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**LEADERSHIP OF PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL PARTY  
COMMITTEES IN THE MEKONG DELTA IN RELIGIOUS  
AFFAIRS IN THE CURRENT PERIOD**

**DISSERTATION ABSTRACT**

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Rationale of the study

Viet Nam is a multi-religious country, where various religions coexist within a unified socio-cultural space, and no religion holds a dominant position. At present, the State has recognized 34 religious organizations, granted registration for operation to four religious organizations and one religious practice within 16 religions, with approximately 26.5 million followers, accounting for about 27 per cent of the population. Throughout the process of national renovation (Đổi mới), the Communist Party of Viet Nam has consistently identified religious affairs as a long-term strategic issue. Party resolutions, particularly Resolution No. 24-NQ/TW (1990), Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW (2003), and the Documents of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Party, continue to emphasize the need to improve religious policies, promote the positive and humanistic values of religions, and resolutely combat acts that exploit religion to incite national division and undermine political and social stability.

The Mekong Delta is a region of strategic importance, with a population of nearly 18 million people. At present, 13 religions are legally recognized, with more than 4,900 places of worship and nearly 6.9 million followers, accounting for over 36 per cent of the region's population. In recent years, provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta have paid increasing attention to the leadership of religious affairs by promptly concretizing the Party's guidelines, strengthening communication and mobilization, building a contingent of cadres, and promoting the role of the political system, thereby contributing to the maintenance of political and social stability and reinforcing the confidence of religious dignitaries and followers. However, in some localities, the leadership of religious affairs remains subject to limitations, as reflected in the uneven quality of the issuance and implementation of resolutions; the organizational apparatus and cadres engaged in religious affairs are insufficient in number and often hold concurrent positions; and coordination mechanisms as well as inspection and supervision have not been fully effective. In the new context, although the religious situation in the Mekong Delta is basically stable, it still contains many potential complexities, requiring further strengthening and renewal of the leadership methods of provincial and municipal Party committees. Against this background, the doctoral candidate selects the topic *“Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in Religious Affairs in the Mekong Delta in the Current Period”* with the aim of clarifying the theoretical foundations, assessing practical realities, and proposing feasible solutions to enhance the effectiveness of leadership over religious affairs in the new situation.

## **2. Research Objectives and Tasks**

### ***2.1. Research Objectives***

On the basis of clarifying both theoretical and practical issues concerning the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta, the dissertation proposes major solutions to strengthen Party leadership over religious affairs through 2030, with a vision to 2045.

### ***2.2. Research Tasks***

*Firstly*, to review and synthesize domestic and international scientific studies related to the dissertation topic.

*Secondly*, to clarify and elaborate the theoretical and practical issues concerning the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta in the current period.

*Thirdly*, to survey and assess the current situation of religious affairs and the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta from 2003 to the present, thereby identifying achievements, limitations, their causes, and lessons learned.

*Fourthly*, to propose orientations and major feasible solutions to strengthen the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta over religious affairs through 2030, with a vision to 2045.

## **3. Object and Scope of Research**

### ***3.1. Object of Research***

The dissertation focuses on the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta over religious affairs in the current period.

### ***3.2. Scope of Research***

The dissertation examines the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta during the period from 2003 to July 2025. The research scope is divided into two phases: the period prior to the merger of provincial-level administrative units, when provinces and cities existed independently and implemented religious affairs in accordance with their specific local characteristics; and the period following the mergers, marked by the formation of new administrative units, which has posed requirements for adjusting leadership methods, coordination mechanisms, and the organization of the implementation of religious affairs in line with the new governance space. The research timeframe is determined from the promulgation of Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW (2003) on religious affairs. The analysis focuses primarily on the period from 2010 to 2025, associated with the implementation of the resolutions of the 11th, 12th, and 13th National Congresses of the Communist Party of Viet Nam. On this basis, the dissertation proposes orientations and solutions to strengthen Party leadership over religious affairs through 2030, with a vision to 2045.

## **4. Theoretical and Practical Foundations and Research Methods of the Dissertation**

### ***4.1. Theoretical Foundations***

The dissertation examines the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta during the period from 2003 to July 2025. The research scope is divided into two phases: the period prior to the merger of provincial-level administrative units, when provinces and cities existed independently and implemented religious affairs in accordance with the specific characteristics of each locality; and the period after the mergers, marked by the formation of new administrative units, which has required adjustments in leadership methods, coordination mechanisms, and the organization of the implementation of religious affairs in conformity with the new governance space. The research timeframe is determined from the issuance of Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW (2003) on religious affairs. The main focus of analysis is the period from 2010 to 2025, associated with the implementation of the resolutions of the 11th, 12th, and 13th National Congresses of the Communist Party of Viet Nam. On that basis, the dissertation proposes orientations and solutions to strengthen leadership over religious affairs through 2030, with a vision to 2045.

### ***4.2. Practical Foundations***

The practical foundations of the dissertation are based on the realities of the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta from 2003 to the present (since the issuance of Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW dated March 12, 2003, of the Seventh Plenum of the Party Central Committee (9th tenure) on religious affairs); as well as on research works, practical reviews, and preliminary and final reports concerning the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta.

### ***4.3. Research Methods***

The dissertation is conducted on the basis of the methodology of Marxism-Leninism, thoroughly applying the Party's viewpoints on religious affairs and Party building as the guiding foundation throughout the research process. On that basis, the dissertation employs a combination of research methods, including analysis and synthesis, the historical-logical method, sociological surveys, statistical methods, comparison, field surveys, and practical review, in order to ensure objectivity, comprehensiveness, and scientific rigor. These methods are flexibly applied across the chapters to systematize the theoretical foundations, clarify the Party's viewpoints, analyze and assess the current situation of the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta during the period

2003-2025, and identify achievements, limitations, and their causes. The dissertation conducts a sociological survey with 600 valid questionnaires across 13 provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta, focusing on groups of actors directly involved in leadership, advisory functions, organization and implementation, as well as those affected by religious affairs. The survey results constitute an important scientific basis for proposing orientations and solutions to strengthen the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees in the coming period.

