

# Ultramontanism, Nationalism, and the Fall of Saigon: Historicizing the Vietnamese American Catholic Experience

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Notwithstanding the steady growth of Vietnamese Catholics in the United States, the lack of historical research has left many gaps and led to a generic and imprecise understanding of their experience. The scholarship from the social sciences and religious studies has shed light on some areas but also leaves out the historical dimensions, particularly the exilic identity that formed among Catholic refugees during the initial period of resettlement. This identity came from three major historical developments: the impact of ultramontanism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the experience of nationalism and anticommunism, and the abrupt end of the Vietnam War. To deal with national loss, family separation, and the challenges of living in a foreign society, Catholic refugees resorted to their ultramontane legacy and anticommunist nationalism. Although Vietnamese American Catholics no longer identify themselves as exilic, their initial experience formed some of the most important aspects about their identity to this day.

Since the end of the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese presence in the American Catholic landscape has been notable for several reasons. Among Asian Americans, the ratio of Vietnamese Catholics to non-Catholics is higher than average. A national survey in 2012 shows that about 19 percent of Asian Americans were Catholic and 22 percent Protestant, but the figures among Vietnamese Americans were 30 percent Catholic and 6 percent Protestant. Only Filipino Americans have a higher rate of Catholic affiliation at 65 percent.<sup>1</sup> In sheer numbers, Vietnamese should continue to be a major ethnic group among Catholics of Asian heritage.

Another example is the growth among Vietnamese communities during the last quarter-century. In 1998, for example, the Archdiocese

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1. These figures come from the Asian-American Survey: <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-religious-affiliation/>.

of Galveston-Houston inaugurated the ethnic parish Christ the Incarnate Word to accommodate the burgeoning number of Vietnamese Catholic immigrants in the Houston area. In twenty years, its membership grew from three hundred parishioners to more than 6,000 parishioners. The increase reflects the overall growth of Vietnamese in Harris County (which encompasses Houston), whose population in 2016 made up about 31 percent of all Asian Americans in the county.<sup>2</sup> Another example is the smaller Diocese of Arlington in northern Virginia. It currently schedules regular Sunday masses in eleven languages other than English and Spanish, including eight Vietnamese masses at two parishes: the largest number for a single group.<sup>3</sup> These developments are notable in an era of parish closure among many older Catholic ethnic communities. Even the cathedral parish of the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont, which does not have a large Vietnamese population, illustrates poignantly the contrasting dynamics between older and newer Catholic groups: in this case, Irish and French-Canadians on the one hand and Vietnamese and West Africans on the other hand. Having faced a steep decline in attendance, it merged with a nearby parish and moved its regular Sunday masses to the other parish (which became a co-cathedral). Once a month, however, the main cathedral building hosts a Sunday mass in Vietnamese because Vietnamese Catholics in the diocese, still wishing to worship in their language, have secured the service of a Vietnamese priest who travels from Montreal.<sup>4</sup>

In a different development, the first- and 1.5 generations of Vietnamese Catholics have produced a good share of diocesan priests and men and women religious even in areas with a small number of Vietnamese. According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 6 percent of newly ordained priests in 2009 were Vietnamese. A list compiled by a Vietnamese American Catholic organization indicates that there were over 800 Vietnamese priests during the early

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2. The information on Christ the Incarnate Word Church comes from its website: <http://www.giaoxungoiloi.org/home-1.html>. The number of Vietnamese in Harris County is from Leah Binkovitz, "Asian Population Is Houston's Fastest-Growing Group," The Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Rice University (September 20, 2016): <https://kinder.rice.edu/2016/09/20/houstons-asian-population-fastest-growing>.

3. "Multicultural Mass Information," Catholic Diocese of Arlington: <https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/Multicultural-Ministries/Multicultural-Mass-Information/>. They include two vigil Vietnamese masses on Saturday evening. The Korean community has the second highest number with four Sunday masses.

4. Howard Weiss-Tisman, "Vietnamese Catholic Community Breathes Life into a Struggling Burlington Parish," Vermont Public Radio (February 8, 2017): <http://digital.vpr.net/post/vietnamese-catholic-community-breathes-life-struggling-burlington-parish#stream/0>.

2010s, most of whom are former refugees or first-generation immigrants.<sup>5</sup> Vietnamese Americans have also enriched the landscape of Catholic religious orders in the United States. Several institutes such as the Congregation of the Mother of the Redeemer (men) and the Lovers of the Holy Cross (women), both founded in Vietnam, came to American shores in 1975 and have continued to grow in membership. The fall of Saigon led to the arrival of enough Vietnamese Redemptorists in the United States that the Holy See created a special province for them. A number of Vietnamese men have joined American provinces of Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans, among others; others have helped to revitalize the missionary Society of the Divine Word. It is an exaggeration to call Vietnamese American priests the “new Irish” or to declare that they “swell” the clergy, as popular news outlets have done.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, their outsized participation is impressive due partially to the decline in the overall number of American priests, which stood at 58,632 in 1975 and dropped to 37,192 in 2016.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, Vietnam has recently become a pipeline of seminarians, priests, and women religious for some dioceses and religious orders in the United States. In 2011, for example, eight Carmelites from Vietnam arrived to live at a monastery in Alabama that had been close to closure. They came at the invitation of the Archbishop of Mobile, who sought them out after the consultation and involvement of some Vietnamese American religious members. Starting in 2013, seven members of a Cistercian monastery in central Vietnam have lived at the Assumption Abbey in Missouri.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere, two

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5. “Linh Mục Việt Nam tại Hoa Kỳ” [Vietnamese Priests in the United States], <http://www.liendoanconggiao.net/doc/danh sach/LinhMucVietNamTaiHoaKy.doc>. There is no specific date on this continuously updated list, but the most recent one in my possession clearly comes from the early 2010s. The total number from this list contradicts the commonly cited estimate of 450–500 priests in 2015 found in “Vietnamese Vocations,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/vocation-directors/vietnamese-vocations.cfm>. Using additional information from other sources, I have come to an estimate of more than 900 Vietnamese priests in the United States in 2012.

6. David Haldane and Mai Tran, “New ‘Irish’ Priests Are Vietnamese,” *Los Angeles Times* (April 15, 2007); and Gustav Niebuhr, “Vietnamese Immigrants Swell Catholic Clergy,” *New York Times* (April 24, 2000).

7. These figures come from the website of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate: <http://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/>.

8. Benjamin Mann, “Carmelite Nuns Come from Vietnam to Alabama to Revitalize Monastery” (February 23, 2011): <http://www.ewtnnews.com/catholic-news/US.php?id=2693>; Ryan Scheussler, “A Fading Missouri Monastery Finds New Life—in Vietnam,” Public Radio International (December 26, 2017): <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-12-26/fading-missouri-monastery-finds-new-life-vietnam>; and “Vietnamese Monks to Move to Southwest Missouri Abbey,” *Missourian* (December

seminarians from the Diocese of Vinh in central Vietnam came to America to study under the sponsorship of the Archdiocese of Louisville. Ordained to the transitional diaconate in 2017, they agreed to work for the archdiocese for at least a few years before making a decision on staying or returning to Vietnam. In the same year, three Vietnamese seminarians arrived in New England to begin their studies for the aforementioned Diocese of Burlington. The development in Burlington received direct support from Senator Patrick Leahy, himself a Catholic from the diocese.<sup>9</sup> These events call to mind the once common strategy, especially during the nineteenth century, of American bishops inviting religious orders and clerics from other countries to help with ministerial needs in their dioceses.<sup>10</sup>

### **Approaching the Vietnamese American Catholic Experience**

Recent developments suggest that Vietnamese American Catholics continue to be a small yet steadily growing force within the American church in the foreseeable future. This growth notwithstanding, there has been little historical scholarship about their experience. On the one hand, scholars in the social sciences and religious studies readily and correctly consider the 1975 and “boat people” arrivals to the United States to be refugees and not immigrants. Scholars have also acknowledged the unusual historical circumstances that led to their arrival *en masse* to America: the rapid military developments that led to the abrupt demise of the Republic of Vietnam, the chaotic departure of many South Vietnamese on American helicopters and ships, and the resettlement throughout the United States thanks to voluntary agencies and local churches, including Catholic ones.<sup>11</sup>

Yet scholars have also glossed over those events when studying their cultural, political, and economic activities and adaptations in the

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11, 2013). Assumption Abbey had been Trappist but became Cistercian after this influx of Vietnamese religious.

9. Ruby Thomas, “Local priests visit diocese in Vietnam,” *The Record* (April 14, 2016); Quân Nguyễn, “Thánh lễ truyền chức Phó Tế tại Tổng Giáo phận Louisville, Hoa Kỳ” [Ordination Mass to the Diaconate at the Archdiocese of Louisville in the United States], *VietCatholic News* (March 27, 2017): <http://www.vietcatholic.net/News/Html/217798.htm>; and Elizabeth Murray, “From Vietnam to Vermont: Three Men Train to Be Priests in the U.S.,” *Burlington Free Press* (August 24, 2017). The last article quotes the outdated estimate of Vietnamese American priests from the USCCB.

10. See, for example, Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 43–64.

11. See, for examples, Peter C. Phan, “Vietnamese Catholics in the United States: Christian Identity between the Old and the New,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 18 (Winter 2000): 19–35; and Carl L. Bankston III, “Vietnamese-American Catholicism: Transplanted and Flourishing,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 18 (Winter 2000): 36–53.

new society. This situation is analogous to students of mid-nineteenth-century Irish immigration, who readily acknowledge the Great Famine *without* dissecting the impact that the abrupt and devastating famine had over the self-perception and experience of the immigrants after they arrived in the United States. There remains a lack of historical research into the background of displacement among Vietnamese American Catholics, and how they saw themselves as refugees. As a result, popular media often portray the refugees as grateful recipients of American assistance and largesse (which was true) without considering their initial skepticism towards the United States or their primary orientation towards their fallen noncommunist Vietnamese nation (which was also true). As detailed below, the scholarship on Vietnamese American Catholics has yielded some fruitful discussions about their experience, including the experience of race and racism. But this scholarship is also piecemeal on their historical background, leaving significant gaps—large enough that they almost constitute a blank slate—about their experience in the United States, including the American Church. As a result, there have yet to be significant or convincing thematic arches to interpret this experience.

For these reasons, this article seeks to make a contribution towards a more historically informed understanding of the Vietnamese Catholic experience in the United States. It is my argument that their experience today should be viewed within a strong transnational and historical framework: one that engages the American Church but is also embedded in the history of Catholicism in Vietnam. In particular, I contend that Catholic refugees in the 1970s and 1980s assumed an exilic identity even as they adjusted to American culture and society. Below, I begin with a survey of scholarly literature about them by situating this scholarship in the broader context of Vietnamese Americans. Following the survey, I argue that their experience could be understood within the context of three historical phenomena: ultramontanism, nationalism, and the fall of Saigon. I then explain their exilic identity by examining a number of Vietnamese-language publications by Catholic refugees from the 1970s and early 1980s.

