

The Catholic Question in North Vietnam: From Polish Sources, 1954–56

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The Geneva Agreements (July 1954) which terminated hostilities in Viet Nam provided that "persons on either side of the dividing line at the 17th parallel of latitude, would be free to move to places of their own choice". Hundreds of thousands of North Vietnamese, mostly Catholics, were clamouring to leave the North soon to be under Communist rule to South Vietnam in 1954 and 1955. Anxious to solve the "Catholic question", the Lao Dong Party asked Polish comrades for advice. Indeed, because of the importance of the Catholic Church in Poland, they were the best qualified among the fraternal countries to help them to manage the Catholic integration in a socialist country. Based on Polish Foreign Affairs Archives and on International Commission of Control Archives (with Canadians and Indians, Poles were called on to supervise the application of the Geneva Agreements), this paper intends to show the Polish view on the Catholic Question in North Viet Nam in the first years of the partition. It proposes to examine to what extent the Poles influenced the Lao Dong Party on Church-state relations question and to what extent the DRV diverged from Chinese policy towards the Catholic Church.

Wojciech Ketrzynski, member of the Catholic Polish delegation invited to Vietnam in the spring of 1955, concluded his report in these terms:

The DRV has to face a very difficult task: from the beginning, it has to work at the building of its State and at the same time to lead a difficult struggle for the unification of the country. The Catholic factor will not play an essential role in the general political problems of Vietnam. Even so, as the strongest, the most homogeneous and the most organized religious group, the Catholics probably carry some weight in the general balance of power.¹

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This assessment of a Catholic member of the association Pax² sums up very well the terms of the Catholic question for the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), in the days following their victory at Dien Bien Phu.

The purpose of this paper is to use the Polish archives to help shed some new light on the Catholic question in the first years of the independent DRV. Indeed, because of the inaccessibility of Vietnamese sources, it is an interesting alternative to consider the question from the accessible sources of a former ‘brother country’. Obviously, the USSR and China were the two main references and models for the DRV, concerning important international questions. But just after the Geneva Agreements, the DRV asked for help from the Popular Republic of Poland (PRP) in order to solve the very serious problems posed by the Catholic minority, and overall, its massive exodus to the South. Because of the importance of Catholicism in Poland, the Polish comrades were seen by the Vietnamese communist leaders as the most qualified among the brother countries to advise them about the integration of the Catholics within a socialist regime.

This paper is mostly based on reports of the Polish ambassadors in Hanoi, as well as reports of the Polish representatives in the International Committee for Supervision and Control³ kept in the Archives of Foreign Affairs Ministry in Warsaw (Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych). In this paper, I intend to highlight the Catholic question in the first years of the independent DRV, from 1954 to 1956, considered from a communist perspective (that of the Vietnamese government and its Polish advisers). The point of view of the Catholic minority will also be mentioned.

To begin, a rapid introduction is necessary, concerning relations between communists and Catholics during the first years of the DRV, that is to say, the years of war against the French. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the extremely tense situation in 1954, without having in mind the complex history of Catholic–communist relations during the war of independence. Then I will adopt a chronological plan: first, I will present the Polish ambassador’s analyses of the Catholic question, in particular during the year 1955. Second, I will focus on reports of the Polish delegation invited to North Vietnam in April–May 1955, on the special request of the DRV. And last, I will examine how Polish–Vietnamese cooperation continued during 1956, and what the influence of the Central European events of the autumn of 1956 was on this cooperation.

Communists and Catholics during the War of Independence: An Alliance Becoming Impossible

It was in the same terms as Wojciech Ketrzynski that the Vietnamese communists considered the Catholic minority during the war of independence. Whereas the Catholic question was obviously not so central a question as the independence of the country, the conquest of power or the establishment of a communist regime, the rallying of the Catholics was nevertheless not a negligible concern. Despite its suspicion of this minority, inherited from the history of the French conquest, and

reinforced by the anti-religious doctrine of communism, until 1951 the Viet Minh (VM) carried out a general policy of National Union, which included the Catholic minority. Indeed, this strategy of rallying the whole population was essential for communist success. To avoid presenting themselves as communist, the VM intended to gather behind them all the classes of the population in their struggle for independence, including the bourgeoisie and the Catholic minority.⁴ Their rallying to the Viet Minh would give a good image of the new government to the international community: that of a coalition representing the Vietnamese population in its diversity.

Moreover, it was all the more important to rally the Catholics, as the years 1947–49 were a very hard time for the VM: they had to take into account the influence of Catholics in some strategic, key areas such as the Red River Delta or some areas in the South, where the VM still remained rather weak. Given this situation, considerable means were devoted to propaganda aimed at Vietnamese Catholics, according to numerous leaflets and newspapers kept in the French Military Archives in Vincennes.

Ho Chi Minh was the great architect of the National Union with the Catholics. This policy proved to be very effective, since from early September 1945 Ho Chi Minh was recognized as the legitimate head of the DRV by the four Vietnamese bishops. When he came to power, he did not hesitate to appoint the Catholic Nguyen Manh Ha to the post of minister of economy, in his first National Union government. In the Vietnamese delegation that went to Fontainebleau for negotiations, he included Nguyen De because of his good relationships with the French and within the milieu of the Indochina Bank. Lastly, the presence of the higher VM leaders, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap, at the consecration of Bishop Le Huu Tu and at the creation of the Catholic League, not affiliated with the VM (Lien Doan Cong Giao), in Phat Diem in October 1945 testified to their interest regarding the rallying of the Catholic minority. On that occasion, Ho Chi Minh even appointed the bishop of Phat Diem supreme adviser of the government!⁵ Contacts between Catholics and communists were direct and at the highest level in the North, mainly controlled by the VM, and more unofficial in the South, which was very rapidly re-conquered by the French.

Moreover, very strict instructions were given forbidding any type of excess against religions, and in particular the destruction of places of worship – this was a crime which could result in the death penalty.⁶ There was a real effort to limit prejudice against Catholics: in 1949 Ung Van Khiem, commissioner of the Interior of Nam Bo (formerly Cochinchina), firmly recommended: ‘to avoid any anger or provocative act towards Christians.’⁷ Far from forbidding the holding of religious services, the VM government permitted the organization of great ceremonies on the occasion of important Catholic holidays. Every Christmas Ho Chi Minh made a point of sending his best wishes to Vietnamese Catholics. Reports of the apostolic vicars from Missions Etrangères de Paris (MEP), while very critical of the VM, regularly noted that, despite their scorched earth policy, the VM used to respect religious buildings, unlike the French Expeditionary Corps, which did not hesitate to occupy or destroy them. As one MEP missionary wrote early in 1949: ‘In general, and at least in appearance, the VM policy shows a certain tolerance. It seems that Catholics, as such, are not subjected to

a harder regime than that which weighs on the rest of the population... Quite obviously, there is a watch-word issued from the higher realms... In fact, it's rather a strategy in order to rally Catholics.⁸ On the Catholic side, they became deeply involved in the nationalist movement, as they were anxious to put an end to accusations that they were 'traitors to the fatherland', which had weighed heavily on them since the French conquest.⁹ It can be said that during the first part of the anti-French war, Catholics and communists shared an experience of collaboration, which could be compared to the situation in France during World War II. The common fight for independence justified this collaboration.

