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Buddhist-Catholic relations in Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract

Relations between Buddhism and Catholicism began to take place in Vietnam in the sixteenth century and in Ho Chi Minh City in the seventeenth century. There have been conversions of Buddhists to Catholicism and a very few reconversions of Catholics to Buddhism. Dialogue and tension/conflict between Buddhists and Catholics have been also sometimes found. The article first examines some types of conversion and relations between Buddhists and Catholics in a number of countries. It then explores relations between the two religions in Vietnam. Finally, the article surveys how Buddhist-Catholic relations have been in Ho Chi Minh City. It focuses on cooperation, and conversion and its causes between Buddhists and Catholics.

Keywords: Buddhism, Conversion, Buddhist-Catholic relations, Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City

Introduction

Buddhism and Catholicism are two major religions in Vietnam nowadays. Buddhism was introduced by monastics and laypeople to Vietnam in the third century BCE, but its maturity was achieved by the end of the second century CE with the famous Luy Lâu Buddhist center. After its establishment, it co-existed with Confucianism, Taoism and other indigenous traditions in Vietnam. Under the Lý and Trần dynasties, it was regarded as state religion which was practiced by the kings, mandarins and the Vietnamese people. “Taking the refuges’ or conversion to Buddhism has not yet caused any problem in Vietnamese society. However, when Catholicism was spread by Catholic missionaries to Vietnam in the sixteenth century, it began to convert the Vietnamese. Conversion to Catholicism sometimes caused conflict by which the lords and the kings often issued edicts to control and ban the spread of Catholicism.

Since the sixteenth century, relations between Buddhism and Catholicism in Vietnam began to be recorded in terms of conversion and sometimes dialogue and tension. Later on, the relations between the two religions in Ho Chi Minh City took place in the seventeenth century. There have been conversions of Buddhists to Catholicism and a very few reconversions of Catholics to Buddhism. Dialogue and tension/conflict between Buddhists and Catholics have been also sometimes found. This article, utilizing both Buddhist and Catholic sources, aims to clarify Buddhist-Catholic relations in Ho Chi Minh City. The article first examines some types of conversion and relations between Buddhists and Catholics in a number of countries. It then explores relations between the two religions in Vietnam. Finally, the article surveys how Buddhist-Catholic relations have

been in Ho Chi Minh City. It focuses on cooperation, and conversion and its causes between Buddhists and Catholics.

Regarding the relations, politics is said to have caused conflict between Buddhism and Catholicism in Vietnam at large and Ho Chi Minh City in particular before 1975, particularly in 1963. Some scholars such as Nguyễn (2000), Nguyễn Quang Hưng (2009), and Trần (1988) have provided a number of accounts which stated that there was conflict between Buddhists and Catholics in Vietnam. However, conversion has not yet mentioned as a main cause of tension or conflict. In the meantime, conversion was regarded and asserted to be a cause of tension in a number of Buddhist countries. This article argues that conversion plays a key role in tension/conflict between Buddhists and Catholics in Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City in particular, and that as long as the issue of conversion has not been dealt with, a true dialogue and cooperation between Buddhists and Catholics are difficult to be carried out.

Types of conversion

The term conversion can be described differently in different research fields or contexts. From a psychological perspective, conversion is understood as a transformation of an intransitive aspect in the Christian tradition,¹ and as a matter of self-purification and self-realization in Buddhism.² From sociological and anthropological perspectives, it is defined as a change from one religious tradition to another, or from one denomination of a particular religion to another, and or from no involvement to participation in a religious community.³ Apart from these two forms, there is another form of conversion called “partial conversion” in which one practices two or more traditions at the same time.⁴ Some call this form of conversion “hybridization of beliefs and ritual behavior, not a total repudiation of the previous belief system.”⁵ Conversion as a move or change from one tradition to another takes place in both traditions but this type of conversion is clearer in Catholic context than in Buddhist one. This article focuses on the second and third forms.

It can be said that conversion is a product of multiple causes and not of single cause. Rambo argues that conversion is not a single event but influences and is influenced by a matrix of relationships.⁶ Wingate suggests two fundamental factors leading to conversion, namely, “push-pull” dynamics. A “push” factor may be lack of peace found in temples, a sense that beliefs do not satisfy the life questions being asked, violence in a particular country, experience of famine, lack of educational possibility, and so on. A “pull” factor may be the person of Jesus Christ, the Buddha’s personality, the teachings of the Bible, the Buddha’s teachings, Buddhist meditation, the hope and opportunity for a better life of personal freedoms and advancement, material benefits and so forth. Non-religious elements of the “pull” factor have a key influence in the process of conversion.⁷ It is the “pull” factor which often causes tension in conversion.

Buddhist-Catholic relations in a number of countries

Both Buddhism and Catholicism were spread into many countries all over the world. Buddhism was spread to a number of Asian countries such as China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Tibet, Mongolia, and Bhutan to the north, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia to the south.⁸ By the nineteenth century, Buddhism was

introduced into Europe, Australia, America and then Africa by Western scholars and immigrants.⁹ Like Buddhism, Catholicism was spread throughout the Roman Empire and to north Europe through the fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁰ By the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it was spread to America, Asia and Africa.

The earliest relations between Buddhists and Catholics date back to the sixteenth century in Asia and to the nineteenth century in the West. There are two main aspects of their relations: dialogue and conversion. Dialogue in action takes place when Buddhist representatives pay a visit to Catholics on major celebrations of Catholicism and vice versa. Dialogue in words between the two religions is sometimes organized for studying or co-operating each other in some fields. Particularly, conversion is a controversial problem in some countries where Buddhists and Catholics co-exist. The article primarily discusses the last one.

Conversion between Buddhists and Christians sometimes causes a controversial issue. Many Buddhist countries in Asia protest against “unethical conversion” which is allegedly carried out by Christians. It is defined as using aid means such as finance, education, medical treatment, and the media by missionary groups to induce followers of other religions to change their religion. These attempts sometimes involve illegal activities such as fraud¹¹ and inducements including to give money to potential converts, computers to universities, and scholarships to children of influential officials.¹² This aid evangelism is regarded by Buddhists as “unethical conversion.” This type of phenomena have been reported in a number of countries including Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, China, Laos, Vietnam, and so forth, all of which have sought to make such activities illegal. For example, in Sri Lanka, evangelists have been accused of taking advantage of the ethnic turmoil and poor economic conditions of the Buddhist communities as fertile ground for recruiting new members.¹³ The JHU¹⁴ and various Buddhist groups have demanded from the Sri Lanka government to pass a bill in the parliament to ban such attempt of “unethical conversion.” They have argued that the protection of Buddhism requires the enactment and enforcement of appropriate legislative mechanisms to combat “unethical conversion.”¹⁵ Connie Levett assumes that Christians lure Thai Buddhists with “gifts” after the tsunami in 2004 in Thailand.¹⁶ In Cambodia, the Ministry of Cults and Religion issued a directive which bans Christian groups from door-to-door proselytizing.¹⁷ In Vietnam, during the periods of French rule and the Diem regime, the rulers supported the expansion of Catholicism which led to tension between the two religions, particularly the crisis in South Vietnam in 1963.

