to exercise his ministry. The text of the decree concerning the training of priests is partly reproduced below:

a. All religions may set up schools for the training of specialists in religious activities. The persons selected for training must enjoy civil rights, prove their patriotism and love for socialism. To set up these schools, the religion must seek the permission of the popular Committee of the province or of the corresponding authorities and abide by the following regulations:

- The pupils selected for training must obtain, from the popular Committee or from the place where they live, a testimonial to the effect that they are good citizens and that they had not broken the law.

- The teachers of religious schools must be approved by the popular Committee of the province of the corresponding authorities.
- The content of the religious teaching must not be in contradiction to the law, options and the political line of the Party. If the schools intend, in addition to conduct some secular teaching, this teaching must conform to the policies set by national departments which are in charge of supervising the program, the content of teaching, and the diffusion of news and political lines for the students.
- b. Ordination and nomination of religious specialists (even if they are elected by the faithful) must have the prior approval of the authorities. As they exercise their activities in the canton, district, province or town, they must obtain approval from the popular Committee of the canton, district, province or town accordingly. If the territory of their religious activities cover several provinces, this approval must be obtained from the Prime Minister.
- c. Any change in the posting of religious activity specialists must be approved by the popular Committee of the place of their postings.

According to needs, the clergy may be assisted by a number of the faithful in religious activities. These lay people must also obtain approval from the regional authorities.

Although this decree was published only in 1977, most of the clauses, however, had already been applied to the whole of Vietnam since late 1976. What appeared in the texts to be a simple control over the training of priests showed itself to be a very effective way of stifling, little by little, all institutions for the training of priests. It was soon realized that what was at stake was whether or not the training of the priesthood was going to remain a function of the Church.

(B) Disappearance of Seminaries

The story of the progressive disappearance of all premises for the training of priests in South Vietnam is a good illustration of the fallacious character of the freedom which the law has given to the Church. In 1975, the statistics on seminaries in Vietnam were impressive. For the 13 dioceses in a Catholic population of 1,806,416 faithful, the number of students training in the minor seminaries totalled 4,399 and those training in the major seminaries totalled 1,056. The training was conducted in 5 major seminaries, in addition to the Pontifical Institute of Dalat which trains students up to university level. In April 1975, at the time of the change in regime, in anticipating obstacles to the movements of people, many dioceses including Kontum, Nhatrang, My Tho and a few others, started their own seminaries.

However, after some time, all seminaries opened in 1975 were closed down. Others which had existed for a much longer time such as the Pontifical Institute of Dalat and the Vinh Long Seminary, were seized by the authorities and their students dispersed. Since 1983, there have been no major seminaries in South Vietnam. The one in Saigon, which is not officially closed, has not reopened for 3 years because it has not fulfilled the conditions of the law.

Not all seminaries, however, were brutally shut down. There are a number of reasons why the seminaries train priests today. The most important reason is the demands made by the State and the absolute control it exercises on the selection of students as well as on the kind of teaching they are allowed to conduct. The Hue diocese, for instance, violently protested against this policy. The second reason for the abandonment of seminaries is the fact that in order to enter the seminary a student must get the permission of the authorities, which in most provinces is never given. With the exception of Long Xuyen, which for a period of time enjoyed special conditions, the only diocese in Vietnam which was able to obtain a few ordinations since 1976 is the diocese of Ho

Most seminaries progressively disappeared because of the stringent conditions of the law governing their existence

With the closing of seminaries in Vietnam, many former students swelled the flood of boat people in the hope of completing their training abroad

Chi Minh (3 in 1977, 1 in 1979, then 3 others during the years that followed). It was recently learnt that when the three Vietnamese bishops visited Rome, the authorities gave permission for 4 new candidates, all of whom had worked for many years in cooperatives or agricultural sites. On the other hand, in Dong Nai province, where there has been a big community of Catholic refugees since 1954, the authorities decided that the number of incumbent clergymen was enough and that there would be no need for new ordinations.

There are other causes for the gradual disappearance of the seminaries. Since 1977, all seminaries were required to produce the curriculum vitae of the candidate which would, among other things, show his family origin. Candidates from families not accepted by the regime, such as former military officials and civil servants and capitalists, were often declared unsuitable for religious studies and rejected. Besides, most of the students studying in institutions that were closed down by the authorities were not able to continue their studies elsewhere. In fact in the Vietnam of today, each individual must have a *ho khau* (an identification form which binds him to his place of residence). The seminaries were not able to obtain new *ho khau* which would have allowed their students to be accepted into other institutions. Paradoxically, others who had registered in seminaries without obtaining the prior approval of the government for their ordination, although they may have completed their studies a long time before, were obliged to remain on the spot as the authorities refused to grant them a new place of residence. Some of them, compelled to leave the institutions where they were training for the priesthood, roamed from village to village without any legal status and were turned away everywhere by the local authorities.

Thus, little by little, the seminaries in South Vietnam became empty. Many of their former students went back to civilian life. Others went to swell the flood of *boat people* in the hope of completing their training abroad, namely, in Europe or the United States. In concluding this point, another paradox must be noted. In the South, where seminaries were disappearing, in the North, however, the authorities allowed the bishops, who since 1954 did not have any more seminaries to train young people, to prepare them for ordination.

(C) Exercise of Priesthood

The decree 297/CP outlines quite carefully the model which the State promotes within the Church. It is not sufficient for the priest to show his total allegiance to the official ideology. The law allows him to preserve the right to exercise his functions as a priest only if he shows his total obedience and submissiveness. The slightest deviation from the official teachings can result in his losing his right as a priest "according to the heart of the regime". The decree provides:

- *The priest must seek permission to conduct extraordinary celebration (but this "extra ordinary celebration" is not defined);*
- *He must seek permission to conduct all religious instruction;*
- *In his sermons, he must not spread superstitions; he must not speak against the socialist regime; he must move the faithful to the service of the political line of the day.*
- *All religious documents will be submitted to ordinary censorship.*

If one is cynical, one could say that the State arrogates to itself the right to recognize the validity of the Catholic priesthood. Increasingly in these last years, priests have lost their right to exercise their ministry. This is a normal practice that is applied to those who went through re-education camps or prisons, whatever the length of their detention may be. A decree issued in Dong Nai province states specifically that even

if the priests who were set free have shown sincere repentance during their stay in camp, they will not automatically enjoy the right of exercising their function as priests (*chuc linh muc*). At the end of 1984, it was learnt that young priests ordained in May 1975 and October 1976, came under the scrutiny of the security authorities and were told that their priesthood would be officially recognized only under certain conditions.

State control of the church takes the form of police surveillance over the daily functions of the priests

In reality, however, State control takes the form of police surveillance over the daily functions of the priests. Their movements are highly restricted. Since 1975 no priest is allowed to go abroad. This permission to travel was given only to bishops on rare occasions for participating in certain gatherings in Rome or for their "*ad limina*" visits. In 1980, almost all the bishops were able to make that trip. In 1985, only three were permitted to do so. The Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, which has been meeting each year in Hanoi since 1979, is always an event because the participants of the dioceses of Vietnam do not know until the last moment whether permission would be given to them. Moreover, there are always some bishops whose conduct or pronouncements do not satisfy the government. In 1985, this was the case for the Archbishop of Hue and the bishops of Kontum and Danang.

In Vietnam itself, restrictions on the movements of clergymen are even worse. Since 1975, official authorization is required for anyone moving from one province to another. Ordinary citizens can obtain their permits by applying to the district authorities. For priests, most of the time, the procedures are more complicated. The application to the district office is sent to the provincial or town authorities for examination. It often takes between two weeks to a month before the Security authorities reply, which may be positive or negative. The Archbishop of Hue, for instance, can no longer leave the city or visit the parishes in his own diocese, because he had opposed a public denial of the new association of patriotic Catholics. In the last few years, many restrictive measures were added to the decree 297/CP. In most provinces, priests are not allowed to celebrate the Eucharist except in the parishes in which they are assigned. For any other place of worship, they must obtain the permission of the local authorities, who are particularly strict on this matter. In certain provinces, Phan Rang for example, it has been impossible to organize the annual retreat for priests in the last 5 or 6 years.

In the big cities like Ho Chi Minh City, the freedom of worship (for example, the celebration of the Eucharist each day of the week and Sunday) takes place without too many difficulties. But this is not the same everywhere. In many regions, daily masses are prohibited on the pretext that these hinder the "productivity" of the faithful. Besides, and it is a practice which is spreading, the Church is open only for an hour a day, when the priest celebrates mass and gives oral catechism. Since 1975, however, in certain parishes in the province, it is not rare that when there is a big religious festival the Catholics find themselves unable to attend because on precisely that day the popular committee organizes big public meetings which everyone is obliged to attend.

(D) The Priest as Transmitter of the Ideology

To assess the position of the priest in Vietnamese socialist society, one should not confine the analysis to the limitations which seem to marginalise him among his compatriots. From this point of view, he may in fact, appear to be a second class citizen. But, if one considers the fact of how the priest is perceived in the domain of ideology and the attention paid by the officers of the "*Fatherland Front*" to his political training, one may realise that the designs of the VCP, with regard to the priesthood, are not so much to stifle it as to use it, for as long as it exists, for propaganda purposes.

The Catholic media is proscribed except for two weeklies which serve more as the propaganda organs of the VCP

The decree 297/CP has proclaimed that the "specialists in religious activities" were duty-bound in their sermons to move the faithful in such a way that they may correctly fulfil their civic duties. The political officers in charge of religious affairs ensure that the parish priests are aware of the political themes which they discuss in the Sunday homilies which should include the political lines of the day, calling for financial contributions from the faithful for the development of the country, and inciting them to military mobilization. Some recalcitrant priests paid for their unwillingness to cooperate with long detentions in prison and prolonged interrogations. Many parish priests have, moreover, identified those among their congregations who inform "whom it may concern" of the content of the sermons.

