

Rm 3/4
10:45 Breakout
Vietnam

Dr. ĐỖ QUANG HƯNG
Professor, National University of Hanoi

RELIGION, DEMOCRACY, AND CIVIL SOCIETY
Experiences from Vietnam

1. AWARENESS

1.1 My first point is, "Religion and Democracy" in these days is generally speaking of the relationship of religion within society. In European and American societies there are many current issues dealing with religion such as abortion, same-sex marriage, stem-cell research, and various arguments about the relationships between Church and State. Within Asian societies many of these same issues and others relating to religion and public life seem to be even more contentious.

One positive for Vietnam is that the direction to actively building a better society follows our accepted goal and motto of "Prosperity for the People, Strength in the Nation, Fairness for all, Civility in all things."

1.2 My second point, according to the thesis of John Locke all those years ago, religions have the power to appoint civil power. Civil society to us is primarily a European and American philosophy and ideal. However, these days it has become a major issue within many Asian societies as well. Because of this very important social issue, in recent years in Vietnam, the government has continually referred to religion under their terms of the Socialist Rule of Law and Religion.

In spite of that, the adoption of a more "civil society" meaning that the power is held by the people, outside of those that work for the state, is still an ongoing process in Vietnam. However, it must be said, that in the current political system and in most political institutions in Vietnam, there are representatives from most religious organizations, even within the National Assembly which is the highest political body in the country.

1.3 The issues of religion, democracy and a civil society also must be focused on from the perspective of religion. Up to this point, the rate of growth of religious influence in politics in many Asian countries and Vietnam is not very high. Secularity in society has been pretty clear cut. But, at the same time, most of Southeast Asian countries would still say they are religious or have a high "religiosity." I say this because in the relationship between religion and state, though Vietnam has a *fairly* diverse religious system, religious pluralism is still barely revealing itself. The process of building democratization in regards to religion still has many inherent problems.

II. Choosing a Research Model

The process of innovating new religious policy in Vietnam began in 1990 with Resolution 24 of the Vietnam Communist Party. So far, in the aspect of Law and Religion, there are 2 texts and 2 cases that are especially important and the most effective.