

For the information the Directing
Committee and the General Secretariat
of Pax Romana. NOT FOR PUBLICATION.

10th. July '57.

Interim Report on S.Vietnam



Student population in the University of Saigon 3000(app.)

About 30% of these are refugee students from the North.

About 10% are Catholics.

There is only one university in S.Vietnam. The University of Hue is to be started shortly.

For detail information the following could be contacted,

1. Rev. Fr. Lich, O.P.
Student Chaplain,
Cercle Renaissance
43 rue Nguyen Thong, Saigon.
2. Miss Tran Thi Lai (delegate to Pax Romana Assembly '57)
86 Huyuh Thuh Cua
Saigon
3. Miss Nguyen Thi Oanh (International Catholic Auxiliaries)
Girls Student Centre
232 bis/c Hien Vuong
Saigon.

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The Catholic students are organised. Fr. Lich is the chaplain of this organisation. Its meetings are always held at the Cercle Renaissance.

Approximately 1000 students (both Catholic and non-Catholic) are organised into what is called the National Union Of Students in S.Vietnam. This Union has close contact with COSEC.

The affiliation of the Catholic Students' organization to Pax Romana

It has an effective programme of action. Affiliation would be of mutual benefit. Even more it would mean an inspiration to the other Asian Federations. Catholicism has taken strong native roots here, real and very earnest. On the surface however the country and even within Catholic Action itself is wrought with conflict partly arising from the nepotism of Diem's "counsellors" and the corrupting use of American "generosity" (Some view a trend similar to that debacle of ^{the} Marshall Mission in China)

The roots of Catholicism in S.Vietnam have however been too firmly implanted to be easily shaken by the ambitions of a few Catholic individuals or the "god intentions" of American democrats and republicans.



Religious formation

Cercle Renaissance is the centre of action. Each Sunday there is dialogue mass and the ~~chaplain's~~ ^{and} chaplain's sermon, the weekly meeting. In the same place of land are housed the three Dominicans and two seminarians-to-be. The Superior in charge of this small 'convent' is an authority in Vietnamese Literature, who was formerly in Hanoi and is now a professor in the University of Saigon. His salary forms the major monthly contribution to the running of the Cercle. The students (around 100) housed at the Cercle, both Catholic and non-Catholic, pay only a very nominal charge for their board and lodging. The 'poverty' of the 'convent' is a strong factor in the indirect formation of the students. There is close and effective contact between priest and layman. Many a time and many a non-Catholic would stroll along to the chaplain's office and hear him sing his beautiful French and Vietnamese songs accompanied by his own guitar. On these occasions many a question on the Faith is asked and answered. Fr. Lich is very much a priest of the students.

The Association publishes a magazine periodically. (in Vietnamese) It is read by both Catholics and non-Catholics on the campus.

The facilities for enclosed retreats have still to be found. Most students work for a living as well as attend classes.

A whole wealth of Catholicism is within the reach of the Vietnamien intellectual via the French. He has a tremendous advantage over the subject of the British, the subject ipso facto of ~~the~~ sedate protestantism, the subject of compromise.

Saigon is the city chosen by Therese of Lisieux.

Intellectual formation

The university of Saigon like so many of the universities in Asia today faces apart from its own inherent difficulties the pressure of social needs of its environment. The French Mission, the team of professors from France, seems to be up against tremendous odds. But one trend is clear, there has already become apparent an enthusiastic re-acceptance of French ideas and values. The massive but somewhat obtrusive Financial Aid of America has left the minds relatively untouched. Vietnam has experienced the strong influence of Chinese civilization and French civilization. She has ^{reacted} and is reacting against both in an attempt to preserve her own ~~her~~ identity. In doing so she is preserving her own identity. She is I think discovering in the process that the richness of this identity cannot be isolated from the richness and the best that ~~the~~ ^{French} and Chinese civilization had ~~contributed~~ contributed towards its growth. In as far as French civilization is concerned the ~~Vietnamien~~ Vietnamien has little alternative but to continue to pursue it if he is to remain true to his own identity. The political barrier has been removed with independence. In as far as Chinese civilization goes against the ~~sensibility~~ sensibility of the present-day Vietnamien nationalist and in as far as it becomes too manifest in terms of economic power it is being discarded impatiently. Yet can he really discard it? The period of transition is difficult for the intellectual torn between the voice of reason and the ~~nationalist~~ national pride.

