IMPACT OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON THE INTERRELIGIOUS RELATION BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM AND OTHER RELIGIONS - A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

MR. HOANG DO BA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts In Religious Studies

Graduate School of Philosophy and religion
Assumption University
Bangkok, Thailand
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ACADEMIC YEAR: 2015

The Graduate Programs of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University, has approved this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies.

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ABSTRACT

In the entire history of the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council is considered as one of the Councils that made great changes in the Catholic World. This Council made a significant change in the field of interreligious dialogue. Through its official documents, the Second Vatican Council encouraged its children to enter into dialogue with members of other faiths, discovering “the seed of the Word” in other religious traditions, collaborating with them in every possible activity. This change has left impact on the Catholic Church in Vietnam in its relation to members of other religious traditions.

This research aims at investigating the change of the attitude of the Second Vatican Council towards other religions; at the same time, the researcher also wishes to discover the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the interreligious relation between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religions. Inspired by the teachings of the Second Vatican
Council, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has initiated many interreligious activities that contributed to better understanding between Catholics and followers of other faiths. With this initiative, there is hope for better understanding between Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religious traditions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Rev. Br. Dr. Bancha Saenghiran, President of Assumption University, who kindly granted me scholarship to study at Assumption University. I am also grateful to the community of Brothers of St. Gabriel, Assumption University for their generous support and encouragement.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Veerachart Nimanong. This thesis would not have been completed without his advice and helpful assistance. I would also like to offer my special thanks to all the professors at the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University for their guidance and encouragement: Dr. Warayuth Sriwarakuel, Rev. Dr. Nghi Dinh, Dr. Subhavadee Numkanisorn, Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf, Dr. Roman Meinhold, Dr. John T. Giordano, Dr. Kajompat Tangyin, Dr. Joseph I. Fernando. I am deeply indebted to them for their moral support.

I am especially grateful to Arjarn Wanida Nanthavanij for her patience in helping me checking and correcting my English.

I also wish to express my gratitude to members of the Dominican community in Bangkok without whose support this thesis would not have been possible. For them I am deeply grateful.
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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS

Jn : Gospel of St. John
Mk : Gospel of St. Mark
1Pt : The first letter of St. Peter
NA: Nostra Aetate
GS : Gaudium et Spes
LG : Lumen Gentium.
FABC : Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Significance of Research

Nowadays we are living in a world of globalization. This affects every aspect of our life, politically, economically, culturally, religiously, etc. With the advancement of technology, people from any corner of the world can come into contact with one another easily and rapidly regardless of the distance and the difference of their cultures and religious beliefs. In this multicultural world, it is unavoidable for believers from different cultures and religions to communicate with one another. There arises some questions: Why is it difficult and sometimes impossible to understand people from other cultures and religions? Religions are often blamed for conflicts and wars. Is that blame fair and justifiable? It is undeniable that relationship plays an important part in the situation of the world: a world of conflicts and wars or a world of cooperation and peace. Each religion has its own attitude to this reality.

Among the great religions in the world, the Catholic Church plays an important role due to its position and its large number of followers. Facing this multi-cultural and multi-religious world, the Catholic Church chooses dialogue as the way to interact with believers of other religions, and its official teachings on this can be found in documents of the Second Vatican Council. To its own members, the Church encourages them to accept others as they are in their religious traditions. To followers of other faiths, the Church invites them to a sincere and open dialogue.

The Second Vatican Council is seen as open and positive to other religions. This Council made a significant change in the field of interreligious dialogue. Through its
official documents, it guides all the Catholic members on the matter of inter-religious relations.

In the Catholic perspective, one can clearly see the marked change in the Catholic Church before and after the Second Vatican Council. Generally, before the Second Vatican Council, the attitude of the Church towards other believers and religions can be summarized through the proposition "Extra Ecclesiam nulla salut!" (Outside the Church, there is no salvation). This has been the official teaching of the Church for a long time. There needs to be many discussions on this proposition: "There is but one universal church of the faithful outside which no one at all is saved" (Denzinger, 2002, p.169). This is a negative and exclusive viewpoint towards other religious traditions and its members. Anyway, this proposition has been a dominant theme in Catholic theology until the Second Vatican Council. The above perspective is a negative attitude and holds an exclusivist view towards other religions. And this theological proposition has influenced the Church’s relationship with other religions in every aspect; or we can say: there is not a good bridge between the Church and other religions.

The Second Vatican Council is a turning point that marks the change of the Catholic Church towards other religions. One cannot see the Church’s exclusivism anymore. The Catholic Church now chooses interfaith dialogue as the way to relate to followers of other religions. Through the Church’s official documents, we can see a positive attitude towards other religions. That is the reason why Vatican II has been considered as the ‘turning point’ of the attitude of the Catholic Church towards other religions. Discussing this, the Secretariat for Non-Christian comments in its documents that:

“The Second Vatican Council has marked a new landmark in the relations of the Church with the followers of other religions. Many Conciliar documents made explicit reference to them, and one in particular, the declaration Nostra
Aetate, is entirely dedicated to the relations between the Catholic Church and Non-Christian religions." (Gioia, 1997, p.566)

Reading the documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly those relating to other religions, one can easily see the change in its attitude. Leaving the theological view of exclusivism behind, the Second Vatican Council chose a different attitude towards other religions. This attitude can be seen as opening and welcoming, as Cardinal Francis Arinze comments in his book Church in Dialogue, Talking with Other Believers that:

"One of the ways in which the Vatican Council showed this concern was in its reflection on and articulation of the relationship between the Church and other religions which do not believe in Jesus Christ. This attitude is placed in the context of the general spirit of the Council, which is that of openness, welcome, and promotion of unity and building of bridges." (Arinze, 1990, 160)

Interfaith dialogue is the definite choice of Vatican II. Instead of rejecting or confronting, now the Catholic Church made a bold step to communicate with other religions. As no one can deny that nowadays "interreligious dialogue is not optional. It is obligatory" (Arinze, 1990, p.182). In a world that is more globalized and interdependent, relations among religions play an important part in building peace in the world. The post-Vatican II Church is committed to interreligious dialogue as a way to join hands with followers of other religions to build peace and to enrich itself. In order to reach this commitment, the Catholic Church itself has endured a radical change in theology; and this is the result of a long and difficult journey. As Francis Arinze reflects: "On 13 April 1986 the Pope visited the Jewish synagogue in Rome. In terms of distance, the journey from the Vatican was a mere two kilometers. In terms of history, the journey spanned almost two millennia" (Arinze, 1990, pp.173-174). This is to prove that in the field of
interreligious dialogue, it is not easy to make the first step; and it is more difficult to establish friendship.

The main reason that the Catholic Church chooses interfaith dialogue is that it realizes positive values in other religions. These values have been the ways of life, the experiences, and the wisdom of human beings. They have really been the great treasure of humanity. Analyzing this, Francis Arinze writes:

"These religions are the ways of life of a greater part of humanity. They are the living expressions of the souls of vast group of people. They carry with them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to live, how to pray and how to die. The Catholic Church therefore cannot afford to ignore them." (Arinze, 1990, p.166)

These values can be the beauty, the goodness, the truth; and everything that is good, beautiful and true comes from the same Ultimate Reality or God, as Vatican II states:

"The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although different in many ways from her own teachings, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men." (Gioia, 1997, p.38)

Another point is that, the Second Vatican Council saw in other religions spiritual values and thus urged the faithful to respect and foster those values:

"The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men." (Gioia, 1997, p.38)

Through its documents, Vatican II made it clear that it highly appreciates spiritual values in other religions; those values, as in the words of the Council, can be 'contemplation values', 'elements of truth and grace' or 'Seeds of the Word'.
Last but not least, the Second Vatican Council also saw in other religions God’s plan. The followers of other religions can also be saved: “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation” (Gioia, 1997, p. 42).

Through all these reasons, the Second Vatican Council chose interfaith dialogue as the way to cooperate with believers of other religions and she demands her children to follow that way. The Council stated clearly in its document *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) that, “Since God the Father is the beginning and the end of all things, we are all called to be brothers; we ought to work together without violence and without deceit to build up the world in a spirit of genuine peace” (GS, 92).

That open and positive attitude of Vatican II has had much influence on its local churches; among those is the Catholic Church in Vietnam. Having an overview on the history of relations between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religions, one can see clearly the impact of the Second Vatican Council. In the past, there was a big wall between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religions. For a long time, people of different religions lived separately; there are ‘villages of Catholic’ versus ‘villages of Gentiles’; there is the separation between ‘giao’ (Catholic) and ‘luong’ (non-Catholic). There had been little contact or cooperation among them. There had been doubt, misunderstanding, or even confrontation among members of different religions. Even though there were no religious wars, the relations among religions in Vietnam, for a long history, could be considered as negative. Besides, as a consequence of political conflicts, the relations between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religions have been
abused. This created some misunderstandings and tension among followers of different religions.

In order to have a better view of the situation, it is necessary to mention briefly some main religions in Vietnam.

Vietnam is a multi-religious nation. Among the religions in Vietnam, some main religions should be mentioned: traditional religions, triple religion (Tam giao in Vietnamese, includes Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism), Christianity, and new religious movements.

Traditionally, the worshipping of ancestors is the most popular cult in Vietnam. Ancestor worship plays a significant role both in family and in social life in Vietnam.

Triple religion (Tam giao) was introduced into Vietnam very early in the history of the country. It has been really absorbed into the life and thought of Vietnamese. The majority of Vietnamese regard themselves as Buddhists even though not all of them actively take part in Buddhist rituals or habitually go to temples. Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam around the first century BCE by the Chinese who ruled over Vietnam, and their long domination over 10 centuries has had a very strong impact on Vietnamese society. At present, the role of Confucianism has been more and more on the decrease. Taoism came into Vietnam around the first century. Even though Taoism had a great influence on Vietnamese way of thinking and life style, now it is also on the decline.