The use of these sources enables us to hear the discourse among the refugees on the important issues that they encountered and the ways that they dealt with those issues. In particular, I examine two Catholic monthlies that were well known to Vietnamese Catholic refugees. The first monthly is *Dân Chúa* [People of God], whose first issue came out in February 1977. Published in New Orleans, the site of probably the largest Vietnamese Catholic community in America during the 1970s, this magazine was staffed largely by priests in their thirties and drew regular contributors from refugee priests, religious, and laity. The

second magazine is *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* [The Immaculate Heart of Mary], which began publication in December 1977 under the auspices of the Congregation of the Mother of the Redeemer (CMR) in Missouri. It was in fact the revival of a monthly under the same name that the CMR had published in South Vietnam before 1975. Staffed entirely by CMR members, the magazine nonetheless depended on many non-CMR clergy, religious, and lay refugees for contributions.<sup>12</sup> Together with other primary sources examined in this article, these magazines provide a rich source of information about the exilic experience among the first wave of Vietnamese Catholic refugees, who in turn formed the foundation for the Vietnamese American Catholic experience today.



Father Cao Dang Minh, chaplain of the refugee community in Portland, rented an apartment for choir rehearsal and other activities, 1976.  
Photo courtesy of Our Lady of La Vang Parish, Portland, OR

12. The publisher of *Dân Chúa* was Nguyễn Đức Việt Châu, a priest of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, commonly known as Father Việt Châu. The first editor was the late Phạm Văn Tuệ, a diocesan priest ordained in South Vietnam two years before the fall of Saigon. The general secretary was Đỗ La Lam, a lay Catholic with considerable publishing experience in South Vietnam, including the positions of publisher and editor of the government-sponsored magazine *Cách Mạng Quốc Gia* [National Revolution] during the rule of Ngô Đình Diệm. At *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ*, Nguyễn Đức Thiệp, the provincial of the CMR in the United States at the time, was the first publisher and the CMR priest An Bình was the first editor. Note that until 2017, the name of the CMR was the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix and its members signed CMC to their names. Hereafter in the notes, *Dân Chúa* and *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* are abbreviated as *DC* and *TTĐM*, respectively.

## Scholarship on Vietnamese American Catholics

The first wave of scholarship on Vietnamese refugees was produced from the mid-1970s to the late 1990s. The bulk of this work comes from the social sciences and focuses on adaptation to American society. Catholics appear only in passing. One of the first studies looked into the Vietnamese enclave in northern Virginia and concluded that “the individual is conspicuously absent” in self-perception among the refugees.<sup>13</sup> Yet it does not say whether organized religion or the Catholic Church had any impact on this non-individual perception. Similarly, Nazli Kibria’s oft-cited study on Vietnamese families focuses on cultural influences but says exceedingly little about any effects that religion might have yielded over Catholic families.<sup>14</sup>

More attuned to the effects of church life on the refugees are the sociologists Min Zhou and Carl Bankston, who studied cultural adaptation among refugee children. Without discussing the impact of doctrines and devotion, their focus on Vietnamese Catholics in New Orleans nonetheless helps to highlight the structural and cultural impact of church life on the refugees. Arguing that the Vietnamese relied on their cultural capital and *not* assimilation for social mobility, Zhou and Bankston are attentive to religious participation and contend that church involvement and church organizations had a strong affect on ethnic identification among the students.<sup>15</sup> In short, the first wave of scholarship names the cultural significance of Catholicism in the lives of the refugees but pursues and explores other matters instead. This tendency is also found in comprehensive studies that seek a broad interpretation of the refugee experience.<sup>16</sup>

Starting around the turn of the millennium, the second wave of scholarship shifted attention from adaptation to community formation. Some of this scholarship focuses on political involvement among Vietnamese Americans, and some on their historical or transnational

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13. David Haines, Dorothy Rutherford, and Patrick Thomas, “Family and Community among Vietnamese Refugees,” *The International Migration Review* 15 (Spring/Summer 1981): 319.

14. Nazli Kibria, *Family Tighrope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

15. Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston III, *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998); and Zhou and Bankston, “Religious Participation, Ethnic Identification, and Adaptation of Vietnamese Adolescents in an Immigrant Community,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1995): 523–534.

16. Paul James Rutledge, *The Vietnamese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); and James M. Freeman, *Changing Identities: Vietnamese Americans 1975–1995* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995).

experience. While the bulk of this scholarship still treats Vietnamese Catholics in passing, there are notable exceptions.<sup>17</sup> In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a number of scholars have emphasized the agency of Vietnamese Catholics and their community-based organizations in the Gulf Coast. Studying post-Katrina Vietnamese in New Orleans East, five social scientists employ “resilience” as an analytical category to understand the recovery of the Vietnamese. They affirm that this ethnic community “possesses social and cultural capital that is based on its members’ lived experience and historical memory.”<sup>18</sup> Another scholar, Eric Tang, picks up on this concept in a study about relations between Vietnamese refugees and African Americans in New Orleans East. Tang employs his field work in Versailles, including interviews with Father Vien Nguyen, the pastor of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Church. He argues that “resilience” should be understood within a long and embedded history of Catholicism in the lives of the refugees: that is, their history that goes back to the migration among Catholics from northern to southern Vietnam in 1954–1955.<sup>19</sup>

The roles of culture, including the activities of Father Vien and his parish, are also explored in Mark VanLandingham’s monograph on post-Katrina recovery. This analysis complicates “resilience” by pointing at “vulnerability” among the Vietnamese as well. Although VanLandingham focuses on post-Katrina mobilization, especially among second-generation Vietnamese Americans, he notes the cohesiveness of Mary Queen of Vietnam Church before Katrina. He goes so far as to state that “formal mobilization in the [New Orleans] community was minimal outside of” this large Catholic parish before

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17. A major example is Karin Aguilar-San Juan, *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). “My scholarly inattentiveness,” acknowledges Aguilar-San Juan, “to religion and religious affiliations is most certainly a loss” (154).

18. Karen J. Leong, Christopher A. Airriess, Wei Li, Angela Chia-Chen Chen, and Verna M. Keith, “Resilient History and the Rebuilding of a Community: The Vietnamese American Community in New Orleans East,” *Journal of American History* 94 (December 2007): 777. See also Yoosun Park, Joshua Miller, and Bao Chau Van, “‘Everything Has Changed’: Narratives of the Vietnamese American Community in Post-Katrina Mississippi,” *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 37 (September 2010): 79–105.

19. Eric Tang, “A Gulf Unites Us: The Vietnamese Americans of Black New Orleans East,” *American Quarterly* 63 (March 2011): 117–149. On Father Vien Nguyen and his parish, see also the interview “Father Vien Nguyen with Charles Henry Rowell,” *Callaloo* 29 (Autumn 2006): 1071–1081; and Vy Thuc Dao, “From the Ground Up: A Qualitative Analysis of Gulf Coast Vietnamese Community-Based Organizations and Community (Re)Building in Post-Disaster Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama” (PhD diss., Tulane University, 2015), 146–178.

the fateful hurricane.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the geographer Christopher Airriess has examined the use of space among Catholics in Versailles, including the placement of devotional statues, ecclesiastical and national flags, and herb gardens.<sup>21</sup> The community formation in Versailles “is not unique,” writes Airriess, “but certainly distinctive based upon the particular historical experience of its inhabitants.” Nodding with approval towards a deeper scholarship on the past experience among the refugees, he concludes that the “importance of a shared historical experience and conditioning cannot be overstated.”<sup>22</sup> The significance of the Vietnamese past is also discussed in Sharon Tomlin’s study of a Vietnamese parish in the Archdiocese of Minneapolis–St. Paul. Tomlin shows, for example, that many of her interviewees articulated their experience of faith in America in frequent references to their lives in Vietnam.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the second wave of scholarship has been a lot more attentive to the historicity of the communal experience among Vietnamese Catholic refugees and immigrants.

Besides the focus on community formation, the second wave of scholarship is marked by a turn towards race and transnationalism. In addition to Eric Tang’s research on Vietnamese and African Americans in New Orleans, the anthropologist Thien-Huong Ninh has studied racial dynamics in the Diocese of Orange, which encompasses the largest Little Saigon enclave in America. Ninh employs the concept “racialized multiculturalism” and explores issues related to ethnic parishes, particularly constraints that the diocese placed on the Vietnamese Catholic community. She argues that the predominantly white church hierarchy sought to deter political and cultural mobilization of Vietnamese Catholics in the diocese because it viewed them as religious outsiders.<sup>24</sup> Ninh has also conducted research on

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20. Mark J. VanLandingham, *Weathering Katrina: Culture and Recovery among Vietnamese Americans* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2017), 105.

21. Christopher A. Airriess, “Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans,” in Kate A. Berry and Martha L. Henderson, ed., *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America: Race, Space, and Place* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002), 228–254. See also Christopher A. Airriess and David L. Clawson, “Versailles: A Vietnamese Enclave in New Orleans, Louisiana,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 12, no. 1 (1991): 1–13.

22. Airriess, “Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans,” 248.

23. Sharon Tomlin, “Breathing New Life into an Old Edifice: A Historical Ethnography of a Vietnamese American Catholic Parish” (PhD diss., University of St. Thomas, 2011), 105–152.

24. Thien-Huong T. Ninh, “Colored Faith: Vietnamese American Catholics Struggle for Equality within Their Multicultural Church,” *Amerasia Journal* 40, no. 1 (2014): 81–96. An example of racialized experience among Vietnamese outside of the Catholic Church is Hoang Vu Nguyen, “Disasters, Settlements and the Homeland: Vietnamese

Marian devotion in the Vietnamese diaspora, including an analysis of racialization within multiculturalism. She especially explores the shift of the visual representation of Our Lady of La Vang that changed from a primarily European-looking representation to a completely Vietnamese one. Ninh argues that this change reflects the Vietnamese Catholic experience of rejection through political discrimination in Vietnam and racialization in America, the latter of which did not allow them to be equal notwithstanding the official rhetoric of multiculturalism.<sup>25</sup>

Scholars in theology and religious studies have also found Marian devotion central to Vietnamese Catholicism. Thao Nguyen has drawn a comparison between Catholic veneration of Mary and Buddhist devotion to Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, concluding that they “share noteworthy similarities in spirituality, religious practices, and ethical application.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Peter Phan has interpreted Mary as a figure of mercy as much as she is a figure of power in the Vietnamese tradition.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, Jonathan Tan employs Catherine Bell’s theory on ritual practice and interpreted this devotion among Asian Americans, including Vietnamese Americans, as part of a strategy to shape their identities in multiracial and multicultural America.<sup>28</sup> Broader in scope and reflecting influences from the social sciences, Linh Hoang has interpreted Vietnamese American Catholics in the context of acculturation and ethnic enclaves among Vietnamese refugees.<sup>29</sup> Most notably, he has called attention to Catholic participation at three protest events in California. Two events occurred in Southern

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American Experiences of White Supremacy in New Orleans” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2017), 77–123.

