

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM*

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ABSTRACT

In a succinct form, Peter N. V. Hai traces the historical growth of the Church in Vietnam from its beginning (1533) to its present maturation. He brings out salient features of such development: the lay people's exemplary witness of faith, at times to the point of shedding their blood, their fidelity to the Church, and their zeal for lay ministry. At present they are taking a fuller role in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

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Introduction

Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục (Texts and Explanations of the Complete Mirror of the History of Vietnam),¹ the Imperial Annals of Vietnam, notes that, according to private sources, in March 1533 a certain Western man under the name of “I-nê-khu” (Ignatius) secretly preached the religion of Christ in Nam Định, a province in northern Vietnam today.² To date, no one knows the true identity of this European missionary as “I-nê-khu” (Ignatius) was a Vietnamese name, written in Chinese.³ Taking issue with Nguyen Huu Trong’s assertion that this missionary was a religious coming from Malacca or the Sunda Islands in 1543, Manuel Teixeira suggested that the first religious stationed in Malacca were the Jesuits in 1548, and they arrived in Sunda much later.⁴ Therefore, while its exactness may be disputed, the date of March 1533 has generally been accepted by Vietnamese scholars to be the

1. *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục* (Texts and Explanations of the Complete Mirror of the History of Vietnam) were prepared between 1856 and 1884 by order of King Tự Đức. See Lê Thành Khôi, *Le Việt-Nam: Histoire et Civilisation* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955), 66, 510; Phạm Cao Dương, *Lịch Sử Dân Tộc Việt Nam: Quyển 1: Thời Kỳ Lập Quốc* [History of the Vietnamese Nation: Volume 1: Period of Establishment] (Huntington Beach, CA: Truyền Thống Việt, 1987), 197–228.
2. This historic note was mentioned in a 1663 royal edict, which prohibited the propagation of Christianity. See *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục*, vol. 33 (Hà Nội: Viện Sử Học, 1998), 301; cited by Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luộc Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)” [Brief History of the Catholic Church in Vietnam (1533–2003)], in *Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam: Niên Giám 2005* [The Catholic Church in Vietnam: Almanac 2005], 187, and Ngô Thị Nhật and the Editorial Staff, “Niên Biểu Công Giáo Việt Nam” [Chronology of Vietnamese Catholicism], *ibid.*, 204; Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược* (*Histoire du Viet-Nam*), 3rd edition (Hà Nội: Tân Việt, 1949), 341–42; “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991): 13. It is of note that “according to Chinese records the first contact between Vietnamese and Europeans was in AD 166 when travellers from the Rome of Aurelius arrived in the Red River delta near present-day Haiphong.” See Phạm Minh Hạc, “The Education System in Vietnam,” in *Higher Education in Vietnam: Change and Response*, David Sloper and Le Thac Can, eds. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), 46.
3. See Trần Minh Tiêt, *Histoire des persécutions au Vietnam* (Paris: Notre Dame de la Trinité, Blois, 1955), 31. For Peter C. Phan, “I Ne Khu was probably a Christian (priest?) who was sailing from Malacca to Macao along the coast of Vietnam and decided to enter the country to preach the Gospel.” Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 8. Henceforth this book will be cited by its short title *Mission and Catechesis*, followed by relevant page numbers.
4. My loose translation of the Portuguese text: “os primeiros religiosos que se estabeleceram em Malaca foram os Jesuítas em 1548 e a Sunda só chegaram muito mais tarde.” See Manuel Teixeira, *Macau e a sua Diocese*, vol. 14, *As Missões Portuguesas no Vietnam* (Macau: Imprensa, 1977), 7; Nguyen Huu Trong, *Le Clergé National dans la Fondation de l’Église au Vietnam: Les Origines du Clergé Vietnamien* (Saigon: Tinh Việt, 1959), 61.

beginning of Christianity in Vietnam.⁵ The latest almanac of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (hereafter VEC), published in 2005, divides the entire history of the Catholic Church in Vietnam, from 1533 to 2003, into five periods, namely, (1) the Beginnings of the Church (1533–1659); (2) Early Organization of the Church (1659–1802); (3) Trials and Tribulations (1802–1885); (4) the Development of the Church (1885–1960); (5) the Maturing of the Church (1960–present).⁶ The start date of each of these periods was marked by events that brought about significant changes in the life and structure of the Church.⁷ While basing our rapid survey here on this schematization, and for the 17th century, on Peter C. Phan's book, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam*,⁸ we will draw on other sources to include features that are pertinent to our investigation.⁹ We will also qualify each of these periods with general remarks on the mission of the laity, and explicate in more detail their role in the early phases of Christianity in Vietnam. Our general observation is that, throughout the entire history of the Church in this country, lay people have distinguished themselves by fidelity to the Catholic faith, at times to the point of martyrdom, and obedience to the hierarchy. For the first three hundred years, they were empowered to carry on their own ministry of evangelization. Writing to the Vietnamese bishops in 1966, Paul VI noted the following qualities among the lay faithful in Vietnam: their exemplary adherence to the faith of their ancestors, their devotion and obedience to the hierarchy, their unconditional and unlimited trust in divine assistance, and their generous participation in all activities of the social apostolate.¹⁰ These traits are very much in evidence as the Church in Vietnam enters into the 21st century. But first, we will briefly look back at its long and dense history.

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5. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Luộc Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)," 188; see also Joseph Nguyen Huy Lai, *La tradition religieuse spirituelle et sociale au Vietnam: sa confrontation avec le christianisme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), 368.
 6. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Luộc Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)," 188.
 7. Ibid.
 8. See n. 3 above.
 9. For an annotated biography on the contextual theology in Vietnam from 1800 to 2000, and prior to 1800, see respectively, *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, vol. 1, *Asia Region 7th–20th Centuries; South Asia; Austral Asia*, John C. England et al., ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 556–655, and *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, vol. 2, *Southeast Asia*, John C. England et al., ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 48–50.
 10. Paul VI, "Lettre du pape Paul VI aux évêques du Vietnam [15 September 1966]," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/letters/1966/documents/hf_p-vi_let_19660930_vescovi-vietnam_fr.html (accessed June 22, 2007).