But, with time, the Catholics faced a dilemma: the keenest fighters for independence were communist, and the communist plan for society did not coincide with theirs. In my Ph.D. dissertation, I have shown that Catholic collaboration with the communist resistance (essentially in the northern bishoprics) continued until 1949.¹⁰

For the Catholics, the alliance reversed in the years 1950–51, when they tried to remain autonomous from the communist resistance, as well as from the Bao Dai government, which was dependent on the French.¹¹ It was clearly an attempt to free themselves from the instrumental function that the Viet Minh, as well as the French, wanted to see them play. Except for a minority of Catholics engaged in the ranks of the Viet Minh Resistance, from 1952 the Catholics definitely rejected the communist alliance: the experience of living under Viet Minh power in the North,¹² and international events such as the role of Communist China in the Korean War, caused a progressive mistrust toward the Viet Minh. Failing in their attempt to follow a third road, independent of the communists, as well as of the French, the Catholics resigned themselves to supporting the least bad option: to rally to the Bao Dai government, which was negotiating with the Catholic nationalist Ngo Dinh Diem.

In fact, the DRV policy of national unity was mainly strategic, and the communists remained deeply suspicious of the Catholics, even those Catholics who became communist. Groups of Catholics within the resistance were very quickly placed under the strict control of the party and their room for manoeuvre reduced. With the advent of Communist China, there was a hardening of the regime. The arrival of Chinese advisers, in particular from 1953, with the implementation of the principle of 'class struggle' and the Land Reform in the Viet Minh-controlled areas (with large Catholic communities) provoked a rejection of that VM which no longer hid its communist nature. But, to the communists, that choice was seen as grave treason.

Because of these turbulent relations between 1945 and 1954, we can better understand why the tensions between Catholics and communists were so important in the years following the victory at Dien Bien Phu. While not a central question, the Catholic problem still had considerable weight in the general policy of the young DRV, in particular on two main questions: on the one hand, the building of a socialist state, and on the other hand the reunification of the country, guaranteed by the Geneva Conference.

To sum up the Catholic question in 1954, from the communist point of view, the Catholic Church, far more than any other religious or political group, was a highly

organized force with deep anti-communist values and was very dependent on their clergy. Their geographical concentration in some villages and districts in strategic areas was seen as dangerous. Furthermore, their dependence on the Vatican was seen as proof that the Catholics were the 'agents of a foreign imperialist power'. This view was strengthened by the anti-communist rhetoric of Pope Pius XII. And, lastly, an important segment of the Catholics in the South, but also in the North, looked for leadership to the southern Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem. Although the DRV had just won a great victory against the French colonizers, it had to face the strong hostility of a majority of Catholics against the socialist state. For all these reasons, the Catholic Church was feared and distrusted by the DRV authorities and regarded as a rival to the new regime.

While the leaders of the North were aware of the difficulty concerning the place of the Catholics in the socialist state after the Geneva agreement, they were caught unawares by the massive exodus of Catholics, from the North to the South, in early July 1954 and during the following year. The unforeseeable and growing exodus was a big concern for the leaders of the DRV. It would have catastrophic repercussions for one of the most important priorities of government policy: the reunification of the country via the holding of free elections in the two zones in July 1956, as stipulated by the final statement of the Geneva agreements.¹³

How did such a population movement happen just after the Geneva agreements? Besides the gathering of the military forces on each side of the 17th parallel, the Geneva agreement included the possibility for civilians to move to their chosen area, within a period of 300 days (until 18 May 1955). That measure was absolutely necessary to the North, which repatriated from the South around 85,000 Viet Minh soldiers and their families; and to the South, which repatriated not only French soldiers and civilians but also Bao Dai's army and administration.

At the beginning, the civilian repatriation from the North to the South mostly affected the urban population (including a lot of civil servants). But very soon the rural areas, particularly those with an important Catholic concentration, were concerned. Neither the northern leaders nor the French army¹⁴ expected such a massive exodus of refugees, the overwhelming majority of whom were Catholics. The movement began in July 1954, in the days following the Geneva conference. It increased in September–October and continued to grow even after the deadline for repatriation in May 1955. Around 78% of the refugees were Catholic, and a major part of the Catholic hierarchy (three bishops and 618 priests) left the North. At the end of 1955, 40% of northern Catholics remained in the North (456, 720) and 37% of the northern clergy (375).

The Critical View of the Polish Ambassador about the Catholic Question (December 1954–April 1955)

Even before the arrival of the first Polish ambassador, Tomasz Pietka, in Hanoi in December 1954,¹⁵ Poland had been asked for advice about the Catholic question.

Indeed, the Ho Chi Minh government had asked the USSR for help in organizing the repatriation of Viet Minh units and armament from the South to the North. But because the Soviet merchant navy was unable to procure a boat rapidly, and it happened that the Polish merchant navy had a boat (the *Jan Kilinski*) in the China Sea, the Poles were charged with the job of transporting the DRV's men and military material from October to July 1955.¹⁶

It was just after the Polish ambassador's arrival in Hanoi that the communist leaders asked for his help to solve the Catholic question. In his first report dealing with the internal situation, in January 1955, Ambassador Thomasz Pietka made the Catholic problem his first priority and mentioned the demand for assistance from the Vietnamese government: 'The problem of the Catholic exodus continues: The government and the party do all that they can to reduce that problem, but they encountered serious difficulties. . . . The problem of Catholics will dominate the domestic policy of the DRV in the following period and that's why very often, they ask for help and advice from the embassy.'¹⁷ In his first attempt to analyse the reasons of the massive exodus, Pietka called into question French and American propaganda, but also the Vietnamese leaders: 'These difficulties can be also explained by the fact that within the basic organs of the Party, there is sectarianism. The comrades of the rank and file say: 'During eight years in the jungle, I sacrificed to liberate them, and now they want to leave us!' Then, they take radical measures such as rejecting demands for permission to leave, without any explanation.' He also criticized their 'lack of knowledge about the Catholic problems' in the propaganda field: 'Until now, only the Party managed consciousness raising actions, without making the Fatherland Front participate. That, we pointed out to them.' In his following report, Pietka congratulated the leadership on the enlargement of the Fatherland Front to include more social groups, and in particular their 'reaching out towards the Catholics', with the presence of Father Vu Xuan Ky at the Lien Viet Congress, which was held in Hanoi in January 1955.

In his opinion, another important cause of the exodus was the catastrophic economic situation in North Vietnam. In his report of February, he wrote:

One needs more rice and other agricultural products on the markets, because there is a serious shortage. One must prevent a catastrophic famine in the fourth zone, where there are all the symptoms (dryness, abandoned, uncultivated fields. . . .) The countryside is overpopulated. The peasants go to the cities, where they can't find any jobs (the factories don't work), where they work in the street trade and door-to-door trade . . . In the countryside, one can feel the lack of food, which provokes discontent, even among the members of the resistance, who used to eat roots during the fight for freedom of their fatherland. . . . Speaking with the leaders of the important state ministries, one can very often see tears in their eyes, when they speak about their problems.