25. Thien-Huong T. Ninh, *Race, Gender, and Religion in the Vietnamese Diaspora: The New Chosen People* (New York: Palgrave, 2017); and “Global Chain of Marianism: Diasporic Formation among Vietnamese Catholics in the United States and Cambodia,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (Spring 2017): 49–82.

26. Thao Nguyen, SJ, “Quan Am and Mary: Vietnamese Religious, Cultural, and Spiritual Phenomena,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 37 (2017): 191–208. A contemporary development on both figures is Thao Nguyen, SJ, “Inculturation for Mission: The Transformation of the French *Notre-Dame des Victoires* into *Our Lady of La Vang* in Vietnam 1998,” *Missiology: An International Review* 45 (April 2017): 180–190.

27. Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 112–121; and “Mary in Vietnamese Piety and Theology: A Contemporary Perspective,” *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 51 (2001): 457–472. Both works focus on Vietnam rather than America, and the theological and sociological effects of this tradition in the United States are implied rather than explored.

28. Jonathan Y. Tan, “Asian-American Marian Devotions as Ritual Practice,” *New Theology Review* 23 (August 2010): 35–44.

29. Linh N. Hoang, *Rebuilding Religious Experience: Vietnamese Refugees in America* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2007).

California against Vietnamese, including a visiting cardinal, thought to be insensitive to the memories of South Vietnam and sympathetic to the communist government. The third protest was against the bishop of the Diocese of San Jose regarding the reassignment of a popular Vietnamese priest and the larger issue of ethnic Vietnamese parishes.<sup>30</sup> Though short in details, Hoang's attention to these events suggests that they are potentially fruitful starting points to examine some of the complexities of the Vietnamese American Catholic experience.

In comparison to the scholarship in religious studies and the social sciences, the contribution from historians has been negligible. When Vietnamese American Catholics show up at all in studies that employ archival sources, they receive little analysis or none at all.<sup>31</sup> For this reason, it is not a surprise that two major attempts at historicizing their experience thus far have come from a sociologist and a theologian rather than a historian.<sup>32</sup> The bare-bone historical scholarship could be spotted in three general histories about American Catholicism published since the turn of the millennium. One of these books describes Vietnamese American Catholics in only two short paragraphs; the second mentions them twice in passing, and the third does not say anything about them at all.<sup>33</sup> Another example of historical oversight is lack of attention to their devotional practices, which include the annual Marian pilgrimage in the tens of thousands to Carthage, Missouri since 1978. This event has been well noted by national and Catholic media,

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30. Linh Hoang, "Occupying Religious and Cultural Spaces: Vietnamese American Catholics in New Territory," in *Southeast Asian Diaspora in the United States: Memories and Visions Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, ed., Jonathan H. X. Lee (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 143–158. Hoang has also placed Vietnamese Catholics in the context of Asian Americans on issues of racism and generational changes. See Linh Hoang, OFM, "All Look the Same? Asian American Catholics and Racism," *New Theology Review* 21 (February 2008): 18–28; and "The Faith and Practices of Asian American Catholics: Generational Shifts," *New Theology Review* 23 (February 2010): 48–57.

31. Kurt E. Kinbacher, *Urban Villages and Local Identities: Germans from Russia, Omaha Indians, and Vietnamese in Lincoln, Nebraska* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2015), 129–171; and Phuong Tran Nguyen, *Becoming Refugee American: The Politics of Rescue in Little Saigon* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

32. Bankston, "Vietnamese-American Catholicism"; Phan, "Vietnamese Catholics in the United States"; and Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics*. The bulk of Phan's monograph is about cultural and theological aspects in the Vietnamese Catholic tradition, and the sections on refugees and immigrants are brief.

33. They are, respectively, James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); and Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

but it receives nary a mention in a well-received collection about Catholic devotion, including Marian devotion, in twentieth-century America.<sup>34</sup> Or, for a third example, the most important study of the Cursillo movement in the United States does not appear to be aware of Vietnamese American cursillistas, whose membership in the National Cursillo Movement USA has become important enough that the organization's website includes a Vietnamese section in addition to those in English and Spanish.<sup>35</sup> The near-absence of Vietnamese in studies about American Catholicism reflects the general lack of the historical scholarship, depriving scholars and pastors alike an opportunity to dissect important connections such as those between religious practice and political belief. It is a gap that should be filled sooner rather than later.

This survey shows that social scientists and scholars of religious studies have pursued questions appropriate to their academic disciplines and have shed light on several aspects about Vietnamese American Catholics.<sup>36</sup> Yet a lack of historical research has also obscured important aspects of their experience, especially their identity during the initial period of resettlement. Scholars have not studied, for example, the establishment of Vietnamese parishes in the context of self-identification as “exiles” among the refugees. Nor have they considered the persistence of Vietnamese American devotional practices as reinforcement of their political identity. This is not to deny the significance of their racial identity, their encounters with racism, or their racial relations with the American Church. Nonetheless, it was their experience of abrupt loss, separation, and exile that most centrally defined their initial identity in America and most informed the creation of their communities. The remainder of this article explores those forces and presents an historical interpretation of the Catholic refugees according to their experiences of ultramontanist, nationalism, and national loss and family separation.

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34. James M. O'Toole, ed., *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

35. Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Cursillo Movement in America: Catholics, Protestants, and Fourth-Day Spirituality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

36. This review of scholarship excludes literary studies and cultural studies on Vietnamese refugees—including the field of critical refugee studies that has frequently topicalized the experience of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees—because these fields have shown little interest about religion in general and Catholicism in particular. For example, a recent special issue of a major journal of ethnic literary and cultural studies includes ten articles, mostly on Vietnamese refugees, by advocates and supporters of critical refugee studies; but not once does any of the articles (or the introduction) mention the word “Catholic” or “religion.” See *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 41 (Fall 2016), guest edited by Marguerite Nguyen and Catherine Fung.

## The Shaping of an Ultramontane Church

Perhaps the most significant gap in the aforementioned scholarship is the lack of analysis about the legacy of ultramontaniam among Vietnamese American Catholics. Even in studies of Vietnamese Marian devotional practices, this aspect is rarely explored with any historical depth. It is my contention that the ultramontane legacy was crucial in shaping twentieth-century beliefs and practice among Catholics in Vietnam and, subsequently, Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in the United States.

Ultramontaniam was one of two broad movements that reacted to post-Napoleonic upheavals in Europe especially during the nineteenth century. As a Catholic movement, it was first prominent in France in response to Gallicanism. But it also drew enormous support from the clergy and laity in Italy, Germany, and other parts of Europe. Essentially a pro-papacy movement—"ultramontane" literally means "beyond the mountains," a reference to the Vatican on the other side of the French Alps—it sought to reassert and strengthen the authority of the pope. Doctrinally, ultramontane supporters reached their zenith with the dogmatic proclamation of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870. They also sought to confirm and expand papal authority beyond faith and morals and into matters of politics and society. In the words of two historians of European Catholicism, ultramontaniam "came to embody an ideology that took in liturgy, devotion, clerical discipline, theology and extended it to the realm of politics, social action, and culture."<sup>37</sup> One result has been the issuance of teachings in varying forms from modern popes on a host of subjects. Moreover, the ultramontane movement helped to create a post-revolutionary revival of religious institutions, especially religious orders for men and women. Its supporters also promoted pilgrimages and other devotional practices, especially those having to do with the Virgin Mary, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of penance. (Some of the new or revived religious orders indeed drew their appeal from a particular devotion.) Although ultramontaniam did not entirely prevail over Gallicanism in the end, it produced powerful and lasting consequences on Catholic belief and practice in the Catholic world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>38</sup>

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37. Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, *Priests, Prelates and People: A History of European Catholicism since 1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 101–141. The second movement was Romanticism, which was more eclectic and diverse in its reaction to and rejection of eighteenth-century rationalism.

38. The historical literature on ultramontaniam, Catholic revivals, and their effects in Europe and the Americas is considerable. A recent major study is John W. O'Malley,

The scholarship on ultramontanism in nineteenth-century Vietnam is scant due partially to the emphasis on two other subjects in Vietnamese history: anti-Catholic persecution and relations between missionaries and French colonialism. Nonetheless, the evidence presented by historians of Vietnam suggests that European missionaries and Vietnamese Catholics participated in deepening Roman allegiance and faith practices. On popular devotion, missionaries since the seventeenth century had recognized local popular preoccupation with spirit potencies, leading to the popularity of Catholic paraphernalia such as holy water, medals, and crucifixes for the purposes of faith-healing or protection against demons. Later, relics of Vietnamese and European martyrs became prized possessions among the faithful.<sup>39</sup> On matters of doctrine, Vietnamese Catholicism was more varied during the eighteenth century because some communities were oriented towards the Portuguese Jesuits while others to their rivals the Spanish Dominicans or the French missionaries from the *Société des Missions Étrangère de Paris* (MEP). In the late eighteenth century, however, the Dominicans prevailed over the more indigenously oriented Jesuits for overall control of Catholic vicariates in Vietnam. Apostolic vicars began to tighten regulations on matters of dress, preaching, and confession.<sup>40</sup> As a result, the more orthodox Dominicans and MEP missionaries dominated the hierarchical landscape of Vietnamese Catholicism well into the 1930s.<sup>41</sup> Because they were responsible for seminary training, they exerted enormous influence on shaping Vietnamese attitude towards the papacy.

This is not to say that Vietnamese Catholics were merely passive recipients to ultramontanism. To the contrary, they actively partook in the construction of their religious identity, especially by honoring their own heritage of martyrdom and Marian apparitions at La Vang in central Vietnam. Although the Virgin Mary held a doctrinal place in their beliefs since the seventeenth century, there was not yet a

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*Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018).

39. Nola Cooke, "Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Catholics and Others in the Pages of the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*," *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (2004), esp. 275–281. For a broader context of devotional objects in Southeast Asia, see Tara Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500–1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147–155.

40. George E. Dutton, *A Vietnamese Moses: Philiphê Bình and the Geographies of Early Modern Catholicism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 48–59. The dominance of the Dominicans over the Jesuits was a result of Rome siding with the former over the latter.

