The Role of Religion in Sustainable Social Development: A Philosophical-Ethical Perspective

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DOI: 10.18355/XL.2026.19.03.05

Abstract
This article offers a philosophical-ethical reading of religion's role in sustainable social development, with the Vietnamese context as substantive case. Drawing on comparative virtue ethics (Knitter, 1995; Kung & Kuschel, 1993) and on contemporary philosophical work on sustainability (Jonas, 1984; Norton, 2005; Pope Francis, 2015), we examine how Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and Vietnamese-indigenous religious traditions function as public ethical resources for the social pillar of sustainable development. The argument develops three aspects of religion's contribution. First, religion regulates human relations in ways that promote social justice — though the philosophical anthropologies grounding the just ordering of relations differ across traditions. Buddhist *Phat tinh* (Buddha-nature) and dependent origination, Christian *imago Dei*, Islamic *ihsan*, and Vietnamese-indigenous *Tu an* (the four debts of gratitude) supply distinctive grammars that converge at the level of moral commitment while diverging at the level of ontological grounding. Second, religion contributes to social welfare andsocial security through institutional engagement in healthcare, education, and charitable activity — read here as the practical specification of welfare-as-virtue rather than as supplement to a secular welfare apparatus. Third, religious adherents and dignitaries function as public-ethical agents through whom religious-ethical resources enter the public sphere. The Vietnamese case, where post-2003 (When Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW dated March 12, 2003, of the Seventh Conference of the Central Committee of the Party (9th term) on religious affairs was issued.) policy frameworks recognise religion as resource for national development, is at once an instance of a universal philosophical question and a particular philosophical answer, with productive complementarity between Vietnamese-Marxist scholarship and religious-philosophical resources as the article's distinctive contribution.
Key words: religion, religious ethics, sustainable social development, comparative virtue ethics, Vietnam

1. Introduction

The concept of "sustainable development" was officially defined in 1987 in the *Our Common Future* report (the Brundtland Report) of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987). According to this report, sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Sustainable development encompasses environmental, economic, and social dimensions. The present article concerns the social dimension — Sustainable Social Development — which entails the organisation and regulation of social life to ensure progress, equity, inclusiveness, and stability, where all members have equal access to development opportunities, where their fundamental rights and interests are protected, and where community cohesion and intergenerational responsibility are maintained throughout the development process.

The Brundtland definition has the merit of compactness, but it leaves open a deeper question that the contemporary philosophical literature on sustainability has taken up directly. What kind of question is sustainability, philosophically considered? Hans Jonas argued in *The Imperative of Responsibility* (Jonas, 1984) that modern

technological civilisation has so radically extended the spatial and temporal reach of human action that traditional ethics — oriented to the proximate other and the present moment — has become inadequate to the moral situation it now confronts. A new categorical imperative is required: act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on earth. Bryan Norton extends the framework procedurally: sustainability is not a fixed end-state but the iterative, multi-scalar process by which a community reformulates its development goals against new information and new value commitments (Norton, 2005). And Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'* (2015), supplies the religious-philosophical articulation that holds the Jonasian foundation and the Nortonian process together: integral ecology is the claim that environmental degradation and social injustice share a common root, and that "a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach" (Pope Francis, 2015, §49). Sustainable social development, on this composite philosophical reading, is more than a development-policy goal. It is a substantive philosophical question about what we owe future generations — and about the social-moral fabric within which the question of just human relations is itself articulated.

Religion plays a vital role in this process, and contemporary Vietnam is a particularly interesting site for examining that role. In Vietnam, four decades into Doi Moi, religion has become more visibly present in education, healthcare, charitable activity, disaster relief, and everyday moral reasoning about what the nation owes its weakest members. The Communist Party of Vietnam's own policy documents, from Resolution 25-NQ/TW of 2003 onward, recognise religion as a resource for national development rather than as a problem for management (Do Quang Hung, 2014); the 13th Party Congress consolidated this formulation in 2021 (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p 171). *Why* religion can play this role, and on what philosophical grounds, is the question this article addresses.

Our approach is comparative and philosophical-ethical. Drawing on Paul Knitter's framework for globally responsible interfaith dialogue (Knitter, 1995) and on Hans Kung and Karl-Josef Kuschel's articulation of the Parliament of the World's Religions' Global Ethic (Kung & Kuschel, 1993), we read the ethical resources of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Vietnamese-indigenous religious traditions as commensurable but not syncretic — each tradition supplying a distinctive philosophical anthropology that converges with the others at the level of moral commitment while diverging at the level of ontological grounding. Naming this divergence-with-convergence is the comparative-philosophical work the article performs.

In what follows we examine three aspects of religion's role in sustainable social development: the regulation of human relations toward social justice; the contribution to social welfare and social security; and the public-philosophical agency of religious adherents and dignitaries. The argument is grounded in canonical religious texts — the *Sigalovada Sutta* in the Pali canon, Pauline epistles and the prophetic literature in the Christian Bible, Qur'anic Zakat passages, and the foundational texts of the Vietnamese-indigenous traditions — and in contemporary religious-ethics scholarship. The Vietnamese particularity is engaged through Do Quang Hung on state-religion-law relations (Do Quang Hung, 2014), Tran Dinh Huou on tradition and modernity (Tran Dinh Huou, 1996), Phan Ngoc on Vietnamese cultural identity and the Vietnamization mechanism (Phan Ngoc, 2002). Hang Thu Cao's earlier work on corruption and the building of a Developmental Government in Vietnam (Cao, 2020) established the methodological move the present article extends — productive complementarity between the Vietnamese-Marxist policy register and the religious-ethical resources mobilised at the level of communities, families, and institutions.

2. Religion regulates human relations in ways that promote social justice

The core characteristic of religion is belief, and belief in religious values, doctrines, and norms is the driving force that motivates believers, clergy, and religious institutions to

live virtuous lives. It is in this process that religion contributes to sustainable development in general, and to social sustainability in particular. The first aspect of religion's contribution we examine is its role in regulating human relations toward social justice.