Contrary to conversions of Buddhists to Christianity in Asian countries, conversions of Christians to Buddhism in the West take place voluntarily and smoothly. Some typical examples are extracted here to illuminate the statement. Alison Murdoch was a Christian and interested in spiritual life in Christian tradition. After she went to India for her spiritual purpose and studied the Dharma, practiced meditation, she became fundamentally Buddhist in philosophy and practice. The second one is Robina Courtin who was a devout Catholic. In 1976, she firstly joined a meditation course given by two Tibetan lamas. Through meditation courses, she found what she looked for. She then became a Buddhist nun. Another one is Bob Sharples, a Christian man. He also became a Buddhist after he attended meditation courses, studied the Dharma, and was attracted by his master’s quality.¹⁸

Buddhist-Catholic relations in Vietnam

According to the history of Buddhism and that of Catholicism in Vietnam, the earliest relations between the two religions date back to the sixteenth century, at the time of Catholicism's entry. The article discusses the relations in three aspects: conversion, tension or conflict, and dialogue.

The relations between Buddhists and Catholics have manifested obviously in terms of conversion. As soon as Catholicism arrived, a number of the Vietnamese people who were practicing three main religions (Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism) converted to Catholicism. Conversion between the followers of Buddhism and Catholicism often took place in a way that the Buddhist side lost its followers to Catholicism. Particularly, in the period of French rule (1884-1945) and under the Diệm regime (1954-1963), a great number of Buddhists converted to Catholicism because the latter was granted several privileges to expand its community. After the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, every religion is equal in accordance with the state policy. However, the number of Buddhists converting to Catholicism is much bigger than that of Catholics converting to Buddhism.

Conversion between Buddhists and Catholics is a controversial issue. Mass conversion to Catholicism was undertaken everywhere because those converted were allowed to attend school or had a chance to receive higher education, got food and money, obtained colonial echelons and assistance of the missionaries.¹⁹ Particularly under the Diệm regime in South Vietnam, the government carried out a policy of Catholicization of South Vietnam.²⁰ All the American aid which had been sent to South Vietnam was distributed to Catholics and used to persuade Buddhists to become Catholics by Catholic Relief Services. As a result, thousands of individuals, or families, and even many entire villages became Catholics in order that they could retain their jobs or get the best food, clothing, money and even save their lives.²¹

In contemporary Vietnam, main reasons for conversion between Buddhists and Catholics due to marriage and sometimes economy or faith. These kinds of reasons for conversion to Catholicism have here and there been recorded by lay Buddhists and Catholics. Minh Thnh, a Buddhist who has spent much time in observing evangelical activities, argues that the case that money and material are used for the purpose of conversion has been sometimes found. Proselytizers use money to help the sick in a cloak of charity. They then try to convert the sick and their relatives. Embargo is also used to deal with non-Catholics who are living in parish areas. When this happens, non-Catholics meet difficulties in their business because Catholics do not buy their goods. As soon as they become Catholics, however, their work is supported.²²

The story of an illegal conversion of Mrs Phng is an example. She is a lay Buddhist living in Ho Chi Minh City. In 2010, she was seriously ill and taken into Pham Ngoc Thach hospital for treatment. While she was treated there, some Catholic nuns sometimes visited and prayed for her. On 13 December 2010, she was hastily baptized and given a Catholic name Maria Phng while she was unconscious. Later on, she was taken her house because her health was deteriorating. Her relatives helped her to shave her hair and guide her to recite the Buddha's name before her death in February 2011. Her funeral was held by Buddhist monks and lay Buddhists at her home. However, an article which was written by a priest and posted on media stated that Mrs Phung was a Buddhist nun and chosen by God to be baptized.²³ The story is a clear example of the way through which proselytizers help the sick and then try to convert them.

Nonetheless, conversion to Catholicism through marriage can be said to be as an effective way for Catholics to expand their community in Vietnam today. Before the marriage, a man and a woman have to attend a marriage preparation class (canon. 1063). A marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic can be permitted by the competent authority if the Catholic party “makes a sincere promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church” (canon. 1125). With these regulations, non-Catholics have two choices. Firstly, they must be baptized, i.e., converted. Secondly, if they do not convert, their children will have to be brought up in the Catholic tradition. Both cases bring followers to Catholicism.²⁴ As a result, the majority of non-Catholic people who married Catholics have converted to Catholicism. In 2006, there were 31,576 converts because of marriage, making up one fifth of the new Catholics that year.

In Buddhism, in contrast, conversion is not compulsory in interfaith marriage. In 2007, Zen master Thích Nhất Hạnh discussed with Father Phạm Ngọc Khuê-bishop of Phát Diệm diocese about mixed marriage. The master argues that “a person could practice two religions: Buddhism and Catholicism. It is not necessary to exclude from each other. If a person can overcome his/her narrowed mind and realize that both complement each other, he/she will have an open-minded attitude.” He suggests that when two young persons, one Buddhist and one Catholic, love each other, the family of both sides should permit them to be married. The condition for this marriage is that a man has to accept the tradition of his wife and vice versa. A Buddhist should then study Catholicism and a Catholic should also study Buddhism. Both Buddhist and Catholic should go to church on Sunday and go to temple on the first and the fifteenth days of every lunar month. He also suggests that Buddhism and Catholicism should sign a common contract of mixed marriage.²⁵

Although conversion is said to have become a normal occurrence, it has been concerned by a number of leaders of both religions, particularly Buddhist side. Buddhists argue that the issue of conversion, to a certain extent, has caused tension or conflict between the two communities. Catholics have not agreed such an argument. Instead, Catholics insisted that politics was the cause of tension or conflict between the two religions before 1975 and that there have been no tension after that year.

Converting to Catholicism has brought about some problems to Vietnamese society. Under the Nguyễn dynasty (1802-1945), the royal court forbade and expelled several foreign missionaries as well as forbidding conversion. Several Catholics were arrested and killed because of their resistance to the court’s ban. On the pretext of protesting the conversion ban, the French invaded and colonized Vietnam for nearly 100 years (1858-1954). The unintended consequence also took place under the Diệm regime that supported Catholicism and repressed Buddhism. Buddhists held a number of demonstrations to protest the unjust religious policies issued by the Diệm government in 1963. As a result, several Buddhists were arrested and killed. The corollary of conversion has impacted not only on Buddhists’ life but also on Vietnamese society.