41. See Cooke, "Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Catholics and Others," 263–275; and Jean Michaud, "French Missionary Expansion in Colonial Upper Tonkin," *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (2004): 287–310.

distinctive Marian cult among Vietnamese Catholics until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The experience of persecution, indeed, contributed crucially to a new devotion to Mary throughout the nineteenth century. In the middle of the century, for example, some Catholics in central Vietnam participated in the Sodality of Our Lady (*Hội Đức Bà*): an activity encouraged by the first missionary bishop of the Archdiocese of Hue. The La Vang devotion grew further after Catholics living near the site were killed by an anticolonial and anti-Catholic movement in the mid-1880s. Not only was a new and larger church constructed at the same site, but a special statue, based on the European representation of Our Lady of Victory, was commissioned. In August 1901, the statue was consecrated during the first Vietnamese Marian festival of the century. In an early sign of popular pilgrimage, an estimated 12,000 Catholics participated in this festival.<sup>43</sup>

The promotion of Our Lady of La Vang was merely one of many outcomes of ultramontane influence and Vietnamese participation and adaptation. As historian Charles Keith has shown in his excellent monograph, “more Vietnamese Catholics also came to perceive their Marianism in a global context” during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>44</sup> They were receptive to the stories about Marian apparitions at Lourdes, and some of the Catholic workers and soldiers who went to Europe to support France during World War I even visited the site before returning to Vietnam. Eucharistic congresses, another feature of European ultramontaniam, also became a popular devotion among Vietnamese Catholics. Between the 1930s and the 1950s, many new sodalities and associations were formed at the parish and national level. One example is the Eucharistic Crusade (*Đạo Bình Thánh Thể*), which had roots in nineteenth-century French Catholicism; another is the League of the Sacred Heart (*Liên Minh Thánh Tâm*), a men’s sodality founded by an ultramontane Jesuit in Quebec in 1883. This new associational culture reflected the direct influence of the Catholic Action movement, which

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42. Before the nineteenth century, theological energy was spent on issues such as ancestor worship and, more broadly, the relationship between Catholicism on the one hand and Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism on the other hand. See Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998); Hung T. Pham, SJ, “Composing a Sacred Space: A Lesson from the *Catechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 46 (Summer 2014): 1–34; and Anh Q. Tran, *Gods, Heroes, and Ancestors: An Interreligious Encounter in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

43. Nguyễn Văn Ngọc, *Linh Địa Lavang* [The Holy Site of La Vang] (Saigon: 1970; reprint Carthage, MO: Nguyệt San Trái Tim Đức Mẹ, 1978), 32–70.

44. Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 173.

also began in nineteenth-century Europe and then received crucial support from several popes in the next century. Thanks to the ultramontane emphasis on papal authority and the Vatican's support for the creation of a national church in Vietnam, Catholic enthusiasm for the papacy was most visible during the annual Papal Day celebration that began in 1929.<sup>45</sup>

During the division of Vietnam, the Catholic associational culture was heavily curtailed in North Vietnam but continued to thrive in South Vietnam and led to a variety of relief and humanitarian activities.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the devotional culture flourished and became integral to the Catholic Action movement in the south. The Legion of Mary (*Đạo Binh Đức Mẹ*), which began in Ireland, was established in Hanoi during the First Indochina War. The popularity of this organization reflected the spread of Catholic Action in Vietnam during late colonialism, especially in South Vietnam. In 1953, the Vietnamese bishops established a national office for Catholic Action. Each of the southern dioceses also created its own office to coordinate and promote activities of various organizations under the Catholic Action umbrella.<sup>47</sup>

Another effect of ultramontanism was the growth of religious vocations. At the turn of the twentieth century, there were already two Vietnamese priests for every European missionary. The ratio grew to about six to one in 1945.<sup>48</sup> Widely respected and honored among the laity and even non-Catholics, female and male religious orders flourished, especially in South Vietnam. The LaSallians, whose educational presence in southern Vietnam goes back to the 1860s, were especially influential in educating middle-class and elite sectors in southern Vietnam.<sup>49</sup> The Canadian Redemptorists first came to Vietnam during the 1920s and grew to more than eighty priests in 1960,

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45. Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 155–176.

46. Van Nguyen-Marshall, “Tools of Empire? Vietnamese Catholics in South Vietnam,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 20, no. 2 (2009): 138–159. A personal account of the church's difficulties in North Vietnam is Lê Đắc Trọng. *Chứng Từ của Một Giám Mục: Những Câu Chuyện về Một Thời* [A Bishop's Testimony: Stories about the Past] (Westminster, CA: Nguyệt San Diễn Đàn Giáo Dân, 2009.)

47. Phan Phát Huân, CSsR, *Việt Nam Giáo Sử: Quyển II (1933–1960)* [History of Vietnamese Catholicism: Volume II, 1933–1960] (Saigon: Cứu Thế Tùng Thư, 1962), 483–518; and *Việt Nam Công Giáo Niên Giám 1964* [Catholic Yearbook of Vietnam, 1964] (Saigon: Sacerdos, 1964).

48. Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 88.

49. Valéry Nguyễn Văn An, FSC, “Tóm Lược Lịch Sử Tỉnh Dòng Lasan Việt Nam, 1866–2016: Giai Đoạn 1954–1975” [Summary of the History of the LaSallians in Vietnam, 1866–2016: The Period 1954–1975]: <http://www.lasan.org/lasan-vietnam/tdvn-1866-2016/tdvn-menu.htm>. The fact that all provincials of the LaSallians were Vietnamese after 1951 illustrates the Vietnamization of the leadership among religious orders during this period.

including sixty-five Vietnamese.<sup>50</sup> After 1954, the dilution of European missionaries and a greater number of seminarians studying abroad led to the introduction of smaller religious institutes, both imported and homegrown, in South Vietnam. One example is the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, founded by the prominent nineteenth-century ultramontane priest Peter Eymard. Thanks to initiatives of younger clergy who received seminary training in France, Switzerland, and the United States, Vietnamese Catholics learned about this congregation and the hierarchy formally welcomed it to South Vietnam in 1970.<sup>51</sup> Last but not least, national division led to the resettlement of the native-founded Congregation of the Mother of the Redeemer from the north to suburban Saigon. Many members would become refugees again in 1975, leading to its current status as the largest religious order of Vietnamese men in the United States.<sup>52</sup>

The Cold War alliance between the United States and South Vietnam also helped to establish and enlarge ties among Catholic institutions between the two countries. As early as 1950, an organization was founded among Vietnamese Catholic students in America.<sup>53</sup> A smaller number of Vietnamese priests and religious also came to the United States for studies or training, including at least a dozen of priests in 1967.<sup>54</sup> In the same year, twelve of the members of the women's religious congregation Sisters of the Rosary arrived in Philadelphia at the invitation of the archbishop, Cardinal John Krol. The nuns became the first Vietnamese congregation to migrate *en masse* to the United States, and most worked at Philadelphia's St. Charles Borromeo Seminary while the rest studied in other parts of

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50. Phan Phát Huân, *Việt Nam Giáo Sử*, 399.

51. "Đôi Dòng Lịch Sử Dòng Thánh Thể Tại Việt Nam" [A Few Sketches of the History of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in Vietnam], *Dân Chúa USA* [People of God, USA] (no date): <http://danchuausa.net/luu/doi-dong-lich-su-dong-thanh-the-tai-viet-nam/>.

52. *Biểu Tượng Đức Tin và Tình Yêu: Testimony of Faith and Love* (Carthage, MO, 1986), 60–71. This bilingual publication commemorates the CMR's thirty-third anniversary.

53. Father Phạm Quang Thúy and Hà Tôn Vinh, "Sự Chuyển Hướng của Hội Sinh Viên Công Giáo Việt Nam tại Mỹ Châu" [The Shift in the Association of Vietnamese Catholic Students in America], *Đặc San Tin Mừng: Giáng Sinh* [Good News: Christmas Edition] (December 1980), 52. This periodical was published on an irregular basis by Cộng Đồng Công Giáo Việt Nam Miền Trung Đông Hoa Kỳ [The Vietnamese Catholic Community of the Northeast, USA].

54. "Preliminary Directory of Foreign Priests Studying in the United States," Folder "Education: Foreign Students, 1967–1972," Box 66, USCC Records, American Catholic History Research Center, Catholic University of America. One of these priests, Dominic Luong, became the first Vietnamese American bishop in 2003.

Pennsylvania or New York.<sup>55</sup> One result was the formation of the Community of Clergy and Religious in [North] America (*Cộng Đồng Tu Sĩ Việt Nam Tại Mỹ Châu*) in 1970. With the influx of refugees five years later, its membership rose to 165 priests and nearly 400 non-ordained religious and seminarians in 1977. Two-thirds of the priests were between thirty and forty-five years old, and another 25 percent were fifty-five years old or younger. It was a coincidence of history that the relatively youthful age of priests, religious, and seminarians would play a crucial role in the formation of Catholic communities during the first years of resettlement.<sup>56</sup>

### The Growth of an Anticommunist Nationalism

The devotional and associational culture in South Vietnam not only reflected the legacy of ultramontanism, but it also revealed an emphatic anticommunist nationalism among Vietnamese Catholics. Similar to other Vietnamese, twentieth-century Catholics embraced the concept that they share the same nation as well as a Vietnamese “national essence” rooted in millennia of history and distinct from all others, including China.<sup>57</sup> The propagation of nationalism came from a host of factors, especially anticolonial activities in which a number of Catholics lent support. Several Vietnamese priests, for example, participated in the most important anticolonial network during the 1900s, and at least four were arrested and sent to prison.<sup>58</sup> The nationalist cause also received a key assist from the Vatican, which, in Charles Keith’s description, sought to “form a better-educated and more self-sufficient clergy and laity in non-European churches in order to forge closer, more

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55. “Đòng Chị Em Con Đức Mẹ Mân Côi—Chí Hòa” [The Sisters of the Rosary in Chí Hòa], in *Kỷ Yếu các Hội Dòng Tân Hiến & các Tu Đoàn Tông Đồ Việt Nam* [Yearbook of Vietnamese Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life], 311–314. I have not been able to locate the relevant information about this book, but a scan of this chapter is on the website of the organization Liên Hiệp Bề Trên Thượng Cấp Việt Nam [Federation of Vietnamese Superiors]: <http://www.betrenthuongcap.net/dong-chi-em-con-duc-me-man-coi-chi-hoa-fmsr.html>.

56. The estimate of religious comes from Father Việt Châu, “Giáo Hội Việt Nam Hôm Nay” [The Vietnamese Church Today], *DC* [People of God] 1 (February 1977), 23. See also Trần Phúc Long, “Đại Hội Linh Mục và Tu Sĩ Việt Nam tại Washington DC” [Convention of Vietnamese Priests and Religious in Washington, DC], *TTĐM* 10 (October 1978): 22. The figures of priests come from Nguyen Van Tinh, “The Vietnamese Priests in USA,” November 3, 1977, 2–3, Folder “NCBB: Ad Hoc Committee: Migration and Tourism: Vietnamese Priests: Nguyen Van Tinh 1976–1977,” Box 46, NCCB Records, American Catholic History Research Center, Catholic University of America.

