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**PHAM CHAU HAI**

**THE INFLUENCE OF PROTESTANTISM ON THE SOCIAL LIFE  
OF VINH LONG PROVINCE TODAY**

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**Advisor 1: Assoc. Prof. PhD. Nguyen Duc Luan**

**Advisor 2: Assoc. Prof. PhD. Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Hoa**

Reviewer 1: .....

Reviewer 2: .....

Reviewer 3: .....

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. The Necessity of the Research Topic

Religion is a social and historical phenomenon inherently linked to the formation and development of human society, serving as a vital component of human spiritual life. From the perspective of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, religion is viewed as a specific form of social consciousness, reflecting objective reality in an illusory manner through a system of beliefs, doctrines, and religious rituals. The formation and evolution of religion are inextricably linked to specific socio-economic conditions and are subject to the integrated impact of various factors, including economics, politics, culture, and social psychology. Within the dialectical relationship between social existence and social consciousness, and between the base and the superstructure, religion is not only determined by material conditions but also possesses the capacity to exert a reciprocal influence on social life, particularly through the shaping of moral values, cultural norms, and forms of community organization. Consequently, studying religion holds not only theoretical significance in perceiving the essence of a form of social consciousness but also profound practical value in explaining the role and influence of religion on social development within specific historical contexts.

In Vietnam, religion is a constituent part of social life and the spiritual well-being of a segment of the population. Throughout the process of leading the revolution and national construction, the Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently maintained its stance on respecting and guaranteeing the people's freedom of belief and religion. Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW, dated March 12, 2003, of the 9th Central Committee, affirmed: *"Belief and religion are spiritual needs of a segment of the people, which will coexist with the nation during the process of building socialism."* Simultaneously, the Party emphasizes the requirement to promote the fine moral and cultural values of religions, aligning religious activities with the interests of the nation and the sustainable development of society. On this basis, the State of Vietnam promulgated the 2016 Law on Belief and Religion and its guiding documents, establishing an important legal corridor to ensure citizens' freedom of belief and religion while enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of state management over religious activities in the new situation.

In this context, Protestantism is a religion with a development process marked by

many distinct characteristics. Originating in Europe in the 16th century during the Reformation, Protestantism emphasizes a direct relationship between the individual and God, upholding individual moral life, the work ethic, and flexible organizational methods. Introduced to Vietnam in the early 20th century, Protestantism has gradually developed and formed communities of followers in many localities across the country. Alongside the process of *Doi Moi* (Renovation) and international integration, Protestantism has increasingly exerted certain influences on the cultural life, morality, and social relations of a portion of the population.

Vinh Long Province, located in the Mekong Delta, is a region with a rich and diverse religious life, characterized by the presence of various religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao Buddhism, along with traditional folk beliefs. In recent years, along with socio-economic development and the process of cultural exchange and acculturation, religious activities in the province have undergone notable changes. Protestantism in Vinh Long has shown a tendency to increase in terms of the number of followers, organizational scale, and the scope of religious practice, thereby exerting an increasingly clear impact on local social life.

Practical evidence shows that Protestant organizations and followers in the province have made many positive contributions to social charitable activities, supporting the poor, and participating in building a cultural lifestyle in residential areas, contributing to the consolidation of the great national unity bloc. However, alongside positive impacts, the development of Protestantism also raises several issues requiring research attention, such as changes in cultural life, lifestyle, and family and community relations among a segment of residents, as well as new requirements for the state management of religion in the current context. Although there have been many studies on religion in Vietnam in general and the Mekong Delta in particular, in-depth research on the influence of Protestantism on social life in Vinh Long Province from a philosophical perspective remains relatively limited and does not yet correspond to the actual dynamics of religious life in the locality.

Therefore, researching the topic "The Influence of Protestantism on Social Life in Vinh Long Province Today" is essential and holds both theoretical and practical significance. The research results will not only clarify the mechanisms and extent of Protestantism's influence across various spheres of social life but also provide a scientific basis for formulating and implementing religious policies, enhancing the effectiveness of state management of religion, and contributing to the promotion of

positive values while mitigating the negative impacts of religion on the sustainable development of Vinh Long Province in the current period.

Dưới đây là bản dịch sang tiếng Anh chuẩn học thuật cho mục Mục đích và Nhiệm vụ nghiên cứu:

## **2. Research Objectives and Tasks of the Thesis**

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

The objective of this thesis is to clarify the theoretical and practical issues regarding the influence of Protestantism on social life in Vinh Long Province today. On this basis, the study proposes a set of solutions aimed at promoting positive influences and mitigating negative impacts of Protestantism on the social life of Vinh Long Province in the coming period.

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

**Literature Review:** Conduct a comprehensive review of existing research related to the topic to clarify the value of previous works and identify the gaps that this thesis needs to address.

**Theoretical Framework:** Systematize and clarify theoretical issues concerning the influence of Protestantism on social life.

**Situational Analysis:** Analyze and evaluate the current reality and the emerging issues arising from the influence of Protestantism across various spheres of social life in Vinh Long Province.

**Forecasting and Solutions:** Forecast the situation and changing trends of Protestantism in Vinh Long Province, and propose solutions to leverage its positive aspects while limiting negative impacts in the future.

Dưới đây là bản dịch sang tiếng Anh chuẩn học thuật cho mục Đối tượng và Phạm vi nghiên cứu:

## **3. Research Objects and Scope**

### ***3.1. Research Objects***

The research object of this thesis is the influence of Protestantism on social life in Vinh Long Province at the present time.

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

**Regarding Content:** The thesis approaches the issue from a philosophical perspective, focusing on the study of Protestantism as a form of social consciousness. It examines its influence on the economic, political, cultural, and social spheres, with particular emphasis on the spiritual life, morality, lifestyle, and social relationships of

the local population.