Since 1975, clergymen and all religious leaders have always been invited to national festivals and anniversaries marked on the socialist calendar such as the Revolution of October, proclamation of the independence of Vietnam, birthday and death anniversaries of Ho Chi Minh, founding of the VCP and the like. These meetings and study sessions take a great deal of the time of the clergy. These meetings and study sessions are organized by the Fatherland Front which is directly responsible for the political training of the religious staff. The purpose of these studies was to explain socialism and its compatibility with religion. At present, each new political line and each decision taken by the Central Committee is cause for a new session to be held.

For example, in October 1985, in Ho Chi Minh City, the clergy of the city assembled in the major seminary to listen to a talk on the eighth resolution of the Plenum of the Central Committee which encouraged the struggle against bureaucracy and introduced a new kind of remuneration for work. Generally, such talks are followed by a symposium where the topic of the talk is discussed. The assembly then votes a resolution approving unanimously the line of the day and calls for a mobilization for all the faithful. Very rarely, and only for good reason, are criticisms heard. The principal declarations of Monseigneur Nguyen Kim Dien, archbishop of Hue on the absence of religious freedom in Vietnam were heard on such occasions and then secretly diffused. Other bishops or priests took advantage of meetings where the new Constitution of 1980 was presented to propose amendments so as to make the distinction between the "love of socialism" and the "love of the country".

The Catholic Church, no longer has any place in the official media, which is totally in the hands of the government. Indeed, there are two Catholic weekly newspapers: in the North, *Nguoi Cong Giao Vietnam* (*The Vietnamese Catholic*), in the South, *Cong Giao va Dan Toc* (*Catholicism and the Nation*). But they subscribe fully to the political line which considers the Church as an organ for the propaganda of the government. There is no question here of judging the little group of priests who run them. These newspapers announce each week the big events of the universal Church. This, to a certain extent, is beneficial to cautious Christians (and indeed many are cautious). However, it is obvious that all they are doing is to echo and to propagate in Catholic circles the directives of the Fatherland Front. As for the declarations of the Vietnamese Catholic hierarchy, the papers publish only items that is in line with official policy. They worked together unconditionally with the VCP hierarchy to establish a patriotic Catholic movement, the Committee of Union of Catholic Patriots of Vietnam.

(E) Committee of Union of Catholic Patriots of Vietnam

This movement founded in Hanoi on 10 November 1984 had repercussions on the Church. It illustrates more than any other event the State's intention towards the Church in Vietnam. It cannot be denied even by those in charge of the movement, that its formation was entirely inspired by government agents. Indeed, it was neither the State nor the Party which directly took the initiative, but the "Fatherland Front of Viet-

nam". Since the founding of the Vietnam Workers' Party, this organization has always been its faithful and effective instrument. It served as its instrument to propagate the party's message in various sectors of the society. No cultural, professional or artistic association, newspaper or any movement, may be set up without being attached to the "Front". It is always through the Front that the State and the party relates to the Catholic communities.

The Fatherland Front not only took the initiative to set up the "Union Committee" but it also chose the delegates (142 priests, 11 religious brothers and sisters, 146 lay people) who assembled in Hanoi in November 1984 to launch the movement. Besides, the articles of association of the new Committee clearly refer to its dependence on the Front. Article 2 states that "... the Committee of Union of Catholic patriots of Vietnam is a member of the Fatherland Front; it acts in conformity ... with the program of action of the Vietnamese Patriotic Front".

The leaders of the Front who were represented at the founding meeting spoke clearly on the role and function of this new organization. The president of the Front, Mr Huynh Tan Phat, said, that in Vietnam only the Communist Party has achieved the various tasks which any Vietnamese filled with sincere love for the country, has to undertake. It is the party which led the struggle against colonialism and imperialism and, therefore, won independence for Vietnam. It brought about unity of the country, and it will consolidate the construction of a new society:

"That is why, to speak today of patriotism, is to speak of love of the Socialist Fatherland not to understand socialism is not to understand patriotism in all its significance and content. The Committee of Union of Catholic Patriots has the function of uniting all Catholics filled with this patriotism which has just been correctly defined above, with a view to mobilizing the ardor of our Catholic compatriots in favor of the edification of socialism".

The officer in charge of the Bureau of Religious Affairs, Dang Thanh Chon, assigned the same objective for action by militants assembled in Hanoi. He even added that the new Committee was a State organism so that whoever opposes it "evidently violates the law in Vietnam". Finally, Pham Van Dong, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, before a delegation of the new association, left no doubt about the kind of patriotism he demanded henceforth from Catholics. He said: *"Actually, to love the fatherland is to love socialism Not to understand this truth, not to put it into practice, is to prove that you are neither a good Vietnamese nor a good Catholic"*.

One may believe that both the Vietnamese leaders and those presently in charge of the movement are willing to establish an autonomous Church like the one in China. But, on the other hand, it is certain that through this new association, the State wishes to put all its weight on the internal life of the Church in order to transform it according to its design. It is also feared that the Committee of Union will not resist the temptation to replace the hierarchical Church in a number of fields. As the only Catholic organ with official status which controls the Catholic media and links to the government, it is most likely that when its structures have been extended all over Vietnam, it will act as the official Church. Such a development will throw the authentic Church into the shadows and stifle its voice.

(F) Repression

These facts oblige us to define the Church in Vietnam as "*a Church under control*", even if in certain sectors at certain times, this control takes the form of an unbearable pressure. However, it would be a grave injustice against the victims not to talk of repres-

"To love the fatherland is to love socialism. Not to understand this truth is to prove that you are neither a good Vietnamese nor a good Catholic"

At regular intervals the regime orchestrates big prosecutions of the clergy and the faithful in order to terrorise the church

sion. Repression, that is sporadic, sometimes brutal and often highly unjust in the choice of its victims, has always existed in South Vietnam since 1975. Each year has had its share of priests, religious and lay people prosecuted and imprisoned, religious houses confiscated, and communities dispersed.

As far as the priests who are in prison or re-education camps are concerned, it has never been possible to give precise statistics. It is, however, reasonable to believe that in the years 1976-1979 between 250 and 300 priests and religious people were imprisoned in detention houses or reeducation camps. This figure has probably decreased today. Some died in prison while others have been released (although most of them are still not allowed to minister). The current figure must be between 150 and 200 (excluding numerous priests under house arrest and those unable to exercise their priestly duties). None of them was ever arrested for religious reasons. Military chaplains were sent to re-education camps because of their collaboration with the army of the South in the "*psychological warfare*". Others were reproached for their political past. It is primarily their insubordination to the ideological directives of the regime which had led many priests into solitary confinement or labor camps. More recently ecclesiastics have been accused of conspiracy against the security of the State

Generally, these arrests and internments are done very discreetly. Close relatives of the detainee have very often to wait many months before finding out the place of detention. It is very seldom that they are told the reasons for imprisonment. But there are times where repression is carried out in the open or when the authorities delight in taking "*public action*". This is echoed by official media and accompanied by opinion campaign and "*popular*" denunciation. This was so in three big cases which the authorities exploited to generate publicity.

(G) Three Big Prosecutions in Ho Chi Minh City

1. On 13 February 1976, government forces besieged Vinh Son (St Vincent) Church in Saigon, arrested the parish priest, Father Nguyen Quang Minh as well as some officers who, according to the official communiqué, were hiding in his church. According to the same source, they found a radio in his apartment, as well tracts and material for printing false money. The priests who were invited to witness and authenticate the evidence, noticed that it was nothing more than just an old game. Big publicity is immediately given to the case. The various religious leaders of the whole of Vietnam are encouraged to issue statements in which they condemn the conduct of the priest. In the parishes and religious communities, meetings are organized to comment, criticize and blame the attitude of the parish of St Vincent. The prosecution of the victims took place in September of that same year. Two other priests were also accused: one was condemned to 20 years imprisonment and the other to life imprisonment. As for the rest of the accused including the former officers, two were condemned to death, another two to life imprisonment and five to 20 years imprisonment.

This first prosecution served as a model for other cases. Clergymen are never accused alone. They are always accused together with former officers of the Saigon regime called reactionaries who are supposed to have mounted a conspiracy against the State. The prosecution seeks to prove the liaison between clerics and that group. On the basis that there were contacts between the two groups, they were judged as guilty.

2. In the second prosecution in Ho Chi Minh City in November 1980 several cases, although unconnected, were tried together. They found the same complicity between the clerics and rebel officers accused of being part of a clandestine movement aimed at instigating popular revolt. A Redemptorist priest, Nguyen Van Vang, was con-

The life of Christians underwent a profound change after the socialist takeover of South Vietnam in 1975

demned to life imprisonment and three secular priests, Fathers Bui Thanh Long, Nguyen Viet Linh and Le Van Hao were respectively given 17, 5 and 4 years of imprisonment. The court also sentenced two brothers of christian schools, Pham Quang Hong and Le Van Dao, to 14 and 12 years of imprisonment respectively.

3. The best known case tried by the Ho Chi Minh City authorities was uncontestedly the prosecution of the Jesuit fathers of the Alexander de Rhodes Centre. This center, which was founded well before 1975, was a seat of extremely varied activities in relation to the student world of Saigon. After the change of regime, and although it was obliged to stop a certain number of secular activities, the center continued to be the meeting point for many young people who went there to attend very lively masses and catechetical and bible sessions. The leaders were arrested in 1983. Representatives of major religious communities of Ho Chi Minh City were invited by the court to attend the trial. All the accused faced one general charge: attempt to topple the government and spreading anti-revolutionary propaganda. As in the other cases, the accused included a mysterious person who was a former officer of the Saigon regime who happened to be in charge of an organization plotting against the security of the State. Only one of the seven Jesuits and the 4 lay people belonging to the Alexander de Rhodes Centre had, according to the charge, met this mysterious officer twice and that only for a few minutes. But that was enough for everyone to be convinced that the accused were plotting a coup d'Etat. The Jesuit priests who were condemned to 12, 5, 4 and 3 years of prison each, were far from being reactionaries. In particular, Father Nguyen Cong Doan, the provincial superior, was in Saigon and was one of the pioneers who wanted to ensure the presence of the Church in the new society of Vietnam. In the testimony given by the archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City before the authorities, Father Doan was the one responsible for the text, which after discussion with the bishops, was to become the first joint letter of the episcopal conference. (More of this will be discussed below). Those present at that trial were very shocked by the incredible charges made against these religious people whose only wrong was, without doubt, to have exercised too strong an influence on the youth of the former capital of South Vietnam.