The ultimate goal of all major religions is a society in which everyone is treated fairly. According to researchers, the essence of social justice lies in satisfactorily resolving the balance between contribution and reward, between duty and rights, in all areas of interpersonal and societal relationships. Religions read this balance through the full fulfilment of each individual's duties and obligations in relations with others and with the wider community. If everyone fulfils their duties, then fairness in duty is established; when everyone fulfils their duties, society is more stable and sustainable, and the fruits of sustainable development can be more equitably enjoyed. This perspective is shaped by religious conceptions of life, humanity, human liberation, and the path to a peaceful existence — and these conceptions, as we will show, differ in their philosophical-anthropological grammars even as they converge in their moral commitments.

2.1. Buddhism: Buddha-nature, dependent origination, and the relational grounds for justice

Buddhism teaches that all beings — including all humans — possess Buddha-nature (*Phat tinh*). Read philosophically (Williams, 2009; Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2005), this is a relational philosophical anthropology. Persons are constituted in dependent origination (*pratityasamutpada*), and compassion is therefore ontological commitment rather than supererogatory virtue. The Mahayana doctrines of *sunyata* (emptiness) and the bodhisattva ideal carry the philosophical-anthropological argument forward: liberation is not the achievement of an isolated self but the inseparable flourishing of all sentient beings. The ground of universal human dignity, on this reading, is not extrinsically conferred but intrinsic to the dependent-origination structure of persons themselves.

In ancient Indian society, the *Manava-Dharmasastra* (Manu Laws) divided society into four absolute, birth-determined castes — Brahmin priests, Kshatriya warriors, Vaisya merchants, and Sudra servants — between which no movement was possible across generations. In philosophical protest against this hierarchy, the Buddha said: "There is no class distinction in blood that is the same colour, no class distinction in tears that are the same saltiness. Humans are not born with inherent qualities, necklaces around their necks, or the *tilaka* mark on their foreheads" (Institute of Philosophy, 1986, p. 115). The philosophical force of this rejection should be heard precisely: *Phat tinh* as the universal possession of all beings makes social hierarchy a contingent and revisable feature of human arrangement, not an inevitable structure of the cosmos.

Because Buddha-nature is universally possessed, every human can practise toward enlightenment and liberation. This *fairness of liberation* — equal availability of liberation as the fruit of self-cultivation rather than as salvation bestowed by an all-powerful being — grounds Buddhism's recognition of social justice in the register of self-cultivation, specified through the five precepts (*ngu gioi*): not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery, not lying, not consuming intoxicants. Read philosophically (Harvey, 2000, pp. 65-93), these are not merely individual moral discipline; they specify the practical virtues that render the practitioner fit for just relations with others and describe the social fabric in which just relations can be sustained. The five precepts are how Buddhism articulates social justice in its practical-ethical detail — fairness as the determinate character of everyday social life.

From its grounding in the equality of all human beings and the universal availability of liberation, Buddhism demands fairness in all relationships. The textual anchor is the *Sigalovada Sutta* in the Pali canon, transmitted in the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition

as *Giao tho Thi Ca La Viet*. Read philosophically, the Sutta is not a moralistic etiquette code but a determinate specification of relational anthropology: the just relation is the one in which both parties acknowledge what the other is owed, and the acknowledgment is constitutive of, rather than added to, the relation itself (Walshe, 1995).

Within the family, the Buddha named five obligations parents owe their children, corresponding to five obligations children owe their parents. Parents must prevent their children from doing evil; encourage them to do good; teach them a profession; arrange a suitable marriage; and give them their inheritance at the right time. Children, in turn, must support their parents; fulfil their duties toward them; preserve the family and its traditions; protect the inherited property; and perform funeral rites when their parents pass away.

The structure is reciprocal, and that reciprocity carries philosophical weight. Responsibility in the parent-child relation is not unilateral; both parties bear genuine duties toward the other. This is the philosophical anthropology that grounds Buddhist family ethics: persons are constituted in their relations, and the just relation specifies what each party is owed.

The *Sigalovada Sutta* extends the same reciprocal structure to husband and wife — five duties on each side, mirroring the parent-child structure. The structural principle — equal and fair reciprocal obligations between the parties — is what carries the philosophical weight, not the historically situated content of the duties themselves.

Buddhism extends this scheme further. Between teachers and students, the Buddha demanded five reciprocal duties on each side — the student to greet and serve the teacher, study diligently, and learn the profession attentively; the teacher to train the student in what has been skilfully learned, ensure the student's mastery of various professions, and praise the student before others. The same reciprocal structure governs relations between friends, between masters and servants, and between monks and laypeople — in each case, equal and fair obligations on both sides.

At the level of the relation between the individual and society, Buddhism advocates a fair and equal balance among duties, obligations, and rights. In *The Disposition of Error*, Mouzi argued that Buddhists should be filial to their parents at home and serve the country and its people outside; the *Jataka* stories specify ten virtues a ruler must possess to govern justly, affirming that "the king must be a virtuous person, and strive towards complete and boundless enlightenment" (Thich Minh Chau et al., 1995, p. 77). Read philosophically, the Buddhist tradition's engagement with rulership extends the relational anthropology to the political domain: the ruler whose own virtues are inadequate to the office cannot establish just human relations within the polity (Nguyen Tai Thu ed, 1988).

2.2. Christianity: imago Dei, justice as virtue, and the prophetic critique of unjust institutions

Like Buddhism, Christianity has consistently advocated for a just society — but the philosophical-anthropological grammar grounding the commitment is distinctive. According to Christianity, justice is a society in which every citizen is free, in which those in power do not abuse their authority, and in which all citizens stand in proper relation both to one another and to God. The grounding claim is that all humans share the same nature and the same origin: created in the image of the one true God (*imago Dei*) and possessing inherent, inalienable dignity. As the Pauline tradition puts it: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:26-29; *The Bible*, 2011, pp. 2584-2585). This is not a rhetorical flourish. It is a substantive philosophical-anthropological claim about the universal common nature of persons.