Regarding Time: The thesis primarily analyzes the period from 2000 to June 2025 (the period prior to the administrative merger of Ben Tre and Tra Vinh provinces into Vinh Long Province). Additionally, it proposes solutions for the period from 2025 to 2035.

#### **4. Theoretical Basis and Research Methods**

##### ***4.1. Theoretical Basis***

The thesis is conducted based on the theoretical foundations of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and the viewpoints of the Communist Party of Vietnam regarding religion and religious affairs. It specifically focuses on perspectives concerning the role and influence of religion within social life.

##### ***4.2. Research Methods***

The thesis utilizes the methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, employing a combination of the following specific methods: Analysis and Synthesis: To break down complex religious phenomena and reassemble them into a coherent theoretical framework. Historical and Logical Methods: To trace the development of Protestantism in chronological order while maintaining logical consistency in theoretical arguments. Comparative and Contrastive Methods: To highlight the characteristics of Protestantism in relation to other social and religious factors. Data Processing: To ensure accuracy and objectivity in evaluating socio-religious statistics. Fieldwork and Forecasting: To collect practical evidence from the local area and predict future trends of the religion in the province.

Dưới đây là bản dịch sang tiếng Anh chuẩn học thuật cho mục Đóng góp mới về khoa học:

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

The thesis contributes to supplementing and clarifying the content and mechanisms of Protestantism's influence across key sectors of social life. Specifically, in the economic sphere, values such as industriousness, frugality, and honesty help orient labor behavior and enhance the sense of responsibility among followers. In the cultural sphere, Protestantism shapes a simple and disciplined lifestyle while simultaneously driving the transformation of certain traditional customs. In terms of social relations, through ecclesiastical organizations and believer networks, this religion both strengthens community cohesion and may create certain distinctions between social groups. These influences are analyzed in close connection

with specific socio-economic conditions, thereby clarifying the operational mechanisms of religion in practice.

Furthermore, the thesis identifies specific manifestations of Protestant influence within major areas of social life in Vinh Long Province. This is reflected in the improved living standards of a segment of followers, the reinforcement of moral values, and enhanced community bonding; however, it also reveals shifts in cultural practices and certain differences in social activities. The research results contribute to establishing and supplementing a scientific database regarding the impact of Protestantism on the social life of Vinh Long Province.

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

### ***6.1. Theoretical Significance***

The thesis contributes to systematizing and clarifying theoretical issues regarding the influence of Protestantism as a form of social consciousness on social life within the specific context of Vinh Long Province.

### ***6.2. Practical Significance***

The thesis clarifies the current reality and proposes solutions to promote the positive aspects while limiting the negative impacts of Protestantism in the coming period. In doing so, it provides a scientific basis for advisory work and state management, aiming to leverage the positive influence of religion in general, and Protestantism in particular, toward local socio-economic development. Furthermore, the research results serve as a supplementary resource for the system of reference materials used in the research and teaching of religion and Protestantism in Vinh Long Province.

## **7. Thesis Structure**

In addition to the introduction, conclusion, list of references, and appendices, the thesis is organized into 4 chapters and 15 sections.

## **Chapter 1**

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

#### **1.1. Research on Protestantism and the Spread of Protestantism in Vietnam**

Nguyen Xuan Hung (2001) clarified the historical origin and significance of the term “Protestantism,” which originated from the 16th-century Reformation movement and was localized in Vietnam as “Tin Mừng” (Good News), reflecting the

process of indigenization that allowed Protestantism to integrate into Vietnamese religious life. This study is significant in explaining the formation of religious identity among the Protestant community in Vĩnh Long.

Nguyen Thanh Xuan (2002) systematized the basic knowledge of Protestantism from a global perspective to Vietnam, presenting its origins, doctrines, organizational structure, and the process of introduction in the early 20th century. Although descriptive in nature, this work provides a theoretical foundation for studying the influence of Protestantism on social life and for state management of religion.

### **1.2. Research on Social Life and the Influence of Protestantism on Social Life**

The study by Hoang Thi Hanh (2014) shows that core values of Protestantism, such as compassion, a sense of responsibility, and community concern, have encouraged adherents to actively participate in charitable activities. Churches and networks of believers play a coordinating and supervisory role, ensuring transparency, thereby strengthening social cohesion, promoting mutual support, and spreading positive behaviors within the community.

Tran Quang Vinh (2014) focused on the economic aspect, noting that Protestant adherents often demonstrate qualities such as honesty, diligence, thrift, and discipline in labor, contributing to sustainable economic development at the local level. Churches serve not only as centers for community bonding but also as providers of capital, skills, and production-business experience, helping to enhance competitiveness and economic efficiency.

### **1.3. Research on the Influence of Protestantism on Social Life in Vĩnh Long Province**

According to *“Exploring Vĩnh Long Culture 1732–2000”* (Vĩnh Long Provincial Party Committee Propaganda Department, 2001), Protestantism was introduced to Vĩnh Long in the early 1920s from the direction of Mỹ Tho, propagated by Mr. Văn Huyền; the first believer was Mr. Huấn. The first church was established near the pier area, later moved to Cầu Lộ, and subsequently a preaching house was built at 276B Phạm Hùng Street, Vĩnh Long City. In 1969, Vĩnh Long became the center of the Southwest District, which was later reorganized as the Central-Southern United Association (1973).

According to *“The History of Patriotic Tradition of Religious Communities in Vĩnh Long Province 1930–2005”* (Vietnam Fatherland Front Committee of Vĩnh Long Province, 2006), Protestantism was introduced in 1922. During the resistance

wars against the French and Americans, many Protestant believers in Vĩnh Long participated in revolutionary activities, with some becoming party members and martyrs. After 1975, they continued contributing to local development and were awarded high honors and medals by the State.

