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Bắc Di Cư in the Diaspora: Mapping a Vietnamese Catholic Refugee Identity

by

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Abstract

This social history examines the transformation of collective identity of Northern Catholics who migrated to the South in 1954 and escaped Vietnam after 1975. In this paper, I make the argument that due to the overwhelming number of Northern Catholic migrants and their tight-knit communities, key features such as the devotion to the Vietnamese martyrs and Our Lady of La Vang had come to define the Northern Catholic migrant experience and identity in 1954. After 1975, as many of these Northern Catholic migrants would rebuild their communities overseas, these close relationships between Northern Catholic migrant communities and institutions allowed for these features to become mainstays of a Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity as victims of communism.

Keywords: Northern Catholic migration of 1954, Vietnamese Catholic martyrdom, Our Lady of La Vang, Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement, Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity

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Abbreviations

RVN	Republic of Vietnam
USCCB	United States Catholic Conference of Bishops
VEYM	Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement
VEYM-USA	Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement in the United States

Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abbreviations	iii
Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Martyrdom: An Ancestral Lineage for Catholic Refugees	6
Our Lady of La Vang: Protector of Vietnamese Refugees	15
The Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement: Socialization and Education	23
Building a Vietnamese Refugee Catholicism	35
Conclusion: Prospects of a Vietnamese Catholic Identity	55
Bibliography	60
Notes	70

Introduction

In a tranquil, relatively unknown area of Versailles, New Orleans, a group of Vietnamese-American Catholics gathered together in front of Mary Queen of Vietnam Church in May of 2018. They were celebrating a major holiday of the liturgical year, May Crowning, meant to signify the coronation of the Virgin Mary in heaven. Youth in *áo dài* of various colors represent a different flower to be presented to the Blessed Virgin, little children are dressed in white angel wings, and older community members on the sides marvel at the performance. As the statue of the Virgin Mary is exposed, it is placed on an embroidered red palanquin and paraded around the church.

This is no ordinary Vietnamese Catholic church, much less an ordinary Vietnamese Catholic tradition. From the architecture of the church, with curved-tiled roofs supported by red pillars and yellow dragons painted along the sides, to the unique nature of the performances and procession, the community of over 14,000 Vietnamese-American Catholics traces its roots to a specific group of villages in Bùi Chu diocese in northern Vietnam. An entirely Catholic village formed to protect themselves from religious persecution in the Nguyễn Dynasty, the Bùi Chu community, led by their village priest, fled to the south in 1954 as part of the *Bắc di cư* [Northern migrant] migration of over one million refugees. This specific Bùi Chu community resettled in Phước Tỉnh village, in Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu Province, where they continued their fishing activities as they had done for generations in the North. For several years after the communist takeover of the country in 1975, many of these villagers attempted to escape to the United States through a variety of different means. Over the years, a small fishing community had begun to grow in East New Orleans, composed of many of the same Northern Catholic villagers who had followed each other to the South in 1954, and after 1975, to the United States. Half a century later, they still try to maintain their unique Catholic traditions tied to a specific region in northern Vietnam.

This Versailles community, in which over 75% are Northern Vietnamese Catholics, stands in stark contrast to conventional images of an overwhelmingly Buddhist nation, yet more, of a refugee population that escaped South Vietnam.¹ Nevertheless, the overrepresentation of this kind of community is not an anomaly. According to a study by Pew Forum in 2012, over 30% of Vietnamese-Americans are Catholic, as compared to only 8% in Vietnam.² In addition, as shown in surveys of refugee camps conducted between 1975-1980 by the INS and Interagency Task Force on Indochina, over 40% of the early refugee population were of Northern descent, a majority of which were Catholic.³ Observations of refugee camps by researchers suggest that the proportion may be even higher. Evidently, this small minority of approximately 800,000 Northern Catholic migrants to the South in 1954 is exceedingly overrepresented among the Vietnamese refugee diaspora.

Northern Catholic migrants belong to a specific historical movement of over one million refugees from North to South that resulted from the division of Vietnam into two countries in 1954. In this paper, I demarcate the boundaries of “North” as the territory of Vietnam above the 17th parallel created by the Geneva Accords and “South” as the territory below that line. This diverse population, including Catholics, Buddhists, intellectuals, mandarins, landowners, political activists, and members connected to the former colonial government, had a variety of reasons to flee the North that generally was due to fear of persecution from the communist Việt Minh.

Most scholars of this Northern refugee population since 1954 have either tended to treat this diverse group as one monolithic community or conflated the 800,000 Northern Catholic migrants with the entire *Bắc di cư* population. As early as the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords that officially divided North and South Vietnam, both the CIA and new Republic of Vietnam state under Ngô Đình Diệm targeted the incoming migrants as a source of political legitimacy and

rejection of communism. Propaganda that “Christ has Gone to the South” put forth by Colonel Edward Lansdale and American support for the “Operation Passage to Freedom” have been repeated in later scholarship about Northern refugees.⁴ Diệm himself traveled to Hanoi several times in 1954 and portrayed himself as a savior for Catholics, hoping to utilize this group as an anti-communist bulwark loyal to the new regime.⁵ However, Peter Hansen rejects the traditional emphasis on the American government and Diệm’s role in bringing Northern refugees to the South, noting that individual families and local Catholic clergy were the primary organizers of mass migrations under a tight-knit Northern village structure that looked to clergy as both spiritual and social leaders.⁶ He also questions conventional associations with Northern Catholic migrants as loyal supporters of Ngô Đình Diệm, demonstrating how many refugees actively resisted forced resettlement programs and societal initiatives that prioritized the regime’s political needs.⁷ Phan Văn Nguyễn asserts that Northern Catholic migrants developed a cultural and political identity in the South distinct from both the Catholic Church hierarchy, Southern Catholics, and the political nature of Ngô Đình Diệm’s Catholicism.⁸ As a matter of fact, many of these Northern Catholic villages and local clergy defied orders from the Vatican to stay in the North. Upon migration, these communities would also be forced to reevaluate their Catholic identities as exclusive *họ đạo* village-communities, especially as their traditions came into conflict with those of non-Catholics and Catholics in the South.⁹

In the South and overseas, Northern Catholic migrant villages, whose Catholic identity was considered both an ideology and a way of life, found their situations as both separated and overlapping with Northern Buddhists, Northern refugees who served the French military and government, educated Catholic intellectuals, Southern Catholics, and Southern Buddhists alike. Because these inextricable links make it so hard to define a “Northern Catholic migrant” identity,

I will use the term “Northern Catholic migrants” to refer primarily to a specific subgroup of Northern Catholic village-communities that maintained their secluded nature when they fled to the South. To be more precise regarding time periods, I will also use the term “Northern Catholic migrant” as a broader term to refer to any Catholic migrants who fled to the South in 1954, with the term “Northern Catholic refugee” referring to a specific subgroup of those migrants who had escaped Vietnam and are currently living overseas. With these specific subgroups among the Northern Catholic community of 1954 as a point of reference, I will attempt to map out a social history of the formation of Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity abroad. Phi-Vân Nguyễn and Peter Hansen’s scholarship offer a foundational framework for an identity of Northern Catholic migrants between 1954-1975. In this paper, I will offer my historiographical intervention by connecting this identity to the formation of a Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity after 1975. I make the argument that in the Republic of Vietnam, due to the overwhelming number of Northern Catholic migrants and their tight-knit communities, key features such as the devotion to the Vietnamese martyrs and Our Lady of La Vang had come to define the Northern Catholic migrant experience and identity in 1954. After 1975, as many of these Northern Catholic migrants would rebuild their communities overseas, these close relationships between Northern Catholic migrant communities and institutions allowed for these features to become mainstays of a Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity as victims of communism.

In examining this social history, I will utilize a diverse collection of oral histories, newspaper articles, internet blogs, speeches, and other writings circulated within the refugee community. Since my intervention is centered around the contributions of the Northern Catholic migrant identity to the broader Vietnamese Catholic refugee community, many sources take on a contemplative quality. Reflections by refugees currently residing overseas on the migration of

1954, the communist takeover of 1975, their escape overseas, and the formation of the diasporic community abroad – corroborated by writings during those time periods – will help provide clearer insight into the complex transformations of a Northern Catholic migrant identity, the identity of the Church of Vietnam, and the identity of the Vietnamese Catholic refugee community over those periods of time.

I will first premise my argument on Hansen and Phi-Vân Nguyễn's assessments that due to the exclusive nature of Northern Catholic village-communities supported by the South Vietnamese government, Northern Catholic migrants in 1954 had transformed into a distinct cultural and political identity separate from other Northern migrants and Southern Catholics. Following the years after the 1954 migration, the overwhelming number of migrants together with their close-knit structures dominated Southern Catholic communities and made their distinct Northern Catholic traditions and organizations widespread in the South. In my first two chapters, I will focus specifically on the unique devotion to the 117 Vietnamese martyrs and Our Lady of La Vang by Northern Catholic migrants, which developed from their experiences under communism in the North and migration to the South. After 1954 and 1975, these devotions became key identifying features that marked their Northern Catholic migrant identity as refugees from communism. Those anti-communist elements would later be appropriated and popularized by the Church of Vietnam, South Vietnamese government, and the Holy See, creating conditions for these identifying features to become synonymous with the Vietnamese Catholicism in the South.

