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RELIGIOUS POLITICS IN SOUTH VIETNAM:  
A STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF VIETNAMESE POLITICS

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In November of 1963, the government of Ngo Dinh Diem fell. Behind the scenes, generals had maneuvered to take over the government. On the streets, Buddhist demonstrators had aroused public opinion against the regime.

Since that day, there have been several cabinets in Saigon. Some were backed by one military faction, some by another. Most of them have been opposed at one time or another by organized religious groups.

The question which this study poses is: Why have religious groups become prominent in South Vietnamese politics?

The answer which the study proffers is that religious groups have become involved because the overall thrust of Vietnamese politics today is religious, that is to say, it is an effort to find ultimate meaning in the body politic. The fact that politicians are often motivated by such things as regionalism, lust for power, fear, and the desire for gaining wealth does not obscure this larger religious trend.

"Religion" is herein defined as a system of beliefs, rituals, and organizations designed to deal with ultimate matters in human life such as death, suffering and frustration.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A similar definition was used by C. K. Yang in his study: Religion in Chinese Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 1.

Such a definition does not necessarily imply belief in the supernatural.

Except for Confucianism and Taoism, which have largely become cultural phenomena and thus a part of the other religious traditions of the country, the religions discussed will be limited to those institutional sects that have aggressively pursued political ends in the post World War II era, namely, Buddhism, Catholicism, Cao Daism, Hoa Haoism and communism. No claim is made that this is a complete list of Vietnamese religious sects which have been involved in politics. The political roles of these, however, are sufficient to indicate the validity of the present study.

The word "politics" is used to refer to the art of managing the affairs of government. While "religious politics" is the art of managing the affairs of government according to a philosophy of ultimate concern.

A difficulty is encountered if one sets religion and politics over against one another as mutually exclusive concepts and then proceeds to analyze the Vietnamese situation in terms of the interplay of these two categories of life. One would then speak of the separation of church and state, of political support for religion, and of religious support for the state. But the Vietnamese do not compartmentalize life in this manner. Diem wanted a personalist Republic,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. post, pp. 70-71.

Thich Tri Quang, a Buddhist state.<sup>3</sup> Diem tried to make the First Republic an expression of Emmanuel Mounier's Catholic philosophy of personalism. Tri Quang's Buddhist state would presumably be a return to the system that existed during the golden period of Vietnamese Buddhism when the monks provided the spiritual impetus for the Confucian state<sup>4</sup> or it would duplicate other Southeast Asian patterns where the Buddhist religion provided both spiritual guidance and cosmological orientation for the body politic.<sup>5</sup> Both Diem and Quang thought of politics in terms of their religion. It was, for them, "religious politics," not "politics" and "religion."

The traditional Vietnamese political system structured the whole of society. The ruler, his functionaries, and the people all had defined roles to play. The Confucian tradition, in which the body politic was rooted, prescribed them.

When the French came, the Confucian state disintegrated and with it the measure of identification which the people had with the government. The religious sects developed in this environment, each of them seeking to bring to its adherents, once again, some sense of a meaningful place

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. post, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. post, pp. 31-32.

<sup>5</sup>R. Heine-Geldern, Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia, Data Paper No. 18 (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University, 1956), pp. 1 ff.



for themselves in relation both to the universe and to the government.

The use of the body politic to relate the people to a concept of ultimate reality is a persistent theme in Vietnamese history. This study will trace the theme from the early Confucian Buddhist courts to the religious uprisings of 1966-67.

## CHAPTER II

### CONFUCIAN POLITICAL HERITAGE

In A. D. 939, Vietnam became an independent state after one thousand years as a Chinese province. This long period of Chinese rule, with its accompanying cultural influence, transformed Vietnam into the most heavily sinicized country in Southeast Asia. Besides such things as immigrants, the iron plow, and a written language, China had furnished to Vietnam the wealth of her religious and political heritage.

The Confucian state system is of particular concern at this point, for, as in China, Confucianism became the legitimizing state myth in Vietnam and the bond which held the whole political system together.

#### I. THE MYTH OF STATE

The Confucian state myth conceives of the Emperor as the intermediary between the earthly and heavenly orders. The former includes the social as well as all other natural orders. He is the great high priest who reconciles the forces of nature through the use of elaborate sacrifice and ritual.

One difference appeared, however, between the Chinese and Vietnamese versions of the state myth. The Vietnamese Son of Heaven received his mandate from the Chinese Celestial

Emperor. This legitimized the tributary relationship of Vietnam to China, a relationship which existed from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup>

It was Ly Thai Tong (1028-1054) who instituted the Confucian State Cult in Vietnam. Since peasant life was centered around the growing of rice, the cultic practices also focused on agriculture. Twice the Emperor conducted the rituals, once at the planting and once at the harvest. Then in 1048, he built the "Walk of the Gods of the Earth and the Harvest" at the south gate of Thang-long. Here the spring festival became the great celebration of the monarchy when the king offered a sacrifice to the four seasons in order to summon rain and prosperity on agriculture.<sup>7</sup>

The same ruler established an elite Palace Guard to protect the person of the Emperor. In order to identify them, he had tattooed upon their foreheads three Chinese characters which meant "Armed by the Son of Heaven."<sup>8</sup>

This early Ly Emperor was implementing in independent Vietnam the Confucian myth of state.

How deeply the teachings of Confucius permeated the Vietnamese social structure is not clear. Buttinger maintains

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<sup>6</sup> Nghiem Dang, Viet-Nam: Politics and Public Administration (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966), p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> Le Than Khoi, Le Viet-Nam: Histoire et civilization (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1955), p.147.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

that the cultural transfer was largely limited to the literati.<sup>9</sup> Countering this conclusion, however, is the extreme prevalence of ancestor worship in Vietnam today. Ancestor worship was one of the cults which was encouraged by the Confucian state. It provided a means of strengthening the kinship system which, in turn, was instrumental in the maintenance of the orthodox socio-political order. In addition, knowledge of the Five Confucian Relationships and the responsibilities which they impose upon one are commonly known and respected by the people of Vietnam. It is difficult to see how one could agree with Buttinger in the face of such evidence. The fact that Confucianism did not replace the other religious influences among the peasants does not mean that it did not come to have considerable influence. Undoubtedly it did have sufficient pervasiveness to give to most of the people a sense of their place in the socio-political order.

As the high priest, the ruler also became the standard bearer of morality. He had to claim virtue in public whether he had it or not in private. Confucius had said in his Analects, 'When a prince's personal conduct is correct, his government is effective without the issuing of orders. If his

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Buttinger, The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), p. 108.

personal conduct is not correct, he may issue orders but they will not be obeyed."<sup>10</sup>

A ruler's right to govern rested upon his virtue. If he lost his moral stature, things did not go well for the people and they had the right to rebel. There was no right to publicly disagree with the Emperor. This would have been the same as challenging his virtue which, in turn, was justification for revolt.

Perhaps this doctrine is one of the reasons why peasant revolts were so common in Vietnamese history. The sinicized upper class, which replaced the indigenous aristocracy during the Chinese period, exploited the peasants. It became an alliance of local mandarins and feudal families whose power rose and fell in inverse proportion to the strength of the central government. The result was that the peasants were often robbed of their land and left to the mercies of the officials. Sometimes the unfortunates were enslaved by the nobles or they were conscripted for the corvee. Whenever someone arose to lead these people, they exercised their right to rebel. The Emperor and his officials had failed to live up to their responsibilities as far as they were concerned.

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<sup>10</sup>Quoted in John K. Fairbank, China: The People's Middle Kingdom and the U. S. A. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1967), p. 6.

In addition to peasant rebellions, the existence of feudalism has also limited the actual power of the Son of Heaven throughout most of Vietnamese history. At its height, two feudal families divided the country into separate fiefs and perpetuated this arrangement for two hundred years. The Trinhs ruled in the North and the Nguyens in the South. The dividing line between the two rival factions was roughly the same as the one agreed upon by the Geneva Convention in 1954. While the real power lay in the hands of the Nguyens and the Trinhs, they were careful to maintain the fiction that they were regents of the Emperor.

The French also continued the myth in their colonial arrangements. They ruled Tonkin and Annam as protectorates rather than as crown colonies, and after World War II, they reinstalled an Emperor as the nominal head of state. In fact, he spent most of his time in France and left the running of the country to others. Nonetheless, the Prime Minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, had great pangs of conscience when, for the good of the country, he felt that he must turn against the Emperor.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, the Confucian myth of state provided the doctrinal basis for the Emperor to exercise complete authority. Actually he was limited both by in-court interests among his

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<sup>11</sup>Robert Shaplan, The Lost Revolution (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 123-124.

mandarins and by peasant rebellions. In spite of these limitations, the Emperor did exercise a great deal of power and his position as Son of Heaven gave religious sanction for it. The myth also provided grounds for demanding complete obedience from the civil servants and, through them, from the people at large.

## II. THE MANDARINATE MENTALITY

Besides the imperial myth, the Chinese gave to Vietnam the mandarinat, an administrative institution which was able both to buttress the power of the sovereign and to keep the day-to-day bureaucratic work of government running for centuries.

The mandarins who stood between the Emperor and the people were selected on the basis of competitive examinations. These were first introduced into Vietnam by Ly Nhan Tong (1072-1127). Before this time, the mandarins had been Chinese who were recommended by the national Buddhist clergy.<sup>12</sup>

In 1089, the mandarinal hierarchy was fixed. There were nine grades of functionaries, both civilian and military. This network reached all the way down to village level. It was only in the eighteenth century that the Vietnamese village

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<sup>12</sup>Le, op. cit., pp. 148-149.

received political autonomy under a council of notables.<sup>13</sup> Much of this was lost a hundred years later under the French colonial administration.

In 1304, the program for the mandarinal examinations became fixed. They were divided into four parts: first, orthographic transcription of a text from memory; second, explanation of the classics and composition of poems; third, redaction of an ordinance, of an imperial proclamation and of a report to the throne; and finally, commentary.<sup>14</sup>

The swearing-in of the mandarins had been instituted by Thai Tong to reinforce the strength of the throne. Each year, in the tenth month, the functionaries had to present themselves to the temple of Dong Co in order to recite the following prayer: "If as a son, I default in my obligations of filial piety toward my parents, if as a subject, I default in my obligations of loyalty to my sovereign, let the clairvoyant Genie strike me dead." Then the mandarins entered the temple by the east gate and drank the blood of animal sacrifices.<sup>15</sup>

Tran Thu Do (1225-58), founder of the Tran dynasty, established the policy of advancing the mandarins in grade

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<sup>13</sup> Ellen Hammer, Vietnam Yesterday and Today (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966), p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> Le, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 146.



every ten years and in function every fifteen years. He also created a commission of censors for control of the civil service. In the nineteenth century, Gia Long replaced the commission with a tribunal of censors which had broader powers and responsibilities. Basically, the censorate was a system whereby an official of lower rank checked upon an official of higher rank. The lower official was not responsible to the higher in his official duties. The censors were also charged with discretely addressing remonstrances to the throne.<sup>16</sup> This arrangement was designed to complement the myth of state in insuring the subservience of the bureaucracy to the Emperor.

One wonders how corruption, which such writers as Wesley Fishel and Roy Jumper consider to be endemic in Vietnam,<sup>17</sup> could have developed under such a system of bureaucratic watchmen. The answer may lie in the fact that the government had traditionally demanded contributions from the people to the mandarins. The contributions were at first on a voluntary basis each time a citizen required the services of an official. Later these stipends became required and uniform. Royal edicts

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 173 and 321.

<sup>17</sup>See Wesley R. Fishel, "Problems of Democratic Growth Free Viet-Nam," Problems of Freedom, Fishel, editor (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), p. 24; Roy Jumper, "Mandarin Bureaucracy and Politics in South Viet-Nam," Pacific Affairs, XXX (March 1957), pp. 51, 58.

regulated the gifts which village authorities were to make to district chiefs when they entered the administrative service, on New Year's Day, on being promoted to higher rank, on presenting a request, etc. Similarly, gifts were presented by mandarins themselves to their superiors right on up to hierarchy to the Emperor. Less frequently, gifts would also be passed down the hierarchical ladder.<sup>18</sup> The giving of gifts was an institutionalized means of paying public officials and a traditional part of the system of Confucian hierarchical administration. As such, it was not corruption. Beginning with the Nguyen dynasty of the nineteenth century, all mandarins were paid a salary. But considering the fact that salaries in such societies are usually meager, it is not surprising that public officials continued to collect their traditional stipends.

Another characteristic of the mandarinat was the supremacy of the civilian arm over the military. The low place given to the soldier in society probably came about because he was often involved as a bandit warring against officialdom. The literary requirements for admission to the mandarinat led to great value being placed upon learning as a legitimizing agent for authority. Furthermore, Confucianism taught that one's body which was received from his parents

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<sup>18</sup> Nghiem, op. cit., p. 268.

should not be carelessly exposed. As early as the third century before Christ, a Confucian scholar-official is purported to have remonstrated with his Emperor that though empires might be won on horseback, they could not be ruled from there.<sup>19</sup>

Vietnam does not have a tradition of military rule.<sup>20</sup> A ruling military cast had failed to develop. Vietnamese generalship was held in great esteem only in time of war. "Not one of the prominent generals in Vietnamese history looked upon military exploits as a possible vocation for an entire human existence."<sup>21</sup> If a general wanted to be honored, he had to distinguish himself in other fields as well, namely, in poetry, philosophy, and moral leadership. After the fall of the Trinh and Nguyen families at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was no strong feudal element with which the military could ally themselves in a quest for power. The French, however, once again strengthened the feudal groups in Vietnam society. The feudalists, in turn, were countered by the communists. This led to an alliance of civil mandarins

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<sup>19</sup>Helmut G. Callis, China: Confucian and Communist (New York: Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1959), p. 68.

<sup>20</sup>An exception was the short lived military government of the Tay Sons at the end of the nineteenth century. Their mandarinal hierarchy made the military arm superior to the civilian arm (See: Le, op. cit., p. 309).

<sup>21</sup>Buttinger, op. cit., p. 284.

and military leaders to oppose the communists. The military group eventually came to dominate the alliance and the country fell under military rule.

The country's dissatisfaction with recent military governments is a matter of record. Uprisings became endemic among Buddhist groups, and each of several cabinets found it necessary to promise a return to civilian rule. Finally, with the founding of the Second Republic in 1967, substantial steps were made in that direction.

Generals Thieu and Ky were elected as President and Vice President respectively. A question which should be asked is: How can the election of a regime which is culturally incompatible give it legitimacy? The answer, of course, is that it cannot. The generals are still "ignorant" men, not highly educated in the classical studies, who have come to power by virtue of their control of the means of violence. Furthermore, they have not proved their right to rule by bringing harmony to the society over which they preside.

### III. THE CORVEE

An accompaniment of Confucian rule was the corvee. The Tran dynasty (1225-1400) had to devise ways to feed a growing population so they ordered their provincial governments to build dykes along the Red River. A royal decree went out authorizing nobles to impress into service all of

the unemployed and to put them to work clearing land and making it into rice fields. The fields were then added to the private holdings of the lords.<sup>22</sup>

Later, the nineteenth century Nguyens drafted colonists for "new villages" from among the poor, the exiled, and the prisoners of war. These people moved into the South expanding rice production and pacifying the countryside at the same time. Thus they divided their time between agricultural pursuits and fighting with the prior inhabitants who resisted their encroachment.<sup>23</sup>

The use of forced labor was not limited to the dynasties above. They were simply characteristic. It was the French, however, who incurred the greatest hostility through its use. Although technically illegal, the colonial authorities paid no attention to the law prior to 1935.<sup>24</sup>

In order to recruit labor for public works, they gave to the mandarins the authority to forcibly enlist quotas from every village. Most of the mandarins were French appointees who had not gained their positions through the examination system.