Later on, two great world religions were also introduced into Vietnam, namely Islam and Christianity. Islam came to Vietnam around the 10th century. Its followers are among the Cham people in the central and the south of Vietnam. The Cham people used to be independent with their own kingdom called Chiem kingdom. In the course of history, the kingdom was annexed to Vietnam and the Cham people were intergrated into
Vietnamese society. Even the number of Cham Muslim in Vietnam is quite small, it is unique for its own culture.

The Catholic Church was brought to Vietnam in the 16th century by European missionaries. In the first stage, this religion was foreign to the local people and was considered by the country leaders as the religion of the colonizers. For a long time, Catholicism was forbidden in Vietnam. The Catholic Church also faced the culture gap; and it suffered suspicion and persecutions. Today, the number of Catholic adherents is about 6 million; and that is the second biggest religion in Vietnam.

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Protestant missionaries came to Vietnam. Protestantism in Vietnam has different sects. Among these, only some of them are recognized by the government. These include northern Evangelical Church, southern Evangelical church. Those that are not recognized include the Baptists, Pentecostals, and Mennonites. Protestantism is growing rapidly in Vietnam. Today, the number of Protestants is estimated around 2 millions.

Recently, some local religious movements have emerged, and they also play an important part in the life of Vietnamese people. They are Caodaism and Hoa Hao Buddhism. Caodaism appeared in 1926, and today its followers is estimated at about 2.5 million. This religion is a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Confucianism. Hoa Hao Buddhism is a renewed sect of Buddhism, which was founded in 1939 and was named after its place of birth. This religion soon spread to other provinces in the South of Vietnam. The followers of Hoa Hao Buddhism is around 1 million.

Within this diverse religious background, Vietnam society is much affected by the relations among different religions. In term of the number of adherents, Catholic is the
second largest. Moreover, the Catholic Church is more structured and better organized than any other religion in Vietnam, so it plays an important role in the society.

Within the above background of religions in Vietnam, the researcher would like to investigate the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the attitude of the Vietnamese Catholic towards other religions and its adherents. Putting the teaching of the Second Vatican Council into practice, what has been done by the Catholic adherents in Vietnam? What needs to be done? What positive contribution can the Second Vatican Council bring to Vietnamese multi-religious society? There are different interpretations on the attitude of the Second Vatican Council towards other religions. Some stressed on the positive steps that it made; others pointed out its limits. The researcher entirely agrees with Jacques Dupuis’ idea, when he writes in his book *Toward a Christian Theology of Pluralism* that, the documents of the Second Vatican Council should be seen ‘not as an end product but as a project for a new beginning’ (Dupuis, 2001, p.161). As seen as an end product, it is expected to be perfect and satisfying; while seen as a project or direction, it can be developed further.

Inspired by the Second Vatican Council on the attitude towards other religions, Vietnamese Catholics are more and more open to other religions and their followers. In the field of interreligious relation, many interreligious activities were initiated by the Vietnamese Catholics. There are visitations to other religious members: Buddhism, Islam, Caodaism, Hoa Hao Buddhism. There are meetings as well as cooperation in social work activities.

There has been a change in the attitude of the local church. This can be seen clearly both in the official documents of the Catholic Church in Vietnam and in the attitude of the faithful. The preference for dialogue can be seen in many various documents of the
leaders of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, among these, some main documents are worth mentioning here: Pastoral Letter in the year 1964, the Common Letter in the year 1980, the Common Letter in the year 2001, the Pastoral Letter in the year 2003, etc. Particularly, Vietnamese Catholics are encouraged to respect, cooperate and to enter into dialogue with the adherents of other religions for a fraternal society. In its letter in 1998, Catholic Bishops’ Conference directed the faithful that:

"The faithful are instructed to respect spiritual and moral values in non-Christian religions. All the members of the Catholic Church are invited to enter into ways of cooperation and dialogue with the followers of other religions in order to build a fraternal world." (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam, 1998, p.55)

There are meetings and exchanges that are initiated by Catholic people of different levels: lay people, religious men and women, leaders of religions. Other religions are also taught in Catholic institutes. Religious men and women are encouraged to make contacts with their counterparts in other religions for mutual understanding. Lay people are urged to cooperate with followers of other religions in social work activities. There are many other efforts to improve the relations with other religions. All these are the results of the inspiration from the Second Vatican Council; that is to appreciate all that is good from other religions, to foster values and to work together for a peaceful community even though there are still differences in the ways of living and expressing one’s own faith. This is to prove that under the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council, both leaders and lay people of the Catholic Church in Vietnam have acquired a different attitude. In the past, their attitude was negative. Now it is positive attitude and open towards others.

Some relevant research projects have been done on the relations between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religions; however, so far none of these works have addressed the matter of the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the Catholic Church.
in Vietnam in the field of interreligious dialogue. Without an adequate understanding, Catholic faithfuls in Vietnam may be kept in ignorance and not ready to enter into interreligious dialogue with adherents from other religions. This study intends to make clear this matter.

Through investigating all matters relating to the interreligious relation between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religions, the researcher will critically look into the practice of interreligious dialogue between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religious traditions.

From the Catholic perspective, the researcher hopes that this research will contribute to the improvement of understanding and harmony between the Catholic faithfuls in Vietnam and followers of other religions.

1.2. Thesis statement

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on other religions has greatly influenced the attitude of the Catholic Church in Vietnam towards other religions. Although this is a positive change, it also poses a challenge to the future of the Catholic Church in Vietnam in its own relation to other religions.

1.3. Research Objectives

1.3.1. To examine the attitude of the Second Vatican Council towards other religions, especially in *Nostra Aetate*—Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.

1.3.2. To examine the documents of the Catholic Church in Vietnam concerning its own position towards other religions.
1.3.3. To investigate the influence of Vatican II on the interreligious relations between the Catholic followers in Vietnam and followers of other religions.

1.4. Preceding Relevant Researches and Documents

Relating closely to this study, some studies have been done:

1.4.1. The first book that discusses the relation between the Catholic Church and other religions in Vietnam is *Catholiques et Bouddhistes au Vietnam*, by Piero Gheddo. This book deals with the relation between Catholics and Buddhists during the time of conflicts and wars. During the years of 1960s, Vietnam was plunged into continuous wars. In the south of Vietnam, Catholicism was supported by the ruling government; while Buddhists was supported by communism, an opposite power. In such situation, it was easy for the followers of different religions to become enemies and to have hatred toward other religions. During the period of difficulties, both followers of Buddhism and Catholic were victims. They shared the same pain and suffering. Gheddo found out that, despite the conflicts and wars, Catholics and Buddhists were still encouraged to have the 'spirit of tolerance and dialogue' (Gheddo, 1968, p.17). The author also makes it clear that, there are efforts from both sides to overcome hatred, 'to avoid creating division between Catholic and Buddhism' in order to build a peaceful society (Gheddo, 1968, pp.241-242).

1.4.2. The second research that relates to this topic is *Interreligious Dialogue- The Case of Buddhism and Christianity* by Tran Xuan Chieu. In this research, through comparative methodology, the author mostly focuses on theology of interreligious dialogue, particularly on the two great religions: Buddhism and Christianity. The book includes four chapters. In the first chapter, the author gives a general view of 'theology of Interreligious Dialogue' from the Christian perspectives. The second chapter is about
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the teachings of religious founders, the Buddha and Jesus. The author suggests some ways for practicing interreligious dialogue between the two religions in chapter three. The fourth chapter deals with the practice of interreligious dialogue in Vietnam. The author finds out that: “the Buddhists and Catholic groups are the ideal groups to begin serious or formal dialogue with each other in Vietnam” (Chieu, 2001, p.130).

1.5. Definitions of the Terms Used in the Thesis

Catholic Perspective: The researcher examines the matter in its relevance to the official teachings of the Catholic Church.

The Second Vatican Council/ Vatican II: (1962-1965) is probably the most important Council for the Catholic Church after Nicaea I (325) and the Council of Trent (1545-1563), as it ushered in an era of thorough change in the structures and practices of the Church and in its attitudes towards the modern world (FLinn, 2007, p. 622).

Nostra Aetate (NA): Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions of Vatican II. This is the key document that expresses Vatican II’s attitude to other religions.

Gaudium et Spes (GS): this is one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council. The document stresses of the pastoral activities of the Catholic Church in the modern world.

Lumen Gentium (LG): this is the main document of the Second Vatican Council. The document gives a clear theological view of the position and mission of the Catholic Church.
Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam: This is the most important organization in Vietnamese Catholic Church. It includes all the bishops-leaders of the local church.

Common Letter: special guidance that is officially proclaimed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Pastoral Letter: On special occasions, the Catholic Bishops' Conference or bishops of dioceses would give particular directions for the faithful to guide them in pastoral activities.

1.6. Limitation of the Research

1.6.1. The research will focus on the interreligious relations between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religions from the Catholic point of view.

1.6.2. The researcher will look into the practice of interreligious dialogue initiated by the Catholic, both in official documents and in practice.

1.6.3. The research will investigate the influence of the Second Vatican Council leading to the interreligious activities of the Vietnamese Catholic.

1.6.4. The researcher will evaluate both the progress and the limits of the Catholic Church in Vietnam vis-à-vis the challenge of modern day pluralism.

1.7. Research Methodology

In order that the goal of the study may be reached, the researcher will strictly follow the process of a qualitative research. All the data and information will be collected from various sources. The sources of documents, books, journals, will be gathered from various libraries: Assumption Library, Dominican Institute's Library. Relevant data and
supporting evidence from trustworthy websites will also be used. All the data and information will be critically evaluated, analyzed and critiqued in order to avoid a religious bias view, and to get a complete understanding.
CHAPTER II

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

In order to point out the positive change brought about by the Second Vatican Council, the researcher presents a brief history of the age-old negative viewpoint of the Catholic Church towards other religions. Then, he presents the teachings of the Council itself. Viewpoints that are for and against this teaching are also mentioned.