Tension or conflict between the two religions has sometimes taken place because of the issue of politics and conversion. Under the support of the French colonists, Catholicism got favorable conditions for its expansion. The missionaries had not only supreme power in religious and cultural matters, but equally in social, economic and political ones. Some priests abused their position to order soldiers to destroy Buddhist temples and replace Buddhist images with the Cross or the Virgin Mary.²⁶ A number of

Buddhist temples were taken for constructing Catholic churches. For example, Nhà Thờ Đức Bà Saigon (Saigon Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica) was built on top of a Vietnamese temple in 1887. Nhà Thờ Lớn Hà Nội (Saint Joseph Cathedral) was built in 1886 on the ground of chùa Báo Thiên (Báo Thiên temple) [one of the four great national vessels constructed by the Lý dynasty]. Basilica of Our Lady of La Vang was constructed on top of chùa Lá Vàng (Lá Vàng temple), Quảng Trị province.²⁷

The policy of favoritism towards Catholicism and discrimination against Buddhism caused conflict between Buddhism and the Catholic government and between Buddhists and Catholics in 1963. Buddhists organized demonstrations in order to oppose the discriminatory policy and defend its communities. Consequently, strife between lay Buddhists and Catholics sometimes took place. There were clashes between extremist lay Buddhists and Catholics at the Saigon radio station and at a newspaper building in Saigon, in Huế, Quy Nhơn, Đà Nẵng, and so on. Several Catholic buildings were attacked by the Buddhists and the Catholics did the same to Buddhist buildings.²⁸

Regarding dialogue between Buddhists and Catholics, it has reflected in debates and visits. It is believed that there were some debates between Catholicism and Buddhism before French rule. They were debate between Father Rhodes and some Buddhist monks in Thăng Long (Hà Nội now) in 1627,²⁹ public debate at the Nguyệt Đường temple between Zen master Hương Hải and three Catholic missionaries namely Tài Gia, Tài Hữu and Tài Chi,³⁰ and debate under the reign of King Lê Hiến Tông or Lê Cảnh Hưng (r.1740-1786) which was recorded in the book entitled *Hội Đồng Tứ Giáo* (Conference of Four Religions).³¹

Since the 1960s, Catholicism has initiated and sustained attempts of interfaith dialogue but it has not yet brought the expected results in Vietnam.³² After the Buddhists protested against the Diệm regime in 1963, an interfaith council was founded in 1964 aiming at searching for resolutions for the political and religious conflicts and ending the war. However, its activity was not effective because the representatives of the involved religions did not meet the common purpose. Until 2009, Diocesan Commission for Interfaith Dialogue of Ho Chi Minh City archdiocese was established. The purposes of this commission include: “to learn the teachings and practice of other major religions in diocese; to visit and talk with followers of other religions in order to build friendship, to increase understanding each other, and if any to cooperate in aspects of charity and public welfare; and to hold interfaith meetings in order to exchange experience of religious life and to share Catholic faith to other religionists.”³³ However, the relations between Buddhists and Catholics in terms of dialogue in words and cooperation have not been established so far.

After 1975, the relations between Buddhists and Catholics in Vietnam have been normal at least in the aspect of social exchange. This result is in part attributable to the state policy which stipulates that all religions are equal according to the law. Leaders of Catholicism and Buddhism often pay a visit to each other on major celebrations of the two religions.

In recent years, the Catholic Church has been keen to learn about Buddhism in order to find similar points between the two religions, which evangelists can employ in comparing Buddhist teachings with the Bible and in spreading the gospel to people more effectively. As a result, various aspects of Buddhist studies are taught in major seminaries. Some catechists have been assigned to attend Buddhist courses at Buddhist temples. In particular, a number of monks and nuns have even been invited to preach

or share the Dharma to priests, Catholic nuns, catechists and the practitioners.³⁴ These activities are theoretically believed to be a way of interfaith dialogue between Buddhism and Catholicism.

Buddhist-Catholic relations in Ho Chi Minh City

Background information and people's religious life in Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh City is the largest and the most densely populated city in Vietnam. Its former name is Saigon, which was firstly established in 1623 and officially administered in 1698 by the Nguyễn lords. The city's name was changed into Ho Chi Minh City in 1976.³⁵ According to the 2012 census, it covers an area of 2095.6 km² with a population of 7,681,700 people.³⁶ As the center of education, commerce, business, and so on, it has appealed to a great number of people across the country to come for working, and studying. Therefore, a real number of population exceeds the above statistics. In the 2009 census, it was reported that 1,983,048 people registered their religious status, making up 27.68% of the population of the city. Buddhism had 1,164,930 followers, accounting for 16.26%. Catholicism had 745,283 followers, accounting for 10.4%.³⁷ Because of relying on the number of registered people, this statistics should be only regarded as a rough estimate. Practically, many people having sympathy with Buddhism (going to the temple for worship and prayer) have not been counted to make the accurate statistics.

Both Buddhism and Catholicism entered Ho Chi Minh City at the first days of the city's establishment. Buddhism was introduced to this region through three routes. The first was from the central Vietnam. It was spread by Vietnamese monks and lay people and Chinese people in the seventeenth century via the land route. The second was from China by Chinese monks and lay people in the seventeenth century via the sea route. These Buddhists practiced Mahayana Buddhism. In the 1930s, Vietnamese monks and lay people spread Theravada Buddhism from Cambodia to Vietnam via the land route.³⁸ Nowadays, two Buddhist traditions and the Mendicant Sect (Khất Sĩ), a Buddhist sect established in Vietnam in the 1940s, conduct Buddhist affairs in line with the charter of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and the state law.

Catholicism was also introduced to Ho Chi Minh City from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century. It was firstly introduced by Jesuit missionaries and their followers who came from central Vietnam in the seventeenth century. In the middle nineteenth century when the French invaded Saigon, a number of Catholics, who lived in Quảng Nam and Đà Nẵng provinces, arrived in Saigon with the French. From 1954 to 1955, a large number of Catholics came to the South and Saigon from the North after the Geneva Accord which temporarily ended the war in Vietnam and resulted in the partition of the country.³⁹ The history of the diocese had therefore some changes. In 1665, the diocese belonged to Cochinchina (đàng trong). It then belonged to western Cochinchina (tây đàng trong) from 1844 to 1924. Later on, it was called the Sài Gòn (Saigon) diocese from 1924 to 1960, Saigon archdiocese from 1960 to 1976, and it has become Ho Chi Minh City archdiocese from 1975 to now.⁴⁰

An overview of the fieldwork and informants

I have selected Ho Chi Minh City as the research site of my fieldwork because it is a large and densely populated city with sizable Buddhist and Catholic communities that

have lived side by side for a long period of time. The long history of Buddhist-Catholic relations has seen a numerous attempts of conversion from the Catholic side and tensions arising from such attempts. This has influenced their relations, daily religious practice and attitudes towards conversion, and provides a useful example of how Buddhist-Catholic relations have unfolded in contemporary Vietnam.

The survey is a qualitative one. It targeted two groups of informants. The first group consists of Buddhist monks who were temple abbots or ordained monks of Buddhist temples and lay Buddhists who were living and working in Ho Chi Minh City. The second group comprises Catholic priests who were serving at Catholic parish churches and lay Catholics in the same city. The Buddhist monks and Catholic priests were representatives of major temples and major churches in Ho Chi Minh City respectively. Lay Buddhists and lay Catholics were also chosen from these major temples and churches respectively.