The working conditions were so terrible that few returned in good health to their homes after having spent a few

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<sup>22</sup>Hammer, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>24</sup>Buttinger, op. cit., pp. 176-181.

years at public works. Consequently, many left their homes to wander about the countryside and thus escape the draft.

Likewise, the French owned plantations were notorious for the tragic toll of human life which they took among native workers. Vietnamese labor was difficult to recruit so authorities closed their eyes to shady recruiting practices which transformed the work force into little more than a de facto corvee.

Ngo Dinh Diem instituted the agrovillage program against this background. Agrovilles were to be fortified areas which would provide protection and living facilities for settlers while furnishing a nucleus of armed strength for keeping routes of communication open. The facilities were to be constructed partly by government subsidies and partly by the villagers themselves. There was trouble getting the government money for these projects and the laborers were often required during the agricultural season. Criticisms arose that the corvee had been revived.<sup>25</sup> The program was eventually dropped by Diem and has never been reinstated.

Nor has flight from conscription ended. In 1963, there were 37,000 desertions from the regular, regional, and popular forces of South Vietnam. The next year, there were twice as

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<sup>25</sup> Nghiem, op. cit., p. 158.

many. In 1965, it soared to 113,000. During the first six months of 1967, the total was 67,000. This represented an annual rate of one man in five.<sup>26</sup>

Then the government began to do something about it. In August of 1967, they declared desertion to be against the law. The first offense was punishable by five years hard labor in a combat labor battalion, the second offense by ten years, and the third by death. The law had the almost immediate effect of cutting the desertion rate in half.<sup>27</sup>

Reasons for such a high desertion rate include war fatigue, poor leadership, and family loyalty. Sometimes the man simply went home to work the family fields. Then he returned or enlisted in another unit nearer home. Nonetheless, the distaste of conscription bred by centuries of exploitation may also have provided a predilection for people to avoid the draft and to flee from military units.

#### IV. DECLINE OF CONFUCIANISM

The Confucian state which became the norm for Vietnam was decidedly a religio-political institution. Based upon a myth which conceived the Emperor to be the Son of Heaven, buttressed by a large bureaucracy which had been thoroughly

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<sup>26</sup>Time, LXXXVIII (September 1966), p. 36.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

indoctrinated in the state's own legitimizing literature, and supported by public acceptance of the Confucian teachings of filial and governmental obligations, it formed a system of government which hierarchically related all of society to the eternal verities embodied in the Emperor.

Then came the French and the fabric of Confucian society began to fall apart.

### The Catholic Challenge

The first influence to threaten the traditional state was Catholicism. The first missionary, Father Ignace, arrived in 1533. But rapid expansion of the faith was delayed until the organization of two foreign mission societies in the early decades of the following century. An important figure in this work was a Jesuit priest named Alexandre de Rhodes. By 1682, Catholics in Vietnam were said to number around 800,000.<sup>28</sup>

Persecution of Catholics developed for two reasons. First, there were obvious connections between them and the colonial powers. Second, they treated the Vietnamese Confucian-Buddhist heritage with contempt.

The classic example of Catholic involvement in Vietnamese politics is seen in the activities of Msgr. Pigneau de

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<sup>28</sup>Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 16.



Behaine, Apostolic Vicar of Cochin China. It was he who sought French support for the pretender to the throne named Nguyen Ahn. In return for trade concessions the French agreed to assist. In addition, the Monseigneur raised a contingent of mercenaries who, when added to the "loyal" Catholics in Vietnam, were enough to tip the scales in favor of the pretender. Thus in 1802, Nguyen Ahn became Emperor Gia Long. Grateful for the Archbishop's help, he decreed that there would be no more religious persecution in Vietnam.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, xenophobia had already set in and the edict was soon forgotten. The strongly Confucian Minh Mang began an anti-Catholic campaign. He first tried to limit the activities of missionaries by making translators of them. When this failed, he took stronger measures. In 1833, the "Edict of the Emperor Minh Mang: Hostility to Christianity" was issued. It accused men from the Occident of spreading false doctrines, of having no reverence for ancestors, of building houses of worship without discriminating between the sexes in order to seduce the women and young girls, and of extracting pupils from the eyes of sick people. The edict directed that Christian temples be seized and that all believers be forced to trample the cross underfoot. The

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<sup>29</sup>G. A. Carver, "The Real Revolution in South Vietnam," Foreign Affairs, XLIII (April 1965), pp. 387-408.

penalty for refusing to recant or for returning to the faith would be "the last degree of severity."<sup>30</sup> Catholicism and the fear of the West led to a policy of isolationism by the Nguyen dynasty and to a new faith in Confucianism as the salvation of Vietnam. But this proved to be an impossible solution to Vietnam's foreign and domestic problems.

Beginning in 1840, French and Spanish Catholics began to clamor for intervention in favor of their persecuted missionaries in Vietnam. On November 25, 1857, the French Fleet of the Far East was ordered to take Tourane (Danang). From this beginning, France moved on to other sections of the country so that by 1883 the conquest and occupation of Vietnam were complete.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Catholicism had performed at least four political functions in Vietnam: first, its doctrines and its hierarchy had provided an alternative to the Confucian state myth; second, it had helped to stimulate a spirit of nationalism which resulted in a re-emphasis of the Confucian state and a foreign policy of isolationism under the Nguyen Emperors; third, it had provided the occasion for colonialism to fix itself upon the

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<sup>30</sup>George Taboulet, La Geste Francaise en Indochine (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955-1956), I, pp. 328-329.

<sup>31</sup>Buttinger, op. cit., pp. 325-422.

country; and, finally, it had produced a religious division in Vietnamese society.

### Other Colonial Factors

There were other colonial factors which undermined the Confucian system. First, one cannot but observe the contradiction of the coexistence of non-Asiatic (barbarian) exploitation and imperial rule. In spite of the plight of the country, which suggested that the ruler had lost his mandate, the Emperor continued to sit on the imperial throne. Lessening of respect both for the Emperor and for the system that he represented was bound to occur.

A second factor was the profuse use of French civil servants and the introduction of Western law which undercut the personal authority of the mandarins. Those mandarins who continued in office were relegated to secondary positions and became tools of the French authorities.

Finally, the abolition of the examination system and the establishment of Western educational standards sounded the death-knell of the old Confucian state. Remnants of this rich past, however, remain imprinted upon the collective consciousness of Vietnamese society.

Other religio-political systems have arisen to fill the void left by the fall of the Confucian state. Among these are Buddhism, Cao Daism, Hoa Haoism, Catholicism and

communism. The grass roots support which these groups have obtained, coupled with apparent dissatisfaction with the military rulers, leads one to ask the question: Are the people of Vietnam not looking, once again, for an expression of ultimate meaning in the body politic?

## CHAPTER III

### BUDDHIST POLITICAL HERITAGE

The militant political Buddhism which has characterized Vietnam since 1963 did not instantaneously appear. It is the product of a long heritage. To put Vietnamese Buddhists into historical perspective is the function of this chapter.

#### I. WHO THE BUDDHISTS ARE

It is difficult to say who are Buddhists and who are not. Buddhism has existed in Vietnam since the second century A. D. During this time, it has mingled with animism, ancestor worship, Confucianism, and Taoism, influencing them and being influenced by them. Despite this, however, there are still sufficient religious differences among the people of Vietnam to make it possible to speak of various religious groupings. This is true even within Buddhism itself.

#### Theravadists

In the Mekong Delta dwell some half million people of Cambodian descent. Both their physical characteristics and their religion are somewhat different from those of the ethnic Vietnamese. Their skins are darker and they are Theravada rather than Mahayana Buddhists. They are discriminated against by the Vietnamese on both of these grounds.

In Vinh Binh Province where the population is over 40 per cent Cambodian, the author observed that they were given the menial tasks and that few were in meaningful positions of authority. It is significant, however, that the Assistant Province Chief, a major in the Vietnamese Army, was of Cambodian extraction. A few others also served as commissioned officers in Army units stationed there. No one, however, expected that a member of the minority group would rise above the rank of major, or that their social plight would improve appreciably.

An interview with a religious leader in the province capital during the latter part of 1965 revealed that Vietnamese troops during the time of Diem often chased the Cambodians out of the towns and villages of that area. Another revealed that he had seen Vietnamese troops collect identity cards in the rural hamlets of the area and require the inhabitants to pay to get them back.<sup>32</sup> Such disregard for the rights of the people was undoubtedly one of the reasons that the area was heavily infested by the Viet Cong.

### Mahayanists

The largest component of Vietnamese Buddhism is not of the Theravada School found throughout most of Southeast Asia,

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<sup>32</sup>Names of informants withheld for security reasons.

but rather of the Mahayana School found in China, Japan and Tibet. The majority of Vietnamese village Buddhists follow a mixture of the Zen and Pure Land sects.

These followers are required to keep five precepts: abstention from killing, from acts of banditry and theft, from wrong sexual practices, from wrong speech, and from intoxicants. They also perform certain recitations and do acts to gain merit for themselves and their families.<sup>33</sup>

### The Taoist Component

Few people identify themselves as Taoists any more. An examination of the records of every district in a four province area south of Saigon in early 1966 failed to reveal a single person who was listed as Taoist.

This does not mean that Taoism has no influence. It has simply become a diffused cultural phenomenon. The superstitions and philosophical precepts which the Taoist priests brought into the country are now a part of Buddhism, or ancestor worship, or Christianity, or any other religion.

The author overheard a discussion among a group of educated Vietnamese Buddhists in the spring of 1966. They were talking about the distastefulness of the military build-up in Saigon. Soldiers were everywhere. Military vehicles

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<sup>33</sup>Nhat, op. cit., p. 6.

crowded the once lovely streets of the "Paris of the Orient." A clamor had gone up to move the military out of the city. These people were discussing the issue in terms of the Yin-Yang principle. The male principle in Saigon had become too dominant.

According to this principle, existence is a blend of opposites, of male and female, of darkness and light, of cold and heat, of regression and aggression. As long as these elements are in balance, everything goes smoothly. When they become imbalanced, there is always trouble.

Dr. Gerald Hickey, looking at the same scene, remarked to the author, "The Vietnamese are overcome by the military build-up in Saigon and the Americans cannot understand why."<sup>34</sup> The lack of understanding lay in the differing precepts of two cultures. The Americans were concerned with the practical matter of utilizing the security and the urban conveniences of the city. The Vietnamese were concerned with maintaining its beauty and its balance. Part of the difference also lay in the fact that the city belonged to the Vietnamese and they had a greater stake in what it became. Nonetheless, it was interesting that a group of educated Vietnamese would discuss

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<sup>34</sup>Gerald Hickey is a noted anthropologist and consultant on Vietnamese affairs for the Rand Corporation. He is the author of Village in Vietnam (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964).



the problem in terms of the Yin-Yang principle. In this particular instance, a diffused Taoist precept was used by Buddhists to enunciate a political goal, namely, to move the military out of Saigon.

### An Amorphous Mixture

If one has the mistaken idea that the Vietnamese religious traditions are exclusive, he has but to add the percentages of the populations claimed by each religious group to see the fallacy of his thinking. The results would resemble the following:

Confucianists	90%
Anamists	90%
Buddhists	80%
Cao Dai	10%
Hoa Hao	8%
Catholics	10%
Protestants	<u>1%</u>
Total	289%

Almost every rural home has its spirit house and its ancestor shelf. Joss sticks and food offerings are placed at both of these shrines. In addition, there may be a Buddha which occupies a place of honor in the household. Ask the head of the family what his religion is and he could answer any of the three and be absolutely correct.

The author attended an annual spring festival in honor of a local village patron in Than Phu District of Kien Hoa Province in 1966. The occasion had both animistic and Confucian elements. A raft made of banana trees was constructed and floated down the river to carry away the evil spirits. The village patron, to whose spirit reverence was paid, was an old Confucian general.

The "village temple" is a common institution in Vietnam. It is attended on special occasions by people from all religious groups. The spring festivals or village fairs are big events. There are concessions for selling food. There are gossip groups, male and female. And there are, of course, opportunities to pay one's respect to the village saint. Like ancestor worship provides a bond for family life, the village temple provides a bond for village life. In Cai Lay District of Dinh Tuong Province, out of a total of seventy-five religious structures, twenty-six are dedicated to village saints, twelve are Cao Dai, one is Protestant, four are Catholic, and thirty-two are Buddhist.<sup>35</sup>

One cannot dismiss the practice of categorizing people along religious lines, but he must remember that a modern Vietnamese Buddhist imbibes several religious traditions which have blended together to form what is now simply called Buddhism.

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<sup>35</sup>These figures are from a survey of district records made by the author in March 1966.

## II. TRADITIONAL BUDDHIST POLITICS

### Early Buddhist Beginnings

Buddhism was probably well known in Vietnam before its spread in China. Before the end of the Chinese Han dynasty, Giao Chau, as the Vietnamese province of China was called, became a stopping place for pilgrims traveling between India and China. It was in Giao Chau that some of the first translations of Buddhist texts into Chinese were made.<sup>36</sup>

Tradition says that the Zen sect was introduced by Bodhidharma around A. D. 520-525. But the first local sect did not come into being until the end of the century when a South Indian named Vinitaruci settled at Phap-van Pagoda. He died in A. D. 594 but not before transmitting his doctrine to a disciple named Phap Hien. Under Phap Hien's leadership the sect prospered until A. D. 1216. Hien and more than three hundred disciples went throughout the land preaching and constructing pagodas.<sup>37</sup>

At the beginning of the seventh century, governor Lieu Fang reported that one saw in Giao Chau numerous prominent priests spreading Buddhism among all the people. He also

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<sup>36</sup>Chester A. Bain, Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp.48-49.

<sup>37</sup>Le, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

spoke of the Phap-van Pagoda as being designated Pure Land.<sup>38</sup> Thus, at this early date, a blending of the Zen and Pure Land sects which came to characterize Vietnamese Buddhism had already begun to occur. By the second half of the eleventh century, Vietnamese Buddhism had achieved a distinctively national character.

### Rise of Buddhist Political Influence

The Ngo, Dinh and Earlier Le dynasties, who ruled during the first seventy years of independence, relied heavily upon the Zen monks. The country was in a state of turmoil. It was a time of regicides, usurpations and violence. It was a time of sweeping out of the Chinese educated scholar officials who had been running the country for centuries and for beginning again. During these dark years, the pagodas were the only lights of culture not extinguished. It was natural, then, that the early rulers turned to the monks who were versed in the learning of that time to assist them in policing the people and in exercising power.

The Dinh created Vietnam's first Buddhist hierarchy. Its organization paralleled that of the government. They also formed a similar structure for the Taosit priests. In 971,

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

Dinh Tien Hoang bestowed upon a monk named Ngo Chau Luu the title "Great Master Supporter of Vietnam."<sup>39</sup>

The early rulers employed monks as counselors of state, consulting them about important political and military decisions. These monks also became the first poets and writers of independent Vietnam.

It was not until the first great dynasty, the Ly (1010-1224), came to power that cooperation between monks and rulers reached its zenith. The Ly kept the hierarchy created by the Dinh and placed it under the authority of a "Master of the Realm" who served both as chaplain for the sovereign and as his secret counselor in matters of state.<sup>40</sup>

The Ly were ardent Buddhists who made their religion into an instrument of government. They actively sought converts during their reign and at least one Emperor abdicated to lead the life of a monk.

Another factor, and perhaps the overriding one, in the popularity of the dynasty was that they were able both to repel the Chinese in the North and to push back the Cham in the South.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 152-153.

### Decline of Buddhist Political Influence

After the fall of the house of Ly, Buddhism began to lose its position in the court.

