

TUAN HOANG

“Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Will Prevail”: Vietnamese Marianism and Anticommunism, 1940–1975

It was the early hours of Pentecost Sunday when the shelling and shooting began not far from the Marian Center of Trà Kiệu located some twenty-five miles south of Đà Nẵng. The year was 1971, and the fierce fighting between the People’s Army of Vietnam and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam woke up thousands of attendants at a three-day festival honoring Our Lady of Trà Kiệu, to whom Vietnamese Catholics had been showing devotion since the 1880s. The devotees had participated in a Marian procession merely hours earlier. Having been woken up, many disregarded the request of festival organizers that they go back to sleep and decided instead to get up and wait for the early morning mass. The festival expected more pilgrims, especially youths and young adults from Huế and Sài Gòn, to arrive that morning. Remarkably, most vehicles transporting them arrived safely. Fighting, however, continued throughout the day, even during the two-hour outdoor mass that began at eleven that morning, which an estimated sixty thousand people attended. The presiders included the archbishops of Sài Gòn and Huế as well as the bishop of Đà Nẵng, the official organizer of the festival. Also present were the president of the Upper House of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), an unspecified but likely

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sizable number of mayors and members of the national legislature, and other dignitaries. Reflecting the significance of the Catholic Action movement in the country, the archbishop of Hué gave a thirty-minute homily on lay apostolate and called the Virgin Mary a model for apostolic and missionary work "in any situation" among Vietnamese Catholics. The homily was punctuated by "earth-shaking" sounds of shelling, bombing, and shooting from less than a mile away. In fact, a bullet shot through the clerical robe of the priest in charge of choral music and tore a small hole, yet he was unaware of it until someone picked up the bullet from the ground. Although the faithful stayed for the entire mass, the priest-coordinator of the festival consulted with government officials and announced at the end of the mass that the pilgrims should go home after lunch.¹

The deadly sounds of weaponry near the scene of worship were surreal. This episode illustrates the fervency of Marian devotionism in modern Vietnamese Catholicism. Behind this devotionism is, broadly speaking, the belief in the protective and intervening power of the Virgin Mary to affect one's life and afterlife for the better. Throughout the twentieth century, Marianism permeated the lives of Vietnamese Catholics amid overwhelming and overlapping upheavals. Marian devotionism manifested in private and public spaces alike, from praying the rosary alone to participating in processions at churches or on streets. It dominated the lived experience of Catholics at the parish, diocesan, and national levels. The subject has merited some interest from scholars of religious studies.² There is, however, hardly anything of note among the historical scholarship. Yet its history reveals crucial interactions between local and regional developments and external currents from the global church. Such dynamics had been characteristic to the making of Vietnamese Catholicism during the early modern and colonial periods.³ As shown below, they were equally critical during 1940–1954, the period of decolonization that saw global and local factors merging to produce an anticommunist component to Marian devotionism among the faithful. The rise of Hồ Chí Minh and Vietnamese communism helped fuel Catholic belief in the anticommunist messages of Our Lady of Fatima that had been promoted outside of Vietnam. As a result, anticommunist Marianism became an integral component in the religious lives of Catholics in South Vietnam during 1954–1975, an era of national

division and warfare. To be sure, anticommunist Marianism was not the *only* aspect of their devotionism, as Vietnamese continued to pray to the Virgin Mary for physical healing, economic improvement, educational attainment, the well-being of family members and friends, and other personal matters. Nonetheless, the growth of anticommunist Marianism since the mid-twentieth century was a new development in the history of Vietnamese Catholicism. It reflects the experience of national division, intense warfare, and, conversely, the desire for peace, national reunification, and the elimination of communism.

The next section is an overview of Marianism before 1940 to demonstrate the confluence of global and indigenous factors that characterize the history of Vietnamese Marianism. The following section then explores the emergence of anticommunist Marianism during the 1940s and early 1950s. As Vietnamese lived through this violent era of revolution, warfare, and decolonization, the Vatican and many global Catholic organizations, such as the Legion of Mary, promoted Marian devotionism as a spiritual weapon against communism. This promotion contributed substantially to the development of two devotions—Our Lady of Fatima and the reparation movement to the Immaculate Heart of Mary—as a response to the rise of Vietnamese communism. Lastly, the article analyzes anticommunist Marianism in South Vietnam, which was accentuated by national division and resumed warfare. In particular, I examine the significance of the devotions to Our Lady of La Vang and Our Lady of Fatima in South Vietnam in order to illustrate the anticommunist character of Marian devotionism.

Vietnamese Marianism before and during Colonialism

Vietnamese Marian devotionism began in the context of inculturation between European and indigenous traditions. European missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries introduced Marian beliefs to Vietnamese converts, who welcomed rosaries and other Marian representations as they did non-Marian objects such as crosses, crucifixes, scapulars, and holy water.⁴ Vietnamese receptivity of those beliefs were probably affected by their familiarity with cults of female spirits and deities, especially those seen as “mothers” such as the Cham deity Lady Po Nagar.⁵ Standard catechisms assured orthodox teaching about the Virgin Mary’s role in Catholic belief

about salvation. The first Vietnamese catechism, for instance, was heavily influenced by the Counter-Reformation and included one section (out of six) about the Ave Maria. It stressed the Virgin Mary's role as Mother of God.⁶ Her statues adorned churches and chapels, and the rosary was visible during communal recitation of prayers before mass.⁷ Nonetheless, a more distinctly indigenous Marianism did not begin to develop until the end of the eighteenth century. The last quarter of the century witnessed enormous suffering among Vietnamese due to a series of famine, diseases, and destructive warfare. In particular, Catholics in central Vietnam suffered terrible persecution at the hands of armies and governments, especially the Tây Sơn rulers. According to oral tradition, persecution led some villagers in central Vietnam to gather for prayer in the forests at a site called La Vang, where they saw the Virgin Mary by a large tree along with the baby Jesus and two angels. Some villagers later constructed a shrine at the site of the apparitions, which formed the basis for the devotion to Our Lady of La Vang.⁸

Two long periods of persecution during the nineteenth century further contributed to the belief in Mary as a protector of Christians and further cohered the devotional association between her and the martyrs. Alongside growing devotion to La Vang, persecutions in the 1880s at the hands of anti-French resistance movements, especially the Văn Thân, led to the aforementioned devotion to Our Lady of Trà Kiệu. The Virgin Mary's prowess extended to the realm of natural disasters. During a mid-century cholera epidemic in Cochinchina, for instance, natives and missionaries "agreed in saying that the Christians were visibly protected" and the number of "Christians who died [is] infinitely less than that of the pagans."⁹ Anti-Catholic violence ceased after France fully colonized Indochina, and the church in Vietnam entered a period of growth in terms of both membership and infrastructure. La Vang reflected this growth as the ecclesial authorities constructed a larger church and organized processions and pilgrimages. Some twelve thousand people attended the dedication of the new church in August 1901, when the French bishop commissioned the first statue of Our Lady of La Vang, whose image was based on the representation of Our Lady of Victory in Europe. This festival was so successful that by 1910, the ecclesial authorities began to organize it approximately once every three years.¹⁰

In addition, Vietnamese Marianism was a result of the European ultramontane movement that began in France and spread to other Catholic parts of Europe and the world. While ultramontanism had origins in the Reformation and the Enlightenment, it was foremost a Catholic reaction to the French Revolution, whose aftermath included strong and persistent attempts to assert greater state control over church affairs and properties. Church supporters, especially in France but also in Italy and Germany, sought to wrest power back from the state, in part by asserting papal authority and helping to centralize ecclesial power. Rooted in the backlash against postrevolutionary rationalism and modernism, ultramontane beliefs and practices were revolutionary in their own ways. They empowered the papacy with authority over not merely matters of faith and morals but also the arenas of politics, economics, and culture. Their advocacy led to the formal declaration of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. Ultramontanism reinvigorated a culture of intense devotionism, especially to the Virgin Mary, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of penance. New pilgrimages and devotional associations were promoted by the clergy, and there was heavy participation among the laity. Lastly, the movement fueled a revival of religious orders, both men's and women's, including a number of missionary orders that sent their members to missionary territories in Asia, Africa, and North America.¹¹