2.1. Introduction to the Second Vatican Council

In the history of the Catholic Church, there are several events that mark radical changes. The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) is one of the events that has left great changes. This is the 21st Council of the Catholic Church in its entire history. It took place in Vatican City from 1962 to 1965.

During of 1960s, the Catholic Church had to solve problems both within and without. On the one hand, the Church faced new challenges from the modern world. On the other hand, it had to reform itself to be ready for new mission. Catholic Church's boundary was more and more expanding. There was a need to change radically, to leave behind the old mindset. That is the reason why the news about a new ecumenical Council drew much attention not only in the Catholic Church but also from others as well. To describe the enthusiasm for opening of the Second Vatican Council, one writer comments that, "The announcement of the Council and the years of its preparation had created

1 In the Catholic Church, a Council has the supreme authority and full power over the entire Church.
widespread interest both within and without the Catholic Church” (Trisco & Komonchak, 2003, p.409).

Because the Second Vatican Council took place in a period of new movements, discoveries, thoughts, there was a high expectation for change in the Council. Commenting on this, Frank K. Linn writes in his book Encyclopedia of Catholicism that, “The operative word on everyone’s tongue was the Italian aggiornamento, ‘updating’” (Flinn, 2007, p.622). When the bishops gathered at Vatican II, they brought with them an increasing awareness of, and concern for, people of other faiths (Raitt, Bulman & Parrella, 2006, p. 269).

Having a look at the participants, one can easily see that: there were both religious and lay people, both Catholic and non-Catholic observers. This is to show that the Catholic Church was serious in its effort to adjust and to reform itself in order to be up-to-date with the modern world. Describing the participants of this Council, Frank K. Linn gives some details:

“The Council was truly ecumenical, with representatives from around the world, including non-Catholics. ... There were more than 3,000 participants, including bishops, theological experts, called periti, lay Catholics, members of orders, including nuns, and non-Catholic observers.” (Flinn, 2007, p.622)

The Second Vatican Council is important both to Catholic adherents and followers of other religions because it opened a new era in the life of the Church. On the one hand, it was meant to adjust itself to the changing world. On the other hand, it was more open in its relation to other religions. The Second Vatican Council is considered as a reforming Council because it left behind the old mindset and took a new attitude towards other religious traditions and their followers. This is easily seen through the various documents
of the Council. Unlike several preceding Councils, Vatican II was opened not to condemn heresies; rather, it aimed at reforming itself in a changing world and fostering cooperation in a multicultural society. The Council, as seen in the announcement of Pope John XXIII, was expected to reach "a spiritual renewal, reinvigoration of the Church, and updating of its pastoral attitudes" (Trisco & Komonchak, 2003, p. 407).

In the field of relating to other religions, the Second Vatican Council played a significant role. It is the first time, in its official documents, the Council stated clearly and firmly that there is a divine presence in non-Christian religions. Commenting on this, Franklin F. Flinn writes that, "The Council took the daring step of asserting the presence of 'divine mystery' in non-Christian religions; the Church, it declared, rejects "nothing which is true and holy" within them. God can use all for divine purposes" (Flinn, 2007, p. 622).

2.2. The Second Vatican Council's Attitude towards Other Religions

This matter will be discussed in three parts: firstly, a short description of the history of the Catholic Church's attitude to other religions. This is to highlight the difference and the positive side of the Vatican II in the field of relating to other religions. Secondly, the researcher will investigate the official points of view of Vatican II on other religions. Thirdly, in order to have a balanced view, he will have a glimpse of those who support and those who do not concern with Vatican II. Finally, he will discuss about positive steps and the contribution that Vatican II has made to the interreligious relations.

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2 Aggiornamento in Italian. This is one of the key words used in Vatican II. It was used to mean a spirit of change and open-mindedness
2.2.1. History of the Perspectives of the Catholic Church on Other Religions

Mentioning the attitude of the Catholic Church towards other religions, one of the most popular axioms that has been repeated widely is “Outside the Church there is no salvation”. This is a really negative attitude towards other religions and its followers. The dictum gives an impression that only those who belong to the Catholic Church are good. Belonging to the Catholic Church, one is assured of salvation; there is no other way. In order to understand this axiom and its meaning, one needs to trace its origin and its cause.

As we all know, the core teachings of Christianity comes from Jesus. In Jesus’ gospel, one can easily find several teachings that are considered to be exclusive. Among them, some teachings should be noted:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” (Jn 3:16-18, 36)

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn 14:6)

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mk 16:15-16)

According to these gospel passages, Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and man. Only through Him, can one contact God. Only through Him, can one find

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3 in Latin: ‘Extra ecclesiam nulla salus’
eternal salvation. While proclaiming the gospel, more often than not, the apostles of Jesus used these teachings as a way to convert others to become Christians. Gradually, this exclusivist view became popular in the Catholic Church.

Moreover, Jesus himself founded the church as the sacrament of salvation and sent His Apostles into the whole world, just as He himself had been sent by His Father. He gave His Church a mission, an assignment, a task, an apostolate: to evangelise, to bring the Good News of salvation to all men, to be witness of His love and service, to share with all men the superabundant riches of the salvation. Therefore, the Catholic Church is considered as the extended arm of Jesus. It is meant to continue his mission. In the writings of theologians in the beginning period, the role of the Church became more and more important (Arinze, 2005, p.9).

Soon afterward, the axiom “Outside the Church no salvation” appeared. The exclusive view on the role of Jesus is extended to the role of the Church. This is understandable because the Church was founded by Jesus in order to continue his mission. According to Jacques Dupuis, the axiom ‘Outside the Church no salvation’ is usually linked with the name of Saint Cyprian. In order to protect the unity of the Catholic Church and to prevent Catholic adherents from leaving it, Cyprian warned those who intended to follow schismatic groups that, “Be not deceived, my brethen: if anyone follow a maker of schism, he does not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Dupuis, 1997, p.86). Through his profound research on the matter, Jacques Dupuis pointed out that there is a change in the object of the axiom. At first, the axiom is used as a warning to Christians whom they judged to be guilty of the grave sin of heresy and schism. Later on it was widely extended to include Jews and pagans, who do not belong to Catholic Church, as he wrote that:
"It is after the Christian religion had become the official religion of the empire that we find the Church Fathers applying the axiom “Outside the Church no salvation” to the situation of Jews and pagans. As guilt had previously been supposed on the part of heretics and schismatics who had separated themselves from the Church, it is now equally presumed in the case of Jews and pagan who have failed to become Christians." (Dupuis, 1997, p.89)

Initially, the axiom targeted those who are schismatic, preventing them from separating from the Church. At this time, the number of Catholic was still very small; therefore preserving the unity in the Church is one of the vital factors. There is no clear evidence that Cyprian applied this axiom to people who were outside the Catholic Church. Agreeing with this, Sullivan also made clear in his book that, “There is no instance in his writings in which Cyprian explicitly applied his saying: No salvation outside the Church, to the majority of people who were still pagans in his day” (Sullivan, 1992, pp. 22-23).

This matter can also be found in the writings of St. Augustine, one of the greatest theologians in the history of the Catholic Church. Preaching to those who seperated from the Church, St. Augustine reminded them that once separating from the Catholic Church, they are excluded from eternal salvation. He explained clearly that:

“Outside the Church he can have everything except salvation. He can have honor, he can have sacraments, he can sing alleluia, he can respond with Amen, he can have the Gospel, he can hold and preach the faith in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: but nowhere else than in the Catholic church can he find salvation.” (quoted in Sullivan 1992, p. 32)

Through the history, the axiom found its way into the official documents issued by the Church’s teaching authority, both in the teachings of Popes and Councils. Some of the most important documents should be noted:

In the year 1208, the matter was seen in the letter of Pope Innocent III to the archbishop of Tarragona when he stressed the need to belong to the Catholic Church for
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the salvation: "We heartily believe and orally confess the one Church, not of heretics, but the Holy Roman, Catholic, apostolic church, outside which we believe no one can be saved" (quoted in Dupuis, 1997, p. 93).

One century later, the matter is repeated by Pope Boniface VIII in his bull Unam Sanctam (18 November 1302) as follows:

"That there is only one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church we are compelled by faith to believe and hold, and we firmly believe in her and sincerely confess her, outside of whom there is no salvation, no remission of sin.... Furthermore we declare, state and define that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of all people that they submit to the Roman Pontiff." (quoted in Dupuis, 1997, pp. 93-94)

Once again, the axiom was repeated in the fourth Lateran Council (1215) stating, "There is indeed one universal Church of the faithful outside which no one at all is saved" (Dupuis, 1997, p.93). Being inside the Catholic Church is a guarantee for salvation. Once being outside, one can have everything, but salvation.

Through investigating the historical context of the axiom, one can see clearly that the axiom in fact appeared in the period when the Catholic Church was on the defensive against other religions and tried to maintain its unity (Swearer, 1977, p.28). And there was a change in applying the axiom. Clearly, in the beginning, the axiom was used for those who separated from the Church; because all the separation from the Church was seen as a grave sin; and the result was exclusion from salvation. Later on, the axiom was used to include all those who did not belong to the Catholic Church. That is the way the axiom was used to respond to religious difference. To summarize the history of the development of the axiom, Jeannine Hill Fletcher wrote in her article Responding to Religious Difference: Conciliar Perspective that, "While Cyprian directed his charge against other
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Christians and not toward persons of other faiths, it became a central teaching more widely applied to anyone not associated with the Christian Church” (Bulman & Parrella, 2006, p. 277).

Unfortunately, this axiom with its rigid formulation has been the official viewpoint of the Catholic Church for a long time. This has become the symbol of negative attitude of the Catholic Church towards other religions. With this ecclesiocentric attitude, on the one hand, the Catholic Church has considered itself as the one and only way to attain salvation; on the other hand, it created a gap between Catholic followers and adherents of other religious traditions.