Under the first four dynasties, the monks had been important because of their educational qualifications. In 1070, Ly Thanh Ton built the Temple of Literature in what is now Hanoi for teaching Chinese characters and Confucianism. In 1226 and 1253 respectively, two other schools were established for training young people for government service. The first teachers in all of these schools were Zen monks. These monks had accepted and mastered Confucianism because they had seen its value for political administration.<sup>41</sup>

From the beginning, the Vietnamese state had been an expression both of Confucianism and of Buddhism. Under the first four dynasties, Buddhism had enjoyed a favored position. By the time of the Tran dynasty (1225-1427), Confucianism had gained the upper hand. In 1321, examinations were established for all monks in the country. Those who could not pass were required to return to secular life. In 1381, monks began to be drafted into the army and sent to fight against Champa. The monk-educated Confucians had turned on their gurus. Under such pressure, the monks-in-court returned to their pagodas to devote themselves to teaching the clergy and the people the

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<sup>41</sup>Nhat, op. cit., p. 8.

precepts of the Buddha.<sup>42</sup> By the fifteenth century, when the Nguyen and Trinh families came into dominance, the State Cult had taken over completely from Buddhism.

Buddhism experienced a slight revival as a reaction to the coming of Christian missionaries, but it never regained its favored position in the affairs of state. This does not mean, however, that it "became moribund and remained so" as J. B. Pratt alleged. As a student of Buddhism, Mr. Pratt visited Saigon early in the twentieth century and reported an extraordinary contrast in matters of religion when he crossed the border between Cambodia and Vietnam. In the former, the landscape was filled with temples and monks, but in Saigon, he was unable to find either a Buddhist temple or a single monk.<sup>43</sup>

Eliot, on the other hand, writing in 1921, said that the Annamite temples were better kept and more numerous than in China and that there were more monasteries. He described Buddhist temples as having images not only related to Buddhism but also to Confucianism and Taoism. These were attended by Buddhist monks and nuns.<sup>44</sup> Either Pratt did not understand

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> J. B. Pratt, The Pilgrimage of Buddhism (New York: Macmillan, 1928), pp. 680-681.

<sup>44</sup> Sir Charles Eliot, Hinduism and Buddhism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1921), III, pp. 340-347.

the amorphous nature of Vietnamese religion, or he excluded the temples described by Eliot from his definition of Buddhism. Perhaps, like Diem of later fame, he underestimated the latent potential of this "stultified" faith.

Does Buddhism only prosper when it is expressed through the state? Certainly, more temples are built and more people openly identify with a faith at such times. But students of religion know that real vitality is often stimulated by official persecution. By the same token, identification with the state can sometimes rob a faith of its inner strength. The fact that Buddhism in Vietnam has endured for centuries while suffering at the hands of government, either directly through repression or indirectly through official encouragement of other religions, shows that it had achieved a good measure of vitality among the people.

If the monks could organize themselves and if they could mobilize the religious sentiments of the masses, they may, once again, be able to play a significant role in the politics of the nation.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE BUDDHIST REVIVAL

#### I. A NEW DOCTRINAL EMPHASIS

##### A Social Gospel

Buddhism in the twentieth century is not a different religion from its traditional forebearer. It has simply come to understand and apply its ancient social ethic in a more aggressive manner. This ethic is the Buddha's teaching of loving-kindness.

The Mahayana School's emphasis on the bodhisattva further emphasized the teaching. The bodhisattva is Mahayana's concept of the ideal man. He is one who though destined to become a Buddha selflessly postpones entrance into nirvana so that he may assist others in their quest for happiness. Thus those who are more spiritual have a responsibility for those who are less fortunate. A sense of responsibility is the heart of a social ethic. As previously noted, it is a blend of the Zen and Pure Land sects of this School that predominates in Vietnam.

Thich Tri Quang, the Vietnamese political Buddhist, points out that Buddhism teaches that one is happy when he makes other people happy, but that one is even happier when he suffers to make another happy. He declares that this is

the source of his own political motivation and the bond which establishes rapport between the monks and the masses.<sup>45</sup>

### Involvement of the Laity

Another significant emphasis of New Buddhism is lay involvement. A list of Asia's prominent Buddhist leaders would include Mrs. S. R. D. Bandaranaike of Ceylon, U Nu and U Thant of Burma, Princess Poon Diskul and Nai Sanya Dharmasakti of Thailand, Professors Hideki Yukawa and Hajime Nakamura of Japan, and many other non-professionals. Laymen have entered the fields of evangelism, publications, education, and programs for children, youth and adults. Medical assistance, social and philanthropic work are all part of present day Buddhist pursuits. Vietnam's laymen have not attained the stature of those mentioned above but they are nonetheless active. In Vietnam, many temples serve as social welfare institutions and, in most cases, a lay organization supports the temple and carries out its social activities. This greatly enlarged participation of laymen who have an inherent concern for practical social matters moves today's Buddhist much closer to political involvement than his monkish ancestor.

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<sup>45</sup>Jerold Schecter, The New Face of the Buddha (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1967), p. 146.

### Problems of Social Work

In spite of the social concern of many Buddhists, there are limitations upon what can realistically be accomplished in the realm of personal charity. The money available to the average pagoda is simply too small for its social committee to make much of an impact on the total needs. In one district surveyed by the author, religious leaders estimated that per capita contributions averaged one or two piasters (cents) per month. The highest estimate for any district in a four province area amounted to only 150 piasters per month.<sup>46</sup> Most of the revenue collected in this manner was used by the monk for his own living expenses and for the upkeep of the religious structures. This meant that socially minded monks and laymen had to rely heavily upon government assistance and Catholic relief supplies.

Catholic relief agencies sent vast quantities of clothing and foodstuffs to Vietnam. They were then picked up by Vietnamese military officials for distribution to the population. While the United States Military Assistance Command to Vietnam helped to oversee distribution of the items, actual hand-outs were usually made by Vietnamese district

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<sup>46</sup>Personal survey of religious leaders and public officials in the South Vietnamese Delta provinces of Kien Hoa, Kien Tuong, Go Cong and Dinh Tuong during the spring of 1966.

chiefs. This gave them additional manipulative authority over the people.

Besides having to rely upon Catholic welfare for their own needs, Buddhists were further humiliated by the fact that Catholics operated most of the visible charities other than the pagodas themselves.

In Kien Tuong Province, the only orphanage was a Catholic institution. In Go Cong Province, the Catholics operated the only orphanage and an old folks home. The former had sixty-two children and the latter fifty senior citizens. Dinh Tuong Province told a similar story. The Buddhists had a small leprosarium. The Catholics a large orphanage and a kitchen which dispensed free or nearly free meals to the indigent. They also operated a home building assistance program.

Domination of such charities as orphanages and distribution of commodities by Catholic relief agencies did not mean that Buddhists were unconcerned. Nor did it mean that they were not busy, within their means, doing what they could through their pagodas. It did mean, however, that considerable resentment arose both among those who were forced to accept the alien charity and among many of those who were required to distribute the commodities.

The second obstacle which inhibits social action in Vietnam is the intensive family centeredness of peasant

culture. Having lived for centuries in a subsistence economy where they could scarcely afford to support their own family, the peasants are not accustomed to worrying about what happens to those outside the family group. This is further reinforced by the fact that three of the Five Relationships of Confucius deal with family obligations and attitudes.

One of the most striking evidences of this unconcern for the fellow man is seen in the behavior of Vietnamese soldiers on the field of battle. They will sometimes let a wounded comrade die for lack of first aid. On at least one occasion known to the author, wounded men were left lying in the water of a rice paddy during the night while the other men of their unit camped nearby.

Significant advances in personal charity among the Vietnamese will probably require both an improvement in the economic position of the Vietnamese peasant and a lot of preaching on the virtues of loving-kindness.

## II. A NEW ORGANIZATION

In spite of the social gospel inherent in Northern Buddhism, the first modern political stirrings among monks of Southeast Asia did not come from the Mahayana School. They originated rather in Burma where the clergy was better organized. This suggests that organization may be an even more important factor in religio-political developments than

doctrine. This is an area where the Catholics have traditionally had an edge on the Buddhists, but recent years have also seen an evolution of Buddhist organizations. The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam is one part of this development.

### The World Fellowship of Buddhists

As the world has grown smaller, Buddhist organizations have broadened in scope. In 1950, Dr. G. C. Malalesekera organized at Colombo a missionary organization to be known as the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB). In the preamble to the constitution, its purpose is stated as:

Inspiring and influencing people of the earth and their governments to lead the Buddhist way of life . . . so that there will be peace and harmony amongst men and happiness for all beings.<sup>47</sup>

Influencing peoples may be construed as pure evangelism, but influencing governments is decidedly politics.

The ecumenical spirit also began to stir in Vietnam. A Vietnamese national congress was held in 1951 which arranged a union of some of their own associations and voted to join the WFB.

As though inspired by the success of Dr. Malalesekera, U Nu arranged for a Buddhist Ecumenical Council to meet in

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<sup>47</sup>Quoted by Joseph Kitagawa in "Buddhism and Asian Politics," Asian Survey, II (July 1962), pp. 1-11.

Burma during 1954-1956. His objectives were at least three-fold: first, to strengthen Burmese national identity; second, to gain political support among the Buddhist voters of Burma; and, third, to revive the Buddhist religion.

Such international movements among Buddhists give a supra-national framework for viewing the big issues which are the day-to-day fare of the political world. It would be strange if monks and laymen who are forced to look at these issues did not make moral judgments as to the rightness or wrongness of the ways in which they are being handled. When the WFB gives expression to such opinions, it enters into the arena of international politics.

#### The General Buddhist Association of Vietnam

Though during the 1963 political crisis in Vietnam the newspapers were filled with references to a "Buddhist hierarchy," there was, in reality, no such thing. Pagodas were completely independent or they were associated with others through one of several Buddhist associations. Speaking of a Buddhist hierarchy in Vietnam was like speaking of a Baptist hierarchy in the United States.

Until after the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem, Vietnam's largest and most important Buddhist organization was the 1,400,000 member General Buddhist Association formed in 1956. It was composed of three sangha and three lay associations. Two of

these, one sangha and one lay, were formed by refugees who came from North Vietnam after partition.<sup>48</sup> Thus the General Association could claim to represent the whole country.

In May of 1963, an Inter-Sect Committee representing fourteen Buddhist Associations was formed to handle negotiations with the government.<sup>49</sup> By November, they had been instrumental in toppling the Diem regime. There was still no hierarchy, but there was an organization. This organization was able to appeal to the people on the basis of their religious heritage and so produce action.

#### The Unified Buddhist Church

After winning the battle with Diem, Buddhist leaders called the Vietnamese Renunification Congress at Xa Loi Pagoda. Attending the four day meeting, beginning December 31, 1963, were representatives of eleven sects. Thich Tam Chau, Chairman of the Inter-Sect Committee, served as temporary chairman.

Its Organization. The Congress established permanent organizations for administering programs agreed upon by the

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<sup>48</sup> A Short History of Buddhism in Vietnam (Saigon: U. S. Embassy, 1963), p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 10.



united Buddhist movement.<sup>50</sup> An Institute for the Execution of the Dharma (Vien Hoa Dao) was established as the most powerful "secular" force. This organization served as the government of the new Vietnam Association of United Buddhists. Thich Tam Chau was elected Chairman of the Institute. Functional commissions were established to direct the various activities: religious, personnel, faith expansion, rites, finance, lay affairs, and youth. A monk was to be chairman of each commission but commissioners could be either clergy or lay.

In addition, the Congress established the High Council of the Buddhist Hierarchy. Thich Tinh Khiet became the Supreme Bonze. Other Council officials included a Superior Bonze, two Elder Bonzes, a Secretary-General (Thich Tri Quang), and three Deputy Secretaries-General.

The organization coming out of the Congress is sometimes called the Unified Buddhist Church. It was a very significant ecumenical step since it brought together, for the first time, the Theravadists and the Mahayanists of Vietnam into a single organization.

It is hardly likely that the Institute or the Hierarchy ever had complete control of Vietnamese Buddhists -- even of those associated with the unification movement.

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<sup>50</sup>See C. A. Joiner, "South Vietnam's Buddhist Crisis," Asian Survey, IV (July 1964), pp. 915-928.

However, the existence of such a structure was of profound significance both politically and religiously.

Its Leaders. Three of the new officials most often involved in political actions were Thich Tien Khiet, Thich Tam Chau, and Thich Tri Quang. A brief biographical sketch of each follows:

Thich Tien Khiet. Thich Tien Khiet is the country's senior monk. Prior to becoming Supreme Bonze of the Buddhist Hierarchy, he headed the General Buddhist Association of Vietnam. When his name is mentioned in connection with political affairs, it is usually in relation to the conservative (or less militant) position.

Thich Tam Chau. Tam Chau, chairman of the Institute for the Propagation of the Dharma, is also a conservative. He is a northerner born in Ninh-binh Province and educated in the Chinese classics in the Dong Dac Pagoda near his home. The monk has one surviving brother who still farms at his old home. They have not communicated since partition.

Tam Chau became a senior monk in 1946 with supervisory responsibilities over the clergy in four northern provinces. During the Indochina War, he was a leader in propaganda efforts directed against the Viet Minh. At the same time and place, Father Hoang Quynh was engaged in overt fighting of their common foe.

His position on political issues has usually been progressive but not radical. His moderating efforts during the Buddhist uprising of 1966 may have saved the country from total disintegration.

Thich Tri Quang. Like Tam Chau, Thich Tri Quang was born in North Vietnam near the town of Dong Hoi in Quang-binh Province. He attended primary school there but at the age of thirteen went to Quoc Pagoda in Hue to become a novice. In 1944, he graduated with honors and returned to the North to teach in a Buddhist school in Hanoi. Here he became a member of the Viet Minh Buddhist Association. When the Indochina War began, he returned to Hue.

Tri Quang's family did not fare so well under the communists. His elder brother and his mother were imprisoned as landlords and another brother was killed.<sup>51</sup>

On one occasion, the monk was sheltered in the United States Embassy against his political enemies in the South. But throughout the Buddhist uprisings, Tri Quang's anti-government agitation has also sparked anti-Americanism. This was especially evident during the 1966 affair.

The two major Buddhist political leaders, then, are Tam Chau, the classically educated anti-communist conservative

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<sup>51</sup>Biographical information on Tam Chau and Tri Quang condensed from Schechter, op. cit., pp. 154-165.

from the North, and volatile, Hue educated, anti-government Tri Quang. Both have figured prominently in Vietnamese politics during the last six years.

### III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REVIVAL

#### Not Pure Politics

It is possible to view the Buddhist revival as pure politics. In Vietnam, there have been power struggles both within Buddhist organizations and between their leaders and the officials of government. Even in the World Fellowship of Buddhists, delegates have taken nationalistic positions on such questions as banning nuclear tests and seating Chinese representatives. An article appearing in a 1962 issue of the Journal of International Affairs discounts the religious nature of the revival. In it, the author says, "It is not a revival but a secular movement."<sup>52</sup>

Such a statement errs both in understanding and in logic. It errs in understanding because Buddhist thought does not separate the sacred from the secular. The Western ideal of separation of church and state is foreign to such a setting. It errs in logic because the existence of a "secular" movement among monks and laymen would in no way

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<sup>52</sup>D. Baly, "The Sanction of Religion in the New Societies," Journal of International Affairs, XVI (May 1962), pp. 156-164.

exclude the possibility that the movement may also be "sacred" even by Western standards.

The religio-political movements in modern Vietnam, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, cannot be dismissed as "pure politics." To do so is to impugn the sincerity of countless religious souls and to close one's eyes to the possibility that an ancient and persistent religious heritage may still be able to influence people.