In my third chapter, I will focus on the history of the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement as one of the main institutions in maintaining the Northern Catholic migrant identity through the socialization and education of the community's youth. The tight-knit nature of these communities and the overwhelming presence of Northern Catholic migrants allowed the

Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement to thrive, integrating itself as an important organization for creating a Vietnamese Catholic identity in the South. Following the events of April 30, 1975, this collective identity would be transplanted overseas along with the millions of Catholic refugees who escaped Vietnam. While most of the refugee community and its institutions were scattered and divided, the close relationships maintained between Northern Catholic migrant communities became focal to the creation of an international Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement, helping socialize a common Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity among youth all over the world.

My final chapter focuses on the building of a Catholic refugee identity premised on communist persecution of religion from before 1954 to the present time. As both Southern and Northern Vietnamese Catholics experienced religious persecution and suffering under communist rule, anti-communist elements of the Northern Catholic migrant identity that had become integrated into the pre-1975 Vietnamese Catholic identity would become central to the formation of collective identity abroad. Youth organizations, Vietnamese Catholic newspapers, and online websites/blogs helped connect Vietnamese Catholics abroad and socialize them under a new Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity. This identity would be premised on a unique history that stretches from the period of religious persecution of Northern Catholics before 1954 to current restrictions of freedom of religion and speech by the communist government today.

Martyrdom: An Ancestral Lineage for Catholic Refugees

Leaving behind one's home and escaping religious persecution as a community has for centuries been a central theme in the identities of Northern Catholic migrants since the mid 19th century. In 1839, Emperor Minh Mạng declared in court that Catholicism, including practicing Vietnamese Catholics, were a threat to the Confucian social order.¹⁰ Those like Minh Mạng perceived Vietnamese Catholics as holding dividing loyalties between the God, the Holy See, and

the Emperor, a possible source of danger as the Nguyễn Dynasty faced fears of aggression by European colonial powers. This began the mass execution of over 130,000 Vietnamese Catholics by the Nguyễn Dynasty.¹¹ While persecution in the South was ended in the 1860s by the French presence in Cochinchina, it lasted approximately twenty more years in the North. Still then, unofficial violence against Catholics continued into the colonial period, as proponents of the pro-monarchist Cần Vương movement in the North executed Vietnamese Catholics they viewed as traitors.¹² In response, Northern Catholics formed themselves into various *giáp*, which were isolated subvillages specific to Northern village traditions that existed as communities that provided self-protection and places to freely practice their faith.¹³ These *giáp* were encompassed entirely of Catholics, and over time, several *giáp* in certain regions came together to form specific Northern Catholic *họ đạo* village-communities, in which the church replaced the traditional Northern *đình* as a center for all community affairs, and the parish priest was considered the spiritual and moral guide to daily life. Catholics in the South, whose traditions were not as exclusive and hierarchical as Northern village-communities, did not have as urgent of a need to form these isolated Catholic communities, instead assimilating into diverse villages that included a wide array of beliefs and traditions.

The approximately 130,000 Vietnamese martyrs, killed or persecuted for their faith, were highly regarded by all Vietnamese Catholics as exemplars of a holy life. Yet for these Northern Catholic villages, these martyrs were central to their identity as Catholics. Jennifer Yến Phạm, although born and raised in Saigon, related how her Catholic identity was tied to her family and community from the North: her uncle was a priest, her sister was a nun, and one of her ancestors is a Vietnamese martyr.¹⁴ Anthony Lê Đức, born and raised in a small *họ đạo* called Đồng Nghĩa in Nam Định, described how he was taught that his ancestors on his father's side were Vietnamese

martyrs from Thanh Hoá, while his ancestors on his mother's side were forced by Emperor Tự Đức to *đi phân tháp*, referring to the forced relocation of Catholics in the North to prison camps around Nam Định.¹⁵ This formation of these *họ đạo* after the period of forced incarceration in those specific areas is one of the main reasons why the pre-1954 dioceses of Bùi Chu and Phát Diệm were major areas for Northern Catholic villages that would flee South in 1954. For those like Anthony, these isolated *họ đạo* villages played an important role in transmitting their collective history of religious persecution, as well as affirming a kind of Catholic identity tied to kinship and geography. Like many other Vietnamese folk traditions of worshiping local deities, Northern Catholic villages venerated Vietnamese martyrs as local patrons tied to their community.

These community identities centered around religious persecution for Northern Catholics play an important role in their motivations to migrate to the South in 1954 and later to escape the country after 1975. Anthony Lê Đức likens his ancestors' forced relocation to Nam Định to communist policies, remarking:

It was really no different than current communist theoretical practices, where the people coming back from reeducation camps are still put under house arrest, that's one form of communism, taken from the oppressive methods used by kings in the past. They also copied ideas which are unsuitable for this time period, and just cause more misery for the people.

Over one million people were imprisoned in re-education camps after 1975, with Decrees 1-CS/76 and 2-CS/76 specifically targeting all members in the “army, government, or reactionary political organizations of the old regime.”¹⁶ A large number of re-educated persons that fell into these categories were Northern Catholic migrants and clergy, partly due to the strong support by the Catholic Church and U.S. government in providing education for Northern Catholic migrants, as well as the fact that many Northern Catholic migrants had specific personal and economic reasons for joining the military.¹⁷

After Anthony Lê Đức fled to the United States by boat in 1980, he collaborated with a group of other Northern Catholic refugees in the United States to write a collection of stories of their Trần ancestors in Nam Định. While Anthony described the experiences of his ancestor's Catholic discrimination under Tự Đức, his friend from the same village wrote the following story about his grand-uncle Pherô Phạm Tàn, bishop of Thanh Hoá. The story, titled “Theo chân tổ đi Phân Tháp” [Following the footsteps of my ancestors under *phân tháp*], details how his ancestor was denounced by the communists during the land reform period. The communists proceeded to bury the bishop alive in the mud and trampled on him with a water buffalo until his death. The title makes a direct connection between religious persecution and martyrdom under the Nguyễn Dynasty with that under communist rule between 1945-1954. Anthony himself then connects those experiences with current communist practices such as reeducation camps. Anthony later described that he felt that he was discriminated against after 1975 because of his involvement in the 1954 emigration to the South, while also noting that he tried to hide the fact that Đồng Nghĩa was his birthplace for fear of his Catholic roots being exposed. The connections from his collective past to his present feeling of religious persecution against his Northern Catholic migrant identity was a primary motivation for his decision to escape Vietnam.

The connection between Northern Catholic ancestral traditions and remembrance of the Vietnamese martyrs can be seen clearly through the profiles of the 117 martyrs in Vietnam officially canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1988. Of the 97 martyrs of Vietnamese descent, 81 of them trace their hometowns above the 17th parallel. This overrepresentation is not only because religious persecution was more pronounced in the North. Approximately one-third of canonized Vietnamese martyrs trace their roots to the diocese of Bùi Chu in Nam Định, where over 70% of lay people and clergy fled to the South in 1954 and constitute almost one-quarter of all Northern

Catholic migrants.¹⁸ As shown by Jennifer YẾN Phạm and Anthony Lê Đức's oral histories, the Vietnamese martyrs were treated not merely as symbol ancestors but as genealogical ancestors, and it is likely that it was for this reason that while most of the 130,000 Vietnamese martyrs were forgotten by individual families, the specific community-traditions and tight-knit nature of Northern Catholic villages in the North had allowed the many of their blood-ancestors to be memorialized as local patrons in their communities. Although the Vietnamese martyrs had not widespread attention by the Holy See until calls for their canonization by refugees after 1975, their cause for sainthood and patronage had already begun to be recorded and transmitted in Bù Chu before 1954. Father Andrej Macjen, a Salesian missionary in the North, recalls his visit to a seminary in Bù Chu and how he learned of the sacrifices of 117 martyrs in Vietnam there.¹⁹ Local villages, supported by the diocese, would also collect body parts of fallen martyrs as relics to instill devotion in the community.²⁰

During the migration of 1954, the example of the Vietnamese martyrs was given a new political symbolism by Northern Catholics who went South. Trần Minh Tiêt is one Northern Catholic migrant who was later imprisoned in a reeducation camp and allowed to resettle in the United States. In his 1954 book, "A History of Persecutions in Vietnam," he wrote:

The rise of the Viet Minh Communist Party to power, the return of French troops to the country, then the exodus of refugees following the Geneva agreements, have made Vietnam for ten years a club of politicians or rivalries, resentments, intrigues, and cruelties given free rein. The Catholics who form the tenth of the total population and constitute one of the liveliest elements of the Nation, have often been martyred and plundered by the Viet Minh communities. Like during the reigns of Minh--Mang, Thieu--Tri, and Tu--Duc, the current era of Ho Chi Minh has brought to our Church under a more hypocritical form just as much blood and fire as the tragic years of last century.