Recent scholarship suggests that missionaries, especially Spanish Dominicans and French missionaries from the Missions Étrangère de Paris (MEP) who dominated the colonial landscape of Catholic Vietnam, contributed substantially to papal allegiance and ultramontane devotionism among the Vietnamese faithful, including Marian devotion.¹² The French bishop of Hué, for example, created the Confraternity of Our Lady [Hội Đức Bà] in 1852. At the end of the century, his successor declared Our Lady Protector of Christians to be the patron of the new church in La Vang. In 1895, the LaSallians who ran the Taberd Lycée in Sài Gòn organized the first Indochinese chapter of the Sodality of Our Lady [Hiệp Hội Thánh Mẫu], a global organization of lay spirituality founded by a Belgian Jesuit in the sixteenth century.¹³ The influential Trần Lục, possibly the best-known non-martyr Vietnamese priest from the nineteenth century, named the first of several churches that he built after the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He

also wrote poetry to celebrate a hybrid of Christian-Confucian feminine virtues attributed to the Virgin Mary, exemplifying the merging of indigenous and global factors that shaped Vietnamese Marianism at the turn of the century.¹⁴

Devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes was another example of ultramontane influence on Vietnamese Marianism. An utterly popular devotion in France since the mid-nineteenth century, it quickly gained many adherents in Europe and North America. It became well known to Vietnamese thanks to the preaching and publications by missionaries such as Pierre-Marie Gendreau, the longtime bishop of the Western Tonkin vicariate. A strong devotee, Gendreau's role was central to two *Nôm* editions of a long narrative about St. Bernadette and the Lourdes apparitions, the latter of which came out in 1896.¹⁵ Knowledge of the apparitions and miracles at Lourdes spread with the expansion of the *quốc ngữ* script after 1920. Vietnamese not only read about the apparitions but also dramatized and performed them.¹⁶ Vietnamese Catholics had associated Our Lady of La Vang with the protection of Christians under persecution. Now they were taught to see Our Lady of Lourdes as a holy healer of ailments, physical and otherwise.¹⁷ At Phát Diệm Cathedral, built by the aforementioned priest Trần Lục, the Gethsemani Garden originally constructed for adoration and passion plays was turned into a replica of the Lourdes grotto in the mid-1920s.¹⁸ Twentieth-century technology, especially the growing missionary press, facilitated further exposure to this devotion. In addition, a small number of Vietnamese who went to Europe during World War I had made a pilgrimage to Lourdes before returning home. In the meantime, missionaries continued to introduce Vietnamese to new sodalities, such as the Children of Mary [Hội Con Đức Bà], whose first Vietnamese chapter was established by the Sisters of Vincent de Paul in suburban Sài Gòn in 1932.¹⁹ The Canadian Redemptorists, who first arrived in Indochina in 1925, quickly popularized the devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. They published a popular novena booklet on Perpetual Help and typically ended retreats and novenas with a homily specifically on this subject. In December 1932, in Huế, they organized the first festival to honor Our Lady of Perpetual Help and St. Alphonsus Ligouri, the founder of the Redemptorists. In attendance was Nguyễn Hữu Bài, then the highest-ranking Catholic official

in the Nguyễn Dynasty. In the same year, they organized novenas at a chapel in Hà Nội, whose attendance grew from about twenty people to capacity crowds. The growth led to the construction of a larger church in 1935 to accommodate local devotees as well as pilgrims from other areas. Reflecting post-persecution experiences during late colonialism, the Redemptorists emphasized not protection from enemies but, instead, Marian assistance in daily life as well as indulgences toward the afterlife.²⁰

Vietnamese engagement with the global church during late colonialism further helped to create a new Catholic associational culture tied to Marianism in important ways. A primary reason for the emergence of this new culture was the Catholic Action movement, which began in nineteenth-century Italy as a reaction among the laity to anti-clericalism and other attacks on the church. As it spread to other Catholic parts of Europe, its focus shifted to issues such as industrialization and labor unions. Although the clergy were often involved in Catholic Action, the movement depended heavily on lay participation and leadership. Several popes promoted Catholic Action as a means to transform society and re-Christianize an increasingly secular world, and Pope Pius XI approved its formal structure in 1923. The Legion of Mary (founded in Ireland in 1921), Young Christian Workers (Belgium, 1919), and Young Christian Students (France, 1929) were among popular Catholic Action organizations in Europe.²¹

Before the 1930s, a number of youth organizations, such as the Eucharistic Crusade [Nghĩa Binh Thánh Thể] and Catholic Youth [Thanh Niên Công Giáo], existed in Indochina. Nonetheless, it was not until 1934 that Catholic Action was formally introduced to Vietnam, and the remainder of the decade saw the formation of Young Catholic Workers [Thanh Niên Lao Động Công Giáo], Rural Catholic Youth [Thanh Niên Thôn Quê Công Giáo], and Agricultural Catholic Youth [Thanh Niên Nông Nghiệp Công Giáo] in a number of vicariates, especially in the north.²² By 1940, the vicariate apostolic of Hà Nội sought to create one or more Catholic Action organizations at each parish and provide guidelines on training members.²³ Devotional practices, including Eucharistic and Marian processions, were closely integrated into the lives of these organizations.²⁴ Lastly, the beginning of Catholic Action in Indochina overlapped with the consecration of the first Vietnamese bishops, who strongly encouraged Catholic lay

organizations, including Marian ones. Nguyễn Bá Tòng, for example, formed a new chapter of the Sodality of Our Lady in his diocese not long after he became the first Vietnamese bishop in 1933. The next bishop, Hồ Ngọc Cẩn, began another chapter at the seminary in his diocese along with several first chapters of different Catholic Action organizations. The third bishop, Ngô Đình Thục, was an advocate of youth and worker movements and Catholic Action organizations in his southern Diocese of Vĩnh Long.²⁵ The intersections of Catholic Action and Marianism would become pronounced during the era of decolonization that began with World War II.

The Rise of Anticommunist Marianism, 1940–1954

The 1940s witnessed the development of a new type of devotionism in the Vietnamese church: anticommunist Marianism. The anticommunist turn in Vietnamese Marianism had roots well before decolonization, as Vietnamese Catholics had long followed the Vatican's lead in opposing the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. A popular tract from the missionary press, for example, opposed the anti-Christian policies in the Soviet Union while sounding the alarm to the spread of communist parties in France, Italy, Mexico, and especially China.²⁶ The early 1930s saw the first major violent encounter between Catholics and communists when a communist-led rebellion in northern central Vietnam burned down a church and killed a priest and several lay Catholics. Most of all, it was the Việt Minh-led August Revolution in 1945 that exacerbated tension between communists and Catholics. The period between fall 1945 and summer 1946 witnessed extremely violent clashes between Vietnamese communists and a host of nationalist and religious forces. The communists were far more successful in weakening the noncommunist forces. By the outbreak of the First Indochina War in late 1946, the Vietnamese communist party had seized control of the revolutionary government. This political violence contributed to the welcome of the French return among that the clergy in northern Vietnam.²⁷ It also helps explain the militarization in the heavily Catholic areas of Bùi Chu and Phát Diệm against Việt Minh infiltration during the First Indochina War.²⁸ A number of Catholics certainly sided with the Việt Minh during the war, especially in the early phase. In the south, for example, they included four siblings, three priests, and a nun who was a member of the

Lovers of the Holy Cross Chợ Quán (in Sài Gòn) and had worked for decades in the Mekong Delta.²⁹ There was, however, no consistent Catholic support for the Việt Minh, especially after the latter's shift toward socialist policies in late 1949. This move led a large number of noncommunist participants, including Catholics, to return to French-controlled territories in the north.³⁰