### A Quest for Meaning

A more reasonable approach is to recognize that the forces of Christianity, nationalism, communism, materialism, and secularism have upset the new nations in a very profound manner -- even to the point of challenging religious concepts around which life had once been integrated. As a result, religious thinkers are searching for new expressions of their faith which will come to terms with present social realities. Since religious philosophy is essentially a way of explaining man's relation to his total environment, this quest will of necessity include the area of politics. It is necessary then to realize that the present religious upheaval is due in part to the fact that religion is making an effort to come to terms with a changing culture.

## CHAPTER V

### RELIGION AND WARLORDISM

As previously noted, in times when Vietnam's central government was weak local feudal elements tended to strengthen themselves. Such was the case immediately following World War II. The Japanese who controlled the country had capitulated. France had been reduced to a minor power. There were hopes that colonialism was over and that Vietnam would be allowed to forge its own destiny.

Under these conditions, power groups within the country began to consolidate their own positions. The most powerful of these was Ho Chi Minh's Indochinese Communist Party. It was to them that the impotent Emperor Bao Dai handed over the seal of state on August 25, 1945, and it was they who proclaimed the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam just eight days later.<sup>53</sup>

At the same time, in the Mekong Delta, three other political sects began warring among themselves for control of land, people, and revenues. Two of these were the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects. The third was the Binh Xuyen, a

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<sup>53</sup> See "Abdication of Bao Dai, Emperor of Vietnam (August 1945)," and "Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," Vietnam: History, Documents, and Opinions on a Major World Crisis, Gettleman, editor (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1965), pp. 57-60.

group of gangsters who came into control of the police, the gambling and the prostitution of Saigon. If the central government was going to rule the country, it would have to reduce the power of these feudal sects and extend its own authority into the countryside.

All of the vieing political forces were important, but this chapter will concern itself with the two religious sects.

### I. CAO DAISM

The Cao Dai religion began to spread in the Saigon-Cholon area around 1925. It was conceived in 1919 by Nguyen Van Chieu. But it waited for the organizing genius Le Van Trung to turn it into a missionary endeavor which could claim twenty thousand adherents by the end of 1926. By the time Diem finally succeeded in integrating the Cao Dai into the regular government, they numbered more than two million faithful.<sup>54</sup>

#### Elements of Political Strength

Of the three political sects which Diem deposed, only two remained to have future political significance. They

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<sup>54</sup> Bernard B. Fall, "The Political-Religious Sects of Vietnam," Pacific Affairs, XXVIII, 3 (September 1955), p. 238.

were the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao. The Binh Xuyen had no ideological basis, so when its army and its organization were crushed, it ceased to exist. Not so with the other two! The elements of their strength lay partly in their armies and their organizational structure, to be sure, but also in an underlying faith which refused to die.

Organization. By 1930, the main branch of the Cao Dai sect had evolved a strong religious organization patterned after the Catholic hierarchy. It included a pope, cardinals, bishops and monks. There was also a parallel hierarchy of female ecclesiastical dignitaries. On the latter score, they differed from Catholicism.<sup>55</sup>

The political nature of the structure was emphasized by the existence of a temporal administrative division having executive, legislative, and welfare branches. The first had nine functional ministries: interior, rites, security, finance, supply, education, agriculture, public works, and health. The executive branch had no living chief but was headed by the spirit of a Vietnamese philosopher-saint.

The second branch of government was the domain of the living Pope and a twelve member council. In addition, a secret society existed during the 1950's which bound the living Pope and several thousand adherents together by a blood oath. This was the Pope's main power base.

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<sup>55</sup>Hickey, op. cit., p. 292.



Finally, the third branch of government served to collect charities and to minister to the poor.<sup>56</sup>

Still further subdivisions of all three branches extended the arms of government down to the hamlet. The Cao Dai organization amounted to a completely integrated religious state. Early sect leaders did not fail to see the implications of this. They hoped one day that it would be the state religion of Vietnam.

Military Forces. A second source of Cao Dai power was the existence of its own private armies, to which allusion has already been made.

During World War II, the sect cooperated with the Japanese in fighting the French and in preparing for the Japanese take over in Indochina. In return for these favors, Japanese secret police armed an estimated three thousand men for them.<sup>57</sup> This was the beginning of their military growth.

During this period, the Cao Dai's National Restoration League formed a coalition against the French with the Viet Minh and with the Hoa Hao's Social Democratic Party. Inability of the sects to work with the communists became evident at this time.

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<sup>56</sup>Fall, op. cit., pp. 238-239.

<sup>57</sup>Roy Jumper, "Sects and Communism in South Vietnam," Orbis, I (Spring 1959), p. 90.

During the Indochina War, the Cao Dai supported the French against the Viet Minh. This action gave them additional arms. It is likely that the colonialists would not have had Cao Dai support had not the communist leader in the South decided to destroy the sect himself. French aid to the sects did not completely stop at the time of partition.<sup>58</sup> Such assistance as they continued to give, however, was not enough. For, in the last analysis, it was the need for money and the lack of unity among the anti-Diem forces that led to peaceful addition of the Cao Dai troops to the national army.

Bernard Fall reports that the defection of Cao Dai General Nguyen Thanh Phuong and his twenty thousand soldiers to the government was the result of a \$3.6 million bribe plus monthly payments for his troops. Further, he says that the loyalty of Cao Dai General Trinh Minh The was purchased for two million dollars.<sup>59</sup>

General Lansdale, however, personally persuaded the latter to bring his troops to the government side and he vehemently denied paying him anything more than a cup of coffee. He claimed that they rallied for patriotic reasons

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<sup>58</sup>The New York Times, May 7, 1955; Joseph Buttinger, "Are We Saving South Vietnam?" Supplement to New Leader (June 27, 1955), p. 8.

<sup>59</sup>Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), pp. 245-246.

and all that General The received was a month's pay for his troops when they were integrated into the Vietnamese army.<sup>60</sup>

While the Cao Dai had been generally anti-communist during the Indochina War, they had been reluctant to engage the enemy in a strong or decisive fashion. The power of the feudal leaders depended, in large measure, on the strength of their armies. They could not afford to risk serious depletion of so valuable a resource.

In 1956, Ngo Dinh Diem abolished the independent political and military powers of the Cao Dai lords, but he allowed the sect to continue as a religious group. This meant that they remained as a latent political force in society, awaiting only the propitious moment to reassert themselves.

Religion. Cao Dai beliefs were designed to have a wide general appeal. Its spiritism elicited response from a people who had traditionally believed in spirits. Revelations through seances simply added a note of mysteriousness to the whole affair. Its hall of saints came from all of the great religious traditions: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity. Finally, there was a Supreme Being, the Cao Dai. Cao Daism was an effort to synthesize the great religions into one which would be acceptable to all. This was not such an unbelievable idea to a people whose religions, by whatever name, were already quite a synthesis.

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<sup>60</sup>Shaplan, op. cit., p. 117.

Cao Daism taught universal love, kindness to animals and plants, and service to one's brother.

There were five prohibitions to be observed by all followers: no killing of any living being, no covetousness, no eating of meat or drinking of alcohol, no sensuality, and no lying.

Cao Dai worship demanded that its followers address daily prayers to the Supreme Being at 6:00 A.M., noon, 6:00 P.M., and midnight. Other more elaborate ceremonies were to be conducted on special festival occasions.<sup>61</sup>

### Present Status

The sect has survived the persecutions of Diem intact. Governments since 1963 have followed varying degrees of conciliation in order to win their support.

General Khanh brought several Cao Daists into his cabinet. He released many of their imprisoned leaders. And he appointed Cao Dai General Le Van Tat as chief of Tay Ninh Province. As a further gesture, he took both the United States Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, and the Commanding General of American troops, General Paul D. Harkins, to visit

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<sup>61</sup>Gabriel Gobron, Histoire et philosophie du Caodaisme (Paris: Dervy, 1949), pp. 38-47.

the headquarters of the sect. Finally, he granted Cao Daists permanent title to their lands.<sup>62</sup>

Premier Quat also tried to organize a government with sect representation. One Cao Dai member was appointed to his cabinet and two more were appointed to a civilian legislative body called the National Legislative Council.<sup>63</sup>

A reasonable amount of rapport seems to have been established between the Cao Daists and the post-Diem governments. Some of the local sect leaders have been placed in charge of pacification efforts in their own areas and are heavily relied upon by governmental officials. One small instance of this is to be found in Ham Long District of Kien Hoa Province. Here a shoestring village in the form of an inverted "Y" is predominately Cao Dai. After intensive help by government forces in preparing local defenses, the Province Chief then placed the village in the hands of the local Cao Dai chieftain. In spite of the difficulty of defending such a configuration in a heavily infested area, as of mid-1966, he was holding his ground.

Obviously, local Vietnamese officials and their American advisors, as well as those in Saigon, must take into

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<sup>62</sup>P. M. H. Jones, "Khanh in Command," Far Eastern Economic Review, LXIV, 5 (April 30, 1964), pp. 239-241.

<sup>63</sup>Jack Langzuth, "Saigon Installs Cabinet Designed to End Disunity," The New York Times, February 17, 1965, p. 1.

account the religio-political significance of Cao Dai populations in their pacification efforts.

## II. HOA HAOISM

The second religious sect holding semi-autonomous status at the birth of the Republic was the Hoa Hao. It will not be analyzed in quite as much detail as the Cao Dai since both of them presented much the same religio-political problem.

### Brief History

Hoa Haoism was founded by Huyen Phu So in 1939. So preached a return to the basic principles of Buddhism. Elaborate temples and intermediaries were unnecessary. Inner purity of heart was the main objective.

Prayer was important but could be said in private. Four a day were prescribed: one to the Buddha, one to the reign of peace, one to relatives both living and dead, and one to the masses to improve themselves.<sup>64</sup>

Such a simple faith, with its bare minimum of expense, had great appeal to the poor peasants of the Delta. One 1955

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<sup>64</sup>A. M. Savani, Visage et images du Sud-Vietnam (Saigon: Imprimerie Francaise d'Outre-Mer, 1955), p. 100.

report placed the number of adherents at 1,500,000.<sup>65</sup> This was phenomenal growth during a period of only sixteen years!

The founder, So, was a charismatic leader who was able to hold the sect together during his lifetime. But when he was killed by the Viet Minh in 1947, the sect splintered. The three major warlords to emerge were Tran Van Soai, Ba Cut, and Nguyen Giac Ngo. They warred among themselves, with the Cao Dai, with the Viet Minh, and with the government for control of the Delta. By 1954, the armies of the Hoa Hao numbered some twenty thousand men.<sup>66</sup>

Revenues for the Hoa Hao leaders came from control of rice purchasing and milling, from the operation or protection of gambling establishments and from direct taxation.

In 1955, absentee Emperor Bao Dai succeeded momentarily in effecting a united front among the political sects in opposition to Diem. The former evidently saw in the latter's formidable increase in power the end of his own tenuous position.

The Hoa Hao were finally defeated by Diem, as were the Binh Xuyen and remnants of the Cao Dai. By mid-June, Soai's forces had been neutralized, and he, along with several other

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<sup>65</sup>Fall, "The Political-Religious Sects of Vietnam," p. 243.

<sup>66</sup>Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indochina (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 380.

rebel leaders, had fled to Cambodia.<sup>67</sup> Ba Cut was more tenacious but less fortunate. He was captured in April 1956 and guillotined at Can Tho.<sup>68</sup> Thus Diem had broken the military power of the Hoa Hao and extended the authority of the central government. But, like the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao still existed as a religious group with latent political potential.

Since the Viet Minh killed Huyen Phu So, the Hoa Hao had been anti-communist. Thus in ending their military power, Diem also reduced the strength of an organized indigenous anti-communist movement in Vietnamese society. But, in the last analysis, who knows but what the further growth of religious warlordism might not have been as detrimental to the nation as its alternative?

#### Continuing Significance

The same Vietnamese leaders who sought reconciliation with the Cao Dai also made overtures to the Hoa Hao. General Khanh visited Hoa Hao Village taking Secretary McNamara along to present a hearing aid to So's aged mother.<sup>69</sup> In addition Quat included one Hoa Hao member in his cabinet and one in his legislative council.

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<sup>67</sup>Tran Van Soai is also reported to have sold out to Diem for \$3 million. See Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, pp. 245-246.

<sup>68</sup>Lancaster, op. cit., p. 296.

<sup>69</sup>P. H. M. Jones, loc. cit.



Loosely organized and split into several sects, Hoa Haoism achieved a measure of unity in 1964 by electing a seventeen member Central Executive Committee. Fourteen are required to live in Hoa Hao Village and three serve as representatives of the sect in Saigon. Reports from the latter to the whole committee are required to be made in person at least once a month.<sup>70</sup>

A similar committee exists at each level of the Hoa Hao structure all the way down to hamlet level. They are designed to function only in the area of religion but Hoa Haoism has never been without political significance.

Many good illustrations of the continuing significance of Hoa Hao politics can be seen on the local level. These are to be found both inside and outside the old fiefdoms. The section which immediately follows is such an illustration.

#### Inter-Action With Other Religious Groups

Village "X" is a remote community in the Plain of Reeds.<sup>71</sup> The original inhabitants are Confucian Buddhist

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<sup>70</sup> Robert L. Mole, The Phat Giao Hoa Hao of South Vietnam, U.S. Navy Personal Response Project, 1966, n.p., p. 26.

<sup>71</sup> Village "X" is a hypothetical village created by the author to illustrate the complex religio-political environment sometimes faced by American and Vietnamese pacification personnel. Description of the village is a synthesis of actual circumstances and events.

settlers who have lived under French, Viet Minh and Republic of Vietnam governments. They constitute a little over half of the population.

In 1954, government land grants were made to Catholic settlers coming from North Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> They constitute 20 per cent of the population. This newer group of inhabitants are known to be anti-communist and are considered by the local military government officials as the political backbone of the area. Furthermore, they have never lived under Viet Minh control as have the original inhabitants. The official pre-supposition, then, is that the Confucian Buddhists are suspect and must be won to the government side, whereas the Catholics are dependable. This attitude on the part of officialdom, coupled with resentment of the Catholics as "outsiders who stole their land," does little to further unity.

When American Special Forces advisors came to village "X", they brought with them a pacification force of Hoa Hao mercenaries. Since manpower in this area was scarce, these troops had been recruited outside the province. True to their reputation, the Hoa Hao troops behaved like gangsters. They

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<sup>72</sup>The bulk of the refugees fleeing from north to south at the time of partition were Catholics. Defense was a consideration so they often came armed. One could make a case for warlordery among them. Since they became ardent supporters of the government, however, this study will consider them to be part of the regime.

took from the market place without paying. They manhandled local residents who opposed them. And occasionally there was an unexplained killing which the people immediately imputed to the Hoa Hao.

On one occasion, a Hoa Hao company commander was upbraided because of the high-handedness of his troops. He and his company simply deserted. In a show of solidarity, a second company prepared to follow suit but were outsmarted. Transportation was arranged by advisory personnel to take them to Saigon. What the unwary passengers did not know, however, was that plans had been laid with authorities at the other end to conscript them into the regular Vietnamese army as soon as they arrived.

Replacements were soon recruited by a Vietnamese army captain who had fought with the Viet Minh against the French. Since the new forces were from among the families of his old acquaintances, they became known as the local Viet Minh companies. But these people were likewise Hoa Hao, so the same problem continued to exist.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that local military officials were not native to the area. They had little understanding of the local cultural conflicts or else they chose to ignore them, hoping that they would go away. A tour of village "X" was to them a punishment to be endured and soon forgotten.

## III. EVALUATION

In addition to being political systems which offered the normal services and demands of any government, Cao Daism and Hoa Haoism also offered the people a sense of identification with the universe. The principles of Vietnamese Buddhism and Christianity upon which their teachings were based provided this identification.