Part III: Life and Reactions of Vietnamese Christians

The major part of this report has been to describe the brutal shock faced by the Church of South Vietnam, its encounter with a new State and an ideology with precise designs concerning the Church. It is hardly possible to examine any sector of Vietnamese society without being aware of its connection with the State. However, one must be careful not to oversimplify the situation. The Church in Vietnam is defined only in relation to the State's attitude to it. Since 1975, (with the exception of a few prophetic pronouncements of the Archbishop of Hue) the Church has hardly engaged in polemics. The Church has always tried, even when it spoke of adapting to the new society, to define its position in relation to the Gospel. It is this position which will be discussed below.

The creation of socialist institutions in South Vietnam after 1975 was to deeply change the society. On its part, the Church was also to be turned upside down. As it is part of the civilian society, it is in that capacity that the various measures taken were to affect the Church.

After 1975, the Church was forced to hand over all its educational institutions to the government. This amputation was the first trauma for the Church

(A) Socialization and Nationalization

With the socialization and nationalization of companies and private institutions, the activities which had contributed most to the establishment of the Church in South Vietnamese society — education and charitable work — disappeared. The Church, prior to 1975, operated two universities, thousands of primary and secondary schools, hospitals, dispensaries and many orphanages. In 1975 and 1976, all schools were either closed or taken over by the state, while secondary and primary school teachers, after an obligatory training program, continued to teach provided they accepted the new regulations. But political instruction was given only to officers specially trained for this. All charitable activities of the Church, which up to now was carried out through a tight network of institutions, were henceforth run by the State. Other institutions like orphanages and leper camps, were not taken over by the state at the same time. Many experienced nurses, particularly from the religious orders continue their work up to today. They were absorbed as employees of the government, and they were often cited in the press or in official statements as role models. For the Christians, this amputation was the first trauma and endured by some as a necessary purification. An observation by the Archbishop of Hue summarizes the Church's attitude on this subject during the years 1976-77:

Where educational and social work is concerned our concept is as follows: If the government cannot undertake this work, we cooperate with it in the same way as in a home, where children help their parents. The day when the government can take care of this work, it is with joy that we will hand over the responsibility. Therefore, after the liberation, we handed over 60 educational institutions to the government.

The Archbishop added that this new found poverty of the Church was in fact a strength.

(B) Ideological Control

It would take much space to explain how control over the Church is exercised by the state. But suffice it to say that all public policy is made by the Communist Party and its direct agent, the Fatherland Front. This control resulted in the rapid reduction in the number of newspapers which were numerous in the old South Vietnam. After 1975, with the exception *Nhan Dan*, the official daily newspaper printed in Hanoi, there were only two newspapers in Saigon, the *Tin Sang* (*Morning News*) and the *Saigon Giai Phong* (*Liberated Saigon*). The first of these two dailies, which was very slightly liberal in tone, disappeared in 1983. Only two weekly newspapers run by members of the Committee of the Union of Catholic Patriots, were allowed for the Catholic community. Of the old Christian publications, only the *Dung Day* review was allowed to continue for some time. It had, in its time, fought the presence of the Americans in Vietnam and struggled for the liberation of the "old political prisoners". After 1975, only a few issues were allowed to be published.

The control of ideology is evident, first of all, in the printing and publication of books. As Father Chan Tin, a member of the Fatherland Front, said in an open letter to the Central Committee of that body, that apart from the translation of the Bible and a missal, no other religious book has been published in South Vietnam since the change of regime. This situation is in fact much worse as it is practically impossible for Christians to obtain books from abroad.

(C) Control of Associations

While no groups or associations in present day Vietnam can exist without being under the direct control of the Fatherland Front, it is interesting to note that all Catholic action groups have disappeared from the public scene. There were so many of them in the past. Even the J.O.C. whose support of the National Liberation Front was well known, was obliged to disband. From 1975 on, the only movements recognized in Vietnam are the "Good Children of Uncle Ho" (which was for primary school children) "The Pioneers", and the "Communist Youth". To these groups one must add the associations whose objective is to mobilize some social sectors which the communists call "circles", for example, "the Association of Intellectual Patriots" for the intellectual circles, or the "Committee of Union of Catholic Patriots" for the Catholics.

All these measures have affected the Church indirectly but they have not been without serious consequences. Indeed, the Church has freed herself from a triumphalism and a social facade which was sometimes too conspicuous in the past. But, at the same time, the Church has lost her principal points of establishment in the society. Without the freedom of press, and the support organizations with links to the people, the Church is becoming increasingly as only "places of worship" whose voice is no longer heard outside the confines of the Church. This is already happening in some dioceses such as Hue where the statements and pronouncements of the Archbishop are heard by the faithful only through the reports of Vatican Radio!

(D) The Church and the Vietnamese People

It was with much apprehension that the Christians of Vietnam welcomed the change of regime in April 1975. For the majority of them, their attitude was more confident and serene than one would have thought a few months before. This was the case, in particular, of the episcopal hierarchy whose initial reactions surprised even the communist officers who, at other times in North Vietnam, had faced more hostility and defiance. Right from the start, the two archbishops of South Vietnam, Nguyen Van Binh and Nguyen Kim Dien, signed a joint letter in which they rejoiced over the peace that had come once again to Vietnam. They called on Christians to march without fear with the new society and participate with all their compatriots in the reconstruction of the country ravaged by so many years of war. Everywhere in the dioceses, with more or less enthusiasm, the authorities took note of the "freedom to believe and not to believe" proclaimed by the new regime which asked priests and the faithful to accomplish reconversion for life in the new socialist order. They urged participation especially of everyone in public life, and big socialist projects. They encouraged them, as part of their faith, to strip themselves of their possessions that were asked of them. In the big developments which have taken place in Vietnam in the last few years such as the Sino-Vietnamese war, tragedies, the droughts and floods, or even the unification of the country in 1976, the national elections, Catholic leaders had always supported the efforts of the government.

This attitude was confirmed with much gusto in the first joint letter of the Episcopal Conference in 1980. The first call to participate was renewed. The theme of the letter was "Live the Gospel in the bosom of the Vietnamese people":

Being the Church in the bosom of the Vietnamese people, we resolve to remain jointly responsible for the destiny of our fatherland, to pursue the traditions of our people, to associate ourselves with the present life of our country. The Council taught us that "the Church travels along with all of humanity and shares in the earthly destiny of the world" (Gradium et spes.20.21). Therefore, we must travel along with

Without freedom of the press, the Church is becoming increasingly as only "places of worship" whose voice is no longer heard outside the confines of the church

our people, share with them the same community of life, as this fatherland is the place where God has called us to live as his children and this country is the maternal bosom which bears us as we fulfil our vocation as sons of God because this people is the community which God has given us to serve as citizens and as members of the People of God.

This bond and this solidarity leads us to real duties which we can summarize in the two points below:

- 1. To contribute positively with our compatriots in the entire country to the defense and construction of the fatherland.*
- 2. Build in the Church a way of life and a manner of expressing the faith which conforms with the traditions of our people.*

The Vietnamese bishops then expressed the work that Christian people had to do from then on:

Our love for our people must be real, that is to say, that we should be aware of the current problems of our fatherland. We must know the political line and the law of the State, and together with our compatriots throughout the country, contribute to the defense and construction of a rich Vietnam which will be free and happy.

For this service to the fatherland, the Gospel brings us light and strength to overcome difficulties, individual and selfish tendencies which in turn, upholds the spirit of service and universal charity and to look towards "*the new heaven and the new earth*" where everything will come into place in happiness. As we struggle to cleanse ourselves of negative traits, we rejoice by the grace of the resurrected Christ to clothe the new man just and holy.

This commitment of the Vietnamese episcopate was certainly not shared by all Christians. Many were reticent. It is, moreover, difficult to characterize on the whole the attitude of Christians of Vietnam towards the new instructions. The attitude of each one was, in fact, determined by many factors: his political commitment before the change of regime, family tradition, his social status in the old society, and the close links he had with the former regime. One can, however, say that on the whole, the reaction of Christians was the same as that of the South Vietnamese population where in the beginning there was a wait and see policy, and then when the mechanism of the system became better known, there was passive resistance. Up to today, after 13 years, South Vietnam has not yet been molded into the new socialist institutions.

One must therefore not hide the fact that it was a question of resignation because it was hardly possible to do otherwise. Hence, many followed the guiding policy of the joint letter. However, some communities, including groups of lay people and priests went in the way of the flesh. A few religious communities were reorganized, stripped of all their resources except their work. Nuns, employed in hospitals, dispensaries, leper camps or elsewhere, discovered a kind of solidarity which up to now was unknown to them.

A small group, made up mostly of priests, had since the beginning been more involved than others in this new solidarity. This was the guiding spirit in the *Cong Giao va Dan Toc* newspaper. Some of them even took on political and social responsibilities. Father Chan Tin became a member of the Central Committee of the Fatherland Front. Father Huynh Cong Minh was elected a member of the National Assembly. Others became members of the popular committees of their districts.

It cannot be denied that the majority in this group was motivated by earthly considerations "*within the bosom of their people*" as their bishops had asked of them. But it was not long before the Christian community who had witnessed the activities of this group began to question them. (Today, many of them have withdrawn). Does the VCP need collaborators or only instruments in its service? Is it possible to work under the

rigid framework of the socialist society without questioning it and be considered a rebel and chastised as such? These questions became crucial in November 1983, at the time of the founding in Hanoi of the "Committee of Union of Patriotic Catholics of Vietnam".

