

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF SAVING THE WORLD IN THE DOGMAS OF HÒA HẢO BUDDHISM

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Abstract: *The dogmas of Hòa Hảo Buddhism are the moral philosophy not only able to meet the people's spiritual, but also comes from messianic elements, i.e. kindness and compassion ideas, good for the purpose of saving sentient beings and the pursuit of happiness for man. Most content of the tenets is focused on the promotion of human dignity. In the paper the author would like to stress the salvation of Hòa Hảo Buddhism tenets.*

The dogmas of Hòa Hảo Buddhism are expressed in 6 books of Oracles written by Huỳnh Phú Sổ - the founder of Hòa Hảo Buddhism. The guideline of Hòa Hảo dogma is to study Buddhism to improve ourselves. The dogma of Hòa Hảo has advised that his followers should cultivate nature and have pity on living beings.

As you know, any religion was started from a legend. The legends of our nation often have religious features so the relation between the spiritual and the temporal never separates each other. In other way, the relation between “the dusty world” and “the holy world” has been close. The national cultural identity has presented in religion, especially in our native religions. Vietnamese legend on worship of deity changed into the custom of ancestor-worship. This worship has enhanced the relations of generations and it has become valuable tradition of our people. This tradition has reflected respectful behavior and filial piety of Vietnamese people to their ancestors and parents. Passing many years, the custom of ancestor worship has developed and become the spiritual life because death would guide beings to the paradise and create the invisible relation between the sacredness and worldliness. This relation has been solace for beings and it has balanced the essence of beings in the spiritual and temporal life.

Basing on this conception we find that dogma of Hòa Hảo Buddhism on: “To study Buddhism to improve ourselves” and “Four Debts of Gratitude” is new dogma. This dogma not only meets the spiritual need of people but also reflects the spirit of

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saving the world i.e. charitableness, mercifulness in salvation of living beings and seeking of happiness. Before the dogma “to study Buddhism to improve ourselves” there was a view that all people who entered into religion had to reject sentiment and separate their families. Their unique aim had been learning of Buddha. The dogma “To study Buddhism to improve ourselves” of Monk Tây An has been different from the above view. This dogma has stressed on the salvation. It has given prominence to improve ourselves, first of all the Four Debts of Gratitude. In the 6th book (The summary things for followers), venerable Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ wrote that: if we would like to realize dutifulness we should do our best to comply with the four Great Debts of Gratitude “*Gratitude to our Ancestors and Parents; Gratitude to County; Gratitude to three Treasurer; Gratitude to our fellow countrymen*”.

Here, we find that the dogma of Hòa Hảo Buddhism stresses on the salvation. The dogma of Hòa Hảo Buddhism has given prominence to improving ourselves than studying Buddhism. Most of dogma’s content has discussed on morality and **proper behavior**. According to Hòa Hảo Buddhism’s dogma “Leading a religious life bases on moral foundation and social morality, first of all proper behavior”; when we lead a religious life “our heart should be peaceful, our temper should be easy and our mind should be elevated and we try our best to seek the truth. This truth is the behavior of our religion towards humankind, God, Buddha” and “when entering into religion we should try to save livings from misfortune”⁽¹⁾.

In a certain aspect, we have to recognize that the dogma “to study Buddhism and to improve ourselves” of Hòa Hảo Buddhism has made the bold outline of the relation between the holy world (studying Buddhism) and the dusty world (improving ourselves). So we can find that only sentence of “improving ourselves” shows the salvation of Hòa Hảo Buddhism. Hòa Hảo Buddhism attaches much importance to improve ourselves so it advises his followers to cultivate virtue and morals. We find that the belief of Hòa Hảo Buddhism was not basing on any spiritual powers because Hòa Hảo Buddhism has not encouraged his followers to build pagodas, to establish system of monks. Furthermore, Hòa Hảo Buddhism has been influenced by the spirit of loving our country, people and standing up to French of Đoàn Minh Huyên⁽²⁾. This spirit was as follow:

“To expel French to serve our country”.

¹. The dogma of Hòa Hảo Buddhism (6th volume), p. 199.

². A mandarin under the Nguyễn dynasty. He was a patriot. He hated French colonialists. He refuted in Thất Sơn (An Giang), then he built a pagoda there.

Two verses in a poem of Venerable Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ have showed aspiration, sentiment, patriotic spirit and consciousness of our nation

The dogma of Hòa Hảo Buddhism compiled by Venerable Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ also sprang from national aspiration and consciousness.

The salvation of Hòa Hảo's dogma has showed clearly, truthfully and ordinarily.

"We are the farmer-Buddhists

We are practicing Buddhism while faming our land"

Or

"If we would like to attain Buddhahood we should establish our position in this world".

May "the farmer -Buddhist" and "establishing our position in this world" realize to improve ourselves, first of all proper behavior? When the proper behavior has been realized completely, studying Buddhism becomes an important element and condition for beings to carry out improving ourselves. To realize proper behavior completely is to study Buddhism. In fact, the dogma on studying Buddhism for self-improvement has rooted Hòa Hảo followers' consciousness who consider the Four Debts of Gratitude as a need of faith and religious way for the developing of Dharma and strengthening of national independence with the aim of salvation.

There is no need for further argument because four contents of the Four Debts of Gratitude reflect clearly the identity of Vietnamese traditional culture. We can find that the salvation in the dogma of Hòa Hảo Buddhism has been changed from studying Buddhism into improving ourselves through religious practice as charitable activities. This religious practice corresponds to poverty - alleviation policy of our Party and State and contributes to the cause of help of the poor and social welfare.

Hòa Hảo Buddhism and its followers are interested in charitable social work and help of the poor. Hòa Hảo Buddhists' charitable activities are various. They take care of the sick, they distribute free medicine to the sick. They build houses of gratitude and of compassion for the poor... Hòa Hảo Buddhism has made noticeable contributions to society for saving the poor in remote areas from suffering.

According to summing up report of the Central Management Council of Hòa Hảo Buddhism, from May, 1999 to June, 2008 the charitable activities of Hòa Hảo Buddhist Church attained 120.000.000.000 Vietnamese đồng, the assistance fund of

the first half of the 2nd term (June, 2004- June, 2008) was 88.442.000.000 Vietnamese đồng. The followers of Hòa Hảo Buddhism have done many useful works:

They erected 493 bridges and repaired 247 bridges.

They built 5.229 houses of gratitude and repaired 1.165 old houses.

They contributed 3.723.000.000 Vietnamese đồng to help people who met many difficulties by natural calamity.

They contributed 144.400.000 đồng to eye surgery for 722 poor people.

They repaired 320 km of village roads.

In Hồ Chí Minh city, from 1993 to 2005 Bảo Hòa charitable society supplied poor patients in some hospitals with 3.895.223 free rations.

Basing above problems we find that self improvement has been feature of salvation and essence of filial piety. Self-improvement contributes to the development of both Hòa Hảo Buddhism and the country, especially in tendency of international integration at present. In this background, the relation between the spiritual and the temporal has been the essence of human; it reminds us of morality, proper behavior and helps us to remember the national source. /.