#### **1.4. Value of Previous Studies and Issues for Further Research**

##### ***1.4.1. Value of Previous Studies***

Research on Protestantism in Vietnam has considerable theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, these studies clarify the nature, social role, and the relationship between faith, morality, and community behavior. Practically, they reflect the process of introduction, dissemination, and the impact of Protestantism on spiritual life, economy, and socio-cultural aspects. In Vĩnh Long, Protestantism has contributed to socio-economic development while raising issues related to cultural differences and religious integration. Overall, these studies provide a scientific basis for current religious policy-making and management.

##### ***1.4.2. Issues for Further Research in the Dissertation***

The choice of the topic “*The Influence of Protestantism on Social Life in Vĩnh Long Province Today*” stems from urgent practical needs and the objective of approaching the subject systematically and comprehensively, integrating theory and practice. Building selectively on previous studies, the dissertation focuses on four main contents:

First, to outline the new characteristics of Protestantism in Vietnam in the context of globalization, including church organization, forms of worship, internationalization trends, and adaptation during the integration process.

Second, to analyze the process of introduction and development of Protestantism in Vĩnh Long Province from the early 20th century to the present, clarifying historical, cultural, social, and political factors influencing the formation and transformation of this religion.

Third, to assess the influence of Protestantism on the local economy, culture, society, politics, and belief systems, while identifying coordination mechanisms between the authorities and Protestant organizations to promote positive values and limit negative impacts.

Fourth, based on practical surveys, the dissertation forecasts trends in the development of Protestantism in Vĩnh Long in the coming period and proposes appropriate religious policy orientations.

## **Chapter 2**

### **SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES ON THE INFLUENCE OF PROTESTANTISM IN SOCIAL LIFE**

#### **2.1. The Marxist Perspective on Religion**

From a Marxist perspective, religion is situated within the totality of social life and is understood as a product of specific socio-economic conditions, in accordance with the principle that social existence determines social consciousness. Religion reflects reality in an indirect and distorted (“illusory”) manner and is closely associated with alienation, whereby human beings become dependent on supernatural forces of their own making.

Marx’s well-known assertion that “religion is the opium of the people” reveals its dual character: it provides spiritual consolation while simultaneously sustaining certain social conditions. Overall, religion is regarded as a historically conditioned form of social consciousness with multiple origins, which both reflects and exerts influence on social life.

#### **2.2. Overview of the Formation of Protestantism**

##### ***2.2.1. Origins and Essence of the Formation of Protestantism***

Emerging in the 16th century, Protestantism was an inevitable result of the historical transformations in early modern Western Europe, serving as a testament to the law that social existence determines social consciousness. In essence, it is a reformed religious form representing the interests of the bourgeoisie in their effort to dismantle the feudal Catholic ideology. Its formation was rooted in three premises: economic (the need for free enterprise and capital accumulation), political (the class struggle against ecclesiastical power), and cultural (the rise of humanism). Characterized by the individualization of faith and the establishment of the “Protestant ethic” regarding labor and frugality, this religion provided the spiritual impetus for the development of capitalism. This confirms the relative independence of social consciousness and its capacity to exert a powerful counter-impact on historical reality.

##### ***2.2.2. A Comparison of the Doctrines of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam***

From the perspective of historical materialism, although these three religions share a monotheistic worldview, their doctrinal differences reflect distinct socio-historical conditions. Catholicism represents a centralized model with a rigid

intermediary church system, which historically served to legitimize the feudal order. Islam manifests a comprehensive normative model, blending religion with Sharia law and politics to maintain communal cohesion. In contrast, Protestantism executed a shift toward an individualized model, rejecting the intermediary role of the Church to emphasize a direct relationship between the individual and God. This transition not only reflected the rise of the bourgeoisie but also accelerated the process of secularization, transforming humans from a state of dependence into subjects with high personal responsibility. By legitimizing capital accumulation and upholding the labor ethic, Protestantism became the religious ideological form best adapted to modern society, contributing to the shaping of values centered on rationalization and individual liberty.

### ***2.2.3. Representative Denominations of Protestantism***

Protestantism is a diverse collection of denominations that share a common belief in the supreme authority of the Bible and salvation by faith, yet differ in organizational structure and mechanisms of social influence. Lutheranism, pioneering in Germany and Northern Europe, operates on the principle of “*Sola Fide*” (by faith alone), retaining traditional liturgy while rejecting papal authority. The Reformed tradition (Calvinism) is distinguished by the doctrine of “Predestination” and a democratic presbyterian governance model, creating the spiritual impetus for capitalism through the values of industriousness and temperance. Anglicanism embodies a *via media* (middle way) by combining Catholic ritual with reformed theology, characterized by strong nationalization and tolerance. The Baptist tradition upholds liberty of conscience, practicing believer's baptism and leading the defense of the separation of Church and State. Finally, Pentecostalism possesses a powerful populist character, emphasizing direct spiritual experience and the capacity to reorganize the moral fabric of marginalized communities. This diversity demonstrates the flexible adaptability of Protestantism, exerting multifaceted influences on global economic, political, and cultural life.

## **2.3. Spheres of Social Life and Their Interrelationships**

### ***2.3.1. Spheres of Social Life***

Social life is a complex entity consisting of four fundamental spheres that maintain a close dialectical relationship. The economic sphere serves as the infrastructure (base), determining the movement and transformation of the entire social formation. The political sphere, belonging to the superstructure, functions to manage power and mediate class relations. The cultural sphere acts as the spiritual foundation, providing the value system and endogenous motivation for development.

Finally, the social sphere is where interpersonal relationships (family, ethnicity, religion, etc.) are directly manifested and where the function of reproducing human resources for the community is performed. Although the economy holds the decisive role, the remaining spheres possess relative independence, exerting a powerful counter-impact that either promotes or hinders the progress of history.