2.2.2. The Second Vatican Council: a Turning Point

Having a general view on the history of the attitude of the Catholic Church towards other religions helps us see the positive viewpoints of the Second Vatican Council. As we all know, Vatican II happened at a time when there were great changes in the world. The Catholic Church realized the need to adjust itself to catch up with these changes. At the same time, during this period, there was an increase of the tendency among Christians, demanding “to have a look that is more sympathetically at non-Christian religions” (Swearer, 1977, p.28).

In his opening speech, Pope John XXIII stated clearly the direction of the Second Vatican Council. The Council was not opened to condemn others or errors like preceding Councils. Edmund Chia commented in his book that, “It was not to be a doctrinal Council to arrest heresies- as was Vatican I (which arrested modernity) and Trent (which countered with the Reformation)” (Chia, 2003, p. 31); rather, it prefers “to make use the
medicine of mercy” (John XXIII, 1962). Having a general view of the Council itself and its result, one can realize that all of these really happened.

The changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council can be seen clearly through its entire official documents. One cannot find language of condemnation, excommunication, ecclesial ban, etc… instead, the Council spoke of other religions with positive tongue. Talking about this, Jacques Dupuis comments that, “The Vatican II, let us recall, was the first ecumenical Council to speak of other religions in a positive tone. This is one of its claims to greatness, and not the least of them” (Dupuis, 1997, p.136).

In the field of interreligious relation, Vatican II has really made a significant change in its attitude towards other religions and its followers. The best way to grasp the importance of this viewpoint is to look at its own statements:

_Lumen Gentium_ (LG), Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, section 16 states:

“Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience- those too may achieve eternal salvation. …whatever good or truth is found among them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel.” (LG 16)

_Nostra Aetate (NA), Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christians_, section 2 declares:

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.” (NA, 2)

Through these statements, one can see that Vatican II no longer considered itself as the one and only way to God and eternal salvation. Other religions are also ways of human
being in effort to search for God. In non-Christian religions and cultures, there are also the presence and working of the Holy Spirit. Vatican II is more and more aware of this. Talking about the change in Vatican II’s attitude about the possibility of salvation for followers of other religions, Peter C. Phan comments in his book *Being Religious Interreligiously- An Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* that:

“With regard to the salvation of non-Christians, Vatican II, reversing the Church’s centuries-old condemnation of non-Christians to hell, affirms that ‘those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways.’” (Phan, 2004, p.138)

To summarize, in the field of interreligious dialogue, the Second Vatican Council can be seen as a turning point. This can be realized both in its viewpoints toward other religions and the methods it chose to approach them. On the one hand, other religions were no longer seen as pagans who are de facto excluded from eternal salvation. On the other hand, the Council encouraged its children to enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions. This is the reason why Vatican II, especially through *Nostra Aetate*, urged all Christian followers, while living their faith in everyday life, “to recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men” (NA, 2).

### 2.3. General Views from Other Religions on the Second Vatican Council

Talking about the Second Vatican Council and its change on the attitude toward other religions, there are ideas both agreeing and disagreeing. On the one hand, there are voices that praises Vatican II for its positive changes; on the other hand, there are also opinions that point out the limits of the Council. In order to have a balanced view on the viewpoint of Vatican II on interreligious relation, it is necessary to discuss both ideas for
and against it. For those who agree with Vatican II, the change that it made is and ‘extraordinary change’ (Bristow, 1998, p.56). Those who disagree with Vatican II claimed the Council and its documents were just “new wine in old wineskins”. In order to have a better understanding, it would be helpful to look into details of these stances.

2.3.1. Ideas for the Second Vatican Council

Discussing about the contribution of Vatican II to the relations with other religions in general, Mahmud Aydin wrote in his book Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims Since the Second Vatican Council that, “The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on non-Christian religions has been regarded as an important beginning and an epoch-making breakthrough in the Catholic Church’s relationship with non-Christians and their religious traditions” (Aydin, 2002, p.11). According to him, this is the first time in its entire history, the Catholic Church, in its highest authority has spoken about non-Christian religions as entities which the Church should respect and with which Christians should enter into dialogue. Particularly relation between Catholic and Muslims, Mahmud Aydin points out that the teaching of the Council are positive and useful for interreligious dialogue between Christian and Muslim. He also notes that although the conciliar teaching about non-Christian in general and Muslims in particular has many shortcomings, there are a lot of positive and significant points in this teaching (Aydin, 2002, p. 43).

Through investigating the effect of the changes of Vatican II in the field of interreligious relation, particularly with Muslim, Aydin pointed out that the change of
Catholic attitude has contributed to the interfaith dialogue between the two religions. He summarizes in his book that

“The teaching of the Second Vatican Council made tremendous progress in the way of establishing better relations with Muslims. Without these advances, it can be argued, today’s dialogical relationship between Christian and Muslims would have been much more difficult.” (Aydin, 2002, p. 45)

For the Jewish community, the document of Vatican II is seen as positive and helpful to the relation between Jewish and Catholic. In his book *No Religion Is an Island - the Nostra Aetate Dialogues*, Bristow reveals that the change and openness of Vatican II towards Jews were acceptable and this was really a turning point in the relation between the two religions. Mentioning the positive attitude of the Second Vatican Council, he considers that the Church has produced “an incredible instrument to advance the dialogue” between the two religions (Bristow, 1998, p. 385). Talking about *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, Bristow also points out that:

“Nostra Aetate, primarily through its section devoted to Judaism, has been responsible for an extraordinary change in attitude between Jews and Christians. It provided possibilities for dialogue between Jews and Christians that had never before existed in the history of these two great religions.” (Bristow, 1998, p. 56)

### 2.3.2. Ideas against the Second Vatican Council

Beside viewpoints arguing that Vatican II was positive and contributed much to the interreligious dialogue, there are also ideas that disagree with the teaching of the Council. Through investigating the documents of Vatican II, Mahmud Aydin gives a summary of what he considers as the weakness and the limit of the Council. Mahmud Aydin agrees that Vatican II, for the first time, explicitly cancelled the age-old axiom *Extra Ecclesiam*...
Nulla Salus by stating that there is salvation outside the Church. However, he also makes it clear that, there are still ambiguity in the teaching of the Council: firstly, the Catholic Church still considers that it is necessary for salvation, and that only through Christ, can one find the fullness of the means of salvation. According to him, those positive expressions in the documents of the Council are still insufficient “to establish and develop fruitful dialogue between Christians and non-Christians, because there are a number of expressions which negatively affect the process of dialogue especially with Muslims” (Mahmud Aydin, 2002, pp. 43). Secondly, the teaching of Vatican II reveals some limit as the Council still sees non-Christian religions only as a preparation for the Gospel. Thirdly, the author also argues that the documents of Vatican II indicates a somewhat patronising attitude of the Catholic Church towards other religions. He comments that:

“The Council Fathers tries to patronise non-Christians by seeing their truth as a reflection of the Christian truth which illuminates all the world and by regarding the Catholic Church as the champion of the spiritual, moral social and cultural elements of other religions.” (Aydin, 2002, p.44)

On the relation with Muslims, Aydin notes that: the fact that the documents of Vatican II refers to Muslims and not to Islam implies that the Council “puts stress on individual Muslim men and women and not on their faith” (Aydin, 2002, p.44). According to him, in this way, the Council Fathers do not wish to give the impression that Islam, with all claims it makes, is a means of salvation of their followers (Aydin, 2002, p.44).

Another argument against the viewpoint of Vatican II holds that the documents of Vatican II should be read objectively. People from different religions may have different ideas about the change in the documents of Vatican II. It is easy to see that for those who are Christians, Vatican II is a very positive attitude towards other religions; but for those
who are not Christians, many points are unacceptable. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Vatican II's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate), the Center for the Study of Culture and Values of the Catholic University of America (CUA) and the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C, USA, organized a study that asked the scholars of other religions to contribute ideas and reactions to Nostra Aetate. Talking about the effect of Nostra Aetate on the relation between Hinduism and Christianity, Dr. D.C. Rao, a Hindu professor stated that:

"The original Nostra Aetate when read by a Christian proclaims a great step forward in recognizing the authenticity and value of elements in the other religions. Yet read by non Christians the way in which this is said can sound rather condescending: recognizing certain elements that are true and good in other religions could imply that the rest is erroneous and even evil." (McLean & Hogan eds., 2005, p.16)

Another idea from Dr. Veerachart Nimanong, a Buddhist scholar, also pointed out that Vatican II's document did not touch the significance of Buddhism and of other religions and that Vatican II still did not recognize that other religions, in their own ways, are ways of salvation for their followers. He also made it clear that:

"It is difficult for non-Christians to accept the wording of the Second Vatican Council that: Those who through no fault of their own are still ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church yet sincerely seek God and, with the help of divine grace, strive to do his will as known to them through the voice of their conscience, those men can attain to eternal salvation. This would appear to dismiss the significance of Buddhism or of other religions if salvation is possible despite, rather than through them." (McLean & Hogan, eds., 2005, p.30)

Through investigating viewpoints from other religions, one can see that all agree that there was change in the attitude of the Second Vatican Council; however, that change
was not far as much as expected. It was just a change from exclusivist to inclusivist attitude. Commenting on this, Dennis M. Doyle wrote in his book *The Church Emerging from Vatican II: A Popular Approach to Contemporary Catholicism* that:

“The documents of Vatican II represent a shift from an exclusivist position to an inclusivist position. Christianity is still presented as the final, cosmic truth about the meaning of life. Vatican II says little to emphasize that other religions must still be second best, but such as position is clearly implied in a close reading of the documents.” (Doyle, 1992, p. 271)
CHAPTER III
AN EXAMINATION OF THE OFFICIAL VIEWS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

The viewpoints of the Catholic Church in Vietnam towards other religions can be seen through its official documents. In this chapter, the researcher presents the official teachings of the Catholic Church in Vietnam that reflect its attitude in its relations to other religions. The division before and after Vatican II is meant to stress the difference and change of attitude of the Catholic Church in Vietnam towards other religions and its followers.