The survey employed two methods in collecting data: interview and questionnaire. While the questionnaire was a means of seeking responses from lay Buddhists and Catholics, interviews were used to obtain information from clergies of both religions. Through interviews, extra information relevant to the topic was acquired. The present investigation used an interview that included a number of open-ended questions in order to obtain 'depth' information. Because the survey was conducted on a non-anonymous principle, the information of respondents' personal circumstances has allowed a deeper analysis of the data.⁴¹

In a list of potential interviewees, the target number of responses was limited to three Buddhist monks and three Catholic priests. I interviewed Buddhist monks at three Buddhist temples including Xá Lợi temple in district Three, Thiên Tôn temple in district Five, and Từ Quang temple in Thủ Đức district. For Catholic priests, I interviewed them at their places including Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic church in district One, St Francis Xavier church in district Five, and Pastoral Center of Archdiocese Ho Chi Minh City.

As for responses to the questionnaire, there were a total of one hundred Buddhists' and sixty Catholics' responses. Responses were sought from Catholics and Buddhists living in a number of districts of Ho Chi Minh City involving those mentioned above.

The survey was conducted for around 3 months from August to October 2015. The method of contact included writing, phone call, email, and contact in person. All responses are found in the Appendix A and Appendix B.

Buddhist side

There were three responses provided by three Buddhist monks from three temples. The respondents had a university degree. One had a Ph.D degree and the remainder had a BA degree. They were temple abbots.

As respondents are Vietnamese natives who were living in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. Therefore, they could express completely their views. However, when contacted, they were reluctant to giving their views, on the grounds that they had little knowledge of these relations and were afraid of causing conflict with the other religion. The respondents regarded Buddhist-

Catholic relations as bad before 1975, and normal or friendly after this year. Their responses reflected their concerns about the issue of conversion between the followers of the two religions.

The relations that respondents had with Catholics in Vietnam were limited. One of them sometimes had worked with Catholics in their research.⁴² The remainder had only met Catholics at their temples in cases of communication and visit.

Regarding tension between the two religions, the respondents argued that there was tension before 1975, particularly in 1963.⁴³ After 1975, they contended that there was sometimes tension. They agreed that the causes of tension included conversion, politics and the difference of point of views. They expressed their worries about conversion because it impacted the Buddhist community.

Regarding lay Buddhists, there were a total of one hundred responses, provided by one hundred lay Buddhists belonging to the aforementioned temples. Among them, thirty-one percent (31 respondents) were male while sixty-nine percent (69 respondents) female. The age of respondents was relatively old. There were forty percent (40 respondents) over fifty years old, twelve percent (12 respondents) from forty one to fifty, thirty-three percent (33 respondents) from twenty-six to forty, and only fifteen percent (15 respondents) from eighteen to twenty-five. In terms of occupation, the majority of them were civil servant or housewife. They made up twenty-eight (28 respondents) and twenty-six (26 respondents) respectively. The remainders included nine percent (9 respondents) worker (manual laborer), nine percent (9 respondents) student, ten percent (10 respondents) teacher, five percent (5 respondents) merchant and thirteen percent (13 respondents) other jobs. It was noted that fifty-two percent (52 respondents) had their birthplace in other provinces while forty-eight percent (48 respondents) in Ho Chi Minh City. Regarding education, sixty-one percent (61 respondents) graduated college, twenty-nine percent (29 respondents) graduated high school and ten percent (10 respondents) finished junior high school.

Based on the responses of the monks and lay Buddhists, the following sections discuss and analyze their trends and views of relations between the two religions, and of conversion.

Trends and diversity of Buddhists' views of tensions between the two communities

All Buddhist monks, who were interviewed, commented on the issue of tension between the two communities before 1975. They observe that tension between Buddhists and Catholics took place before 1975, particular in the event of 1963, when Buddhists struggled to protest against the Catholic government's policy. They argue that the Diệm regime wanted to expand Catholic communities that were believed to support his policy on the one hand, and suppressed Buddhism and forced Buddhists to take action to protect them on the other. As a result, the relations between the two communities became bad and even there were conflicts between Buddhists and Catholics in some places in 1963. The respondents give a number of causes of tension. Firstly, they have the different views of belief or religious ideology (Chon Khong). Secondly, political intervention or politics is a main reason (Minh Lý,

Chon Khong, Đổng Bôn). Thirdly, religious discrimination is another cause (Minh Lý). And fourthly, the respondents all argue that conversion is a key cause.

After 1975, the respondents all say that the relations between the two communities are normal and friendly. They acknowledge that representatives of the two religions visit each other on major celebrations of Buddhism and Catholicism. They further explain that the two religions are equal according to the policy of the State which advocates national reconciliation and freedom of religion (Minh Lý, Đổng Bôn, Chon Khong). Lay Buddhists and Catholic practitioners can live and work together in their business and in social work such as charity, health care, community events without discrimination (Minh Lý, Đổng Bôn). Đổng Bôn adds that Buddhists and Catholics respect each other, and that several Buddhists are present at Christmas Day as well as Catholics go with their friends to join the Vesak celebration. He also says that Buddhists can marry Catholic partners and vice versa but he does not mention conditions in relation to interfaith marriage.

Nonetheless, the respondents argue that there is some tension between the two religions after 1975. They all argued that the cause of it is mainly conversion which is conducted through interfaith marriage, 'unethical conversion', material or spiritual supports and so on. In addition, tension is also caused by a few individuals who are regarded by the respondents as religious extremists including Buddhists and Catholics in Vietnam and abroad (Chon Khong, Đổng Bôn).

Regarding lay Buddhist respondents, there are twenty-four percent of them (24 respondents) responding that there was tension between the two communities.⁴⁴ However, thirty-nine percent of the respondents (39 respondents) say that conversion is a cause of tension. Other causes include condemnation of teachings,⁴⁵ the difference of views and beliefs, politics, religious discrimination, and religious competition.

The result shows that the majority of the respondents observe that the cause of tension between the two communities is due to politics, discrimination and conversion before 1975 and conversion after 1975. As for the lay Buddhist respondents, they also have the same view with the monks, saying that conversion and politics are main causes of tension. The result also shows that the respondents have some concerns the issue of conversion.

Why do Buddhists worry about conversion?

The respondents all say that conversion is a normal occurrence in that everyone has the right to follow or not to follow a religion. Nonetheless, they say that conversion is one cause of tension between the two communities as noted above and Chon Khong has worries about it. He contends that Buddhists converting to Catholicism because they are seduced, given material support, and due to marital marriage. Regarding lay Buddhist respondents, fifty-one percent of them (51 respondents) also say that conversion affects Buddhist communities.

How do Buddhists maintain the Buddhist community?

All respondents express and suggest that the Dharma dissemination is the crucial way of maintaining the Buddhist community. It is understood through the study and practice of the Dharma. They all argue that it is the only approach carried out and taught

to his disciples by the Buddha at his contemporary time. Hence, they all are preaching the Dharma to Buddhists and suggest that every monk and even lay Buddhists should teach the Dharma to others in line with their own capacity. Nonetheless, the ways of spreading the Dharma carried out by the respondents are different according to their capacity and involvement. In other words, there is not a concrete and common program of the Dharma dissemination for every monk.