### **5. New Scientific Contributions of the Dissertation**

*Firstly*, the dissertation clarifies and establishes the concept of “*the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta*”, and analyzes the system of contents and methods of leadership over religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees under the specific conditions of the region.

*Secondly*, on the basis of summarizing practical experience from 2003 to the present, the dissertation synthesizes five major lessons drawn from the process of leading religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta.

*Thirdly*, the dissertation proposes orientations and a system of solutions to strengthen the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees over religious affairs through 2030, with a vision to 2045.

### **6. Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Dissertation**

*Firstly*, the dissertation contributes to further clarifying theoretical issues related to religious affairs and the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees over religious affairs in the current period.

*Secondly*, the dissertation provides scientific arguments for provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta to study and determine orientations and leadership and directive measures for religious affairs in the coming period.

*Thirdly*, the research findings of the dissertation may also be used as reference materials for research, teaching, and learning at the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, the Regional Political Academies II and IV, and provincial and municipal political schools nationwide.

### **7. Structure of the Dissertation**

In addition to the Introduction, Conclusion, the list of the author’s published works related to the dissertation topic, the list of references, and the appendices, the dissertation consists of four chapters comprising ten sections.

## **Chapter 1**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SITUATION RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION TOPIC**

In recent years, numerous domestic and international studies have examined religion, religious affairs, state management of religion, and the leadership of ruling parties or political parties in this field. However, due to differences in research scope, objects, methodological approaches, and national contexts, these studies have generally focused on specific aspects, such as religious theory, religious policies and legislation, the relationship between religion and politics, religious governance in a rule-of-law state, and the roles of various forces within the political system. Notably,

#### **1.1. Studies Conducted Abroad**

##### ***1.1.1. Group of Studies on Religion and Religious Affairs***

Many studies approach religion as a political and social factor with long-term influence in the modern context, focusing on the analysis of its social integrative functions, its impact on public policy, political order, and global issues. Paul S. Rowe (2010) emphasizes religion as an important variable in global politics, capable of shaping social attitudes, political behavior, and influencing issues such as conflict, peace, and human rights. Jonathan Fox (2015) provides a quantitative comparative approach through extensive surveys of state religious policies across numerous countries, thereby clarifying the relationship between secular political actors, religious agents, and models of religious policy. David T. Smith (2015) introduces the perspective of “religious freedom in relation to political order,” indicating that the state may adjust the degree of “tolerance-control” depending on perceived risks to political stability. Deeg and Scheid (2015) offer insights into the nexus of “religion-culture-politics” in the context of China, emphasizing the role of law and institutions in the management of religious activities. Overall, this group of studies makes significant contributions in: (i) providing theoretical frameworks for understanding the relationship between religion and politics; (ii) elucidating how states govern religion within a legal framework; and (iii) suggesting comparative approaches and identifying the multidimensional impacts of religion.

##### ***1.1.2. Group of Studies on Political Parties, Ruling Parties, and Religious Affairs***

A prominent line of research focuses on analyzing the role of political parties and ruling parties in shaping religious policy and governing society in contexts involving religion. Tepe (2009) examines religious politics in pluralistic settings, demonstrating that religion can become a political resource and that religious parties often “adapt” in order to comply with democratic and secular principles. Studies on Komeito (2014) provide a typical case of the relationship between a political party and a religious organization, offering insights into the

mobilization of social resources within a legal framework. Several studies on China (Liu Zhenhua, Lian Xiangdong; Huang Wenhui; Chu Weiqun; Li Liangdong, among others) focus on governing capacity, methods of leadership, and governance according to law, while also shedding light on the roles of Party organizations, cadres, mass mobilization mechanisms, and front work in addressing ethnic and religious issues. More recent studies on China's religious policy (Zheng Yixuan, 2024) emphasize the trend toward the politicization of religious governance and the growing role of ideological guidance and united front work, thereby suggesting the lesson of "upholding principles while flexibly applying measures" in leading religious affairs. In general, this body of foreign scholarship assists the dissertation by: supplementing comparative perspectives; clarifying the universal requirement of governing religious affairs through law; and suggesting approaches to the leadership and governing methods of ruling parties in the field of religion.

## **1.2. Domestic Studies**

### ***1.2.1. Group of Studies on Religion and Religious Affairs***

Domestic studies generally demonstrate strengths in closely adhering to the ideological foundations and viewpoints of the Party, while systematizing the process of codification and the practice of state management of religion. Ngô Hữu Thảo (2012), Đỗ Lan Hiền (2016), and several other authors clarify the Marxist-Leninist foundations and Ho Chi Minh Thought on religion, emphasizing the principles of guaranteeing freedom of belief and religion, strengthening religious-ethnic unity, and promoting the positive values of religion. Nguyễn Minh Khải (2013) and Nguyễn Thanh Xuân (2020) contribute to systematizing the religious landscape in Viet Nam, distinguishing key concepts (such as religious affairs and state management of religion), and analyzing the subjects, contents, and mechanisms for the implementation of religious policies. Đỗ Quang Hưng (2014) and related studies stress that religious policy should be regarded as an integral component of public policy in a rule-of-law state, clarifying the role of law and the requirements for transparent, constitutional, and lawful governance. Bùi Hữu Dược (2014) provides an important foundation regarding state management of religious activities from 1975 to the present, suggesting an approach based on identifying the situation, causes, and policy recommendations. In addition, in-depth studies on the 2016 Law on Belief and Religion, religious legal entities, inspection and supervision, and freedom of belief and religion offer a systematic body of legal bases and practical experience in implementation. With regard to the Mekong Delta, numerous studies focus on specific religions or particular community groups (such as Khmer Theravada Buddhism and the social welfare activities of indigenous religions), thereby affirming the positive social role of religion and highlighting the need for governance approaches suited to the region's cultural and ethnic characteristics.