He also insisted on the fact these were not only the problems of the Catholics but also of non-Catholics:

In the domestic life of the DRV, the problem of the flight of the Catholics still exists. One can even maintain that it has grown in force in this last period, not only because the Catholics demand permission to leave for the South, but also the non-Catholics. The reasons for this fact remain the lack of food, unemployment, and also the Americano-French propaganda, which never weakens.¹⁸

The situation was still serious in March.¹⁹

In April 1955, another report corroborated the dramatic economic picture of Ambassador Pietka. This report about the risk of famine in the North linked it with the incompetence of the Vietnamese government:

Last year, the comrades didn't deal with the topic seriously enough. The French said there would be a famine, and the friendly authorities replied that they would succeed in solving that problem by increasing productivity, irrigation and the cultivation of more productive plants (potatoes, manioc, beans). That's a good policy, but for the long term. If Vietnam doesn't receive an enormous amount of rice, the situation will be very dangerous and the elections very risky.²⁰

Indeed, thanks to China, the DRV managed to avoid a famine in May 1955.²¹

In a report from April 1955, the Polish representative in the International Control Commission, Jerzy Grudzinski, repeated the economic analysis of his colleague. In his report dated 27 April 1955, he saw the exodus of the Catholics as 'one of the greatest problems of the Commission in recent times'. He wrote:

Some fanatical groups among the population are making a lot of effort to evacuate to the South, which is linked with the campaign led by the Catholic clergy, the French authorities, and the agents of Bao Dai. This trend is getting worse because of the drought and the bad harvest, which threaten the inhabitants of the Catholic areas. After that, within the DRV, the Catholic populations began to organize large gatherings with more than 10,000 people, demanding evacuation to the South.²²

He was certainly referring to the incidents at Ba Lang (Ninh Binh Province), where 10,000 Catholic candidates for evacuation gathered to demand their repatriation to the South, but were dispersed by the army, even though they were waiting for the members of the International Committee for Supervision and Control (ICSC).²³

In his view, the situation of the Catholics who were trying to go to the South was so serious that the ICSC (through his Polish representative) asked for help from the Polish ship (*Kilinski*), which from October 1954 was in charge of the transfer of the VM soldiers and their families from the South to the North. 'At present, our boat *Kilinski* is helping in the evacuation of Catholics to the South. Up to 18 May, it has transported 10,000 people. Currently, there are some rumours that the French want an extension of the deadline for the population transfer, to more than 300 days.' In his report in February, Ambassador Pietka confirmed 'the government agreement that our boat *Kilinski* would transport 5,400 Catholics from the North to the South, in the framework of the policy of "extending a hand to the Catholics"'.²⁴

Visit of a Special Polish Delegation in April-May 1955 in North Vietnam and its Relative Failure

In fact, the policy towards the Catholics was only a part of the general policy of the DRV for the reunification of the country. And their demand for help from the Polish representatives had a very precise and short term objective: the elections of July 1956, as a report of April 1955 confirmed: 'In the future, collaboration between Poland and Vietnam seems to be necessary in that field, at least until the elections are held in 1956.'²⁵

Indeed, responding to the Vietnamese request, Poland sent a Polish delegation to North Vietnam in the spring of 1955, composed of three members: Fathers Jozef Keller and Mieczyslaw Suwala, and an editor Wojciech Ketrzynski. The two priests belonged to the Catholic association Pax, which worked with the communist regime, and with a layman probably close to the Communist Party. This delegation worked in Vietnam from 13 April to 30 May 1955, for around six weeks. The time chosen for this visit was not an accident, as it was during that period, more precisely on 16 May, that the transfer of troops and populations²⁶ on each side of the 17th parallel was officially to end. That was the deadline for any potential refugees to depart from the DRV.

In their first report dated 19 April,²⁷ the members of the delegation mentioned the principal aim of their mission: 'Our whole work is geared towards the normalization of religious relations in view of the future elections and to giving the democratic power all the elements necessary for their policy in that field.' More precisely, the Polish delegation had three missions: '1) to stop as far as possible the atmosphere of panic concerning the exodus, 2) to help the New Committee of Patriotic and Peace-loving Catholics to increase its authority and to develop propaganda aimed at the Catholics, and 3) to collaborate with the representatives of the democratic power in the development of a policy toward the Catholics.'

How did the delegation go about solving the Catholic problem, that is to say the exodus of the Catholic population? In their first report, the Polish noted: 'The situation among the Catholics remains strained and the atmosphere of panic and flight continues to be significant, particularly in the Vinh area.'²⁸ We have to keep in mind that the deadline of 18 May intensified the climate of panic. In view of that situation, Wojciech Ketrzynski and Father Suwala were entrusted with a propaganda mission, and were sent out to the provinces. They delivered at least 16 speeches during mass meetings. They spoke on the situation of Catholics in Poland as an example of the continued existence of Catholicism within a communist regime.

Wojciech Ketrzynski wrote:²⁹

The greatest effort has been focused on the fourth zone in the bishopric of Vinh, where the situation was the most serious. During two consecutive stays, the delegation made six speeches during mass meetings, in particular during a visit to two camps for people waiting to emigrate. . . . In the third zone, we have organized three meetings, one of which was with the population of Ba Lang, where bloody unrest has taken place.

The two men also made three speeches in Phat Diem, two in Haiphong and two in Hanoi, with the last in the municipal theatre, shortly before their departure for Poland. That speech was later printed in a booklet in Vietnamese and delivered in all the Catholic centres. During these meetings with the Catholic communities, the Polish representatives also distributed religious materials, as well as liturgical robes, which were in short supply among Vietnamese Catholics.

It is easy to see that the results were negligible, not to say nil. In the conclusions of their report, we read: 'the delegation arrived too late to be able to prevent effectively an action that had been set up well in advance, to create an atmosphere of conflict between the DRV and the Catholic circles. No doubt the head of the DRV had not prepared to ward off that action, which would have still been possible in the winter.' It must be added that, contrary to the Polish observations, the Vietnamese government had developed propaganda aimed at the Catholics. Very early in July 1954, Ho Chi Minh in particular had committed himself to a policy of outreach towards the Catholics, through many appeals to the Catholic people, promising that the DRV would guarantee religious freedom.³⁰

Acknowledging their failure, the Polish representatives admitted at the end of their report that 'In reaction against the work of the delegation, anti-Polish propaganda had increased among Vietnamese Catholics.' Indeed, the Poles arrived too late to convince anybody that they should remain in the DRV, while hundreds of thousands of people had already left the North. After all, what could two foreigners do, unable to speak Vietnamese, and who were introduced to the Catholics by the same authorities that were doing everything possible to prevent the Catholics from leaving? It was almost inevitable that they should encounter strong hostility.

The other task of the delegation was to help the *Uy Ban Doan Kêt Cong Giao Yêu Nuoc va Yêu Hoa Binh* (National Committee of Patriotic and Peace-loving Catholics – NCPPLC).³¹ It had been created on 3 March 1955, on the decision of the Fatherland Front, at a time when Catholics were fleeing the North en masse.³² An executive committee had been elected during that meeting, with Father Vu Xuan Ky as president and lawyer Duong Van Dam as vice-president.³³ It was not a mass organization in itself but a group of Catholics whose role was to 'spread government policy among the Catholics and to mobilize them to support the regime and to rally the mass organizations within the Fatherland Front'.³⁴ Immediately afterwards, the apostolic delegate John Dooley and the bishops of the northern bishoprics, in a letter dated 12 March, had condemned that association as 'a danger for the unity of the Vietnamese Church'.