According to the respondents' experience and engagement, each respondent provides their own suggestion. Chon Khong suggests organizing Buddhist retreats for youths because the majority of retreats are often set up for old people. He further suggests carrying out the program called "Family Buddhization" and organizing clubs and camps for young people. He himself guides Buddhists to practice daily chanting at his temple. Đồng Bôn emphasizes the study and practice of the Dharma of every monk who is responsible for caring for Buddhists and carrying out Buddhist affairs. He also suggests that Buddhism should gradually get rid of superstition including praying to several gods, drawing lots or casting a horoscope, consulting calendars and so forth. Meanwhile, Minh Lý contends that it is necessary to do social activities such as charity and perform rites⁴⁶ in order to draw Buddhists and non-Buddhists to temple. He explains these forms meet in part the needs of the majority of people. When they go to temple, the Dharma can be taught to them.

In terms of lay Buddhist respondents, the result shows that Buddhists' practice of Buddhism mostly depends on their voluntary will rather than obligation. The percentage of respondents who go to temple every week makes up sixty nine but the rate of youth is very low (15%). In order to maintain the Buddhist community, fifty-four percent of respondents say that they practice Buddhism while forty-six answer that they guide their family, persuade their friends and invite others to practice Buddhism. However, the rate of conversion of Catholics to Buddhism in comparison to that to Catholicism is very low.

The responses of the monk respondents show that the Dharma dissemination mostly depends on temple abbots and individual monks. The respondents all believe that when Buddhists understand the values of Buddhism, they will not convert to other religions including Catholicism. Nonetheless, each respondent suggests a different way of spreading the Dharma to Buddhists. They all have great concern about how to draw young Buddhists to temple because youths do not often go to temple let alone studying the Dharma. This is one of the main reasons resulting in their conversion. The low rate of young Buddhists as noted above reveals that they have not a good enough guideline from their parents. On the other hand, the responses of lay Buddhists also show that they have some concerns about the issue of conversion. I argue that this is a shortcoming of the Buddhist education system in Vietnam.

Catholic side

There were three responses, provided by three priests. Among them, one was parish priest, one was lecturer and one was the head of a pastoral center. One has a Ph.D degree and the rest has a BA degree. Two have worked for over twenty years.

Like the Buddhist monks, the Catholic priests responded to the interviews in Vietnamese. They were also reluctant to express their views of conversion because it

was a sensitive issue. They all agreed there was conflict and tension between Buddhists and Catholics before 1975. They argued that the cause of this problem was politics rather than other reasons such as conversion or religious ideology. Tension, if any, was caused by religious extremists including Buddhists and Catholics.

The priests' responses revealed that Buddhist-Catholic relations gradually improved after 1975. Particularly notable is that, Bảo Lộc, the head of Diocesan Commission for Interfaith Dialogue, has often as a representative of the Church taken part in dialogue with other religions including Buddhism. The Sangha does not have any representative for dialogue.

The responses also showed that the maintenance of the Catholic community was carried out in an organized way. Parish church had a number of associations which worked together to assist parish priest in the management of the Catholic community. All Catholics had to join religious education classes. In addition, a marriage preparation class was compulsory for youth who prepared to get married. The practice of Catholics such as going to church was often observed and reminded by parish priest and his assistants. Therefore, the rate of conversion to other religions was very low.

As for lay Catholics, there were a total of sixty respondents, provided by selected sixty lay Catholics belonging to the aforementioned churches. Among them, forty percent (24 respondents) were male while sixty percent (36 respondents) female. The age of respondents was rather young. There were 33.3% (20 respondents) from eighteen to twenty five years old, 38.3% (23 respondents) from twenty six to forty, fifteen percent (9 respondents) from forty one to fifty, and only 13.3% (8 respondents) over fifty. Regarding occupation, the majority of them was worker (manual laborer) making up 41.6% (25 respondents). The rest included fifteen percent (9 respondents) student, 1.6% (1 respondent) teacher, 13.3% (8 respondents) housewife, five percent (3 respondents) civil servant, 16.6% (10 respondents) merchant and 6.6% (4 respondents) other jobs. Like Buddhists, sixty percent (36 respondents) were born in other provinces while forty percent (24 respondents) in Ho Chi Minh City. As for education, 28.3% (17 respondents) finished junior high school, 46.6% (28 respondents) graduated high school and twenty five percent (10 respondents) graduated college.

Among the respondents, 63.6% of them (38 respondents) were original Catholics and 36.3% of respondents (22 respondents) were converts. Conversion of Buddhists to Catholicism accounted for 25% (15 respondents) and that of those who practiced ancestor veneration made up 11.6% (7 respondents).

Relying on these responses, I discuss trends and views of relations between the two religions and of conversion as follows:

Catholics' reluctance to participate in the survey

As previously noted, religion is a sensitive issue in Vietnam because it is often regarded as related to politics. From the event of 1963 in which the Diệm regime suppressed Buddhism, the relations between Buddhists and Catholics have been more or less affected although they have improved in the recent years. There are very few contacts between the two religions except mutual visits on major celebrations and relationships between Buddhist and Catholic individuals in their work and everyday life.

This partly accounts for why priests are reluctant to respond to the questions. Furthermore, because I (the interviewer) am a Buddhist monk and many of the ‘potential’ Catholic interviewees did not know me, it is understandable that they had some doubt about my stance and intention. During the time I conducted my interviews, I was introduced a priest who is my brother’s friend. He said that he was willing to talk with me about the questions but he could not offer an official text which I can use in my article. He explained that he was not allowed to respond to this issue. Therefore, their decision not to respond to the interview was perhaps ‘wise’.

In regards to the priests who knew my position and purpose through their acquaintances’ introduction, they agree to respond to my interview. Among them, Bảo Lộc openly responded to the questions because he has ever studied abroad, and has experienced in interfaith dialogue for several years. Another reason for the priests’ reluctance to cooperate is that they feel that some representatives of the Church, especially Bảo Lộc, can explain more adequately Catholics’ views on the issues which I asked them about.

Regarding lay Catholics, sixty respondents are good enough to know their views on the issues. However, all the respondents choose “no” to the three questions about “tension between the two communities, the problems behind tension, and conversion as a factor in tension.” Two cases can be inferred from their choice. The first case is that they actually did not aware of tension between the two communities as well as the causes of tension. The second one is that they may reluctant to respond to the questions. Such a choice is perhaps ‘wise’. This response shows that lay Catholics’ views on the relations in term of tension are the same. This is different from the case of lay Buddhists as discussed above. I argue that Catholics are more cautious in their response to religious issues because they feel that their responses may affect their religious life. It is also possible that they did not want to answer because I am a Buddhist monk.

Catholics’ views of Buddhist-Catholic relations before and after 1975

All the priest respondents acknowledge that the relations between the two communities before 1975 (concretely in 1963) were not good. They all observe that the cause of conflict or tension is politics. Two respondents, except Bảo Lộc, say that conversion is not a cause. Nguyễn Văn Đình explains in detail that the causes of tension include intervention of foreigners (Americans), “wrong” propaganda by religious leaders and rulers, and no acceptance of interfaith marriage in the Church. According to Huỳnh Trụ, the tension is caused by a group of extremists. As for Bảo Lộc, he says that the causes include politics, religious discrimination and ‘unethical’ conversion. Only Bảo Lộc mentions conversion as a cause of tension.