57. The scholarship on Vietnamese nationalism is voluminous, including Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

58. Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 1–2.

direct ties between these churches and the Vatican.”<sup>59</sup> The movement towards an independent national church reflected the Vatican’s ultramontane goal of centralization and culminated in the change of status of Vietnam’s mission vicariates to dioceses in 1960.

In addition, the advocacy of nationalism was pronounced in the Vietnamese press, including the Catholic press. With roots in mission publishing, this press promoted church teachings and devotional and associational culture and became an active participant in national issues such as the use of the Latinized new script. Notably, the Catholic press was among the first groups, if not the first, to have attacked communism. During the 1920s and 1930s, it portrayed the communists to be anti-religious in general and anti-Catholic in particular.<sup>60</sup> In the 1940s and early 1950s, revolutionary events furthered the divide between Catholics and communists. Some Catholics favored the anticolonial movement led by Hồ Chí Minh, who actively courted their support during 1945–1946. Nonetheless, communist success in eliminating noncommunist rivals during the same period sharpened suspicion and opposition among the Catholic leaders. As a result, Catholic support for Hồ was mixed at best during the late 1940s and waned completely by the early 1950s. At one Catholic stronghold in northern Vietnam, the bishop and his flock even organized armed defense against potential communist attacks and infiltration.<sup>61</sup>

The migration of northern Catholics in 1954–1955 was the most dramatic illustration of Catholic anticommunism in twentieth-century Vietnam. Led by parish priests and transported largely by the U.S. Navy, this migration depleted the Catholic population in the north but crucially enhanced the critical mass of anticommunists in the south for the next twenty years. Recent scholarship has shown that Catholic opinions on communism and the Americanization of the Vietnam War were more varied than had been assumed previously.<sup>62</sup> Even some of

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59. Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 12.

60. See David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 82–88; and Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 125–146. Even a rare left-leaning Catholic during colonialism advocated for both nationalism and devotionalism; see Phillippe M. F. Peycam, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon 1916–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 208–209.

61. Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam Giáo Sử*, 17–84; and Đoàn Độc Thư and Xuân Huy, *Giám Mục Lê Hữu Từ & Phát Diệm 1945–1954* [Bishop Le Huu Tu and Phat Diem, 1945–1954] (N.p.: Sử Liệu Hiện Đại, 1973).

62. See Peter Hansen, “Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954–1959,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4 (Fall 2009): 173–211; Trần Thị Liên, “The Challenge for Peace within South Vietnam’s Catholic Community: A History of Activism,” *Peace & Change* 38 (October 2013): 446–473; and Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox, “Existentialism and Intellectual Culture in South Vietnam,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 73 (May 2014): 377–395.

the northern Catholic refugees had difficulties with the government of the devout and anticommunist Catholic President Ngô Đình Diệm.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, northern émigrés led most Catholic media and organizations in the south and were dependably vocal against communism during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>64</sup>

Marian devotion, indeed, became a significant venue for Catholics to articulate and symbolize their anticommunist nationalism. In 1961, for example, Ngô Đình Thục, older brother of President Diệm and new archbishop of Hue, organized and headlined a massive pilgrimage to the holy site of La Vang for six days. The event saw the formal participation of civil and military organizations in addition to Catholic ones, and it showed many anticommunist messages through banners, homilies, and other forms. It also showcased Thục's ambition to turn La Vang into a national Marian center on par with Lourdes or Fatima.<sup>65</sup> This desire reflected the popularity of Our Lady of Fatima, who exercised an especially powerful hold on the spiritual imagination of the faithful, including their anticommunist mindset. During 1965 through 1967, a national tour of one of the consecrated statues of Our Lady of Fatima came to Saigon under the sponsorship of the U.S.-founded international organization, the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima. The tour was scheduled for three months but went on for over two years due to its popularity among the faithful.<sup>66</sup> As it happened, this same statue was brought to the United States in 1984 for Catholic refugees attending the annual Marian festival in central Missouri, symbolizing

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63. While Diệm and the northern Catholic refugees shared an ideological opposition to communism, they sometimes differed on specific anticommunist programs or the position of the refugees in southern society and politics. See Phi Vân Nguyen, "Fighting the First Indochina War Again? Catholic Refugees in South Vietnam, 1954–59," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 31, no. 1 (2016): 207–246.

64. Even when discussing problems among Catholics in South Vietnam, researchers tend to confirm their fervent anticommunism. See Hansen, "Bắc Di Cư"; Nguyen, "Fighting the First Indochina War Again?"; and Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 300–301.

65. Details of the pilgrimage are reported in several articles in *Đức Mẹ Lavang* [Our Lady of La Vang] 2 (September 1961), whose publisher was the Archdiocese of Hue. One of the articles—Phạm Đình Khiêm, "Đó Là Đại Hội Lavang 1961 Nơi Kết Tinh Tinh Thần Lộ Đức và Fatima" [That was the Pilgrimage of La Vang 1961: Site of Spiritual Ties to Lourdes and Fatima]—reflects the intended association of the Vietnamese site to the European sites.

66. See the documentary *Mẹ Thánh Du Việt Nam* [Our Lady's Tour of Vietnam], whose footages from the 1960s were compiled and distributed by the Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Carthage, MO: n.d.) It is widely available on YouTube and other social media.

the identification among the refugees to the devotional and anticommunist Church in South Vietnam.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Impact of the Fall of Saigon**

Given this background of anticommunism and nationalism, the fall of Saigon was a complete shock and devastation to the majority of Catholics in South Vietnam. The event was well covered in international media and appeared frequently in political discourse in the United States. But it is only recently that academic scholarship has analyzed the profound effects of national loss on the part of anticommunist Vietnamese, including those who fled since 1975.<sup>68</sup> The shock came for two reasons. Having fought the communists for years, anticommunist South Vietnamese did not anticipate at all that the communists could claim total victory after a little more than four months of fighting. (North Vietnam itself had planned for a two-year campaign.) Second, they could not accept the fact that Dương Văn Minh, the last president of South Vietnam, announced unconditional surrender and ordered their own military to lay down all arms. It was not only the fall of Saigon but also the manner in which it fell that proved shocking and devastating.<sup>69</sup>

Like non-Catholic refugees, the Catholics found the loss of South Vietnam painful and haunting on multiple levels. The anguish caused them to strike in different directions and place the blame of loss on friends and foes alike. On the second anniversary of the fall of Saigon, *Dân Chúa* editorialized that “the horrifying death” of South Vietnam was caused by “the allies of Vietnam, the leaders of [South] Vietnam, and the bloody hands of international Communism.” It accused the United States of having given up on South Vietnam when it signed the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. It blamed President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and the “military clique” for corruption and governing ills, and President Dương Văn Minh for declaring unconditional surrender. Most forcefully, it condemned Hồ Chí Minh and the communists for

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67. Mark B., “Hương Về 30 Năm Thánh Tượng Mẹ Fatima Ở Với Đoàn Con Đồng Công tại Đền Thánh Khiết Tâm Mẹ, Carthage, Missouri” [Looking Back at Thirty Years Ago: Our Lady of Fatima with Her Children of the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemtrix at the Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary] (August 2013): <http://www.xuanha.net/CMC/Huongve30namThanhtuongMeFatima-carthage.htm>.

68. The most detailed analysis of the impact of the fall of Saigon on anticommunist refugees is Tuan Hoang, “From Reeducation Camps to Little Saigons: Historicizing Vietnamese Diasporic Anticommunism,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11 (Summer 2016): 43–95.

69. Hoang, “From Reeducation Camps to Little Saigons,” 59–66.

“working with Moscow to imprison Indochina.”<sup>70</sup> The editorial is probably correct in attributing national loss to more than one reason. But its sharp tone and angry language reveal the still grievous experience caused by the stunning events two years earlier.

Besides the humiliation of national loss, Catholic refugees suffered over family separation and the complete uncertainty about seeing them again. “It has been 365 days since the day of national loss,” wrote a Catholic refugee in California on the first anniversary of the fall of Saigon, “[today we are] silent because we remember our wives, husbands, children, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, grandchildren, extended relatives, friends, and neighbors on our old street.”<sup>71</sup> Virtually all refugees were affected by family separation, and the first issue of *Dân Chúa* readily acknowledged the centrality of this experience by listing “Family Reunion” alongside “The Church in Vietnam Today” as two headings on the cover. The magazine often provided information and updates regarding legal and political means to advocate for family reunion. Like *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* and other refugee publications, it often included a section of ads for Vietnamese looking for their relatives and friends. The pain of separation was worsened by the uncertainty about reunion in the future. Given the difficulty in communication and the lack of formal diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam, few if any refugees had an idea on when they would be reunited with their families. Although no one entertained the possibility of returning to Vietnam, family separation constantly kept Vietnam in their minds while they tried to focus on adjusting to their lives in America.

Out of the abruptness of national loss and separation, the Catholic refugees were shocked, bitter, and depressed. As noted in a report to the USCCB, for example, some of the refugee priests could not adjust “because they are shocked by the loss of contact to the country and church of Vietnam.”<sup>72</sup> Neither the refugee clergy nor laity desire assimilation at all. Instead, they assumed an exilic identity and referred to themselves to be travelers “on the road of exile” (*trên đường tha hương*). This position reflected the belief that they belonged to a noncommunist and postcolonial Vietnamese nation, not to another

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70. “Kỷ Niệm Hai Năm Quốc Hận: Phục Sinh Việt Nam” [Second Anniversary of the National Humiliation: Vietnam Reborn], *DC* 3 (April 1977), iii.

71. Thế Linh, “30/4 Nên Làm Gì?” [April 30: What to Do?], *Tin Yêu* [Faith & Love] 3–4 (1976): 20. This periodical was published by the chaplain to the Catholic community in Washington, DC. Another priest served as editor but most contributors were lay Catholics. It was short-lived like the majority of periodicals and newsletters published by refugees in the 1970s, ceasing publication when the chaplain was reassigned the following year.

72. Nguyen Van Tinh, “The Vietnamese Priests in USA,” 6.

country such as the United States. Now that this nation had disappeared completely, they were left to cope with the pain of loss by doubling down on their ultramontane and nationalist beliefs.