Joseph Minh is another Northern Catholic refugee living in Houston, Texas, publishing an excerpt entitled, "The Tragedy of Vĩnh," which describes how Northern Catholic migrants from the

diocese of Vinh follow in the footsteps of their ancestors through their “modern martyrdom” under the Việt Minh. He writes:

For 70 years (1820-1890), the people of Vinh suffered atrocious persecutions; some Catholic villages were destroyed and many Catholics jailed or killed...Many times, the communist Viet Minh rejoiced in their deep conviction that Catholicism was dying and that very soon the eradication of religion would be completely successful. The Catholics, however, did not wonder at their tragic conditions because their Founder had predicted long ago: 'If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you, too,' and explained the reason for such a persecution: 'Because you are not of the world...therefore the world hates you.'²¹

These two publications, both of which were widely circulated in the Northern migrant community in the South, represent a new addition to the collective memory of Vietnamese Catholic martyrdom that links Northern Catholic migrants as the new martyrs in a lineage of fleeing the religious persecution. For Northern Catholic migrants like Joseph Minh and Trần Minh Tiết, who both fled to the South in 1954 and later to the United States after 1975, martyrdom was not only a tradition tied to one's community, but also a manifestation of a new community that had fled twice to escape religious persecution.

The political symbolism of Catholic martyrdom was not lost on the newly formed communist regime in 1975. When Pope John Paul II officially canonized the 117 Vietnamese martyrs of the Nguyễn Dynasty on June 19, 1988, the Vietnamese government banned all domestic Catholics from attending the celebration in Rome. Nguyễn Quang Huy, head of Vietnam's Commission for Religious Affairs, called the canonization "an embarrassment to the Catholic clergy and laity, distorting the nation's history and adversely affecting the people's unity."²² After 1975, the communist government closed down Catholic schools and churches, arrested clergy, and restricted religious activities in order to limit the Catholic Church's power against their goal to build a “socialist” Vietnamese society. To the communist government, Vietnamese martyrs posed a potential threat to the regime as a symbol of many disenfranchised Catholics who witnessed these

restrictions and also faced discrimination in employment and education.²³ Conversely, for the eight-thousand Vietnamese refugees in attendance and around the world, the canonization marked an official recognition by the Church of the struggles that Vietnamese refugees had undergone due to communism. Pope John Paul II himself, a victim of religious persecution in communist Poland and one of the major figures involved with the end of communism in the Soviet Union, likely felt a close affinity with the Vietnamese refugees. He explicitly addresses both the local Vietnamese church and refugee community in his speech:

For you, Vietnamese Christians living on all continents, the Holy Martyrs are today more than examples. They abide in the love of Christ and they commune with all the members of Christ. They intercede so that, from the still living roots, vigorous branches grow. They are close to you in the oneness of Spirit. They call you to stay faithful...

I know that, for many of you, the experience of exile and separation has reinforced a real fraternal solidarity. In this you imitate the inexhaustible charity of the saints we honor today; they were devoted without limit to the service of the whole community, they visited the prisoners, they helped the poor, they welcomed the orphans. Many of them have devoted themselves to educating young people. Many have made significant contributions to the study of the doctrine of the faith and expressed it to make it accessible in your rich culture. All of these tasks are yours today; by accomplishing them in a spirit of faith and love, you build up the Church, you respond to your Christian vocation.²⁴

While the Vietnamese government had denounced the canonization of the Vietnamese martyrs, the pope made an official recognition of the Vietnamese refugee community in exile and their connection to the Vietnamese martyrs. It should be no surprise then that while shrines and parishes dedicated to the Vietnamese martyrs have remained relatively few in Vietnam, the Vietnamese martyrs have become a key feature of Catholicism within the Vietnamese diaspora. 15 parishes in the United States, Canada, and Australia are dedicated specifically to all 117 Vietnamese martyrs, not including parishes of individual martyrs, while none currently exist in Vietnam. On June 11, 2021, the Diocese of Orange in California, home to the largest concentration of Vietnamese refugees outside of Vietnam, unveiled a \$12.6 million shrine of Our Lady of La Vang and a

memorial wall listing the names of each of the 117 Vietnamese martyrs.²⁵ As no comparable shrine dedicated to all 117 martyrs yet exists in Vietnam, Vietnamese martyrs have undoubtedly been sealed specifically in the hearts of the Vietnamese Catholic diaspora.

The experiences of Northern Catholic migrants as “double refugees” to the South and then overseas played an essential role in the Vietnamese martyrs’ case of canonization receiving international recognition by the Holy See. Monsignor Vincent Trần Ngọc Thụ was born in the Northern Catholic village of Đông Hải, under the diocese of Phát Diệm.²⁶ Prior to migrating South in 1954, he became the personal secretary to Bishop Thaddeus Lê Hữu Từ, and later was given responsibility over the ten newly formed Northern Catholic migrant parishes in Saigon. In 1976, he was expelled by the Vietnamese government and invited to work at the Holy See’s Department of Foreign Affairs. Later serving as the chief postulator for the canonization of the Vietnamese martyrs, Trần Ngọc Thụ was forced to face the issue that two miracles needed to be verified by the Holy See in order to qualify for sainthood. The martyrs were beatified in four waves (1900, 1906, 1909, and 1951) prior to the canonization without the proof of miracles.²⁷

Trần Ngọc Thụ made the case that the widespread devotion to the Vietnamese martyrs by Northern Catholics who fled the South in 1954 and Vietnamese refugees who fled by boat after 1975 merited exceptional circumstances for the canonization of the Vietnamese martyrs.²⁸ He argued that there were a vast number of unverified miracles among refugees who escaped life-or-death situations by praying to the Vietnamese martyrs, and that the canonization for the Vietnamese martyrs would serve as recognition for “one of the most vibrant Catholic communities in the world.”²⁹ It would seem that the Pope John Paul II concurred. Almost immediately after the canonization, the pope established the Center of the Pastoral Apostolate for Overseas Vietnamese, appointing Philip Trần Văn Hoài to be its first director.³⁰ This appointment of Hoài, who had

founded the Vietnamese Laity in Diaspora Movement in 1992 aimed at helping overseas parishioners engage in politics and social justice, was significant in that it recognized a known communist dissident to head affairs for Vietnamese Catholic refugees.

Just as significant, the pope invited the postulator for the Vietnamese martyrs' canonization, Trần Ngọc Thụ, to become his own personal secretary, the first person of Asian descent to ever fulfill that role. In giving his reasons for choosing Thụ, the pope remarked: "The reason I chose you [Thụ] is because I think of how the Vietnamese Church, during times of past persecution, had remained faithful to the universal Church and to the Holy See. And recently, despite undergoing so many trials, the Vietnamese Church has continued to maintain a steadfastly intimate, loyal association with Rome."³¹ The head of the Catholic Church, who had just granted an exception to canonize the first saints in Vietnamese history due to their devotion among Northern Catholic migrants and Vietnamese refugees, decided to affirm this commitment by taking on a Northern Catholic refugee as his personal assistant. Trần Ngọc Thụ would himself remark his great privilege as a refugee being able to represent his national church, expressing his intimate connection with the 8,000 refugees present for the canonization and "especially with the elderly, who wiped away their tears with handkerchiefs as they were so honored and happy to be the descendants of heroes."³²

For both the Northern Catholic and larger refugee community overseas, Trần Ngọc Thụ's appointment and the pope's direct recognition of the boat people amounted to a newfound pride for the Vietnamese Catholic identity. Francis Phạm Văn Phương, a Northern Catholic migrant from Phát Diệm diocese who followed his parents to Xuân Lộc as a child, wrote how moved he was by Thụ's visit in 1976 to his newly formed *họ đạo* in Atlanta, Georgia, a refugee community of about 400 Northern Catholic families with shared roots in Phát Diệm.³³ In hearing the news of

Thụ's appointment in 1988, Phạm Văn Phương recalls the pride he felt that a respected elder from his hometown had helped build and maintain the refugee community in the South and overseas. Years later, he and his friends, who shared their roots in Phát Diệm and Xuân Lộc, decided to write a biography of Trần Ngọc Thụ in order to memorialize his contributions to the Vietnamese Church and the Holy See. Trần Vinh, another Northern Catholic refugee in the United States who was Thụ's nephew, wrote in an email how Trần Ngọc Thụ's appointment inspired so much pride in the refugee community specifically because Thụ was a figure that both represented the Church of Vietnam and shared the refugee community's experiences of exile and suffering.³⁴ Trần Ngọc Thụ's key role in the Holy See and the canonization of the Vietnamese martyrs is one of many examples of how the migration of 1954 became a central aspect for the refugee community's devotion to the Vietnamese martyrs. It also highlighted how local devotions to individual martyrs by Northern Catholics had become inserted into an international Catholic refugee identity. With this devotion embedded into the refugee consciousness, the devotion to the 117 Vietnamese martyrs would also foreshadow a new set of devotions to "martyrs under communism" in the form Vietnamese refugees who had to flee Vietnam due to religious persecution. Popularizations of figures like Nguyễn Văn Thuận, Trương Bửu Diệp, Marcel Văn, and many others, as well a specific devotion to Our Lady of La Vang as protector of Vietnamese refugees, are important examples that highlight the development of the Catholic refugee identity.