I. The Beginnings of the Church (1533–1659)

In 1550, a Dominican missionary by the name of Gaspar de Santa Cruz arrived in the southernmost province of Hà Tiên, which at that time belonged to Cambodia.¹¹ While concurring with the general view that “Christianity seems to have made its first appearance in Vietnam in the first decades of the 16th century,” Peter C. Phan suggests that “Christian mission in Vietnam by the end of the sixteenth-century was insignificant,” and that “Christianity only began to take roots with the arrival of the Jesuits in Cochinchina (i.e., the southern part of the country, then known as Annam) in 1615.”¹² Eleven years later, in 1626, two other members of the Society of Jesus arrived in Tonkin, the northern part of Annam.¹³ Most of these early Jesuit missionaries worked under the authority of the Portuguese *padroado*, the majority of them being Portuguese with the rest being Italian or Japanese.¹⁴ For George H. Dunne, the Portuguese *padroado* was “the worst form of Europeanism, union between

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11. Peter C. Phan notes that “there is no historical evidence that Gaspar de Santa Cruz carried out missionary activities in Vietnam.” See *Mission and Catechesis*, 9; see also Ngô Thị Nhật and the Editorial Staff, “Niên Biểu Công Giáo Việt Nam,” 204; Georges Naïdenoff, “Les Chrétiens du Vietnam,” *Missi Synthèse* 2 (April 1993): 4. For a helpful summary of the context of Christian mission 17th-century Vietnam, see Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 3–36; see also Joseph Nguyen Huy Lai, *La tradition religieuse spirituelle et sociale au Vietnam*, 365–460.
 12. Peter C. Phan, “Religious Plurality in East Asia before 1800: The Encounter between Christianity and Asian Religions,” <http://www.dunglac.net/phandinhcho/plurality.htm> (accessed January 4, 2006), 20. Charles B. Maybon notes that for nearly 200 years after 1615, there were approximately 180 Jesuit missionaries in Cochinchina and Tonkin. See *Histoire Moderne du Pays d’Annam* (1592–1820) (Paris: Plon, 1920), 29. It is noteworthy that in the course of its history Vietnam was known under twelve different names, some chosen by Vietnamese rulers and others imposed by the Chinese. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 6, n. 2. *Annam*, meaning literally “pacified South,” is a term imposed by the Chinese and offensive to the Vietnamese.
 13. *Ibid.* According to Peter C. Phan, at the beginning of the 17th century, Vietnam was under a nominal king and divided into two regions: the northern region under the Trịnh lords, referred by foreigners as Tonkin (meaning literally “Eastern Capital,” the original name of the capital of the country, which was later changed to Thang Long and then Ha Noi), comprising Tonkin, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh and the northern part of Quang Binh. The southern region under the Nguyễn lords, known in the West as Cochinchina, consists of the southern part of Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon, and Phu Yen. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 6–7; see also Alexandre de Rhodes, *Histoire du Royaume du Tonkin*, Introduction et Notes par Jean-Pierre Duteuil (Paris: Editions Kimé, 1999), 21. The seven wars between the Trịnh and the Nguyễn, which lasted from 1627 to 1672, brought poverty and untold sufferings to local people. See Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược*, 295, 304.
 14. *Ibid.*

mission and colonial imperialism.”¹⁵ Under this system, “the clergy, laity, princes, kings, and even the emperor, were forbidden to trade, or to fish, or to sail the seas” in the regions granted by successive Popes to the king of Portugal. In return, the king “was required to further, as far as in him lay, the spread of Christianity in his sphere of influence. He was to send missionaries into these regions, to provide for their maintenance, to establish churches, chapels, cloisters, and other mission foundations.”¹⁶

The most famous among these early missionaries was Alexandre de Rhodes, a Jesuit priest hailing from Avignon, France, who arrived in Cửa Bạng (Thanh Hoá), on the feast of Saint Joseph on March 19, 1627,¹⁷ inaugurating the first formal program of evangelization in Tonkin. After being expelled from Vietnam in 1645 he returned to Macao, and later in 1649 went to Rome to plead for the establishment of the local hierarchy in Vietnam.¹⁸ Thanks to his efforts Rome appointed Vicars Apostolic for Tonkin and Conchinchina,¹⁹ and with them came members of the Missions Etrangères de Paris (Foreign Missions of Paris).²⁰ De Rhodes’ support for the establishment of native clergy

15. George H. Dunne, *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), 8.
16. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
17. Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, xxi, 48. Cửa Bạng is also known as “Port St Joseph.” See the first map between pages 4 and 5 of Manuel Teixeira, *Macau e a sua Diocese*. Three years earlier, in December 1624, de Rhodes and six other Jesuits arrived in Cua Han (Da Nang) from Macao, but the main purpose of his [de Rhodes’] first sojourn in Cochinchina (1624–26) was to study the language. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
18. Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 214; *idem*, “Religious Plurality in East Asia before 1800,” 21. De Rhodes was expelled five times from either Tonkin or Cochinchina, and in 1645, he had to leave the country for good after his death penalty was commuted to expulsion. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, xxi–xxii; “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” 13.
19. Liam Matthew Brockey contends that in 1657, the cardinals of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (created in 1622 to supervise missionary work), in a move “to carve up the vast jurisdictions of the archbishop of Goa,” “separated three new bishoprics from the diocese of Macau: Tonkin, Cochinchina, and Nanjing. Each was governed by a Vicar Apostolic, a secular priest with the ecclesiastical powers of a bishop. Since these men had no Christian secular lords, they owed allegiance only to Rome.” See *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 156. Brockey also contends that the “primary purpose in sending the Vicars eastward was to shatter the Portuguese monopoly over Asian Catholicism. The overweening importance of the Society of Jesus in East Asia, linked directly as it was to the Padroado, needed to be downgraded if Rome was to assume true control over the Universal Church.” *Ibid.*, 185.
20. Jean Guennou, *Missions Etrangères de Paris* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), 36; Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 68; Joseph Nguyen Huy Lai, *La tradition religieuse spirituelle et sociale au Vietnam*, 382–91.

in Vietnam was well ahead of his confreres in China who were hesitant to accept Chinese men into their ranks.²¹ The Jesuits were reluctant to ordain Chinese priests from a wish to maintain their group identity, internal cohesion, and shared loyalty, and a fear that indigenous clergy might not live up to their vows.²² Only in August 1688 did the Jesuit Vice-Province of China (founded in 1619) accept the first three Chinese priests.²³

This great missionary (de Rhodes) has often been considered as the Apostle, the Saint Paul, of the Church in Vietnam.²⁴ He left an indelible mark on the early Church in this country by establishing the institution of catechists, publishing a catechism, and completing the Roman alphabet of the Vietnamese language.²⁵ It is to be noted that

with the assistance of the Propaganda Fide, de Rhodes's *Dictionarium* (as well as *Cathechismus*) was published in 1651 The Romanization of the Vietnamese language, facilitated by the European printing system, remained for two centuries a script used almost exclusively by and for Christians. It was still ignored by the majority of the people for whom the knowledge of Chinese remained a condition for professional advancement. It became widespread only under the French domination (1864–1954). In 1898 French Governor Paul Doumer signed the decree, which definitively went into effect