Developments from the global church also played a major role in the Vietnamese turn toward an anticommunist Marianism. After the Russian Revolution, the Vatican initially sought workable relations with the Soviet Union. During the 1920s, however, relations deteriorated due to a series of Soviet anti-religious campaigns that led to a breaking point in the early 1930s when the Vatican sought to create a transnational network of anti-communism under the coordination of the Secretariat on Atheism.³¹ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Vatican, especially Pope Pius XII, issued a series of public events and pronouncements on anticommunist Marianism. At the direct request of Sister Lucia, the lone survivor among three children who witnessed the Fatima apparitions in 1917, Pius consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary during the silver anniversary of the Fatima apparitions and included a descriptive reference to Russia in the consecration.³² In May 1944, he instituted the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Two years later, he sent a personal emissary to Fatima for the canonical coronation of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima before an estimated one million people. The pontiff's pronouncement of the dogma of the Assumption in 1950 and his opening of the Marian year in 1954–1955 did not have direct ties to Fatima. Nonetheless, he frequently spoke about persecution against the church while promoting devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. Even though Pius never visited Fatima during his papacy, many Catholics called him the “Fatima pope” due to his enthusiastic promotion of the devotion. As a historian of Italian culture puts it, Pius “seized on the potential that a particular form of Marian devotion, in this case to Our Lady of Fatima, might have in the fight against communism.”³³ Elsewhere in the West, Catholic leaders considered their most dangerous enemy to be communism rather than secularization.³⁴ This belief shaped the activities among many Catholic Action organizations, including the Legion of Mary. The organization was founded in 1921 by

the Irish layman Frank Duff, whose inspiration came from Louis de Montfort's classic *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*. The Legion's initial focus was home visitations for the sick and aid to the poor and marginalized—not opposing communism.³⁵ The opening of its constitution, however, articulates a combative language well suited for anticommunist Marianism two decades later:

The Legion of Mary is an Association of Catholics who . . . have formed themselves into a Legion for service in the warfare which is perpetually waged by the Church against the world and its evil powers. . . . The Legion of Mary is therefore organised on the model of an army, principally on that of the army of ancient Rome. . . . But the army and the arms of legionaries of Mary are not of this world.³⁶

While it is not entirely clear how or when the Vietnamese learned about the Legion, we know that by 1947 there were at least three small Catholic groups in Sài Gòn that expressed an interest in joining the organization. The first formal organization, however, emerged in Hà Nội, also in 1947. Partial credit for its founding goes to Marie Zoila, a member of the Congregation of Notre Dame, then living and working as a novice master for the Lovers of the Holy Cross, a Vietnamese religious order of women. This French nun contacted the Legion's headquarters in Dublin for training materials and organized an initial training session for more than ten Vietnamese in Hà Nội. Zoila then learned that Trịnh Như Khuê, the new pastor of the Hàm Long parish in Hà Nội, was also interested in the Legion. She met and "transferred" the trainees to this parish, which led to the first praesidium meeting in October 1947 and then the consecration of the Legion's first Vietnamese members a year later. In 1950, Trịnh Như Khuê, now a bishop, visited Rome for the Holy Year before traveling to Dublin and meeting with the Legion's leadership. As a result of these developments, the Legion grew steadily in Vietnam during the early 1950s. By 1952, there were five praesidia in Hà Nội and six in Huế, including one for children and teenagers in each city. Two years later, it had spread to nearly all mission dioceses in Vietnam.³⁷ The rapid growth bode well for the future of the Legion of Mary in South Vietnam. In 1966, there were 862 senior praesidia and 202 junior praesidia, with 12,420 full members and 1,791 young

members, plus 6,112 “sponsoring” members and 58,322 “supporters” in Sài Gòn alone.³⁸

A related yet different development was the Movement for the Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It derived from the devotion to the reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Instead of focusing on Jesus, reparation to the Immaculate Heart focuses on the love that Mary has for Jesus and for God. In the words of a Marian scholar, its goal is “to unite mankind to God through Mary’s heart, and this process involves the ideas of *consecration* and *reparation*.”³⁹ Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary became a global devotion in the twentieth century, partially on the assumption that the sins of one’s own or others, including the sins committed by atheistic Soviet Russia, have offended or outraged the Immaculate Heart. In return, the Immaculate Heart should receive reparation through penance, mass attendance, communion (especially on the first Saturday of each month), and praying the fifteen mysteries of the rosary from the faithful.⁴⁰ During the 1940s, a number of Vietnamese and missionary priests eagerly promoted reparation sodalities, both Marian and Sacred Heart varieties. In 1942, for example, the Canadian Redemptorist Gerard Gagnon introduced Vietnamese Catholics in Hà Nội to the League of the Sacred Heart of Jesus [Liên Minh Thánh Tâm], an ultramontane sodality founded by the French-born Quebecois Jesuit Édouard Hamon in 1883. Father Gagnon’s introduction led to the formation of the first Vietnamese chapter of the League, also in Hà Nội, four years later. By 1960, the League drew 1,700 members in twenty-six parishes of Sài Gòn and 66 members in two parishes in Huế.⁴¹ Another example is the southern vicarate of Vĩnh Long, whose bishop, Ngô Đình Thục, gave permission to the priest Phạm Tuấn Bình to organize a sodality for the reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1945. A perceived lack of piety, including a drop of 20–30 percent of communicants at Easter, was cited as the reason for this new organization. Simply called the Reparation Sodality [Hội Phạt Tạ], it later expanded to other dioceses and, by 1960, it counted 13,813 members in Sài Gòn alone.⁴²

While the growth of Sacred Heart sodalities was impressive, the Marian reparation movement drew great interest from church members within only a few years. One reason was the publicization of the first two of three “secrets of Fatima” during 1941, which were, as already noted, seized by

Pope Pius XII and other Catholic leaders to promote the devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. By the mid-1940s, this devotion began to take root among Vietnamese Catholics, who prayed the fifteen mysteries of the rosary and the prayer by Pius XII's consecration of the world to Mary. Moreover, Our Lady of Fatima's emphasis on world peace struck a chord in a world facing devastating warfare. Its interlocking three "rules"—repent, pray the rosary, and honor the Immaculate Heart—shrewdly combined a specific and easy-to-do activity (praying the rosary) with the theological concept of reparation.⁴³ Similar to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Heart of Mary saw strong promotion from missionaries and native priests alike. In 1945, for example, the priest Nguyễn Minh Đăng in the northern town of Thái Bình published a tract on "the messages of Our Lady of Fatima" and distributed copies among Catholics in the area. He also organized a group of the faithful to practice the devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. In 1948, one of these early devotees came to Hà Nội and linked up with three other devotees who had learned about the devotion of reparation to Mary through the French Dominican Jeffro Đỗ Minh Thê. Together, these devotees asked the Dominican to form a reparation sodality, which he called the Movement for the Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary [Phong trào đền tạ Trái Tim Vô Nhiễm Đức Mẹ Maria]. It was similar to other reparation movements in Europe and North America in purpose but completely independent from them. After receiving official approval in 1949, Jeffro Đỗ Minh Thê began to publish a small devotional magazine called *Our Lady's Immaculate Heart* [Trái Tim Đức Mẹ] to reinforce the belief among its members and promote the organization. By the end of the First Indochina War, the movement had an estimated membership of thirty thousand people, largely in Hà Nội and other areas of northern Vietnam.⁴⁴

Another major promoter from Thái Bình was Trần Đình Thủ, who was ordained a priest at the vicariate of Bùi Chu in 1937 and, four years later, conceived the idea of founding a Vietnamese congregation of religious men dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as well as evangelization in Vietnam. Drawn to the Marian thought of Louis de Montfort, Trần Đình Thủ consecrated his life to the Virgin Mary and "according to the model of St. de Monfort" in November 1941. During his years as a diocesan priest, he worked as a member of the faculty at the local major seminary, director of

the diocese's mission activities, and pastor of two parishes. He made it his mission to spread devotion to the Immaculate Heart, and he formed several Marian sodalities among parishioners and seminarians. At the first of his two parishes, one of the poorest in Bùi Chu, the young priest visited all families to better understand their situations. He helped them find work while promoting mass attendance, reception of the sacraments, and devotion to Mary as "mother of households." Assigned to a different parish under the influence of the Việt Minh in 1946, he employed the same devotional promotion and practice, leading to a positive outcome.⁴⁵

Trần Đình Thủ drew a number of local young men to the vision of a new religious order, and they helped him spread the Fatima messages of penance, devotion to the Immaculate Heart, and recitation of the rosary among local Catholics. In 1948, the local bishop gave him permission to form a group of religious men in the diocese. Five years later, they received approval from the Vatican to become the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix (CMC). After the Geneva Peace Accords, they moved the headquarters to suburban Sài Gòn. In 1960, the CMC received the blessing of Jeffro Đỗ Minh Thử to resume the Movement for the Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in South Vietnam. Trần Đình Thủ asked Nguyễn Minh Đăng—who, as mentioned earlier, had published a tract on the messages of Our Lady of Fatima—now a member of the CMC, to lead the reparation movement, a role that Nguyễn Minh Đăng held until the end of the Vietnam War fifteen years later.⁴⁶ The activities and interactions among the three clerics and the unnamed laity in Thái Bình and Hà Nội contributed crucially to the growth of an anticommunist Marianism in southern Vietnam for the next two decades.