Read systematically (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004), the Christian tradition specifies justice through five interlocking principles: the dignity of the human person; the common good; subsidiarity; solidarity; and the universal destination of

goods. Justice itself is named as a virtue in the classical philosophical-theological tradition. Aquinas's articulation in the *Summa Theologiae* is the canonical reference: *iustitia est habitus secundum quem aliquis constanti et perpetua voluntate ius suum unicuique tribuit* — justice is the stable disposition of the will to render to each what is due, with the constancy and rightness of reason proper to virtuous action (Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 1). Justice is *ad alterum* — oriented to the other — and is divided into legal justice (oriented to the common good), distributive justice (the apportionment of common goods according to merit, role, and need), and commutative justice (the regulation of exchanges between individuals). Read this way, the Christian articulation of social justice is not a moral preference attached to faith; it is a determinate specification of relational anthropology, parallel in form to (though distinct in ontological grounding from) the Buddhist account.

On the one hand, justice is often understood in two senses, vertical and horizontal. *Horizontal* justice means treating equally those who contribute equally; *vertical* justice means treating differently those whose social conditions differ (Tia Sang Magazine online, 2013). On the other hand, as a foundation, the economic sphere plays a central role in achieving social justice, and therefore social justice should first be implemented in the economic sphere. Christianity has advanced this idea since antiquity. The biblical tradition recognised that society contains rich and poor, and that the poor must not be deprived of their livelihood: the millstone — the means of grinding grain into food — must not be kept as collateral (Deuteronomy 24:6); the poor and destitute hired labourer must not be exploited; the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow must not be denied the harvest (Deuteronomy 24:19). The principle here is not charity but justice: what the poor receive is not given out of supererogation but is rendered as their due.

For genuine justice to obtain, the Christian tradition holds that society must have a humane, strict, and effective legal system; social justice is in part secured by just laws. The Bible critiques the unjust legal systems and unfair judgements of contemporary societies: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, who write oppressive decrees to prevent the weak from receiving justice, and who deprive the poor of their rights" (Isaiah 10:1). And the Bible insists on equality before the law: "You shall have one law, for foreigners as well as for the natives" (Leviticus 24:22). The Psalms praise the just judge: "The Lord is a just judge. He sits on his throne to judge, defend, and protect the rights of men" (Psalm 9:5). Read philosophically, the prophetic-critical tradition extends Christian justice beyond interpersonal ethics into the philosophical critique of law and institution. The just society is not the society in which individuals act justly toward one another; it is the society in which institutions are themselves just, and in which the legal-juridical order is open to ongoing prophetic correction when it fails the standard of just relations.

2.3. Islamic ihsan and Vietnamese-indigenous Tu an: two further philosophical anthropologies of just relations

The comparative scope of the article requires us to name two further religious-ethical resources that appear in the Vietnamese case and that bear directly on the question of just relations between persons.

The Islamic tradition grounds the just ordering of relations in *ihsan* — the moral-aesthetic virtue of doing things beautifully, of attending to the moral form of action, of seeking the good in its moral-aesthetic dimension. Khaled Abou El Fadl's *Search for Beauty in Islam* (Abou El Fadl, 2006) reads *ihsan* as the heart of Islamic ethics.The Qur'an's moral imagination is fundamentally aesthetic and relational, appealing to *husn* (moral beauty) and *qubh* (moral ugliness) as primary ethical categories. Zakat — institutional charitable giving, one of the Five Pillars of Islam — is in this register a justice claim before it is a welfare claim. It is the publicly enacted return of a portion of

wealth to its rightful claimants among the poor, the marginalised, and the wayfarer. It expresses *ihsan* in institutional form and presupposes a philosophical anthropology in which wealth is held in trust rather than owned absolutely. The Islamic-ethical anthropology is a distinctive grammar in which the just ordering of relations between persons is mediated by the moral-aesthetic excellence that animates the relation itself.

Vietnamese-indigenous religious traditions — Phat giao Hoa Hao with its doctrine of *Tu an* (the four debts of gratitude: to ancestors and parents, to the nation, to the Three Jewels, to the people and humanity), Buu Son Ky Huong, the Pure Land Lay Buddhist Association of Vietnam, Tu An Hieu Nghia, Dao Cao Dai — read through Phan Ngoc's Vietnamization apparatus (Phan Ngoc, 2002) are Vietnamization philosophical anthropologies of relational justice. The *Tu an* is not a folk-religious sentiment but a substantive philosophical-anthropological articulation: the person is constituted in a matrix of inherited and contemporary obligation, and the just ordering of relations follows from the proper acknowledgment of each debt. The Phat giao Hoa Hao Charter articulates the path of religious life as "for the dharma, for the nation," with the lay-householder cultivation grounded in repaying the four debts and disciplined by eight prohibitions and the active relief of those in distress (Hoa Hao Buddhist Church, 2014) — a precise specification of relational justice in a Vietnamese-indigenous register, which we will return to in §3 (the welfare aspect) and §4 (the religious adherents/dignitaries aspect).

2.4. Comparative-philosophical synthesis: ontological divergence, moral convergence

Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and the Vietnamese-indigenous traditions all advocate social justice. The convergence at the level of moral commitment is precise: the dignity of the human person is universal and not contingent on social standing; just relations specify what each party is owed; institutions can be evaluated against the standard of just relations and found wanting; and the religious tradition is not exhausted in private piety but commits its adherents to the shaping of just social order. In this sense, religious traditions converge on a substantial body of practical-ethical content, and Knitter (1995) and Kung and Kuschel (1993) supply the methodology under which this convergence is intelligible: globally responsible interfaith engagement on shared moral horizons by mobilising tradition-distinctive resources, not by flattening doctrinal differences into a least-common-denominator religion.

But the convergence is at the level of moral commitment, while the *grounding* of that commitment differs philosophically. Buddhist relational justice is grounded in *Phat tinh* and dependent origination — persons are universally fit for liberation because they are constituted in dependent relations of mutual conditioning, and the just ordering of relations is what those dependent relations require when honoured truthfully. Christian *imago Dei* justice is grounded in the doctrine of creation: persons are universally bearers of dignity because each is created in the image of the one true God, and the just ordering of relations follows from the equal worth thereby conferred. Islamic *ihsan*-grounded justice is grounded in the moral-aesthetic ontology of acts oriented to the divine — relations between persons are just when they are *beautiful*, when they participate in *husn* and resist *qubh*. The Vietnamese-indigenous *Tu an* grounds justice in the layered matrix of inherited and contemporary debt — the person is who he or she is by virtue of standing in relations of debt, and the just relation specifies the proper acknowledgment of each. These are not equivalent philosophical anthropologies. Treating them as parallel motivations for a single secular justice framework obscures what is philosophically distinctive about each.