3.1. Examination of Official Documents of the Catholic Church in Vietnam on the Relations towards Other Religions

3.1.1. Before the Second Vatican Council

Generally speaking, from the time Christianity was introduced into Vietnam to the period before the Second Vatican Council, the relation between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other religions can be considered as negative. Even though between them there was no religious war, there were misunderstandings and conflicts. There was little or no contact between Catholic followers and adherents of other religious traditions. Before Vatican II, through missionaries, Catholic followers in Vietnam inherited a negative view from the Catholic Church towards other religions.
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To begin with, Christianity was introduced into Vietnam in the period when Western colonial power tried to put Vietnam under its domination. This made Christianity look like an extended arm of Western colonial powers. Linked to the work of colonialism, the efforts of evangelization cast doubts in the minds of the national government and the indigenous population. For a long time, Christianity was persecuted. The history of Christianity in Vietnam is a history of persecution and suffering. The problem became more complicated from the end of the 19th century when Vietnam was under French occupation. The colonial administration supported the Catholics to reinforce its power. The Catholics were given privileges while other religions were treated badly. This created discontent among the people of other faiths.

Secondly, during the time of early evangelization, missionaries tried to denigrate other religions. One of the methods often used by missionaries was that they tried to point out that doctrines and teachings of other religions are erroneous. According to them, before introducing Christian faith and doctrine to local people, their “superstitious” beliefs and practices should be purged from their minds. Discussing about this common method of missionaries, Peter C. Phan summarizes in his book *In Our Own Tongue-Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* that, “It is first to destroy the errors of paganism and disabuse the minds of pagans of these erroneous views before establishing and teaching the doctrines and principles of the Christian religion” (Phan, 2003, p. 166). Theologically, in the eyes of the missionaries, hell was for the pagan who was outside the Church. In order to receive baptism, Vietnamese at that time had to deny all doctrines and teachings of their old religions. Once becoming a Catholic, they were forbidden from participating every kind of religious activity of other religions. Not only
religious activities but also some cultural activities considered as dangerous to the faith were also forbidden. They were not allowed to continue their ancestor worship any more. Converting to Christianity meant rejecting ancestor worship.

Another factor that worsened the relations between Catholic and other religions in Vietnam is the ban on ancestor worship. Ancestor worship is an age-old tradition and widely practiced in almost all families and in social life of Vietnam. In the thought of Vietnamese, all things have its sources: river has its sources, tree its roots and human beings have their ancestors. Therefore, ancestor worship is one of the most important obligations in one's life. To Vietnamese, the ancestor worship has two main reasons: firstly, the descendants wish to express their gratitude to their ancestors, as a Vietnamese proverb says: “Drinking water, we think of its source” (Uong nuoc nho nguon). Secondly, through the worship, they may ask their ancestors for help and protection. As they think, the spirit of the dead do not disappear but still impact the living, still stay around to protect, to support the descendants (Hanh, 2005, p. 45). That is the reason why in most Vietnamese families, there is an altar to honor ancestor. In the eyes of missionaries, the cult of ancestor worship is idols worship. Therefore ancestor worship was strictly banned. This ban left a negative effect on the history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. The ban on ancestor worship is one of the main reasons that made Christianity become persecuted from 17th-19th centuries. Besides, followers of other religions also considered Catholics as ungrateful to their ancestors.

During this period of time, Catholicism considered itself as the only true religion, all other religions were considered as erroneous and superstitious. This led to a really negative attitude of Christian life and relation to followers of other religions. While
Catholics saw followers of other faith as pagan. Followers of other religions considered Catholic people as people who chose the wrong way and needed to be re-educated. Catholic people were named as ‘giao’ versus others were ‘luong’\(^1\). There were Catholic villages and ‘pagan’ villages. They lived separately. Between them, there was little or no contact.

Alexandre de Rhodes\(^2\), who is considered to be one of the most open-minded missionaries, and who had great contribution to the inculturation of the Catholicism in Vietnam, still holds a very negative attitude towards other religions. This can be seen in his famous book *Catechismus. Catechismus* (*Phep Giang Tam Ngay*) is a catechism book, aiming at preparing those who wanted to receive baptism and to become Christian. For de Rhodes, Christianity is the only true religion. It can help human beings attain eternal salvation and life. From this faith, de Rhodes hold a negative view on all other religions in Vietnam at that time: ancestor worship, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism. When presenting Christian doctrines to catechumens, de Rhodes praised doctrines and teachings of Christianity. He explained basic doctrines and teachings of the Catholicism such as the existence of God, the creation, the coming of Jesus, the eternal salvation, etc... At the same time, he also indicated points in other religions that he considered as not correct. Generally, de Rhodes’ view on these religions could be summarized as negative. Due to his lack of understanding of these religions, he considered their doctrines and teachings

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1 In the thought of Catholic, *luong* means pagan and *giao* means religious. While in the thought of other people, *luong* means those who are good, honest and giao means need to be reeducated.

2 Alexandre de Rhodes is a French missionary who came to evangelize in Vietnam in the 17\(^{th}\) century. He contributed greatly to the formation of Vietnamese language through his famous book: *Vietnamese-Portugese-Latin Dictionary* and *Catechismus* (*Phep Giang Tam Ngay* in Vietnamese).
as erroneous and superstitious. He also condemned other religions and considered their leaders as evil.

During this period of time, the relation between the Catholic Church and other religions in Vietnam was really very bad. Catholic people were not allowed to take part in any kind of activities of other religions as it was considered superstitious and idolatrous. Followers of other religions saw Catholicism as an alien religion whose followers were ungrateful to ancestors. Discussing about this matter, Chieu describes in his book *Interreligious Dialogue- the Case of Buddhism and Christianity* that:

“...They continued not to attend Buddhist funerals, especially those of their Buddhist relatives who keep on practicing ancestral worship and laying out offerings for the dead. On the other hand, the Buddhists view the Roman Catholic as a killer, they called Westerners "White Devils" and a religion that forbade ancestral worship is sub-human, only animals forget their ancestors.”

(Tran xuan Chieu, 2000, p. 127)

No one can deny the fact that religions play important roles in making peace of the world. As long as there is no peace among religions, there are little chance of peace in society. In the history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, there was very little connection of its members with followers of other religions. Catholics and adherents of other religions may live next to one another, but very rarely did they mention or discuss religious matters with one another, let alone interreligious meetings or interreligious activities. They inhabited side by side in the neighborhood, practicing their different religious activities and following their particular ways of thinking. All occasions such as feasts, anniversaries, funeral ceremonies and wedding celebrations were carried out by each group in their own way. When some Catholics dared to participate in religious activities of other religious traditions, they were condemned as heretics (Chieu, 2002, p.
Before the Second Vatican Council, the attitude of the Catholic Church in Vietnam towards other religious traditions can be described as 'closed'. There were certain 'barriers' that prevented people of different religions from coming to one another and kept Catholic followers from approaching adherents of other religions. Historically, Catholicism was considered as alien or colonial religion in Vietnam. This is the result of a long history of evangelization and the clash between Christianity and Vietnamese culture and religions. There was also misunderstandings between the Catholic Church and Vietnamese people or followers of other religions. That is the reason why Christianity in Vietnam was heavily persecuted in the early days of its arrivals.

3.1.2. After the Second Vatican Council

On the interreligious relation, the official viewpoints of the Catholic Church in Vietnam can be seen in its official documents. These documents include pastoral letters of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam on special occasions. These documents play an important role in the life of the local church. They also reveals the attitude of the Vietnamese Catholics in communicating with brothers and sisters from other religions. Besides, there are letters and speeches of Catholic leaders as local bishops. These letters and speeches reveal their understanding of the importance of the interreligious relations and their respect towards brothers and sisters who hold different faiths. Among the most important documents, some of them should be noted.

The first one is the Pastoral Letter of 1964. Immediately after the Second Vatican Council, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam issued a pastoral letter to the entire Church in Vietnam. This letter played an important role in interreligious relation. This is
the first time in its official document, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam encouraged all members of the Catholic Church in Vietnam to think of the interreligious relation with brothers and sisters from other religions. They pointed out that although there were differences in faith and practices of Catholic and other religions, these differences should not become obstacles preventing all members of various religions to cooperate in building the country. The Church also invited its followers to overcome all these differences and to join hands with adherents of other religions in building peace for the country (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam, 2011, pp.56-57).

Another important document is the Pastoral Letter in the year 1976. In its official teaching, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam stressed the points that Catholics should keep in mind as they related to brothers and sisters of other faiths: (1) The Catholic Church in Vietnam strongly believed that dialogue was the best way to understand and to have respect for people with different faiths. (2) Every Vietnamese Catholic should follow the example of Jesus in loving fellowmen and serving them without condition. (3) Vietnamese Catholics were encouraged to join hands with brothers and sisters from other religions in building the country (Pham Ngoc Lam, 2012, p.218).

In the Pastoral Letter of 1980, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam also urged all Catholic followers to be open to people of other faiths and to join hands with them in building the country. The letter states, “Being faithful to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council which means the spirit of openness, dialogue and social integration with the community we live” (Nguyen Dinh Dau, 2010, p. 99).

On the occasion of celebrating the 470th anniversary of the proclamation of the Good News in Vietnam, Catholic Bishops’ Conference invited all Vietnamese Christians
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to enter into dialogue with brothers and sisters who follow different religions. To them, interreligious dialogue would create mutual understanding, empathy, and respect. According to the teaching of Catholic leaders, dialogue was seen as a dimension of living the faith in the present context of Vietnam, a dialogue of life was suggested as the most appropriate method in relating to others.