Anticommunist Marianism in South Vietnam, 1954–1975

The mass migration of northern Catholics to the south during 1954–1955 made anticommunist Marian devotionism a central part of Catholic life during the Vietnam War. Recent scholarship has shown that it was neither new Vietnamese leaders in the south nor US-made slogans such as "the Virgin has headed south" but the words and actions of parish priests that exerted by far the greatest influence over the decision, especially among lay

Catholics in the rural north, to leave their ancestral homes.⁴⁷ At the same time, well-publicized photography of émigrés traveling south with rosaries and pictures of the Virgin Mary reflects the continuous significance of Marian devotionism. Taking such devotional objects to the south, many Catholic émigrés also brought with them an emergent belief about the need to pray to the Virgin Mary for peace without communism.

The experience of national division indeed heightened Catholic belief about the communist threat among émigrés, if not also southerners. At a Marian procession in La Vang to celebrate the Lunar New Year in 1962, the homilist preached,

Vietnamese might wonder [could there be peace] since the Bến Hải River is only miles from here. . . . Many dark clouds from the north are hurrying to the south, many large waves are crossing over, and the head of a massive blood-red snake is trying to sneak across the river and destroy the last free land of our beloved Vietnamese country. . . . Yet why should we be pessimistic and worried? For we could see that close to the border [between north and south], right on this spot, is the Church of Our Lady of La Vang: a strong and sturdy Marian city [against communism].⁴⁸

“Why should we be pessimistic and worried?” The rhetorical question was answered by the priest’s affirmation at the end of the homily that “Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart will prevail” [*trái tim Mẹ sẽ thắng*]. If the rise of Vietnamese communism had drawn Vietnamese devotees to the Fatima messages, national division intensified their desire for the reparation of the Immaculate Heart. It left them with an unshakable conviction about the righteousness of their stand against the “blood-red snake” of Vietnamese communism.

Catholic Action also played an important role in spreading anticommunist Marianism. In 1953, the bishops appointed Gerárd Gagnon, a Canadian Redemptorist priest who had introduced the Vietnamese to the ultramontane and Quebec-founded men’s sodality League of the Sacred Heart [Liên Minh Thánh Tâm] to coordinate and lead Catholic Action in the country. He purchased a property in the city of Đà Lạt that was later used as a center for retreats and training sessions for thousands of Catholic Action members and associates in the southern church.⁴⁹ While Catholic Action virtually ceased to exist in the north, it grew in leaps and bounds in the south. Each

dioceses had its own office of Catholic Action, typically headed by a priest but included mostly laity, usually men, among the executive leadership.⁵⁰ By 1966, virtually all major Marian organizations appeared under the umbrella of Catholic Action. In metropolitan Sài Gòn alone, about three hundred thousand Catholics belonged to one or more of the following organizations: The Legion of Mary, the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima [Đội Binh Xanh], the Associated Sodality of Our Lady [Hiệp Hội Thánh Mẫu], the Rosary Society [Hội Môi Khôi], the Society of Children of Our Lady [Hội Con Đức Mẹ], the Union for the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady [Đoàn Tận Hiến Đức Mẹ Vô Nhiễm], and, of course, the Movement for Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.⁵¹ The 1970 annual pilgrimage festival to the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Sài Gòn drew thirty thousand attendants over four days of festivities, including members of “[various] lay oblates, the Legion of Mary, the Sodality of Our Lady, the Association of Catholic Mothers, the League of the Sacred Heart, the Blue Army, the Children of Mary, and the Eucharistic Youth, among others.”⁵² Marian sodalities and organizations engaged in a variety of activities. Members of the Legion of Mary, for instance, visited leper colonies and sponsored lay speakers on Catholic subjects.⁵³ They were well represented at major Catholic gatherings, and Marian events typically drew participation from many non-Marian organizations.

To better explain the nationalist and anticommunist strand of Marianism in South Vietnam, I now turn to two case studies that illustrate mass organization of and participation in this devotionism. The first is the expansion of the La Vang site and the largest triennial festival to date, both under the leadership of Ngô Đình Thục, the archbishop of Huế and older brother of President Ngô Đình Diệm. The festival began in 1901 and was held approximately every three years between 1910 and 1938 but then not again until 1955, when the missionary bishop of the vicariate of Huế revived the festival, which drew about twenty thousand attendants over three days. Three years later, the festival lasted twice as long and was attended by an estimated fifty thousand people, who welcomed a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes that had been blessed by Pius XII on the occasion of the centennial celebration of the apparitions at Lourdes.⁵⁴ Neither the 1955 nor the 1958 festival, however, could match the 1961 festival in scale or scope. That year,

the establishment of the national Vietnamese Church and the appointment of Ngô Đình Thục as archbishop of Huế overlapped to create, possibly, the largest and grandest Marian festival up to that point in Vietnamese history.

Prior to his assignment to Huế, Ngô Đình Thục served as bishop of the vicariate of Vĩnh Long. He was active in the promotion of Catholic Action, comparing it to "a legion" that is organized into "armies, calvaries, air forces" to do apostolic work for Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church.⁵⁵ During the 1950s and early 1960s, he helped to organize study sessions on the personalist philosophy for selected civil servants in the South Vietnamese government. A frequent guest at the presidential palace, he at times exploited his clout as the president's older brother to raise funds for new projects, including the construction of a church near the Redemptorist headquarters in Sài Gòn. His ambition was an appointment to the Archdiocese of Sài Gòn because it was the best position in South Vietnam to lead toward the cardinalate in the future. Ngô Đình Diệm, however, did not share his older brother's ambition because he did not want proximity to give the public further impression of family rule. The Vatican appeared to agree. In 1961, it assigned Ngô Đình Thục the smaller Archdiocese of Huế, whose jurisdiction included the La Vang site.⁵⁶

If the new archbishop felt any disappointment about the assignment to Huế rather than Sài Gòn, he hid it very well. His years of studies in Europe had endeared him to the appeal and intricacies of ultramontanist and Marianism, and he envisioned La Vang as not merely a national site but possibly a site on the scale of Lourdes or Fatima. The combination of vision and experience made him into a capable, if at times overeager, builder in Huế. Addressing the faithful that gathered to welcome his arrival to Huế, he declared that "Our Lady of La Vang is Our Lady of our ancestors [and] Our Lady in times of persecution [and] Our Lady of all Vietnamese people."⁵⁷ The next day, he led an irregular meeting of the Vietnamese bishops and successfully persuaded them to expand the size and capacity of the La Vang shrine into a national center of Marian pilgrimage. He invited the Europe-based and deeply ultramontane Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament to send a priest to La Vang to explore the possibility of opening and running a branch there.⁵⁸

More urgent was the next triennial La Vang festival. Having only four months until the event, Ngô Đình Thục immediately put himself and others to work. He met with architects to design various additions to the shrine. He found thousands of hired hands, volunteers from nearby parishes, and soldiers from several battalions and regiments. The laborers even worked after Sunday masses. Digging by hand, they created two artificial lakes and built a new road of seven kilometers around the shrine campus. They constructed the main platform for outdoor ceremonies, set up communication technology, and built temporary housing quarters, among other things. The organizers invited Catholics who could not volunteer in person to contribute money for hiring laborers in their place: an appeal that led to many donations from the laity and clergy alike. The archbishop also ordered his staff to produce a monthly magazine named after Our Lady of La Vang. Released shortly before the opening of the festival, the contents in the first issue variously promoted the festival, reported on its preparation, and attacked communism, openly and indirectly. One essay, for instance, calls the La Vang site “famous because Our Lady had mercy on the Vietnamese Church hiding from [its enemy] then, and now it is fighting against communism [which is] the disaster of the entire world, especially in Southeast Asia.” Referencing the river that was dividing Vietnam, the magazine declared that only “the heavenly army led by the Queen, the Mother of God, could defeat the army of devils and stop the red wave on the other side of the Bến Hải River.”⁵⁹