All the respondents observe that the relations have improved and become normal and good after 1975. In general, according to them, there is no tension taking place between the two communities.⁴⁷ The followers of the two religions follow the State’s policy and contribute their energy to construct the nation (Nguyễn Văn Đình, Bảo Lộc). Both sides visit each other on major celebrations and join conferences or meetings (Bảo Lộc). Lay Catholics and lay Buddhists live and work peacefully together (Nguyễn Văn Đình). Bảo Lộc also says that

Catholicism expects to cooperate with Buddhism in the fields of study exchange, environment and social work. Huỳnh Trữ and Bảo Lộc talk about the establishment of Commission for Interfaith Dialogue. However, it has not yet played a significant role in the relations between Buddhism and Catholicism. The commission has organized four interfaith conferences at its center while Buddhism has not had its official representatives attending these conferences, except for some Buddhist individuals. In terms of lay Catholics' responses, they all say no tension between the two communities.

How to maintain the Catholic community

According to the above responses, there was a common formula employed by the Catholics to maintain and develop the community. Parish priest and his assistants managed to care for Catholics' religious life. Each parish is divided into several zones which are managed by representatives. Each parish has Parish Pastoral Council and several associations which assist the parish priest. All members of the church are guided to join one of associations. Every church has adult religious education classes for new Catholics and marriage preparation classes for young people. Catholics are encouraged to attend Mass which is carried out twice per day, except Sunday four times. Therefore, the number of Catholics was checked yearly. On the other hand, non-Catholic bride-to be and groom-to be often become Catholics before their marriage (Bảo Lộc). In addition, Migrant Pastoral Committee often assists and encourages young people and workers who are busy in their work to attend Mass (Bảo Lộc). Another key factor which helps to maintain the Catholic community is that Catholics are protected by their family and community and that converting to other religions is considered as a betrayal to their ancestors (Bảo Lộc).

The responses suggest that Catholics have strong belief in God and in the Church. Their steady belief prevents them from conversion and encourages them to frequently go to church. 96.6% of the respondents join Mass every week. Particularly, young generations are cared for well and encouraged to practice religion. They are also educated to keep their faith. When they get married, their partner whether man or woman, often converts to Catholicism rather than converting to the partner's religion. Indeed, 36.3% of the respondents converted to Catholicism via marriage. In sum, it can be said that lay Catholics play a key role in maintaining the Catholic community.

Conclusion

The relations between Buddhists and Catholics can date back to the sixteenth century in Asia and to the nineteenth century in the West. Dialogue and conversion are two main aspects of the relations. Conversion is a controversial problem in some Buddhist countries where Buddhists were converted to Christianity.

The relations between the two religions in Vietnam began in the sixteenth century. They manifest in three aspects: conversion, tension or conflict and dialogue. Conversion is also a controversial issue in Vietnam where majority of Buddhists were converted to Catholicism.

These relations took place in Ho Chi Minh City in seventeenth century. They are also found in three aspects as mentioned above. According to the responses, the relations between the two religions are not good before 1975 because tension between the two religions took place. The Buddhist and Catholic respondents who answered the interviews acknowledge this issue, especially the event of 1963 caused by the Diệm regime. Nonetheless, while the priest respondents (except Bảo Lộc) argue that the cause of the tension is not conversion, monk respondents argue that conversion is one of causes leading to tension. Some lay Buddhists also say that there is tension between the two religions while none of lay Catholics says yes.

After 1975, Buddhist-Catholic relations have gradually become normal and friendly because they have complied with the religious policy of the State. Representatives of the two religions often visit each other on the occasions of Vesak day and Christmas. Furthermore, Catholicism takes efforts to promote the relations including studying Buddhism, inviting Buddhist monks to talk about Buddhism, and suggesting to cooperate with Buddhism in study exchange, environment and social work. It also establishes Diocesan Commission for Interfaith Dialogue which specializes in conducting dialogue with other religions. On the other hand, Buddhism has not established a department for interfaith dialogue.

One of the problems mentioned by Buddhist respondents in discussing the way to maintain their community is conversion. Both Buddhist and Catholic respondents generally agree that people have the right to convert or not to convert. If conversion brings happiness to their life they should convert. However, Buddhist side argues that the practical situation is not like this. The majority of non-Catholics are compelled to join marriage preparation classes taught by priests, and convert to Catholicism due to marriage. As Bảo Lộc said, there are two thousand Catholic and non-Catholic marriages in Ho Chi Minh City yearly. Half of non-Catholics have to convert to Catholicism and half of non-Catholics still keep their religion after marriage. In the second case, their children have to be baptized. The Catholic side explains the Church does not compel non-Catholics to convert but rather Catholic family does. This explanation would not be convincing in interfaith dialogue. Therefore, conversion is still a cause of tension after 1975 and the relations between the two religions are still limited.

The responses of lay Buddhists and lay Catholics show that they have a normal relationship after 1975. They have worked together in business and social work. A number of them go to church or temple, travel each other and exchange their views. Buddhists can marry Catholic partners and vice versa. However, they often avoid discussing the issue of religion because they are afraid that it may harm their feelings. Marital conversion is still an obstacle to the relations between the followers of the two religions.

Endnotes

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⁴³The 1963 event described the conflict between the followers of the two religions.

⁴⁴The question for lay Buddhists is general instead of giving the specific time (i.e. before and after 1975) as the question for monks.

⁴⁵For example, the teachings of Buddhism are condemned by Catholics as ‘superstition’ or ‘evil’ and vice versa.

⁴⁶The rites include Buddhist rites and other rites attached to Buddhism such as praying for the dead, hungry ghosts, praying to gods. Actually, most of temples in Vietnam, particularly temples in countryside areas, often rely on rites for survival. When temple performs rites to meet the needs of people, they donate (pay) an amount of money or gift to temple. This money is used for temple spending.

⁴⁷Tension, if any, is caused by individual extremists but not the Church.

Appendix A

An Interview on Buddhist-Catholic Relations in Ho Chi Minh City

(English translation)

(For Buddhist monks)

The interview has two main purposes. The first is to investigate relations between Buddhists and Catholics according to the comments of Buddhist monks. The second is to understand their positions on conversion and the details of their attempts to maintain their religious communities.

Section A: Personal introduction

- 1. Gender.....
- 2. Age
- 3. Education
- 4. Present position/occupation.....
- 5. Period of experience.....

Section B: Comments

- 1. What were the relations between Buddhists and Catholics in Ho Chi Minh City like before and after 1975? Do you perceive any change in the relations? Please give your views about the relations between the Sangha and the Church and those between followers of the two religions.
 - Relations between the Sangha and the Church
 - Relations between followers of the two religions
- 2. Do you think there is tension between Buddhist and Catholic communities?
- 3. What kinds of problems do you think there are behind the tension?
- 4. Do you think conversion is a major factor in the tension?
- 5. Conversion has been taking place fairly commonly in Ho Chi Minh City and it has sometimes become a controversial problem. Can you provide your comments on the issue of conversion, especially why people convert?
- 6. Are you worried about missionary activities of Catholics trying to convert the members of your communities? Please give details about how your community has been affected?
- 7. What do you do to maintain your religious community? What difficulties do you meet and how do you deal with them in your activities?