Recently, in the Common Letter post Congress of the People of God 2010 titled “Together we build the love and life of civilization”, the Vietnamese Bishops also suggested direction to interreligious dialogue for all Christians in Vietnam. They invited all its members to enter a “heart to heart dialogue” with followers of other religions, with the poor and with non-religious people. The goal of this dialogue is to have better understanding of one another, and to bring happiness to fellowmen, as it is written:

“In the context of the Vietnamese society, when carrying out the evangelization mission, the Church should have dialogue with other religions, the poor and non-religious people. This is a heart to heart dialogue aiming at building mutual understanding and service for the real happiness of the people. This is also a dialogue to increase the grace of salvation.” (Commission of Interfaith Dialogue, 2011, p. 78)

Catholic leaders have also been more aware of the importance of interreligious dialogue to the life and mission of the Church in Vietnam. There are initiatives to establish relations with leaders of other religions. Visits of Catholic leaders to those of other religions now become normal. Particularly on important feastdays of other religions, they send greetings or representatives to share joy with its members. Through all these activities, they aim at urging all Catholic members to have an open attitude to friends of other faiths. To put this into practice, in its common letter to all Christian on the occasion of the Congress of the People of God 2010, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam
invited all its children to enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions. There is no
doubt that this interreligious dialogue will make the Catholic Church in Vietnam have
good relations to other religions. In the letter, Catholic leaders also pointed out the
common points that Christianity shared with other religions. These common points can
be the starting points for all religions to cooperate in building society and bringing peace
to fellowmen. They wrote:

"In Vietnam, we find that the Catholic charity meets the Buddhism
benevolence, the Taoism sense of spirituality, the Confucianism social
philosophy and the Vietnamese in-born devotion: respect the Creator,
pRACTISING PIETY AND SHOWING GRATITUDE TO THE ANCESTORS, PARENTS, HEROES OF THE
NATION. DIALOGUE ALSO FACILITATES THE CHURCH TO EXPAND COOPERATION WITH OTHER
RELIGIONS IN THE MISSION OF MAKING THE SOCIETY HEALTHY AND ENHANCING HUMAN
DIGNITY. FURTHERMORE, IT IS A CHANCE FOR THE CHURCH TO RENEW FAITH IN CHRIST
WHO IS THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF HUMAN HISTORY. BEING AWARE OF THE
IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE WITH RELIGIONS, IN THE COMING YEARS, THE CHURCH HAS TO
GIVE FURTHER ATTENTION TO THIS ASPECT IN HUMAN TRAINING AS WELL AS IN PASTORAL
ACTIVITIES." (COMMISSION OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE, 2011, p. 79)

According to the instructions of Catholic Bishops' Conference in Vietnam,
interreligious dialogue, particularly with Buddhism, plays an important role the life and
mission of Catholic Church in Vietnam. Through dialogue, Vietnamese Catholics can
cooperate with followers from other religions to build the country and to contribute to
peace and happiness for all fellowmen. However, in the particular situation of Vietnam,
there are limits and obstacles, which make this dialogue difficult and unable to bear fruit
as it is expected. In spite of that, there are still visits and meetings between Catholic
leaders and those of other religious traditions. There are still efforts both from Catholic
Church and other religions to join hands in social work activities (Catholic Bishops'
The Catholic bishops also reminded Catholic followers to improve relations with friends of other faiths through concrete acts in their daily life. In its pastoral letter to the faithful in 2013, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference pointed out some activities that all Christians can do to build good relations with brothers and sisters from other religions: to visit other religious friends, to share occasions of joy and sorrow, to support those in need. Christians were also encouraged to share experiences in living their own faith. All these activities will bring great contribution to interreligious relations and to help members of different religions to have a better understanding and respect for one another (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam, 2011, p. 98-99).

Through investigating the official documents of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, one cannot deny that, under the influence of the Second Vatican Council, there has been a change in the attitude of the Catholic Church in Vietnam towards other religions. These changes can be seen clearly in the official documents of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam. There has been an awareness of the important role of interreligious dialogue. Step by step, interreligious dialogue plays a significant role in the pastoral activities of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. The Church in Vietnam has shown a gradual understanding and openness to interreligious dialogue. Relations with other religions and theirs followers little by little become one of the pastoral concerns of the leaders of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. The Catholic Church in Vietnam chooses to enter interreligious dialogue with all brothers and sisters from other religions in the spirit of openness and sincerity because they are convinced that only through dialogue can members of different religions join hands in their services to the countrymen and to
contribute to building peace for the country. Dialogue is the way through which Christian can “build the Kingdom of God here on earth” (Pham Ngoc Lam, 2012, p. 223).

3.2. Obstacles to Interreligious Dialogue

Even though there are improvements in relation between Catholic and other religions in Vietnam, there are still difficulties and obstacles to this interreligous dialogue. To begin with, entering into dialogue, both Catholic and adherents of other religions in Vietnam have to overcome their old and conservative mindset. There were misunderstandings and separation in the past from both sides. Catholics considered doctrines and practices of other religious as erroneous. Followers of other religions saw Catholicism as alien or extended arm of Western power. There are doubts and suspicions from both sides. These are the results of ignorance about the teachings and practices of each other’s religion. Sometimes, a closed community is also a barrier to interreligious relations. One example, although Vatican II has allowed for a mixed marriage between a Catholic and non-Catholic, still very few dared to get married with a non-Catholic. If one married a non-Catholic, he/she would be isolated from other Catholics in the community. These attitudes really separate people and distancing them from one another (Tran xuan Chieu, 2000, p. 128).

Another obstacle that prevents interreligious dialogue between Catholic and other religions in Vietnam is the sense of superiority. Entering into Vietnam for several centuries, Christianity still holds a ‘Western face’ with Western thoughts, and Western values. These factors sometimes become alien to the local people. In order to enter into interreligious dialogue with other religions, Vietnamese Catholics need to discard their
old attitude and be open to meet others with respect and sincerity. Stressing the importance of this, the Secretariat for Non-Christians reminds Catholics in its document *Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions- Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* that:

"Interreligious dialogue is a meeting of heart and mind between followers of various religions. It is communication between two believers at the religious level. It is a walking together towards truth and a working together in projects of common concern." (Arinze, 2005, p. 162)

Besides, negative viewpoint of other religions on Catholics is also a disadvantage. There are still suspicions towards Catholic initiatives in dialogue. Some see it as a hidden agenda of the Catholic Church in Vietnam to evangelize and to convert members of other religions to Christianity. In fact, for Catholics, interreligious dialogue does not aim at converting others as it is often understood. Explaining this, Arinze explains in his book *Church in Dialogue- Talking with Other Believers* that:

"Interreligious dialogue is not the same as an effort to get the interlocutor to be convinced of one’s own faith and to persuade him to change his religion. Dialogue for the Catholic Church does not aim at conversion, that is, to persuade the other to accept baptism and become a Christian, although it must never close the doors to that possibility, because we must presume that a sincere and convinced Catholic would also want to share his faith with others. However, conversion understood as greater readiness to do God’s will should be one of the fruits of sincere interreligious dialogue." (Arinze, 2005, p.161)

Understanding conversion in this sense, all those who enter into interreligious dialogue, be they a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim or a member of any religion, are opened to the possibility to be converted. As through interreligious exchange, they can made progress in movement to God, to be more sincere in the search for truth, to become more open to divine action and more receptive of God’s saving action.
Thus, interreligious dialogue cannot be understood as a way to convert others. There are many good and positive points that one can benefit from the interreligious relation. Arinze mentions some in his book that, “By interreligious dialogue we can share with him such evangelical values as love of one another, honesty, self-sacrifice, self-control, concern for moral rectitude in society and defence against materialism and atheism” (Arinze, 2005, p. 192).

Political factor is also an obstacle to interreligious in Vietnam. From the time of the French occupation of Vietnam at the end of the 19th century the colonial administration supported the Catholics to reinforce its power. There was unfair treatment between Catholics and members of other faiths. At the present, the ruling government has bias against Catholics. It also tries to divide religions. In its eyes, religions are tools to govern the country. All these created separation among members of different religions. Under the regime of Communist government, religions were seen with suspicious eyes. For fear that followers of different religions would unite and overthrow their rule, Communist government prevented religious leaders from meeting one another. Followers of different religions find it difficult to cooperate with one another in religious or social work activities. In the case of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, sometimes, it is depicted as an extended arm of Western power, a threat to the ruling government as it links to ‘Western power’, the Vatican. All these also help to create misunderstanding and gap between Catholic people and followers of other religions.
3.3. Limits of Interreligious Dialogue

There are some limits in the interreligious activities of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. Firstly, this activity has just begun recently. For most of the Vietnamese Catholics, interreligious dialogue is still a new activity. They have not fully recognized the importance of interreligious dialogue in their religious life. Secondly, interreligious dialogue has not become the priority of every diocese of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. The Catholic Church in Vietnam includes 26 dioceses; and not every diocese has the Commission of Interfaith Dialogue to foster interreligious activities. Thus, interreligious activities have developed only in some dioceses. Secondly, Vietnam is a multi-religious society. The Catholic Church in Vietnam has not had proper interreligious dialogue with each religious tradition. Most of its activities have been carried out with Buddhist followers; and the field that most developed is social work activities. Thirdly, due to the political situation, some religious sects have not been ‘recognized’ by the Communist government. Religious meetings, particularly between different religions are still in strict control. This also prevents interreligious activities of the Catholic Church in Vietnam.
CHAPTER IV

INTERRELIGIOUS RELATION BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN VIETNAM AND OTHER RELIGIONS UNDER THE IMPACT OF THE
SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

In this chapter, the researcher presents interreligious activities that the Catholic Church in Vietnam has carried out. The matter will be investigated following the four dimensions of dialogue that are dialogue of daily life, dialogue of social activity, dialogue of sharing religious experiences, and dialogue of doctrinal exchange.