The comparative move that Knitter and Kung-Kuschel license is one in which each tradition speaks from its own resources and the convergence at the level of moral commitment is allowed to stand without forced ontological harmonisation. This is not merely scholarly housekeeping. It bears directly on what religious traditions can offer

Vietnam's project of sustainable social development. If Buddhist *tu bi*, Christian *agape*, Islamic Zakat, and Vietnamese-indigenous *Tu an* are read as parallel sentiments converging on a common moral essence, the philosophical contribution of each is thinned to little more than motivational supplement to a secular development apparatus. If, instead, each tradition is recognised as supplying a distinctive philosophical anthropology — Buddha-nature, *imago Dei*, *ihsan*, *Tu an* — the comparative resources for thinking about just relations between persons become substantially richer. The Vietnamese case, in which these traditions have coexisted in productive tension under the philosophical-cultural mechanism of *tam giao dong nguyen* (the Unity of the Three Religions) (Phan Ngoc, 2002), becomes a particularly fruitful site for the comparative-philosophical work the article performs. Vietnamese sustainable social development is not the application of a single ethical framework derived from one tradition; it is the productive mobilisation of multiple distinctive ethical anthropologies, each making its own contribution to the just ordering of human relations within a shared social horizon.

3. Religion contributes to social welfare and sustainable social development

The second aspect of religion's contribution to sustainable social development is its contribution to social welfare and social security. Read philosophically, religious-welfare engagement is not a religious supplement to a secular welfare-state apparatus. It expresses, across distinctive philosophical-anthropological grammars, a substantive commitment to the integrity of the embodied person as itself constitutive of just social order. Welfare-as-virtue, on this reading, is continuous with — not parallel to — the justice analysis of §2. Where §2 specified what each tradition holds about the just ordering of relations between persons, §3 examines how those relational anthropologies become concrete in the institutional care of the most vulnerable members of society.

The implementation of social security is a function and responsibility of the State, the political system, institutions, and social organisations. Among the various entities whose functions contribute to social security, religious followers and religious organisations possess unique strengths and advantages — and these strengths, we will argue, are not contingent strengths attached to a parallel apparatus but follow directly from the philosophical-anthropological grammars examined in §2.

3.1. Welfare-as-virtue across traditions: the comparative motivational framework

Religious-ethical motivation across traditions, read in the philosophical-virtue register, is what generates the practical welfare commitments we will examine in §3.2. Buddhist *tu bi hi xa* — the four *brahmaviharas* of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity — and *vo nga vi tha* (selfless altruism) are not sentiments. They are distinctive philosophical-anthropological articulations of welfare as virtue (Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2005). Compassion in this register names the love of one human being for another and for all sentient beings — the essence of humanity itself — and grounds the practical disposition to share, empathise, and assist those in difficulty.

Becker and Hamblin (2021) supply the canonical recent example of how this framework can be deployed for sustainability. Standard sustainability discourse, on their reading, rests on an implicit anthropology of the rational utility-maximising individual; Buddhist virtue ethics, with its doctrine of *anatta* (non-self) and its relational understanding of personhood through dependent origination, offers an alternative anthropology of *interdependent personhood* more conducive to sustainable practice. The "sustainable person," in their formulation, is constituted by interdependent personhood: identity is not a bounded self but a relational nexus, and sustainability virtues — including the virtue of welfare-as-care for others, for nature, and for future beings — follow from internalising the relational understanding. This is the methodological model the present article extends across multiple traditions and into the Vietnamese case.

Christianity articulates the virtue of welfare through *agape* and *caritas*. To love God is to love one's neighbour: the Bible teaches that loving one's neighbour is the proof — and indeed the substance — of loving God (cf. Matthew 25:45; 1 John 4:20). The Catholic articulation is institutionally specified through the principles of solidarity and the universal destination of goods. Solidarity, in the Pontifical Compendium's formulation, is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good" rather than a feeling of vague compassion at the misfortunes of others (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §193). The universal destination of goods names the principle that the earth's resources are intended for all humanity, with private property a derived and qualified principle subordinate to that universal destination (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §171). Read philosophically, welfare-as-virtue in the Catholic tradition is intelligible only against this systematic backdrop: charity is not the act of giving from one's own to those who lack but the practical specification of the prior philosophical claim that the goods of the earth are universally destined.

The Christian articulation continues in the practical register through the Letter of James, which makes the philosophical move explicit. "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm and eat well,' but does not give them what their body needs, what good is that?" (James 2:15-16). Faith without works, on the Jacobean reading, is dead — and the works in question are not legalistic supererogation but the constitutive practical specification of *agape*. The Old Testament's institutional protections of foreigners, widows, and orphans (Exodus 22:20-22; cf. Deuteronomy 24) extend the same ethic into legal-moral structure. Read philosophically, the welfare ethic is constitutive of *imago Dei*: welfare-as-virtue is what the *imago Dei* commitment looks like in the practical specification of relations between persons.

Islamic Zakat, which we examined in §2.3 as a justice claim grounded in *ihsan*, operates here as the institutional-charitable specification of welfare-as-virtue. As one of the Five Pillars of Islam, Zakat is required of Muslims who possess sufficient means; it is the publicly enacted return of a portion of wealth to its rightful claimants among the poor and the wayfarer. The justice grounding established in §2.3 is what licenses Zakat's welfare deployment: where the justice claim is that wealth is held in trust rather than owned absolutely, the welfare claim is the institutional realisation of that holding-in-trust through periodic redistribution.

The Vietnamese Hoa Hao tradition expresses welfare-as-virtue in its own register through the *Tu an* (the four debts of gratitude — to ancestors and parents, to the nation, to the Three Jewels, to fellow countrymen and humanity). Article 1 of the Charter of the 4th term of Hoa Hao Buddhism articulates the guiding principle as "*for the dharma, for the nation*," with the lay-householder cultivation grounded in repaying the four debts and disciplined by eight prohibitions, the active relief of those in distress, and engagement in charitable activities beneficial to society and all sentient beings (Hoa Hao Buddhist Church, 2014). The practice of charity and almsgiving operative in Hoa Hao life is the practical-virtue specification of relational anthropology in a Vietnamese-indigenous register. Adjacent traditions in Vietnam — the Pure Land Lay Buddhist Association of Vietnam, the Baha'i faith, Buu Son Ky Huong, Tu An Hieu Nghia — articulate similar commitments in their distinctive philosophical-religious grammars.