An Interview on Buddhist-Catholic Relations in Ho Chi Minh City

(English translation)

(For Catholic priests)

The interview has two main purposes. The first is to investigate relations between Buddhists and Catholics according to the comments of Catholic priests. The second is to understand their positions on conversion and the details of their attempts to maintain their religious communities.

Section A: Personal introduction

- 1. Gender.....

2. Age
3. Education
4. Present position/occupation.....
5. Period of experience.....

Section B: Comments

1. What were the relations between Buddhists and Catholics in Ho Chi Minh City like before and after 1975? Do you perceive any change in the relations? Please give your views about the relations between the Sangha and the Church and those between followers of the two religions.
 Relations between the Sangha and the Church
 Relations between followers of the two religions
2. Do you think there is tension between Buddhist and Catholic communities?
3. What kinds of problems do you think there are behind the tension?
4. Do you think conversion is a major factor in the tension?
5. Conversion has been taking place fairly commonly in Ho Chi Minh City and it has sometimes become a controversial problem. Can you provide your comments on the issue of conversion, especially why people convert?
6. What do you do to maintain your religious community? What difficulties do you meet and how do you deal with them in your activities?

List of the respondents and their views

Table 1 Buddhist monks

	Name	Age	Temple	Education and Position	Conflict/Tension
1	Minh Lý	55	Từ Quang	BA, abbot, Buddhist school lecturer	conversion, politics, religious discrimination
2	Chơn Không	60	Thiên Tôn	BA, abbot	politics, conversion, the difference of beliefs
3	Đồng Bản	59	Xá Lợi	Ph.D, abbot, university lecturer	politics, conversion

Table 2 Catholic priests

	Name	Age	Church	Education and Position	Conflict/Tension
2	Nguyễn Văn Đình	78	Assisi Catholic church	BA, priest, seminary lecturer	politics, “wrong” propagation
3	Huỳnh Tr	71	Xavier church	BA, parish priest	politics
6	Bảo Lộc	55	Pastoral center	Ph.D, seminary lecturer, head of the commission for interfaith dialogue	politics, religious discrimination and conversion

Appendix B

Analysis of Lay Buddhists’ Responses

A Questionnaire on Buddhist-Catholic Relations in Ho Chi Minh City

(English translation)

The purpose of the questionnaire is twofold. The first is to understand the extent and nature of Buddhists’ commitment to their religious tradition and of their involvement

with Catholics. The second is to investigate Buddhists' perception of, and attitude towards conversion.

Results

Section A: Personal details

1. Gender:
 - a. Male: 31 (31%)
 - b. Female: 69 (69%)
2. Age:
 - a. 18 – 25: 15% ($n = 15$)
 - b. 26 – 40: 33% ($n = 33$)
 - c. 41 – 50: 12% ($n = 12$)
 - d. Over 50: 40% ($n = 40$)
3. Occupation:
 - a. Worker: 9% ($n = 9$)
 - b. Student: 9% ($n = 9$)
 - c. Teacher: 10% ($n = 10$)
 - d. Housewife: 26% ($n = 26$)
 - e. Civil servant: 28% ($n = 28$).
 - f. Merchant: 5% ($n = 5$)
 - g. Others: 13% ($n = 13$) include mason, pharmacist, photographer, maid, safe-guard, receptionist, retiree, cashier, tourist guide and reporter.
4. What is your native land/birthplace? 48% of respondents ($n = 48$) in HCMC, 52% of respondents ($n = 52$) in other provinces.
5. What is your education?
 - a. Junior high school: 10% ($n = 10$)
 - b. High school: 29% ($n = 29$)
 - c. College: 61% ($n = 61$)

Section B: Religious affiliation

1. What is your present religious affiliation? They all are Buddhists
2. Have you converted from other religion (including no religion)? Converts make up 6% ($n = 6$).
3. If your response is yes, please answer the following questions:
 - a. What is your previous religion? Ancestor veneration: 5% ($n = 5$), Catholicism: 1% ($n = 1$).
 - b. When did you convert? Two: 8 years ago, one: 1 years ago, two: 3 years ago, and one in 1969.
 - c. Why did you convert?
 - i. Following your partner's tradition: no response
 - ii. Realizing the spiritual values of the doctrine: 6 responses
 - iii. Looking for salvation: no response
 - iv. Looking for consolation or security: one response
 - v. As a consequence of help: no response

- vi. Other reason: no response
- d. How has your life been after your conversion?
 - i. Spiritually: better: 6 responses; no change: no response; worse: no response
 - ii. Materially: better: 6 responses; no change: no response; worse: no response
 - iii. Has your conversion triggered any difficulty to your life? One response (Catholic)
 - iv. Are you overall happy with your present religion? 6 respondents answer yes

Section C: Involvement with your own religion

1. How often do you go to Buddhist temple?
 - a. Every day: 25% ($n = 25$)
 - b. 3 – 4 times a week: 28% ($n = 28$)
 - c. Once a week: 16% ($n = 16$)
 - d. Once or twice a month: 21% ($n = 21$)
 - e. A few times a year: 6% ($n = 6$)
 - f. Once a year: 3% ($n = 3$)
2. What do you usually do there?
 - a. Prayer/ recitation: 79 responses
 - b. Studying religion: 46 responses
 - c. Giving your assistance: 36 responses
 - d. Other reasons: visit, 2 responses
3. With whom do you go there?
 - a. Your family: 38 responses
 - b. Your friends/colleagues: 36 responses
 - c. Your neighbors: 10 responses
 - d. Alone: 16 responses

Section D: Relations with Catholics

1. Do you have relations with Catholics? There are 46 responses “no” (46%), 54 responses “yes” (54%). Those who have relations with Catholics continue responding to the following questions:
 - a. Do you have Catholics in your family? There are 29 responses for yes.
 - i. Parents: 1 response
 - ii. Partner: no response
 - iii. Children: 3 responses
 - iv. Your relatives: 25 responses
 - b. How is this relation?
 - i. Good: 14 responses
 - ii. Normal: 15 responses.
 - iii. Difficult: no response
 - c. Do you have friends/ colleagues/ neighbors who are Catholics? There are 52 responses for yes. The relations are:
 - i. Good: 21 responses
 - ii. Normal: 31 responses

- iii. Difficult: no response
- d. What do you do with your Catholic friends/ colleagues/ neighbors?
 - i. Sharing your religion with them: 17 responses
 - ii. Going with them to church: 3 responses
 - iii. Going with them to Buddhist temple: 8 responses
 - iv. Cooperating with them in your business: 15 responses
 - v. Cooperating with them in charity: 18 responses
 - vi. Other: 6 responses (social exchange)
- 2. Do you think there is tension between Buddhist and Catholic communities? 76% of respondents ($n = 76$) say no and 24% of respondents ($n = 24$) say yes.
- 3. What kinds of problems do you think there are behind the tension? 72% of respondents ($n = 72$) don't respond while 28% of respondents ($n = 28$) give a number of problems including condemnation, different religious beliefs, politics, religious discrimination, conversion, expansion of religion, marital conversion and religious competition.
- 4. Do you think conversion is a major factor in the tension? 39% of respondents ($n = 39$) say conversion is one cause while 61% of respondents ($n = 61$) don't respond.
- 5. What do you think about conversion?
 - a. One should not convert: 19 responses
 - b. One should be free to convert to other religion if they choose to do so: 67 responses
 - c. It is good if they convert to Buddhism: 14 responses
 - d. Others: no response
- 6. Do you think conversion affects your community? 51% of respondents ($n = 51$) say yes while 49% of respondents ($n = 49$) say no. However, they don't know how to prevent conversion, except for practice of Buddhism.