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21. See Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 419, 126, 142–45.
 22. Ibid., 143, 145, and 419. No doubt these China Jesuits still remembered the “native apostates and saboteurs who had served in their ranks in the wreckage of Japan mission.” Ibid., 143.
 23. Ibid., 151. A year later (1869), one of these priests “‘disappeared one night, jumping over the wall’ of the Jesuit residence in Shanghai.” Ibid. The following year, “he appeared in northern Fujian Province asking for shelter and pardon from the local Jesuits.” Ibid. As a result, “it would take over four decades and another round of harsh persecutions before native Jesuits formed a significant portion of the missionary group.” Ibid. Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong observed that even in the 1930s the missionaries still “discouraged the zealous first generation of converts from taking holy orders.” See Michael Sheridan, “Long March of an Only Son,” *The Tablet* (July 8, 2006): 4. It is noteworthy to recall that the Jesuits’ “claim to sole proprietorship over Christianity in China came to an end in 1673 when the papacy “declared China open to evangelization by secular priests, in addition to members of any Catholic religious order.” See Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 126, 157.
 24. Georges Naïdenoff, “Les Chrétiens du Vietnam,” *Missi Synthèse* 2 (April 1993): 4. Peter C. Phan notes that Pope Innocent X “thought there was no better candidate for the episcopacy in Vietnam than de Rhodes himself but the latter declined the appointment.” *Mission and Catechesis*, 67; see also Eugène Veuillot, *La Cochinchine et le Tonquin: Le Pays, l'Histoire et les Missions* (Paris: Amyot, 1859), 144.
 25. “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” 13. Georges Naïdenoff contends that “le mérite immortel d’Alexandre de Rhodes est d’avoir remplacé l’écriture chinoise par l’alphabet latin.” See “Les Chrétiens du Vietnam,” *Missi Synthèse* 2 (April 1993): 4.

only in 1909, mandating the use of chu quoc ngu [national script] in civil service examinations. In 1917 an imperial decree abolished traditional forms of education in favor of those based on the chu quoc ngu and French.²⁶

For Stanley Karnow,

the Vietnamese rulers were particularly disturbed by the achievement of Alexandre de Rhodes, the seventeenth-century French Jesuit who perfected the simplified script quoc ngu, which transcribed Vietnamese, previously written in arcane Chinese ideographs, into Roman alphabet. The innovation endangered the traditional Vietnamese structure, for priests could now propagate the gospel to a wide audience, thereby weakening officials whose power reposed largely on their narrow scholarship.²⁷

In the same vein, closing his above-mentioned *magnum opus*, Peter C. Phan gives a fitting tribute to this towering figure in the early Church in Vietnam:

Founder of the Vietnamese Christianity, perfecter of the Vietnamese national script, author of the first Vietnamese theological work, and pioneer in catechesis for the Vietnamese people, de Rhodes has left a cultural and theological legacy for which the Christian Church in Vietnam and the Vietnamese people as a whole will be eternally grateful.²⁸

Towards the end of this first phase of the history of the Vietnamese Church there were approximately 100,000 Catholics in Vietnam with about 80,000 in Tonkin and 20,000 in Cochinchina.²⁹ This incredible success was due to the evangelizing efforts of the members of the Society of Jesus, in particular Father de Rhodes, and above all, to the dedication of the laity who labored as

26. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 33, 34; see also Pham Minh Hac, "The Education System in Vietnam," 46–47. Đào Duy Anh notes that the traditional literary examinations, first introduced in 1705 to select future mandarins, were officially abolished in the whole of Vietnam in 1919. See *Việt Nam Văn Hoá Sử Cương* [Cultural History of Vietnam] (Hà Nội: Quan Hải Tùng Thư, 1938; reprint, Hồ Chí Minh City: Khoa Sử Trường Đại Học Sư Phạm TP Hồ Chí Minh, 1992), 262, 283; see also Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 24.

27. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 59.

28. Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 202. Phan notes that in 1654 de Rhodes, born on March 15, 1593 in Avignon, "was made superior of the Jesuit mission in Persia where he died on 5 November 1660." See *Christianity with an Asian Face*, 214.

29. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)," 189. According to Peter C. Phan, in 1641 "the church in Tonkin counted 108,000 Christians and 235 churches." *Mission and Catechesis*, 57.

lay leaders and catechists during the prolonged absence of the Jesuit missionaries.³⁰ Peter C. Phan notes that de Rhodes was working practically alone during his first mission in Tonkin from 1627 to 1630 because his companion did not speak the language. Later, in his second mission to Cochinchina from 1640 to 1645, he relied on the laity to carry out “his task of evangelization and *plantatio ecclesiae* [planting the Church].”³¹ Wherever he went, de Rhodes formed “a nucleus of lay leaders, made up of former Buddhist monks, mandarins, doctors, *licenciés*, persons of noble birth, and commoners, not only men but also women.”³² Indeed, right from his first sojourn to Tonkin, de Rhodes already involved lay people in teaching and governing the local Church.³³ He empowered lay people, “allowing them to be ‘ordinary ministers’ of baptism and encouraging them to lead the assemblies in prayers and devotions.”³⁴ In fact, they were permitted to perform “all ministries not requiring holy orders.”³⁵ Therefore, later, in his second sojourn to Cochinchina, “everywhere he went, de Rhodes found vibrant Christian communities, directed and ministered by lay people.”³⁶ Of the lay leaders, the catechists were the pillars that de Rhodes relied on to build the Church in Vietnam.³⁷ In the 17th century all candidates to the priesthood except for one were selected from this cohort of catechists, and some of them were counted among the first martyrs of the Church in Vietnam.³⁸ Peter C. Phan concludes that “without lay leaders like these, de Rhodes could not have accomplished what he did. Together with him, they deserved to be called the cofounders of Vietnamese Christianity.”³⁹

II. Early Organization of the Church (1659–1802)

Several important events marked the second phase of the history of the Vietnamese Church. First, Pope Alexander VII, through the decree, *Super*

30. Ibid.

31. Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 100.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 50.

34. Ibid., 101.

35. Ibid., 102.

36. Ibid., 61.

37. De Rhodes established the institution of catechists in Tonkin in May 1630, and in Cochinchina on July 31, 1643. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, xxi. For the author, “the founding of the institution of catechists was a stroke of pastoral genius.” Ibid., 105.

38. Ibid., 105.

39. Ibid., 101.

Cathedram of September 9, 1659, established the first two dioceses in Vietnam and appointed two missionaries of the *Missionnaires Etrangères de Paris* as their Vicars Apostolic.⁴⁰ One of the prelates, Lambert de la Motte, ordained seven catechists to the priesthood, and he chaired the first Synod in Vietnam in Pho Hien (Hung Yen) in February 1670.⁴¹ He also gave the statutes to the first Vietnamese female religious congregation, Dòng Mến Thánh Giá or Les Amantes de la Croix (Congregation of the Lovers of the Cross) in today's Bùi Chu and Hà Nội dioceses.⁴² His successor, Guillaume Mahot, became the first bishop to be consecrated in Vietnam, and, immediately after his consecration, called another Synod in October 1682.⁴³

During this period the nascent Church in Vietnam suffered from periodic persecutions under the Trịnh and Nguyễn lords, and later under the Tây Sơn rulers. The first edict against Christianity was issued in 1630,⁴⁴ only three years after the establishment of Christian missions in Tonkin in 1627, and fifteen years from the beginning of organized missions in Cochinchina in 1615.