Our Lady of La Vang: Protector of Vietnamese Refugees

The devotion of the Vietnamese martyrs by Catholic refugees is also intimately linked with the special devotion to the Virgin Mary, and most especially, Our Lady of La Vang. Although stories regarding the apparition of Our Lady of La Vang vary by individual, the legend according to the Archdiocese of Huế recounts that in 1798, the Cảnh Thịnh Emperor, last king of the Tây

Son Period, had executed thousands of Vietnamese Catholics who they regarded as threats to the kingdom.³⁵ Hundreds of parishioners from the village of Cỗ Vư attempted to find refuge in La Vang forest, and on an ancient banyan tree, a beautiful Lady in a robe appeared on top of the tree with the Child Jesus in her arms. The Lady protected the villagers from harm and healed all of their illnesses, promising that anyone who comes to La Vang to pray will be blessed by her.

Today, the devotion to Our Lady of La Vang by Vietnamese refugees who give thanks for being protected from harm as they fled Vietnam has transformed into a mainstay of the Catholic diasporic community while remaining relatively marginal in Vietnam. Shrines to Our Lady of La Vang are found all over the world, including United States, Canada, Australia, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia.³⁶ Over twenty parishes in the United States, Canada, and Australia have been built since 1975 dedicated to Our Lady of La Vang during a time in which worship in the original basilica in Quảng Trị was disallowed by the communist government until 1990.³⁷ At opposite ends of the Pacific Ocean stands two shrines. In Vietnam, a \$25 million dollar basilica stands where the original apparition occurred in Quảng Trị. Most of the basilica had been completely destroyed in 1972 due to war bombing, and it was only recently restored in 2012. On the opposite end of the sea stands the \$12.6 million shrine of Our Lady of La Vang at the center of Christ Cathedral, where over 200,000 Vietnamese-Americans reside. Both shrines had received much of their funding from Vietnamese Catholics around the world.

Pictured left: Our Lady of La Vang Shrine in Orange County, California

Pictured right: Our Lady of La Vang Basilica in Quảng Trị, Vietnam

It should be noted that Marian devotion is not limited to the diaspora and still exists widely across different Catholic cultures and in Vietnam today. However, as Thiên-Hương Ninh asserts, the image of Our Lady of La Vang has been specifically utilized to create a collective identity for Vietnamese Catholics around the world based on a shared faith, ethnic culture, and political positionality as refugees.³⁸ Today, while Marianism exists as a prominent feature among both domestic and overseas communities, the particular devotion to Our Lady of La Vang did not become popularized until the Northern migration to the South in 1954. As many Northern Catholics had become devoted to Our Lady of La Vang as gratitude for their safe journey South, the figure of Our Lady of La Vang gained the attention of the RVN government and international community. A nationalized devotion to Our Lady of La Vang in South Vietnam became fully salient during the boat people crisis, as refugees attributed their freedom from communism to Our Lady of La Vang and built a network of shrines and parishes to express their honor.

Thiên-Hương Ninh notes that until 1954, the devotion of Our Lady of La Vang had remained a relatively regional tradition.³⁹ Following the period of religious persecution during the mid-19th century under Emperors Minh Mạng and Tự Đức, parishioners from Cổ Vưu in 1864 organized a pilgrimage to La Vang as thanksgiving for being protected from the violence.⁴⁰ On August 8, 1901, the local parishioners, with the support of the local bishop Gaspar Lộc, organized

the first official La Vang pilgrimage celebration in the presence of about 12,000 pilgrims.⁴¹ From then on, there would be twelve successive celebrations until 1954. Most of the pilgrims, ranging from 10,000-30,000 per celebration, would be limited to the Northern Central provinces of Vietnam. According to the notes of Father Philip Lê Thiện Bá, during the 12th La Vang celebration, August 19, 1938 - the last celebration before political turmoil against French colonialism had prevented pilgrims from coming to La Vang - only 200 pilgrims came from the South out of the 50,000 in attendance.⁴²

As noted by Đoàn Triệu Long, the migration in 1954 popularized Our Lady of La Vang to the national community in South Vietnam.⁴³ The Geneva Accords of 1954 had split Quảng Trị province, including the Diocese of Huế, into half, with the shrine to Our Lady of La Vang located on the southern side of the 17th parallel. As many refugees had become devoted to Our Lady of La Vang for protecting them against religious persecution of the Nguyễn Dynasty, Northern Catholic migrants too developed a specific devotion to Our Lady of La Vang as most had to pass the shrine on the 17th parallel as a sort of symbolic rite of passage for their safe arrival into the South. Saved from the horrors of the land reform period, denunciations of landowners and clergy, endless violence between the Việt Minh and the French, and communist restrictions on churches, the image of Our Lady of La Vang served as a symbol that these Northern Catholic migrants were now safe in the South. Nearly 30,000 migrants from Northern Quảng Trị alone had passed through the shrine to Our Lady of La Vang on their journey South.⁴⁴ According to the *Tông Đồ* magazine, a Catholic newspaper circulated among Northern Catholic migrants in the South, nearly 4,000 parishioners and 15 priests gathered together around the shrine on September 1954 to give thanks to Our Lady of La Vang for protecting them on their journey to the South.⁴⁵ Another history from Our Lady of La Vang parish in Houston recounted how approximately 1,000 Northern migrants had converted

to Catholicism upon passing the shrine of Our Lady of La Vang.⁴⁶ The lasting influence of Our Lady of La Vang on these migrants can be seen through the 13th La Vang celebration on August 17, 1955. After seventeen years since the last celebration, over 20,000 pilgrims came to attend the celebration, presided over by Bishop Urritia Thị from the diocese of Huế, as well as Bishops Lê Hữu Từ from Phát Diệm diocese and Phạm Ngọc Chi from Bùi Chu diocese.⁴⁷ Compared to the previous celebration that was limited mainly to Northern-Central Catholics, the celebration in 1955 gathered pilgrims from all regions. Represented by the the two Northern bishops primarily responsible for the migration to the South, many of those pilgrims were Northern Catholic migrants. For many of the migrants who had to pass through La Vang as a symbolic representation that they had finally reached a place of refuge, a specific devotion to Our Lady of La Vang flourished that would become nationalized into the culture of the Republic of Vietnam.

As Northern Catholics flooded into the South with their newfound devotion, U.S. governmental and non-profit organizations assigned to aid in their migration and resettlement also paid their respects to Our Lady of La Vang. A few days after the gathering in September 1954 of 4,000 Northern Catholic migrants at the shrine, two American delegations from Huế and Saigon also arrived to pay their respects to Our Lady of La Vang and help serve the new migrant community.⁴⁸ A number of important religious and national figures linked to the Northern Catholic migration movement followed in 1955. Cardinal Francis Spellman of the Archdiocese of New York, a close confidant of the Ngô Đình Diệm regime who had helped secure over \$80 million from the U.S. Catholic Church for the resettlement of Northern migrants, visited the shrine in January of 1955 and remarked, “I pray and firmly believe that Our Lady of La Vang will win and bring peace to the Vietnamese Church.”⁴⁹ Ngô Đình Diệm, President of the Republic of Vietnam, along with 200 international representatives who were there to investigate the implementation of

the armistice, made his own pilgrimage to Our Lady of La Vang three weeks later.⁵⁰ By the 15th celebration of La Vang on August 17, 1961, the figure of Our Lady of La Vang as a protector of the Northern migrants had been popularized into a metaphor for the Church of Vietnam undergoing political turmoil. Inviting Catholics of all regions to attend the celebration, Archbishop Ngô Đình Thục of the diocese of Huế declared the elevation of the shrine of Our Lady of La Vang to the status of a Basilica:

At this time, more than ever, the whole Vietnamese people must turn to Our Lady of La Vang, in order to find comfort for their souls, find peace for the country, and seek divine grace for the Church.

Therefore, all the Archbishops and Bishops representing the Vietnamese hierarchy have agreed to dedicate the Shrine of La Vang as a place for Our Lady to reside to bless the Church and give the Vietnamese nation a safe haven and a place of territorial reunification in peace and freedom.⁵¹

Vietnamese Catholics responded enthusiastically to the official nationalization of Our Lady of La Vang. 300,000 pilgrims from all over the country were present at the 15th celebration, an exponential increase of pilgrims from the celebrations only a few years prior.⁵² In the presence of Ngô Đình Diệm, the archbishops officially dedicated the country of Vietnam to the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady of La Vang.⁵³ While it was not Ngô Đình Diệm himself who dedicated the country, historians such as Seth Jacobs had dissembled that the president's dedication of the country to Our Lady was evidence of his goals to turn Vietnam into a Catholic country.⁵⁴ Regardless, these characterizations by South Vietnamese society and the international community transformed the image of Our Lady of La Vang from a local shrine before 1954 to a symbol synonymous with both the Church of Vietnam and the Republic of Vietnam itself.