### ***2.3.2. Interrelationships Between the Spheres of Social Life***

Social life is a unified whole that operates through a multi-dimensional and dialectical relationship between the economic, political, cultural, and social spheres. Within this system, the economy serves as the infrastructure (base), holding the ultimate decisive power over the formation and transformation of the superstructure. However, the other spheres are not passive; they possess relative independence and exert a powerful counter-impact: politics acts as the organizing and regulating force that provides strategic orientation for the economy; culture serves as the spiritual foundation, guiding the values and moral norms of social behavior; while the social sphere is the practical environment where relationships are mediated and the validity of socio-political policies is tested. This relationship is organic rather than linear: the economy provides the material prerequisites, politics ensures legitimacy and stability, culture generates endogenous motivation, and the social sphere maintains harmony. Any imbalance in any of these spheres can lead to a chain of negative consequences, necessitating synchronized development to ensure sustainable social progress.

### ***2.3.3. The Influence of Protestantism on Spheres of Social Life***

#### ***2.3.3.1. The Influence of Protestantism on the Economic Sphere***

Protestantism influences the economic sphere not through direct administration, but by establishing a moral value system that shapes individual behavior. At the heart of this influence is the concept of "Beruf" (Calling), which views secular labor as a noble religious obligation, thereby blurring the line between spiritual life and practical production. According to Max Weber's thesis, Protestantism has internalized qualities such as industriousness, frugality, honesty, and responsibility into a modern "economic ethic". This mechanism transforms faith into an intrinsic motivation that fosters self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and the continuous improvement of educational and professional skills. By regarding legitimate material success as a sign of divine grace, it has validated capital accumulation and reinvestment, creating a favorable cultural foundation for the emergence of the middle class and the process of modernization. Consequently, Protestantism constructs an economic environment based on trust and discipline, serving as a vital spiritual impetus for sustainable and humane development within society.

### *2.3.3.2. The Influence of Protestantism on the Political Sphere*

The political influence of Protestantism does not lie in direct power intervention but in the creation of a political culture that upholds individual liberty and civic responsibility. Stemming from the principle that every individual has the right to interpret the Bible directly, Protestantism establishes a philosophical foundation for subjective rights, encouraging believers to actively participate in democratic processes and social critique based on “individual conscience” rather than submitting to imposed authority. In public governance, Protestantism promotes transparency and accountability, viewing the State as a civil institution serving the common good and public service as a form of moral practice. In particular, the decentralized ecclesiastical governance model, operating on principles of election and mutual oversight, served as a precursor to the development of modern democratic institutions and the rule of law. Consequently, Protestantism contributes to the formation of an active citizenry with the capacity for self-governance and critical thinking, fostering a democratic, transparent, and sustainable political environment.

### *2.3.3.3. The Influence of Protestantism on the Cultural Sphere*

Protestantism profoundly impacts cultural life by establishing behavioral norms based on the internalization of moral values and rationality. Within family culture, it promotes the “miniature church” model, where values of fidelity, filial piety, and educational responsibility are transmitted across generations, creating a solid foundation for self-conscious morality. At the communal level, this religion fosters a culture of connection and mutual support through small-group activities and volunteer work, transforming spiritual faith into concrete humanitarian action. Notably, Protestantism shapes a rational and temperate lifestyle, simplifying elaborate rituals and eliminating superstitions to focus on substantive spiritual values. With an open spirit and an emphasis on education, the Protestant community adapts quickly to modern culture and technology, creating a harmonious intersection between identity preservation and global integration. These cultural characteristics not only enhance individual spiritual quality but also construct a dynamic, healthy, and sustainably developing communal environment.

### *2.3.3.4. The Influence of Protestantism on the Social Sphere*

Protestantism serves as a vital social resource, shaping behaviors and relationships between individuals and the community through the internalization of humanistic moral values. Regarding behavioral orientation, Protestant doctrine transforms faith into proactive citizenship, encouraging believers to live responsibly, honestly, and with a commitment to addressing social issues such as poverty, social vices, and inequality.

Structurally, Protestantism creates flexible, decentralized social networks (Bible study groups, volunteer teams), generating abundant "social capital" that strengthens trust and communal self-organization. Specifically, through regular charitable and relief activities, this religion not only supports the marginalized but also cultivates the character and civic spirit of its followers. With a philosophy that prizes self-reliance, Protestantism empowers individuals to enhance their social resilience, proactively improve their lives, and adapt well to the context of modernization. These mechanisms synergize to create a self-governing, cohesive, and humane social model, contributing to social stability and promoting sustainable progress.

#### **2.4. Factors affecting the influence of Protestantism on social life.**

The existence and influence of Protestantism are determined by the totality of social relations within each historical period. The economic factor plays a fundamental role, shifting from a "psychological compensation" function during times of instability to value orientation as the economy develops. Changes in social structure, particularly urbanization and migration, enable Protestant communities to become alternative anchors for fractured traditional bonds. The political and legal systems perform a regulatory role, establishing a framework for religious activities within the unity of freedom and social responsibility. The cultural environment serves as the space for acculturation and the harmonization of Protestant doctrines with indigenous traditions. Finally, science and technology, along with intrinsic characteristics (flexible organization, simplified rituals), help Protestantism adapt rapidly to the modern context. The dialectical interaction between these factors ensures that

### **Chapter 3**

## **THE INFLUENCE OF PROTESTANTISM ON THE SPHERES OF SOCIAL LIFE IN VINH LONG PROVINCE: CURRENT STATUS AND ARISING ISSUES**

### **3.1. Characteristics of Vinh Long Province and the Process of Introduction and Development of Protestantism**

#### ***3.1.1. Characteristics of Vinh Long Province Before Consolidation***

Vinh Long Province is located in the center of the Mekong Delta, between the Tiền and Hậu Rivers, occupying a strategic position connecting the provinces of Southwestern Vietnam. With an area of 1,525.73 km<sup>2</sup> and flat, fertile terrain, the province is well-suited for agricultural development, trade, and regional economic integration.

