

CHRISTIANITY IN VIET NAM

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in memory of Ngoc Le (1947-1967)

In churches in unified Viet Nam, united since 1976, the minority of Christians are regularly encouraged to share their faith with unbelievers or bring their friends and relatives to church to hear the Gospel, but very few do so as many find evangelism difficult. A group of young Christian adults recently discussed what was hindering them in personal evangelism. As in other countries, some were so busy with church activities that they had little time for non-Christians friends. Others did not know what to say, or how to explain their faith in terms that outsiders could understand. There was also fear. Some had tried to share their faith but met opposition and ridicule or had friends avoid them subsequently. Other have never tried ; perhaps they have heard of the stories of difficulties which their parents or grandparents had encountered for being Christians and so chose to keep quiet about their faith.

Some were reluctant to share because their friends were happy with their own lives.

Since the Gospel first came to Viet Nam, poorer people have come to faith through healings, miraculous economic provision or being saved from addiction to drugs and alcohol.

But most Vietnamese seem to live very good lives and are bright, successful and hard-working. They are focused on the here-and-now and they do not care about the future or abstract ideas. They produce barriers. Outside of the church, most people know virtually nothing about what the Bible teaches, but misconceptions of evangelical Christianity are widespread. It is a faith that 'abandons grandparents' because Christians do not continue the Vietnamese traditions of ancestral worship. Christianity is also regarded as the religion of the poor and the uneducated people with rumours of 'rice Christians' converting to receive material or financial help. Older people claim that Christianity is the ' American' religion. In talking to Christians, friends and neighbours are unlikely to voice these views, but they are widely held nonetheless,

In listing Vietnamese student culture we have to ask is Christ relevant to these students

Their ideas are:

concerned with success, grades, salary, doing better than others,

sense of self-worth based on what one has as possessions, appearance, qualifications and relationships,

many come from broken families lacking in affection, so like attention,

like to live in virtual reality,

worried about the future- not getting a good job, not finding marital happiness,

afraid of not being accepted by family or friends,

afraid of being uninformed or out-of-date,

afraid of getting old, ugly or ill,

afraid of death and ghosts.

Viet Nam is fundamentally atheistic being a communist regime and such left wing politics hate Christianity.

The population of Viet Nam, and the north and south are now united as one country, is about 95,414,640 and 81% declare themselves to be non-religious. The religions that do exist are Mahayana Buddhism which accounts for 16.4%. There is a triple religion (tam go) which is a mixture of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism as practised by the Chinese. It is said that about 85% of Vietnamese people visit Buddhist pagodas.

Buddhism is based on the teachings of the Indian philosopher, Buddha and this does not accept creation by any god but considers the interconnection of all things and the law of Karma. Nothing in the world is fixed or is anything everlasting. Happiness in life does not last and in the noble art of suffering can we discern what is right and wrong. Most people call it a philosophy of peace.

Is it a religion?

Confucianism is about ethical principles and has no beliefs about God or other deities. Is it a religion ? Is it philosophy?

Taoism concerns itself with central organising. It believes in the closeness to nature as does paganism. This is usually called a philosophy.

Religion is about behaviour and practice and very often does not deal with anything theological or about God or other deities

Roman Catholicism came to the country about 1911 and it is estimated that 5.5 million people may be Catholic and only 70,000 of Vietnamese are Protestants which is a mere 0.00073 %

The other countries who have a high rate of convinced atheists are

China, Japan, Czech Republic, France, Australia and Iceland. It is also said that Norway has 39% of convinced atheists. These statistics may be surprising to many.

As an aside, Viet Nam means the Viets (people) from the south. but it must be remembered that Viet Nam is now united as one country and not divided in two countries, north and south. It is known as the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and has been since 1976.

Christians may wonder why the God of love, the God of the Bible, allows Communism to rule a nation and decimate Christianity. I have heard people say, 'God, that is unfair. You are allowing left wing politics to destroy the Gospel and kept this wonderful news of redemption from millions of people'.

Why is this?

I had a platonic girl friend who was Vietnamese. She studied music in London and was converted but said that this Gospel was not proclaimed in her country and how sad, indeed tragic, this was.

Christians and converts are being persecuted relentlessly in this country according to Open Doors USA.

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Ref. CM17-6