The symbolism of Our Lady of La Vang as a figure that would bring refuge to a nation affected by war and suffering would be extrapolated to the experiences of Vietnamese refugees who looked to Our Lady of La Vang for hope and refuge in their journey abroad. Cây Ngô Đồng,

a Catholic who was imprisoned for thirteen years in a reeducation camp, asserted that Our Lady of La Vang had helped him survive his escape by boat in 1989:

When I crossed the border in mid-1989, the refugee camps in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia were closed. Our boat was picked up by a Malaysian coast guard boat. But after 10 days they put us on a rickety fishing boat, towed us out to sea, cut the cables, and signaled for us to go down to Indonesia. In the afternoon of the second day, the ship broke down about 100 meters from a small island. The sky started to become stormy, the clouds made the sky black, and the wind blew fiercely. The boat began to be pushed back and forth by the waves. We were very worried, we tried all kinds of ways but could not move the boat. Fortunately for us, the islanders saw a big storm coming but our boat refused to enter the beach. They thought we were in trouble, so they mobilized many small boats to pick us up ashore. In the evening, a big storm came. The next morning, when I went to look, the boat was overturned and lying on one side. Due to its proximity to the shallow water, the boat did not capsize. Two weeks later, the High Commissioner for Refugees picked us up and brought us back to the Galang camp. On the island, I saw the statue of Our Lady of La Vang standing on the boat crossing the border. I burst into tears and many people cried. I suddenly understood that Our Lady of La Vang saved us... For asylum seekers, Our Lady of La Vang has a special meaning. Christmas, 1989 at the Galang refugee camp, Indonesia, I wondered what to say to the young children (who crossed the border without elderly relatives) who were crying because of sadness, helplessness, and homesickness. What do I have to say to let them know that the Lord was born with sufferings just like them?...I suddenly realized that Our Lady, Saint Joseph, and Jesus had also experienced refugee status like us, so they understood and sympathized with our situation.⁵⁵

Đồng's testimony demonstrates that he was not the first refugee to give thanks to Our Lady of La Vang during the escape by boat. According to an article by the construction board of an Our Lady of La Vang monument in San Jose, California, almost every refugee camp community in Southeast Asia had established their own parish or shrine dedicated to Our Lady of La Vang.⁵⁶ As Thiên-Hương Ninh notes, the Our Lady of La Vang parish left behind in the Palawan refugee camp has been embraced by local Filipino Catholics as the patroness of Puerto Princesa and Palawan.⁵⁷ Đồng's testimony also highlights the intimate connection Vietnamese Catholic refugees have with Our Lady of La Vang. Similar to how Northern Catholic migrants had taken on a devotion to Our Lady of La Vang and connected the symbolism of the figure as a protector against religious

persecution with their own plights, Đồng connected his own refugee journey with that of the escape into Egypt by the Holy Family.

Vietnamese Catholic refugees established shrines and parishes dedicated to Our Lady of La Vang wherever they resettled.⁵⁸ Many of these local communities, especially many refugees who sought to preserve their traditions from the North, sought to insert their own local styles of architecture. Anthony Lê Đức, the Northern Catholic refugee from Đồng Nghĩa village, remarked that the architecture of Our Lady of La Vang parish in Santa Ana, California is deeply reflective of Northern Vietnamese dualistic architecture. Unlike most Catholic churches, which typically have a congregation of seats facing the altar in the front, the altar in Our Lady of La Vang parish is placed in the center of the church, with the congregational seats surrounding the altar in a circle. He remarked:

When people enter the church, it becomes something called *tam tài* (three gifts), which is an aspect of Vietnamese philosophy. *Tam tài* refers to *thiên địa nhân* (sky, earth, and mankind), in the form of a thick *bánh giầy* cake. The church has a thick section which is similar to a piece of *bánh giầy*. The ground around the church is formed into a square, and we are the people who go there called the *nhân*. Therefore they believe that *thiên địa nhân* will be in harmony and become more beneficial. That's the wish of the people who believe in that.⁵⁹

Both the parish architecture and the structure of the Our Lady of La Vang shrine in the courtyard outside follow this architectural style.

Pictured left: courtyard of Our Lady of La Vang Parish, Santa Ana, California
 Pictured right: inside of Our Lady of La Vang Parish in Santa Ana, California

Inside the Mission of Our Lady of La Vang in New Orleans, Louisiana, which is the center for multiple Northern Catholic parishes and Marian celebrations like the one in the introduction, the shrine dedicated to Our Lady of La Vang utilizes traditional features of Northern architectural culture: Opening to an entrance of three doors (*tam quan*) typical of traditional Northern Buddhist pagodas, a courtyard (*sân chùa*) surrounds the small temple holding Our Lady of La Vang (*bái đường*), and behind it stands the main hall that parishioners use for social gatherings (*chính điện*). In the front of the shrine, a Vatican and South Vietnamese flag flies high for the community to see.

Mission of Our Lady of La Vang, New Orleans, Louisiana

These parishes and shrines that integrated elements of their pre-1954 Northern villages and South Vietnamese nationalism serve as powerful representations of how the image of Our Lady of La Vang has been transformed from a singular devotion of Northern Central parishioners to an international representation of the plight of the Vietnamese Catholic refugees. The devotion to both the Vietnamese martyrs and Our Lady of La Vang, initially understood as a tradition of local communities whose ancestors faced religious persecution, had taken on a new cultural and political meaning to refugees who had arrived overseas. As Peter Phan concludes regarding the nature of Vietnamese-American Catholicism, the unique devotion to the Vietnamese martyrs “has no doubt enriched and fortified their faith in a way not available to those enjoying religious freedom.”⁶⁰

The Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement: Socialization and Education

On a broader level, Northern Catholic migrants' local traditions and devotions became socialized into a larger Vietnamese Catholic identity through institutions mediated through migrant and refugee networks. After 1954, Northern Catholic migrants had flooded into Catholic communities in the South and dominated them. According to a report by the United States Navy, approximately 1.6 million Catholics lived in the Republic of Vietnam by 1967.⁶¹ Assuming that the roughly 800,000 Northern Catholic migrants had only expanded since 1954, Northern Catholic migrants made up over half of the entire Catholic population in the South. Ironically, Southern traditions were assimilated into concentrated Northern Catholic communities, rather than the other way around. Peter Hansen writes that this was largely a result of the Ngô Đình Diệm administration's policies of resettling Northern Catholic migrants in already-established Southern Catholic communities while actively discouraging the assimilation of Northern migrants into the general population.⁶² This was done as a means of maintaining order with fears of resentment from Southern residents while also utilizing Northern Catholic communities as a bulwark of support for the regime.⁶³ Bishops Phạm Ngọc Chi and Lê Hữu Từ from the Bùi Chu and Phát Diệm dioceses were given authority to head the resettlement of Northern Catholics, and they were only too willing to accommodate Diệm's political priorities that aligned with the migrant communities' segregated nature and resistance to assimilation. Northern Catholics rebuilt entirely their communities in the South, naming their parishes and shrines similar to how their counterparts in the North. Parishes named Hà Đông, Hà Nội, Lạng Sơn, and Thái Bình still exist in the Gò Vấp district of Hồ Chí Minh City as remnants of what was a majority Northern Catholic population.⁶⁴

One of the most pronounced impacts by Northern Catholic population on the South was their proliferation of national Catholic youth associations, especially the Eucharistic Crusade

[*Nghĩa Binh Thánh Thể*], which would later be renamed the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement [*Phong Trào Thiếu Nhi Thánh Thể Việt Nam*] in 1965. Charles Keith recounts that a French Sulpician priest, Léon Paliard, founded the first chapters of the Eucharistic Crusade in 1929 in Hanoi.⁶⁵ Although chapters were established in Huế and Saigon, all of the other chapters were established in the North, and the movement found significant growth in the Bùi Chu and Phát Diệm dioceses because of the confident support by its bishops, Bishop Hồ Ngọc Cẩn and Bishop Nguyễn Bá Tông.⁶⁶ The establishment of its monthly journal, *Nghĩa Binh Thánh Thể Tạp Chí* [Eucharistic Crusade Journal], helped foster a Catholic youth identity specific to the North, through which youth in Northern dioceses would be able to communicate with each other through essay contests and pen pal exchanges.⁶⁷ Unlike its Southern counterparts, the Eucharistic Crusade played a crucial role in Northern Catholic villages as the primary center for educating youth on Catholic ideology and social conduct in the community.