In their very first report, the commission members noted that, 'this committee is too restricted and too cut off from most of the influential Catholic milieus. They need to work to enlarge the base of the committee in order to make it more representative'.³⁵ To spread the committee's influence, the Polish delegation felt that a group of lay activists should be trained in order to develop efficient propaganda within the Catholic community. The Poles gave them examples of such propaganda from Poland. Moreover, the delegation tried to bring the committee closer to the bishopric of Hanoi.

They organized a meeting between the two priests at the head of the committee and Bishop Trinh Nhu Khue, who had suspended them. The meeting was unsuccessful and relations between the committee and the bishopric remained strained.

Thus, the 11 work meetings which the Polish delegation held with the committee during their stay did not seem to bear fruit. In the final Polish delegation's report, Wojciech Ketrzynski concluded: 'One of the main tasks of the delegation was to organize a Catholic social movement, likely in the long term to support a policy of collaboration between the Church and the Democratic State. In fact, Vietnam doesn't have such a movement. The present Catholic National Liaison Committee with the Fatherland Front completely lacks unity and is unable to work.'³⁶ In addition to these meetings with the Catholic committee, the Polish delegation spent a large part of its time meeting the clergy, especially in Hanoi and in the bishoprics of Vinh, Thanh Hoa and Thai Binh, where relations between the church and the local authorities were particularly difficult. Some meetings between the church and governmental authorities were organized in order to 'prevent open conflicts which could have very unfavourable international repercussions'.³⁷ During their conversations with the clergy, they attempted to convince its members of the possibility of the church cohabiting with a socialist regime: they informed them about the religious situation in the PRP and answered the priests' questions about 'the attitude of Polish Catholics towards the Pope, the material situation of the clergy and the religious orders, and the possibilities of religious education for children'.

The position of the Polish priests can be explained by the situation of the Polish church at this time. Indeed, the Polish church's policy toward the state was guided by the strong personality of Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski.³⁸ His attitude toward the socialist state consisted in establishing some sort of *modus vivendi* with the communist regime. His strategy was based on hopeful expectations that developments in Poland might follow a different course from that followed in the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.³⁹ Undoubtedly for pragmatic reasons, the church leaders did not refuse business contacts with representatives of the communist government. As Vincent C. Chrypinski pointed out: 'Fully aware of the role they play in the Polish national life, they preferred a country run by Polish communists to the incorporation of Poland into the Soviet Union.'⁴⁰ Indeed, after hard negotiations, Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski approved discussions on a future accord and was the main driving force among the bishops toward its conclusion (agreements with the state in April 1950 and later in December 1956), in spite of Pope Pius XII's reluctance. He had the deep conviction that social peace was the necessary precondition for the advancement of religion and the promotion of national interests, and that love of the church could coexist with love of his homeland.

Another important mission of the Polish delegation was to persuade reluctant bishops to maintain contacts with the state. During their stay, the Polish delegates organized nine meetings with the hierarchy, that is to say the bishop of Hanoi Trinh Nhu Khué, the bishop of Vinh, Tran Huu Duc, Fathers Tan, Liem and Hiep, curates of regions whose bishops had left for the South (Thanh Hoa, Phat Diem and Haiphong),

as well as two French Dominican bishops (Bishops Hedde and Jacq). It seems that the delegation was not welcomed with open arms, in particular in Hanoi, Vinh and Thanh Hoa. The bishop of Hanoi adopted a cold, not to say a hostile, attitude from the moment of their arrival: 'The bishop has adopted the most hostile position with regard to the delegation, permitting the priests to celebrate mass only in a closed chapel "sine assistentia populi"!' It was the same with the bishop of Vinh. These bishops, described by the delegation as 'reactionary', had stayed on in the North and firmly enjoined the Catholics in their flocks not to leave for the South, contrary to the two bishops of Phat Diem and Bui Chu, Le Huu Tu and Pham Ngoc Chi, who fled to the South, leading their flocks with them.⁴¹

Overall, the Polish mission to 'contribute to the normalization of religious relations' was unsuccessful. The delegation did not succeed in bringing the Catholic committee closer to the hierarchy. It was not the Polish delegation but Nguyen Manh Hà, and the bishop's secretary, Father Pham Ham Quynh, who organized the first official meeting between Vice President Pham Van Dong and the bishop of Hanoi in April 1955.⁴² A prominent Catholic figure in North Vietnam, Nguyen Manh Ha was considered by the French as the head of 'the advanced Catholic leanings' and described as 'leftist'.⁴³ Indeed, under Vo Nguyen Giap's proposal, he participated in the first provisory government of national union in August 1945 as minister of national economy.⁴⁴ As the war broke out at the end of 1946, Nguyen Manh Ha maintained good contacts with the VM leaders (Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap). During the war, he was approached several times by French authorities, to get contacts with the VM leaders. Expelled in 1951 by General de Lattre (who could not stand Hà's position in favour of negotiation with the VM), he lived in Paris with his French wife. Anxious with regard to the position of the church in a communist regime, he met the VM leaders in Geneva in July 1954 and proposed his services as the intermediary between the DRV and the church. The DRV leaders invited him to Hanoi twice in 1955. Thanks to his friendship with the bishop's secretary, Father Pham Ham Quynh, and his quite good relations with Bishop of Hanoi Trinh Nhu Khué, Nguyen Manh Ha succeeded in persuading him to accept a meeting with the DRV leaders, in order to define the future church–state relations. Without doubt, the role of Nguyen Manh Ha was predominant on that question. And the Polish delegation was unable to have any influence on the Vietnamese hierarchy.

It appears that the one positive achievement of the Polish Catholic delegation involved their work on the Vietnamese legislation defining relations between church and state. On several occasions, they met the DRV political authorities, Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong, and above all Hoang Quoc Viet, member of the Lao Dong Party's political board delegated to take charge of Catholic affairs. On their arrival, the Polish delegation criticized 'the lack of precise political guidelines concerning the Catholic problem'.⁴⁵ Subsequently, they made some proposals with regard to the organization of a board for religious services and religious affairs. They also took part in the editing of laws with the ministry and the lawyer Duong Van Dam. As Wojciech Ketrzynski asserted in his report:

the delegation took an active part in elaborating the texts of the decree concerning religious freedom and freedom of conscience. This text has been corrected several times by the delegation and, to a large extent, the final editing is the result of the delegation's work. . . . It has also collaborated on the elaboration of the land reform rules, concerning the question of ecclesiastical property and the general issue of the financial basis of Catholic activity in Vietnam.⁴⁶

Indeed, on 14 June 1955⁴⁷ the decree no. 234 on the religious question was promulgated by Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong. The decree guaranteed 'freedom of conscience and religious observance' as well as the economic, cultural and social activities of the religious denominations (including religious education) and even planned special treatment for the religious denominations in the Land Reform. There was a slight relaxation in attitudes regarding the practice of religion (above all in Hanoi) in 1955, but it did not last. Moreover, the situation at the time was very different in the countryside, where the fifth phase of the Land Reform was being implemented in an uncompromising way.⁴⁸

In my opinion, the decree also bears the imprint of President Ho Chi Minh, who had always paid special attention to relations with religious believers, and with the Catholics in particular. To elaborate the legislation defining relations between church and state, the Polish representatives certainly used as a model articles 70 and 80 of the Polish Constitution of 22 July 1952. Officially, the religious policy of the Polish state was governed by two highly acclaimed principles: freedom of conscience and religion (*wolność sumienia i wyznania*) and the separation of church and state.⁴⁹ But the importance of Polish participation in drafting the law on religion could only be finally evaluated by consulting the preparatory texts in the Vietnamese archives.