In the case of Cao Daism, the relationship to government and to the Cao Dai (Supreme Being) was structured through the same hierarchy of officials.

While at first, the same may not appear to have been the case with the Hoa Hao committees which had responsibility only in religious affairs, it is quite likely that the same natural leaders were selected to fill both religious and governmental positions.<sup>73</sup>

In any event, governmental officials sometimes used the appeal to religious identification as the explanation for political action. This is illustrated by Tran Van Tuoi, chief of An Giang Province, who explained in 1965 why his province was one of the few "safe" spots in Vietnam by saying that his

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<sup>73</sup>An analogy may be drawn from the relationship of village cult committees to officialdom. In Khanh Hau, the committees were composed entirely of former village chiefs and the village council played a significant role in their affairs. See Hickey, op. cit., pp. 214-218.

people were Hoa Hao and when the Hoa Hao saw Viet Cong they killed them or drove them away.<sup>74</sup>

Tuoi's comment suggests the existence of a kind of peasant nationalism within the sect which provides a bond between the followers of the group and their leaders. The larger world for many peasants is their religious world. Whoever heads their religious group is, in effect, their king. As such he commands their measure of loyalty.

In the case of these two Vietnamese sects, religion provided both organizational bonds and a mystique for holding the political entities together.

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<sup>74</sup>Seth King, "Vietcong Blocked by Sect in Delta," The New York Times, April 2, 1965, p. 7.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RISE AND FALL OF AN AMBIVALENT DICTATOR

Ngo Dinh Diem was a controversial man. He was loved by some because of what he was and what he did for his country. He was hated by many because he stood for value systems that they had either discarded or refused to accept. Diem was a strangely ambivalent combination of the Confucian high priest and the ardent promoter of Catholicism. As such, he could not survive to rule a people who had Westernized enough to reject Oriental despotism, but who still had enough Confucian Buddhist pride to refuse having Christianity thrust upon them.

#### I. DIEM, THE MAN<sup>75</sup>

Ngo Dinh Diem was born January 3, 1901. His father Ngo Dinh Kha, had served in high positions with the Emperor. But when the Emperor was deposed in 1907, Kha resigned and became an organizer and promoter of Vietnamese nationalism.

Kha's religion was Catholicism. Many members of his family had suffered death in the anti-Catholic persecutions. Kha himself was an ardent practitioner and promoter of his faith.

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<sup>75</sup>Biographical information condensed from Denis Warner, The Last Confucian (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), pp. 65-86.

These two things, his ardent nationalism and his fervent faith, he bequeathed to Diem.

At age fifteen, Diem was living with his father on the farm. True to his mandarinal background, he cared little for manual labor. He began to study for the priesthood but gave this up to attend the French school in Hanoi. Here he graduated with honors and went to work as a civil servant in Hue.

The French quickly recognized Diem's ability and his honesty so they promoted him rapidly. At twenty-eight years of age, he was chief of a province. During these years, Diem played well the role of civil servant.

After attaining the position of Minister of the Interior, however, he found himself less pliable. Perhaps he could not be part of an administration which did not "rule by virtue for the good people." On the other hand, he was noted for his stubbornness. Regardless of the cause, he quit his post. This dissociation of himself with the French helped to preserve his image as a Vietnamese nationalist.

When Diem worked in the civil service, he worked like a good Confucian. When he became Prime Minister and then President, he continued to live by the same principles.

II. UNITED STATES SUPPORT<sup>76</sup>

In 1950, Ngo Dinh Diem chanced to meet Wesley Fishel, an assistant professor of political science at the University of California at Los Angeles. Fishel convinced Diem that he should travel to the United States to sell his point of view. Diem's brother, Bishop Can, provided an excellent contact with the American clergy. Accommodations were provided for him in the Maryknoll seminaries of New Jersey and New York. While staying at the latter, Diem developed a close relationship with Cardinal Spellman who became one of his ardent supporters.

Another important political figure who was convinced that the French were fighting a losing battle and who saw in Diem a possible alternative was Justice William O. Douglas. Douglas introduced Diem to Senators Mike Mansfield and John F. Kennedy. Both of these two influential men were severe critics of the French role in Vietnam and advocates of a nationalist alternative. These Americans and others decided to promote Diem as that alternative. In 1954, Bao Dai chose his ex-Minister of Interior to form a cabinet, giving to him "full civilian and military powers."

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<sup>76</sup>Facts condensed from Robert Scheer, "The Genesis of United States Support for Ngo Dinh Diem," Gettleman, editor, op. cit., pp. 235-253.



Much of Diem's power base lay in the United States but his attack upon the religio-political sects brought division among his American supporters. Some began to side against him with the French. General Collins, for example, complained that his domestic power base was too narrow to rival that of the Viet Minh. Diem's American lobby was strong, however, and he won the day. From the spring of 1955, Yankee commitment to Vietnam's new master was complete.

### III. FACTORS THAT LED TO HIS FALL

#### His Concept of the Presidency

Bernard Fall insisted as late as 1964 that Ngo Dinh Diem remained faithful to the mystique of the monarchy. He quoted Diem as having written: "A sacred respect is due to the person of the sovereign. He is the mediator between the people and heaven as he celebrates the national cult."<sup>77</sup>

When Diem became President, he took the Emperor's place. Furthermore, the constitution, which he undoubtedly had a hand in drafting, stipulated that the President was vested with the "leadership of the nation."<sup>78</sup>

Consistent with the idea that the ruler represented the will of heaven to his people and not vice versa, Diem closed

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<sup>77</sup>Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 237.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., Appendix II, p. 428.

his mind to all contrary advice. Fall told of presenting statistics to one of his ministers on communist executions of village officials during one of the "years of peace" which followed partition. The minister replied that he had shown evidence of these things to the President but that he had simply refused to believe it. Diem wanted to think that everything was going well so he chose to ignore all evidence to the contrary.<sup>79</sup>

This intractable and closed-minded nature was also commented upon by Denis Warner who quoted a Vietnamese friend as saying, "He is a monk living behind stone walls. He knows nothing."<sup>80</sup> Warner further stated that a member of the Ngo family had said, "You think you have a meeting of minds with Diem. I tell you it is impossible."<sup>81</sup>

Diem sought to unify his administration through the liberal use of family members. Since the mandarinal examinations had been abolished, nepotism in government was an easy matter. Four other of the Ngo brothers achieved prominence in South Vietnam's political life. Ngo Dinh Nhu became political boss of Saigon, deputy to the National Assembly and political advisor to the President. Ngo Dinh Can became

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<sup>79</sup>Personal interview, August 1965. See also ibid., p. 317.

<sup>80</sup>Warner, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

political boss of Central Vietnam. Ngo Dinh Luyen became Ambassador to Great Britain. And Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc became an influential presidential advisor and supporter.

Imitating the President, lesser officials gave their relatives jobs as well.

After the fall of the regime, the bank accounts of twenty-one persons were ordered held for investigation for having collaborated in building up the personal fortunes of the Ngo family.<sup>82</sup> Evidently, those with whom the President surrounded himself were not as scrupulously honest as he.

Diem's concept of the Presidency was that he was "mother and father" of all the people. He knew what was good for them and he would carry out his program regardless of what they thought or did. It was the duty of the President to chart the course. It was the duty of the people to obey.

Diem even resurrected the Court Sage. Confucius himself was supposed to have been one. Only now it was Ngo Dinh Nhu with his philosophy of personalism.

Personalism was a philosophy developed by young Catholics in France during the 1930's. Nhu encountered it during his studies in that country. It stressed the value of human dignity or humanism in modern society, especially in the collective sense. The Ngos had little use for ideas of extreme individualism.

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<sup>82</sup>Nghiem, op. cit., p. 296.

Just as the Confucian schools had indoctrinated the mandarins with the official philosophy of state, so the Diem regime indoctrinated its officials with the official philosophy of personalism. Re-education centers were established and attendance was demanded of Buddhist, Cao Daist, etc., as well as of Christians. Again the seeds of religious unrest were sown. The fact that the regime itself grossly abused the dignity of the people undoubtedly contributed to their ultimate rejection both of the philosophy and the philosophers.

It is a matter of record now that the Vietnamese people would not tolerate this type of leadership. Buddhist unrest mounted. Military leaders became restive. And the Viet Minh argued persuasively that they had both the mandate to rule and the "new truth" upon which to build a better life.

Diem's view of the Presidency was an ambivalent combination of Confucian and Catholic principles. He ruled as though he were the Emperor, but his stated philosophy of government, personalism, was rooted in an alien tradition. A regime based upon such a view could not survive.

#### His Police Tactics

Writing in 1959, Wesley R. Fishel said that if one examined the structure of the Republic of Vietnam and the behavior of President Ngo, he would learn that Ngo Dinh Diem

had all of the authority and power one needed to operate a dictatorship, but that he did not operate one.<sup>83</sup>

In retrospect, one can surely take issue with this statement. In fact, it was Wesley R. Fishel and his Michigan State University Group that helped Diem tighten the noose of dictatorship around the throats of the people. From 1955-1960, the professors had the major responsibility for training, equipping, and financing Ngo Dinh Nhu's secret police network. It was patterned after the FBI but with additional powers to suit the environment in which it operated. They also trained and equipped an elite Palace Guard.<sup>84</sup>

Ngo Dinh Nhu headed both of these organizations and used them to terrorize the populace. By 1958 round-ups of dissidents had become frequent and brutal. Philippe Devillers described a typical sequence of events as: denunciation, encirclement of villages, searches and raids, arrests of suspects, plundering, interrogations enlivened by torture, deportation, and "regrouping" of populations suspected of collaborating with the enemy.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Wesley R. Fishel, "Vietnam's Democratic One-Man Rule," New Leader, XLII (November 2, 1959), pp. 10-13.

<sup>84</sup> Scheer, op. cit., pp. 249-253.

<sup>85</sup> Philippe Devillers, "The Struggle for Unification of Vietnam," The China Quarterly, No. 9 (January-March 1962), pp. 2-23.

Mrs. Ngo Dinh Nhu also became a political force. She headed the Women's Solidarity movement and recruited a woman's militia to fight the Viet Cong.

Like the Censorate of old, Nhu and his wife had eyes and ears at every level of society from the central government to the hamlet. Furthermore, they had in their hands the power to deal with deviants. Association with these instruments of repression made them the most hated members of the Ngo family.

#### His Preference for Catholics

In spite of the fact that Diem ruled like a Confucian monarch, he was accused by the Buddhists of being pro-Catholic. Part of the regime's pro-Catholic image derived from the resettlement of Catholic refugees and part from the repression of politically active Buddhist monks and their followers.

The Refugees. The refugee problem was thrust upon the government by the terms of the Geneva settlement in 1954. It provided a three hundred day period for individuals, both in the North and in the South, to choose which zone they wished to inhabit. The number of refugees coming south is usually put in excess of eight hundred thousand. Most of these were Catholics who refused to live under communism. This very refusal, when added to the anti-communist stance of the church itself, was enough to practically insure their loyalty to the Diem regime.

What was the President to do? He had to maintain the loyalty of these people. He had to use their strength against the common foe. And he had to find places for them to live.

No one likes to give up land. Hostility was aroused in the South by the very fact that the government granted them living space. By mid-1957, 319 resettlement villages had been created. Of these, 207 were in the Mekong Delta, fifty in the delta region of Central Vietnam, and sixty in the mountainous region of Central Vietnam.<sup>86</sup>

Non-Christians liked even less to give up land to Christians. Using a slightly lower total figure, Msgr. Harnett of Catholic relief services said that out of three hundred resettlement villages about 267 became known as Catholic villages and two as Protestant. In Cochin China, where the French had ruled directly, a substantial portion of the well-to-do people were already Catholics. This assignment of additional lands to the refugees put still more wealth in their hands.<sup>87</sup>

Then there was the fact that many of the Catholics came armed. Would Diem take their arms or would he strengthen

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<sup>86</sup>Bui Van Luong, "The Role of Friendly Nations," Vietnam: The First Five Years, R. W. Lindholm, editor (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1959), p. 52.

<sup>87</sup>Joseph J. Harnett, "Refugee Resettlement," America's Stake in Vietnam (New York: American Friends of Vietnam, 1956), p. 43.

their militias? He chose to do the latter. Father Augustin Nguyen Lac Hoa and his "Sea Swallows" are a good example of this policy.

Father Hoa and his band did not come with the rush in 1954. They moved from Cambodia in 1959 after that country recognized Red China. Hoa was a native Chinese priest who had fled China with his parishioners when the communists assumed power there.

They were given a piece of wasteland in the province of An Xuyen. Under the priest's leadership, the salty marshland was leached and made productive. By 1966, his settlement of 375 refugees had grown to one of twenty-five thousand. Only two-thirds of them were now Chinese and only one-third of them practicing Catholics.<sup>88</sup>

Arms were obtained from the government in Saigon and his militia was expanded from a "knife and stave platoon tenaciously holding on to their small plot of ground" to one which began to assist nearby villages when they were attacked by the Viet Cong.

Another Catholic settlement is to be found in Kien Hoa Province (formerly Ben Tre). This district town is a Catholic enclave. American advisors entered the district for the first time in the spring of 1966. The first concern of the leaders

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<sup>88</sup>Personal interview, July 1966.



of the town was to prevent the government from confiscating any land. Defenses were inadequate and land was needed for this purpose, but the church owned the land and would not release it. While this village had been integrated into the formal political structure, the priest remained unofficially the most influential man in the district. Needless to say, the rapport between the village priest and the government officials, who were by then Buddhists, was not the best.<sup>89</sup>

If one multiplies these cases by Msgr. Harnett's figures of 267, it does not appear strange that grass roots resentment developed both toward these northern Catholic settlers and toward the regime which had the difficult task of relocating them in the South.

Buddhist Allegations. Confrontation of the regime with indigenous religious leaders was bound to come. It did in 1963. A convenient outline of the main aspects of discrimination and persecution allegedly suffered by Buddhists are outlined in the report of the United Nations fact-finding mission which arrived in the country just one week before the November coup d'etat.

(a) Preferential treatment of Catholics and discrimination against Buddhists were apparent in the law, mainly Ordinance 10 of 1950 (pre-Diem) under which the Buddhist community had to obtain government permission to hold public ceremonies, while the Catholic Church, not subject to the

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<sup>89</sup>Personal observation, spring 1966.

Ordinance, enjoyed full freedom in its operations. Many more Catholic than Buddhist holidays were given official recognition. Marriage and family matters had been the subject of Catholic-oriented legislation, contrary in some respects to Buddhist customs and beliefs.

(b) In practice, discrimination against Buddhists had taken many forms: Catholics were appointed to all of the important public affairs; various facilities were granted to the Catholic Church for acquisition of land, and denied Buddhists; relief goods were distributed in preference to Catholics through Catholic agencies.

(c) Catholic ceremonies were celebrated with great brilliance, the Vatican flag being largely displayed, and all government employees, even non-Catholics being required to attend; while, in contrast, Buddhist ceremonies were subjected to all kinds of restrictions and harassment. Acts of vandalism against Buddhist holy places or property were carried out by certain elements, including private Catholic armies, with the tacit support of the government.

(d) From October 1960, mainly in the provinces of Quang-Ngai, Phu-Yen and Binh Dinh in Central Vietnam, local government officials had attempted to compel a number of Buddhist believers to become Catholics either by threats of being sent to re-education camps and of being subjected to forced labor as suspect pro-communists; or while detained in such camps by the promise of earlier release in the case of conversion; or by threats of persecution against those who refused to comply.<sup>90</sup>

Of course, the Diem regime denied these charges. At a later date, William P. Bundy commented that the Buddhists had some case against the government for personal discrimination,

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<sup>90</sup>United Nations, Report of U. S. Fact-Finding Mission to South Vietnam, U. S. Congress, Senate Committee on the Judiciary (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 242-243.

though little for true religious persecution.<sup>91</sup> As one can readily see, the Buddhist allegations had overtones of hostility toward totalitarianism as well as toward Catholicism. Regardless of the validity of the allegations, they formed a part of the thought pattern which nurtured the "Buddhist Crisis."