In 2024, the GDP grew by 7.09%, with the economic structure shifting toward industry and services (industry and construction 37.64%; services 42.36%; agriculture, forestry, and fisheries 11.86%), and the average per capita GDP reached approximately 4,700 USD.

Vĩnh Long has a long history and has held several names over time (Long Hồ, Vĩnh Trấn, Vĩnh Thanh, Vĩnh Trà, Cửu Long). It was re-established in 1992 and currently comprises 8 administrative units with 109 communes, wards, and towns.

The province's culture reflects the interaction of three ethnic groups: Kinh, Khmer, and Hoa. Vĩnh Long has 69 historical sites and 2 nationally recognized intangible cultural heritages, demonstrating its humanistic identity, respect for learning, and community solidarity.

In 2024, the population was approximately 1.03 million, with Khmer accounting for 2.2% and Hoa for 0.35%. Labor with vocational training reached 28.3%. Social welfare policies have been emphasized, reducing the poverty rate to 3.8%.

### ***3.1.2. The Process of the Introduction of Protestantism into Vĩnh Long Province***

Protestantism in Vĩnh Long has developed in a “naturalized” manner, spreading from the grassroots through civil relationships, practicing “de-ritualized” forms of worship, and adapting flexibly to historical fluctuations. As a result, despite its quiet growth, Protestantism has remained resilient, enriching the province's religious and social life.

Protestantism was first introduced into Vietnam in 1911 by missionary Robert J.A. Clemmons (United Gospel Mission – CMA, USA), gradually spreading to the South. Vĩnh Long, as a central province in the Mekong Delta with a rich religious life, became a favorable area for the reception of Protestantism in the early 20th century.

Around 1918, Protestant merchants from Sa Đéc brought the Gospel to Cái Tàu Hạ, forming home-based prayer groups. Missionary Văn Huyền organized religious activities, and in 1924, the Vĩnh Long Protestant Church was officially established, marking the institutionalization of the religion. Protestantism gradually expanded to the districts of Trà Ôn, Tam Bình, Bình Minh, and Ba Càng, with simple forms of worship emphasizing Bible study and prayer.

Developing along the lines of “naturalization” and “de-ritualization,” Protestantism has adapted flexibly to historical changes, maintaining sustainability

and contributing to the enrichment of religious and social life in Vĩnh Long Province.

### ***3.1.3. Development Stages of Protestantism in Vĩnh Long Province***

The development of Protestantism in Vĩnh Long reflects a dialectical adaptation between religion and social life. Before 1975, Protestantism was introduced in the 1920s–1930s, establishing prayer groups in Vĩnh Long, Long Hồ, and Tam Bình, initiated by the United Gospel Mission (CMA). During the French colonial period and the Republic of Vietnam, the religion operated legally and steadily in urban areas, forming ethical lifestyles based on thrift, honesty, and community service, although war and political suspicion limited religious activities.

After 1975, Protestantism underwent three stages: a period of stagnation and contraction (1975–1986); recovery during the Renovation (Đổi Mới) period with legal recognition (1986–2005); and stabilization and integration (2005–present), with over 8,000 adherents, multiple congregations, and active social activities such as charity, relief work, and education. Protestantism has shifted from a minority religion to a positive social component, contributing to the reinforcement of ethics and national unity.

## **3.2. Current Status of the Influence of Protestantism on Social Life Spheres in Vinh Long Province**

### ***3.2.1. Influence on the Economic Sphere in Vinh Long Province***

Protestantism in Vinh Long has established a positive “economic ethic” by transforming labor into a “calling” and” vocation. Believers in Long Ho, Binh Tan districts, and Vinh Long City are notable for their discipline, honesty, and rational frugality. The radical elimination of elaborate ritual costs (votive papers, death anniversaries) has enabled them to accumulate resources for investment in sustainable poverty reduction models such as organic agriculture. Although the scale remains spontaneous, the community of over 8,000 believers has contributed to local “social capital” through internal support networks and immunity to social vices (alcoholism, gambling), earning high praise from businesses for their human resource quality. From a philosophical perspective, Protestantism acts as a “soft resource” promoting a sustainable and humane local market economy.

### ***3.2.2. Influence on the Political Sphere in Vinh Long Province***

In Vinh Long, the political influence of Protestantism is manifested through a dialectical shift from “isolation” to “responsible integration” Based on the doctrine of submission to authority, local Protestants primarily maintain a neutral, peaceful, and

law-abiding attitude. Following the *Doi Moi* reforms, particularly Directive 01/2005/CT-TTg, interaction between the authorities and the Church has evolved from mere administrative management to cooperation in building the great national unity bloc. Practically, believers are no longer “outsiders to politics” but have integrated deeply into the socio-political system: 07 believers work in provincial agencies, 22 dignitaries/officials participate in the Vietnam Fatherland Front at various levels, and 07 believers have been admitted to the Communist Party. Voter turnout in heavily religious areas (such as Loan My commune) exceeds 95%, testifying to the alignment between religious faith and civic duty. Despite challenges from unregistered groups and the risk of exploitation, Protestantism in Vinh Long has fundamentally become a positive factor, contributing to social order and local political consensus.