Section E: Maintenance of your own religion

- 1. Have you tried to introduce your religion to Catholics? 31% of respondents ($n = 31$) say yes while 69% of respondents ($n = 69$) say no. 31 respondents give their responses as follows:
 - a. Communicating with others about your religion: 19 responses
 - b. Providing religious books, CDs, VCDs, DVDs: 15 responses
 - c. Inviting them to join Dharma talks: 12 responses
 - d. Other: 2 responses (talking about religion in general)
- 2. What do you do to maintain your religious community?
 - a. Guiding your family to follow your tradition: 44 responses
 - b. Persuading your relatives/friends/colleagues to follow your tradition: 20 responses
 - c. Inviting others to become followers of your religion: 10 responses
 - d. Other: 54 responses. They include going to temple and practicing the Buddha's teachings.

Analysis of Lay Catholics' Responses

A Questionnaire on Buddhist-Catholic Relations in Ho Chi Minh City

(English translation)

The purpose of the questionnaire is twofold. The first is to understand the extent and nature of Catholics' commitment to their religious tradition and of their involvement with Buddhists. The second is to investigate Catholics' perception of, and attitude towards conversion.

Results

Section A: Personal details

1. Gender:
 - a. Male: 24 (40%)
 - b. Female: 36 (60%)
2. Age:
 - a. 18 – 25: 33.3% ($n = 20$)
 - b. 26 – 40: 38.3% ($n = 23$)
 - c. 41 – 50: 15% ($n = 9$)
 - d. Over 50: 13.3% ($n = 8$)
3. Occupation:
 - a. Worker: 41.6% ($n = 25$)
 - b. Student: 15% ($n = 9$)
 - c. Teacher: 1.6% ($n = 1$)
 - d. Housewife: 13.3% ($n = 8$)
 - e. Civil servant: 5% ($n = 3$)
 - f. Merchant: 16.6% ($n = 10$)
 - g. Others: 6.6% ($n = 4$): accountants, retiree, engineer
4. What is your native land? 40% of respondents ($n = 24$) in HCMC, 60% of respondents ($n = 36$) in other provinces
5. What is your education?
 - a. Junior high school: 28.3% ($n = 17$)
 - b. High school: 46.6% ($n = 28$)
 - c. College: 25% ($n = 15$)

Section B: Religious affiliation

1. What is your present religious affiliation? They all are Catholics
2. Have you converted from other religion (including no religion)? Converts make up 36.6% ($n = 22$).
3. If your response is yes, please answer the following questions:
 - a. What is your previous religion? Buddhism: 25% ($n = 15$), ancestor veneration: 11.6% ($n = 7$)
 - b. When did you convert? The time of conversion was arranged from some months to twenty years.
 - c. Why did you convert?
 - i. Following your partner's tradition: 17 responses
 - ii. Realizing the spiritual values of the doctrine: 6 responses
 - iii. Looking for salvation: 3 responses

- iv. Looking for consolation or security: 4 responses
- v. As a consequence of help: 1 response
- vi. Other reasons: no response
- d. How has your life been after your conversion?
 - i. Spiritually: better:16 responses; no change: 6 responses; worse: no response
 - ii. Materially: better: 3 responses; no change: 19 responses; worse: no response
 - iii. Has your conversion triggered any difficulty to your life? 22 respondents answer no
 - iv. Are you overall happy with your present religion? 21 respondents say yes while one says no.

Section C: Involvement with your own religion

1. How often do you go to church?
 - a. Every day: 11.6% ($n = 7$)
 - b. 3 – 4 times a week: 33.3% ($n = 20$)
 - c. Once a week: 51.6% ($n = 31$)
 - d. Once a month: 3.3% ($n = 2$)
 - e. A few times a year: no response
 - f. Once a year: no response
2. What do you usually do there?
 - a. Prayer/ recitation: 57 responses
 - b. Studying religion: 11 responses
 - c. Giving your assistance: 6 responses
 - d. Other reasons: no response
3. With whom do you go there?
 - a. Your family: 47 responses
 - b. Your friends/colleagues: 23 responses
 - c. Your neighbors: 5 responses
 - d. Alone: 2 responses

Section D: Relations with Buddhists

1. Do you have relations with Buddhists? 66.6% of respondents ($n = 40$) answer yes while 33.3% of respondents ($n = 20$) say no. Their relations reflect as follows:
 - a. Do you have Buddhists in your family? There are 24 responses for “yes.” These responses give details as follows:
 - i. Parents: 17 responses
 - ii. Partner: 4 responses
 - iii. Children: no response
 - iv. Your relatives: 23 responses
 - b. How is this relation?
 - i. Good: 12 responses
 - ii. Normal: 12 responses
 - iii. Difficult: no response
 - c. Do you have friends/ colleagues/ neighbors who are Buddhists? There are 37 responses for “yes.” The relations are:

- i. Good: 12 responses
- ii. Normal: 25 responses
- iii. Difficult: no response
- d. What do you do with your Buddhist friends/ colleagues/ neighbors?
 - i. Sharing your religion with them: 10 responses
 - ii. Going with them to Buddhist temple: 1 response
 - iii. Going with them to church: 2 responses
 - iv. Cooperating with them in your business: 18 responses
 - v. Cooperating with them in charity: 11 responses
 - vi. Other: 9 responses (social exchange)
- 3. Do you think there is tension between Buddhist and Catholic communities? All the respondents say no.
- 4. What kinds of problems do you think there are behind the tension? All the respondents say no.
- 5. Do you think conversion is a major factor in the tension? All the respondents say no.
- 6. What do you think about conversion?
 - a. One should not convert: 34 responses
 - b. One should be free to convert to other religion if they choose to do so: 22 responses
 - c. It is good if they convert to Catholicism: 19 responses
 - d. Other: no response
- 7. Do you think conversion affects your community? All the respondents say no.

Section E: Maintenance of your own religion

- 1. Have you tried to introduce your religion to Buddhists? 45% of respondents ($n = 27$) say yes while 65% of respondents ($n = 33$) say no.
 - a. Communicating with others about your religion: 21 responses
 - b. Providing religious books, CDs, VCDs, DVDs: 1 response
 - c. Inviting them to join Mass: 13 responses
 - d. Other: 2 responses of pilgrimage
- 2. What do you do to maintain your religious community?
 - a. Guiding your family to follow your tradition: 9 responses
 - b. Persuading your relatives/friends/colleagues to follow your tradition: 1 response
 - c. Inviting others to become followers of your religion: 1 response
 - d. Other: 57 responses. They include going to church, practicing Jesus's teachings and practicing one's faith.

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