The second issue includes many reports and photographs about the massive gathering, starting with a visit from the archbishop’s president-brother the day before the festival. Tens of thousands of people attended during the next six days, including all Catholic bishops in South Vietnam; over three hundred priests; hundreds of members of religious orders, especially women; and members of dozens of sodalities and organizations within Catholic Action. During each of the first five days, one or two participating groups were designated recipients of prayers and benediction: mothers, the sick, civil servants, the “silent Church” under communism, and, together, members of Catholic Action and members of the armed forces. The third evening saw the official opening mass of the pilgrimage, in which the archbishop concluded his homily by calling Catholic and

non-Catholic Vietnamese alike to "carry out absolutely the message of Our Lady, so as to bring about peace, so that She will reunite the boundaries of Vietnam in brotherly and mutual support."⁶⁰ The final day was designated the "day of prayer for the Vietnamese country," and the RVN's vice president attended its solemn mass. The day also included a procession honoring the relics of Vietnamese martyrs, another procession honoring the Virgin Mary, a ceremony to consecrate the country to her Immaculate Heart, and Archbishop Ngô Đình Thục's announcement that Pope John XXIII had elevated the status of the shrine to minor basilica. The magazine's estimate of three hundred thousand attendants might or might not have been an exaggeration, but the event was a resounding success from all appearances.⁶¹

Anticommunist nationalism shaped the organization and activities of the festival. The schedule alone reflected a deliberate juxtaposition between individual-oriented devotion and more political design aimed at mass participation. The first two categories designated for special prayer—mothers and the sick—were long familiar among Marian devotees. On the other hand, the remaining categories—Catholic Action, civil servants, military officers and soldiers, the "silent Church," and the entire nation of Vietnam—were entities created by or belonging to the church or the state. When bishops, priests, and lay leaders spoke to these groups, they reiterated the church's roles as a guide of the faithful's conscience *and* a moral leader in the fight against communism. Festival organizers consistently affirmed clerical and hierarchical authority. The day of prayer for the church under communism, for example, was assigned specifically to "men and women of religious orders because their lives focus on prayer and sacrifice." The day designated for armed forces included the baptism and confirmation of four high-ranking officers and one former member of the RVN's Assembly.⁶² Ngô Đình Thục's leadership at the festival showed a very confident and ambitious cleric who saw himself as *primus inter pares* among the Vietnamese hierarchy, if not the unofficial head of the postcolonial Vietnamese Church. There are reasons to consider him, as historian Phi-Vân Nguyen has, the "leading anti-communist" in South Vietnam, at least in the religious realm.⁶³

The La Vang festival illustrates much more about Marianism in South Vietnam. First was the collective nationalist identity and pride among

Vietnamese Catholics, whose national hierarchy was formally established by Pope John XXIII less than a year before the festival in November 1960. Upon the announcement, the Vietnamese bishops could not wait until the next scheduled meeting to celebrate the occasion. They held an irregular gathering in Sài Gòn, where they decided to dedicate both the Vietnamese Church and the nation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Now, La Vang provided another opportunity and a far larger event to celebrate the new national church. This background explains Ngô Đình Thục calling the next festival in 1964 the “second national festival” at La Vang, thus identifying the 1961 festival as the first national pilgrimage in the post-independence era.⁶⁴ He had plans for new construction at the site in the years ahead.⁶⁵

Catholic Action in South Vietnam also played a central role at this festival. From the Archdiocese of Huế alone were members and representatives of all fifty-two chapters of the Eucharistic Crusade and thirty-five chapters of the Society of Children of Our Lady [Hội Con Đức Mẹ]. On the first day, representatives of the Association of Catholic Mothers [Hội Các Bà Mẹ Công Giáo in South Vietnam held a meeting with the national director of Catholic Action after a larger meeting for mothers that attended the morning mass. Many chapters of the Legion of Mary and the League of the Sacred Heart in South Vietnam were represented during the largest procession of the festival while diocesan lay officers of Catholic Action walked together. The hierarchy chose Thérèse of Lisieux to be the patron saint of Catholic Action in Vietnam, but it was the figure of Mary that unified its many member organizations. There had been massive public Marian events before 1940, but they had not shown the same scale of associational membership and participation that came after the consolidation of Catholic Action in the south.

The 1961 festival was probably the zenith of public devotion to Our Lady of La Vang in South Vietnam. The overthrow of Ngô Đình Diệm, the exile of Ngô Đình Thục to Europe, and the expansion of warfare combined to diminish both the organization of and participation in subsequent editions. The festival was held only twice more, in 1964 and 1970, before the end of the war. Although it resumed in 1978, it was not until 1996, when postwar Vietnam was integrated into the global economy, that the event began to reach the size and prestige of the 1961 festival. Yet the anticommunist

component of Marian devotion hardly diminished after 1963 and until 1975. Ngô Đình Thục might have been the best-known anticommunist Catholic in South Vietnam, but he was only one among millions. Whenever possible, southern Catholics continued to organize pilgrimages to La Vang. In January 1965, for example, over 250 university students from Sài Gòn, Huế, and Đà Lạt and their chaplains walked and recited the rosary over some thirty kilometers to the Marian site.⁶⁶

In fact, the intensity of the Vietnam War during the 1960s stoked greater faith among Marian devotees such as the CMC, now headquartered in suburban Sài Gòn. During its early formation in the north, the priest Trần Đình Thủ and other CMC members were merely local players in spreading the messages of Our Lady of Fatima. They were not as well-known as Jeffro Đỗ Minh Thế in Hà Nội and did not have the resources that he did. The Dominican's reparation movement, however, stalled when Vietnam was divided in 1954, and he folded his magazine before moving to the south. Some adherents later asked him to revive the magazine in the south, but by then he was serving as chaplain for the Sisters of St. Paul in Đà Nẵng. They suggested that he invite the CMC to assume the leadership of the movement, which, as noted, would occur in 1960. The CMC also resumed the publication of the devotional monthly *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* [Our Lady's Immaculate Heart]. Running almost uninterrupted until the fall of Sài Gòn, the revived magazine became the CMC's principal medium. Five years after the new beginning, the movement for the reparation claimed over one hundred thousand members in the southern dioceses.⁶⁷

The movement's primary goal was spreading the threefold message of Our Lady of Fatima. Each issue of *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* promotes and expounds on this message in different forms. Before but especially during the Cold War, devotion to Our Lady of Fatima was intensely anticommunist: a fact well reflected in the pages of the CMC's magazine. An essay in the first issue, for instance, claims an intimate connection between the start of the Russian Revolution in March 1917 and the first apparition at Fatima two months later. It calls Moscow the site chosen by "the snakes of Hell" to spread warfare and suffering on earth and, conversely, Fatima the center of Marian intervention to save humankind.⁶⁸ Crucial to this salvation is the threefold demand of repentance, praying the rosary, and devotion to her. In

some respects, this demand was a standard interpretation of the Fatima apparitions among Catholic circles at the time. Yet the devotion also saw significant indigenous influence. To begin, its eschatological vision aligned well to the CMC's conviction that Mary is "co-redemptrix" in the history of salvation. This theological proposition has been historically controversial and, indeed, in 2017, the CMC changed its name to the Congregation of the Mother of the Redeemer (CMR) at the request of the Vatican. Nonetheless, the postcolonial landscape of Vietnamese Catholicism provided Trần Đình Thủ and his companions an advantageous position to lead this devotion among the faithful. As a completely native but young congregation, they could not match the resources, training, and prestige of the Dominicans, Redemptorists, LaSallians, and other men's religious orders with long-standing ties and support both domestic and from abroad. By making Our Lady of Fatima and the Movement for Reparation their central mission in South Vietnam, the CMC carved out a modest but appealing and well-timed position within the ultramontane and anticommunist Catholic culture of South Vietnam.