### ***3.2.3. Influence on the Cultural Sphere in Vinh Long Province***

The influence of Protestantism on Vinh Long’s culture is a dialectical interaction between imported faith and indigenous identity across three core dimensions. Regarding ethics and lifestyle, the internalization of the “Ten Commandments” has formed a lifestyle that is “good for both religious and secular life” helping believers in Long Ho and Tam Bình districts remain immune to social vices and consistently achieve a 100% “Cultural Family” rating. In culinary culture, Protestantism creates a temperate “subculture” through absolute abstinence from alcohol and ritual offerings; this promotes a healthy lifestyle but also creates a certain distance in traditional community interactions. Regarding wedding rituals, the religion has shifted from clan-based ties to a sacred individual covenant with simple, cost-effective ceremonies, contributing to a modern, civilized lifestyle. Generally, Protestantism acts as a factor that “filters the turbid and clears the pure” eliminating backward customs and establishing new moral standards, though it still poses challenges regarding harmony with ancestral worship within the local national unity bloc.

### ***3.2.4. Influence on the Social Sphere in Vinh Long Province***

The social influence of Protestantism in Vinh Long is prominent in the restructuring of moral standards and community behavior. In the spirit of “loving one's neighbor” believers build a righteous, disciplined life and reject social vices. Within the family, the religion redefines filial piety: focusing on caring for parents while they are alive and simplifying funerals toward civilization and frugality, although the rejection of ancestral worship still creates “friction” with local traditions.

Notably, with the motto “faith accompanied by action” churches in Dong Phu, Tra On, and Vinh Long have contributed tens of billions of VND to charitable activities such as building compassionate houses, medical support, and raising orphans. These efforts not only contribute to social security but also demonstrate the positive intersection between religious ethics and national ethics in the process of building a sustainable community.

### ***3.2.5. General Assessment, Positive and Negative Influences, and Causes***

#### *3.2.5.1. General Assessment*

From the perspective of historical materialism, religion is a form of social consciousness belonging to the superstructure, possessing relative independence and interacting with ethics, politics, and law. Although reflecting reality in an “illusory” form, religion still crystallizes humanistic cultural and moral standards, creating a dialectical relationship with ethics to provide spiritual orientation and regulate human behavior. Due to its ability to provide value templates consistent with psychological and social needs, religion maintains a persistent vitality and endures throughout the historical process.

#### *3.2.5.2. Positive Influences and Causes*

Protestantism serves as a vital “psychological anchor” helping believers find balance and relieve livelihood pressures in a harsh market economy context. Through the internalization of doctrine, this religion contributes to character orientation, promoting a lifestyle of honesty, frugality, and responsibility, which translates into positive practical behaviors in labor and family life. Additionally, the charitable and volunteer activities of the Protestant community have actualized the spirit of “love” creating sustainable social bonds. The reason Protestantism exerts such a strong influence is due to socio-economic shifts giving rise to new spiritual needs, combined with a clear, accessible doctrinal system and a rigorous organizational form with high community cohesion.

#### *3.2.5.3. Negative Influences and Causes*

Alongside the positive aspects, Protestantism also creates certain challenges when the tendency to absolutize faith limits indigenous rituals such as ancestral worship, causing a “rupture” in the flow of traditional and clan culture. Excessive focus on internal group activities sometimes creates invisible boundaries, reducing cultural exchange between believers and the surrounding community. Simultaneously, the rapid growth of religious groups places significant pressure on

local state management, leading to confusion in legal guidance and situational monitoring. The causes of these issues stem from the conflict between “monotheistic” value systems and folk beliefs, the incomplete cultural awareness of a segment of believers, and management mechanisms that have not yet timely adapted to the rapid fluctuations of local religious reality.

### **3.3. Emerging Issues from the Reality of Protestant Influence in Vinh Long Province**

#### ***3.3.1. The Trend of Overemphasizing Religious Life and the Risk of Diminished Economic Participation***

Practice shows that a segment of believers in Tra On and Tam Binh is prioritizing spiritual life over production activities, leading to a “mismatch” between social consciousness and social existence. Prioritizing time for religious activities over labor may diminish household economic productivity. The issue at hand is the need for a regulatory mechanism that enables believers to maintain their faith while applying the doctrinal values of industriousness and frugality to economic development, preventing religion from becoming a hindrance to local progress.

#### ***3.3.2. The Trend of Reclusiveness in Religious Practice and the Risk of Limiting Socio-Cultural Exchange***

Due to the tight-knit nature of the internal community, a segment of believers exhibits reclusive behavior, rarely participating in communal activities such as folk festivals or self-governing public meetings. This “centralization” of relationships within the parish diminishes cultural connectivity and creates isolated “sub-communities” The challenge here is to establish a state of dynamic equilibrium, helping followers preserve their unique identity while actively integrating into the province's broader socio-cultural life.

#### ***3.3.3. The Risk of Social Stratification and the Gap Between Community Groups***

Differences in life practices (such as views on ancestral worship), if lacking regular dialogue, will accumulate in quantity and transform into a qualitative change in social relations. This creates “soft boundaries” and a sense of reservation in communication between religious and non-religious groups. The solution is not to eliminate differences but to strengthen intermediary institutions and spaces for interaction, transforming diversity into a complementary factor rather than a catalyst for social fragmentation.

### ***3.3.4. The Phenomenon of Exploiting Religion and Its Impacts on Security and Order***

In reality, there have been instances of individuals exploiting the name of Protestantism or utilizing cyberspace to spread misinformation, affecting social order. This is a localized phenomenon of deviance, arising from a lack of legal awareness or livelihood pressures. The issue for state management is to handle the dialectical relationship between ensuring the right to freedom of belief and maintaining legal discipline, combining administrative management with public mobilization and education.