The integral-ecology framing of *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis, 2015, §49) supplies the philosophical apparatus that holds these distinctive grammars together as the social pillar of an integrated philosophical-religious commitment, not as a separable domain. Pope Francis's claim that "a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach" runs in both directions: ecological care for creation entails social commitment to the most vulnerable, and conversely, social commitment to the most vulnerable entails care for the ecological conditions of human flourishing. Welfare, on

this reading, is not added to environmental sustainability as a parallel concern. It is constitutive of integral sustainability itself.

Religious followers and clergy must practise the basic tenets of their tradition for these commitments to take effect — based on *tu bi*, *agape*, Zakat, and *Tu an*, each in its own grammar, the charitable and humanitarian activities of religious institutions are an expression and implementation of distinctive philosophical-religious commitments and a substantive contribution to social welfare. Buddhism states the practical demand directly: "Even if one recites many scriptures but is negligent in practice, one will not enjoy the benefits of being a monk" (Dhammapada, 1993, p. 17).

3.2. Religious institutions and the practical specification of welfare-as-virtue: three domains in contemporary Vietnam

The role of religion in social welfare is demonstrated most effectively through the activities of religious organisations and institutions, which carry out large-scale, diverse, and multi-level welfare activities on a regular basis. From their earliest beginnings in Vietnam, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and the indigenous traditions have encouraged followers to dedicate their lives to the welfare of others — opening schools, providing medical care, and helping those in difficult circumstances — and these activities have contributed increasingly effectively to sustainable social development.

Religious social-welfare activities are both regular and irregular. Regular activities are carried out in accordance with the principles and objectives of religious institutions; irregular activities are undertaken in unusual circumstances such as natural disasters, environmental incidents, and epidemics. Three domains carry the contemporary Vietnamese empirical weight, each illustrating the philosophical claim of welfare-as-virtue rather than welfare-as-supplement.

Healthcare. From ancient times, Buddhist temples have served as places for medical care, especially for the poor. In Vietnam, the historical record shows that the monk Tue Tinh made significant contributions to national medicine in the treatment of patients and the development of medical techniques (Nguyen Tai Thu ed, 1988). Buddhism today organises the *Tue Tinh Clinic* system nationwide under the principle that "*serving sentient beings is offering to the Buddhas*" — a precise philosophical formulation of welfare-as-virtue, in which the care of the sick is not service-delivery contracted out but the institutional expression of the bodhisattva's relational anthropology. The Vietnamese Catholic Church and other religions have likewise established clinics and medical facilities as charitable, humanitarian, non-profit organisations, and religions also undertake irregular activities — free examinations and medication for the poor, assistance to victims of natural disasters, and care for the elderly, the disabled, and orphans. According to recent data, by 2022, Vietnam "had more than 14 million people receiving medical examinations and medication annually at medical clinics and traditional medicine centres run by religious organisations" (SGGP, 2022), and approximately "over 500 charitable medical facilities of religious organisations" had been established in various forms — Tue Tinh Duong, clinics, multi-specialty practices, and traditional and Western medicine clinics (Vietnam Government Committee for Religious Affairs, 2022, pp. 93-94).

Education. Education has been a core activity of religion since its inception, and in the contemporary Vietnamese context religion participates actively in the socialisation of education and shares the burden with the State. Religions have made significant contributions to vocational training and humanitarian classes. According to 2025 data, Vietnam has "approximately 300 kindergartens, 2000 preschool education facilities, 12 vocational training centres belonging to religious organisations (1 college, 1 secondary school, 10 vocational education centres); many charity classes, kindergartens, etc., established by religious organisations" (Ha Anh, 2025). Read philosophically, religious

education expresses the formation of the person as an end in itself — not as human-capital production for the labour market — and gives institutional form to the *imago Dei* and Buddha-nature anthropologies elaborated in §2 (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §§229-254).

Other social welfare activities. Beyond healthcare and education, religions have undertaken further activities in a spirit of compassion and charity — combating human trafficking, protecting children and women, ensuring food security in conflict and disaster zones — and Vietnamese religions have responded enthusiastically to the *den on dap nghia* (gratitude-reciprocation) movement of supporting those who contributed to national independence. According to a 2025 report, "125 social assistance facilities belonging to licensed religious organisations are currently caring for and supporting over 11,800 social welfare beneficiaries" (Ha Anh, 2025). The empirical material illustrates the philosophical claim rather than substituting for it: the 11,800 vulnerable persons supported through religious facilities are concrete Vietnamese expressions of the philosophical-anthropological commitment to welfare-as-virtue read comparatively across Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and Vietnamese-indigenous traditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic offered an exceptional case study. Religious organisations mobilised clergy, monks, and followers in disease prevention and control; thousands of volunteers supported frontline forces with goods, necessities, and medical equipment; and religious institutions worked alongside government agencies through practical and effective approaches (Ha Anh, 2025). Read philosophically, the pandemic-response material illustrates the central claim of this section: in a time of acute social crisis, religious-welfare engagement was not a residual contribution to a state-led emergency response but a substantial, structurally significant component of national mobilisation — welfare-as-virtue under crisis pressure looks like the institutional-religious resources of a society standing fully alongside the polity in care for the most vulnerable.

The voluntary assistance of religious followers to those in difficult circumstances not only directly contributes to social welfare but also indirectly stimulates social activism among non-religious people in charitable activities, thereby promoting a wider movement of *people and families doing good deeds*.

3.3. Welfare-as-virtue, not welfare-as-supplement: comparative-philosophical synthesis

The claim of this section is that religious-welfare engagement in contemporary Vietnam is not residual but structural. Religious social-welfare activities are increasingly developing and expanding, in line with the rapid development of society and people, and reflecting differences in cultural and religious traditions across regions. Welfare activities, on the one hand, remain direct in areas and sectors requiring immediate assistance — natural disasters, epidemics, conflict zones. On the other hand, the social-welfare activities of religious organisations are increasingly oriented toward the creation of sustainable development for people through long-term programmes and projects.