The Catholic Student Association is in fruitful contact with French civilization. It is however completely isolated from the million Chinese near Saigon, in Cholon where the cite universite is situated. "Who is my neighbour?" is question to which an answer must be given by the Vietnamese intellectual if he is to continue being true to his very own identity.

When the Bishop of Saigon was asked the question, "What is the most pressing problem with regard to the Catholic students in the university?", he replied, "They must know clearly and historically Who is The Christ."

There is the familiar demand for professional training. There does not seem to be a similar demand for truth.

Psychological formation

The preceding remarks need to be modified by the consideration of the fact that there



is a strong refugee element in the student population. The President of the National Students' Association was formerly a fighter under the command of Ho Chin Minh. He is still a fighter. The line that distinguishes purely student action from political action is understandably thin. A synopsis of an interview with him reads as follows:

What is the strength of your organisation?

1000, these are mainly those who have a clear stand against Communism. Those who have not joined us could be divided into two groups, the majority—^{and individualist} indifferent, the small minority against the policy of our organisation. (Included in this minority are quite a few Catholic students who are of the opinion that the Association is too political.)

What is its programme of action?

First and foremost we would like to have a students' sanatorium. T.B. is actively present in about 5% of our students. We are currently working on its materialization. (This student president is himself a medical student, graduated last June '57.)

Each Saturday we have a ~~daily~~ page in the daily LIBERTY.

Though we are definitely anti-Communist we are not in any way ~~aligned~~ ^{aligned} to any powerful political party, governmental or otherwise. Hence we are a poor organisation in terms of finance.

~~Our Foundation~~

We have planned for a 'clinical' team of students and young doctors to work in the rural areas during this summer vacation. (financed in part by Asia Foundation)

What are your views on the educational system in the university and the country?

We have the French system. This I think is much better than the Phillipine system.

We are not anti-French in education. On the contrary we love French culture. The French professors are a great help to us at this stage.

What are your views on the present policy towards the Chinese?

The Chinese merchants in our country were ^{Fundação Cuidar o Futuro}relieved ^{sharply} in time of crisis. When our poor people needed milk and rice they were hoarding them. Although therefore I think that the methods used by the Government in its attempt to solve the Chinese problem may be not the best ones, the principle that the Chinese merchants must first and foremost show more convincing proof of their loyalty to the country is a sound one.

Is it true that the majority of your members are students from the North?

Yes. The laziness of the South is more marked than in the North.

(I have discussed this question in more detail with a young graduate from the North. It is generally held that the Northerners seem to have greater drive than the Southerners. It must be remembered that the North was the only seat of higher education before the division of Vietnam and is still ~~in~~ ^{the most} industrialized region compared to the South which retains essentially its rural character. Climatic factors too are significant.)

NB. Central Vietnam where the Imperial City of Hue (cf. Peking) is situated too has a distinct character of its own.

NB. The above information is not to be quoted as it was given in confidence.

State and Church

S. Vietnam has a rather prominent Catholic as President. The feeling is met with in Catholic circles including Cer~~ite~~ Renaissance that some of his most important policies, eg. his attitude towards the appointment of the Bishop of Saigon, his delegation of power in Hue (Central Vietnam), his Chinese policy, his delegation of power to his brother and sister-in-law (the "first lady" in S. Vietnam), are far from Catholic.

S. Vietnam is not a Catholic country. The temporal power of Catholics like Diem can be easily misconstrued as the power of the Church. There is a real danger in the antagonism towards this specific power of a few Catholics becoming an antagonism towards the Church.