National division and growing warfare played to the CMC's mission and heightened the popularity of Marian reparation in the hope of a unified and communist-free Vietnamese nation. By the late 1960s, this political situation and the CMC's promotion combined to give Our Lady of Fatima an edge, at least in public, in popularity over other kinds of Marian devotion. The local experience of the communist threat and national division led to an eschatological vision upon which the Fatima apparitions became deeply appealing to the fear, sorrow, and hope among the Vietnamese faithful. *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* frequently referenced her "promise" of both world peace and personal salvation: that is, both the here and now and the afterlife. As a result, it published pieces about the church and Marianism in other communist countries in addition to calls for the conversion of Soviet Russia.⁶⁹ It helped to popularize the phrase that "Our Lady's Immaculate Heart will prevail" over atheistic communism. The phrase also reflected the anxiety over national division and family separation among many Catholics, especially the majority of northern émigrés, for whom the victory of the Immaculate Heart would mean the union of the nation and with loved ones.

More significant was the widespread organization, mobilization, and participation regarding Our Lady of Fatima at the parish and diocesan levels. In early 1962, for example, a parish in Sài Gòn commemorated the anniversary of the founding of the Movement for Reparation with a procession that began with a "moving" homily about the Virgin Mary. The celebration continued with hand-held lit candles, children performing May Crown-like movements, mass recitation of the rosary, and choir-led "hymns that praise that Our Lady's [Immaculate] Heart will prevail."⁷⁰ In the same year and at the coastal town Qui Nhơn, members of the Association of Our Lady and the Legion of Mary took turns hosting at their homes a Marian statue for twenty-four hours each. The purpose was the "sanctification of the family, the . . . reparation for Our Lady's Immaculate Heart, prayer for the [Second Vatican] Council, prayer for the silent church [under communism], and prayer for peace in Vietnam and the world." The rotation went on for nearly six months and only stopped due to the rainy season that made roads "muddy" and, presumably, difficult to have the daily procession of her statue to the next household.⁷¹ These two examples came from the parish level. At the diocesan level, both the clergy and laity organized prayer campaigns in the name of Our Lady of Fatima. The Diocese of Long Xuyên, for instance, made her the theme of its annual "campaign for virtuous conduct" [*chiến định đạo đức*] during 1962–1963 then again in 1965–1966. (In between were the devotions to the Vietnamese martyrs and the Blessed Sacrament.) The campaign called for public prayer of the rosary at churches, among other activities. Saturdays were especially devoted to confession, mass, and meditation on the fifteen mysteries of the rosary.⁷²

This context explains and accounts for the popularity, even frenzy, of the national tour of the International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima [*tượng Mẹ thánh du*]. Based on the statue of Our Lady of Fatima as described by Sister Lucia, the Pilgrim Virgin was sculpted, albeit with the Immaculate Heart openly on her chest, and had received the blessing from the bishop of Fatima in 1947. Later in the same year, another statue, without the external Immaculate Heart, was sculpted and entrusted to the Blue Army of Fatima.⁷³ Founded in 1946 by the priest Harold Colgan in New Jersey, this organization received papal approval thanks to the effective

advocacy of John Haffert, a former journalist, and then quickly expanded to Canada, Latin America, Western Europe, and Australia. The first tour of the statue in North America was a resounding success. It drew an estimated one hundred thousand people in Ottawa alone. When the statue entered the United States at Buffalo on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, it drew twice as many people.⁷⁴

Vietnamese initiative led to the establishment of the Blue Army in South Vietnam. In early 1964, an unnamed “Catholic military officer” from South Vietnam visited the Catholic Information Center in Washington, DC, during a break from studies at Fort Bragg in California. There he learned about the Blue Army and contacted Father Colgan for further information. He also wrote the archbishop of Sài Gòn for permission to begin a chapter in South Vietnam. It led to the creation of the Blue Army in Sài Gòn in September 1964 with an opening mass that saw “over one thousand members.”⁷⁵ Almost a year later, the chaplain of the Belgian chapter of the Blue Army formally introduced the idea for a tour of the Pilgrim Virgin in the RVN. The inspiration for the tour itself was global, stemming from a tour of the Pilgrim Virgin in South Korea in December 1952, an event that devotees believed to have caused the signing of the armistice eight months later. In the Vietnamese case, Colgan and Haffert readily supported the tour but there were complications due to delayed shipping. Wanting to fulfill the desire among Vietnamese Catholics for a tour, the president of the Blue Army’s Australian chapter intervened and managed to bring the original statue to South Vietnam.⁷⁶

The Virgin Pilgrim arrived in Sài Gòn on October 10, 1965, and drew large crowds everywhere it went. A throng of the faithful, including representatives of the military, greeted it at the airport. After a ceremony in which the Vatican nuncio crowned the statue, a procession of over sixty automobiles took the statue to Notre Dame Cathedral, where tens of thousands welcomed it amid the sounds of liturgical bands and the sights of white and blue balloons, the colors of Our Lady of Fatima.⁷⁷ Giving the homily at the event, the Dominican priest Trần Mực Đích reminded the attendants that “Our Lady will prevail” and they must pray to her because “communism has existed for forty-nine years [and] we plead with [Mary] to stop the communist disaster for our sake.”⁷⁸ Three days later, and likely due

to the coordination of the Blue Army, masses were offered "for the peace of Vietnam" at Fatima, Lourdes, Nazareth, and several other major sites around the world.⁷⁹ The next day, the statue went on the road and visited churches, seminaries, hospitals, orphanages, and other sites in Sài Gòn, Mỹ Tho, Vĩnh Long, Cần Thơ, and other towns and cities. The tour had been planned for three months, but popular demand kept the statue in South Vietnam until 1967.⁸⁰ In February 1974, the Blue Army arranged for an eleventh-hour visit to Sài Gòn during a tour of Asia. Scheduled after a visit to Hong Kong, where the statue was placed "right at the border of Red China," this visit was also well received.⁸¹

The stated purpose of these tours was "praying for peace" in Vietnam, which was enhanced by the frequent singing of the popular hymn "Our Lady, Have Mercy on the Vietnamese Country" ["Mẹ ơi đoái thương xem nước Việt Nam"]. At the same time, as the magazine *Trái tim đức mẹ*, the Movement for Reparation, and the Blue Army kept insisting, Catholics were not to divert from the threefold message of Fatima. For Vietnamese Marian devotees, the desire for peace in their warring country and the desire for the end of communism were not contradictory but overlapping. As affirmed in a published reflection after the first tour, church authorities have "cautioned the faithful to find peace according to the teachings of Our Lady at Fatima: *reform your lives, make sacrifices, and pray to and honor Our Lady.*"⁸² For many Marian devotees, peace was desirable, but it should not have come at all costs, least of all with the domination of a Vietnamese communist regime.

Conclusion

La Vang and Fatima were not the only articulations of the Marian devotional landscape in South Vietnam. There were others, include the devotion to Our Lady of Trà Kiệu illustrated at the beginning of this article, that populated this landscape in national and local settings. It is, however, notable that the Fatima-related reparation movement drew a very large membership, while the La Vang festival of 1961 took on a deeply emotive and nationalist-laden tone. Nationalism and anticommunism were not the only forms or aims among the Vietnamese devotees. Praying to Our Lady of La Vang and Our Lady of Fatima for the end of communism and the

unification of Vietnam was not at all in tension with praying to Our Lady of Lourdes or Our Lady of Perpetual Help for one's health and economic well-being. Rather, they coexisted comfortably because they reflected different yet related aspects of the Vietnamese experience, Catholic and otherwise, during the era of national division and domestic warfare.⁸³

Organizationally, the promotion of anticommunist Marianism was top-down and typically began with activism among the clergy. Exemplified by Trần Đình Thủ, Jeffro Đỗ Minh Thế, Trịnh Như Khuê, and Ngô Đình Thục, priests and bishops were often leading figures and organizers of movements and major events. This outcome came out of the deeply entrenched hierarchical structure in the church and the long-standing privilege accorded to the clergy in Vietnamese culture. At the same time, many lay Catholics were active in promoting devotionism by working with or through the clergy. It goes too far to say that the anticommunist strand of Marian devotionism was a bottom-up phenomenon. Yet it is equally problematic to gainsay the crucial participation of the laity in shaping devotions such as La Vang and Fatima into spiritual mechanisms for coping with the anxiety over warfare. It was, after all, the laity that requested Father Jeffro Đỗ Minh Thế form a reparation movement in late 1940s Hà Nội, or the archbishop of Sài Gòn permission to form a chapter of the Blue Army in the mid-1960s. In the end, Marian devotionism is inseparable from the history of twentieth-century Vietnamese Catholicism—and the anticommunist turn of Vietnamese Marianism is inseparable from the experience of Vietnamese Catholics from 1940 to 1975.