It is also through these processes that the links between religious organisations across traditions, with local government partners, and with international organisations are becoming increasingly strong: the collaboration between World Vision and Caritas with several provinces and cities in Vietnam, and the partnerships between religious organisations and UNICEF, ILO, and other international bodies, are concrete instances of this integration. This demonstrates what Do Quang Hung (2014) names as the secularising trend of the positive cultural values of religion — religion functioning as legitimate public actor in the post-2003 institutional space — and highlights the increasing role of religion in sustainable social development, ensuring well-being and human development.

The comparative-philosophical apparatus deployed in this section converges on a single claim. Becker and Hamblin (2021) supply the methodological model for deploying

religious virtue ethics as contemporary public-philosophical resource for sustainability — a model whose canonical instance is Buddhist *anatta* and dependent origination but whose form is portable across traditions. The Pontifical *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004) systematises the Catholic welfare-as-virtue tradition through the principles of solidarity and the universal destination of goods, and renders Catholic social teaching as substantive philosophical-religious resource rather than denominational sentiment. The integral-ecology framing of *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis, 2015, §49) holds the welfare pillar to the broader integral whole, ensuring that welfare-as-virtue cannot be detached from the wider integral-sustainability commitment. The Knitter (1995) and Kung-Kuschel (1993) comparative-virtue-ethics methodology permits the four traditions — Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Vietnamese-indigenous — to converge at the level of welfare-as-virtue without forced ontological harmonisation.

Religious welfare in Vietnam, read this way, is not a residual contribution to a secular development apparatus. It is structural. Distinctive philosophical-anthropological grammars — Buddhist Buddha-nature and dependent origination, Christian *imago Dei*, Islamic *ihsan*, Vietnamese-indigenous *Tu an* — converge in the practical-ethical commitment to the integrity of the embodied person as itself constitutive of just and sustainable social order. The 14 million annual patient visits, the 500+ charitable medical facilities, the 300 kindergartens and 2,000 preschool education facilities, the 125 social-protection establishments and approximately 11,800 vulnerable persons under their care, the COVID-19 mobilisation —these are the empirical Vietnamese signatures of welfare-as-virtue, not welfare-as-supplement. The philosophical claim of this article is that the institutional welfare engagement of religious traditions in Vietnam is intelligible as substantive philosophical-religious contribution to Sustainable Social Development , and that the post-2003 Vietnamese policy framework — Resolution 25-NQ/TW (2003), the Law on Belief, Religion 2016, the 13th Party Congress's "religion as resource" formulation — has begun to recognise institutionally what the article articulates philosophically. The third aspect, examined in §4, examines who carries this resource into the public sphere — the religious adherents and dignitaries through whom the philosophical-religious apparatus we have laid out becomes operative.

4. Religious adherents and dignitaries as public-philosophical agents

The third aspect of religion's contribution to sustainable social development concerns the agents through whom the philosophical-religious resources articulated in §§2 and 3 enter the public sphere. The prophecies, teachings, and ethical commitments of a religious tradition become socially operative only when they are practised by its followers and dignitaries. We have examined the philosophical-anthropological grammars of justice in §2 and the practical-virtue specification of welfare in §3. We turn now to the question of who carries these resources into the institutional and everyday life of contemporary Vietnamese society — and how the carrying is itself philosophically intelligible.

The Law on Belief, Religion 2016 (No. 02/2016/QH14) supplies the contemporary Vietnamese legal vocabulary for the distinction. Religiuos adherents are persons who adhere to a particular religion and are recognised by the religious organisation to which they belong. Religious dignitaries areadherents who have been ordained or elected by the religious organisation to hold positions within it — charged with the regular care of religious matters, the practice of religious life, the conduct of religious rites within their assigned area of responsibility, and the teaching and propagation of doctrine within recognised religious establishments (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2016). The legal articulation gives the institutional definition; the philosophical reading runs deeper.

4.1. Two modes of public-philosophical agency

Read philosophically, the adherents/ dignitaries distinction articulates two modes of public-philosophical agency through which religious-ethical resources enter the public sphere. Both modes are members of communities, citizens of a polity bound by the social norms of their region of residence, and at the same time adherents of a tradition with its own ethical demands. It is this integration of two roles that, in a certain sense, means that religious followers must fulfil their civic duties well as well as their religious duties — and Hoa Hao Buddhism articulates this with characteristic precision in its Charter, which holds that each person must first fulfil their civic duties well before they can practise Buddhism (Hoa Hao Buddhist Church, 2014). The Hoa Hao formulation is a Vietnamese-indigenous philosophical articulation of what we will see in other traditions in their own grammars: religious-ethical practice is intelligible only in continuous public engagement with the broader human community, not as withdrawal from it.

Habermas's "Religion in the Public Sphere" (Habermas, 2006) supplies the philosophical apparatus that holds both modes of agency together. In post-secular societies — societies, like Vietnam, in which religion has neither receded into private residue— religious and secular citizens engage in mutual learning and translation. Religious reasons are legitimate in the informal public sphere, where lay adherents and clerical dignitaries alike contribute to public moral deliberation; religious-philosophical content requires translation at the institutional threshold of formal political deliberation, where the *chuc sac* is typically positioned as the institutional-religious actor with formal authority to speak. Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Taylor, 2007) frames the philosophical condition under which the Habermasian apparatus operates: the immanent frame, the modern social imaginary in which religion is one option among several rather than the default. Vietnam, on our reading, religious-philosophical content can therefore enter the public sphere as substantive contribution, with translation at the institutional threshold ensuring that religious-philosophical reasons can be heard by citizens who do not share the religious-philosophical premises.

Each tradition articulates lay public-religious agency in its own philosophical-religious grammar. The Catholic articulation runs through the *participatio* of the lay faithful in the public mission of the Church: laypeople are not the recipients of the Church's mission but its bearers in the secular sphere — in family, in workplace, in civic life, and in the broader public conversation about the common good (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, §§541-574). The Buddhist tradition articulates the same point through *upaya* (skilful means) — the disposition to engage the world in whatever form is required for the welfare of sentient beings, which is not the *bhikkhu*'s special prerogative but the practical commitment of any practitioner who has internalised the bodhisattva ideal. The Islamic tradition articulates it through *amr bil-ma'ruf wa-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding the right and forbidding the wrong), named in the Qur'an as a duty of the community of believers and operative through the institutionalised consultation of *shura* and the moral-juristic counsel of the *'ulama'*. These are not parallel doctrines collapsing into a single religious-public-agency principle. They are distinctive philosophical-religious grammars converging on the claim that religious-ethical commitment entails public engagement and is not exhausted in private piety.