The Hue Incident of May 8, 1963. On May 8, 1963, a crowd had gathered in Hue to celebrate the 2507th anniversary of the Buddha's birth. As a part of the celebration, the Buddhist flag was prominently displayed. The government directed the assembly to give prominence to the national flag or to furl the Buddhist colors. When the order was rejected, soldiers tore down the religious flags.

The celebrants were incensed. Three thousand Buddhists marched on the radio station demanding a radio memorial service in honor of the Buddha. When immediate permission could not be obtained, some of the crowd resorted to violence. Fire hoses were used to break up the demonstration. In the midst of the confusion, someone tossed a grenade killing eight people.

Five Buddhist Demands. The Hue affair resulted in five demands being laid upon the government: first, that the government repeal the order to haul down the Buddhist flag; second, that the Buddhists enjoy the special regulations given the

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<sup>91</sup>The Washington Post, January 24, 1965.

Catholic missions; third, that the government put an end to arrests and persecution of Buddhists; fourth, that the Buddhist monks and followers may enjoy freedom of worship and liberty to propagate their faith; and, fifth, that the government pay compensation to the families of the victims of the troubles in Hue and severely punish those responsible.<sup>92</sup>

Immolations. It soon became evident that there would be no meaningful redress of grievances. Accordingly, on May 28, Thich Tinh Khiết, Monk Superior of the General Association of Buddhists in Vietnam, called for a hunger strike to begin in two days. In Saigon, 350 monks and nuns began a forty-eight hour fast and demonstration. In Hue, these activities lasted a week.

But the climax of Buddhist protest came when a seventy-three year old monk, Thich Quang Duc, soaked himself in gasoline and burned himself to death while calling upon President Diem "to honor the five minimum requests of the Buddhists and to be kind and tolerant towards his people."<sup>93</sup> Six others were soon to follow Quang Duc's example.

Repression. When, at the last minute, the government postponed Quang Duc's funeral from June 16 to June 19, bloody rioting broke out in Saigon. The use of tear gas, beatings

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<sup>92</sup>United Nations, loc. cit.

<sup>93</sup>C. A. Joiner, "South Vietnam's Buddhist Crisis," Asian Survey, IV (July 1964), pp. 915-928.

and hundreds of arrests ensued. Following this, on August 21, Nhu ordered his Special Forces units to raid all Saigon pagodas in an attempt to eliminate Buddhist opposition. Several thousand arrests were made, pagodas were desecrated, and monks were beaten and jailed. Student protests resulted in incarceration of the student leaders as well. Thich Tri Quang, one of the heroes of the crisis, escaped to the American Embassy where he was given asylum.<sup>94</sup>

#### Withdrawal of United States Support

Embarrassment to the United States resulted from being associated with the Diem regime. The putting down of religious demonstrations by force brought expressions of outrage from other Buddhist countries, especially from Cambodia, Thailand, and Ceylon. Since Asians do not make fine distinctions between religion and politics, they began to link Catholic President Kennedy with Catholic President Diem.<sup>95</sup> In addition, preoccupation with the Buddhist Crisis took attention away from the war effort.

By early June, the United States Embassy began pressuring Diem to reach an early settlement with the Buddhists.

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<sup>94</sup>R. Jumper and M. W. Normand, "South Vietnam," Government and Politics of South-East Asia, George M. Kahin, editor (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964), pp. 419-420.

<sup>95</sup>Schechter, op. cit., p. 181.

Instead, on June 8, Mrs. Nhu issued a statement accusing the Buddhists of being infiltrated with communists. As noted above, riots and suppression, instead of settlement, ensued. The Embassy suggested that the United States was considering dissociation with the regime. It requested that Mrs. Nhu be silenced and that her husband be removed from the government.<sup>96</sup>

In his own defense, Nhu had begun political talks with Viet Cong representatives in the South. On September 18, Joseph Alsop published an article in the New York Herald Tribune which indicated that with the help of French Ambassador Lalouette negotiations had been opened between the governments of Hanoi and Saigon.

According to Jean Lacouture, Ambassador Lodge made a number of decisions the next day which led to the November coup. Mr. Richardson, in-country CIA Chief, and supporter of Diem, was sent home and the United States Overseas Mission began to withhold American credits from the Saigon government.<sup>97</sup> One specific instance of the latter was the United States' refusal to pay Diem's Special Forces as long as they remained in Saigon and were not in the field fighting the communists.

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<sup>96</sup>David Halberstam, "The Buddhist Crisis in Vietnam," and Halberstam, "Coup in South Vietnam," Gettleman, editor, op. cit., pp. 267-275.

<sup>97</sup>Lacouture, op. cit., pp. 83-85.

On November 1, amidst rumors of an army coup, Admiral Felt, American theater commander in the Pacific, and Ambassador Lodge called on Diem. Mr. Lacouture reported that "according to Vietnamese personalities who were most likely to know," the two visitors offered to guarantee their host's safety if he would resign without a fight.<sup>98</sup> Diem turned them down. His decision proved fatal both for himself and for his brother Nhu.

The army was unhappy with the Ngo regime. They resented being used as a front for violent attacks on civilians. They did not like the fact that the young officers were beginning to feel that one had to become a Catholic to get ahead. The leadership saw that the army was being twisted into something to fit the requirements of the Ngo family rather than being strengthened to fight the Viet Cong.<sup>99</sup>

There had been an effort in 1960 by paratroopers to take over the Palace. On that occasion, the Seventh Division, headquartered in My Tho 75 km. to the south, had sent tanks to defend the Ngos. Diem was well aware of the necessity of keeping loyal commanders in the districts around the capital. Accordingly Generals Ton That Dinh and Huynh Van Cao had been

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Halberstam, "The Buddhist Crisis in Vietnam," p. 269; Halberstam, "Coup in Vietnam," p. 275.

given commands to the North and South of Saigon respectively.<sup>100</sup> The task of the plotters was to discover a way to breach these defenses and to prevent a recurrence of the 1960 failure.

General Dinh was a vain man. The plotters used this to win him to their side. They persuaded him to ask Diem for the portfolio of Minister of Interior. Diem became angry, sent him on a brief vacation, and told him to stay out of politics. In order to get even, Dinh joined the plotters thus opening the northern access routes to Saigon.<sup>101</sup>

The threat from General Cao's Seventh Division, to the south of Saigon, was handled in a different manner. General Tran Van Don signed orders placing the division under the command of Nguyen Huu Co, who flew to My Tho by helicopter, locked the division staff officers in a room, and took command.<sup>102</sup>

General Dinh secured permission from the President to make a massive show of force in Saigon to impress the would be coup makers. In this manner, forces were brought into the city which could be used to overthrow the government. Dinh

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<sup>100</sup>In June, Generals Duong Van Minh, Tran Van Don, and Le Van Kim began to plot. Generals Do Cao Tri of I Corps and Nguyen Khanh of II Corps joined them. Halberstam, "Coup in Vietnam," p. 272.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., pp. 274-275.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., pp. 276-280.



even convinced Nhu that the Americans would not object to bringing troops out of the field if the Special Forces who had been reinforcing the Palace Guard were dispatched to fight the Viet Cong.<sup>103</sup>

If one adds American dissatisfaction with the Ngo regime to these elaborate preparations by the military, it is not surprising that the coup makers succeeded in putting an end to the reign of the Ambivalent Dictator.

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE

When General Nguyen Cao Ky came to power in June 1965, he represented the tenth government in twice as many months. Instability was due in large measure to changing alliances among the generals.<sup>104</sup> Though sometimes using civilian cabinets to mask the fact, these men have been the locus of real power since the fall of Diem.

On the other hand, religious demonstrators were part of the scene. If the politically sensitized religious leaders would not permit Diem to resurrect an oppressive Confucian state under the guise of a "personalist republic," neither would they permit his successors to continue the oppressive characteristics of such an institution.

#### I. THE FALL OF A DICTATOR

Following the overthrow of Diem, the MRC placed Major General Duong Van Minh at the helm of government. "Big Minh" proved to be an ineffectual leader and was supplanted in three months by Major General Nguyen Khanh.

In an effort to gain support from the religious communities, Khanh brought representatives of the four major

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<sup>104</sup>For the best description of these alliances, see Shaplan, op. cit., pp. 188 ff.

religions into his cabinet: the two sects, the regular Buddhists, and the Roman Catholics. But the failure of his efforts is attested by the bloody inter-religious riots of late August and by the fall of the Khanh government.

Buddhists complained about the new regime because it was dictatorial and because it contained elements of the Diem ruling group. The General had proclaimed a state of emergency in early August. He had closed newspapers. Finally, on August 16, he had issued a new charter of government.

The new document was hastily drawn by Khanh himself. It neither provided a Chief of State nor a bill of rights to check the President's power. At a special session of the MRC, it was approved and Khanh was elected President.

The charter alarmed Thich Tam Chau and Thich Tri Quang. They had not been consulted in its preparation and they saw the document as a mask for Khanh's dictatorial ambitions. Students took to the streets demanding an end to the military dictatorship and burning copies of the new charter. The Buddhist leadership joined the students in demanding an end to strongman rule.<sup>105</sup>

But the August demonstrations were not all anti-government. Father Quynh's Northern Catholic refugees took to the streets for the charter. Inevitably, Buddhist-Catholic

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<sup>105</sup>The New York Times, August 21, 1964.

hostility erupted into bloody rioting. A hospital was attacked. A Catholic hamlet and two churches were burned. And mobs fought each other in the streets.<sup>106</sup>

The political result of these riots was the end of the Khanh government. A High National Council composed of seventeen elderly professional men replaced the MRC, and, after a brief interim, a civilian regime headed by Chief of State Phan Khac Suu and Premier Tran Van Huong was inaugurated.<sup>107</sup>

Government sources blamed the troubles on Communist agitation just as they had a year before. Buddhist spokesmen called it a fight for religious freedom. In the midst of threats from militant Buddhists and the possibility of compromise with communism, Catholics had simply fought for survival.

Newly organized national Buddhism had confronted both the Army and the Catholics and had come out the winner. But for many, the bloody price of winning must have taken the joy out of victory.

## II. AN ATTEMPT TO EXCLUDE RELIGIOUS FACTIONALISM

Premier Huong, unlike Khanh, tried to form a government devoid of representation from warring factions. His cabinet selections reflected disregard for suggestions made

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., August 27-28, 1964.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., October 30, 1964.

by Buddhist leaders as well as those of other political groups. Huong was immediately scored for choosing civil servants instead of politicians and for keeping remnants of the Diem regime in his cabinet.<sup>108</sup>

Students began to demonstrate against the new government. Five monks including Quang and Chau vowed not to eat until Huong resigned.

The United States was blamed for its backing of the unpopular government. Thich Tri Quang called for a struggle against the United States, protesting such support. The result: USIS libraries in Saigon and Hue were attacked. In the latter, eight thousand books were destroyed. The resignation of Ambassador Taylor was also demanded.<sup>109</sup>

In the midst of the turmoil, a group of generals called the "Young Turks" arrested most of the High National Council and established in its place the Armed Forces Council with General Khanh as chairman. They also secured the appointment of four generals to the Huong cabinet. Two of these were Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu.

Shaplan suggested that Khanh made an arrangement with Thich Tri Quang to keep the religious demonstrations against the Huong government going until he could secure its dismissal

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., November 6, 1964.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., January 23-24, 1965.

by the Armed Forces Council.<sup>110</sup> In any event, the government was finally discharged. On January 27, Khanh was back in power promising to appoint an Army-Peoples Council to advise the government.

Was there a deal between Khanh and Quang? No one knows. After the Huong government fell, Quang continued to oppose the general as Premier on the ground that he was "too bad a man." Both had wanted to overthrow the Huong government, and they had, for a time at least, been de facto allies.

Mid-February, however, saw the victory of the anti-Khanh group led by General Nguyen Chanh Thi and Marshall Ky. On the occasion of an abortive coup executed by Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, they secured approval of the Armed Forces Council to send Khanh out of the country as roving ambassador.

Buddhist dissatisfaction coupled with the military power struggle had brought an end both to Khanh's authority and to an attempt to keep the government free of religious factionalism.

### III. A COALITION FAILS

The next government was headed by Phan Huy Quat. It represented neither the strongman trying to coerce religious groups to do his will nor the nonpolitical disregard of

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<sup>110</sup> Shaplan, op. cit., pp. 300-303.

religious communities. Mr. Takashi Oka of the Christian Science Monitor called it a compromise worked out by representatives of the armed forces and the four main religious groups. He said that the realization had come upon the armed forces that while they could overthrow governments by coups, they could not rule without support of the religious leadership which was able to arouse the people.<sup>111</sup> Thus, the Quat government was the first attempt to aggregate the interests of the real power groups. One additional fact was of significance. Quat's cabinet was devoid of Diemists.

Would it work? No one knew. Thich Tam Chau urged Buddhists to back the Armed Forces Council and the new civilian government. Thich Tri Quang said that Quat was "a good man." The support of these two men was important if the government was to succeed. Conspicuously absent, however, was any praise from the Catholic quarter.

The fall of the Quat government came about as a result of a dispute between the Premier and the Chief of State, Phan Khac Suu. Quat wanted to make some changes in his carefully chosen cabinet. Suu said that the proposed changes were not in the best interests of the state and so delayed approving the new appointments. Suu was delaying because the changes

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<sup>111</sup>Takashi Oka, letter to Mr. Nolte, Institute of Current World Affairs, 366 Madison Ave., New York, N. Y., dated March 13, 1965.

would be detrimental to the South's representation on the cabinet. He finally did confirm four of them but would not replace the Ministers of Economics and Interior who refused to resign.<sup>112</sup>

At the same time this was going on, Father Quynh sent a petition to the Chief of State to remove Quat from office. The message reiterated long standing Catholic grievances against the Premier. Following the militant priest's protest, Catholics took to the streets to lend their support to his demand.

Finally the generals took over to remove both Quat and Suu. They appointed General Nguyen Cao Ky as Premier while General Nguyen Van Thieu became Chief of State.<sup>113</sup>

Whereas, the Huong government showed that the religious factions could not be overlooked when forming a cabinet, the Quat experiment showed equally well that it was well nigh impossible to coalesce all of these groups.

Of course, both cabinets were shadow governments behind which military chieftains exercised the real power. The fight against Huong and Quat was, in part, still an effort to shake the military dictators.

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<sup>112</sup>The New York Times, May 26, 1965.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., May 28, 1965.



## IV. CONCESSIONS OF STRONGMAN RULE

By the time Ky came to office, the generals had become disgusted both with civilian politicians and with street demonstrations. In typical military fashion, the new Prime Minister announced that he would rule the country with an iron hand. One of his earliest official acts, the closing of Saigon's newspapers, underscored his "new approach."

The real test of the government's viability came in the third, fourth, and fifth months of 1966 when Thich Tri Quang used the occasion of the removal of the I Corps Commander, General Nguyen Chanh Thi, to launch an all-out struggle against the Ky-Thieu regime. Refusing to defend Thi by name, he denounced the Saigon government as "rotten" and portrayed the Prime Minister as an American lackey who had been engaging in a cult of personality.<sup>114</sup>

Simultaneously in Danang, Buddhist student leaders began calling for a strike. Student demonstrations were organized by pro-Thi politicians who were afraid of losing their jobs if the removal held.<sup>115</sup> Hundreds of soldiers also joined the crowds and their officers addressed the public.