In any case, the Polish delegation's contribution remained limited by the understanding of freedom of religion in the 'Peoples' Democracies'. These states guaranteed religious freedom on the model of the Soviet Constitution.⁵⁰ In his book *Society Rediscovered: Politics and Religion in Soviet Europe*, the French sociologist Patrick Michel notes that the problem lies in the interpretation and application of this law: 'The attitude of regimes [of the Soviet type] toward religion, everywhere conforms to the same simple rule: to forbid any religious life outside State control.'⁵¹

Polish-Vietnamese Cooperation Concerning Religious Questions and its Limits (September 1955–December 1956)

Polish cooperation with the Vietnamese on religious matters after the departure of the Catholic delegation was very limited. The proposals of the Polish advisers did not achieve any significant results. For example, the Vietnamese request to Polish Ambassador Pietka to send discreetly to Vietnam (without any official position, but under the cloak of a Catholic newspaper correspondent) 'an experienced Polish Catholic layman who could collaborate with the Political Department and the Committee of Patriotic Catholics regarding questions of church–state relations, organization of the Catholic Committee and propaganda towards Catholics,' did not

seem to bring results. Likewise, the proposal to invite Vietnamese priests, 'aware, mature and socially progressive' to study at the faculty of theology in Warsaw, as well as the proposal to send 'socially progressive' Polish priests 'to help in training the Vietnamese priests to attain a democratic state of mind',⁵² produced no outcome.

On the Polish side, it was probably not easy to find volunteers and competent persons to send to Vietnam, all the more so as the Vietnamese clergy and the Catholic population had already shown suspicion towards the Polish advisers in the spring of 1955. On the Vietnamese side, the Catholic question became less important after July 1956, as soon as the hope of an imminent reunification disappeared and the waves of refugees decreased. In the end, the religious cooperation with Polish Catholics was probably forgotten, as it had been much less significant than the indispensable economic aid received from the communist bloc.

The sole proposals that achieved any results were the sending of propaganda materials about relations between church and state in Poland, and the sending of religious and theological books in Latin, and religious materials such as communion wine and hosts. Along with this aid, the exchanges between the Committees of Patriotic Catholics of the two countries were probably the most important legacy. The Polish delegation to Vietnam was followed by the visit of a Vietnamese delegation to Poland in the autumn of 1955 (from 7 October to 5 December 1955). The three members of Committee of Patriotic Catholics, the lawyer Duong Van Dam, Father Nguyen Thanh Tien and Vo Thanh Trinh, and the secretary Nguyen Van Dat (probably a party member in charge of keeping watch on them) were welcomed by the corresponding association Pax. Beside the meetings between the Committees of Patriotic Catholics of the two countries, the Vietnamese delegation took the opportunity to visit all of the important Polish cities, and their sanctuaries.

The following year, the plan to send a 'delegation of Vietnamese cadres specializing in religious questions'⁵³ to Poland in October and November 1956, to work on propaganda materials, was not realized. In the end it was a delegation of patriotic Catholics that made the trip in October, after a visit to the GDR. In a note of 26 September 1956, the chief of Department V at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, Jerzy Gora, reported a conversation with Hoang Luong, the secretary of the Vietnamese embassy. The Vietnamese diplomat was complaining about the two patriotic priests in the Catholic delegation, Father Ho Than Bien and Vuong Dinh Hai. During their stay in Berlin, they were accused of 'trying to make contact with [German] priests who were very critical of the religious situation in the GDR'. In the view of Hoang Luong, they had made a grave mistake, and he asked the Polish to put them in contact with good patriotic Polish priests during their visit in Poland.⁵⁴ I did not find any report about their visit in Poland. But a note of 22 November 1956 reported a conversation with the Vietnamese representative in Warsaw, Hoang Luong, in which he informed the Polish ministry that 'the authorities of the DRV had decided to postpone the visit of Polish Catholics to Vietnam to a later period. The reason he gave was that he had not succeeded in finalizing the programme for

the visit. The embassy would inform the ministry as soon as the timing for the visit was arranged'.⁵⁵

In this report, we can see the political hardening of the northern line, and signs of tension within the government. The party was coming in for criticism after the XXth congress of the Soviet Union Communist Party in February 1956. Indeed, from autumn 1956, the DRV government had to answer for the excesses of the Land Reform. The French journalist Georges Chaffard wrote about the very critical year 1956 for the DRV:

1956 was a year marked by the crisis of the Land Reform, which brutally shook the still fragile structures of the regime. . . . Everywhere, the land reform had been conducted with brutality and lack of understanding, unleashing in the countryside a dissatisfaction that turned into a revolt in some regions. . . . The dissatisfaction came to its height at the same time as the events of Budapest and the 'Polish October' were shaking the Communist world. The foundations of the Hanoi government were weakened.⁵⁶

It is probably in this context that the patriotic priests thought it would be possible to meet people with more critical opinions about the political and religious situation in Central Europe. At that time Europe was in an uproar, with the uprising in East Berlin in June 1953, the riots in Poznan in June 1956, and the insurrection of Budapest in October 1956. All would be quelled.

The Vietnamese government thus preferred to cancel the visit of the Polish Catholics. I did not find any files in the following years attesting to exchanges between Polish and Vietnamese patriotic Catholics. Despite the period of One Hundred Flowers, and a relative liberalization for the Catholic Church in 1957,⁵⁷ the government definitely put an end to the experience of Catholic exchanges. They feared the contagion of these revolts and protests from Central Europe. Moreover, it was unthinkable to invite a Polish delegation because of the critical situation in the country at the end of 1956, in particular in the Catholic regions.

Indeed, several reports of November 1956 mentioned incidents in Catholic-dominated areas. The best-known uprising occurred in November 1956 in Quynh Luu, in Ho Chi Minh's Nghe An Province, with a rebellion that threatened to spread to surrounding areas. Because of discriminatory treatment during the Land Reform, some Catholics had sold their goods and livestock. Then, according to the Vietnamese authorities, under pressure from the clergy, large meetings of 300 to 500 people had been assembled, with a strong attendance of young people. On 12 and 13 November, several hundred Catholics organized meetings to demand the right to leave the North for the South, shouting slogans such as 'Down with Land Reform!', 'Down with Communism, down with the Popular Republic of China!', 'Down with the USSR!', 'Long live Virgin Mary!' According to these reports, the meetings provoked incidents with the army, which left five people dead and a lot of wounded.⁵⁸ A few days later Ho Chi Minh announced the rectification of errors campaign, which lasted through the end of 1957, and acknowledged the excesses of the Land Reform campaign.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to discuss two important points. The first concerns the specificity of the religious policy of the DRV, especially in comparison with China. The second concerns the Polish view of a key period of DRV history.

The first question is: to what extent did the Poles influence the Lao Dong Party in its religious policy and to what extent did the DRV diverge from Chinese policy towards the Catholic Church?