4.1. Dialogue of Daily Life

Inspired by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has encouraged its children to enter into dialogue with brothers and sisters from other religious beliefs through all activities in their daily life. Through these activities, Catholic members have opportunities to have a better understanding about others, seeing them not as opponents or pagans who need to be converted but as brothers and sisters who are also on the way to their own salvation. Practicing this, Catholics are following the instruction of the Catholic Church on relating to friends of other faiths as it is suggested in the document *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions* in June 1984, that:

“Interreligious dialogue is a meeting of heart and mind between followers of various religions. It is communication between two believers at the religion level. It is a walking together towards truth and a working together in projects of common concern. It is a religious partnership without complexes and without hidden agendas or motives.” (quoted in Arinze, 1990, p. 162)
Interreligious dialogue is not only the work of religious leaders; rather it is the mission of each and every believer in their everyday life. In daily life, people of different religions have chance to contact, to communicate with brothers and sisters of other religions. It is in this context that members of different faiths really enter into dialogue. Reflecting on this, Catholic Church reminds its members that, “Before all else, dialogue is a manner of acting, and attitude; a spirit which guides one’s conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality toward the other” (quoted in Gioa, 1997, p. 575). Vietnam is a multireligious country. Members of different religions are required to dialogue to understand and to respect one another. This dialogue firstly happens in daily life of members of different religions, those who live in a village, a quarter, through their communicating, working and supporting one another. Religions should be the foundation for people to get close to one another (Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2011, p. 60).

Being aware of this, Catholic Church in Vietnam encouraged its children to visit relatives and friends from other religions, to share with them in time of joy or sorrow. Both Catholic leaders and lay people consider visiting friends from other religions as the first step to building friendship and to begin interreligious dialogue. Nowadays, special feastdays of each religion as Christmas of Christianity, Vesak of Buddhism, have really become occasions that draw followers of different faiths together, particularly between Catholics and Buddhists.

In 2010, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam, in an open letter to the faithful, proposed a "heart to heart dialogue" with other religions, with the poor and with people
of no religious belief. In order to put this into practice, Catholic members were especially invited to be open and sincere to brothers and sisters of other religions. A sincere attitude can help one to accept others even though there are still differences or contradictions; while a lack of openness could easily lead to defensive or aggressive attitude. Besides, Catholic members were also urged to visit and to share their beliefs and practices with friends from other religious traditions. This is to help them to have a right understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices (Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2011, pp. 98-99).

Following the instruction of Catholic bishops in Vietnam, in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, a Pastoral Commission for Interfaith Dialogue was established on 5 December 2009. The aims of the organization are as follows: (1) to encourage all Christians to make the first step in going out to meet followers of other religions following the instructions of Vatican II, especially Nostra Aetate, (2) to learn the teachings and experiences of the Church in the field of interfaith dialogue. At the same time, to learn to have a right understanding of teachings and practices of other religions, (3) to join hands with brothers and sisters in other religions in social concerns, (4) to organize interreligious meetings and exchanges on issues of common concern (5) to open training courses specially in interfaith dialogue with professors from different religions (Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2011, pp.112-113). From then, the commission have organized many activities to establish contact with other religions. The commission has gradually become the meeting place of people of different faiths. It really gives support and inspiration to those who are concerned with interfaith dialogue. Sharing the joy of being a member of the Commission of Interfaith Dialogue, one Christian follower said:
“When starting a group of interfaith dialogue, we have been very happy to be part of dialogues up to religious tolerance. With achievements in building good relationship with other religions through dialogues, we can catch up with the rest of the Church which has been seriously engaged in interfaith dialogue for 50 years and also with the Church in South East Asian through FABC.” (Ai Thien, 2016)

In Vietnam, there is another kind of daily dialogue that is the dialogue of members of different religious traditions in a family. Children may follow a religion which is different from that of their parents. Sharing experiences of living in this multireligious family, Mai Thanh, a Catholic nun, whose parents are Buddhists, tells that there are misunderstandings and challenges. In order to meet the challenges and to avoid any misunderstanding, members of her family have to be patient and tolerant of one another (Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2011 p. 176). Ha Thien Trúc, a Catholic priest coming from a multi-religious family, with his father being a devout follower of Cao Daism, his mother a pious Buddhist, reveals that differences in religious beliefs and practices pose no problems in his family; on the contrary, it is through compassion and love from his parents, that helps him discover the vocation to become a Catholic priest (Manh Hung, 2009).

A multi-religious family can also be the result of mixed marriages. With 6.7% of the population, Catholic adherents is just a small number in Vietnam. This leads to an increase in mixed marriages. Nowadays, it is normal for a Catholic to get married with someone of different religion. The couples who live married life with their husband/wife of different faiths often face difficulties, particularly in the religious practices of their spouse. Thus, in preparation for marriage, Catholic youth in Vietnam are usually taught and prepared to respect differences in religion, and to practice religious life as witness to
their faith. This kind of interfaith dialogue requires those who are involved to be patient and tolerant. When there is difference, Catholic is reminded to follow the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that, “Let there be unity in what is necessary; freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case” (GS, 92).

With these efforts, there is hope for a better understanding between Catholics and followers of other religions. Practicing dialogue with friends from other religious traditions in daily life is also following the teaching of the Church through the word of the apostle Peter in his letter to Christians in the early days of Christianity: “Revere the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for hope which is in you. But give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience” (1Pt 3: 15-16).

4.2. Dialogue of Action: Common Social Activities

There are many social activities which are the results of cooperation from followers of different religions. In Ho Chi Minh City, some so-called “interfaith charity clinics” were opened. These clinics are the result of the cooperation by followers of Catholics and followers of other religions aiming at serving the poor. There are participation of doctors, nurses, and volunteers who come from many different religions including Buddhism, Catholicism, Caodaism, Protestantism, Hoa Hao Buddhism. Patients are welcomed without any discrimination. Through these social work activities, members of different religions cannot only join hands helping patients but also become witness to their own faiths. They also have opportunities to have a better understanding about one another’s religions (Ai Thien, 2016). In Hue diocese, the center of Vietnam, for a long time, there
has been cooperation among followers of different religions to care for HIV patients. Kim Long charity clinic is a center founded by the Catholic Sisters, now witness the joint participation of many physicians, nurses, and volunteers of different religions, particularly Catholicism and Buddhism. It is charitable activities that bring members of different religions together (Ai Thien, 2015). Being aware of the differences in religion, members of different faith traditions come together to serve the poor and the needy with the motto: “many religions- one heart” (BHHV, 2011). Through this, one can see that those who join hands in serving others are aware of their religious differences; however, these differences are not perceived as obstacles to their collaboration with one another.

Also in Hue, there is a special group with the name ‘Doing goodness’. Initially founded by a Buddhist, the group has now become a meeting place of followers of different religions. Among its members, there are Catholic priests, Brothers and Sisters, Buddhist monks and nuns; a large number of lay people from many religions also participate in the activities of this “Doing goodness” group. Aiming at helping the poor with food and taking care of street children, the group has become a home for compassionate souls to meet (Mai Thanh, 2010, pp. 88-89).

With the encouragement and support from religious leaders, many other social activities have been carried out with collaboration of followers of different religions. Some organizations accept membership of different believers for certain areas of activities like: arts and letters, music and song. Persons of different faiths, particularly those who are willing to serve the poor and the aged, have been welcomed. These social work activities have become opportunities that unite people of different faiths. Sharing this experience, Venerable Thich Thien Chieu, who cares for 75 poor blind children, in a
charitable center for blind children, said: “Common concern for disadvantaged children has united Catholics and Buddhists” (Tran xuan Chieu, 2000, p.129).

Through charitable works, followers of different faiths can also enrich their religious life and discover unique experiences. A Buddhist nun, Hue Tri from Dieu Giac Pagoda, shared her experience of joining hands with members of other religions in doing charitable work:

“I am Buddhist, a disciple of Buddha. Doctor Vu is a Catholic social worker. Together we work with street kids. Every month we meet for regular discussion. The Buddha’s and Jesus’ good nature mean that when someone cries, Buddha or Jesus comes. When they see these unfortunate children, Buddha or Jesus come. I would like to do something for these unfortunate children as Buddha and Jesus taught me.” (Vu, 2009)

Sharing the same view on this, Hue Khai, a faithful Caodai follower, makes it clear that, every religion teaches its members to do goodness and to avoid evil. In order that there be effective cooperation and harmony among followers of different religious traditions they need to learn to understand one another. Interreligious dialogue will help them to avoid prejudice and superiority complex (Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2011, p. 169).

In the viewpoint of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, social activities are seen as a bridge to unite members of different religions. Through charitable works, Catholics can join hands with compassionate souls of other faiths in serving the poor and the needy; at the same time, they can meet one another at the religious level.
4.3. Dialogue of Religious Experience

Another form of interfaith dialogue that members of different religions can exchange their understanding is dialogue of religious experience. This is also called depth dialogue. In this kind of dialogue, those who are involved can share their religious experiences which are personal and subjective to each individual. It is generally assumed that there will be no arguments or discussions on what is shared. In the document *Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions*, Catholic Church explains some basic elements of this form of dialogue that:

“At a deeper level, persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute. This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals.” (Gioa, 1997, p. 577)

At the deepest level, interreligious dialogue is the sharing of religious experience. The most precious value that one can share with followers from other religions is the experience of the Ultimate Reality. For Christians, what can they share with followers of other religions if that is not the experience of communicating to God? Can there be any better way to make dialogue with others than sharing our way of praying, communicating with our Christ? (Rosales & Alvaro eds., 1992, p. 70).

In order to encourage exchange of religious experience among Catholics and followers of other religions in Ho Chi Minh City, following the spirit of the interfaith encounter in Assisi¹, in the year 2011 the Commission of Interfaith Dialogue of the

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¹ In October 27, 1986, Pope John Paul II organized the first World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, the birthplace of St. Francis- a symbol of universal compassion. 160 religious leaders joined the event to pray for peace of the world. From then, 'Assisi's spirit' becomes symbol of peace and compassion.
archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City organized the so-called 'Interfaith Encounter Day'. This attracted a lot of attendants from different religions. Among them, there are both religious leaders and lay people. They came to join activities and shared spiritual experiences. Representatives from each religion had a chance to share their experiences in living and in witnessing to their faith. They also had an opportunity to pray for peace. This activity has been organized yearly under different themes: Together We Build Peace (2011), Together We Overcome Sufferings (2012), Together We Cultivate Harmony (2013), Together We Share Spiritual Joy (2014), and Cultivating Encountering Culture (2015). These days have become opportunities for members of different religions to come to meet one another, to share their religious experiences, and to enrich their religious life.