### ***1.2.2. Studies Related to the Party's Leadership over Religious Affairs***

This line of research focuses on clarifying the development of the Party's theoretical thinking on religion and the mechanisms of Party leadership over the State and organizations within the political system, including religious affairs. Nguyễn Đức Lữ (2011) and Nguyễn Hồng Dương (2012) systematize the Party's viewpoints and lines on religion, emphasizing consistency in guaranteeing freedom of belief and religion while resolutely combating the exploitation of religion. Nguyễn Thị Liên (2014) provides historical materials on religious mobilization during the period 1930-1954, offering lessons on mobilization methods and the building of religious unity. Studies on renewing the Party's leadership methods (such as those by Trần Khắc Việt, Nguyễn Văn Giang, and Phạm Tất Thắng) offer direct implications for the dissertation in several aspects, including the quality of resolution issuance, the responsibility of heads of Party committees, mechanisms for institutionalization and organization of implementation, and coordination among the Party, the State, the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, and mass organizations. Research on cadre work, grassroots political systems, and the struggle against the exploitation of ethnic and religious issues provides an important foundation for analyzing the roles of Party organizations and cadres, inspection and supervision, and implementation capacity at the local level.

## **1.3. Overview of Research Results and Issues Addressed by the Dissertation**

### ***1.3.1. Research Results Achieved***

*Firstly, in terms of theory:* Existing studies have clarified the Marxist-Leninist foundations and Ho Chi Minh Thought, affirmed that religion is a social phenomenon that will continue to exist over a long period, and emphasized the principle of respecting and guaranteeing freedom of belief and religion. At the same time, they stress the need to promote the positive values of religion, limit superstition, and prevent the exploitation of religion. Many studies have also developed analytical frameworks on the relationships between religion and politics, religion and the rule-of-law state, and the governance of religion through law.

*Secondly, in terms of practice:* Numerous works vividly reflect the religious situation in Viet Nam, highlighting challenges such as illegal proselytization, disputes over land and places of worship, radicalization, and the exploitation of religion for subversive purposes. Some studies have addressed the roles of local Party committees, grassroots political systems, the Viet Nam Fatherland Front,

and mass organizations in mobilizing religious followers and maintaining social stability.

*Thirdly, in terms of solutions:* Existing studies propose various groups of feasible solutions, including enhancing political awareness and the responsibility of the political system; improving laws and policies; consolidating organizational structures and cadre contingents; renewing mass mobilization; strengthening inspection and supervision; and promoting the social resources of religions.

### ***1.3.2. Research Gaps and Issues Addressed by the Dissertation***

Although the existing body of research is extensive, most studies primarily: (i) adopt a national-level perspective; or (ii) focus on a specific religion or locality; or (iii) analyze particular dimensions such as law, state management, religious mobilization, or the struggle against the exploitation of religion. Consequently, there remains a lack of an in-depth, systematic, and comprehensive study on the contents and methods of leadership over religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta under current conditions, especially when examined in the context of the requirements for renewing leadership methods, reorganizing the organizational apparatus, and adjusting administrative units.

Building on a selective inheritance of previous studies, the dissertation concentrates on addressing three key issues: (1) clarifying the theoretical foundations and constructing a theoretical framework for the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta (including concepts, subjects, objects, objectives, contents, methods, and participating forces); (2) surveying and assessing the current situation of leadership over religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta, identifying achievements, limitations, causes, and drawing lessons learned; and (3) analyzing the context and influencing factors, thereby proposing synchronized and feasible orientations and solutions that meet the requirements for strengthening Party leadership over religious affairs through 2030, with a vision to 2045.

## **Chapter 1 Summary**

The review of domestic and international studies enables the dissertation to comprehensively approach the theoretical foundations of religion, the Party's viewpoints and the State's legal framework, as well as research directions on religious governance and the leadership methods of ruling parties. At the same time, empirical studies provide important data, cases, and solution-oriented insights for analyzing the specific characteristics of the Mekong Delta region. However, taken as a whole, there remains a lack of a systematic study on the contents and methods of leadership over religious affairs by provincial and

municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta in the new context. Therefore, the dissertation clearly identifies the inherited scholarly value, existing research gaps, and key issues requiring further clarification, thereby affirming the theoretical and practical urgency of the topic.

## **Chapter 2**

### **PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL PARTY COMMITTEES IN THE MEKONG DELTA IN LEADING RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN THE CURRENT PERIOD - THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES**

#### **2.1. Provinces, Cities, and Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta at Present**

##### ***2.1.1. Provinces and Cities in the Mekong Delta***

The Mekong Delta is located at the southernmost part of the country, adjacent to the Southeast region; it borders Cambodia to the north, the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest, and the East Sea to the southeast, thus possessing significant geo-strategic importance in terms of national defense, security, economic development, and external relations. The region's terrain is relatively flat, with a dense network of the Tien and Hau rivers and canals, subject to tidal influences and upstream floods from the Mekong River. These conditions create advantages for agriculture, aquaculture, and inland waterway transportation. At the same time, the region has a coastline of approximately 750 kilometers and a vast sea and exclusive economic zone, providing favorable conditions for the development of the marine economy and renewable energy. Historically, the region is associated with the Oc Eo-Funan culture and, from the seventeenth century onward, gradually integrated into the process of territorial expansion and development of the Vietnamese nation-state. This process shaped a multi-ethnic and multi-religious residential space with a distinctive riverine cultural identity. Following the reorganization of administrative units effective from July 1, 2025, the Mekong Delta comprises five provincial-level units (Can Tho City, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, An Giang, and Ca Mau), thereby enhancing conditions for intra-regional and inter-regional connectivity, resource integration, and coordinated planning of infrastructure and logistics. Economically, the region serves as a pillar of national agriculture and aquatic product exports. In 2024, the regional gross regional domestic product (GRDP) reached VND 1,409,300 billion, increasing by 11.9 per cent, with an economic growth rate of 7.31 per cent and an average income of VND 80.7 million per capita. Rice output reached 24.2 million tons, aquaculture production 4.79 million tons, and export turnover USD 25.7 billion. In terms of politics and society, the situation remains basically stable and the political system continues to be