Of course, strict control over religious life in the DRV was the norm in the communist bloc: control of hierarchy and clergy, creation of a Committee of Patriotic Catholics in order to control them better, restriction of religious teaching, severe press restrictions – these were typical measures. But as the French sociologist Patrick Michel pointed out, all the communist countries shared the same ideology toward religion, but each country adapted this common ideology to a particular national context. At the same time, the churches ‘are aware of the necessity to see the long term and so to make a minimum compromise in a transitory phase’. He also added:

The power’s attitude depends on the presumed utility of the church in comparison with the objectives fixed by the party. If it seems to be pointless, it would be advisable to destroy the church. On the contrary, either the church would agree to collaborate and it will be protected, or the church would refuse or would collaborate reluctantly and it will be repressed.

According to Michel, church/state relations in the Eastern European countries followed the second logic.⁵⁹

What can be said about the religious policy of the DRV? Is it much more similar to that of the former Eastern European countries or to China’s? At first sight, the situation of religion within the Vietnam state seems to be very close to that in China. As in China, the state control and monitoring of religion in Vietnam and the attitudes of suspicion and systematic policies of regulation or suppression toward grassroots religion are far from an invention of the Communist Party. Indeed, ‘the state’s prerogative to determine which forms of religion are acceptable within the dominant orthodoxy of the day, and which forms are to be spurned as ‘heterodox’, as well as the bureaucratic impulse to control even authorized religious form and repress deviancy’, is deeply rooted in China and Vietnam’s governing tradition, based on Confucianism.⁶⁰

Moreover, from the perspective of the communist government in Vietnam as in China during the 1950s, Catholics were suspected of being traitors and spies: because of the use by the western powers of religious justifications for launching military action during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Catholics were associated with western expansion and dubbed the cultural arm of western imperialism. At the time of the communist takeover, the Vietnamese Catholic Church, as the Chinese one, was still seen as largely at the hands of Europeans missionaries and its members could not be trusted unless they could prove their patriotism.⁶¹

But, in my opinion, the religious policy of the communist government in Vietnam stands out from the Chinese one. First, because of the immensity of China, ‘the Catholic Church is absolutely insignificant in the national internal policy of the PRC.’⁶² The Vietnamese Catholic Church, in contrast, carries a heavier weight in Vietnamese history, even if it has always been seen by the communists as an instrument, not as a partner. In the case of the DRV, I think that the objectives of the Communist Party in the 1950s required unity with the Catholics, at least twice: first during the war of independence, and second during the fight for reunification in the years 1954–56. Although the Vietnamese government did not intend to outlaw the church, its long-range aim was to transform the church into an instrument for the state, in a continuing policy inherited from the war against the French. Because the Catholic Church had a certain utility, the DRV policy toward the Catholics was *in theory* very liberal, as in the decree of June 1955.

In the realm of legislation, the DRV created its own religious policy. During the war of independence against the French, Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong expressed their understanding and their open-mindedness towards religion, and had acquired a certain amount of experience.⁶³ Their considerable influence, together with the Polish input, can explain the very liberal legislation dealing with church/state relations drawn up during 1955, in comparison with other communist countries. Of course, there was a gap between texts and practice!

So it can be said that the religious policy of the DRV is much more similar to that of the former Eastern European countries than to China’s. While the DRV chose the Chinese Marxist model for the organization of the party, for the conduct of the war, and for Land Reform, it did not follow the Chinese model for religious policy. Indeed, China is the only state that succeeded in creating an autonomous Catholic bishopric: local Catholic reform committees created in 1950 were centralized in 1957 in a national Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) which consecrated several new bishops without Vatican approval. That was not the case in Vietnam: according to Ho Chi Minh, the fight for the reunification demanded that all the internal forces rally (also in the South) and obtain international support (not only from the communist bloc), as during the war against the French. An openly anti-religious policy, with the creation of an autonomous church, had been rejected by the Vietnamese northern government.⁶⁴

Did the Polish play a role in that trend of the DRV religious policy? From the Polish archives, we can conclude that the Polish influence on religious policy in North Vietnam was in the end limited. It can be said that the mission of the Polish delegation to stop the exodus of the Catholics from the North to the South failed. It also failed in helping the Committee of Patriotic and Peace-loving Catholics to increase its authority among the Catholics and to improve its relations with the church hierarchy. Their role in drafting the law on religion seems to be the most noticeable but had to be evaluated by consulting the preparatory texts in the Vietnamese archives.⁶⁵

So, it seems that the Poles did not have a demonstrable impact upon the situation in Vietnam. Indisputably, there had been a ‘culture shock’ of Poles and Vietnamese encountering each other basically for the first time. First, on the ‘catholic level,’ the

historical heritage of the Catholic Church in Poland, and in Vietnam was completely different. Whereas the weight of the Catholic Church was determining in contemporary Poland,⁶⁶ it was a religious minority in Vietnam, seen as a foreign religion supporting the western invaders. That certainly explains the critical analysis of the Polish observers about the situation of Catholics in North Vietnam and the Vietnamese Communist Party policy with regard to church–state relations. It is difficult to imagine such a proposal for help in the evacuation of Catholics to the South, from another brother country.

Second, the ‘cultural shock’ may also exist on the ‘state level’. Whereas the PRP was one of the only countries of the communist bloc to keep a private sector in the agricultural field, the RDV started a Land Reform on the Chinese model. It must be noted that their critical views about the DRV policy (on a religious and political level) dated from early 1955, much before the decisive XXth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. This is evidence of the broadmindedness of the Polish representatives in Vietnam.

In my opinion, the Polish archives offer new light on the first years of the independent DRV. During the years 1955–56, Polish representatives in Hanoi tried to be objective, and did not hesitate to criticize their Vietnamese comrades. Their reports offer a quite balanced description of the domestic situation in North Vietnam. Of particular interest is the Polish observers’ concern in understanding the reasons for the massive exodus of people from the North to the South. Of course, they insisted on French–American propaganda and on the harmful influence of the ‘reactionary clergy’. But the economic cause of the massive exodus during the year 1954–56 is strongly underlined, in particular they pointed out the dramatic economic situation in the winter and spring of 1955 and the responsibility of the Vietnamese comrades.

To conclude, with regard to the implications in the Vietnamese situation of the great powers, in particular the two great communist countries USSR and China, the political role of the PRP was obviously limited. The PRP did not weigh in a decisive way either during 1954–, or on the course of the war in Vietnam. But the period 1954–56 marked the beginning of a growing diplomacy of Poland in Southeast Asia which led to a ‘go-between’ role in the peace negotiation in the 1960s.⁶⁷ Consulting Polish archives for the late 1950s and early 1960s would certainly enrich our knowledge of contemporary history of the DRV, on the domestic as well as the international level.

Notes

- [1] Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (AMSZ) Archives of Foreign Affairs, Department V, Zespół (Unit) 12, Teczka (box) 613, Wiazka (file) 26: Report on the activity of the Catholic delegation in Vietnam between 13 April and 30 May 1955, Hanoi, signed Wojciech Ketrzynski.
- [2] Pax was an association of Catholic priests and laymen who supported the new Polish communist regime policy, created just after the Second World War. Its founder Boleslaw

Piasecki (1915–79) thought the collaboration with the communists would permit them to transform the system from the inside.