One of the significant ecclesial events that occurred during this period was the promulgation on 11 July 1742 of Benedict XIV's Constitution, *Ex quo singulari* (July 5, 1742), which banned *inter alia* the ancestral and Confucian rites.⁴⁵ Wanting this Constitution to "remain in force, all of it lasting for all time to come," the Pope ordered and commanded that each and every thing in it "be observed exactly, integrally, absolutely, inviolably, and unchangeably" by "each and every archbishop and bishop now living in China, and other

40. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Luộc Sứ Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)," 190. Liam Matthew Brockey notes that as bishops, these Vicars Apostolic "were empowered to make demands on all clergy in their appointed territories. By virtue of their vows, the Jesuits had the choice to obey or leave." See *Journey to the East*, 156.

41. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Luộc Sứ Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)," 190; Jean Guennou, *Missions Etrangères de Paris*, 163; Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 105. Two years earlier, in 1668, Msgr. Lambert de la Motte ordained the first three Vietnamese priests, Joseph Trang (March 31), John Hue, and Benedict Hien (June 15). Ibid., 156.

42. Jean Guennou, *Missions Etrangères de Paris*, 164; Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, "Luộc Sứ Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)," 190.

43. See Trần Anh Dũng, "Sứ Luộc Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–1980)," 15.

44. Lê Thành Khôi, *Le Viêt-Nam: Histoire et Civilisation* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955), 507.

45. For the full text of this Constitution, see *100 Roman Documents Relating to the Chinese Rites Controversy* (1645–1941), translations by Donald D. St. Sure and edited by Ray R. Noll (San Francisco: The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 1992), 46–61.

kingdoms and provinces bordering China, or in her vicinity, as well as those who will be there at some time in the future.”⁴⁶

This controversy, as George Minamiki suggests, “involved the whole field of cross-cultural understanding and missionary accommodation,” as at issue were two problems: “the linguistic and semantic problem of how to designate in Chinese the divinity and other spiritual concepts, and secondly the problem of the ceremonies in honor of Confucius and the ancestors.”⁴⁷ To George Dunne, “the rites observed in honor of Confucius did not differ essentially from ancestral ceremonies. Only the scholar class, however, performed the Confucian ceremonies, whereas all Chinese observed the ancestral rites.”⁴⁸

The consequence of *Ex quo singulari* was gigantic and its impact continues to reverberate in the Churches in Asia today.⁴⁹ George Minamiki notes that the making of this constitution’s decision

had involved in the course of a century and a half seven popes and two apostolic delegates; two Chinese emperors and their courts; the kings of Portugal, Spain, and France; the Jesuit confessor of Louis XIV; the Holy Office and the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith; the theology faculty of the Sorbonne; the Jansenists; preachers like Fenelon and Bossuet; writers like Voltaire and Leibnitz; the missionaries, their congregations, and superiors. Most important of all, it touched the lives of the Chinese Christians and affected in an irrevocable way the course of the Church in the Middle Kingdom.⁵⁰

46. See Ibid., 60, 59 respectively.

47. George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), ix, xii.

48. See George H. Dunne, *Generation of Giants*, 289.

49. The interventions of the Vietnamese bishops at the 1998 Synod for Asia show that the issue of ancestor veneration continues to remain current and urgent, at least in the context of Vietnam. See, for instance, Stephen Nguyen Nhu The (Archbishop of Huế), “Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124–26; Paul Nguyen Van Hoa (Bishop of Nha Trang), “Evangelization in Vietnam,” *ibid.*, 122–24; Roland Jacques, “Le dossier des rites Chinois doit-il être rouvert?” *L’année canonique* 41 (1999): 366.

50. George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times*, ix–x.

George H. Dunne critically adds that the impact of Pope Benedict XIV's Constitution, *Ex quo singulari*, on the nascent Church in China was two-fold:

by banning the Confucian ceremonies it made it impossible for a scholar-official to become a Christian or for a Christian to become a scholar, thus destroying the possibility of those sympathetic rapports upon which, in the Jesuit method, the peaceful penetration of Chinese society had been based. By banning the ancestral rites the Church was forced to assume a posture that seemed hostile to the Chinese environment. Instead of heaven, Christianity became a foreign substance in the body of Chinese social culture. It meant the effective ending of the policy of cultural adaptation. If these consequences were fully understood by the Holy See, it must have felt that the integrity of faith required payment of so high a price.⁵¹

Indeed, while the causes for the prohibition of Christianity were manifold—political, economic, cultural, moral, and religious—the most recurrent charge was that the missionaries required the Vietnamese Christians to abandon the cult of ancestors. This charge was leveled against Christians during de Rhodes' first sojourn in Cochinchina (1624—26), and became the oft-repeated charge during the persecution of Vietnamese Christians in the 19th century.⁵² For Peter C. Phan, the cult of ancestors “provided continuity across generations and bound all the Vietnamese together, from the king as the august Son of Heaven to the humblest citizen in the country.”⁵³ Therefore, “this cult of ancestors, if viewed as contrary to Christian faith, would constitute one of the most serious challenges to Christian mission,” and it would be natural for any rulers of the country to take every possible measure to proscribe Christianity if it posed a threat to this traditional practice.⁵⁴

Today, Vietnamese bishops generally consider that the Church's negative attitude towards the cult of ancestors was one of the main reasons for the oppression of Christians in Vietnam. “In Vietnam, the ban against ancestor

51. George H. Dunne, *Generation of Giants*, 300. It is worth noting that the French Vicars Apostolic did not share the Jesuits' view on the Chinese Rites. See Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 157.

52. Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 74.

53. *Ibid.*, 75.

54. *Ibid.* There is no doubt that the separation from family members and other Vietnamese cultural and religious communities occasioned by conversion to Catholicism has created grave difficulties.

worship imposed on Christians for three centuries had the effect of estranging them from the very foundation of Vietnamese society. This explains why they were considered strangers in their own country and persecuted.”⁵⁵ Abandoning the cult of ancestors was often interpreted as an abandonment of one’s tradition and also one’s country, hence a double apostasy: “for believers of certain religions . . . to become Catholic means betraying their family and even their state.”⁵⁶ Archbishop Stephen Nguyen Nhu The of Huế also believes that today “we speak of the ‘veneration’ rather than ‘cult’ of ancestors in order to be more precise theologically,” and he adds that the unwillingness of Vietnamese Catholics to participate in the cult of ancestors in family life is “a great obstacle for evangelization.”⁵⁷

It is estimated that some 30,000 were martyred during this period.⁵⁸ At the end of this phase, the Church in Vietnam had a clear organizational structure with three dioceses and approximately 320,000 Christians.⁵⁹