Thus, as over 800,000 Northern Catholic migrants flooded the South, the Eucharistic Crusade remained a crucial center for educating youth into the Catholic faith and maintaining community structures. Hoàng Xuân Làng, a Northern Catholic migrant to the South who stayed in the country after 1975 and helped revitalize the movement in 1998 after activities were banned by the communist government, remarked that “without the Eucharistic Youth Movement, it would have been impossible to teach catechism.”⁶⁸ Wherever Northern Catholic villages were reestablished, Eucharistic Crusade movements followed. In 1957, the Vietnamese Catholic Conference of Bishops officially recognized the Eucharistic Crusade as a central aspect to Catholic education in Vietnam, appointing Northern Catholic priest Michael Nguyễn Khắc Ngữ to be its first national leader while advocating for the movement’s growth in other Southern parishes. Before 1954, the youth movement had only existed in Saigon and Huế, but by 1957, Eucharistic

Crusade movements were present in every diocese in the South.⁶⁹ In 1965, aiming to revitalize itself as a national Catholic youth movement, the organization had renamed itself the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement, organizing its structure by rank and uniform and balancing catechism classes with outdoor singing and playing activities. By 1975, the movement had over 140,000 members operating in 650 parishes across the South, while the movement in the North had been discontinued by the communist government.⁷⁰

The Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement is significant not only because of its major influence by Northern Catholics on the South, but also for its impact on Vietnamese Catholicism in the diaspora. After the Fall of Saigon in 1975, Northern Catholic migrants constituted a large proportion of early refugees that fled the country with American support or by boat. Many had more reason to escape than others due to their lived experiences under communism, fears of reprisal, and perceived discrimination against their identities as Northern Catholic migrants. According to the Interagency Task Force on Indochina, approximately 60,000 “high-risk” individuals were airlifted to Guam, many of whom were Northern Catholic migrants who worked for the RVN, U.S. government, and U.S. organizations, while 60,000 more refugees, most of whom were Northern migrants to the South, were also shipped to Guam by boat.⁷¹ An overwhelming proportion of those surveyed in refugee camps in America were of Northern Catholic descent.⁷² Linda Hitchcox also notes in her studies of refugee camps in Southeast Asia that approximately 50% of boat people in these camps were Catholic.⁷³

Many of the Northern Catholic refugees trapped in Southeast Asia had travelled with their communities and churches in the same way that they had done in 1954. Nguyễn Văn Minh is one Catholic from Northern Quảng Trị who fled to the southern part of the province in 1954. His family was able to escape by boat through a local priest in Vũng Tàu who organized an escape with his

parish.⁷⁴ One group from a Southern village comprised mainly of Northern Catholics had been trapped in Taiwan after escaping by boat immediately after the Fall of Saigon. In a letter to the U.S. government, they asked for safe passage to the United States:

To USA Government,

We are fifty nine South Vietnamese Refugees (including 30 men, 12 women and 17 children whose names and situations are detailed in the following included list), who have been saved from death in the Pacific Ocean by the M.V. Singapore Ship after many days spent on the sea on our way to freedom...

Most of us have been struggling against Communist regime before 1954 and after the Geneva Congress, we must go to the South Vietnam to escape the Communist cruelty and to continue our struggle. Now, once more because of the Communist invasion, we must leave our country to continue our life in the free world.

We have been many weeks on the sea for escaping and for waiting.

We are very tired physically and morally. May we hope that the USA Government will give us very soon a favorable decision which will save us from anxiety and misery.

With our highest respects, may we express to USA Government our most grateful feelings.⁷⁵

Village-parish migrations of Northern Catholics like those above helped contribute to the preservation of community organizations like the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement that operated closely within those villages. Before the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement was even officially established in the United States, parishes and youth movements were already forming in refugee camps in Southeast Asia. By the mid 1980s, VEYMs had appeared in Palau Bidong, Palawan, and Sungei Besi refugee camps.⁷⁶ The preservation of these Northern Catholic communities during the refugee journey would be crucial in the reorganization of VEYM groups both in Southeast Asia and in their resettled countries.

According to Linda Hitchcox, these Catholic youth groups and parishes functioned as community spaces for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. For the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement, whose main activities outside of catechism included prayer circles and games among youth, these spaces served as areas where non-Catholics and Catholics from other parishes would

find a community in the refugee camp.⁷⁷ According to Hitchcox's study, 4.9% of those in the refugee camps surveyed had converted to Catholicism after escaping the country, while an even larger percentage continued to "attend services, join in Bible readings, youths groups, sing-songs and other 'cultural activities' run by Christian organizations."⁷⁸

Eucharistic Youth Movement 1982: Palawan Refugee Camp

These youth organizations, including the Boy Scouts and Buddhist Youth as well as the Eucharistic Movement, also brought into their groups some of the first traditions of diasporic nationalism. Hitchcox notes that all religious youth groups would line up every morning together in the Palawan refugee camp for a flag-raising ceremony and singing of the South Vietnamese national anthem together.⁷⁹ While the singing of the anthem and flag-raising was not a feature of the Eucharistic Youth Movement that was revived in Vietnam in 1998, it continued to exist as a shared characteristic of all chapters in the United States. When the first official Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement in the United States was founded in 1984, many of these nationalistic traditions would be embedded into their rules and bylaws.⁸⁰ Of the eighteen official songs of the Eucharistic Youth Movement in Vietnam that were revived in 1998, VEYM in the United States has preserved all eighteen songs in their official song list while adding two extra songs that does not exist in Vietnam today.⁸¹ The first song listed on the top of the official list is the national anthem of the Republic of Vietnam, which is played at all major events that includes the flag-

raising ceremony characteristic of youth organizations in the first refugee camps.⁸² The second is the Song for Knights of the Eucharist [*Hiệp hành ca*] reserved for members of the Knights of the Eucharist [*hiệp sĩ*] class designating youth members between 17-18 years old:

Under the flag I will set the example of a loyal Knight.
Because I love God, I will willingly rush forward
Bringing the Faith into the gates of Heaven.
Bringing love and affection into people's hearts.
The Knight lives by example.

As a Knight I strive to fight, setting a noble example of my house of Faith,
I will wholeheartedly dedicate myself to the Eternal Church.
As a Knight, I strive to fight, bring comfort to our great Homeland
justice in every place, for the greatness of Vietnam.

Under the flag, I will follow the example of Mary and the Martyrs of the Southern Country
For parishioners to live a fervent religious life.
For the Nation of peace and prosperity.
A Knight is worthy of the title of Hero.⁸³

The song's continued presence for the movement in the refugee community highlights an important link between the Vietnamese Catholic collective identity and love for the nation that is transmitted to second-generation youth abroad. In a study of the Church of St. Anne in Minnesota, Sharon Tomlin highlights the responses of younger generations who have learned to connect to their Vietnamese Catholic identity through history classes of the movement, songs related to Vietnam and the faith, and having a regular community in which youth interact with and learn from the elders.⁸⁴ Unlike other youth organizations, young children are able to join the movement as early as five years old, advancing in rank and continuing their activities until they reach eighteen. Even those who become adults are expected to become the new leaders who return to their VEYM chapters to help educate and mentor younger children into their chapter. In this sense, VEYM is unique as a youth organization that welcomes the involvement of members of all ages and

backgrounds, acting more as a community center for socializing and education youth rather than an unstructured group of adolescents, all of similar age.

With references to fighting for the prosperity of Vietnam and following the example of the Vietnamese martyrs, the Song for the Knights of the Eucharist is one of many examples that have linked patriotism and belonging to a Vietnamese Catholic identity that is passed on to Vietnamese youth born abroad. Indeed, the transmission of the major identifying features of the Catholic refugee community is most prominent within VEYM, where chapters are given Vietnamese-specific names as such chapters exist under larger, non-Vietnamese parishes. Many of these chapters' names are based on their previous chapters and parishes that existed in Vietnam, tracing their roots back to parishes in the South between 1954-1975 as well as in the pre-1954 North. For example, the chapter of Rạng Đông in Corona, California, which operates under the Shrine of the Presentation Catholic Church, traces its roots to the Northern Catholic village of Rạng Đông in Bùi Chu diocese.⁸⁵ The title of the Ra Khơi league, which is comprised of ten chapters in the Los Angeles area, makes a specific allusion to the Vietnamese boat people who had fled into the open sea due to religious freedom.⁸⁶ 35 of the VEYM's 133 chapters are named after a specific Vietnamese martyr, a remnant of the movement's Northern migrant and refugee history that instills an identity into the new generation as descendants of a lineage of religious persecution. Many of these chapters are named after Anrê Dũng Lạc and Thomas Trần Văn Thiện.⁸⁷ Both martyrs can be traced back to their counterparts in Vietnam. Anrê Dũng Lạc, a priest from the Bắc Ninh province in the North, held a significant importance as the most regarded of Vietnamese martyrs in the Northern Catholic migrant community.⁸⁸ Thomas Thiện also played a significant role as a martyr at the age of eighteen, held up by the Catholic community as the model for Vietnamese Catholic youth.⁸⁹