consolidated; however, potential complexities persist related to land issues, religious establishments, and the risk of exploitation to undermine the great national unity bloc. At the same time, the region faces major challenges from climate change and saltwater intrusion, which require increasingly high levels of leadership capacity and governance for sustainable development.

### ***2.1.2. Provincial and Municipal Party Organizations and Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta - Functions, Tasks, Powers, Working Relationships, and Roles***

#### *2.1.2.1. Overview of Provincial and Municipal Party Organizations in the Mekong Delta*

Prior to the implementation of the policy on the reorganization and merger of administrative units, the Mekong Delta had 13 provincial and municipal Party organizations, corresponding to 13 provincial and municipal Party committees and standing committees. The system of Party organizations subordinate to the provincial-level Party committees was diverse, including district-level Party organizations, Party organizations of sectoral blocs, Party organizations of the armed forces, sector-based Party organizations, as well as Party delegations and Party civil affairs committees. During the 2020-2025 term, the region had a total of 642 members of provincial-level Party committees, including 187 members of standing committees, with 616,285 Party members. Following the reorganization, the Mekong Delta now comprises five provincial-level administrative units, corresponding to five provincial-level Party organizations and five standing committees. At present, the region has 549 subordinate Party organizations with approximately 657,000 Party members. This reality indicates that the scale and socio-political capacity of the Party organizations have been consolidated in a streamlined direction, while simultaneously posing requirements for further strengthening grassroots Party organizations, improving the quality of the Party membership contingent, and enhancing leadership capacity in the new context.

#### *2.1.2.2. Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta - Concept, Functions, Tasks, and Powers*

##### *\* Concept*

Provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta are leadership bodies elected by the provincial and municipal Party congresses, operating between two congress terms. They lead the implementation of the resolutions of the provincial and municipal Party congresses, as well as the Party's guidelines, resolutions, directives, and conclusions, and the State's policies and

laws; and propose and make recommendations to the Politburo and the Secretariat on issues related to the Party's leadership over the locality.

*\* Functions*

Based on the concept of provincial and municipal Party committees and the Party's regulations, particularly Regulation No. 305-QĐ/TW, provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta perform the function of direct and comprehensive leadership and direction over the provincial and municipal Party organizations; at the same time, they lead and direct agencies and organizations within the local political system and subordinate Party committees and Party organizations. Within this overall set of functions, leadership over religious affairs constitutes an important and continuous component, closely linked to the requirements of maintaining political stability, consolidating the great national unity bloc, and promoting religious resources in service of the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta.

*\* Tasks and Powers*

In accordance with the Party Charter and Regulation No. 305-QĐ/TW, provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta possess a comprehensive system of tasks and powers, reflecting the Party's direct leadership role over local Party organizations and the entire political system within the locality. Within this system of tasks and powers, leadership over religious affairs is an important component, closely associated with the requirements of political stability, the consolidation of the great national unity bloc, and the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta.

*\* Standing Committees of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees*

The Standing Committees of provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta are elected by conferences of the provincial and municipal Party committees from among their members. They constitute a particularly important component and represent the core of the provincial and municipal Party committees, serving as the leadership body of the provincial and municipal Party organizations between plenary sessions of the Party committees, operating in accordance with the principle of collective leadership combined with individual responsibility.

*2.1.2.3. Working Relationships of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta*

In accordance with Regulation No. 305-QĐ/TW dated June 13, 2025, of the Politburo, provincial and municipal Party committees and their standing committees in the Mekong Delta maintain close and unified working relationships

with the Party's central leadership bodies and other actors within the political system, thereby ensuring the Party's comprehensive and direct leadership over localities, including religious affairs.

#### *2.1.2.4. Roles of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees and Their Standing Committees*

Provincial and municipal Party committees and their standing committees hold a central position within the provincial-level political system, serving as the core leadership bodies that provide comprehensive leadership over all aspects of political, socio-economic, national defense, and security life in each locality. In the Mekong Delta—characterized by its distinctive geographical location, diverse population structure, rich religious life, and strong impacts of climate change—the leadership role of provincial and municipal Party committees is of particularly significant importance in translating the Party's guidelines and policies into practice, ensuring stable and sustainable development, and consolidating the great national unity bloc, including religious communities.

## **2.2. Religion and Religious Affairs in the Provinces and Cities of the Mekong Delta**

### *2.2.1. Religion in the Provinces and Cities of the Mekong Delta - Overview, Characteristics, and Roles*

#### *2.2.1.1. Overview of Religions in the Mekong Delta*

At present, the Mekong Delta has 13 religions recognized by the State, with more than 6.5 million followers (approximately 36.5 per cent of the population), nearly 5,000 places of worship, and a large contingent of religious dignitaries and functionaries. Major religions include Buddhism, Catholicism, Hoa Hao Buddhism, Cao Dai, and Protestantism, which are widely distributed across localities. In recent years, religious life has remained stable, and religious dignitaries and followers have actively participated in patriotic emulation movements, living a life that is “good in life and beautiful in faith” However, there remain instances of the exploitation of religion, which requires provincial and municipal Party committees to strengthen leadership, mobilization, and appropriate management.