III. Trials and Tribulations (1802–1885)

In 1802, Nguyễn Ánh, the last surviving member of the deposed Nguyễn Lords, defeated the Tây Sơn rulers and ascended to the throne, taking the dynastic name Gia Long. Under his 20-year reign the Vietnamese Church enjoyed relative peace as the emperor was grateful to Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine and other Catholics for their support during his long campaign to regain power and unify the country.⁶⁰ When Gia Long died, he “enjoined upon

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55. Nguyen Son Lam, speaking at the Synod for Asia in 1998 Bishop; “Christian Sense of Family Coincides with Tradition,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (May 13, 1998): 14.
 56. Bishop Paul Nguyen Van Hoa of Nha Trang, in his intervention at the Asian Synod. See “Evangelization in Vietnam,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124.
 57. See “Inculturation in the Context of the Veneration of Ancestors,” in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, 124–25.
 58. Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–1980),” 17. Peter C. Phan notes that “the years 1798–1800, under the reign of King Canh Thịnh (1792–1802), were very hard for Catholics. The king suspected that his opponent Nguyen Anh was being assisted by the French bishop Pigneau de Béhaine, who had recruited French officers and arms to help Nguyen Anh reestablish the Nguyen dynasty. Fearing Catholic collusion with his enemies, the king ordered Catholics to be killed as a preventive measure” (“Mary in Vietnamese Piety and Theology,” *Theology Digest* 49, no. 3 [Fall 2002]: 247).
 59. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luận Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003),” 192.
 60. Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược*, 462. Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine (1741–1799) was credited with helping Nguyễn Ánh to become the founding emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty (1802–1945), also Vietnam’s last, who “ruled over almost all of the territory of present-day Vietnam.” See Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 3rd edition (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), 145–46, 314–15.

his successor that there was to be no persecution of the three religions established in his empire—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity.”⁶¹ However, Minh Mạng (1820–1840), his successor, a strict Confucian and an admirer of Chinese culture, reintroduced the 18th century policy of suppressing believers with the first edict issued in 1825.⁶² Unable to suppress Christian activities, in 1838, Minh Mạng sent a delegation to France to resolve the continuing dispute over the presence of French missionaries in Vietnam. King Louis Philippe did not meet the delegation because the Church opposed it. Minh Mạng died before the delegation returned to Hue, the capital of Vietnam.⁶³

Bloody suppressions continued under the reign of his successors. After a few years of calm, Thiệu Trị (1841–1847) issued a similar edict in 1847, in the last year of his reign.⁶⁴ The oppression of Christians became more severe under Tự Đức (1847–1883), the next emperor, who issued two edicts against Christians in 1848 and 1851.⁶⁵ In 1868, he issued an infamous decree dividing the population into two categories: *lương dân*, the good citizens, and *dữ dân*, those who follow Christianity.⁶⁶ This royal decree was followed by the devastating havoc that the Văn Thân movement inflicted on Vietnamese Catholics.⁶⁷ Approximately 100,000 Christians died for their faith during the reign of these rulers from 1820 to 1883.⁶⁸

IV. The Development of the Church (1885–1960)

The Vietnamese Golgotha came to an end with the 1884 Patenôtre Treaty, which established the protectorate of Tonkin and Annam, and

61. See D. G. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (London: Macmillan Education, 1968), 685.

62. Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược*, 464.

63. Ibid., 465.

64. Ibid., 469.

65. Ibid., 477.

66. Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–1980),” 19.

67. Văn Thân (Scholar-Gentry) was a militant political movement led by scholars in Nghệ An province in 1874, numbering approximately 3,000. Its slogan was “Bình tây sát tả,” meaning “Defeat the Westerners and exterminate the heretics [i.e., Catholics].” See Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược*, 520, and Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 336.

68. Some 60,000 Christians were killed by the Văn Thân. See Trần Anh Dũng, “Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–1980),” 17. There were approximately half a million Catholics in Vietnam in 1850. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Luận Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003),” 195.

guaranteed religious freedom.⁶⁹ In a classic book on the history of Vietnam, written in 1919, a textbook in use in South Vietnam until 1975, Trần Trọng Kim considers the following factors as the main causes for Vietnam's loss of independence and becoming a French protectorate: persecution and suppression of Christians, prohibition of foreign trade, narrow-mindedness and arrogance of court officials, and confrontational attitude towards Westerners.⁷⁰ According to Adrien Launay, there were approximately 648,435 Christians in Vietnam in 1889.⁷¹ By 1939, this figure increased to 1,544,765 while the country's population stood at 23,193,769.⁷²

In 1954, after Vietnam was divided into two separate regions, approximately 650,000 Catholics went to the South, and 750,000 remained in the North with seven bishops and about 370 priests.⁷³ Stephen Denney notes that “this exodus radically changed the proportion of Catholics in North and South—before 1954 Catholics constituted about 10 percent of the population in the North and five percent in the South; after 1954 these figures were reversed.”⁷⁴ The ecclesial community in the North became *une Église*

69. The six provinces of Cochinchina had already been ceded to France by the Treaty of Saigon in 1862 and the Philastre Treaty in 1874, and governed directly by the French as a colony. See Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược*, 494–95, 517–19, and Bruce M. Lockhart and William J. Duiker, *Historical Dictionary of Vietnam*, 312, 387–88.

70. Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt-Nam Sử-Lược*, V–VI; also 465, 476–77.

71. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “*Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)*,” 196.

72. *Ibid.*, 198. For a detailed study of the place of the Catholic Church in postcolonial Vietnamese politics and society, see Charles Keith, “Annam Uplifted: The First Vietnamese Catholic Bishops and the Birth of a National Church, 1919–1945,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 2 (2008): 128–71. In this essay Keith questions the assumption of “the close ties between some Vietnamese Catholics and the French during the rise of the colonial power,” and “challenges assessments of Catholicism as a conservative, reactionary presence in colonial Vietnam.” *Ibid.*, 129–30.

73. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “*Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003)*,” 199; Trần Anh Dũng, “*Sử Lược Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–1980)*,” 23. Peter Hansen notes that official figures compiled by the Republic of Vietnam “in October 1955 indicated that the migrants who arrived in the South from the North included 676,348 Catholics (76.3 percent of all Bắc di cư), 209,132 Buddhists (23.5 percent), and 1,041 Protestants (0.2 percent).” See “Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954–1959,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009): 180. For further details on the “Emigration of Laity and Priests from Northern Dioceses, 1954,” see Table 1, *ibid.*; see also the “Decimation of the Northern Church” table compiled by Peter C. Phan, “The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd edition, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003), 502.

