



# vietnam

why did  
we go?

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The Religious  
Beginnings of  
an Unholy War

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**By AVRO MANHATTAN**



# **vietnam**

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we go ?**

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## Dedication

To the people of the U.S.A.  
as a warning:  
trusting that the tragedies of the past,  
no less than the hopes of the future,  
may soon bind them together  
in brotherly love.

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## PREFACE

The political and military origin of the war of Vietnam has been described with millions of written and spoken words. Yet, nothing has been said about one of the most significant forces which contributed to its promotion, namely, the role played by religion, which in this case, means the part played by the Catholic Church, and by her diplomatic counterpart, the Vatican.

Their active participation is not mere speculation. It is an historical fact as concrete as the presence of the U.S., or the massive guerrilla resistance of Asian communism. The activities of the last two have been scrutinized by thousands of books, but the former has never been assessed, not even in a summarized form.

The Catholic Church must be considered as a main promoter in the origin, escalation and prosecution of the Vietnamese conflict. From the very beginning this religious motivation helped set in motion the avalanche that was to cause endless agonies in the Asiatic and American continents.

The price paid was immense: thousands of billions of dollars; the mass dislocation of entire populations; political anarchy; military devastation on an unprecedented scale; the disgrace upon the civilized world; the loss of thousands upon thousands of young Asian and American lives. Last but not least, the wounding, mutilation and death of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children.

The tragedy of Vietnam will go down in history as one of the most pernicious deeds of the contemporary alliance between politics and organized religion.

Factors of a political, ideological, economic and military nature played no mean role in the unfolding of the war, but the religion of the Catholic Church was one of its main instigators. From the beginning her role has been minimized when not obliterated altogether. Concrete facts however, cannot be wiped away so easily, and it is these which we shall now scrutinize, even if briefly.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Preliminaries*

When in 1940, France was defeated by Hitler, the French surrendered Vietnam to the Japanese who asked them to continue to administer the land in their place. A French puppet, Bao Dai who had already ruled the country during the previous twenty years, did so.

Bao Dai however, came face to face almost at once with a vigorous nationalism. This became belligerently concrete and took the form of an increasing effective guerrilla warfare. It's ultimate goals were two: riddance of French and Japanese rule, and total independence. The freedom fighters known as the Viet-Minhs, were supported by the general population with the result that they became identified at once with the national aspirations of all the Vietnamese.

At Japan's defeat in August, 1945, the Vietnamese were in control of most of Vietnam. In September of that same year, the freedom fighters declared Vietnam's independence. The French-Japanese puppet, Bao Dai, resigned. After more than a century, Vietnam was once more free, or so it seemed. The Vietnamese, although dominated by communists, realized that a solid minority of the country were Catholics. Recognizing that most of the Catholics had supported their fight against both the French and the Japanese, they elicited their support by appointing several prominent Catholics to their new government.

Ho Chi Minh, their leader, nominated a Catholic as his economic minister, indeed he even had a Roman Catholic Vicar Apostolic. Furthermore, to prove how, although a Marxist, he was not biased against the Church, he adopted the first Sunday of each September as the official day of Vietnamese Independence. This because it coincided with the National Catholic Day.

Religious liberty was assured to all. The achievements of the Viet-Minh were so popular that in September 40,000 Catholics demonstrated in support of Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi itself. Indeed four Catholic bishops even appealed directly to the Vatican asking it to support the new independent Vietnam under its new rulers.

It appeared as if a new chapter had been initiated, not only for Vietnam, but also for the Catholics, who until then, although protected by the French, nevertheless had increasingly resented, French colonialism.

While the new Vietnamese government in Hanoi was working for the establishment of a democratic republic in North Vietnam, the British, knowing of the surrender of Japan, handed back South Vietnam to the French. The French, smarting under their defeat in Europe, imposed a most drastic colonial administration, with the objective of extending their dominion over the rest of the country. The Vietnamese, affronted, organized guerrilla warfare to prevent the reimposition of French rule.



In February, 1950, the U.S. recognized the Bao Dai government. Almost simultaneously France asked for military help. In March, two U.S. warships entered Saigon to support Bao Dai. Soon afterward, in May, Washington announced aid for the French, with a \$10,000,000 grant. The U.S. had agreed to let France deal with Vietnam while the U.S. was engaged in a war in Korea. In June, President Truman announced the U.S. was going to finance the French army to fight the government of North Vietnam. By November, 1952, the U.S. had sent 200 shiploads of material, 222 war planes, 225 naval vessels, 1,300 trucks, paying one third of the war bill in Vietnam.

When Eisenhower succeeded Truman in July, 1953, an armistice was signed with Korea, but by 1953 the U.S. financial support had already reached 400 millions a year. In October the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, declared that the U.S. help for France's colonial rule had been "his brightest achievement of the year."

By 1954, the U.S. was already paying 80% of the total. The French government itself stated that the U.S. had spent a total of \$1.785 billion for their war. But the end of that same year, the U.S. in fact had paid \$2 billion to keep French colonialism in power.

The Vietnamese, however, determined to rid themselves once and for all of the French, fought with a ferocity which astonished friends and foes alike. On the brink of defeat in Dienbienphu, France asked for U.S. help. John Foster Dulles demanded U.S. intervention (to defend Indo-China from communism). Then, he announced a plan, the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). In April he called a secret meeting of congressional leaders. The objective: to give Eisenhower power to use U.S. air and naval forces to help the French in Vietnam. The plan was called appropriately "Operation Vulture." Lyndon Johnson, later president, objected to committing American troops and most of the congressional leaders agreed with him. By