#### *2.2.1.2. Characteristics of Religion in the Provinces and Cities of the Mekong Delta*

The religious landscape of the Mekong Delta is diverse, encompassing both imported religions and indigenous religions formed within a specific historical and cultural context. The majority of followers originate from agrarian backgrounds, possessing strong patriotic traditions, yet a segment remains vulnerable to influence under conditions of socio-economic difficulty. The contingent of religious dignitaries is large, relatively well trained, wields considerable influence, and maintains extensive

international connections -serving both as a core force and posing requirements for close management. Religion is a sensitive field that is often exploited by hostile forces, thereby necessitating enhanced leadership and effective management by provincial and municipal Party committees.

#### *2.2.1.3. Roles of Religions in the Mekong Delta*

On the positive side, religions in the Mekong Delta make important contributions to preserving and promoting national cultural identity through institutions, festivals, and traditional values, while also strengthening the great national unity bloc and enhancing cohesion among communities. Religious activities actively contribute to socio-economic development, particularly in the areas of social welfare, charity, and environmental protection. In addition, religions contribute to political stability, the maintenance of social order and safety, and the education of moral values and healthy lifestyles within communities.

On the negative side, religion may be exploited for political purposes, causing division and social instability. Certain conservative and superstitious notions can hinder innovation in thinking and socio-economic development. In practice, violations of law still occur, such as illegal proselytization and the construction of places of worship in violation of regulations. Moreover, passivity and excessive dependence on religion can affect social life, along with the risks of commercialization and distortions in religious practices and festivals.

### ***2.2.2. Religious Affairs of Provinces and Cities in the Mekong Delta - Concept and Contents***

#### *2.2.2.1. Concept*

Religious affairs are understood as the totality of leadership activities by Party committees, the management by state authorities, and the participation of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations in thoroughly grasping, concretizing, and organizing the implementation of the Party's guidelines and lines, as well as the State's policies and laws on religion; concurrently conducting communication, mobilization, and consolidation work to encourage religious dignitaries, functionaries, and followers to participate in the fulfillment of political tasks, socio-economic development, the consolidation of national defense and security, and the strengthening of the great national unity bloc at the local level.

#### *2.2.2.2. Contents of Religious Affairs of Provinces and Cities in the Mekong Delta*

*Firstly*, on the basis of the guidelines and decisions of provincial and municipal Party committees and governments regarding religious affairs, the actors involved in religious affairs develop and promulgate their own guidelines, decisions, programs, and plans on religious affairs in association with the performance of the functions and tasks of each organization.

*Secondly*, the actors involved in religious affairs lead and direct the dissemination and implementation of the established programs and plans on religious affairs among their members.

*Thirdly*, the actors involved in religious affairs coordinate with relevant organizations and forces in implementing their programs and plans on religious affairs.

*Fourthly*, the actors involved in religious affairs lead the building of organizational structures, cadres, and core forces engaged in religious affairs.

*Fifthly*, the actors involved in religious affairs conduct inspection and supervision of the implementation of programs and plans on religious affairs among their members and subordinate units.

*Sixthly*, the actors involved in religious affairs organize preliminary reviews, final reviews, and the drawing of lessons learned.

### **2.3. Leadership of Religious Affairs by Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta in the Current Period - Concept, Contents, Methods, and Roles**

#### ***2.3.1. Concept of the Leadership of Religious Affairs by Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta***

The leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta is understood as the totality of activities carried out by provincial and municipal Party committees in formulating and promulgating resolutions, decisions, and conclusions; providing directive orientations; and directing the dissemination, implementation, inspection, and supervision of religious affairs in accordance with their scope, functions, tasks, and delegated authority.

#### ***2.3.2. Contents of Leadership***

*Firstly*, provincial and municipal Party committees lead the determination of objectives, orientations, major tasks, and solutions for religious affairs.

*Secondly*, they lead provincial and municipal governments in the Mekong Delta to concretize and institutionalize the resolutions and decisions of provincial and municipal Party committees into resolutions, programs, plans, and projects on religious affairs, and to organize their implementation.

*Thirdly*, they lead the building of organizational structures, cadres, and core forces engaged in religious affairs.

*Fourthly*, they lead subordinate Party committees in implementing the resolutions, decisions, and conclusions of provincial and municipal Party committees on religious affairs.

*Fifthly*, they lead and direct the coordination among relevant organizations and forces in carrying out religious affairs.

*Sixthly*, they lead the organization of preliminary reviews and final reviews of the implementation of resolutions, directives, and conclusions of the Central Party organs and of resolutions of provincial and municipal Party committees on religious affairs.

### ***2.3.3. Methods of Leadership***

*Firstly*, leadership is exercised through resolutions, decisions, directives, and plans of provincial and municipal Party committees and their standing committees concerning religious affairs.

*Secondly*, leadership is exercised through communication, persuasion, and mobilization related to religious affairs.

*Thirdly*, leadership is exercised through promoting the role of state management over religion by provincial and municipal governments.

*Fourthly*, leadership is exercised through organizational and cadre work.

*Fifthly*, leadership is exercised through Party organizations and Party members, including the pioneering and exemplary actions of Party members who are religious believers.

*Sixthly*, provincial and municipal Party committees lead the promotion of the roles of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations, social organizations, and other forces in religious affairs; the building of core forces within religions; and the mobilization of religious dignitaries to play their roles in implementing the resolutions of provincial and municipal Party committees on religious affairs.