74. Stephen Denney, “The Catholic Church in Vietnam,” in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, Pedro Ramet, ed., Christianity under Stress, Vol. 2 (London: Duke University Press, 1990), 271.

du silence over the next twenty-one years.⁷⁵ Today, to a certain extent, the northern community, which was isolated from the thinking of the universal Church⁷⁶ generally reflects the conservatism of those whose preconiliar faith was severely tested by the restrictions of the Communist government, which confiscated all the Church's educational and social properties.⁷⁷ By contrast, in South Vietnam, changes initiated by the Council proceeded, albeit slowly, in the same period.⁷⁸

In Đà Lạt, South Vietnam, the first Catholic University was established on August 8, 1957, followed by the creation of the first Faculty of Theology in the Giáo Hoàng Học Viện Piô X (St Pius X Pontifical College) on September 13, 1959,⁷⁹ which was entrusted to the care of the Society of Jesus, and it opened

75. "Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions," 15; see also Chris McGillion, "Rome's Next Domino," *The Tablet* (September 25, 1993): 1224.

76. Peter C. Phan, "The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam," 501.

77. Peter C. Phan notes that "Christian faith is nourished predominantly by the family with its practice of the daily recitation of morning and evening prayers. Prayers most often include the rosary, litanies, prayers to the patron saints (especially St. Joseph), the *Miserere* (Psalm 51) for the ancestors, and the acts of faith, hope, and charity. When a priest visits the parish church, bells toll to announce the Mass" ("The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam," 501). Phan also observes that "in general, Vietnam Catholicism, especially among the Northerners, is heavily pietistic and ritualistic. Greatly influenced by baroque piety of Spanish and French missionaries, Vietnamese Catholics love devotions, in particular Marian devotion, veneration of saints, statues, relics, processions, pilgrimages, sodalities and other external exhibitions of faith. Knowledge of the Bible among the laity (and, sadly, among most Vietnamese priests) is practically non-existent" ("Aspects of Vietnamese Culture and Roman Catholicism: Background Information for Educators of Vietnamese Seminarians," *Seminaries in Dialogue* 23 [Spring 1991]: 7). In his view, "Vietnamese Catholicism is nourished not only by the sacraments but also by popular devotions, pilgrimages, processions, and novenas" ("Under the Bamboo Cross," *U.S. Catholic*, July 2000: 37).

78. It is worthwhile to recall one of Peter C. Phan's insightful remarks on Vietnamese-American Catholics, an observation, which in our view, is also true for Vietnamese Catholics living in other parts of the world: "Because Vietnamese Catholicism developed in dependence on the 16th-century missionary activity, it stands today between a more conservative post-Tridentine and a more progressive Vatican II Catholicism. Which side Vietnamese-American Catholics favor largely depends on their regions of origin—generally with those in the south being more open, those in the north more traditional." See "The Dragon and the Eagle: Toward a Vietnamese-American Theology," *Theology Digest* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 205. The scope of this essay does not allow us to investigate the complex issue of the so-called three generations of Vietnamese Catholics in Vietnam: pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, and post-Vatican II.

79. Trần Anh Dũng, "Sử Luận Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–1980)," 23, 24.

its doors to lay people in 1970.⁸⁰ The purpose of this institution was stated by Paul VI in his letter to the bishops of Vietnam on September 15, 1966:

The establishment of a Faculty of Theology in the ‘St. Pius X’ Pontifical Institute at Dalat will stimulate, in this decisive post-conciliar period, all men of good will to strive toward the realization of the Pauline motto *veritatem facientes in caritate* (Phil 4:15), and will be a place of gathering to give value, in the light of the Gospel, to the rich philosophic and religious patrimony of the nation. Such a reality will certainly contribute to amalgamating heterogeneous and until now divided groups, in the seeking of the common good.⁸¹

V. The Maturing of the Church (1960–present)

By 1960, Vietnamese Catholics numbered approximately 2,096,540 representing 7.17% of the population.⁸² However, figures alone do not tell the full story, for the Church in South Vietnam at this time was represented by institutions whose influence far surpassed its population. Organizations sponsored by the Church ran one university, 93 secondary schools, 1,122 primary schools, 58 orphanages, 48 hospitals, 35 homes for the aged, 8 leprosaria, 159 dispensaries helping 1,870,073.⁸³ Although it is difficult to gauge the effects of such work, Catholic lay people became an important force in the bureaucracy,

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80. See Trần Đình Quảng, “Vài nét về Giáo Hoàng Học Viện Thánh Piô X Đà Lạt” [Outline of the St. Pius X Pontifical College, Da Lat], <http://www.vietcatholic.net> (accessed June 22, 2007). This college was confiscated by the Communist government in late 1977, and in a response (January 17, 1994) to the VEC’s request for its return for the use of theological training, the governmental Committee on Religious Affairs stated that the buildings “were being used for nuclear research and that the request that they be returned to the Church would be taken into consideration in the future.” See Peter C. Phan, “The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam,” 505. The VEC made the same request again in 1995 and 1997. See *La Conférence épiscopale du Vietnam*, “La majorité de nos demandes sont restées sans réponse,” *La Documentation Catholique* 2130 (January 21, 1996): 96; see also “Thư gửi Ngài Thủ Tướng Chính phủ của Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (11-10-1997) [Letter to His Excellency the Prime Minister from the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (11-10-1997)],” in *Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam (1980–2000)* [The Vietnamese Episcopal Conference 1980–2000], 533.
81. See *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963–1995)*, edited by Francesco Gioia (Boston, Mass.: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), 143. For the original version in French see Paul VI, “Lettre du pape Paul VI aux évêques du Vietnam [15 September 1966],” http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/letters/1966/documents/hf_p-vi_let_19660930_vescovi-vietnam_fr.html (accessed June 22, 2007).
82. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Lược Sử Giáo Hội Công Giáo Việt Nam (1533–2003),” 199. The total population in the country was estimated at 29,200,000. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, 200. Omer Degrijse notes that the “Société missionnaire vietnamienne” was founded in 1973. See “The Third World Churches Are Becoming Missionary,” *Communio* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1989) 587.

education, commerce, and the professions.⁸⁴ This year also saw the establishment of the Vietnamese hierarchy by Pope John XXIII. From 1962 to 1965, nine bishops of the Vietnamese Church participated in the sessions of the Second Vatican Council. Conciliar teachings gradually permeated the life of the Church in South Vietnam, and lay people began to claim and assume their rightful place in the Church. Their role was strengthened when the entire country came under Communist control on April 30, 1975, and, as a result, clerical activities were strictly limited. On June 19, 1988, Pope John Paul II canonized 117 Vietnamese martyrs, of which 58 were lay people.⁸⁵

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Church is facing a new set of challenges, occasioned by the monumental changes emanating from the decision of the Communist Party of Vietnam to adopt a market-oriented economy while retaining its absolute political control.⁸⁶ Our assessment is that the country is still very far from achieving the balance and harmony between economic efficiency, social justice, and individual freedom.⁸⁷ We also suggest that one of the greatest challenges facing Vietnam is the reconciliation between the unity of the country and the individual freedom as expressed by the two inscriptions which flank the massive Victor Emmanuel Monument at the heart of old Rome: “to the unity of the country” and “to the freedom of the citizens.”