## **Chapter 4**

### **SITUATIONAL FORECASTS, TRENDS OF CHANGE, AND SOLUTIONS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE INFLUENCES WHILE MITIGATING NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF PROTESTANTISM ON SOCIAL LIFE IN VINH LONG PROVINCE IN THE COMING PERIOD**

#### **4.1. Forecasting the Situation and Trends of Protestantism in Vinh Long after the Administrative Integration with Bến Tre and Trà Vinh Provinces**

##### ***4.1.1. Situation Forecast***

##### ***4.1.1.1. In the Economic Sector***

Protestantism in Vinh Long, especially the Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations, emphasizes diligent labor, thrift, responsibility, and entrepreneurship, aligning with Max Weber's concept of the "Protestant ethic and capitalism." Believers, mainly from ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged groups, participate in clean agriculture, small-scale trade, eco-tourism, and vocational training for youth, thereby securing livelihoods while expressing ethical values and community spirit.

Cooperatives and family-run businesses managed by believers integrate faith with production, sharing risks and profits. However, they face limitations in capital, management, and market connectivity. A tendency toward internal closed networks and reluctance to take bank loans restricts business expansion, highlighting the need for coordination mechanisms between churches and local authorities.

Integrating vocational training, financial skills, and entrepreneurship into religious activities helps develop a workforce that is both skilled and faithful, transforming religious belief into a driver of economic development. Attention must be paid to the

risks of insularity and weak market linkages, while promoting a “co-development” model between the authorities and churches to ensure sustainable growth.

#### *4.1.1.2. In the Political Sector*

Protestantism in Vĩnh Long plays a positive role in promoting civic awareness, transparency, and peaceful dialogue. Believers comply with the law, cooperate with local authorities, and participate in political-social organizations such as the Fatherland Front, Farmers’ Union, and Youth Union, demonstrating civic responsibility grounded in religious faith. Churches also serve as bridges between authorities and the community, disseminating policies, participating in mediation, and providing local advisory services, contributing to social stability, especially in multi-religious areas.

By integrating ethical teachings with community activities, Protestant believers both maintain their religious identity and actively engage in political and social life. It is forecasted that by 2035, with increasing numbers and higher educational levels, the Protestant community in Vĩnh Long will continue to be a driving force for grassroots democracy, social stability, and the development of “active religious citizens,” while also enhancing responsibility and ethical standards within the broader community.

#### *4.1.1.3. In the Cultural Sector*

Protestantism in Vĩnh Long positively influences culture by shaping ethical, honest, and frugal lifestyles while emphasizing family values. Protestant believers live simply, reject superstition, alcohol, and gambling, and actively participate in community activities such as group worship, Bible study, the “live a good life, uphold faith” movement, environmental protection, cultural performances, and moral education for children and youth.

Churches also organize life skills classes, hymn festivals, and value education programs, contributing to community culture, character development, and artistic appreciation. At the same time, Protestantism serves as a positive counterbalance to deviant cultural trends, helping guide healthy lifestyles, fostering responsibility, self-respect, and a spirit of community service.

It is forecasted that by 2035, with increasing integration and development, Protestantism in Vĩnh Long will continue to be a positive cultural force, maintaining religious identity while promoting civilized, humane, and sustainable lifestyles in social life.

#### *4.1.1.4. In the Social Sector*

Globally, Protestantism is regarded as a force that promotes community development through healthcare, education, humanitarian aid, and charitable activities. In Vietnam, Protestant churches carry out charitable work, supporting the poor, children, ethnic minorities, and vulnerable groups through free medical services, gift distribution, construction of charity houses, and life skills programs.

In Vĩnh Long, Protestant believers actively participate in community support, organize volunteer groups, raise legal awareness, protect the environment, and promote sustainable rural development. It is forecasted that by 2035, the Protestant community will continue to expand its social influence through mutual aid models, collaboration with authorities in social welfare and moral education programs, while maintaining community unity and stability.

From a philosophical perspective, the presence of Protestantism in Vĩnh Long exemplifies the dialectical relationship between religion and society, as the ethical values, spirit of service, and community responsibility of believers contribute to progressive and humane social transformation, simultaneously creating sustainable development momentum for the locality.

#### ***4.1.2. Forecast of Trends in the Transformation of Protestantism in Vĩnh Long Province in the Coming Period***

##### *4.1.2.1. Trend of the emergence of new Protestant denominations in Vĩnh Long and competition among denominations and with other religions in the area*

In Vĩnh Long, Protestantism currently has approximately 12,734 believers, operating within a context of 11 officially recognized religions. Protestantism is a multi-denominational faith, characterized by simple rituals, emphasis on personal responsibility, adaptability, and dynamic missionary activity, particularly targeting ethnic minority areas. Charitable and social activities are often used as a means to attract followers.

At present, besides the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Southern region), several new denominations have emerged in Vĩnh Long, such as the Vietnamese Baptist Church (Southern region), Mennonite, Pentecostal, Christian Alliance, and Brethren. Some of these groups operate in private homes, lack formal worship places, and are not legally recognized, comprising about 230 believers in total. The emergence of these denominations largely results from believers or clergy being removed from office and establishing new branches, or receiving support from

foreign religious organizations.

It is forecasted that in the coming period, unrecognized Protestant denominations will continue to consolidate and expand, compete for followers, and seek legal recognition. Missionary strategies that combine charitable activities with financial support from external sources will continue to be a key method to increase the number of believers and expand influence amid religious competition at the local level.

#### *4.1.2.2. Trend of Concentrated Evangelism in Remote Areas and among the Khmer Community*

Vĩnh Long Province has approximately 353,000 Khmer people, mainly residing in Trà Ôn, Tam Bình, Vũng Liêm, Trà Cú, Cầu Ngang districts, and Bình Minh ward, most of whom follow Theravada Buddhism. However, economic difficulties and a spiritual gap have led some Khmer individuals to encounter and join Protestantism.

Protestantism, with its simple rituals, streamlined organization, and emphasis on personal responsibility, focuses missionary activities in remote areas and among the Khmer community, combining social and charitable activities to attract followers. The religion encourages civilized lifestyles, abandonment of outdated customs, and attention to the everyday life of the community.