TUAN HOANG is associate professor of Great Books at Pepperdine University. He teaches primarily in the Great Books and history programs and conducts research on Catholics in twentieth-century Vietnam and the diaspora. This article was presented at the UC Berkeley–UCLA conference “Ethnic and Community Identity in Southeast Asia,” the World Christianity Conference at Princeton Theological Seminary, and the Vietnam Center annual conference, all during 2021. The author wishes to thank the conference participants for their comments, plus especially Charles Keith and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on earlier drafts.

ABSTRACT

Marian devotionism was the most popular faith practice among twentieth-century Vietnamese Catholics. Yet its contents were not uniform but reflected shifting realities of church history and Vietnamese history. In particular, the period 1940–1975 witnessed a monumental movement that associated Marianism with anticommunist nationalism among many Vietnamese Catholics. This development came from a combination of several interlocking factors, some global and some local. The development indeed reflects a pattern of interactions between the global and the local in the history of Vietnamese Marianism. It further illustrates the agency of Vietnamese Catholics, who welcomed ideas and beliefs from the global church yet also actively shaped them to further the destiny of their national church.

KEYWORDS: *Anticommunism, Catholicism, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Marian devotionism, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of La Vang, Our Lady of Lourdes, South Vietnam*

Notes

1. This account is compiled from *Hiện diện* [Attendance] 11 (June 1971): 60–61; and Hoàng Xuân Nghiêm and Lê Quang Hiên, “Đại hội thánh mẫu Trà Kiệu 1971” [The Marian Festival of Trà Kiệu in 1971], *Bản thông tin địa phận Quy Nhơn và Đà Nẵng* [Bulletin of the Dioceses of Quy Nhơn and Đà Nẵng] 14 (1971): 16–39. The second source has been republished online: “Đại hội thánh mẫu Trà Kiệu 1971,” *Linh Địa Trà Kiệu*, March 15, 2014, <https://trakieu.net/dai-hoi-thanh-mau-tra-kieu-1971/>.
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3. Important works include Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); George E. Dutton, *A Vietnamese Moses: Philipphê Binh and the Geographies of Early Modern Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017); Anh Q. Tran, *Gods, Heroes, and Ancestors: An Interreligious Encounter in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Claire Thi Liên

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 6. Gieromimo Mayorica, *Thiên Chúa thánh giáo khai mông* [Holy Teachings of the Lord of Heaven] (n.p.: 2003), 109–116. This publication belongs to the series *Sách Nôm Công Giáo* [Catholic Texts in the Nôm Script] that was printed and distributed “for internal use” by some of the Vietnamese clergy.
 7. An eighteenth-century example is *Thư của các giáo sĩ thừa sai* [Letters of Missionaries], trans. Nguyễn Minh Hoàng (n.p.: Văn Học, 2013), 84–85.
 8. Nguyễn Văn Ngọc, *Linh địa Lavang* [The Holy Site of La Vang] (Sài Gòn: 1970; reprint, Carthage, MO: Nguyệt San Trái Tim Đức Mẹ, 1978), 14–36. For a broader background, see George E. Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), 181–196. See also Joseph Tran Anh Dung, “Witness of Faith: The Martyrs in Vietnam,” in *Martyrs in Asia*, ed. Fabrizio Meroni (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2019), 21–44.
 9. “Letter of Rev. Dr. Pellerin on December 16, 1849,” *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, vol. 11 (London: 1850), 301.
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 12. Dutton, *A Vietnamese Moses*, 48–59; Jean Michaud, “French Missionary Expansion in Colonial Upper Tonkin,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 287–310.
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14. Đoàn Độc Thư and Xuân Huy, *Giám mục Lê Hữu Từ & Phát Diệm 1945-1954* [Bishop Lê Hữu Từ and Phát Diệm, 1945-1954] (n.p.: Sử Liệu Hiện Đại, 1973), 20; Lan Anh Ngo, "Nguyễn-Catholic History (1770s-1890s) and the Gestation of Vietnamese Catholic National Identity" (PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 2016), 224-225.
15. *Lộ Đức thánh mẫu* [Our Lady of Lourdes], 2 vols., (n.p.: 2005). Gendreau is credited to have "passed on" the story [*truyền tử*], while the MEP priest Pierre-Marie Cadro, under the name Pierre-Marie Lương, was listed as "teller" [*thuật*] of the narrative.
16. Suzanne Trần Thị Phước, *Đức bà hiện ra tại Lourdes* [Our Lady Appeared at Lourdes] (Quinhon: Imprimerie de Quinhon, 1927); *Sách hạnh bà thánh Bernadette* [Exemplar of Saint Bernadette] (Huế: Trường An, 1934). The first work is a play that apparently belonged to the repertoire of the company Bon Theatre de Saigon.
17. Post-persecution devotion to Our Lady of La Vang continued to honor her role as protector of Vietnamese Catholics, but there was also a growing devotion to her as advocate and healer in matters of health and material life. See Joseph T. V. Trang, *Tự tích tôn kính đức mẹ La-Vang* [Origin of the Devotion to Our Lady of La Vang] (Qui Nhơn: Imprimerie de Quinhon, 1930), 5-6.
18. J. Trinh, *Đạo chơi Phát Diệm* [Touring Phát Diệm] (Qui Nhơn: Imprimerie de Quinhon, 1937), 18-19.
19. Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 150; Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam giáo sử*, 506.
20. Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam giáo sử*, 403-405; *Đức bà hằng cứu giúp* [Our Lady of Perpetual Help] (Sài Gòn: Dòng Chúa Cứu Thế, 1938).
21. Massimo Faggioli, *Sorting Out Catholicism: A Brief History of New Ecclesial Movements*, trans. Demetrio S. Yocum (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 37-52; Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology: The First Wave (1924-1959)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5-53.
22. See the contribution of Claire Thị Liên Trần in this issue.
23. Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 155-162; Tổng Cục Địa Phận Hà Nội, *Cùng các vị tuyên úy làm thế nào để thiết lập công giáo tiến hành ở mỗi xứ* [Alongside Chaplains: How to Form Catholic Action at Each Parish] (Hà Nội: Imprimerie Trung-Hoa, 1940), 20-48.
24. See *Kỳ đại hội công giáo Nam Thanh lần thứ nhất địa phận Bùi Chu* [The First Catholic Youth Congress in the Vicariate of Bùi Chu] (Nam Định: Trương Phát, n.d.); and "Thanh niên với sự cầu nguyện" [Youths and Prayer], *Thanh niên* [Youth] (June 1, 1940): 3. The first source, probably published in 1940, describes several organizations in the vicariate of Bùi Chu. Note that Vietnamese then used the term "youth" [*thanh niên*] to mean people in their late teens to thirties.

25. Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam giáo sử*, 508; Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 161; and Ngô Đình Thục, “Thư chung đức thầy Phêrô về công giáo tiến hành năm 1943” [Pastoral Letter of Bishop Peter on Catholic Action in 1943] (Vĩnh Long: 1943).
26. J. M. Thích, *Vấn đề cộng sản* [The Problem of Communism] (Qui Nhơn: Imprimerie de Quinhon, 1927), 22–30.
27. Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies, 1940–1970* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 198; Tuan Hoang, “From Reeducation Camps to Little Saigons: Historicizing Vietnamese Diasporic Anticommunism,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 2 (2016): 50–52.
28. Đoàn Độc Thư and Xuân Huy, *Giám mục Lê Hữu Từ*; Ronald H. Spector, “Phat Diem: Nationalism, Religion, and Identity in the Franco-Viet Minh War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 34–46.
29. Lê Tiền Giang, *Công giáo kháng chiến nam bộ 1945–1954: Hồi ký* [Catholics during the Anticolonial War in the South, 1945–1954: Memoir] (Sài Gòn: Chơn, 1972). The oldest of the priests, Father Nguyễn Bá Luật, was the principal organizer of an anticolonial group of young Catholics in the Delta. He was killed by French forces in 1951. The leadership of southern Vietnamese clergy in nationalist youth movements before the August Revolution probably helped to mobilize some Catholic youths for the Việt Minh. See Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina*, 198.
30. An example is the city of Nam Định; see 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), 85–102.
31. See Giuliana Chamedes, “The Vatican, Nazi-Fascism, and the Making of Transnational Anti-communism in the 1930s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 2 (2016): 261–290.
32. Leo Madigan, *A Pilgrim’s Handbook to Fatima* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2001), 145; Andrew Apostoli, *Fatima for Today: The Urgent Marian Message of Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 173–174, 251. Sister Lucia had wanted Pius XII to consecrate Russia, but it was not possible due to the sensitivity around Soviet membership in the Allies at the time. He eventually consecrated the Russian people to the Immaculate Heart in 1952.
33. Robert A. Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Election of 1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 107–108.
34. Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy*, 108–123. For other contexts in Western countries, see Christ Maunder, *Our Lady of the Nations: Apparitions of Mary in 20th-Century Catholic Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Thomas A. Kselman and Steven Avella, “Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States,” *American Catholic Historical Review* 72 (1986): 403–424; and Katharine Massam, “The Blue Army and the Cold War: Anti-Communist Devotion to the