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84. Both presidents in the South Vietnamese government were Catholics: Ngô Đình Diệm (1955–1963) and Nguyễn Văn Thiệu (1967–1975). The second Catholic university, named Minh Đức, was established in Saigon in early 1970s.
 85. Thu Bui and K.I. Rabenstein, “Martyrs of Vietnam,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd edition, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Gale in Association with the Catholic University of America, 2003), 491–99; see also Peter Nguyen Van Hai, “Canonization of 117 Vietnamese Martyrs on June 19, 1988,” *Annals Australia* (April 1988): 8–10.
 86. “Plenty to Smile About,” *The Economist* (31 March 2007): 29. In 2000, Bill Clinton was the first president to visit Vietnam since the fall of Saigon after having lifted America’s trade embargo in 1994 and restored diplomatic relations a year later. See “Good Morning at Last,” *The Economist* (3 August 2006), http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=7252940 (accessed 17 July 2007). On 11 January 2007, Vietnam became the 150th member of the World Trade Organization. See Patrizia Tumbarello, “WTO Membership Strengthens Vietnam’s Outlook,” *IMF Survey* 36, no. 2 (29 January 2007): 23. Nguyen Vu Tung notes that “Vietnam has remained committed to ASEAN since it joined in 1995” (“Vietnam’s Membership of ASEAN: A Constructivist Interpretation,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29, no. 3 [December 2007]: 499). For Robert A. Scalapino, “Since three-fourths of Vietnam’s growing population of more than 80 million are under the age of 35, this is a nation that must look to the future.” See “The United and Asia in 2008: A Time of Challenge,” *Asian Survey* 49, no. 1 (January 2009): 13.
 87. For John Maynard Keynes (*Liberalism and Labour*, 1926), “the political problem of mankind is to combine three things: economic efficiency, social justice and individual liberty.” Quoted by Julie Clague, “The Gospel of Life: John Paul II on Spiritual Malaise and Its Social Aftermath,” in *The New Politics: Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Paul Valley (London: SCM Press, 1998), 121–22.

Indeed, for many analysts inside and outside Vietnam, Vietnam is increasingly beset and burdened with numerous social problems,⁸⁸ including the widening gap between the rich and the poor,⁸⁹ the migration of people to the urban areas,⁹⁰ the exploitation of women,⁹¹ the exposure to Western cultures and the decline in traditional values,⁹² the corruption and abuse of

88. VEC Pastoral Letter 2001, no. 8.

89. Nguyen Nhu The, “La Vie Religieuse au Vietnam: Perspectives,” *Dossiers et documents* no. 1. *Eglises d’Asie* 191 (January 1995), <http://www.eglasie.mepasie.org> (accessed 8 December 2006). According to the CIA’s estimate, in terms of household income or consumption by percentage share, the lowest 10% of the population has only 2.9% while the highest 10% enjoys a whopping 28.9%. See Central Intelligence Agency, “Vietnam [last updated on 24 January 2008],” in *The World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html> (accessed February 1, 2008). Vo X. Han observes that “the proportion of households below the poverty line in the highlands was four times greater than the national average” (“Vietnam in 2007: A Profile in Economic and Socio-Political Dynamism,” *Asian Survey* 48, no. 1 [January–February 2008]: 31). Han notes that in 2007, “the average income of farmers in a four-person household was VND 175,000 (\$10.85) per month, far below the current official poverty line of VND 260,000 (\$16.12).” *Ibid.*, 30.

90. Peter Kham Van Nguyen notes that between 1994–1999 “around 1.2 million people migrated from rural to urban areas.” See his project in ministry, “A Training Program for Animators of Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam,” (Doctor of Ministry, the Catholic University of America, 2004), 15; “Voting for More of the Same,” *The Economist* (19 May 2007), 31.

91. Rosanne Rushing, “Migration and Sexual Exploitation in Vietnam,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 15, no. 4 (2006): 471–94. Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn listed other social evils such as drug abuse, HIV/AIDS victims, prostitution, and abortion. See “Trách nhiệm đối với giới trẻ Việt Nam [Responsibility for Vietnamese Youth],” *Định Hướng* (Summer 2003): 59.

92. VEC, “‘Be Christians Worthy of the Name’: Pastoral Letter of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference [1992],” *Catholic International* 4, no. 2 (February 1992): 71. In an interview of a group of young people in 2002 about the changes in Vietnamese society, one young woman said: “I don’t want to be a model citizen [*cong dan mau*] like my parents—I want to be a model [*nguai mau*]!” See Nguyen Bich Thuan and Mandy Thomas, “Young Women and Emergent Postsocialist Sensibilities in Contemporary Vietnam,” *Asian Studies Review* 28, no. 2 (June 2004): 144. In a survey published in the Tết [Vietnamese New Year] issue of the *Tuổi Trẻ* [Youth] magazine, young people were asked to name their idols: “Bill Gates (89%) led the list, followed by Hồ Chí Minh with 39%, Gen. Võ Nguyên Giáp 35%, Bill Clinton 6.5%, PM Phan Văn Khải (3.2%), Hilary Clinton (3.2%).” See Đặng Tươi et al., “Idols of Young Vietnamese,” *Indochina Chronology* 20, no. 2 (April–June 2001): 24; see also “Adeste fideles,” *The Economist* (June 22, 1991): 27.

powers by officials,⁹³ the gradual erosion of party and government legitimacy,⁹⁴ the pervasive and increasing social surveillance,⁹⁵ and the restriction of religious liberty and human rights.⁹⁶