The convergence has Vietnamese-indigenous expression as well. The Hoa Hao articulation of dual-role responsibility, the Cao Dai tradition's syncretic public engagement, the Tinh do Cu sy Phat hoi's emphasis on lay practice, and the Tu An Hieu Nghia tradition's insistence on the active reciprocation of debt to community and humanity — these are Viet-hoa-ed articulations of the same philosophical claim (Phan Ngoc, 2002). Religious-ethical commitment in the Vietnamese-indigenous register is not an interior disposition; it is constitutively public, sustained in the relational matrix of family, community, nation, and humanity.

4.2. Religious dignitaries as exemplars: international and Vietnamese instances

The *chuc sac* role carries additional philosophical specification. Religious dignitaries are typically educated in the substantive content of their tradition; they exercise a teaching role within the religious institution; they bear responsibility both for their own practice and for the formation of those who follow their guidance. Just like religious believers, religious leaders are people who have religious beliefs, practise the doctrines and teachings of their religion, and strive to achieve the highest aspirations and goals of their tradition. But fundamentally, they are also the ones who transmit religious doctrines to believers and hold a position of standing within the religious system. Therefore, they need to ensure both the fulfilment of their own aspirations and the implementation and guidance of religious doctrines by their followers. Their role is essential, both professionally and ethically.

The Buddha instructed his disciples to walk for the blessings of many, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, blessings, and happiness of gods and humans. "A monk brings happiness to himself and brings happiness to others. A monk himself is fully virtuous and encourages others to be fully virtuous. He himself is fully meditative and encourages others to be fully meditative. He himself is fully wise and encourages others to be fully wise. He himself is fully liberated and encourages others to be fully liberated. He himself is fully knowledgeable and encourages others to be fully knowledgeable. Having these five qualities, O monk, a monk brings happiness to himself and brings happiness to others" (Thich Minh Chau et al., 1995, p. 17). Read philosophically, this is a precise formulation of the dignitary's double role: the *dignitaries* is at once a practitioner who carries the religious-ethical commitment in his or her own life and a teacher whose vocation is the transmission of that commitment to others, with neither role separable from the other.

International history offers canonical examples of religious-philosophical agency in the public sphere. Albert Schweitzer, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952, built and sustained the hospital at Lambarene in Gabon as a religious-philosophical-medical witness in which his theology and his medical practice were one. Mother Teresa, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, and the Missionaries of Charity she founded gave institutional form to Catholic *agape* in care for the dying poor of Calcutta and beyond. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Christian-prophetic engagement against racial oppression in the United States operated as religious-philosophical agency in the public sphere of mid-twentieth-century America, mobilising the *imago Dei* and prophetic-justice resources of the Christian tradition into a substantive philosophical-political intervention. Read philosophically, these are not exemplars of religious sentiment. They are exemplars of religious-philosophical agency — public-philosophical actors who mobilised the distinctive philosophical-anthropological resources of their respective traditions toward the shaping of just and humane social orders (Knitter, 1995).

The Vietnamese inheritance is parallel and substantive. Among the clergy active in the Vietnamese mission-history record, there were those who acted for their faith and also contributed to the dissemination of certain Western-civilisation achievements. Alexandre de Rhodes, along with missionaries Francesco de Pina, Christoforo Borri, Gaspar de Amaral, and Antoine de Barbosa, introduced the Latin alphabet system to Vietnam, contributing to the creation of the national script (*chu Quoc ngu*) and the Latinisation of the Vietnamese language (Vietnam Social Sciences Committee & Vietnam Government Committee for Religious Affairs , 1988, p. 19). The contribution is philosophically and culturally significant in a register that runs beyond mission-history narrowly construed: a religious-philosophical engagement with the Vietnamese language produced a writing system that subsequently became one of the most important infrastructures of Vietnamese modernity — democratising literacy, enabling popular journalism and political mobilisation, and sustaining the Vietnamese national project across the colonial and post-colonial centuries. Vietnamese Buddhist leaders

historically — Tue Tinh in the medical-monastic register, the Truc Lam Zen lineage in the spiritual-philosophical register — and contemporary Buddhist leadership; Vietnamese Catholic episcopal leadership; the leadership of the Vietnamese-indigenous traditions (Phat giao Hoa Hao, Dao Cao Dai) — these are continuing forms of religious-philosophical agency in the post-2003 institutional space (Do Quang Hung, 2014).

In areas with stable religious communities and substantial religious participation, social order and moral cohesion tend to be more pronounced. The voluntary engagement of religious followers in civic life, the leadership of religious dignitaries in educational and welfare institutions, and the everyday practice of religious-ethical commitments in family and community life — these are not residual features of a receding religious public but constitutive of the social fabric within which sustainable development proceeds.

4.3. Globalisation, post-secular publics, and comparative-philosophical synthesis

Globalisation extends religious activity and the engagement of religious leaders and followers across linguistic, cultural, and institutional thresholds in real time, and the post-secular condition obtains globally rather than regionally. The Habermasian framework already deployed in §4.1 supplies the philosophical apparatus for thinking about this transnational circulation: religious-philosophical content carries semantic weight that secular reason has not fully captured, with translation operating at the institutional threshold so that religious-philosophical reasons can enter formal political deliberation without imposing their premises on those who do not share them; traditions cooperate by mobilising their distinctive philosophical-religious resources toward shared moral horizons (Knitter, 1995; Kung & Kuschel, 1993).