### **The Making of an Exilic Identity in America**

Some Catholic refugees underscored their situation by comparing it to Biblical stories of exile. The first issue of *Dân Chúa*, for example, shows on its front cover a statue of the Madonna and child with Asian facial features rather than the much more common European features found in most Marian representations at the time. The statue had been made in Vietnam and was evacuated to America by a refugee family during the fall of Saigon. The magazine called the statue “the Vietnamese Refugee Madonna” as a way to “commemorate the urgent refugee experience of Jesus, Our Lady, and Saint Joseph from Bethlehem to Egypt two thousand years ago and, simultaneously, to reflect upon the painful refugee experience [caused by] political change in South Vietnam during April 1975.”<sup>73</sup> *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* not only compared the situation of the Catholic refugees to the exile of the Israelites in Babylon, but also interpreted their situation as continuation to the movement of northern Catholics to southern Vietnam in 1954–1955. “Twice in our lives we have been refugees,” states a devotional essay, “and we don’t know whether we’ll be refugees again before our final departure [from earth].”<sup>74</sup> Elsewhere, an editorial from the Catholic community in Washington, DC echoed the anguish caused by loss and uncertainty. Calling the fall of Saigon a “nightmare” and “tragedy,” it raised the horrifying possibility that the refugees may be “forever” separated from their “beloved country.” It further acknowledged the “lonely isolation” among the refugees in the “vastly different” United States with its “non-spiritual civilization” and the “insanely speedy routines of this mechanical society.”<sup>75</sup> Having no choice but to live in America, the Catholic refugees found their new society alien in many respects. The difficult realities reinforced their self-identification as, again, a people traveling “on the road of exile.”

Specifically, the Vietnamese Catholics coped with national loss and familial separation by holding closely to their ultramontane, nationalist, and anticommunist convictions. This phenomenon could be discerned in the first issue of *Dân Chúa*, whose editorial likens the situation of the refugees to “a large conference” on how Vietnamese

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73. The note of explanation appears on the inside front cover of *DC* 1 (February 1977).

74. Father Hồng Phúc, “Đức Mẹ Người Di Cư” [Our Lady the Refugee], *TTDM* 28 (April 1980): 3.

75. “Quan Điểm” [Opinion], *Tin Yêu* 3–4 (1976): 1.

should live in America. The editorial presents the magazine as “a voice among Vietnamese Christians” at this conference. It also offers a firm commitment to three basic goals for the refugees: to “improve [our] material life”; to “maintain and develop the nationalist spirit”; and to “develop the spiritual life.”<sup>76</sup> While the magazine acknowledged the immediate task of economic survival and societal adjustment, it insisted upon the necessity of clinging to a fixed and essentialized identity of Vietnamese nationalism.

Following this commitment, *Dân Chúa* and also *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* consistently affirmed the South Vietnamese interpretation of Vietnamese nationalism. Both magazines published many articles and columns on Vietnamese history, literature, and culture emphasizing the uniqueness of the Vietnamese people and the pride in their “national essence.” They repeated and reflected on the vocabulary, concepts, ideas, motifs, and tropes about the noncommunist Vietnamese nation, which were modern but also essentialist. The first issue of *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ*, for example, began a series on folk poetry on the beauty and essence of the Vietnamese civilization. Written by the CMR priest Đoàn Quang, the essays in this series say little about Catholicism but, instead, feature a different topic on ethnic particularization each month: Vietnamese self-sufficiency, bravery among Vietnamese men, virtue among Vietnamese women, and so on. After this series ended, the magazine published a second series on folk poetry by Chu Quang Minh, another CMR priest, this time on the subject of “Vietnamese men and women.” Like its predecessor, the series affirms and explains a host of Vietnamese values such as marital fidelity and filial obedience.<sup>77</sup> These series and similar publications indicate that the refugees found it pressing to hold on to Vietnamese essentialism because they saw themselves having to live in an individualistic society and contend with family separation. This experience confirmed and enhanced their exilic self-identification.

Starting with the fourth issue, the CMR magazine also featured a long-running series about Vietnamese history. The columnist, Tăng Xuân An, had been a high school teacher in Saigon and now wrote about historic events, dynastic heroes, and anticolonial patriots. The following

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76. “Đôi Lời Trân Trọng” [A Few Respectful Words], *DC* 1 (February 1977). Like most editorials in this journal, it appears on the unnumbered inside front cover.

77. The first article of the first series is Đoàn Quang, “Đi Vào Kho Tàng Văn Chương Bình Dân Việt Nam” [Exploring the Riches of Vietnamese Popular Literature], *TTDM* 1 (December 1977): 30–31. The second series begins with Chu Quang Minh, “Trai Gái Việt qua Ca Dao” [Vietnamese Men and Women through Folk Poetry], *TTDM* 16 (April 1979): 30–31. The second series later changed from “folk poetry” to “literature” [*thơ văn*].

year, An began a second series on national landmarks that celebrated Vietnamese geography.<sup>78</sup> Like other ethnic publications, the magazine applauded and essentialized the beauty of the Vietnamese long dress, the *áo dài*, a creation during colonialism that became the second most popular national symbol (after the flag) in the Republic of Vietnam. A different column on modern Vietnamese women even asserted that the long dress is appropriate to “only our Vietnamese women” for conveying “gentility, grace, and attractiveness,” and “it does not look good when Western women wear it.”<sup>79</sup> The subjects of these series and columns varied, but all of them insisted on the distinctiveness of Vietnamese culture: a common assertion in nationalist discourse.

This attitude was shared by other contributors, including Cao Thế Dung, a lay teacher and writer in South Vietnam. One of Dung’s essays, for example, challenges the notion that Vietnamese should have an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the technological advancement of Americans and Soviets. This view, it states, “is mistaken because it fails... to distinguish between technological developments and [other] completely different activities in the history of human civilization.”<sup>80</sup> That is, technology alone does not define cultural or national identity. Dung had lost his important position in Vietnam, but he would not shy away from his ethnic and nationalist beliefs. Indeed, his posture reflected the same position made by noncommunist nationalists in South Vietnam during the 1960s and early 1970s, who defended native values against the encroachment of American cultural and political influence.<sup>81</sup> Now that the challenge came from the very society that housed these nationalists, Dung’s message of standing up for Vietnamese essentialism sounded more urgent and more desperate than before.

Beneath the anguish over “losing South Vietnam” was a fear of losing the memories related to the nationalist identity during exile in America. Writing also for *Dân Chúa*, Cao Thế Dung authored a series

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78. Tăng Xuân An’s first series began with “Trang Sử Việt Oai Hùng” [Glorious Vietnamese History], *TTĐM* 4 (April 1978): 27–29; and the second with “Vịnh Hạ Long: Kỳ Quan Thứ Tám” [The Halong Bay: The Eighth Wonder] *TTĐM* 14 (February 1979): 28–29.

79. Lê Thu, “Áo Dài Việt Nam” [The Vietnamese Long Dress], *TTĐM* 14 (February 1979): 18.

80. Cao Thế Dung, “Từ Tình Yêu đến Hôn Nhân” [From Romance to Marriage], *TTĐM* 6 (June 1978): 19.

81. Two examples of South Vietnamese defense against American influences are Olga Dror, “Raising Vietnamese: War and Youth in the South in the early 1970s,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 44 (February 2013): 74–99; and Nu-Anh Tran, “South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper *Chính Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965–1969,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1 (Fall 2006): 169–209.

on particular sites in the old country as if to remind his co-religious refugees that they could not be anything other than Vietnamese. “When will we, if ever,” asks the opening essay of this series, “visit our homeland?” The question assumes the inseparable identity as much as it conveys desire for reunion. Dung opens by evoking a reverse journey: “Imagine that we have purchased tickets on Pan Am, flying to Guam . . . then to Subic Bay [in the Philippines] . . . then board the ship God of Dreams to visit our motherland.”<sup>82</sup> During this imaginary visit, the refugees would consume local food and visit families of Catholic fishermen in the southern coast and delta. Subsequent essays followed the same pattern of mixing facts and fantasy. Revealing the agony over loss and separation, these dream sequences also insist upon the centrality and irreplaceability of identity belonging to the Vietnamese nation among the readers.

At times, the monthlies also showed ambivalence among the refugees towards assimilation and adaptation in the United States. Some writers evoked an outright fear of “losing roots” (*mất giống*). “How much Americanized,” a priest-author asks pointedly, “have you been?” The author expressed empathy to his fellow refugees on the desire to get better acquainted with American society. Yet he insisted repeatedly that they must keep their “national customs” and “family ethics” such as respect for parents and hierarchy, and they must speak Vietnamese to their children.<sup>83</sup> Some articles went so far as to discourage romantic relationships between Vietnamese women and American men, arguing that the two cultures are too incompatible for such unions to end up well. A story in *Dân Chúa*, for example, tells of an American high school student who fell in love with a Vietnamese girl in Texas. But he eventually enlisted in the navy because she liked him but obeyed her parents and stopped seeing him. The Vietnamese teenager was heartbroken when he left, but she also underscored their differences by calling herself “a daughter of the Mother of Vietnam.” Having lost her homeland, she was determined to live “my lifestyle and traditional customs to demonstrate that I am still one of Mother’s beloved daughters.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, adaptation should take second place to unconditional loyalty to Vietnam and Vietnamese “essential” values. As a visual reminder of the need to inculcate this loyalty, both *Dân Chúa* and *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* included a regular feature called, respectively, “The Vietnamese Family” (*Gia Đình Lạc Việt*) and “The Fatima

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82. Cao Thế Dung, “Quê Hương Yêu Dấu” [Beloved Country], *DC* 3 (April 1977): 15.

83. Father Trần Bình Trọng, “Bạn Đã Mỹ Hóa tới Mức Độ Nào?” [How Americanized Have You Been?], *DC* 11–12 (December 1977): 36.

84. Văn Vi Trần, “Mẹ Việt Nam, Con Sẽ Là Con của Mẹ Mãi Mãi” [Mother Vietnam: I Shall Be Your Daughter Forever], *DC* 26 (March 1979): 24.

Family.” These features published small portraits of refugee school children sent by their parents throughout the United States. *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* asked the young members to say a Hail Mary each day “for the Vietnamese country.” *Dân Chúa* went a step further to include short “lessons” about Vietnamese history or values such as studiousness and filial obedience. Like other refugee publications, both magazines exhorted parents to speak Vietnamese with their children and teach them to read and write the language.

In some respects, the fear of losing their ethnic, linguistic, and nationalist identity was a major driving force behind the desire and attempts among the refugees to have their own parishes. Only a few refugee communities were able to begin an ethnic parish during the 1970s, and news of those events were reported with great joy. One example is the establishment of the Queen of the Vietnamese Martyrs Parish in Port Arthur, Texas: the first of its kind in the United States. *Dân Chúa*'s initial report found the news to a “good surprise because for a long time now the American Church has decided not to establish [ethnic] parishes.” If indirectly, it promoted the larger cause of Vietnamese parishes in saying that “the ministry for Vietnamese Catholics [in the Diocese of Beaumont] will be diverse and ethnically valuable in the true spirit of the Second Vatican Council.” To mark the historic event, the magazine even printed the bishop's decree in original English, itself a rare occasion. Since CMR priests staffed this parish, *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* filed occasional reports on this community, including a day-long visit of the next bishop who praised the parishioners for their “love of the family and loyalty to the faith.”<sup>85</sup> Had the bishop added “love of the Vietnamese country,” he would have summarized perfectly their concurrent threefold experience of living an ultramontane faith, enduring family separation, and holding tight to Vietnamese essentialism in the aftermath of national loss.