The development of Protestantism in these areas also raises legal challenges, such as building worship facilities without permission, self-ordination of pastors, and conducting unregistered rituals, which may create complications for local public order.

It is forecasted that Protestant evangelism will continue to expand in remote areas, mainly through small groups, personal, and family networks. If conducted in compliance with the law and in coordination with local authorities, this trend can become a positive religious force, contributing to socio-economic development and strengthening the spiritual life of the community.

#### *4.1.2.3. Trend of Exploiting Protestantism to Undermine the Regime*

Protestantism in Vĩnh Long has the potential to rapidly attract followers; therefore, hostile forces-particularly the United States and certain reactionary organizations-continue to exploit this religion to implement a “peaceful evolution” strategy aimed at undermining the regime and destabilizing socio-political order. The forms of exploitation are increasingly sophisticated, including: using charitable and humanitarian activities for illegal propaganda; exploiting religious and ethnic conflicts; developing online propaganda targeting youth and those with limited legal

awareness.

If not strictly managed, these activities could divide internal factions within Protestant groups, reduce trust in the government, and create “hot spots” of religious security issues. To respond, it is necessary to raise vigilance, educate believers on the law, cooperate with legally recognized Protestant leaders, monitor unregistered missionary groups, and strengthen management of online activities, while ensuring lawful handling that simultaneously protects national security and respects citizens’ freedom of religion.

## **4.2. Groups of Solutions to Promote Positive Influence and Limit Negative Influence of Protestantism in the Social Life of Vĩnh Long Province in the Coming Period**

### ***4.2.1. Economic Solutions***

It is necessary to improve the material living standards of the Protestant community by promoting production, livestock farming, handicrafts, expanding markets, and transferring agricultural technology. Ensure equitable access to land, capital, technical knowledge, and information, provide preferential loans and vocational training to reduce poverty and stabilize the economy in remote, rural, and ethnic minority areas.

At the same time, leverage the positive aspects of Protestantism in economic development, combine with community-based models, restructure the local economy, apply high technology, develop processing industries and tourism, upgrade infrastructure, train high-quality human resources, adapt to climate change, and ensure security and social order.

Developing the Protestant community economy by connecting the State – religion – society not only enhances the effectiveness of religious affairs but also implements the policy of “Religion Accompanies the Nation” in Vĩnh Long.

### ***4.2.2. Political Solutions***

Vĩnh Long Province needs to manage Protestant organizations in a synchronized manner, limit spontaneous groups, and prevent the exploitation of religion for subversive purposes, while linking these efforts with socio-economic development, strengthening the grassroots political system, enhancing national defense and security, and building national unity, especially in remote areas and among ethnic minority communities.

State management should institutionalize laws on religion, regulate the

registration of Representative Boards' activities, innovate policy communication, and classify believers according to education level, occupation, and ethnicity to improve effectiveness.

Strengthen political capacity among believers through core cadre training, mobilize participation in the political system, enhance the competence of religious officials, and provide political and ideological education for cadres, Party members, and the general faithful. When implemented transparently and democratically, Protestantism will become a positive “soft power,” contributing to social stability and development in line with the orientation of the Party and the State.

#### ***4.2.3. Cultural Solutions***

Culture is a spiritual foundation that contributes to political stability and socio-economic development. Protestantism both reflects and shapes cultural and human values, modernizes customs, eliminates outdated practices, while needing to harmonize with traditional national culture to avoid conflicts.

Vĩnh Long promotes the movement “All People Unite to Build Cultural Life,” combining the preservation of traditional values with the positive ethical aspects of Protestantism, thereby enhancing cultural resilience and preventing the exploitation of religion to disrupt unity.

The solutions include: strengthening leadership; institutionalizing policies on culture, education, and religion; preserving and restoring historical sites linked with tourism development; improving quality of life; encouraging participation in community cultural activities; and developing high-quality human resources. These measures both protect national identity and create an environment for Protestantism to integrate, consolidate community spiritual life, and effectively implement the Party's and State's religious policies.

#### ***4.2.4. Social Solutions***

Society is a system of institutions in which religion helps shape ethical norms, supports social welfare, and reduces injustice. Protestantism, with the tenet “Love God, Love People,” has actively contributed to charity, education, healthcare, and support for the poor and people in remote areas, helping build new rural areas and civilized communities.

The solutions include: raising awareness of law compliance and civic responsibility among the Protestant community; providing social ethics education based on religious teachings; enhancing dialogue between authorities and religious

organizations; training religious management personnel; and establishing the model of “Culturally Exemplary Protestant Families” to spread positive values.

Coordinated efforts among the government, religious organizations, academic institutions, and the faithful will enable Protestantism to become a positive spiritual and social resource, accompanying sustainable development, strengthening national unity, and improving social life quality in Vĩnh Long.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the Marxist-Leninist perspective, religion both reflects and is shaped by social existence. Protestantism emerged during the European Reformation in the 16th–17th centuries, arising from economic, political, and social transformations while promoting democratic ideas and economic development. Upon entering Vĩnh Long, Protestantism adapted flexibly, forming local characteristics suitable to the region.

Protestantism exerts multidimensional influence: in economics (faithful are diligent, frugal, engaged in production and charity), politics (law-abiding, participating in social organizations), culture (simple, disciplined lifestyle, occasionally conflicting with traditions), and social life (community cohesion, support for vulnerable groups).

To enhance positive effects and mitigate negative ones, it is necessary to strengthen management, guide religious practice, promote education and dialogue, improve policies, develop the economy and society among religious communities, and harness ethical values of religion in harmony with national culture. Correctly recognizing the influence of Protestantism contributes to building a stable, sustainable, and harmonious Vĩnh Long.

**LIST OF THE AUTHOR’S PUBLISHED WORKS RELATED TO THE  
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