Through this cooperation, and through the everyday engagement of religious adherents and dignitaries in communities across Vietnam, religions create solidarity, unity, tolerance, and mutual sharing among religious followers worldwide and within the Vietnamese national context. The comparative-philosophical synthesis of this section can be stated precisely. The religious adherents is the public-philosophical agent who carries religious-ethical commitment into the everyday relational matrix of family, neighbourhood, workplace, and civic life. The religious dignitaries additionally carries the institutional-religious responsibility of teaching, ritual, and the institutional transmission of philosophical-religious content across generations. Both modes are intelligible philosophically through the Habermasian post-secular framework; both are anchored institutionally in the Vietnamese space established by the post-2003 framework; both are the carriers through whom the philosophical-anthropological grammars of §§2 and 3 — Buddha-nature, *imago Dei*, *ihsan*, *Tu an* — become operative in the social fabric of contemporary Vietnamese sustainable development.

5. Conclusion

The role of religion in sustainable social development, on the philosophical-ethical reading we have offered, is manifested in three coordinated aspects, each grounded in distinctive philosophical-anthropological grammars and converging at the level of moral commitment to human dignity, just relations, and welfare-as-virtue.

We have shown, first, that religious traditions ground the just ordering of human relations in distinctive philosophical anthropologies — Buddhist *Phat tinh* and dependent origination; Christian *imago Dei*; Islamic *ihsan*; the Vietnamese-indigenous *Tu an*. Each grammar carries its own philosophical-anthropological commitments and its own determinate specification of just relations between persons. The convergence at the level of moral commitment is real and substantial; the divergence at the level of ontological grounding is also real, and is what makes the comparative-philosophical move philosophically substantive rather than syncretic.

Second, we have shown that religious-welfare engagement in contemporary Vietnam — the 14 million annual patient visits, the 500+ charitable medical facilities, the 300

kindergartens and 2,000 preschool education facilities, the 125 social-protection establishments and 11,800 vulnerable persons under their care, the COVID-19 mobilisation — is not residual but structural. It expresses, across distinctive philosophical-anthropological grammars, the commitment to the integrity of the embodied person as itself constitutive of just and sustainable social order. Third, we have shown that religious adherents and dignitaries carry these resources into the public sphere as two modes of public-philosophical agency, intelligible through the Habermasian post-secular framework and anchored in the Vietnamese institutional space established by the post-2003 framework.

The Vietnamese case demonstrates that the philosophical question of religious ethics and sustainable social development can be answered productively *within* a Marxist-Leninist polity in the immanent frame, with productive complementarity (rather than opposition) between Vietnamese-Marxist scholarship and religious-philosophical resources. The post-2003 policy framework — Resolution 25-NQ/TW (2003), the Law on Belief, Religion 2016, the 13th Party Congress's "religion as resource" formulation (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021) — operationalises this institutionally. The comparative virtue-ethics convergence articulated philosophically across §§2-4 supplies the philosophical apparatus for the operationalisation. The integral-ecology framework (Pope Francis, 2015), the Jonasian imperative of responsibility (Jonas, 1984), and the Nortonian adaptive integration (Norton, 2005) treat sustainability as a substantive philosophical question with religious-ethical resources demonstrably mobilisable. The first author's earlier work on corruption and the building of a Developmental Government (Cao, 2020) established the methodological move the present article extends to the religion-and-sustainable-development question — productive complementarity rather than opposition between the Vietnamese-Marxist policy register and the religious-philosophical resources mobilised at the level of communities, families, and institutions.. Religious ethics as public philosophical resource is not a private moral residue or a culturalist supplement; it is a substantive philosophical contribution to the question of sustainable social development in our historical moment.

The Vietnamese case adds something distinctive to international religious-ethics scholarship and to international sustainability-ethics scholarship. International religious-ethics work has rarely engaged Southeast Asian religious traditions as live philosophical interlocutors; the article shows that Vietnamese Buddhism, Vietnamese Catholicism, Vietnamese Islam, and the Vietnamese-indigenous traditions read through Phan Ngoc's Vietnamization apparatus and Tran Dinh Huou's tradition-modernity framework are substantive philosophical interlocutors carrying their own distinctive contributions to comparative philosophy of religion (Phan Ngoc, 2002; Tran Dinh Huou, 1996). International sustainability-ethics work has engaged religious traditions inconsistently and almost never engaged Vietnamese material; the article shows that the Vietnamese case is at once a worked instance of universal philosophical questions (Jonas, 1984; Norton, 2005; Pope Francis, 2015) and a particular philosophical answer with its own contributions to the comparative discussion. The post-secular framework (Habermas, 2006; Taylor, 2007) is the most receptive Western philosophical frame; Do Quang Hung's post-2003 framework (Do Quang Hung, 2014) and the Vietnamese philosophical-cultural inheritance are the Vietnamese-internal philosophical voices that the international religious-ethics literature has not yet adequately heard.

For Vietnam-specific sustainable-development policy, the philosophical reading clarifies what is at stake when "religion as resource" is operationalised: not the instrumental use of religion as a service-delivery channel but the recognition of religious-ethical content as substantive philosophical contribution to a shared national horizon. Future work might extend the productive-complementarity move to other East and Southeast Asian Marxist or post-Marxist polities (China, Laos, Cuba), test the

philosophical claims advanced here through provincial-level empirical-philosophical study of how religious-ethical resources are mobilised in concrete Vietnamese sustainable-development practice, and ask whether the Vietnamese model contributes to comparative philosophy of religion-and-public-life alongside the Habermasian and Taylorian frameworks.

We close with a Buddhist saying that names the philosophical horizon of this article precisely. As the Sixth Patriarch Huineng affirmed: "Buddhist teachings are in the world; if one abandons this world to seek enlightenment, it is like searching for turtle hair or rabbit horns." The teaching applies, in distinctive philosophical-religious grammars, beyond Buddhism alone. The ethical-religious resources of the world's traditions are intelligible in their fullness only when they are practised in this world — in the institutional life of communities, in the family and the neighbourhood, in the welfare of the vulnerable and the just ordering of relations, in the everyday public agency of *religious adherents and dignitaries*. Religious ethics as public philosophical resource for sustainable social development, in Vietnam and beyond, is what this looks like in our own historical moment.

Declaration on AI Use

AI-assisted tools (including Claude Sonnet 4.6, Opus 4.6 and Grammarly) were used during manuscript preparation for initial brainstorming, annotated outline suggestions, language editing and refinement. The author takes full responsibility for the content, interpretation, and integrity of the research.

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Words: 9761
Characters: 70 427 (39 standard pages)

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