The VCP was very precise about the committee: to rally the support of Vietnamese Catholics for the policies of the party

Part IV: The Church and Socialism

We have already mentioned about the State's role in the founding of the Committee of the Union of Patriotic Catholics in October 1983, the leading role it played in the nomination of delegates, as well as in the running of this association and the moral and material support it gives to it.¹¹ This kind of movement is, moreover, not new in Vietnam. In March 1955, a small group of priests among the Catholic elements of the Viet Minh resistance movement founded the "*Liaison Committee For Catholics Loving The Fatherland and Peace*" in Hanoi. Disapproved by the hierarchy and enjoying little support from the faithful in North Vietnam, this group was, however, the only spokesman for the authorities. It managed the only Catholic weekly at that time, the *Chinh Nghia (The Just Cause)* which was replaced in September 1984 by "*Nguoi Cong Giao Vietnam (The Vietnamese Catholic)*". This association finally played a secondary role in the rapport between the Church and the State in the North.

(A) The Committee of Union of Catholic Patriots of Vietnam

After the change of regime, for almost 5 years, no organization comparable to the Liaison Committee existed in the South. It was not until 1980 that the first movement, "*the Committee for Catholic Action in Ho Chi Minh City For The Building And Defense Of The Fatherland*", was formed. Its declared aims were: spread the political lines of the State among Catholics, and to make representations of the legitimate wishes of the Catholics to the government. Archbishop Nguyen van Binh who gave his approval to the movement, emphasized its representative function and made it clear that it was not in any way a Church movement.

It was only in 1983 that the decision to expand the old "*Liaison Committee*" and to reorganize in the same movement all Catholic patriots in Vietnam, was taken. In Ho Chi Minh City reservation was expressed in preliminary meetings by the Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City whose statement was censored by the weekly *Cong Giao va Dan Toc*. The statement explained the reasons why the bishops of Vietnam were concerned about the new organization. They feared that it would create a division within the Church in Vietnam and move towards establishing an autonomous church separated from Rome. The 299 delegates who went to Hanoi for the founding of the Committee did not receive any mandate from the bishops of their diocese. They were simply selected by the Fatherland Front. The debates at the meeting, and the statements and regulations voted there did not dispel the suspicion that many had of the movement.

It was mentioned earlier that the Vietnamese leaders were very precise about the objectives of the Committee: to rally the support of Vietnamese catholics for the policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam which is the only authentic representative of national patriotism. Minutes of the meeting show that the "*patriotic Catholics*" were hardly trying to keep their distance from the announced aims. The resolution voted at the end of the meeting states, for example, that "*at the present time, our love for the fatherland must be linked to socialism*". It "*manifests its confidence and gratitude to the Communist Party of Vietnam, the government and the Patriotic Front for having directed and guided the*

patriotic movement of the Catholics". It "approves totally the Soviet initiative in matters of peace and especially the statement of 28 September 1983 of Yuri Andropov". The status of the association published after the Congress recapitulates the themes mentioned above and provides for the future expansion of the movement in all provinces and towns of Vietnam.

Members of the Committee of the Union of Patriotic Catholics are probably sincere when they proclaim their fidelity and faith to their Church and to the universal Church. We can believe in the sincerity of their patriotism. But it is only superficial. The mechanism in which they are entrapped is beyond them.

We still know very little of the attitude of the Vietnamese christian community, especially the bishops, in the face of the new association (which shows the present isolation of the Church). However, the echos which reached the West shows that the reaction was much more negative than the official media wanted people to believe. At the founding of the Congress, only the assistant Archbishop of Hanoi (the cardinal did not attend) and another bishop, well known for his "conciliatory" positions were present. Since opposition to the new movement has been presented by the authorities as "*a violation of socialist law*", it was not easy for the bishops to raise their objections. Most of them instead preferred to work discreetly with their priests rather than to oppose the regime. It is believed that at the Episcopal Conference of May 1984, the participants reached an agreement on the attitude to be adopted, that is, not to openly oppose this organization set up by the government, but to take to task those Catholics who act against the interests of the Church. However, various reactions were noted. A bishop told his priests that whoever among them wished to be a member of the Committee must first of all give up being a parish priest. The archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City has on many occasions, in the course of preparing for the Congress and after the return of the delegates, expressed his anxiety. He openly published his reproach on what took place at the Congress, in particular at the closing mass where the celebrants omitted (doubtless involuntarily) the prayer for the intentions of the Pope. To a western press agency, he spoke of his preoccupation with what the movement may evolve into. Finally, the archbishop said to Vietnam News Agency after the Episcopal Conference of May 1984 that the association was an initiative of the State:

"Our Episcopal Conference considers the Committee of Union as an organization of the Fatherland Front recognized by the State. Therefore, to oppose it, is to oppose the State and the Fatherland Front".

(B) Long Interrogation of the Archbishop of Hue

It was without doubt in the confrontation of the Archbishop of Hue, Msgr Nguyen Kim Dien, that the matter of the Committee of Union was clarified, that it was not an internal matter of the Church but a matter concerning the State. The Archbishop, well known in his country for his many courageous pronouncements since 1975, had publicly expressed his rejection of the new association and had given this the desired publicity. The efforts of the government to induce him to change his mind revealed the extent of the rapport that existed between the Committee and the State.

As soon as preparation for the Congress in Hanoi was made known, the Archbishop sent to the President of the group who was in charge, Father Nguyen The Vinh, a letter which was meant for the authorities, as well as, for the Christian community in Vietnam. The letter noted that the initiative to hold the Congress had been taken and that the delegates had been nominated without the Vietnamese episcopate ever being consulted. The letter then expressed the fear that this new association would be transformed into a patriotic Church as that was the case in China. The Archbishop then

proposed to the group of priests involved to refer the issue to the Episcopal Conference which alone had the mission of "directing the activities of catholics in the country". The letter was clandestinely distributed widely in the country and abroad but did not provoke any immediate reaction from the patriotic Catholics. Their official reply did not reach the Archbishop until more than six months later.

"I cannot apply whatever law or political line of the State when it is in contradiction to the interest of the church"

The Archbishop then told the clergy of his diocese that any priest who went to Hanoi for this Congress would be immediately subject to ecclesiastic sanction. Only one among them defied this order, Father Louis Nguyen Van Binh. On his return, the Archbishop pronounced on him the "*suspensio a divinis*". As a result of this action what appeared to be an internal matter of the Church became instead a matter for the State. The security authorities of the province began to put pressure on the Archbishop to force him to change his attitude. They drew his attention to his isolation within the Church of Vietnam. To this the prelate of Hue retorted that (and this will always be his attitude on this matter) he was only carrying out the laws of the Church. Msgr Dien has, in fact, in conscience tried to defend the independence of the Church highly endangered by this movement. There were abundant rumors then in Hue that the archbishop was to be expelled from his diocese or be the victim of a motorcar accident.

On 5 April 1984, the authorities summoned him to their office for the first series of interrogations which was to last for 50 days and which were to leave him exhausted and suffering from heart trouble. They said that the Archbishop hardly replied to the questions and only told them that "*already in the time of Jesus, they accused him of rising against Ceasar and the State*".

After a short break during which the authorities tried in vain to rouse public opinion against Msgr Dien, the "*work sessions*" (as the interrogations in present day Vietnam are called) resumed. The interrogations did not end until 15 October 1984. Without losing much time, the Archbishop issued the following day a letter to all the Christian people of his diocese and gave a summary of the police action against him and of the report which he had signed:

As you know, since 5 April 1984 up to these last few days, for 120 days I had to go through two successive "work sessions" at the headquarters of the Security of Binh Tri Thien. The principal subject was the Committee of the Union of Catholic Patriots.

During the last interrogations on 15 October 1984 when concluding this long series of "work sessions", I was asked a number of general questions with regard to my attitude towards the Committee.

To reply to the question, "On what grounds do you oppose the Committee?", I said: "On the grounds of the declaration of the Congregation for the Clergy of 8 March 1982. I also hold on to the Canon Law, old and new promulgated by the Holy Siege. "... The officer who was interrogating me referred to the decree 297/CP, (which states that all documents coming from abroad must be submitted for censorship by the government).

In a nutshell he told me, "The declaration for the Congregation for the Clergy as well as the new Canon Law have not yet been submitted for censorship and moreover they are against the political line of the State. To apply them is, therefore, a violation of the law".

I replied simply, "I must obey the law of my Church; I can't do otherwise".

They asked me to explain what I meant.

"This means that I cannot apply the law of the socialist Republic of Vietnam as it has just been presented to me".

The officer continued to point out that the Committee has obtained permission and a legal guarantee. Hence, to oppose it was to oppose the law and the political line of the State. I replied (and this is kept in the report of the interrogations), "I affirm that when the laws of this world are in opposition to the law of God and the Church, I

The VCP leaders have admitted to many strong prejudices against religion

must, as did the apostles long ago and all martyrs of every generation, obey the Word of God rather than that of man (See Acts of the Apostles 5:29)".

The officer asked me to explain this answer, and I said, "This means that I cannot apply whatever law or political line of the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam when it is in contradiction to the interest of God or of the Church".

I signed the final statement on the morning of 15 October and from that day, I was freed from work sessions.

The archbishop of Hue has since that time been always under the surveillance of the security authorities and is not permitted to leave the city of Hue.

C. The Sixth Party Congress and the New "Old" Line

The Sixth Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party, which was held in December 1986 in Hanoi, was planned and presented as the congress of realism and self-criticism. One wonders whether the difficult rapport between the Church and the State, which we have just described, will benefit from the "liberal" outcome of this Congress.

It is true that during the 8 months before its opening, a campaign of criticism and vilification unparalleled in the past, was mounted to question the corruption and incompetence of the Party and bureaucracy. Thus some Catholic organizations were able to comment on the behavior of the authorities on the matter of religious policy. At the annual Congress of the Committee of the Union of Catholic Patriots in October 1986, delegates spoke of possible violations of religious freedom, and a report on this was sent to the organizing Committee of the 6th Congress. The Catholic Weekly of South Vietnam, *Cong Giao va Dan Toc*, opened its first page to readers who questioned the vagueness of certain rulings of the decree 297/CP on religion, and spoke against the difficulty of opening catechism classes classified under the decree as "extraordinary activities". Some nuns wrote to the paper to complain that some of them, although "employees of the State", could not get accommodation in their half empty convent. Besides, the secretary of the Communist Party for Ho Chi Minh City, Mai Chi Tho himself, in a public report, acknowledged that the Party had "a lot of strong prejudices against religion".