Besides clinging fiercely to this essentialism, the Catholic refugees continued to assert their anticommunist stand. In fact, they were more distrustful of the Vietnamese communists now than they had been in South Vietnam because Vietnam's postwar economic and political policies drastically harmed the economy and actively discriminated against their families and friends. Especially troubling was the incarceration of family members and friends who had served in the Saigon government and military, and both Catholic monthlies were highly critical of unlawful imprisonment and other violations of human

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85. “Giáo Xứ Việt Nam được Thành Lập” [The First Vietnamese Parish Has Been Established], *DC* 9 (October 1977): 35; “Tin Tức Cộng Đoàn” [Community News], *TTDM* 3 (March 1978): 41. The official date of establishment was March 3, 1977. The name of the parish was changed to Mary Queen of Vietnam in 1983.

rights. They highlighted the incarceration of Catholic and other religious leaders, especially Nguyễn Đức Thuận, the bishop of Đà Nẵng and a nephew of Ngô Đình Diệm. They were equally critical of socialist economic policies that sought to abolish private property. “Instead of raising the standards of living in the North to the level in the South,” states a commentary, “[the government] has lowered the standards in the South by applying the slow-moving ladder from the North.”<sup>86</sup> The subject of family reunions provided a different example of their anticommunist discourse. Even though *Dân Chúa* supported reunions and made it a priority of advocacy, it also voiced opposition to American overtures for closer relations with the Vietnamese government. An article about a visit of American officials to Hanoi in 1977, for instance, acknowledged the harsh realities of family separation. The author even implied a desirability for diplomatic improvements that would lead to more family reunions. Yet he argued that the refugees should not count on closer U.S.-Vietnamese relations for the purpose of reuniting with their families. “[Since] the communists resort to many hooligan tricks,” he wrote, “family reunions will not go smoothly after the establishment of formal diplomatic relations.” Even worse was the possibility that greater relations would lead to the presence of a communist “embassy in Washington, DC then, gradually, consulate offices in cities with a large Vietnamese population.”<sup>87</sup> Having lost their noncommunist republic, the refugees would have been horrified to find their enemies follow them to American soil.

The fear of communist penetration was accompanied and reinforced by passionate and consistent attacks on ideology and practice of Vietnamese communism, especially on the pages of *Dân Chúa*. In 1978, it hired Phạm Kim Vinh, a former military officer and lecturer, to be its in-house political analyst. Vinh frequently pointed out Hanoi’s economic and diplomatic failures to demonstrate the inherent problems of the Vietnamese Communist Party. He also attacked Americans and other Westerners who showed support for normalization with Hanoi. In early 1979, Vinh urged Washington to negotiate with the communist government only under the following conditions: “a full accounting of MIAs, permission for Vietnamese to emigrate, especially those who worked for the United States, or were members of the South Vietnam government, an end to restrictions on human rights, including elimination of the so-called re-education camps, and an end to Hanoi’s

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86. Quan Sát Viên, “Kinh Tế Việt Nam sau 5 Năm Giải Phóng” [The Vietnamese Economy after Five Years of Liberation], *TTĐM* 28 (April 1980): 29. The writer’s pseudonym means “observer.”

87. Minh Châu, “Tiên Đoán Hậu Quả Bang Giao Việt Nam” [Predicting the Consequences of Diplomatic Relations with Vietnam], *DC* 3 (April 1977): 10–11.

support of communist insurgencies” in Southeast Asia.<sup>88</sup> Vinh’s fear of normalization was somewhat far-fetched because it could not have occurred during the Carter Administration for a host of reasons.<sup>89</sup> His fear, however, was not unfounded when juxtaposed to the experience among the refugees since the fall of Saigon.

Besides opposition to communism in print, Catholic refugees employed the liturgy and devotional practice to express their political stand. In 1978, for example, *Dân Chúa* reported that an estimated 500 Catholics in southern California gathered at a parish in Long Beach on the eve of the third anniversary of the fall of Saigon. The refugees began with a mass then took turns participating in Eucharistic adoration until the next morning. That afternoon, another 700 Catholic refugees gathered in Burbank for a procession centered on the adoration of the cross. The procession featured representatives of seven Catholic communities taking turns to carry a heavy cross, which became a symbol of grief and agony caused by the events of “black April” (*tháng tư đen*).<sup>90</sup> During 1976–1978, the refugees in the Archdiocese of New Orleans had a large gathering each year to commemorate the fall of Saigon. Perhaps due to size or convenience, they decided in 1979 to hold separate masses and ceremonies at the parish level. The Woodland community organized a special gathering in addition to the mass. In his speech, the principal speaker denounced the postwar policies of the Vietnamese government and invited support for the rescue of the boat people. He also called for economic “self-reliance” and “reduction” of dependence on governmental welfare programs so to “demonstrate that Vietnamese refugees are not a burden” to American society.<sup>91</sup>

Commemorative masses and anticommunist processions were merely two practices within a larger devotional culture among the refugees. This culture replicated the long-standing ultramontane devotional culture, albeit with additions and revisions to reflect the recent experience of loss and separation. On May 31, 1975, or one month after the fall of Saigon, over 7000 people participated in a Marian procession at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas. The reality that there was not much to do while waiting for resettlement should not obscure the fact that the procession featured the aforementioned and emotionally laden

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88. Phạm Kim Vinh, “Why Such a Hysterical Hurry to Talk to Hanoi’s Murderers?” *DC* 24 (January 1979): 43. Several of Vinh’s articles, including this one, were published in English.

89. See Cécile Menétrey-Monchau, *American-Vietnamese Relations in the Wake of War: Diplomacy After the Capture of Saigon, 1975–1979* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006).

90. “Tin Cộng Đoàn” [Community News], *TTDM* 7 (July 1978): 36–37.

91. “Ngày Quốc Hận của Tổng Giáo Phận New Orleans” [Day of National Loss in the Archdiocese of New Orleans], *DC* 29 (June 1979): 38–39.

statue Our Lady of Vietnam the Refugee.<sup>92</sup> It was probably the first major procession of its kind among the Catholic refugees in America. In December 1976, a Marian procession in Fort Smith drew about 400 refugees, including some driving from Oklahoma City and Grannis, Arkansas: the latter a site of resettlement for many refugees who found work in the poultry processing industry. The participants walked for miles then had a mass led by three Vietnamese priests assigned to the communities in Arkansas.<sup>93</sup> In October 1977, the Sisters of the Rosary, who had been incorporated into the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, organized a special procession at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. They flew in the statue of Our Lady of Vietnam the Refugee from New Orleans for this event with some 600 refugees in participation.<sup>94</sup>

A full account of public devotion awaits future researchers, but such evidence indicates that it was common among large and medium-sized refugee communities during the 1970s and 1980s. Even the small refugee community in the Diocese of Peoria conducted a Eucharistic procession on Christ the King Sunday notwithstanding the forecast of a snowstorm.<sup>95</sup> The two monthlies reported on these events and strongly advocated for more. Both published many articles, usually authored by priests and religious, about the history of Eucharistic adoration, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, devotion to the Vietnamese martyrs, and Marian devotion, especially on the rosary. In particular, *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* considered its central mission to promote the devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. It created, for example, a national network of refugee membership to the small Marian shrine on the CMR campus in Missouri and constantly promoted this membership on its pages.

Marian pilgrimages also became a common practice among the Catholic refugees during their first few years in America.<sup>96</sup> A number of priests and religious took advantage of proximity to well-established Marian sites in several different states and organized pilgrimages among their co-ethnics. During the summer of 1976 and under the sponsorship of Vietnamese Redemptorists, Catholic refugees in the Northwest participated in a pilgrimage at the National Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother in Portland. The event was the first of an annual

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92. “Đức Mẹ Việt Nam Tị Nạn” [Our Lady of Vietnam the Refugee], *DC* 9 (October 1977): 4.

93. Cao Thăng, “Đi Thăm Các Cộng Đoàn Công Giáo Việt Nam” [Visiting Vietnamese Catholic Communities], *DC* 1 (February 1977): 24.

94. “Sinh Hoạt” [Activities], *DC* 10 (November 1977): 35.

95. “Các Cộng Đoàn” [Communities] *TTDM* 2 (February 1978): 39.

96. Trần, “Lộ Đức 1977” [Lourdes in 1977], *DC* 8 (September 1977): 13–15. This narrative is written in the form of a letter and signed with only the first name of the author as if it were sent to a friend in the United States.

pilgrimage that has continued to this day and culminated in a “Freedom Mass.”<sup>97</sup> In 1977, a refugee seminarian at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland organized the first pilgrimage to the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes among Catholics in the Diocese of Harrisburg. Three years later, the annual pilgrimage became a regional event with participation of refugees from several dioceses and archdioceses in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland.<sup>98</sup> The site of the largest annual pilgrimage, however, was not an already established site but completely a product of the refugees: the Marian Days at the CMR campus in Carthage, Missouri. From a one-day event in the summer of 1978, this event has grown into the largest annual pilgrimage among *all* Catholics in the United States today.<sup>99</sup>



The first annual Vietnamese pilgrimage to the National Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother, The Grotto, July 1976. Photo courtesy of Our Lady of La Vang Parish, Portland, OR

97. “Freedom Mass: Refugees Celebrate This Gift from God,” *Catholic Sentinel* (July 6, 2011): <http://www.sentinel.org/Content/News/Local/Article/Freedom-Mass-Refugees-celebrate-this-gift-from-God/2/35/15534>. The second annual pilgrimage is noted in “Các Cộng Đoàn” [Communities], *DC* 7 (August 1977): 37.

98. “Sinh Hoạt Cộng Đoàn” [Community Activities], *TTDM* 8 (August 1978): 20–21; and “Phóng Sự Ngày Hành Hương Đền Núi Đức Mẹ Lộ Đức, Emmittsburg (sic), MD, 2016” [Report on the 2016 Pilgrimage to the Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in Emmitsburg]: [http://www.liendoanconggiao.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5725:phong-su-ngay-hanh-huong-den-nui-duc-me-lo-duc-emmittsburg-md-2016&catid=85:tin-tuc-thong-bao&Itemid=375](http://www.liendoanconggiao.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5725:phong-su-ngay-hanh-huong-den-nui-duc-me-lo-duc-emmittsburg-md-2016&catid=85:tin-tuc-thong-bao&Itemid=375). At one time, there was a discussion on moving the annual pilgrimage to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, but the Emmitsburg site was retained because it was a more central location than Washington, DC.