Why had the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement become so synonymous with the Vietnamese Catholic identity abroad compared to other youth organizations? As noted by the Vietnamese Catholic Conference of Bishops, the Eucharistic Youth Movement was not the only Catholic youth movement existing in the South, competing with similar groups such as Valiant Hearts [*Hùng Tâm Dũng Chí*], Catholic Scouts, Catholic Youth, Children of Mary, Catholic Student Union, and the Catholic Workers Association.⁹⁰ While the presence of these Southern Catholic youth groups are marginal among the Vietnamese community in the U.S, VEYM has been recognized by the USCCB as the “most active faith-based movement for Asian-Pacific Islanders in the U.S.” as well as the “the largest and most active Eucharistic Movement in the world,” boasting over 25,000 members in 133 chapters around the world.⁹¹ Linda Hitchcox makes references to several Catholic youth groups in refugee camps in Southeast Asia, yet the presence of these groups is barely recognizable in their resettled countries compared to the overwhelming spread of VEYM around the world.⁹²

Probably one of the most significant reasons for the organizational rise and spread of VEYM is due to its unique connection with the Northern Catholic migrant community. While most of the diaspora had been scattered across the country during resettlement, many of these Northern Catholics utilized their close relationships to those of the same *họ đạo* to provide organizational support for the official rise of VEYM in the United States. The first VEYM group established in the United States in 1977 was in New Orleans, Louisiana, home to a growing Northern Catholic community that would become the first community to build a parish specifically for Vietnamese parishioners.⁹³ Headed by Father Dominic Vũ Thanh Tường, a Northern Catholic refugee who would eventually become the first General Chaplain of VEYM-USA, the VEYM community

in New Orleans would serve as the central area for the establishment of VEYM as a national organization.

From 1977-1982, similar VEYM chapters were formed through the establishment of Vietnamese-specific Catholic communities, especially in San Jose, from which a majority of the national VEYM-USA's key founders were based in. After serving as chaplain for Catholic refugees in Camp Pendleton in 1975, Joseph Nguyễn Văn Tịnh moved with roughly 150 parishioners to St. Patrick's Church in San Jose.⁹⁴ Unlike other Vietnamese refugees, these parishioners gathered together around churches in San Jose in order to be able to practice their faith according to Vietnamese local traditions and rediscover a Catholic community, similar to how many Northern Catholics had formed *họ đạo* in the South upon their migration to 1954. Unlike other Vietnamese Catholic communities, these Northern Catholic communities were able preserve their local traditions, celebrate mass with a Vietnamese priest in their own language, and eventually re-establish VEYM chapters due to the close, transnational relationships that were maintained throughout the refugee journey. These small, mostly Northern Catholic communities would become the leading centers that would link with each other in order to create a national VEYM.

According to Joseph Nguyễn Đình Mạnh Trường, the founding vice-president of VEYM-USA, these communities were able to connect with each other through a newspaper called *Báo Liên Lạc* aimed at reconnecting Catholic communities that were separated in Vietnam or were residing in refugee camps in Southeast Asia.⁹⁵ Father Joseph Vũ Đức Thông, who had previously been the typewriter for Nguyễn Văn Tịnh and chaplain for the national VEYM in Vietnam before April 30, 1975, was able to connect with these growing VEYM chapters and proposed to create VEYM training centers in San Jose and New Orleans. In 1982, members from the training center

released the *Hạt Cải* newsletter, aimed at redeveloping VEYM chapters around the United States.⁹⁶ With full support from Dominic Mai Thanh Lương, another Northern Catholic priest serving as President of the Vietnam Catholic Federation in America and pastor for the New Orleans community, VEYM-USA was officially established in July 1984 Versailles, New Orleans as part of the Vietnamese Catholic Federation Congress.⁹⁷

The strength of Northern Catholics in the San Jose and New Orleans communities of can be seen in its first executive committee: Peter Nguyễn Văn Liêm and Joseph Nguyễn Đình Mạnh Trường from the San Jose parishes were named respective President and Vice-President, and Joseph Vũ Thanh Tường from New Orleans was named to serve as General Chaplain.⁹⁸ Dominic Mai Thanh Lương, who had helped establish and head the first Vietnamese-specific parish of Mary Queen of Vietnam in Versailles, would eventually be named Bishop of the Diocese of Orange, the first Vietnamese bishop in the American Catholic Church.⁹⁹ Over the next 30 years, VEYM-USA would be able to expand its chapters into Canada, Australia, France, Malaysia, the Philippines, and even Vietnam, operating as a separate umbrella organization from the VEYM organization that reorganized itself in Vietnam after 1998. Interestingly, both umbrella organizations trace their histories to the same pre-communist past in the 1920s North. However, VEYM in the diaspora differs with its counterpart organization in Vietnam in that its history marks 1975 as the end of VEYM in Vietnam due to the fall of South Vietnam, connecting the end of the movement in Vietnam to the rise of VEYMs around the world as a continuation of that history. On the other hand, VEYM in Vietnam views the period between 1975-1998 as a period of temporary death, by which it had “risen again” like Christ through the efforts of domestic Catholics in Vietnam who had been active in VEYM before 1975.¹⁰⁰

Unlike other Catholic youth organizations that existed in the Republic of Vietnam, VEYM was able to establish itself as an essential part of Vietnamese Catholic identity abroad through the close-knit nature of emerging Northern Catholic parishes in New Orleans and San Jose that integrated their chapters within Vietnamese-specific congregations. The ability of individuals, especially their local priests, to link with other chapters based on prior relationships with similarly close-knit relationships allowed a scattered diaspora to find a sense of collective organization through these relationships. A year after VEYM-USA's founding, Pope John Paul II, in an address to the World Congress of National Secretaries of the Apostleship of Prayer in April of 1985, remarked that, "Special attention must be given to children and the young who constitute the "Youth Eucharistic Movement", formerly known as the "Eucharistic Crusade", and also the sick who, by their willingness to unite their sufferings to the Passion of Christ."¹⁰¹

With no other Eucharistic Youth Movement around the world even comparable to VEYM-USA in the size, organization, and enthusiasm, Pope John Paul II's address served doubly as recognition by the Holy See for the tremendous impact of VEYM on the Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity. Eight years later, Pope John Paul II would address Vietnamese Catholic Youth in the diaspora directly at the World Youth Day 1993 in Denver, Colorado. Speaking to the crowd that included many VEYM chapters all over the world, Pope John Paul II encouraged the movement to maintain unity and encourage cooperation: "I am told that the Vietnamese community has many associations, organizations and movements, which promote cultural and social activities as well as spiritual and apostolic works. I wish to encourage you to maintain a great spiritual unity among yourselves, and to strengthen more and more the spirit of cooperation between all these different groups. There is strength in unity; there is only pain and scandal in division and conflict."¹⁰²

Emboldened by John Paul II's enthusiastic address at the 1993 World Youth Day, VEYM-USA amended its bylaws and set itself on the task of internationalizing VEYM to other countries with large Vietnamese Catholic refugee populations. Under the leadership of Vincent Nguyễn Đức Mậu and Joseph Vũ Đức Thông, VEYM-USA helped establish training camps and new chapters in Canada, France, and Australia.¹⁰³ In 1984, VEYM established the organization-wide *Hướng Tâm Lên* magazine as a way for other diasporic countries to remain connected as one organization. Since the establishment of these training camps in 1984, there have been four chapters in France, six in Canada, and nine in Australia.¹⁰⁴ By the time VEYM had been allowed to resume its activities in Vietnam in 1998, the Eucharistic Movement had already established itself as the leading youth organization connecting Vietnamese Catholic diaspora under a single collective identity.

Like the devotion to the Vietnamese martyrs and Our Lady of La Vang, the development of VEYM in the diaspora had remained a relatively local activity among Northern Catholic migrants. However, because of its fundamental role in socializing Catholic children and preserving the community identity of Northern Catholic migrant communities, its nationalization connected Northern Catholic migrant communities into a singular collective identity that overwhelmed the collective identity of the South Vietnamese church as well. When VEYM became transplanted abroad, it maintained those connections and allowed youth from all over the world to continue to be socialized and stay connected under a particular Catholic refugee identity.

Building a Vietnamese Refugee Catholicism

The canonization of Vietnamese martyrs by Pope John Paul II in 1988, the widespread devotion to Marian figures like Our Lady of La Vang, and the formation of the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement that socialized these elements to new generations under a collective

identity helped transform Vietnamese Catholic refugees into an increasingly recognizable cultural and political community. Linked by South Vietnamese nationalism and the experiences of pre-1954 Northern Catholics, Vietnamese Catholic refugees expressed these identities through their distinctive songs, print-magazines, internet blogs, devotions, and popularizations of modern figures and leaders in their community. This new collective identity became increasingly separate from the Church in Vietnam, drawing upon traditions and experiences of Vietnamese Catholics from the republican period that were restricted after April 30, 1975.