However, reading the documents of the Congress and, in particular, the political report, does not give any insights into the big changes in the future religious policy of the regime. Indeed, the report, as everyone has noted, paints a very gloomy picture of the state of the economy, administration and even of the Party, but these criticism do not affect, what one might call, the ideological basis of the Party or the government's attitude towards religions which, as we have seen, has very deep ideological roots. As is often the custom in such a long report, it carried a paragraph on freedom of religion. It is part of chapter IV on the "collective mastership of the working people." It is the same as those one finds in the reports of preceding congresses. It affirms that this freedom must be on guard against its possible exploitation by reactionary and imperialist forces:

The party and the State, today as always, implements a policy of freedom of faith. It directs our religious compatriots and helps them to build a new life and to participate with enthusiasm in the defence of the Fatherland. In the spirit of vigilance and resolution, it will always oppose the intrigues and undertakings of imperialism and reaction which divides believers and non-believers, and among the faithful of different religions. (Cong Giao va Dan Toc, 21/2/87)

Some modification to the line may be made by new comers to the Political Bureau.

It is probable that they will keep to the traditional concepts of the Party. Some press agencies and a few newspapers made much of the statement of the new Secretary General, Nguyen Van Linh, before the 6th Congress. We give below a translation of a few extracts according to the text published by the Ho Chi Minh City daily, *Saigon Giai Phong (Liberated Saigon)* on 24 October 1986.

The accession of Nguyen Van Linh to power has not changed the regime's attitudes toward the Church

Where Catholics are concerned, including the "refugees" (a term referring to the Catholics of the North who had taken refuge in the South after the Geneva agreements of 1954), the majority of them belong to the working people. It is necessary to implement a policy which helps them in their work, takes care of their material and spiritual life and raise their level of political conscience so that they associate themselves more and more each day with the common task and become payees of the national Community.

Where priests are concerned, they must get closer to those who follow correctly the political line, who will help them to accomplish their duties with regard to God and the Fatherland. At the same time, it is necessary to intensify our vigilance and to take measures to chastise severely reactionary elements whose aim is to draw the faithful into anti-revolutionary activities.

Some commentators believed that this was a liberal statement. They have no doubt forgotten to consider the context from which this passage was extracted. Catholics are mentioned in the discussion after intellectuals of the former regime, and before the Sino-Vietnamese, two categories of marginals who have problems with the regime. Besides, an interpretative error slipped into the text reported by the agencies. Priests who had to be helped were, in fact, qualified as "good priests". It is evidently a bad translation of the adjective "tot". In the traditional language, this adjective describes in fact a good heart but in political vocabulary, which is that of Nguyen Van Linh, it means a conduct in line with the imperatives of the regime.

The statement is nothing new. Encouraging the faithful and priests to follow the correct political line figure habitually in this kind of literature. On the other hand, the threats against those who should have the audacity to go out of the path laid out before them are very clear.

Conclusion

The story continues. No one can really predict what the future of the Catholic Church in Vietnam will be. This is why we will not speculate. We just want to conclude with a statement in the form of a wish.

The discussion of the Church's thirteen year relationship with the State of Vietnam has permitted us to observe, in the course of time, two ambitious, though sometimes contradictory desires. On one hand, there is the wish of the Communist Party of Vietnam to take complete charge of the destiny of the nation and to win the loyalty of this major sector of the society — the Christians. On the other hand, there is the desire of Christians who are sometimes roused to join their people and not to abandon them in the hard times that they are going through. For some, the big temptation is to accept the invitation of the Party and to believe that real patriotism is the love of socialism. The most far-sighted among the Christians think that there can never be any conclusion to the dialogue if the Church does not remain absolutely faithful to its gospel and if it does not retain its independence. At the present time, one can only note that there is not yet any real dialogue that is for the good of the Vietnamese people and the State itself. The Church has remained for a long time the place for freedom of speech in the country.

NOTES

1. See Constitution 1980, article 38.
2. On this point, the best studies are those of P Cadiere, in *Faith and Religious Practices of the Vietnamese*, Saigon: Society of Indochinese Studies, 1958. Read also Jean Mais', "To Be Vietnamese", *France-Asia Exchange* (Information Service MEP) No. 63, February 1981, Paris.
3. We will speak later of this type of document (see p. 9).
4. Published in Hanoi in the series of *Manuals of Marxism-Leninism*, 1980.
5. These two texts have been translated and published in the *France-Asia Exchange - Religion and Communism in Vietnam*, 3/86 March 1986, Paris.
6. p. 9.
7. Preface of *Tay Duong Gia To Bi Luc*, Hanoi: Editions de Science Sociales, 1981.
8. "Catholicism and the National Movement", *Vietnam Studies*, No. 53, (Hanoi, Foreign Language Edition). See also issue no. 42 of *Vietnam Studies* "U.S. Colonialism in South Vietnam, Vietnamisation". A few questions on the issue of Van Hoa Nghe Mien Nem Duoi Che Do My nguy (The art and culture of Vietnam under the American marionette regime" Hanoi, Culture edition 1980 pp 92-144).
9. Document published by *France-Asia Exchange*, No. 72, February 1982 "A document of the Vietnamese communist Party concerning the Catholic Church".
10. Op.cit. p. 9.
11. See J Mais, "Committee of Union of catholic patriots" *France-Asia Exchange*, No. 10, Dec. 1984-Jan. 1985.

* Jean Mais, from the *Missions Etrangères de Paris* is among the few specialists on Catholicism in Vietnam. From 1966-1975, Fr. Jean Mais taught French Literature at Dalat University. After the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, he was sent to a re-education camp for 9 months, before being repatriated to France in 1978. Currently, Fr. Mais is actively involved in assisting Indochinese refugees in Paris. He is a regular contributor to *Duong Moi*, "The New Road", a leading Vietnamese publication.

ANNEX I

AN OFFICIAL POINT OF VIEW ON THE PRESENT STATE OF RELIGIONS IN VIETNAM

This annex contains a translation of a report given by the officer in charge of the Bureau for Religious Affairs at the Congress of the Fatherland Front in Hanoi in May 1983. It illustrates very well the discussion in Part I of this essay. It is in fact, a typical point of view of the authorities when they discuss the religious problem in Socialist Vietnam.

It is necessary to point out that this type of discussion is carefully prepared for the target audience in mind. In the case we are referring to the officer in charge of the Bureau for Religious Affairs, which is an organ directly responsible to the Prime Minister and is therefore under the authority of the State and the Party, is addressing the leaders of the Fatherland Front. It should be noted that the latter has assumed different names since the founding of the Communist Party of Vietnam, and is the agent responsible for mobilizing (*dong vien*) intellectuals, women, religious congregations, professional groups, etc., into the service of the Party. Besides the small group of officers of the Fatherland Front the official of the Bureau is also addressing the public at large. Mr Dang Thanh Chon will, therefore, not use the language proper to socialist terminology. Nowhere in any part of this report, for instance, is the long term objective of the Socialist Revolution to "liberate the masses from religious influence", ever mentioned. One only notices the subtle and masked hints on scientific atheism which is indeed the official ideology of the regime. To this is added the fact that the work will take a long time. When the official refers to the religious analysis of Marxism-Leninism, he does highlight the positive aspects of the religious phenomenon, or its popular and traditional character. One does not find in this portrait of religions in Vietnam any harsh statements which embellishes what was earlier referred to as the pragmatic language which bluntly unveils the Party's wish to control the various religious institutions in Vietnam.

This apparent affability is even more striking since this report was made in May 1983, barely one month before the prosecution of the Jesuits of the Alexander de Rhodes Center. The general tone of the official of the Bureau of Religious Affairs does not exclude the unjust accusations and condemnations which, in a few weeks time, will be hurled at the eminent members of the Catholic community in the ancient capital of the South. All the same, this law-suit had already been carefully prepared in May 1983. In April, several articles on the essential points of the accusations were published in the *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*.

The fact that such a discussion coincides with such a contradictory action alerts our attention towards what a casual reader may consider as effects which are disquieting. The denunciation by lay people of "anti-revolutionary elements" is considered as a positive contribution of the faithful to the development of the Revolution. In the short description of the various religions in this report, one sees that the only spokesman for the State on the matter of religions is the Patriotic Movement itself. One can imagine that religious groups such as the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai Sects, which are not protected by it, must be having an even more difficult time with the authorities. One cannot help but be surprised to find such an optimistic picture of the situation of religions in Vietnam in statements like "*a certain number of religious organizations are run by reactionaries*". It is therefore difficult not to conclude that the certificate for patriotism awarded by Mr Chon are limited only to some religious minorities who accept unconditional collaboration.

In the mind of the official it is in fact the only alternative open to believers. To those who do not want to remain in the darkness of the Reaction, there is only one way:

...the one which consists in accepting the direction of the Communist Party of Vietnam, observing the Constitution and laws of the State, positively participating in the victorious building of Socialism and the defence of the Socialist Vietnamese Fatherland. It is only in this way that our religious compatriots will have an independent, free and happy life. It is only in this way that they will lead a moral life, and enjoy an authentic freedom of faith and proper conditions to achieve the spirit of their own doctrine.

Many of Mr Chon's compatriots will, no doubt, find it difficult to accept this proposition, not because they refuse to rebuild their country but that they believe "*naively*" that their faith and religious aspirations harken to other dictates instead of those of the Party.