**Seventhly**, leadership is exercised through inspection and supervision of the implementation of religious affairs.

### ***2.3.4. Roles***

*Firstly*, the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees ensures that religion and religious affairs are implemented in accordance with the Party's guidelines and lines, as well as the State's policies and laws.

*Secondly*, the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta serves as a key factor in ensuring the promotion of the combined strength of the entire political system in religious affairs.

*Thirdly*, the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees ensures the maximum mobilization of resources for religious affairs, including resources derived from religion itself.

*Fourthly*, the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees plays a decisive role in strengthening religious and ethnic unity in the Mekong Delta.

*Fifthly*, leadership over religious affairs constitutes an important component of the overall leadership work of provincial and municipal Party committees in the

Mekong Delta, directly contributing to enhancing leadership capacity, combat strength, and political prestige of local Party committees.

### **Chapter 2 Summary**

Chapter 2 focuses on clarifying the theoretical and practical foundations of religious affairs and the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta, thereby affirming the dialectical relationship between religion and politics under current conditions. Religion is approached both as a form of social consciousness and as a social entity exerting a certain influence on local political and social life. The clarification of concepts, contents, and methods of leadership over religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees constitutes an important foundation for the analysis in subsequent chapters. Based on a review of relevant literature and empirical materials, the dissertation outlines an overall picture of the religious situation in the Mekong Delta, including the characteristics of major religions and the issues arising in leadership and management. These arguments provide the basis for further assessing the current situation of leadership over religious affairs in Chapter 3.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL PARTY COMMITTEES IN THE MEKONG DELTA IN LEADING RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS - CURRENT SITUATION, CAUSES, AND LESSONS LEARNED**

##### **3.1. Current Situation of the Leadership of Religious Affairs by Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta**

###### ***3.1.1. Strengths***

###### ***3.1.1.1. In Terms of Leadership Contents***

*Firstly*, provincial and municipal Party committees have led the determination of objectives, orientations, major tasks, and solutions concerning religious affairs. *Secondly*, they have led provincial and municipal governments to institutionalize and implement the orientations and guidelines of provincial and municipal Party committees on religious affairs.

*Thirdly*, they have led the building of organizational structures, cadres, and core forces engaged in religious affairs.

*Fourthly*, they have led subordinate Party committees in organizing the implementation of resolutions, directives, and conclusions of provincial and municipal Party committees on religious affairs.

*Fifthly*, they have led and directed coordination among relevant organizations and forces in carrying out religious affairs.

*Sixthly*, they have led the organization of preliminary reviews and final reviews of the implementation of resolutions, directives, and conclusions of the Central Party organs and of resolutions of provincial and municipal Party committees on religious affairs.

### **3.1.1.2. In Terms of Leadership Methods**

*Firstly*, leadership has been exercised through resolutions, decisions, directives, and plans of provincial and municipal Party committees and their standing committees concerning religious affairs.

*Secondly*, leadership has been exercised through communication, persuasion, and mobilization related to religious affairs.

*Thirdly*, leadership has been exercised through promoting the role of state management over religion by provincial and municipal governments.

*Fourthly*, leadership has been exercised through organizational and cadre work.

*Fifthly*, leadership has been exercised through Party organizations and Party members, including the pioneering and exemplary actions of Party members who are religious believers.

*Sixthly*, provincial and municipal Party committees have led the promotion of the roles of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations, social organizations, and other forces in religious affairs; the building of core forces within religions; and the mobilization of religious dignitaries to play their roles in implementing resolutions of provincial and municipal Party committees on religious affairs.

*Seventhly*, leadership over religious affairs has been exercised through inspection and supervision.

### **3.1.2. Limitations and Shortcomings**

#### **3.1.2.1. In Terms of Leadership Contents**

In terms of leadership contents, certain provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta still exhibit specific limitations. The identification of objectives, orientations, tasks, and solutions for religious affairs has not always been sufficiently focused, failing to highlight core issues and local particularities. Leadership in guiding provincial and municipal governments to institutionalize and organize the implementation of Party committee guidelines has at times been slow, insufficiently specific, and not closely aligned with practical realities. The building of organizational structures, cadres, and core forces engaged in religious affairs has not yet met new requirements. In some subordinate Party committees, the implementation of resolutions has lacked determination and uniformity, while

preliminary and final reviews have remained formalistic and have not effectively served to adjust leadership methods.

### **3.1.2.2. In Terms of Leadership Methods**

In terms of leadership methods, a number of provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta reveal notable shortcomings. The issuance of resolutions, directives, and plans on religious affairs has at times lacked strategic vision and failed to keep pace with changes in religious life. Communication and mobilization efforts have not been sufficiently synchronized or focused; the role of state management over religion by governments has not been fully brought into play. Leadership through organizational and cadre work, as well as through Party organizations and Party members who are religious believers, has encountered difficulties; the roles of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, mass organizations, and core forces have not been widely diffused. Inspection and supervision work has remained formalistic, lacking proactiveness and depth.

## **3.2. Causes and Lessons Learned**

### **3.2.1. Causes**

#### *3.2.1.1. Causes of the Strengths*

*Firstly*, the Party's correct renovation-oriented line on religion and religious affairs.

*Secondly*, the awareness of provincial and municipal Party committees regarding the role of religion and religious affairs has become more urgent in response to changes in the revolutionary situation.

*Thirdly*, the direct and comprehensive leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees over the coordination among organizations within the political system in carrying out religious affairs.

*Fourthly*, provincial and municipal Party committees have built a contingent of cadres engaged in religious affairs that has increasingly developed in both quantity and quality, better meeting task requirements in the new situation.

*Fifthly*, strengthened dialogue, attention to livelihoods, and the creation of favorable conditions for lawful religious activities.

#### *3.2.1.2. Causes of Shortcomings and Limitations*

*Firstly*, the overarching cause is the insufficient and inadequate awareness among a segment of the political system regarding religion and religious affairs.