In Vietnam, even though there is no official center or organization for this form of dialogue, there are still meetings and sharing of experiences among Catholic individuals and members of other religions, particularly Buddhists. Hue Khai, a Caodai member, shares his experiences in dialogue with Catholic partners that, “A real religious life is not limited to daily praying and offering; it consists in experimenting one’s own faith through relating to people with different religions. These are the chances for members of different religions to enrich their religious experiences” (Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2011, p. 165).

4.4. Dialogue of Doctrinal Exchange

Another form of interfaith dialogue is the dialogue of Doctrinal exchange. This is the dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions in order to walk together toward truth and to work together in projects of common concern (Gioa,
1994, p. 566). In Vietnam, this kind of dialogue is not strong because as in the thought of the common Vietnamese people, they care more about real life affairs than doctrinal discourse. However, there are efforts from the Catholic Church in Vietnam to establish relations among religious scholars. The first initiative of the Catholic Church in Vietnam to foster doctrinal exchange among religions was made right after Vatican II. In 1964 Catholic bishops in the South of Vietnam founded an organization named Interreligious Conference. The aim of the organization was to encourage all religions to join hands to alleviate sufferings and to build peace during the time of civil war. This organization was well responded by many religious leaders. On 15 September 1966, Pope Paul VI sent a message to encourage this organization. Unfortunately, being founded during the time of civil war, it could not contribute much to the interreligious dialogue as was expected (Commission of Interfaith Dialogue, 2011, p. 110).

In order to help its members get rid of ignorance and misunderstanding about other religions, the Commission of Interfaith Dialogue in the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City often opened courses such as The Practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue. These courses were not only for Catholics but also for followers of any religion who wished to have basic knowledge about other religions. The courses aimed to provide learners with basic knowledge of doctrines, teachings, and practices of different religions. It also provides participants chances to have new religious experiences through organizing visits to different religious places of worship. Attending these courses, learners may have opportunities to communicate with people of different faiths, to understand their religious practices, and to share experience in living and witnessing their faith. At the end of the courses, learners are expected to increase their understanding about doctrines and
practices, to be able to collaborate with brothers and sisters from other faiths in common activities. Talking about the unique experience that learners benefit from these courses, one of the attendants shares that:

“The Buddhist scholar gave course participants the opportunity to understand certain aspects of Buddhism, especially how difficult it can be to take religious orders as well as forgive and live with others. Catholic participants learnt how Vietnamese Buddhists conceive, view and explain human life. At the end everyone was happy to take advantage of this constructive opportunity for Catholic-Buddhist dialogue.” (Vu, 2009)

With the aim to encourage Doctrinal dialogue, the Interfaith Dialogue Commission of the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City also started to publish a quarterly magazine titled The Bridge of Heart (Nhip Cau Lien Ton). With the vision Together We Build a Harmonic and a Peaceful World, the magazine really gives scholars of different religions opportunities to share their theological writings. Besides, a special website Nhipcautamgio.net (bridge of hearts) for interreligious dialogue was also established. In this website, readers are provided with basic elements of religious beliefs: doctrine, cult and practice. Aiming at building friendship among members of different religions, and enriching knowledge and understanding about one another’s faith and practices, those who founded the website states clearly its vision:

“Nhipcautamgio.net heartily wishes to become a Home for Interreligious Dialogue between Religious Friends or those who are seeking for living cause of human and spiritual values to cultivate the friendship, sympathy and a tolerant life direct the heart to the source of Truth-Goodness-Beauty.” (BBT, 2010, p. 3)

In addition to that, to prepare for doctrinal exchange between Catholics and members of other religions, the Catholic Church in Vietnam also includes Religious
Chapter IV: Interreligious Relation between the Catholic Church in Vietnam and other Religions under the Impact of the Second Vatican Council

Studies in its program to train priests. In this course, experts of other religions have often been invited to explain doctrines, teachings, and practices of their religious traditions to religious brothers and sisters in Religious Study Center or to future priests in seminaries.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The researcher has tried to examine the documents of the Second Vatican Council, finding its positive changes and its contribution to the interreligious dialogue. He has clarified that these changes have left positive impact on the relation between Catholic Church and other religions.

In the history of the Catholic Church there were changes in its attitude towards other religious traditions from negative to positive. In the beginning centuries, Catholic's attitude can be seen as mostly on the defensive against other religions; then the attitude changed from defense to attack. In the modern time, with the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church officially began to recognize positive values of other religious traditions. Through this Council, Catholic Church has made a turning point in its viewpoints towards other religions and its followers. This change of viewpoint has contributed to better relations among religions and to the effort to promote world peace.

However, there still are people (Catholics included) who do not entirely agree with the change resulting from the Second Vatican Council. Those who agree with the change note its positive aspects, while those who do not tend to point out the flaws and the limitations of the change. For the researcher, he agrees that there are still many limitations in the viewpoint of the Second Vatican Council. However, he sees that the change brought about by the Council should be seen not as an end product; rather, it should be seen as a new direction and open for further improvement.

At the same time, he has also investigated the influence of the Second Vatican Council on the local Church in Vietnam in its relation to other religious traditions.
Through the investigation, the researcher has tried to point out that the change of attitude of the Catholic Church in Vietnam is the result of applying the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. In other words, the new direction of the Council really paved the way for the Catholic Church in Vietnam to have a new beginning in interreligious dialogue with followers of other faiths. There have had changes in the ways of thought and in the behaviour of Vietnamese Catholics towards followers of other religious traditions. These changes have led to concrete actions in the Catholic Church of Vietnam.

The followings are recommendations for future interreligious dialogue between Catholic and other religions in Vietnam.

On the discussions of interreligious dialogue, there are too many aspects that need to be mentioned. One of the most important dimensions in interfaith dialogue is spirituality. Actually, that is the most fundamental aspect that needs to be stressed so that real interreligious dialogue may happen. In the context of Vietnam, the researcher recommends “the way of harmony” of Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) as the foundation for interreligious dialogue between Catholics and followers of other religions. According to the Federation of Asian Bishop’s Conferences, there are four dimensions of this harmony: harmony with oneself, harmony with human beings, harmony with creation, and harmony with God.

Vietnam is a multireligious society; and in the course of history Vietnam has endured a lot of wars and conflicts. This left a negative attitude among followers of different religions. Thus, harmony needs to be the foundation and the starting point from which believers of different cultures and religion can come together.

Firstly, in the field of interreligious dialogue, one is considered to be harmonious with oneself when he/she is sincere and convinced of his/her own faith. How can interfaith
dialogue succeed if one is not firmly convinced of one's own belief? How can participants talk to each other if one of the parties fails to express what his/her conviction is, what he/she believes, or what he/she follows? Being a Christian, a Buddhist, or a Muslim, each has to show and witness what makes each of them as they are; otherwise, interreligious dialogue may fail right from the beginning. Lacking harmony with oneself, real interreligious dialogue cannot achieve its goal.

Secondly, on the harmony with human beings, some may view harmony simply as to live peacefully, or not in conflict with others. In fact, harmony is deeper than that. It does not stop at negative but go further to positive aspects. To be harmonious with fellow human beings means respecting and fostering what is good. Different in ways of thinking, ways of life and religious experiences do not mean that it is a threat to one's life or faith but that it is a chance to enrich oneself. From Catholic perspective, harmony with our fellow human beings consists in recognizing in others God's image and likeness (Gen 1, 26). Only when we accept that other people are created in the likeness of God as we are, then can we see their being, their cultures or religions are valuable, even though those values are different from ours. In interreligious dialogue, it is the human that counts, not the religious doctrines, dogmas, or constitutions. Those who are involved in interreligious dialogue need to be fully aware of this; otherwise, dialogue may mislead participants or even create more misunderstanding and trouble.

Thirdly, the harmony with nature requires human beings to reject an anthropocentric view of the universe and to respect all of creation as the traces of God. This respect for creation generates a harmony which reflects God's providential love for his creatures. But the reality shows that being overwhelmed by the attempt to control, the desire to exploit, and the will to satisfy, human beings cannot realize their real position in
creation. Through interreligious dialogue, followers from different religions may help one another to realize the responsibilities to creation which is what they share through everyday life. Creation is a gift that God gives to humanity. It is also a chance to share and to care for creation which is our common home. This is one of the easiest ways that believers from different religions can cooperate with one another through interreligious dialogue.

Lastly, being harmonious to God also makes the relations between man and others more fruitful. The more united to God, the more man becomes harmonious with oneself, with His creation, and with other fellow human beings. For Christians, real interfaith dialogue has to take root in God and lead participants from every party to return to God.

To the researcher, harmony plays an important role in interreligious dialogue; without harmony, one cannot lead a full life, or practice one’s own faith, let alone sharing religious experience with followers of other religions. Harmony is the basic requirement for those who are devoted to the work of interfaith dialogue. The spirituality of harmony is an invitation to all those who are concerned in interfaith dialogue, especially for Catholics in the Vietnamese context.
Meeting of Archbishop of Saigon and Leaders of Other Religions in 1963

Catholic Leaders visited Buddhist Leaders on Vesak Day
Catholic Leaders visited Buddhist Leaders on Vesak day

Meeting of Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and Leaders of Caodaism
Catholic Nuns and Buddhist Monks

Interfaith Encounter Day
Interfaith Encounter Day

Interfaith Encounter Day
Catholic Seminarians Paid a Visit to Buddhist Temple

Catholic Priest and a Group of Lay Catholic Visited Buddhist Place of Worship
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