Jean Mais

EXTRACTS FROM THE STATEMENT OF MR DANG THANH CHON ON THE PRESENT STATE OF RELIGIONS IN VIETNAM

Statement in May 1983 in Hanoi before the Congress of the Fatherland Front. Text published in *Cong Giao Dan Toc*, Special issue April 85; pp 65-69. (Translation by Jean Mais)

"When one reviews the state of religions as it has evolved since the liberation of South Vietnam up to this day, one cannot but rejoice in noting that throughout the country, it has made notable progress. One must dare to speak the truth: As a result of the use of religion by the reactionary American imperialists and the effect of psychological warfare launched by their reactionary valets, our religious compatriots of the South had mixed feelings immediately after the liberation. They were divided between the enthusiasm provoked by the triumph of the Revolution which brought them peace and independence and the fear that the government would seek vengeance and prohibit religion. This agony tormented many of them.

But today, following the progress made by religions in North Vietnam, those in the South are evolving more and more each day in the right path. Our religious compatriots of the North, inspired by the success of the Revolution, success to which they have themselves justly contributed, participate always with more enthusiasm in the edification of socialism, defence of the Fatherland, and in many places, the patriotic revolutionary movement follows the same rhythm as that of other citizens.

Our compatriots of all religions in the South, thanks to the reality of revolutionary development, are acquiring gradually a correct understanding and are associating with the national community. With enthusiasm, they implement the directives and the policy of the Party and the State and they create many transformations in numerous fields. Thanks to their positive efforts for the building of a new life and their contribution to the defence of the Fatherland, the believers of our country are linking themselves more and more to the new regime.

Many lay people, who gradually became aware of the imperialist strategy which consists of using religion to achieve its end, helped the local authorities to unmask anti-revolutionary elements, camouflaged valets of imperialism and actively participated in the struggle to quell their endeavors and activities. That is why reactionaries, although they still exist clandestinely here, are now weak and isolated. The option for observation of the policy and laws of the State and a common market with the entire people is gradually spreading in all the churches. Many genuine ecclesiastics are collaborating with the authorities and encourage the faithful to accomplish their civic duties.

Following their old tradition of patriotism, thanks to the positive contribution of progressive associations and monks, Buddhist organizations and sects are united into only one organization, the Buddhist Church of Vietnam, which submits to guidance for the harmonization of Buddhist activities in accordance with the national spirit and socialism.

The Liaison Committee of Patriotic and Peaceful Catholics, which represents the patriotic spirit of our compatriots of the Christian religion, are always assembling and mobilizing the lay people and the clergy so that they can participate in socialist patriotic activities. The Catholic Church founded the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam in mid-1980. This Conference published a joint letter affirming the attitude of the Church, that is to say: "Associate with the nation and unite with the entire people for the construction and defence of the fatherland".

The General Assembly of the Protestant Church is still developing its role as a patriotic religious association and supports the socialist regime. In the organization of Protestantism in South Vietnam, although there still remains many complex questions, the option for a change in orientation of activities and for a reorganization adapted to the new regime is gradually developing.

The patriotic Cao Dai sects continue to contribute positively to the common work. The Cao Dai sect of Tay Ninh has begun to implement certain changes and is restructuring its activities in order to observe the policy and the law of the State and the common market with the people. The Hao Hao religion has done away with their reactionary political organization instituted during the former regime and has gone back to ordinary religious activities as when it first began.

Such are the mammoth transformations which have been accomplished in the different religions during the past period. They are all the more significant because they took place in a short interval of time and because the revolutionary situation, although uncontestedly successful, still faces many difficulties. Besides, these changes make up living realities which show where the shadows and darkness are when the attitudes of both the old and new regime towards religion confront each other.

Our compatriots understand more and more each day that the noisy appearance and in many aspects its triumphalist religious activities, the former neo-colonialist regime of South Vietnam did not care much for the freedom of faith of our people but was instead using religion as a pernicious policy to turn the various religions into instruments for invasion and domination. With anti-communist slogans they betrayed the people and drew them into opposition against their own nation. Through the dollar, neo-colonialism corrupted individuals and religious organizations which, in fact, departed from their own beginnings and became a contradiction to the spirit and content of the moral they extol.

It is with the victory of the Revolution and, in living under the new regime that our religious compatriots rose from the position of slaves, betrayed instruments used by imperialism and its valets, to being masters of their own country. They have been associated with the national community to build a new life and to construct and defend the beloved Fatherland. The state of division and rivalry among the different religions, between believers and non-believers, have been replaced by a spirit of union and solidarity through a common march on the road of patriotism, and the building of a prosperous and happy life. From this reality, believers of this country can proclaim that: there is no other way than the one which consists in accepting the direction of the Communist Party of Vietnam, observing the Constitution and laws of the State, positively participating in the victorious building of Socialism and the defence of the Socialist Vietnamese Fatherland. It is only in this way that our religious compatriots will have an independent, free and happy life. It is only in this way that they will lead a moral life and enjoy an authentic freedom of faith and proper conditions to carry out the spirit of their own doctrine".

ANNEX II

The statement of complaint and petition of Reverend Tran Dinh Thu, General Director of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix, to Nguyen Van Linh, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

The reconsideration of the accusation of the "Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix of its possession of many anti-government documents, damaging the national security and operating in the black market". This accusation is untrue and legally unfounded.

The rescinding of the illegal order to blockade and occupy the monastery and respect the right of freedom of religion of the members of the Congregation as defined by law.

Releasing the members of the Congregation, parishioners, and their families who are being detained by the security officials in the blockade and occupation at the monastery.

References

1. Article 82 of the Criminal Laws:
The crime of propaganda against the Socialist government.
2. Article 83 of the Criminal laws:
The crime sabotaging national security.
3. Article 165 of the Criminal laws:
The crime of profiteering.
4. Inter-Communiqué No. 06/TTLN issued on December 20, 1982 and
the Executive Order issued on June 30, 1982 regarding the punishment of
this crime.
5. Article 166 of the Criminal laws:
The crime of concealing the forbidden goods.

6. Decree No. 162/QDQB dated October 13th, 1985 of UBND/TP-HCM which defines the procedures for criminal search and detention.
7. The Reports of Censure of the Evidence in accordance with the Order No. 490/KTHC dated May 16, 1987 of the UBND of the District of Thu Duc regarding the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix.
8. The Report of Sealing the Evidence in accordance with the Order of KTHC No. 490.

I, the undersigned, Reverend Tran Dinh Thu, born in 1906, of at 33 B/2, Phu Chau village, Tam Phu, Thu Duc District Ho Chi Minh City, enclose explanation in this petition dated May 21, 1987 sent to the central and local government authorities.

At approximately 12 noon on May 16th, 1987, two officials of the Internal Security Office (PA 16) of the City of Ho Chi Minh (Tran thanh Ta and Nguyen van Dang) inspected the properties of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix as defined in the Administrative Censure Order No. 490/KTHC dated May 16th, 1987. The two inspected properties of the Congregation are located 400 meters apart; one in the territory of the province of Song Be, and the other in the territory of the City of Ho Chi Minh:

Residence No. 112; the head of the residence in Nguyen Ngoc Ngoan of Binh Duong Village, Di An, Thuan An District, Song Be Province. This residence is located on an approximately 4-acre piece of land.

Resident No. 33 A/2, 33 B/2 and 34/2 located within the city limits of Tam Phu Village, Thu Duc District, Ho Chi Minh City.

We did obey and correctly comply with the Administrative Censure Order, and guided the concerned officials to inspect every place as requested; the total search of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix was completed at 6 PM May 16th, 1987 with two reports of censure of the property and one report of sealing the evidence (please see the enclosure).

At 9 PM on the same day, May 16th, 1987, the Security Officials of the district of Thu Duc intended to transport 190 bags of rice from the Congregation monastery in Song Be Province territory; their fourth vehicle was discovered by parishioners and its progress was hampered by the people's resistance. The Priests and Brothers of the Congregation explained to the people and suggested that they leave and allow the vehicles to proceed. Thus the security officials were able to transport all 190 bags of rice.

At 6.00 AM the following day, May 17th, 1987, security officials of the District of Thu Duc used their public address system to announce the false information:

"The Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix possesses many anti-government documents, is sabotaging national security. We appeal to our fellow citizens to be calm".

After the two reports of censure and one report of sealing the evidence dated May 16, 1987, and after the above-mentioned broadcast were over, the concerned-government authorities did not issue any other report regarding the newly developed situation until 11 PM May 20th, 1987; all the residences of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix were seized, and all the members of the Congregation and their families were detained.

Based on the established facts and on the concrete evidence of the two reports of censure and one report of sealing the evidence that the government sent us, we wish to present our case in detail and in accordance with legal norms, with the spirit of respecting the Constitution and the laws in order to have the affair solved justly on the basis of law as the Party and the country have established to guarantee the justice of the Socialist Republic and to strengthen the belief of people.

We wish to present our case step by step as follows:

I. The Administrative Censure Did Not Conform With the Regulations of the Nation

According to the definition regarding the administrative census issued with the Decree No. 162/QD-UB dated October 13th, 1986 by the People's Committee of the City of Ho Chi Minh:

Article 2:

The Administrative inspection must be performed carefully and only in the utmost necessary situation based upon the concrete proof of a violation of the laws. The inspection must be performed with a clearly stated objective and in agreement with the laws in order to guarantee both the rights of ownership and the rights of freedom of the citizens.

Article 7:

The Writ to inspect and search must clearly define the area and commodities to be inspected. The investigating officials cannot by their own initiative inspect outside the defined areas of commodities.

Article 9:

The Writ to inspect must clearly record the name of the residence (or name of the head of household), the address to be inspected, the reason of the inspection, the area and commodities to be inspected, and the agency responsible for initiating the investigation.

Article 10:

Agency, officials who are given responsibility for the inspection must conduct the inspection properly according to the laws and must be held responsible for the results of the inspection.

Article 13:

The inspecting officials cannot by their own initiative devise their own rules of procedure.

Article 17:

The seizure of evidence and the final decision regarding the faith of the evidence must comply with the regulation of the Council of Ministers and the People's Committee of the Cities.