- [3] Most of these reports are based on those of the Polish representatives in the International Committee for Supervision and Control (ICSC). Indeed, Poland had been designated during the Geneva meeting as a member of the ICSC. The aim of this commission was to ensure the application of the military agreements, in particular the gathering together of the military forces on either side of the dividing line at the 17th parallel. It also was commissioned to supervise the political settlement planned in the Final Declaration, which foresaw free elections in July 1956 with a future reunification in mind. This commission reflected the balance of power of that time, since it was composed of three countries: Poland representing the communist bloc, Canada the capitalist block, and India the new emerging power and leader of neutralism. Then, the work in the field of Polish representatives was an invaluable source of information for the Polish embassy. In March 1955, there were 160 employed in the Polish delegation. On the ICSC see Thakur, 'Peacekeeping and Foreign Policy', but because of a lack of sources, the author dealt very little with Poland.
- [4] In parallel with this policy of national union, the VM did not hesitate to use more expeditious methods to get rid of the rival nationalist parties. See the paper by Guillemot, 'Au cœur de la fracture vietnamienne'.
- [5] Concerning relations between Catholic personalities and VM leaders see Trần, 'Les catholiques vietnamiens et la RDVN (1945–1954)'.
- [6] ASHAT INDO 10 H 4191: Circular banning using places of worship for war purposes, Nguyen Binh, no. 413/TS, 14 July 1947.
- [7] ASHAT INDO 10 H 4191: SDECE BR n° 15699/8, 9 September 1949, leaflet signed by Ung Van Khiem, Commissioner of the Interior of the Nam Bo.
- [8] Lebourdais, 'Missions of Tonkin', 208–209.
- [9] Sharing the same religion as the colonizers, the Catholics were accused of being the reason for the French conquest. Nevertheless, Christianity in Vietnam did not arrive with the French occupation, but appeared in the sixteenth century, thanks to the Portuguese Jesuits. From the seventeenth century, Christianity spread over Vietnam, thanks to the action of the Avignonese Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes, and thanks to the Spanish Dominicans. Faced with the hostility of the Vietnamese imperial power with regard to a religion considered as foreign, the Vatican's concern was to avoid any compromising deals on the part of the missionaries with the great colonial powers of that time (Spain and Portugal). On Jesuit advice, the Vatican entrusted to a French order, the Missions Etrangères de Paris, the task of evangelizing Vietnam. It was the French missionaries one century later who would appeal to French troops to put an end to the persecution of the Catholics. With that intervention, the Vietnamese Catholics were compromised. See Tran, 'De la notion loyauté/déloyauté à la notion d'engagement politique'.
- [10] Tran, 'Les catholiques vietnamiens pendant la guerre d'indépendance (1945–1954)'.
- [11] It must be added that the Catholic community was far from monolithic. In 1945, Vietnamese Catholics involved themselves in a great diversity of political parties, from the nationalist to the Communist Party. In 1949, three trends could be distinguished: a dominant trend around Ngo Dinh Diem and the northern bishoprics, a minority supporting Bao Dai, and another minority supporting the VM (particularly in the South) For further information, see Tran, 'Les catholiques vietnamiens pendant la guerre d'indépendance (1945–1954)'.
- [12] During the 1947–54 period, the Vietnamese communists controlled areas of the North and implemented revolutionary policies there, in particular the Land Reform from 1953.
- [13] See Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War, Vol. I*, 55–69, Chapter 4, Hanoi and Reunification.

- [14] ASHAT Fonds Gambiez, 1 K 540 Carton 16, Report on the situation of the North Vietnam refugees, written by Bishop Pham Ngoc Chi, Apostolic Curate of Bui Chu in charge of North Vietnamese refugees, October 1955, sent to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Rome. Of 860,206 refugees, 676,348 were Catholics.
- [15] The PPR had recognized the DRV in 1950, as did most of the countries of the communist bloc, but it was only after the signature of the Geneva agreements, that an ambassador was sent in Hanoi. AMSZ, Department V, Z11,T675, W47, Bangkok; 30 January 1950, No. PV/511-NG, Representative of the DRV in Thailand Nguyen Duc Quy to the Foreign Office of the PRP – Letter of Hoang Minh Giam, 23 January 1950.
- [16] AMSZ, Department V, Z12,T612, W26, AH 36 14 W55, Report of R Cielewicz, captain of the boat Jan Kilinski, 7 April 1955. See also Jurdzinski, Transport żołnierzy Wietcongu. In all, the Polish boat transported nearly 85,000 people, and 3,500 tonnes of military equipment and 250 of ammunition.
- [17] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T608, W25: AH/242/1/W/55 Hanoi, 14 January 1955, Ambassador Pietka: report from 20 December 1954 to 10 January 1955.
- [18] In their report, the delegation of the Polish mission visiting Vietnam in April–May 1955 made the same analysis: ‘The material situation, and above all the critical food situation is one of the reasons for the exodus (even if the efficient propaganda Americano-French is the most important).’ AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activities of the Delegation of Polish Catholics in Vietnam (13 to 19 April 1955), Hanoi, 19 April 1955, signed P. J. Keller, P. Suwala and W. Ketrzynski.
- [19] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T608, W25 Ambassador Pietka, Hanoi, 10 April 1955, March report: ‘Among the most important difficulties with which our comrades are confronted is the threat of famine. . . . At the moment, aid from the PRC arriving, but it doesn’t cover all the needs. The harvest of May looks unpromising because of the drought that reigns.’
- [20] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T606, W25 Tel no. 101050, Hanoi, 20 April 1955 signed Ogrodzinski.
- [21] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T608, W25 Ambassador Pietka, Hanoi, 2 May 1955, April report: ‘At the end of April, the situation improved a bit thanks to the arrival of rice, chickens and potatoes from the PRC.’
- [22] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T1235, W63: Ambassador Jerzy Grudzinski, New Delhi, 27 April 1955, Report no. 243/10/55 to the Foreign Office in Warsaw. Moreover, the ambassador reported some demands of Catholics, refugees in the South who ‘disappointed not to find fields and buffaloes promised by the Bao Dai power, demanded to come back to the North’.
- [23] ASHAT Fonds Gambiez, 1 K 540 Carton 16, Report not signed, Haiphong, 25 February 1955: The Refugees of North Viet Nam, 5: The report speaks about a bloody fight which left 50 Catholic dead or injured.
- [24] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T608, W25, AH/242/4/W/55 Ambassador Pietka, Political report, February 1955.
- [25] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activity of the Catholic delegation in Vietnam, between 13 April and 30 May 1955, Hanoi, signed Wojciech Ketrzynski: ‘One should cut the Catholics from the South, and keep them forever in the democratic camp; that could have a great importance in the fight beginning for the unification of the country.’
- [26] About the Geneva agreements and the international context concerning the partition of Vietnam, see Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, Vol. I, 19–33: Chapter 2, The Geneva Partition.
- [27] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activities of the delegation of the Polish Catholics in Vietnam (13 to 19 April 1955), Hanoi, 19 April 1955, signed P. J. Keller, P. Suwala and W. Ketrzynski.
- [28] Ibid.