*Secondly*, state management of religious activities has been slow to innovate, with manifestations of administrative formalism, failing to keep pace with practical realities.

*Thirdly*, the contingent of cadres working in religious affairs has not met practical requirements, thereby affecting the effectiveness of Party committee leadership.

*Fourthly*, the impacts of globalization and digital transformation have increased difficulties for the leadership of religious affairs in the Mekong Delta.

*Fifthly*, the living standards and educational levels of religious followers remain low, affecting the effectiveness of leadership over religious affairs.

*Sixthly*, prejudice and mistrust among a segment of religious dignitaries toward the leadership of the Party and local authorities.

### *3.2.2. Lessons Learned*

*Firstly*, leading Party committees and Party organizations should enhance political and ideological awareness regarding religious affairs.

*Secondly*, leadership should focus on building a strong grassroots political system, especially in areas with large populations of religious followers.

*Thirdly*, leadership should strengthen coordination among organizations within the political system in religious affairs.

*Fourthly*, attention should be paid to improving the material and spiritual lives of religious communities.

*Fifthly*, leadership should effectively carry out mobilization work and engage religious dignitaries, functionaries, and persons of prestige within religions.

## **Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter 3 clarifies the current situation of the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta across multiple terms. Practice shows that Party committees at all levels have increasingly recognized their role as the core leadership, paid greater attention to leading and directing religious affairs, and introduced innovations in both content and methods, thereby generating positive changes in scale and quality and making important contributions to political stability and socio-economic development in the region. However, leadership over religious affairs still reveals certain limitations, particularly hesitation in selecting appropriate leadership methods and the lack of breakthrough solutions in specific situations. Based on an analysis of strengths and shortcomings, the chapter identifies major causes and lessons learned, emphasizing the need to continue renewing awareness, strengthening decisive leadership, and promoting breakthroughs and creativity. These constitute an important basis for the dissertation to propose orientations and a coherent, feasible system of solutions suited to the characteristics of the Mekong Delta in the coming period.

**Chapter 4**  
**ORIENTATIONS AND SOLUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE  
LEADERSHIP OF PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL PARTY  
COMMITTEES IN THE MEKONG DELTA OVER RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS  
THROUGH 2030, WITH A VISION TO 2045**

**4.1. Forecast of Influencing Factors and Orientations to Strengthen the Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta over Religious Affairs through 2030, with a Vision to 2045**

***4.1.1. Forecast of Factors Influencing the Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta over Religious Affairs***

***4.1.1.1. Favorable Factors***

Favorable factors for the leadership of religious affairs in the Mekong Delta stem from the achievements of 40 years of renovation and the Party's consistent line on religion, as reflected in resolutions, directives, and the 2016 Law on Belief and Religion, which provide a solid legal corridor and political foundation for promoting the positive values of religion. In the context of the country entering a new stage of development, the Party advocates mobilizing the strength of the great national unity bloc and regards religion as an important social resource to be integrated into the sustainable development strategy of the Mekong Delta. The reorganization and consolidation of administrative units contribute to streamlining the apparatus, unifying management, and enhancing the effectiveness of leadership, inspection, and supervision of religious activities. In addition, improvements in socio-economic conditions and the process of digital transformation and application of information technology have created favorable conditions for enhancing management efficiency, increasing transparency, and proactively preventing and addressing religious issues in the new context.

***4.1.1.2. Difficulties and Challenges***

Difficulties in leading religious affairs in the Mekong Delta arise from the context of globalization, the rapid development of social media, and the increasing diversity of forms of religious activities, including spontaneous and unrecognized groups that potentially pose risks to stability. Hostile forces continue to exploit issues of freedom of belief and religion, external religious relations, and cyberspace to distort the Party's policies and incite division within the great national unity bloc. In addition, the extensive international connections of a segment of religious dignitaries and followers, as well as external sources of assistance, pose challenges to management. The capacity and experience of some cadres engaged in religious affairs remain limited, while certain shortcomings have been slow to be thoroughly

remedied. Difficult living conditions among a segment of religious dignitaries and followers continue to be a factor susceptible to exploitation, thereby affecting the effectiveness of leadership, communication, and mobilization in the coming period.

#### **4.1.2. Orientations to Strengthen the Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta over Religious Affairs**

*Firstly*, religious affairs are the responsibility of the entire political system under the leadership of the Party.

*Secondly*, the core content of religious affairs is mass mobilization work.

*Thirdly*, leadership over religious affairs should be combined with ethnic affairs.

*Fourthly*, information technology application and digital transformation should be promoted in leading and directing religious affairs.

#### **4.2. Major Solutions to Strengthen the Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Mekong Delta over Religious Affairs through 2030, with a Vision to 2045**

##### ***4.2.1. Enhancing Awareness and Responsibility of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees, Subordinate Party Committees, Governments, Socio-Political Organizations, Party Members, and the People in the Mekong Delta regarding the Position and Role of Religious Affairs and the Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in the Current Period***

*Firstly*, strengthening communication and education to raise awareness and responsibility of the entire political system toward religious affairs in the new situation.

*Secondly*, renewing and improving the quality of the dissemination and implementation of the Party's resolutions on religious affairs in association with the practical conditions of provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta.

*Thirdly*, strengthening leadership and direction in organizing seminars, scientific research, and the implementation of research projects on religious affairs linked to local practice.

*Fourthly*, improving the quality of communication on religious affairs within the political system and society in the Mekong Delta.

##### ***4.2.2. Improving Procedures and Enhancing the Leadership Capacity of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in Formulating and Organizing the Implementation of Resolutions on Religious Affairs***

*Firstly*, correctly identifying key contents of religious affairs in each period to focus leadership efforts.