If evidence of criminal action is discovered, the inspecting agency must transfer the case to the Criminal Investigation Agency or to the People's Control Institute to continue the investigation according to criminal procedures.

Article 20:

The inspected party has the right to appeal the decision. Based upon the regulations of the nation and the concrete facts of the events that occurred on May 16th, 1987, we wish to present our opinion:

Each province and each city which is directly under the central government has its own proper jurisdiction and territory, and each province or city's official business must have been approved by the proper government of the province or city.

In the case of the administrative censures on May 16th, 1987, if the People's Committee of the district of Thu Duc decided to conduct an administrative census, this decision should be conducted in the area within the jurisdiction of the District of Thu Duc, and it must be conducted by the officials of the District of Thu Duc who are responsible for the implementation of the inspection.

However, in reality, the administrative census order of the People's Committee of the district of Thu Duc was executed by the officials of the Internal Security Office (PA 16) of the Security Office of the City of Ho Chi Minh. If done correctly according to the law, the People's Committee of the City of Ho Chi Minh would issue the decision of an administrative census, and the Security office of the City would execute this decision. The fact that the

security officials of the city implemented the decision of the People's Committee at the district or village level is irregular.

Moreover, the administrative census also dealt with the Congregation's property located in the territory of the Province of Song Be, while the other property of the Congregation does reside in the jurisdiction of the City of Ho Chi Minh. These 2 areas are 400 meters apart and divided by a road and a cemetery. The inspection agency neither informed nor co-operated with the authorities of the Province of Song Be. They clearly exceeded their authorized jurisdiction.

Besides, the decision to search the properties did not clearly state the purpose or reason of the inspection or the commodities to be searched.

In implementing the inspection, the inspecting agency confiscated 190 bags of rice stored in the territory of the Province of Song Be and neither report nor rendered a reason for this confiscation.

On May 16th, 1987, after the administrative census was completed, two reports of census and one report of sealing the evidence were issued and handed over to us. The inspecting agency did not inform us of any possible legal actions. Then suddenly at 6 AM on May 17th, 1987, the security officials of the district of Thu Duc broadcasted the accusation that: the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix possessed many anti-government and anti-revolution documents. This is clearly "pre-condemning" the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix without complying with the procedures of the code of criminal law. According to the principles of the law: everyone is innocent until proven guilty by a court.

On the legal matter, the administrative inspection of the People's Committee of the District of Thu Duc definitely violated the above-mentioned provisions. We propose that the concerned and interested officials reconsider the facts.

II. The Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix does not Conceal Anti-Government Documents, or Possesses Any Document With the Purpose of Subverting the Socialist Republic Regime

As mentioned above, the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix complied seriously with the administrative inspection and guided the inspecting officials to inspect every place as requested; and this resulted in two reports of census of the evidence and one report of sealing the evidence which were recorded at the site of investigation.

In these reports, it was recorded that the evidences included Christian prayer-books, the French language-tapes by G. Mauger, and some letters from relatives abroad. There was no material with an immoral, anti-government or propagandistic attitude (Please see the enclosed reports).

The reports of censure and sealing the evidence were established by the government authority in the presence of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix. There are the true and concrete evidences for the concerned authorities to investigate, for the Control Institute and the Court to use as the legal basis to ratify the "GUILTY-OR-NOT" verdict. Every citizen has the obligation to believe these facts.

The confiscated articles recorded at the Congregation did not display any proof of anti-government activities or intention.

The administrative census was conducted seriously — this meant every place was searched and no evidence of anti-government materials, or anti-revolutionary documents being found; because in reality, the Congregation has operated purely in the religious realm with the motto "Love God and Love the Nation". The Congregation has no political acitivity.

Previously, in May 1975, some Priests, Brothers and I were laboring at the Djilinh plantation; I subsequently was detained and jailed for nearly 2 years. After examining my case and finding that I was not guilty, the Deputy Minister, Cao Dand Chieu, signed the order to release me, and when contacting me he said: "I have examined them and now know that the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix has national spirit, self reliance and is not dependent on others".

Article 82 of the Code of Criminal Law concretely defines the criminal action of propaganda against the Socialist regime as follows: "Whoever conducts fallacious propaganda against the Socialist regime, spreading false rumor, causing confusion in the population, or producing, concealing and circulating the products with the anti-Socialist content is breaking the law".

The Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix has only a variety of prayer books and French language-tapes. We do not have anti-government documents as was falsely broadcasted by the security officials of the district of Thu Duc.

Thus, based on what evidence, what reason, did the security officials of the District of Thu Duc broadcast as search? What is their purpose? An agency which is entrusted with the implementation of the laws when it does not conform to the laws causes us to be confused and bewildered.

III. The Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix does not Participate in Any Activities Contrary to National Security:

Article 83 defined concretely the criminal action of sabotaging national security in the Code of Criminal Law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as follows:

"Anyone with the purpose against the People's government, who agitates, recruits and gathers people to sabotage security, to resist the officials doing their public business, obstruct the activity of government authorities or social organizations, is committing the crime of sabotaging national security".

We affirm that the charging of the Congregation with the crime of sabotaging national security is absolutely untrue, if not an intentional attempt to defame the Congregation.

When wishing to indict the Congregation of concealing anti-government materials, on what legal basis did the concerned agency (security office of Thu Duc) base their indictment? On which witness or what evidence?

The incident occurred as follows:

After completing the inspection on May 16th, 1987 at 6 PM and after handing over to the Congregation two reports of census on the commodities found within the monastery, and one report of sealing the evidence, the inspecting delegation (the Security Office of the Ho Chi Minh City + security officials of the District of Thu Duc and Representatives of the local authority) left the monastery; but at 9 PM. Security officials of the District of Thu Duc with their vehicles arrived to transport the 190 bags of rice which were not originally recorded in the reports. This rice-storaged is located in the Province of Song Be.

The rice was transported peacefully at first, but after the fourth vehicle arrived, this activity was discovered by the local population; and people on their own gathered and besieged the vehicles. Security officials had to open fire as a precautionary measure to clear the road for their vehicles to reach Thu Duc.

The remaining officials were surrounded, yelled upon and questioned by people for their reasons of taking away the rice of the Congregation. Official Dang Huu Sy had to ask the Brothers Mai Duc Chuong, Tran Trung Than, Nguyen Minh Quan, Nguyen Ngoc Ngoan to explain to and ask people to disperse so the government officials could accomplish their given task; but there was no compliance with the brothers' request. The Brothers and Security officials had to request help from the Regional moderators, Father Minh, Father Do Quang Chi, joined

by the People's Committee of the Village of Tam Phu. All the Brothers and Priests explained to the people in the presence of the Representatives of the District and Village government, but the people did not agree to disperse.

At 6 AM on May 17th, 1987, the officials of the District returned to Thu Duc after being reinforced by a security unit.

The whole event occurred in the presence of everyone. The District and Village officials recognized the compliance of the Congregation with the Writ of inspection of the People's Committee of the District; everyone recognized that the Congregation protected the lives of the officials from the people's anger; and everyone recognized that the Congregation explained to the people the situation and asked them to disperse.

The Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix did not agitate the people, gather them nor obstruct the activity of the government authorities. Thus why charge the Congregation with sabotaging?

If the Congregation had been greedy or sorry for the loss of the goods, we would have found every possible means to resist the inspection and would have asked people to stop the very first rice-transporting vehicle; and if there had been a violation to the life of the working officials, then who would have been the culprit amid the crowd?

However the Congregation did not do so because we still believed in the Party, in the government and in the laws of the Socialist Republic, especially after the launching of the Reformed Ideology, Reformed Deed, and the Movement of Respecting the Law, competing to live and work in accordance with the Constitution and the Laws.

The accusation of the Congregation on the charge of sabotaging national security from the officials of the District of Thu Duc revealed a painful truth "To save someone, and then receive a slap in the face!" Do the officials not have a conscience, rationale when filing those charges? If so, who protected them in front of the chaotic crowd? Who calmed the people, who explained to them, who dispersed them so the officials could leave peacefully?

And if the government of the District of Thu Duc still intends to condemn us, then please prove:

Who agitated the people?

Who recruited and gathered the people to obstruct the officials' transportation of the rice to Thu Duc?

IV. Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix did not Commit the Act of Speculation:

The Code of Criminal Laws defined in the Article 165 on speculation as:

"Anybody who buys, stores goods, food, private commodities or provides services with the purpose of re-selling them to make profits illegally" commits the criminal act of speculation.

The Inter-Communiqué No. 06/TTLN dated December 20th, 1982 clearly defined the crime of speculation as follows:

"Buying some commodity with an amount clearly exceeds the requested activity or regular storage that influences the distribution and legitimate need of others with the purpose of re-selling it at a higher price to make profits illegally".

First of all, the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix is a religious organization whose existence and the social activities has been accepted by the government, and operated purely in a religious realm, self-sufficient throughout the source of support from abroad regularly — except receiving gifts from relatives abroad as defined in the government on the receipts — therefore the Congregation did not have any activity with the intention of making profits or to buy the commodities, waits for the price to increase then re-sell them with a higher price to make profits illegally.

Nevertheless, could the amount of 190 bags of rice of the Congregation be considered speculation?

A. The Financial Source of Buying Food:

The domain of the Congregation at 112, Binh Duong Village, Di An, Thuan An District, Song Be Province has a agricultural land of 4,000 square metre consists of:

2,000 square metre to grow vegetables such as lettuce, epilobe, cabbage, spinach, basil, carrot, beet, gourd, squash ... the daily average harvest is 10,000 piasters.

Expenditures for the postulants, Novices, Brothers and the Priests:

3,000 piasters daily.

Earning: 10,000 piasters daily

Net balance 7,000 piasters daily.

This 7,000 piasters could buy 200 Kilos of rice at the currency of January and February, 1987.

If used to buy rice, 6,000 kilos (6 tons) of rice could be bought monthly.

2,000 square metre to grow fruit trees i.e. Nourrice, Jackfruit tree, coconut-trees, Papaya-trees, sacuche, Guava-trees ... each crop could earn 500,000 piasters.