International Formation

Students from the Association of Catholic Students have participated in Red Cross projects in Saigon.

A young Vietnamese lady graduate from U.S.A. together with two Belgian and two Italian International Catholic Auxiliaries have recently started a Girls' Student Centre along the lines of Crossroads Center, Chicago, at the national level.

The Chairman of W.U.S. is at the same time the Rector of the University of Saigon. He is impressively young. Miss Lai's application for an exit permit to attend the Pax Romana Assembly at El Salvador has his support.

A request was received from Fr. Lich that more information about Pax Romana be made available, preferably in French. There is as yet little understanding of the significance of international agencies and organisations like UNESCO, W.U.S., COSEC etc.

In a meeting on What is Pax Romana? the Assistant Secretary was asked in particular to clarify Pax Romana's relationships vis-a-vis these organisations.

The Association is keen to have greater contact with other Federations. Interest was expressed with regard to the possible SEAsian Seminar in Hongkong.
(NB. It may be of interest to record the reference to the Chinese problem in S. Vietnam as "the problem of your compatriots" when FR. Lich discussed briefly some aspects of the situation with the Assistant Secretary of Pax Romana..)

International formation is perhaps in a special way of importance to the Catholic university student in S. Vietnam. She is up against two very urgent and HUMAN problems,
1. The Refugee from the North.
2. The Chinese in their midst.

Any lasting solution cannot be narrowly nationalistic.

National Catholic Action

At the present period of transition the picture is somewhat confused. One major factor that stands in the way towards a united Catholic Action programme at the national level is the inability of a few powerful Catholics both lay and clergy to see clearly the distinction between political party action and Catholic Action.

This is not to belittle the work that is being achieved in spite of the ~~confusion~~ confusion.

(A remark recorded reads, "Msgr. Chi is President of Catholic Action partly due to the fact that no layman acceptable to the hierarchy and acceptable to President Diem has yet been found.")

Returned graduates from France and U.S.A.

One of the factors that influenced the strong reluctance of the Government to grant passports and exit permits to Vietnamese students is the reluctance of quite a few young Vietnamese engineers, doctors and other professional men to return to S. Vietnam.

There is at the moment a small group of young/Catholic graduates ^{returned} organised in Saigon. Their current programme has two priorities, find out where and who are the graduates and attempt to lessen the isolation of the "French" from the "American" graduates. At the helm of this movement is

Pho Ba Long
165 Phan Thanh Gian
Saigon.

He has been ~~strongly~~ strongly influenced by Fr. Emmanuel ~~Jacques~~ Jacques of Crossroads Center. (I think Pat McGuire met him last year.)

A former Assistant Editor of the Times of Vietnam who has since left the paper because of its trend towards an over pro-Government policy is also active in this group. His name and address is as follows:

Tran Long
170, Pasteur,
Saigon.



Pax Romana's programme in collaboration with the Catholic Students' Association.

1. Participation in SEAsian Seminar, Hongkong, '57. (Special assignment to study Chinese ^{problem})
2. Translation of student articles into French for Pax Romana Journal.
3. Translation of Pax Romana articles or information into Vietnamese where necessary.
4. Study groups at national level and/or National Workcamp on the theme for the next inter-federal Assembly. Collaboration with young graduates.
5. Ten copies of the Pax Romana Journal to be despatched gratis on the understanding that ten subscriptions will be forthcoming during the year.
6. Contact with Vietnamese students who have attended Pax Romana meetings abroad, eg. through the despatch of the local student publication to addresses furnished by either Pax Romana or organisations like the International Catholic Auxiliaries etc.
7. Training of a possible candidate for the General Secretariat 58-59.
8. Contact with W.U.S., COSEC, UNESCO at National level.
9. Possible invitation through Pax Romana to one member from the Association to stay one month in the Federation of Malaya/Singapore for the purpose of Practice of English and contact with Catholic student action in that area with the special assignment to observe the 'integration' of the Chinese immigrants.

PAX ROMANA

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

Assistant Secretary
SINGAPORE