*Secondly*, enhancing the capacity to formulate and lead the organization of the implementation of resolutions on religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta.

***4.2.3. Strengthening the Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees over Governments in Integrating Religious Affairs into Socio-Economic Development Strategies in the Mekong Delta***

*Firstly*, concretizing orientations on socio-economic development in areas with large religious populations in Party committee resolutions and action programs.

*Secondly*, prioritizing infrastructure investment and livelihood support in areas with large numbers of religious followers.

*Thirdly*, creating conditions for religious dignitaries and followers to participate in poverty reduction programs, new rural development, and social security.

*Fourthly*, promptly addressing difficulties and obstacles related to land, credit, and vocational training policies for religious followers.

*Fifthly*, promoting the role of religion in socio-economic development in areas with large religious populations.

***4.2.4. Renewing Leadership Methods of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees through Party Organizations in Areas with Large Numbers of Religious Followers and Party Members Who Are Believers; Building Core Forces within Religions***

*Firstly*, promoting the role of Party organizations in areas with large religious populations.

*Secondly*, building and promoting the role of Party members who are religious believers.

*Thirdly*, strengthening mobilization of religious dignitaries and followers and building core forces within religions.

***4.2.5. Strengthening the Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in Promoting the Roles of Governments, the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, and Socio-Political Organizations; Proactively Preventing and Combating the Exploitation of Religion, Safeguarding Political Security and the Great National Unity Bloc***

*Firstly*, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of state management over religion by governments at all levels.

*Secondly*, promoting the roles of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations, and mass organizations in religious affairs.

*Thirdly*, strengthening leadership in preventing and combating the exploitation of religion by hostile forces, safeguarding political security and the great national unity bloc.

***4.2.6. Consolidating the Organizational Apparatus, Renewing Cadre Work, and Improving Coordination Mechanisms under the Leadership of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees in Religious Affairs in the Mekong Delta***

*Firstly*, consolidating the organizational apparatus and promoting the roles of specialized, advisory, and assisting agencies of provincial and municipal Party committees in religious affairs.

*Secondly*, building, training, and promoting a contingent of cadres specializing in religious affairs to meet the requirements of the new situation.

*Thirdly*, strengthening coordination among organizations and forces engaged in religious affairs, as well as coordination among provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta in leading religious affairs.

***4.2.7. Renewing Leadership Methods of Provincial and Municipal Party Committees through Inspection, Supervision, Preliminary Review, and Final Review of Religious Affairs***

*Firstly*, strengthening inspection and supervision by provincial and municipal Party committees over subordinate Party committees, cadres, and Party members in implementing resolutions and decisions on religious affairs.

*Secondly*, regularly conducting preliminary and final reviews of the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees over religious affairs.

**Chapter 4 Summary**

Chapter 4 focuses on forecasting the situation, identifying orientations, and proposing a system of solutions to strengthen the leadership role of provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta over religious affairs. The chapter clarifies favorable factors such as renovation achievements, the active participation of religious organizations, administrative unit reorganization, improvements in socio-economic conditions, and digital transformation in state management; while also identifying difficulties arising from complex developments in religious life, hostile forces' sabotage, limitations in the cadre contingent, and the difficult living conditions of a segment of religious followers. On that basis, the dissertation identifies five key orientations and proposes seven groups of synchronized and feasible solutions, linked to enhancing awareness, improving institutions, promoting the role of the political system, strengthening inspection and supervision, and preventing and combating the exploitation of religion. The chapter also emphasizes the supportive and directive role of central authorities in ensuring effective leadership over religious affairs in the Mekong Delta in the new period.

## CONCLUSION

The Mekong Delta is a region of particularly strategic importance in terms of politics, economy, culture, society, and national defense and security, while also being an area with a large number of religious followers and a diversity of religious organizations and forms of religious practice. It is also a region that hostile forces frequently exploit religious issues to undermine the Party and the State. Therefore, strengthening the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta over religious affairs in the current period is an urgent requirement, aimed at both promoting the positive values of religion in social life and ensuring the strict implementation of the Party's guidelines and the State's policies and laws. The leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees in the Mekong Delta constitutes the totality of leadership and direction activities of Party committees, with the participation of the entire political system and the local population, ranging from the issuance of resolutions, directives, and conclusions to the organization of implementation, inspection, and supervision. In practice, in recent years, the leadership of religious affairs by provincial and municipal Party committees has achieved many important results, contributing to the maintenance of political stability, the consolidation of the great national unity bloc, and the promotion of socio-economic development. However, there remain certain limitations and shortcomings in awareness, leadership methods, and organization of implementation, which require continued and effective remedies in a comprehensive manner. Drawing from the practical leadership of religious affairs in the Mekong Delta, the dissertation identifies several key lessons learned: enhancing the political and ideological awareness of Party committees at all levels regarding religious affairs; building a strong grassroots political system in areas with large religious populations; strengthening coordination among organizations within the political system; paying due attention to improving the material and spiritual lives of religious communities; and effectively carrying out mobilization work to engage religious dignitaries, functionaries, and persons of prestige within religions. On that basis, the dissertation proposes a system of solutions to strengthen the leadership of provincial and municipal Party committees over religious affairs in the Mekong Delta, with key focuses on: raising awareness and responsibility across the entire political system; improving procedures and enhancing capacity in formulating and organizing the implementation of resolutions on religious affairs; linking religious affairs with socio-economic development strategies; renewing leadership methods through Party organizations, Party members who are religious believers, and core forces within religions; promoting the roles of governments, the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, and mass organizations; consolidating the organizational apparatus and the contingent of cadres; and strengthening inspection and supervision. The synchronized implementation of these solutions will contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of leadership over religious affairs and creating a solid foundation for the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta in the new period.

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