93. Brian J.M. Quinn, "Vietnam's Last Call for Bribes, *Far Eastern Economic Review* (June 2006): 52; Martin Gainsborough, "Corruption and the Politics of Economic Decentralization in Vietnam," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 33, no. 1 (2003): 69–84; Adam Ford, "Vietnam in 2003: The Road to Ungovernability?" *Asian Survey* 44, no. 1 (January–February 2004): 126–27; Regina M. Abrami, "Vietnam in 2002: On the Road to Recovery," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 1 (January–February 2003): 97; Hy V. Luong, "Vietnam in 2005: Economic Momentum and Stronger State-Society Dialogue," *Asian Survey* 46, no. 1 (January 2006): 152; "Vietnam in 2006: Stronger Global Integration and Resolve for Better Governance," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 1 (January 2007): 173; "Grappling with Success," *The Economist* (February 2, 2008): 34.
94. "Manh Alive," *The Economist* (April 29, 2006): 34. David Koh argues that "like its counter part in China, the Vietnamese Communist Party believes that economic performance is the key pillar of its legitimacy, allowing for the Party to brush aside concerns about the lack of political reforms." See "Vietnam Must Map Its Own Flight Plan," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 169, no. 10 (December 2006): 54. In 2007, *The Economist* observes that "the party remains terrified of the slightest challenge to its monopoly on power" and "treats pro-democracy activists as common criminals, jailing them for supposed spying and sabotage" even though "the National Assembly, once a rubber stamp, has become a forum for real debate and scrutiny" and "serious criticisms of the government are aired and reported in the press." See "Plenty to Smile About," *The Economist* (March 31, 2007): 29.
95. According to Martin Bell, in 2005, Vietnam has some 5,000 Internet cafés. See "It Could Have Been Me," *New Statesman* (23 October 2006): 3. According to government figures, "more than 21m people, a quarter of the population, use the internet." "Vietnam's Nationalist Bloggers: Getting Off Your Chest," *The Economist* (12 September 2009): 31. Hy V. Luong observes that "the Vietnamese government required public Internet users to show identification cards and Internet shop owners to maintain a list of users' names" ("Vietnam in 2006: Stronger Global Integration and Resolve for Better Governance," 174). In fact, "Internet-café owners are being made agents of the state as it tries to keep the lid on news, information and any signs of cyberdissent." "Editorials: Trying to Kill a Revolution," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (24 June 2004): 8. Human Rights Watch noted that the government "tightened its control on internet use, blogging, and independent research, and banned dissemination and publication of content critical of the government." *World Report 2010: Events of 2009* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010), 361.
96. For a detailed discussion of the application and limits of Vietnam's constitutional provisions and legal regulations governing religious affairs, in particular those relating to the Catholic Church, see Peter Hansen, "The Vietnamese State, the Catholic Church and the Law," in *Asian Socialism & Legal Change: The Dynamics of Vietnamese and Chinese Reform*, John Gillespie and Pip Nicholson, ed. (Canberra: ANU E Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2005), 310–34. In November 2006, the U.S. Department of State "lifted the country's designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for Religious Freedom," "in recognition of 'significant improvements towards advancing religious freedom.'" See U.S. Department of State, "Vietnam: International Religious Freedom Report 2007," <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90159.htm> (accessed February 28, 2008). However, the report notes that "despite progress during the reporting period, problems remained in the implementation of the country's legal framework on religion." Ibid. In 2009, Human Rights Watch reported that the Vietnamese government "continues to crack-down on democracy activists,

Despite their positive *ad limina apostolorum* (“to the threshold of the apostles,” i.e., every five years) report to the Holy See in 2002, the Vietnamese bishops noted that the Vietnamese regime still “insists on veto power over the appointment of bishops,” and “in practice, the level of religious freedom varies from region to region, depending on the attitude of local Communist officials.”⁹⁷ In 2006, Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ International Policy Committee, observed that “the Church in Vietnam, while still suffering restrictions in its pastoral life, has nevertheless reported a continuing improved relationship with the government.”⁹⁸ He also recalled that in testimony to the U.S. Congress, the American Catholic Bishops have encouraged “stronger ties between the United States and Vietnam that include closer trading relationships.”⁹⁹ These dynamics of social changes have been impinging on the mission of the Church in Vietnam and will have a great impact on the role of the Church, especially the laity, in the third millennium.

Conclusion

From our rapid historical journey in this paper, which left untouched much material of interest, we note that the Catholic Church in Vietnam was a predominantly lay-led Church in the first three hundred years, due in part to recurrent persecutions and prolonged absence of the missionaries.¹⁰⁰ Later it became a clergy-dominated Church from the late 19th century, when the country became a protectorate of France. However, from the 1980s there have been encouraging signs that once again lay people are being empowered to take

journalists, human rights defenders, cyber-dissidents, and members of unsanctioned religious organizations.” See Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2009: Events of 2008* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009), 325. Johnny Blades observes that while “there has been some improvement in religious freedom for many Vietnamese who are willing to worship in government-registered institutions, significant abuses remain.” See “Despite the State’s Protestations, Vietnam’s Religious Must Live in Fear,” *The Guardian Weekly* (March 5, 2010): 9. In terms of human rights rating, in 1991 Vietnam was given a 27% with the average being 62%, and Australia achieving 91%. See *World Human Rights Guide*, Charles Humana, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 361, xvii; see also Abdelfattah Amor, “Une enquête sur la situation religieuse au Vietnam,” *Dossiers et documents*, no. 6, *Eglises d’Asie* 289 (June 1999), <http://www.eglise.mepasie.org> (accessed December 8, 2006).

97. See “Hope for the Church in Vietnam,” *The Tablet* (February 2, 2002): 33.

98. See Thomas Wenski, “Vietnam: The Impact of Improving Trade Relations,” *Origins* 26, no. 14 (September 14, 2006): 226.

99. *Ibid.*

100. “Une Eglise de martyrs: trois siècles de persécutions,” *Missi* 2 (February 1991): 12–15.

a more active role in the life and mission of the Church.¹⁰¹ Throughout these centuries of mission, the Vietnamese Church has been entangled in the political vicissitudes of the nation, and its members, especially the laity, suffered years of hardships and persecutions.¹⁰² Today, 479 years after a Western missionary under the name of “I-nê- khu” landed on a seaside village in Nam Định, the mood of the Church in Vietnam is optimistic and cautiously enthusiastic.¹⁰³ There is no longer clamor among the clergy for a return to a Church dominated by the ordained and religious. Rather, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, there is a collective desire to develop a more inclusive Church where the laity can take a fuller role in the life and mission of the Church. In his address to the bishops of Vietnam in 2002, John Paul II states that, by their credible and enthusiastic witness, Vietnamese lay people today are worthy heirs of those who went before them in the path of the gospel.¹⁰⁴

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101. See Nguyễn Văn Nội, “Công Đồng Vatican II với Giáo Hội Việt Nam [The Second Vatican Council and the Vietnamese Church,” *Triết Đạo* [Journal of Vietnamese Philosophy and Religion] 5, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 101–24.
 102. John Paul II paid tribute to the sufferings that the Church in Vietnam had undergone: “Marked by the holiness and martyrdom of so many of her children, she has become a Church glorified by their zeal in the service of God and their brothers and sisters.” See “Vietnamese Church Has Given Heroic Witness to Christ’s Love,” [the Pope’s *ad limina apostolorum* address to the Vietnamese Bishops], *L’Osservatore Romano* 2 (January 8, 1997): 9. Benedict XVI also reflected on the heroic witness of Paul Le Bao Tinh, a 19th-century Vietnamese martyr, in his second encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, released in late 2007. See “Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on Christian Hope,” no. 37, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html (accessed January 11, 2008).
 103. Meeting with the Pope on their *ad limina* visit to Rome in January 2002, the Vietnamese bishops “presented a generally positive report of church life in Vietnam” (“Hope for the Church in Vietnam,” 33). Peter C. Phan also observes that “despite its external difficulties, the Vietnamese Catholic Church is vibrant and dynamic.” See “The Catholic Church in Present-Day Vietnam,” 507.
 104. Johannes Paul II, “Ansprache von Johannes Paul II. Aus Anlaß des ‘ad limina’-Besuches der Bischöfe von Vietnam, Dienstag, 22. January, 2002,” no. 6, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020122_viet-nam-ad-limina_ge.html (accessed May 30, 2006).

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