This amount of money, if used to buy rice, could buy 16,000 kilos (16 tons) of rice.

Besides the earning from the agricultural cultivation, the Catholic religious Committees also earned the "Holy Mass Stipends" from the faithful's request, and money sent to the members of the Congregation from their relatives abroad through gifts approved by the receipt numbers.

From the financial source of self-production, self-expenditure, self-reliance within the pure religious realm, this definitely proves that the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix is not a religious Community whose activities were supported financially from abroad, but a religious community whose financial source was chiefly from the lawful and collective activities of the Congregation.

Based on the financial source earned from the lawful activities of the Congregation, the properties earned from this lawful financial source has been approved by the Laws and Constitution: government protects the rights of ownership of lawful earning.

B. Whom Have the Foods and the Stored Foods Fed?:

Religious community of any religion is a charitable organization.

The amount of 190 bags of rice (estimate 20 tons) and used to feed these people:

More than 50 residents, always reside in the Congregation.

The faithful who attend the catechism classes, with a maximum period of 7 days, regularly held from class to class, from group to group, day-time classes only with a possible number from 50 to 60 students. During the administrative inspection, the number of these students was 31 males and 31 females.

Approximately 200 members of the Congregation were discharged previously; they returned to their homes, but because of the living difficulty, the Congregation has been obliged to support 20 kilos of rice per person per month.

According to the above statement, and also to the report dated May 21th, 1987, the total number of people whom the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix has been obliged to support is from 300 to 310 persons monthly. From the average calculation, if each individual consumes 20 kilos of rice monthly, thus the Congregation will have to export monthly:

20kg X 300 persons = 6,000 kg of rice or 6 tons.

The Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix as a collective individual, a communal family, therefore we do have budget planning similar to that of an individual family except we have to always stock a greater quantity than that of a small family due to a great number of people in our Congregation. If the Congregation had no such precaution, we would run into many difficulties in the case of price-changing or food scarcity. As a business corporation has to feed 300 workers daily, it is adequate for a community to always have a stock of three months of food in storage.

As a time-honored wise saying states "To store food for the hungry day, to put away clothes for the winter". Agencies, organizations or individuals, must all similarly store food, clothes, the only difference is the quantity either greater or lesser.

Hence, the storage of the Congregation of three months of rice, the main food for the Oriental, cannot be considered a speculation.

6 tons of rice / per month X 3 months = 18 tons.

C. The Factors of Speculation:

Based upon the above-mentioned principles of laws, the crime of speculation must consist of 2 factors:

- *Buying-up: to buy a good with great quantity, either buying all at one time, or buying at various times with a relatively great quantity; it could be buying at one place, or buying at difference places.*

- *Having the Intention of re-selling the goods with higher prices to make profits illegally. It could be selling right after buying, or selling through a go-between; either part-by-part selling, or wholesale selling; selling to one individual, or to many individuals' or store the goods awaiting for higher price with the intention to gain profits-illegally-even sometimes when the business is loss.*

Thus, speculation could either consist of the act of storage of a good for a long period of time or it could do without.

The storage of food without the intention of buying or selling to gain the profits illegally does not consist of these two factors to be considered speculation. It could be storage as a precaution against the price-changing, or in the case of food scarcity.

With a precise explanation about the reason of the storage of the amount of rice for three months, approximately 20 tons, without the intention of selling it to make profits illegally, and with the only purpose of feeding and supporting the above-mentioned individuals as well as supporting the poor faithful who are not qualified to receive aid from the government. In short, these are the charitable activities of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix.

Because of these reasons, the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix has not committed the act of speculation.

Does it exceed the average amount with the storage of 20 tons of rice for a three month feeding to 300 individuals per month? That remains to be judged by the authority.

If the concerned agency judges that the three month storage of foods of an organization which feeds 300 individuals monthly is unacceptable; I wish to contribute my opinions on these matters:

- The Code of Criminal Law does not regulate the case of storing foods as a precaution to use in family or in organization. Therefore in this case, there is no violation of the Criminal Laws as defined by Article 2 of the Code of Criminal Laws in the basis:

"Only the person who commits a crime defined by the Criminal Laws will be held responsible for the criminal act".

- Due to this, if the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix with me as the Director, because of not fully understanding the laws, we stocked the foods which exceeded the defined level permitted by government, then I will be judged willingly in the administration basis (examination, warning).

V. The Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix Does Not Stock Forbidden Commodities.

The Congregation does not commit the act of speculation as explained above, and if the Congregation were charged with the storage of rice, we would wish to emphasize that rice is not a forbidden good.

Article 166 of the Code of Criminal Laws defined the following commodities as forbidden goods: illicit drugs, foreign currency, precious jewels, precious stones.

According to this definition, the Congregation does not commit the act of storing forbidden good.

VI. The Congregation Of The Mother Co-Redemptrix Does Not Have Any Joint Activity With Foreign Government With The Intention Of Damaging The Country.

As explained above, the financial source of the Congregation's maintenance comes from:

- 2,000 square metre cultivating land,
- 2,000 square metre fruit tree growing land,
- Money earned from "Mass Stipends" of the faithful.

- Money from relatives or families of the members of the Congregation who live abroad and send support to us. These are sent through the control of the government as in the case of any other citizen who is permitted to receive money and gifts from abroad.

With the rightful financial sources, the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix has been self-reliant and also supporting the faithful or the people who are in need.

The letters collected and examined during the administrative inspection day was proof of this.

There were some letters from our branch community abroad, but these are strictly socialization and religion correspondence.

The previous observation of Mr Cao Dang Chieu on the Congregation should be the basis for the concerned authority to solve the affair.

However, the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix, through this case, realized our misapplication of the regulation on the notification of temporary residence as in following case:

Before 1975, the Congregation had had a number of monasteries at Da-Lat, Djilinh, Phan-Rang, Qui-Nhon. The number of the religious members was approximately 500, but after the South was liberated, our monasteries were offered to the government, and the members of the Congregation were released to return home to live with their families.

Although having been released, but the desire to live a religious life and learning the catechesis of the people whose life has been consecrated to God cannot be extinguished. These people once in awhile return to the Congregation to visit and to learn catechesis as well.

Believing that their desire is not in violation with the government laws, moreover, the Congregation has not instructed religion any further, but only taught catechesis to the faithful, thus we accepted them. For the local population, they study as the non-residents; for the people who live far from the Congregation, they study as the in-residents, studying catechesis and laboring to be self-produced and self-reliant at the same time.

Due to the short period of the supplement catechesis-learning session from several days to 1 week, and also because believing that this is strictly a religious activity and there is nothing illegal, the Congregation has not notified the authority of the temporary residence.

The Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix also misapplied the laws in our printing the religious prayer-books without the censorship of the Culture and Information Bureau, but we ask for your understanding in that:

The prayer-books that were roneo printed, binded are religious prayer-books frequently used, preached in the Catholic Church, and domestically distributed.

The prayer-books or prayer materials are the books with purely religious characteristics which all the faithful have been preached everyday or every week. If those are anti-government books, they would be banned by the government a long time ago, or the preachers would be detained by the government while preaching those to the faithful.

With the nature of a religious member, with the spirit of serving our religion, and a total consecration to God, the Congregation has never thought that our misunderstanding of not subjecting the prayer-books to the censorship could be a criminal act.

Regarding the matter of a number of roneo printed prayer-books, I accept the fault. However, I am asking for an understanding from the concerned authority that these are just prayer books, not a political violation to be judged in the administrative aspect.

With the concrete explanation based upon the above-mentioned basis of the Law, and with the concrete, lawful evidences, meaning the evidences found within the domain of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix which were certified in the presence of the Head Residence and the whole Congregation during the period of the administrative inspections from May 16th, 1987 to 10 P.M. of May 20th, 1987, the period when the whole Congregation was isolated; these evidences proved that:

The Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix has neither committed the criminal actions of the charge of violation the national Security as defined from the article 72 to the article 100 of the Code of the Criminal Law, nor violated the economic criminal-action.

The principle element for judging the criminal action violating national security is: whether the activities of the culprit aim at violation of national security or not?

As the General Superior of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix, I am willing to be held responsible for the criminal actions - provided there is adequate evidence, am asking the government to release all the innocent detainees.

Also as the General Superior of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix which was founded by me and recognized by the Holy See, accepted for its existence by the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as a religion which needs activity just as eating and drinking are necessary for human life, I suggest to the concerned authority to raise the blockade against the Congregation so that everybody can keep his own religion according to the definition of the Constitution: "the Citizen has the right of freedom of religions".

I also suggest to the concerned authority to respect the laws on the regulation of detainment and imprisonment of the citizens, and on the procedures of investigation.

I do not agree on the evidence exhibited by the government authority which were found in the domain of the Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix after 10 P.M. on May 20th, 1987 because they were the evidences we did not witness, neither knowing "where were they found?" Nor at what time? Because these evidences were found only by the government officials, and we have the right to question their validity: Why were they not found during the period of the administrative inspection although we had completely complied to the inspection order? Why were they exhibited by the authority only after we were isolated?

Futhermore, by the principles of the investigation procedures, the investigating agency not only must find the evidence for the charge, but also must find the reason to acquit the accused individual. The essential factor is that the truth must be judged objectively.

We hope these statements of fact and Petition will be examined and solved in accordance with the laws.

Ho Chi Minh City, May 25th, 1987

Petitioner,

Reverend Tran Dinh Thu

The General Superior of the

Congregation of the Mother Co-redemptrix

(signed)

Owing to the closed nature of the political system operating in Vietnam, decision-makers, scholars and businessmen who study or deal with Vietnam and its leaders have labored under gross misconceptions, often bordering on ignorance, about the workings of the system, the mindset of Hanoi's leaders, the state of its economy, the character of its society and the nature of its links with its Soviet patrons. Conditions in Vietnam's client states, Laos and Cambodia, are even more grossly misunderstood.

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