- Blessed Virgin Mary in Australia," *Australian Historical Studies* 24, no. 97 (1991): 420–428.
35. On the first period of the Legion, see Finola Kennedy, *Frank Duff: A Life History* (London: Burns & Oats, 2011), 61–123.
 36. *The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary*, revised ed. (Dublin: Concilium Legionis Mariae, 2014), 9.
 37. *Trái tim đức mẹ* [The Immaculate Heart of Mary] (August 1968): 14–19, 35–36; Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam giáo sử*, 230, 511; *Les Missions Catholiques en Indochina 1939* (Hong Kong: 1940), 92. According to the first source, a French military physician and legionary in Indochina wanted to promote Catholic Action in Hà Nội but was leaving Indochina to join a religious order, presumably in Europe. He asked a woman known only by her last name, De La Varende, who, in turn, asked Sister Marie Zoila to organize a chapter of the Legion. By the next decade, she became the mother superior. According to the second source, a Redemptorist by the name of Father Létourneau also contributed to the beginning of the Legion in Hà Nội.
 38. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (December 1966): 157.
 39. Donal Anthony Foley, *Marian Apparitions, the Bible, and the Modern World* (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2002), 72.
 40. Francis Johnston, *Fatima: The Great Sign* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2010).
 41. Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam Giáo Sử*, 509.
 42. “Giới thiệu nguồn gốc đoàn thể gia đình phật tạ thánh tâm Việt Nam” [Introducing the Origin of the Family for Reparation of the Sacred Heart in Vietnam], April 22, 2017, <http://gdptttvn.org/?p=25#more-25>; Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam giáo sử*, 513.
 43. *Tôn kính đức bà môi khô Fatima* [Honor Our Lady of Fatima the Rosary] (Sài Gòn: 1944). Portions of the tract had appeared in the periodical *Nam kỳ địa phận* [Southern Vicariate] (March 1, 1944), which indicates a larger promotion of this devotion in Indochina.
 44. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (July 1965): 363–367.
 45. Cao Tấn Tĩnh, “Hành trình truyền giáo về nguồn dòng công Việt Nam 2017 của phái đoàn đại diện hội thân hữu dòng công Hoa Kỳ” [Missionary travels to the CMR Vietnam 2017 of the Representatives of the Friends of the CMR USA], <http://www.thoidiemmaria.net/TDM2017/MVTG/VN%20Bui%20Chu.html> (accessed August 30, 2020).
 46. *Biểu chứng đức tin và tình yêu: Testimony of Faith and Love* (Carthage, MO: CMC Brothers, 1986), 60–71.
 47. 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, no. 3 (2009): 173–211; Peter Hansen, “The Virgin Heads South: Northern

- Catholic Refugees and Their Clergy in South Vietnam, 1954–1964,” in *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Thomas David DuBois (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 129–151.
48. *Đức mẹ Lavang* [Our Lady of La Vang] (January 1962): 11.
 49. Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam giáo sử*, 486.
 50. The information on Catholic Action is listed under individual dioceses in *Việt Nam công giáo niên giám 1964* [Catholic Yearbook of Vietnam, 1964] (Sài Gòn: Sacerdos, 1963).
 51. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (November 1966): 105, 129.
 52. *Liên lạc* [Communication] (March 1970): 62–63.
 53. *Tiến hành* [Progress] 25 (December 25, 1966): 31; and *Tiến hành* 27 (February 15, 1967): 30.
 54. “Lịch sử đại hội hành hương La Vang” [History of the Pilgrimage Festival La Vang], http://lavangchurch.org/dhtmlv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=104&Itemid=200 (accessed on January 6, 2020).
 55. Ngô Đình Thục, “Thơ chung đức thầy Phêrô,” 7.
 56. Đỗ Thọ, *Nhật ký Đỗ Thọ* [The Diary of Đỗ Thọ] (Sài Gòn: Đồng Nai, 1970), 55–71. Đỗ Thọ was the personal secretary of Ngô Đình Diệm and often saw Ngô Đình Thục when the latter visited the presidential palace.
 57. *Đức mẹ Lavang* (August 1961): 16.
 58. *Đức mẹ Lavang* (August 1961): 17; *Trái tim đức mẹ* (September 1961): 37.
 59. *Đức mẹ Lavang* (August 1961): 5–6, 20–21, 25–41.
 60. *Đức mẹ Lavang* (September 1961): 7.
 61. This information is taken from reports and other pieces in *Đức Mẹ Lavang* (September 1961).
 62. *Đức mẹ Lavang* (September 1961): 41, 51.
 63. 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): 240.
 64. *Đức mẹ Lavang* (September 1961): 16. In preparation for the 1964 festival, Ngô Đình Thục successfully petitioned the Vatican to send a cardinal as the papal special envoy to La Vang. A reproduction of the Vatican’s letter in Italian alongside a translation in Vietnamese is found in *Đức mẹ Lavang* (April 1963): 18–19.
 65. Some details of the planned construction are described in *Trái Tim Đức Mẹ* (September 1961): 36–37, 53.
 66. *Tiến hành* 3 (February 15, 1965): 33.
 67. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (July 1965): 363–367.
 68. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (August 1960): 7–11.

69. An example is an interview of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, conducted by the Vietnamese bishop Hoàng Văn Đoàn during the first session of the Second Vatican Council. See *Trái tim đức mẹ* (February 1963): 206–208, 211. The published interview shows questions and lengthy responses on Marian devotion among Poles.
70. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (February 1962): 223.
71. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (February 1963): 223.
72. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (October 1965): 89–90.
73. “Lịch sử tượng đức mẹ Fatima” [History of the Statue of Our Lady of Fatima], October 14, 2013, <http://www.xdtnntkitovua-gxdmhcg.com/lich-su-tuong-duc-me-fatima/>. This statue was blessed by Pius XII when it made a stop at the Vatican in 1951.
74. Johnston, *Fatima*, “Chapter XIII: The Pilgrim Virgin”; “History of the International Pilgrim Virgin Statue,” *Fatima Tour for Peace*, <https://www.fatimatourforpeace.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/History-of-the-Statue.pdf> (accessed on January 16, 2020).
75. *Sacerdos: Linh mục nguyệt san* [Sacerdos: Priestly Journal] (January–February 1968): 50–53; *Trái tim đức mẹ* (November 1965): 96.
76. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (October 1965): 91; *Trái tim đức mẹ* (November 1965): 96–98.
77. A detailed account of the tour’s first day can be found in *Trái tim đức mẹ* (November 1965): 98–102.
78. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (November 1965): 124.
79. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (November 1965): 102.
80. Subsequent issues of *Trái tim đức mẹ* include shorter reports of the tour in other cities and towns.
81. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (January/February 1974): 128–130; *Trái tim đức mẹ* (March 1974): 346–364, 370–384.
82. *Trái tim đức mẹ* (August 1968): 30; emphasis in the original.
83. Devotionalism to Our Lady of Fatima and Our Lady of La Vang continued after the Vietnam War, if in muted forms during the first decade. They were more openly practiced in the diaspora. See Thien-Huong Ninh, *Race, Gender, and Religion in the Vietnamese Diaspora: The New Chosen People* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); and Tuan Hoang, “Ultramontanism, Nationalism, and the Fall of Saigon: Historicizing the Vietnamese Catholic Experience,” *American Catholic Studies* 130, no. 1 (2019): 30–32.