General Thi was recalled to Saigon for his removal. Five days later, however, he was allowed to return to attempt to still

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., March 16, 1966.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

the demonstrators. Instead, he encouraged them. Before long, he had been "overtaken by events" so that even he could exert little constructive influence on the situation.

Ky met with Buddhist leaders several times to try to negotiate a settlement. The latter demanded concessions in return for ending the protest. The monks wanted Thieu, a Catholic, dropped and their own position in the government strengthened.

Within a few days, however, the moderate element of the United Buddhist Church began to assert itself. Thich Tam Chau, the elected leader of the political arm of the Church, told a crowd of ten thousand that the UBC was not trying to oust the generals. Ky had brought a degree of stability during the last three months. Chau described meetings with Ky and Thieu in which they had promised to carry out the people's aspirations.<sup>116</sup> The cleavage between the moderate and militant elements of the UBC was beginning to widen.

In response to the Buddhist uprisings in Central Vietnam, Father Hoang Quynh issued a statement that his group would take vigorous action against the agitators in Central Vietnam if the government did not.<sup>117</sup> Unrest continued unabated, spreading also into Saigon. Then on April 9, there

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., March 20, 1966.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., March 30, 1966.

was a meeting at the capital of Catholic leaders from forty-five provinces which urged the government to take stringent measures to end the chaos.

On April 15, Thich Tam Chau announced suspension of demonstrations against the government in return for its promise to proceed with preparation for elections, to grant amnesty to demonstrators, and to provide fair organization of balloting.<sup>118</sup> Two days later, Tri Quang agreed to abide by the decision.

A few days earlier Premier Ky had expressed misgivings about Tri Quang. In addition, Ambassador Bundy had gone out of his way to contrast Chau and Quang. He said that the latter wanted elections set up that his group could dominate.<sup>119</sup> A deal had probably been made between Chau and Ky to formally recognize Chau's faction of the UBC in return for his support of the government.

The ruling junta was not seriously threatened for long because of the following facts: first, the Catholics of Central Vietnam did not support the dissidents; second, the politicians who feared for their jobs were soon promised elections; third, though Tri Quang had a large following in the disaffected area, a lot of the sting was taken out of the

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., April 16, 1966.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., April 9, 1966.

struggle by the fact that an even larger group headed by Tam Chau had not supported them in their efforts . . . . Then, there were the Americans.

Finally, the government moved in force to crush the revolt. Throughout the uprising, it appeared that the UBC did not know which side to take in the struggle. The fact is that Tri Quang and Tam Chau were alternately able to dominate actions of the Vien Hoa Dao.

Though Tam Chau was Chairman of the Institute until October 30, 1966, Quang's cronies dominated important commissions within the organization. The most significant portfolio was held by his principal lieutenant, Thich Thien Minh, who was described by Denis Warner as "notoriously corrupt."<sup>120</sup> Minh, in turn, surrounded himself with young monks from Hue. The Education Commission was in the hands of another follower of the militant monk.

Tri Quang acted on his own when he renewed the struggle in May at Danang. After his campaign was well under way, he presented for Tam Chau's signature a petition against Premier Ky. Chau is reported to have said, "My friend, you ask too much. If you continue to press me, I will split the church and form a committee against the division of the people."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Denis Warner, "The Divided Buddhists of South Vietnam," The Reporter, XXXIV (June 16, 1966), p. 23.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

This statement was a portent of what was to follow. When an effort made in the fall of 1966 to restore unity to the Vien Hoa Dao failed, each group elected its own Chairman of the Institute. In the spring of 1967, Tam Chau quietly went about the preparation of a charter for a new church which would exclude the Quang group. The charter was sent to General Thieu, a Catholic, who approved it on July 18. This, in effect, made Tam Chau's organization the official representative of national Buddhism.<sup>122</sup> Tam Chau had supported the government in its time of need and the government, in turn, had kept its bargain.

It is a mistake to think that Quang's support all lies in the Central Region. On May 30, 1966, the writer observed a demonstration against the Ky-Thieu government in the Mekong Delta town of My Tho. At 9:00 A.M., on that day, I observed a group of about twenty-five monks in yellow robes marching down a street past the province hospital. Suddenly, as they reached an intersection, fifteen to twenty national policemen converged upon them swinging night sticks. The apparently peaceful march dispersed in a matter of seconds. One policeman, however, was impaled upon a pole which had been used to support one of three anti-government banners. He died -- and another was wounded.

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<sup>122</sup>The New York Times, August 15, 1967.

Two Buddhist chaplains assigned to the Seventh Division were involved in this and other demonstrations. They were promptly fired by the Division Commander, Colonel Tang.

Tri Quang's causes have been laden with nationalistic overtones. While his power base is undoubtedly stronger around Hue and Danang, there are others who have followed him before and would do it again.

The primary result of the religio-political machinations of early 1966 was the Second Republic. Because of religious pressures applied at a strategic time, strongman rule had to relax a bit. A constitution had to be framed. Elections had to be held. And new avenues of participation had to be opened to the people.

The amount of real power that has been surrendered by the generals is questionable.

The governments that have come and gone since Diem have had no basis of legitimacy in Vietnamese culture. They have been dominated by the military which is contrary to the Vietnamese mandarin heritage. They have not claimed the mandate to rule as Sons of Heaven. And only the present government has had the legitimizing influence of public elections.

It is not surprising that they were rejected by the Vietnamese people and that they could be overturned at will by generals when they deemed it advantageous to do so.

The continuing struggle in Saigon among generals, religious leaders, and civilian politicians is evidence of a persistent search for a government which can be accepted in terms of the nation's cultural values and which, at the same time, can deal with the problems of modern society.

The search for ultimate meaning in the body politic continues.

## CHAPTER VIII

### COMMUNISM: A POLITICAL RELIGION

According to the definitions of religion and politics used in this study, Vietnamese communism qualifies as both. It has a philosophy of ultimates. It is extensively organized to carry out the objectives of that philosophy. And it is heavily involved in the art of managing the affairs of government. To illustrate these characteristics is the purpose of this chapter.

#### I. A RELIGIO-POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

It is not the purpose of this section to discuss communist doctrine in detail but simply to show a few characteristics of its teachings. Among these are its utopianism, its universalism and its totalitarianism.<sup>123</sup>

#### Utopianism

Utopianism is here defined as the firm expectation (or faith) that the ultimate dream of communism will be attained as the result of peoples' struggles. That dream is the classless society where all "share according to their need and contribute according to their ability."

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<sup>123</sup>For further discussion of this topic, see Reinhold Niebuhr, Nations and Empires: Recurring Patterns in the Political Order (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), pp. 217-255.



This faith is based upon the belief that all of the world's ills are the result of private ownership of property and the means of production. If private ownership is abolished, it follows that the world's ills would also vanish. There would no longer be any necessity for the constraints of the state. It too would wither away.

Ho Chi Minh is more than a patriot. He is a committed doctrinaire communist. This is the man who started communist activities in Indochina, and this is the man who still leads them.

Ho published an article on the occasion of the ninetyeth anniversary of Lenin's birth which tells of his conversion from a mere patriot to a patriotic communist. The article was entitled "The Path Which Led Me to Leninism." In it, Ho tells of coming to understand what Lenin was talking about for the first time by reading his "Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions," published in l'Humanite. Upon suddenly seeing the light, he cried out, "Dear martyrs, compatriots! This is what we need, this is the path to our liberation! After this," said Ho, "I had entire confidence in Lenin, in the Third International." He then went on to say that by continued study of Marxism-Leninism and by participation in practical activities he gradually came upon the fact that only socialism and communism could liberate the oppressed

peoples of the world from slavery.<sup>124</sup> Thus Ho Chi Minh, the Communist, was born.

Nor can one deny Ho's utopian outlook. In the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, he quoted the utopian statement of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" and "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" which grew out of American and French revolutionary struggles. Ho looks for a day when his dream will become a reality and the kingdom of earth will be transformed into a Kingdom of Heaven. The Bible for bringing this to pass is Leninism.

Lenin's contribution to the utopian scheme lay in transforming it into a structure of power in which utopia furnished the prestige to justify force. To Marx' utopianism, Lenin added the principle of the "leadership of the elite" or the leadership of the Party. The masses who were supposed to rule were too ignorant and could not be trusted to lead the revolution unaided, so the Party would provide the necessary direction. The Party would rule in behalf of the people. In espousing Leninism, Ho not only adopted his utopian faith but also a means for realizing the goals of that faith.

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<sup>124</sup>Ho Chi Minh, Ho Chi Minh On Revolution, Bernard B. Fall, editor (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 5-7.

## Imperialism

The communist fathers also saw international friction to be the result of human greed which they attributed to property ownership. It followed then that the only solution to international difficulties lay in the world wide socialization of property.

Obviously, socialization had to begin at home, but then it had to be exported if the greater goals of the communist ideology were to be realized. Russian success in industrialization and science was strong evidence to peoples who were struggling to emerge from the fetters of colonialism that the communist approach was the correct one. Both Russia and China sent their advisors into North Vietnam and North Vietnam sent its weapons, troops and political cadre for support of the revolution into every country of Indochina.

Yet John Kautsky in his brilliant essay on nationalism and communism in underdeveloped countries says that nationalism has swallowed communism. He goes on to say that revolution no longer means class struggle or championship of the lower classes but simply industrialization under the leadership of the intellectuals.<sup>125</sup> This reasoning would make Ho Chi Minh

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<sup>125</sup> John H. Kautsky, "An Essay in the Politics of Development," Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries: Nationalism and Communism, John H. Kautsky, editor (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1962), pp. 79-89.

and his cohorts pure nationalists devoid of any external imperialistic designs. It would upset the idea that the fall of Vietnam to communism would endanger other Southeast Asian countries.

Such a view disregards Ho's own testimony that he is a Marxist-Leninist. It disregards the presence of North Vietnamese troops in Laos. It disregards the fact that murder and subversion are still employed as legitimate tools by the Viet Cong, and that such deeds demand a more idealistic justification than industrialization if the people at large are to commit these acts or to support those who do.

If one takes the view that both North and South Vietnam have the right to chart their own separate courses, then there is ample evidence to show the North to be the aggressor. Both Ho Chi Minh and Minister of Defense Giap have spoken of the North's efforts in the South. The United States "White Paper" of February 1965 gives strong evidence of Hanoi's overall direction of the southern struggle.<sup>126</sup>

The other alternative, that the conflict in South Vietnam is totally a civil war, can only be upheld on the ground that the partition at the seventeenth parallel is illegitimate. It could be so considered if there were no basis for the

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<sup>126</sup> Aggression From the North: The Record of North Vietnam's Campaign to Conquer South Vietnam, U. S. Department of State Publication 783, Far Eastern Series 130 (Washington: U. S. Department of State, 1965).

division in the beginning or if the refusal to hold elections in 1956 vitiated that basis. The position of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam has been that the division is justifiable because of the impossibility of holding free elections in the areas dominated by communism. The basis for this claim is the strong control which the Communist Party exercises over all political processes. This will be examined in section II of the present chapter.

### Totalitarianism

Marxism-Leninism also formed the doctrinal basis for the totalitarian tactics which rulers in such countries as Russia, China and North Vietnam have used. The powers-that-be have the responsibility of producing utopia in this life. Ethics then become relevant to such an end. Understanding well the resistance of social structures to change, communists justify totalitarian methods as means for producing utopia. In effect, anything that furthers the ends of doctrine is holy.

One does not have to go outside Vietnam to see the results of such beliefs. Hoang Van Chi lists six stages in North Vietnam's land reform program (1953-1956): first, population classification; second, classification of landlords; third, extortion of money and valuables; fourth, "crime" revelation; fifth, denunciation sessions; and, sixth, trials

and executions.<sup>127</sup> According to a French professor who was in North Vietnam until 1959, the total number of people butchered during the campaign was put at one hundred thousand souls.<sup>128</sup>

Furthermore, in South Vietnam, I have seen busses, loaded with old men, women and children, demolished to prove that a road was closed. I saw a Village Chief's house riddled with bullets killing the wife and children of this "government" official. Finally, it is common knowledge that whole towns have been annihilated by the Viet Cong to teach people what will happen if they resist their self-appointed saviors.

An ideology which says that landlords have to go is understood by the exploited peasant. An ideology which claims that the good life is just beyond the horizon must surely have an appeal for many people who despair of any kind of bliss short of several reincarnations. The communists make mistakes. Innocent people are sometimes killed. But the Communist Church has the sacrament of confession. There has always been rectification of errors. One cannot discard the system simply because it makes mistakes.

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<sup>127</sup> Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1954), pp. 171-191.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 166

## II. A COMMUNIST "CHURCH" STRUCTURE

The organization for carrying out communism's revolutionary goals in South Vietnam includes the Party, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSVN), and a collection of armed forces of varying degrees of competence. These constitute the structure of the Communist Church.

### The Party

The single most important part of the elaborate communist infrastructure is the Party. Today it is called the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP). From 1951 to 1962, it was the Dang Lao Dong (DLD). Both of these were descendants, in turn, of the original Indochinese Communist Party created by Ho Chi Minh in 1930 and ostensibly dissolved in 1946.

The PRP, like communist parties in other countries, was hierarchically structured with committees at village, district, province, and interprovincial levels.

At the base, clusters of cells functioned under the control of village committees with direction and control at the national level provided from without by the Political Bureau . . . and the Secretariat . . . of the Central Committee of the Dang Lao Dong ultimately working within South Vietnam through the 'Central Office for South Vietnam' . . . allegedly located in Tay Ninh Province to the north of Saigon.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Michael C. Conley, The Communist Insurgent Infrastructure in South Vietnam (Washington: CRESS, The American University, 1967), I, pp. 18-19.

At each level below COSVN, these committees had as a maximum the following elements: a secretary and his assistant, a permanent standing committee, and a system of staff officers representing agencies in the illegal bureaucratic structure of state.

To show the degree of penetration of the administrative system by the Party, Conley describes the Fifth Interprovincial Committee, one of two in the South, and its relation to the Interparty Committee at the same level.<sup>130</sup> The political subdivision has an administrative branch, a communications and liaison element, an intelligence and security apparatus, medical and dispensary facilities, a training and propaganda agency, an enemy troop and civilian propaganda section, and an economics agency.

Each of these political agencies is divided into a group of cells. It is the cell, not the office which is the Party member's home. Here self criticism takes place and Party direction is given. If the Party Group secretary is not also the head of the agency, he becomes through this device the power behind the throne because the Party is the recognized leader of the revolution.

The Party Groups are subordinate to the Interparty Committee at the interprovincial level. Fortunately, in the

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-42.



case of the Fifth Interprovincial Committee, the bureaucratic Secretary General was also the First Secretary of the Interparty Committee and so was in position to control both the Party Groups and the governmental agencies. This individual was also always a full or alternate member of the DLD. In fact, all of the members of the Interparty Committee's standing body were direct appointees of the DLD. One First Secretary, a man named Nguyen Don, was a PAVN major general.

Jean Lacouture believes that the North does not dominate communist activities in the South, in spite of such a hierarchy as described above. He bases his arguments upon observations made while living among the Viet Cong. They are not going to "shake one dictatorship to be enslaved by another." They are "90 per cent nationalists." So his argument goes. But Mr. Lacouture undercuts his own argument when he tells of a southern central committeeman named Ung Van Khiem who later became foreign Minister of North Vietnam.<sup>131</sup>

There seems to be little doubt that the communist papacy is located in Hanoi and that a tightly knit Party hierarchy extends from there all the way down to the Mekong Delta village. The custodian of true doctrine, the Party, is so organized and distributed throughout the structure of the illegal state as to insure its control of the course of the revolution.

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<sup>131</sup>Lacouture, op. cit., pp. 173-174.