- [29] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activity of the Catholic delegation in Vietnam between 13 April and 30 May 1955, Hanoi, signed Wojciech Ketrzynski.
- [30] Gheddo, *Catholiques et bouddhistes au Vietnam*, 108. Ho Chi Minh spoke on this issue in July, October and then December. He sent a letter to the Catholics for Christmas, promising them religious freedom and he lifted the curfew on the occasion of the midnight mass.
- [31] In his first report, the Polish ambassador writes that he suggested to the Vietnamese officials, who asked for assistance about Catholic questions, 'to create an association of Patriotic Catholics in order to sharpen the patriotic feelings among the Vietnamese priests'.
AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T608, W25: AH/242/1/W/55 Hanoi, 14 January 1955, Ambassador Pietka: Political report, 20 December 1954 to 10 January 1955
- [32] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T608, W25: AH/242/5/W/55 Hanoi, 10 April 1955, Ambassador Tomasz Pietka, March political report.
- [33] The steering committee was composed of eight priests and 21 laymen. A newspaper, *Chinh Nghia* (The Righteous Cause) was also created.
- [34] Denney, 'The Catholic Church in Vietnam', 273.
- [35] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activities of the delegation of Polish Catholics in Vietnam (13 to 19 April 1955), Hanoi, 19 April 1955, signed Father J. Keller, Father Suwala and W. Ketrzynski.
- [36] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activity of the Catholic delegation in Vietnam between 13 April and 30 May 1955, Hanoi, signed Wojciech Ketrzynski.
- [37] See the incidents in November 1956 in Quynh Luu, in Ho Chi Minh's Nghe An Province in the following pages.
- [38] From 1949 to 1981, Cardinal Wyszynski led the church as the primate of Poland and the chairman of the conference of the Polish episcopate. See Chrypinski, 'The Catholic Church in Poland 1944–1989', 121–122.
- [39] See Wyszynski, *Zapiski wiezienne*, 23.
- [40] Chrypinski, *The Catholic Church in Poland*, 22–23.
- [41] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activity of the Catholic delegation in Vietnam between 13 April and the 30 May 1955, Hanoi, signed Wojciech Ketrzynski. About the bishop of Vinh: 'He's a rather old priest with a committed, reactionary political past. Today, he seems to be a reasonable and cautious man. . . . He has firmly declared his will to stay at the head of his bishopric, and his hostile position with regard to the migration movement» in particular to the seminarists of the High Seminary of Vinh, the only one to remain open.'
- [42] Interview with Nguyen Manh Ha and Pham Han Quynh, Ivry, 15 May 1989.
- [43] In 1945, he was working as factory inspector in the colonial administration in Haiphong. But in the Catholic circles, he was above all well known as the founder of the Youth Christian Workers (Jeunesses Ouvrières Chrésiennes). His concerns in social questions can be explained by his experience in the 'Action Catholique' in France when he was a student during the 1920s and 1930s. Back from France as a graduate of Law in 1937, he was very concerned to develop the 'social thinking of the church' in the Vietnamese church, and the Catholic presence among the workers' milieus in the harbour of Haiphong in particular. See 'Trần Thị Liên, Nguyen Manh Ha: A Voice for a Neutral Solution in South Vietnam (1954–1957)'.
- [44] The choice of the communist leaders can be explained by different reasons. Because they wanted to rally Catholics, they chose a 'progressive figure' from the Vietnamese church. Because their priority was to get independence by negotiation with French authorities, Ha was seen as the right man to approach the French officials, especially the prime minister, Georges Bidault, Christian democratic leader of the MRP (Mouvement Républicain Populaire). He was sent to the Fontainebleau conference in 1946 as a mediator, because of

- his links with the French Catholic circles as well as the fact that was married to a French woman, who was the daughter of Georges Marrane, of the French Communist Party (senator and health secretary in 1946). See Trân, 'Les catholiques vietnamiens et la RDVN (1945–1954)', 258–260.
- [45] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activities of the delegation of Polish Catholics in Vietnam (13 to 19 April 1955), Hanoi, 19 April 1955, signed Father J. Keller, Father Suwala and W. Ketrzynski.
- [46] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Report about the activity of the Catholic delegation in Vietnam between 13 April and 30 May 1955, Hanoi, signed Wojciech Ketrzynski.
- [47] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T608, W25: AH/242/7/W/55 Hanoi, 15 August 1955, Ambassador Tomasz Pietka, Political report for March. See Le Minh Duc, *Les catholiques en République Démocratique du Viet Nam*, 19 and 32.
- [48] Gheddo, *Catholiques et bouddhistes au Vietnam*, 108–112.
- [49] Chrypinski, 'The Catholic Church in Poland 1944–1989', 119.
- [50] Constitution of USSR, 1936 article 124: 'In order to assure citizens the freedom of consciousness, the church in USSR is separated from the state, and school from the church. The freedom to practise religious cults and the freedom of antireligious propaganda are admitted to all the citizens'; see Vaisse, *Le prix de la survie*, 121.
- [51] Michel, *La Société retrouvée*, 38.
- [52] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T613, W26: Warszawa, 6/9/1955, Note of the vice director of the Department V. E. Sluczanski to comrade minister M. Naszkowski.
- [53] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T617, W26 DV Indoch 086/13/56, Note about the conversation with the secretary of the DRV Embassy in Warsaw, comrade Hoang Luong, 26 July 1956.
- [54] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T617, W26 DV Indoch 086/24/56, Note about the conversation with the secretary of the DRV Embassy in Warsaw, comrade Hoang Luong, 24 September 1956.
- [55] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T617, W26 DV Indoch 086/25/56, Note about the conversation with the secretary of the DRV Embassy in Warsaw, comrade Hoang Luong, 22 November 1956.
- [56] Chaffard, *Indochine, dix ans d'indépendance*, 138–140.
- [57] About the relative liberalization during the period of One Hundred Flowers, see Gheddo, *Catholiques et bouddhistes au Vietnam*, 121–122.
- [58] AMSZ, Department V, Z12, T619, W26 domestic situation – Meeting of the Central Committee about the Land reform 1956: report 14/242/1/11/57, Florian Ratajczak to Comrade Sluczanski, Hanoi, 10 December 1956 Note about the conference of Central Committee on 30 November 1956, organized by the DRV Foreign Affairs Ministry.
- [59] Michel, *La Société retrouvée*, 37–39.
- [60] See Bays, 'A Tradition of State Dominance', 13 and 25–39. Thus, the Board of Rites under dynastic governments, as the Religious Affairs Bureau under communist ones, was a specific institutional apparatus in charge of registration and licensing of religious groups and assumed the right to monitor and intervene in religious affairs, in order to avoid any religious movement that could evolve into a dangerous political force for the central government.
- [61] See Madsen, 'Catholic Conflict and Cooperation in the People's Republic of China', 93–106.
- [62] Hanson, 'The Catholic Church in China', 256–257.
- [63] The Catholic Nguyen Manh Ha had always been impressed by their open-minded attitude during its collaboration in 1945. That is the reason why he agreed to return to Hanoi in 1955 in order to try to improve the relations between church and state.
- [64] Concerning church–state relations in China, and in particular the delicate question of the appointment of bishops, the Vatican is willing today 'to adopt the "Vietnam model" in

- which the Vatican appoints bishops from a list approved by the government! See Madsen, 'Catholic Conflict and Cooperation in the People's Republic of China', 103–104.
- [65] The request to consult these documents in the Centre no. 3 of the National Archives in Hanoi was unsuccessful.
- [66] Indeed from modern times, the Catholic Church was one of the pillars of the Polish identity and nationalism, in the face of Protestant German and Orthodox Russian invaders.
- [67] See Hershberg, with Gluchowski, 'Who Murdered "Marigold"?', and Gnoinska, 'Poland and Vietnam, 1963'.

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