99. Thành Tín, “Sinh Hoạt Cộng Đoàn” [Community Activities], *TTDM* 7 (July 1978): 20–22; and “Marian Days,” Carthage, Missouri Convention and Visitor’s Bureau: <https://visit-carthage.com/cvb-event/marian-days-2016/>.

Although priests and religious usually organized processions and pilgrimages during the first years in America, lay organizations were crucial for any successful outcome. Here, too, the refugees replicated their well-formed associational culture rooted in the ultramontane and Catholic Action legacy. While initial organization focused on liturgical groups such as the choir, it did not take very long for former members of the Legion of Mary, the Eucharistic Youth (*Thiếu Nhi Thánh Thể*), and other sodalities to meet and begin a reconstitution in America. Formalized with banners, uniforms, rosaries, and other symbols, their presence during processions and other devotional events was integral to the regular ritualization in their community. It took longer for the re-formation of the Cursillo movement, but by 1979 some fifty former members of the movement, mostly in Louisiana and California, had re-organized this movement among themselves. They worked with the Cursillo movement in the United States towards creating a national network of refugee cursillistas. The collaboration resulted in the first Vietnamese retreat at the national Cursillo Training Center in Louisiana in 1981.<sup>100</sup>



Flower girls who performed May Crowning and other liturgical functions, 1976.  
Photo courtesy of Our Lady of La Vang Parish, Portland, OR

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100. Tam Đa, “Sinh Hoạt Cộng Đoàn” [Community Activities], *DC* 27 (April 1979): 39; and “Khóa Cursillos Đầu Tiên của Người Công Giáo Việt Nam tại Hoa Kỳ” [The First Cursillo Retreat of Vietnamese in the United States] *Liên Đoàn* 4 (November 20, 1981): 6. The international character of the movement is best examined in Nabhan-Warren, *The Cursillo Movement in America*.

One other legacy of ultramontanist among the Catholic refugees was a heavy emphasis on obedience to papal authority and church teachings. This attitude was already in place in South Vietnam thanks to the entrenched hierarchical structure of the church, the stress on obedience to ecclesiastical authority, the Vatican's historical support for the national church, and other reasons. Yet one should not underestimate the additional impact coming from the refugees' experience of national loss and family separation. As noted previously, the refugees were critical of their former government. They were also skeptical of Washington and were outright critical of "American abandonment" of South Vietnam. Moreover, they found American culture and society confusing and challenging to their more conservative sensibilities regarding personal and group behavior.

Living an exilic Catholicism, the refugees were ambivalent about the American society on top of their loss of trust in secular authorities, especially the governments of the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, and the postwar Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This combination contributed to a greater attachment that the refugee clergy, religious, and laity placed on ecclesiastical authority, especially the papacy. A number of articles, columns, and homilies in *Dân Chúa* and *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* stress the validity of church laws, the requirement to adhere to them, and the threat of sin for disobeying them. Reflecting post-Vatican II controversies and debates over sexual ethics, the very first article in the first issue of *Dân Chúa* is critical, if in passing, against the acceptance of artificial birth control by the American priest Andrew Greeley.<sup>101</sup> The next issue carries three related items about church teachings on this subject: an overview that quotes *Humanae Vitae* at length; a monthly Q&A column that focuses entirely on contraception and abortion; and an article promoting the Billings Method. The last item argues that the Billings Method, a natural birth control method endorsed by the Vatican in place of artificial contraception, "is the most recent one, is not hazardous to health, does not cost money, does not require a specialist physician, and most of all it is not against Church laws."<sup>102</sup> During the following year, papal authority was favorably evoked on a very different matter: the Vatican's discipline of the dissident traditionalist French Archbishop Marcel

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101. Father Phạm Văn Tuệ, "Nhìn và Phân Biệt" [Examine and Distinguish], *DC* 1 (February 1977): 1.

102. Cecilia Phương Khánh, "Điều Hòa Sinh Sản theo Phương Pháp Billings" [Birth Control According to the Billings Method], *DC* 2 (March 1977): 4. Also known as the Billings Ovulation Method, this method was named after the Australian physician John Billings. Supporters argued that it was more accurate than other natural contraception methods, including the cycle-based rhythm method.

Lefebvre. Giving an account and a timetable about the controversy, both monthlies were critical of the archbishop's disobedience and sided squarely with the Vatican's position.<sup>103</sup> *Dân Chúa* also reported on the refugee priest Trần Văn Khoát, who led a flock of refugees to the Diocese of Beaumont in 1975 but broke away to form his own community and join Lefebvre's traditionalist Society of St. Pius X. The magazine completely supported the position of the diocesan bishop by printing his letter to Father Khoát and voiced loud criticism against the priest for causing confusion among the faithful.<sup>104</sup>

Papal authority also served as a source of solace to the Catholic refugees. Given the challenges posed by the postwar regime to the Vietnamese church, they found the Vatican to be the most reliable source of official support. Both magazines included monthly columns on news and updates from the global church and the Vatican. Sometimes, there were translations of addresses from or features about Paul VI and John Paul II regarding matters relevant to the church in Vietnam, the growing crisis of the boat people in Southeast Asia, and Catholic relations with the communist world. Both magazines clearly intended to convey to their readers that the pope was attentive to their plight and to the Vietnamese church. They showed an outpouring of sorrow when John Paul I died after thirty-three days in office. *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* devoted more space than usual to photos of the late pontiff and his funeral. Unsurprisingly, the next issue showed even more photographs of his successor.

The election of John Paul II to the papacy in 1978 was a momentous moment for the refugees in part because he came from a communist country. In addition to the photographs, *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* published a two-part series three months later: one article on the pontiff's background and one on Polish Americans. In the biographical article, the author, the chaplain to the refugees in the Archdiocese of Washington, presented the pope as a sign of hope to the refugees by inserting several comments about his ability to deal with the communist authorities.<sup>105</sup> Apt for a Marian magazine, *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ*

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103. Đồng Tiến, "Vụ Đức Cha Lefebvre" [The Case of Archbishop Lefebvre], *TTDM* 2 (January/February 1978): 18–20; and Trần Xuân and Đức Trần, "Tin Lành Lefebvre hay Một Hiện Tượng?" [Is Lefebvre Good News or a [Bad] Phenomenon?], *DC* 13 (January 1978): 19–21.

104. "Cộng Đoàn P.S. Port Arthur Bị Lừa Ly Khai Giáo Hội" [The Port Arthur Community Has Been Deceived on Separation from the Church], *DC* 13 (January 1978): 21–22; and "Tin Lành Trần Văn Khoát hay Đòn Phép?" [Is Trần Văn Khoát Good News or a Trick?], *DC* 13 (January 1978): 26–27.

105. Father Trần Phúc Long, "Đức Gioan Phaolô II với Cộng Hòa Dân Chủ Ba Lan" [His Holiness John Paul II with the Democratic Republic of Poland], *TTDM* 14 (February 1979): 14–15.

publicized the pope's well-known Marian devotion and printed Vietnamese translations of his addresses and writings about the Mother of God. As for *Dân Chúa*, it published editorials, news items, and articles that describe, support, and defend his positions on a host of issues, including social justice and liberation theology in Latin America. Both magazines devoted more space than usual to John Paul's pastoral visits in the news section on the global church. *Dân Chúa* relished in his first and triumphant return to his country, highlighting the reception by Poles and noting the presence of Catholics from other countries in Eastern Europe.<sup>106</sup> They also reported on the pope's meetings with the Vietnamese bishops in Rome and frequently translated papal messages into Vietnamese. Vietnamese American Catholics did not hold Papal Day celebrations as they once did in their home country, but their orientation towards papal authority generally and Pope John Paul II particularly was extremely strong. This orientation could not have occurred without the historical combination of ultramontanist, anticommunist nationalism, and the aftermath of the fall of Saigon.

## Conclusion

Because of the abrupt and unforeseen circumstances that led to their arrival to the United States, the first wave of Vietnamese Catholic refugees defined themselves in terms of an irretrievable loss of nation, a complete uncertainty about family reunion, and a grave fear that their culture and children would be swallowed up by the more materialistic American society. In response to these difficulties, they sought to recreate a Catholic associational culture; promote papal authority and devotionism; establish ethnic communities and parishes; and publish about Vietnamese nationalism and opposition to communism. This they did while having to survive and adapt to many differences and complications in the United States: learning a new language, acquiring new and employable skills, adjusting to a very different set of cultural customs, and so on. There was an experience of "integration" in addition to that of "exile," and a more complete history of their lives during this period will necessarily examine their integration into American life.<sup>107</sup>

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106. Võ Lịch, "Tin Tôn Giáo" [Religious News], *DC* 30 (July 1979): 37.

107. It is beyond the scope of this article to engage the scholarship on post-1965 migration and Catholicism in the United States. Further research, however, may gain comparative perspectives from studies on religious self-fashioning among other groups of Catholic immigrants and refugees. This scholarship is strongest on Latino Catholics, and broad treatments include Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); and

For reasons of size and focus, however, this article examines the “exile” side of their experience in America during the 1970s and early 1980s. Due to a new influx of Vietnamese since the late 1980s, who were classified as immigrants rather than refugees, this exilic identity was eventually replaced by a transnational identity. Much more has changed since then, leading to developments such as the migration of Vietnamese seminarians and religious already mentioned at the beginning of this article. Nonetheless, some crucial aspects of their exilic experience have shaped the transnational identity and have remained important into the present. First-generation Vietnamese American Catholics, for example, are no longer fearful of seeing their children date or marry non-Vietnamese. Their discourse on birth control also diminished during the 1990s, if not earlier. On the other hand, they still hold tightly to a nationalist essentialism that includes antagonism towards China, and they continue to have a very high regard for the papacy as an institution and for the pope as an individual. As they had done in the 1970s and 1980s, they organize Marian pilgrimages and other forms of devotion while consistently voicing criticism of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Even though the former refugees no longer carry an exilic identity, their initial experience was powerful enough that it continues to define American Vietnamese Catholics to this day.

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David A. Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). Roberto R. Treviño, *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) provides a case studies of several parishes and espouses the concept “ethno-Catholicism” rather than the more common term “popular religion.” Although Treviño focuses on the pre-1965 era, his conceptualization provides a potentially useful comparison to the more ultramontane Catholicism among Vietnamese Americans. On Cuban Catholics, whose exilic experience was comparable in important respects to Vietnamese refugees, see Gerald E. Poyo, *Cuban Catholics in the United States, 1960–1980* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); and Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). The case of Haitian Catholic refugees and immigrants is examined in Terry Rey and Alex Stepick, *Crossing the Water and Keeping the Faith: Haitian Religion in Miami* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 33–111. On Filipino Catholics, Protestants, and Independents in the Bay Area, see Joaquin Jay Gonzalez III, *Filipino American Faith in Action: Immigration, Religion, and Civic Engagement* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).