## The Front

The use of front organizations to propagate the doctrine and ends of communism is not new. They have been the pattern, not the exception. Lenin advocated tight control of the revolution by professionals but at the same time, he said that the masses must also be involved. There had to be a division of responsibilities between the professionals and the amateurs.<sup>132</sup>

In Vietnam, Ho's ICP ran the show from 1940-1946. At the end of this period, it seemed advantageous for the Party to disappear, to go underground, so the Lien Viet was created as an extra party front. In 1955, North Vietnam established its Fatherland Front. Finally, in 1960, came the NFLSVN.

The position of the United States is that the Front is a creature of the communist government in Hanoi which demanded its establishment just three months before its formation was actually announced in 1960.

Jean Lacouture points out, however, that the birth of the Front must be traced back to March 1960 when a group of old resistance fighters issued a proclamation denouncing the current situation as "intolerable" and calling for patriots to regroup for action. A letter from Nguyen Huu Tho, later

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<sup>132</sup>V. I. Lenin, "What is to Be Done? Burning Questions of our Movement," Collected Works (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), V, pp. 465-466.

to become President of the NFLSVN, was said to have been read to the group. Mr. Lacouture calls this "little congress" a general call for the creation of the Front, a call which was to force the DLD to assume its responsibility in the South.<sup>133</sup>

The first congress of the Front elected Mr. Tho as President and Professor Nguyen Van Hieu as Secretary General. Neither of these men were known Party members. They did belong, however, to the Saigon-Cholon Peace Committee, an organization whose communist sympathies had caused President Tho to spend time in Diem's jail. The congress also adopted a neutralistic platform which failed to call for the reunification of the Vietnams.<sup>134</sup> Did all of this mean that the NFLSVN would not be dominated by the DLD?

Whether or not this demonstrated a spirit of independence does not change the fact that structural ties soon became evident which clearly showed a chain of supervision traceable to Hanoi. Staff guidance for the Presidium of the Front's Central Committee was to come from the Secretariat which, in turn, was to receive guidance from COSVN, an agency of the DLD. The Secretary was to sit on the Presidium with the right to interfere in any of its business. The Chairman

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<sup>133</sup>Lacouture, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

of the PRP was also to appear in that august body.<sup>135</sup> With this sort of Party representation, it was not likely that Chairman Tho and his NFLSVN would get very far out of line.

The task of the Front was to bring youth, labor, women, farmers and all organizable interest groups into revolutionary participation. It was an evangelistic organization through which well placed Party members could channel the dissatisfaction of the masses against the non-communist establishment. It was a training ground for new Party members, and it was a cover to mask the harsh revolutionary objectives of Party manipulators with the guise of popular support.

### The Military

The military, like the Front, is one more instrument by which the Party attempts to seize and hold power. At first, this seems a strange element for a "church" to have. Then one remembers the armies of the sects and the Catholic militias and it no longer seems so strange. Ultimately the military forces should develop to the point where they can destroy the government's military capability when the Front is ready to assume political power.

In South Vietnam, there are four kinds of insurgent military forces: the northern units or PAVN, the main force

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<sup>135</sup>Conley, op. cit., pp. 114-117.

southern units, the regional guerrilla, and the local guerrilla. The first two are designed to operate anywhere in the country, the third normally within a given province, and the fourth only in the area of his residence. The local guerrilla is not primarily a military man. Most of his rigid training is political. He engages in support activities but, most of all, he is simply unavailable for government conscription.

Communist military forces operate under the control of the Civil Affairs sections of the PRP committees at each administrative division from village to COSVN. Political commissars within the army operate an aggressive indoctrination program for members of their respective organizations. In addition, those who are Party members are themselves organized into cells. One immediately observes that this additional factor introduces a Party line of supervision which bypasses the regular command structure. Thus the custodians of church doctrine are in tight control of the means of terror and combat.

A second observation is also significant. This pattern of insuring dominance of the military by civilians is in the finest Sino-Vietnamese tradition.

With the "religious" ideology and the organization described above, the communist movement in South Vietnam is a fully integrated religious state.

### III. RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

Some attention has already been devoted to the relations between communism and religio-political sects. The main concern here therefore is with the relation of communism to South Vietnamese Catholicism and Buddhism.

#### With Catholicism

The departure from North Vietnam of over half a million Catholics in 1954 remains the strongest argument for the incompatibility of Catholicism and Vietnamese communism. Furthermore, Father Quynh's ability to muster demonstrations in favor of anti-communist governments in Saigon lends continued significance to the argument. To be sure, the Catholic refugees do not want the conditions in the South to become as intolerable for them as those from which they fled in the North.

Father Hoa, who was mentioned earlier, told the author that the Chinese communists tried to persuade him to conduct his church so that it would be acceptable to the Party rather than in the traditional manner to which he was accustomed. Father Hoa and his parishioners left China rather than do it. A brief stay in North Vietnam convinced them that the situation would be little better there. Therefore, they wended their way to Cambodia where they spent seven years before coming to the Republic of Vietnam. Similar fears propelled the multitudes to go south in 1954.

This does not mean that all Catholics are of the same mind. Mr. Lacouture mentioned seeing both priests and monks on standing committees of communist organizations in the South.<sup>136</sup> In the North, Ho Chi Minh has allowed the church to maintain its Vatican ties. The Vietnamese communist state has not excluded Catholicism in spite of Marx's teaching that religion is the "opiate of the masses."

Communist tolerance of other religions is not the same as religious freedom. Communism is always the primary faith. Others are allowed to function only if they do not interfere with its revolutionary goals. I know of a priest in Kien Tuong Province who was killed in early 1966 because he continued to oppose local Party programs.

Catholic theistic teachings are incompatible with Marxist atheism. The Catholic hierarchy continually reminds the peasant of this fact. So, in spite of current communist religious tolerance, the Catholic parish remains, on the whole, a strongly anti-communist force in the South Vietnamese countryside.

#### With Buddhism

Ernst Benz, a German writer, says that Buddhists in Southeast Asia view communism in two ways. Some see it as a

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<sup>136</sup>Lacouture, op. cit., p.173.

completely incompatible system, whereas the others see it as a misread page from Buddhism itself.<sup>137</sup>

The former remember China where Buddhism has been reduced to a showcase religion. There Mao's attitude at first led him to launch an all out attack upon the institution. By 1955, it was reported that a total of 130,000 Buddhist temples in China, less than one hundred survived the onslaught. In addition, monks and nuns were killed, jailed, or forced into the army.<sup>138</sup> But even in 1953, the government's attitude had begun to change. They created the Chinese Buddhist Association. They restored a few religious structures and built a thirteen story pagoda near Peking to house a holy tooth of the Buddha.<sup>139</sup> Mao had found some use for Buddhism after all.

His motivation was not too difficult to discern. By arrangement with the Burmese and Ceylonese governments, the newly created Chinese Buddhist Association made successful propaganda tours to both of these countries.<sup>140</sup> Ostensibly the purpose of the trips was to display the holy tooth. The association also joined the World Fellowship of Buddhists to

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<sup>137</sup> Ernst Benz, Buddhism or Communism, trans. by R. & C. Winston (Garden City, N. J.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1965), pp. 217-234.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., pp.177-178.

<sup>139</sup> The New York Times, March 12, 1965.

<sup>140</sup> Benz, op. cit., pp. 201-209.



secure a propaganda sounding board. Unable to dominate this body, however, she established her own international fellowship in 1963.

The stronger anti-communist sentiment among South Vietnam's Buddhists is found among the followers of Thich Tam Chau. They are largely a refugee group who, like the Catholic refugees, had first hand knowledge of Ho Chi Minh's communist state to the north.

South Vietnamese Buddhists know that Buddhist Associations are allowed to function in North Vietnam and in areas controlled by the NFLSVN, but they do not consider these indications as guarantees.<sup>141</sup>

Benz's second group, those who see communism as encompassed by Buddhism, "may" be represented by those who have actually joined the NFLSVN.

Tri Quang, on the other hand, claims not to believe in communism. He explains his anti-government activities as follows:

The United States puts the problem this way: "You have to suffer bad governments because of the critical situation with the Vietcong." But Buddhists put it this way: "You have to fight bad government which is of profit to the Vietcong." I strongly believe that Communism is not the ideal of mankind. There are higher ideals.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Schecter, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>142</sup>Lacouture, op. cit., p. 212.

The suspicion of militant Buddhist leaders toward communism is due in part to the desire of some of them to make Buddhism the state religion. Tri Quang has never publicly acknowledged this desire. But Denis Warner quotes Tam Chau's friends as saying that Quang believes he can turn all of Vietnam, North and South, into a Buddhist state that he can dominate.<sup>143</sup> Quang's chief assistant and representative in Saigon, Thich Thien Minh, even proposed to the government in 1964 that they allow "Buddhism" to take over the operation of a few provinces on a trial basis. He believed that they could establish good village representatives and infuse the paramilitary forces with an ideal.<sup>144</sup> Such ambitions would put these militant Buddhists in opposition to both communist and non-communist governments, neither of which envisions a Buddhist state dominated by Tri Quang.

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The relationship of communism with Catholicism and Buddhism is one of faith encountering faith. Each group has a system of ultimate values which excludes the other. Christian theism excludes Marxist atheism and Buddhist non-materialism

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<sup>143</sup> Warner, "The Divided Buddhists of South Vietnam," p. 23.

<sup>144</sup> Schechter, op. cit., p. 160.

excludes Marxist materialism. This means that there can be no true tolerance of non-communist religions in the communist state. Expediency may require that other religious systems be allowed to operate, even as they were under Confucianism. But communist doctrine posits their ultimate elimination. The evidence cited above indicates that the Vietnamese religious leaders understand this principle.

## CHAPTER IX

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Vietnam's traditional political system was Confucian. The Emperor ruled as the Son of Heaven. He presided over the State Cult as the great high priest who mediated between heaven and earth. The mandarins were servants of the Emperor, well schooled in the principle of obedience to their sovereign. The people at large had few rights under such a system. If one opposed the government, he was opposing the will of heaven. This was tantamount to saying that the ruler had lost his mandate to govern. The power of the Emperor was checked in practice, however, by local feudal interests, by Confucian teachings of how a ruler should govern, and by advisors-in-court. These advisors sometimes included Buddhist or Taoist religious leaders. If the ruler were unjust or if calamity beset the land, the people had the right to revolt. The whole political system was supported by the Confucian classics in which the mandarins were well schooled and enough of which filtered down to the common man to give him a sense of his own position in the scheme of things. Thus the Confucian state was grounded in the ultimate will of heaven to which all of the people were related through the Emperor and his mandarins.

Then came the Catholic missionaries. They offered a religion more related to the personal crises of life than

Confucianism. Their teachings weakened the position of the Emperor and his mandarins as mediators of the will of heaven, substituting for them a personal God and the Papal hierarchy. While Catholic converts did not divest themselves of all their former religious heritage, they did become a distinctly recognizable group within Vietnamese society, one which Confucian authorities unsuccessfully tried to suppress.

Other colonial factors which undermined the Confucian state were the secondary position of the Emperor and his mandarins, the introduction of Western standards of education and the abolition of the civil service examinations.

Buddhism developed alongside the Confucian State Cult as a personal faith for the common man. The first four dynasties of independent Vietnam relied heavily upon the monks to help them rule the countryside and to train their civil servants. The monks saw no conflict between Buddhism and Confucianism and therefore trained government workers in the Confucian classics. Once Confucianism became firmly entrenched, however, the government had little use for the monks so they returned to their pagodas. Buddhism persisted as a faith for monks and common folk alike but never regained its favored position in court. In fact, the monks were sometimes subjected to official persecution.

Vietnamese Buddhism experienced a mild revival as a reaction to the coming of French Catholic missionaries but the

real renewal came during the rule of Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem, using the dictatorial methods of a Confucian monarch, virtually established a Catholic state. Armed Catholic parishes moved to the South in 1954. They became local political powers. Bishop Can ran Central Vietnam and Archbishop Thuc became politically influential. In addition Christian personalism became the official philosophy of state. Under Diem, Catholicism, like Confucianism, became an authoritarian religio-political system relating its followers both to ultimate reality and to the state. The difficulty was that most of the people were not converts and they resented the fact that their government was becoming an expression of the Catholic faith.

National Buddhist leaders, having already been stirred by the successes of their brethren in other parts of Asia, called for an end to religious discrimination. The popular uprising which they produced provided the occasion for disgruntled military leaders to depose Diem and to assume power themselves.

Eleven Buddhist sects then formed the Unified Buddhist Church. Its organization included functional commissions designed to operate in all areas of life, both "sacred" and "secular." It is likely that the leaders of this new organization hoped to evolve a Vietnamese Buddhist state. After Diem was overthrown, Saigon's new rulers and their American

supporters stood in the way of their objective. Thus their anti-government struggle continued.

During the unsettled period following the disintegration of French authority in Indochina, three feudal sects, the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao, and the Binh Xuyen, asserted themselves. Communism also greatly increased its strength. All of these except the Binh Xuyen were religio-political sects.

Politics was religious in traditional Vietnamese society. It was religious in all but one of the feudal domains that developed in the wake of World War II. It was religious under Diem. It is religious under the communists. And the continuing struggle in Saigon has been, in part, an effort to find an acceptable religious alternative to Diem's Catholic state. The function of relating the people to ultimate reality is one which Vietnamese politics has performed in the past and still seeks to perform today.

The religious nature of Vietnamese politics has a number of implications for Saigon and Washington.

1. It means that a settlement in Vietnam which is satisfactory to all of the major religious groups will have to provide a government that can relate the people to their several concepts of ultimate reality. Military regimes, republics and other arrangements, if they make no provision for this function, will be inadequate. Furthermore, it is not likely that any unitary system of government could provide

the function. Such a system would always have trouble relating people to conflicting sets of ultimate values. On the other hand, the Cao Dai, Diem and communist political entities tried relating the people to single religious traditions and failed.

A possible alternative would be a federation of religious states. This would allow the political subdivisions to perform the religious function while leaving the center relatively free to devote itself to items of common concern. Such an arrangement would include, as a minimum, Buddhist, Catholic, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and communist states.

A variation of the federation scheme would exclude the communists. This would leave a large portion of the political problem unsettled but might provide a rallying point for non-communists in the South, even for those in the NFLSVN. This more limited group may even find it possible to form a genuine coalition based upon humanistic values, provided guarantees of religious freedom could be made strong enough. Post Diem experience with coalitions which did not have such a common value base has been disappointing.

2. Since most of Washington's dealings with Saigon have been with governments that did not perform the religious function, they have been with governments that were not legitimized by Vietnamese culture. This was even true with Diem since his philosophy of government represented only a



small percentage of the population. It was doubly true with the generals' governments which also violated the Vietnamese tradition of the supremacy of the civilian arm. When regimes are not legitimized by their own culture, it is dangerous to identify too closely with them. A better identification is with the hopes and aspirations of the people. Disregard of this principle will produce anti-Americanism.

3. The United States must be wary of relying too heavily upon the legitimizing effects of elections in a society that is more accustomed to thinking in terms of the mandate of heaven than in the terms of who won the election. Furthermore, she must be aware of the fact that Vietnamese political thought has never provided for opposition parties.

4. Since religion has always supplied the myth of state, American and Vietnamese nation builders cannot afford to underestimate the political potential of the local clergy. They may very well be the only force in Vietnam today capable of bringing stability to the political system.

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Americans do not like religious politics. The Vietnamese do not like any other kind. Perhaps the Vietnamese will change under the impact of modernizing influences, but they have not changed yet. If the Americans are to be of any service at this crucial juncture in Vietnamese history, they will

have to come to terms with religious politics and learn to harness its potential for the constructive tasks of nation building.

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