An event that prominently signals the presence of a new refugee Catholic identity, supported by the Holy See, is the triennial Catholic World Youth Day 1993 that took place in Denver, Colorado.¹⁰⁵ Although Catholics came from all over the world to participate in the event, Vincent Trần Ngọc Thụ, Pope John Paul II's private secretary, convinced the pope to grant a private audience specifically with Vietnamese Catholics in the United States at the McNichols Sports Arena. As the pope entered the convention, the arena of roughly 15,000 Vietnamese-Americans waved South Vietnamese flags to the patriotic melody of renowned composer Phạm Duy's song, "Vietnam, Vietnam!", a song widely considered to be the unofficial national anthem of South Vietnam that was later banned by the communist government after 1975.¹⁰⁶ John Nguyễn, born in Saigon from a family of Northern Catholic migrants, described the significance of the meeting in an interview: "I have never felt more proud to be a Vietnamese Catholic than that day. It was the largest gathering of Vietnamese people that I have ever witnessed, and the Holy Father, the leader of the Catholic Church, took time out of his busy schedule to talk to us, the Vietnamese refugees! Our people have always been looked down upon by the world, but seeing the pope that day, I felt that we have truly been recognized."¹⁰⁷ For Vietnamese Catholics like John, a private audience by the pope during a global Catholic event with over 750,000 people all over the world

waiting to see the pope epitomized their feelings of representation and recognition in the Catholic Church.

In a ceremony meant to present to the pope the best of Vietnamese Catholic culture, what had been previously limited to Northern Catholic communities in the South before 1975 was now presented as quintessential elements of the community overseas. The first exhibition before the pope was a performance of 450 dancers wearing traditional clothing from each region, holding up the famous painting of “Our Lady of Vietnam” that currently is on display in the Phát Diệm Foyer in Rome. The painting, said to have been created by Phát Diệm artist Nam Phong, was given to Bishop Thaddeus Lê Hữu Từ in 1953.¹⁰⁸ The bishop, preoccupied in organizing the migration of his diocese South in 1954, left the painting in the Vatican before returning to the country and migrating to the South. Until 1980, this Northern Catholic painting had been relatively unknown to the Vietnamese community, both domestic and overseas, until Pope John Paul II officially visited the painting on June 22, 1980, as part of the newly reformed Vietnamese Bishops’ Conference after 1975. During the convention with over 15,000 Vietnamese-American Catholics, the painting of “Our Lady of Vietnam” gained a new meaning, presented as one of the quintessential images of Vietnamese Catholic devotion overseas.

“Our Lady of Vietnam” by Nam Phong, 1953

In addition, as the painting was hoisted high, the congregation of Vietnamese Catholics sang the hymn “Queen of Peace,” composed in 1959 by Hải Linh. The composer himself was a Phát Diệm native who resettled in the South in 1956 after studying music abroad and left for Los Angeles in 1986. Alongside the painting of “Our Lady of Vietnam,” the presentation of the song of a Northern Catholic migrant later considered to be one of the greatest composers of the *Thánh nhạc* genre in the republican period demonstrates the power in which traditional Northern Catholic culture had become mainstays of Southern Catholicism and Vietnamese Catholicism overseas.¹⁰⁹

As the presentation ended, Pope John Paul II stood up and greeted the community in Vietnamese, acknowledging their history as refugees:

I greet each one of you. I greet the community in exile, and I send a special word of esteem and friendship to your brothers and sisters in your homeland, where many are listening to my voice through a radio link-up. I wish to assure you all of my constant prayers for the Church of the hundred and seventeen martyrs, for the poor, the sick, the refugees in the camps in Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Within the last two decades many of you left the land of your fathers, facing sufferings and trials of all kinds before you were finally safe and settled. Throughout those difficult circumstances, you found courage also in your faith in Jesus Christ. Now that conditions have improved, the challenge before you is to keep pure and lively your Catholic identity, never giving in to discouragement or sadness, or to attitudes and ways of behaving in contrast with your love of God. I know that you are active in preserving your national customs. We have seen them, at the beginning. Your attachment to your Vietnamese traditions, to your homeland, to your customs, to the beauty of your traditions. Thank you very much for this exhibition and that you make great efforts to keep the Vietnamese language alive among your children and young people. This is a way of showing your love for the homeland, for your own people’s culture and history. It can also be an enrichment of the nation in which you have found a new home.¹¹⁰

Twice, in a direct address to the Vietnamese diaspora, the pope affirmed their Catholic identity as refugees whose fates were directly tied to the noble sacrifices of the Vietnamese martyrs. Whether the pope had intended it or not, this association also indirectly encouraged an already existing anti-communist nationalism given new meaning under a Catholic identity that already had suffered

religious persecution. During the 1988 canonization celebration in Rome, Khánh Ly, a Vietnamese refugee considered one of the most renowned singers of South, performed a Catholic hymn for the pope wearing a traditional *áo dài* with the South Vietnamese flag embroidered into her sleeves.¹¹¹ Here in the United States, as he smiled among the crowds of Vietnamese Catholics waving South Vietnamese flags and chanting now-banned songs and hymns from the republican era, Pope John Paul II had both affirmed the refugee community's nationalism and encouraged them to build their Vietnamese identity and patriotism in their new countries.

Similar to how many Northern Catholic refugee communities in the South had connected their experiences with that of the Vietnamese martyrs, the official canonization of the martyrs and the confident support by Pope John Paul II created a newfound fervor by the Vietnamese refugee community to seek recognition of new “modern” Vietnamese martyrs under communism. In this fervor, community-supported foundations, such as the Marcel Văn Association, the Trương Bửu Diệp Foundation, and the Nguyễn Văn Thuận foundation, sprang up all over the diaspora, advocating for official recognition by the Holy See and the hopeful canonization of victims of communism that they considered saints.

In 1991, a group of Northern Catholic refugees in Canada in France, emboldened by the canonization of the Vietnamese martyrs in 1988 and aided by their local clergy, founded two parallel associations, “The Friends of Văn” in France and the Marcel Văn Association in Canada, advocating for the canonization of Marcel Nguyễn Tân Văn.¹¹² A native of Bắc Ninh, Marcel Văn entered the Vietnamese Redemptorist order and became a brother. In 1954, according to his biography by his former superior, while most of his village including his family had migrated to Xuân Lộc district, Văn volunteered to return to the communist-controlled North so that, “at least one person loves God there.”¹¹³ In 1955, he was denounced and arrested by the communist

government. During his prison tenure, he wrote notes of his continued faith in God despite torture and sickness, and he later died of tuberculosis at the age of 31.

The organizers for his case of martyrdom consisted mainly of his local village friends, family that had fled to Canada and France, and fellow priests in his order. As these community members resettled abroad, they spent decades helping translate Marcel Văn's works from Vietnamese to French, gaining a large following from French-speaking Vietnamese Catholics. Moved by the works sent to him from the foundation, then Cardinal Francis-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận, who himself was imprisoned in a re-education camp for 13 years after the Fall of Saigon before being expelled to the Vatican, sponsored the project for Văn's beatification on March 26, 1997. Writing about Văn's life, Thuận remarked:

First of all, I noticed that Marcel Văn was the same age as me, he was born on March 15th and I was born on April 17th, 1928. Like me, he had weak health and had lived for many years in the re-education camp. All these traits and other things bring me close and make it easy for me to understand our sufferings, our hardships, and our hopes.

The two Churches [French and Vietnamese Church] are united not only by political, diplomatic, cultural or economic ties, but by intimate ties: the sharing of faith between the two peoples. That rope is tied with the blood of martyrs, priests, religious and laity. Marcel Văn had always prayed that the thread of faith would forever evolve and grow more and more closely, in order to fulfill the intention of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus to come to Vietnam according to the plan of the Carmelite Order in Hanoi. Due to poor health, she could not go there, but her heart was always in Vietnam. Instead, her "little brother" Marcel Văn received the work of evangelizing through her in Vietnam, not only for Christians to become perfect and become saints, but for everyone, including non-believers that includes the communists.¹¹⁴

The enthusiastic advocacy of the cardinal, who was already a prominent figure in the refugee community, helped popularize the figure of Marcel Văn overseas. As the first recognized martyr under Vietnamese communism, Marcel Văn represented a "hope" for the Church of Vietnam that the country, including atheist communism, would be converted. Joseph Loi was a Vietnamese seminarian who had become blind in the re-education camp and claimed he regained

his sight after asking the spirit of Văn to pray for him.¹¹⁵ Only after regaining his sight was he able to become a priest at the age of 55. Loi remarked that Marcel Văn's example had inspired him to support the "Friends of Văn" association to help other Vietnamese seminarians in France become priests. As noted in Nguyễn Văn Thuận remarks, Marcel Văn's life also symbolized the intimate religious ties shared by the Francophone Catholic Church and the Vietnamese Catholic Church. Marcel Văn's works, written mainly in French, gained a huge following of Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese alike in French-speaking countries such as France and Canada. As of 2021, while the beatification process is still going on, the annual revenue of "Friends of Văn" is estimated to be about \$361,000 a year, demonstrating the strong support of Văn's popularity among the French-speaking Vietnamese refugee community.¹¹⁶ Initiated from a small group of Northern Catholics, the popularization of Văn as a symbol of Vietnamese martyrdom under communism is one example of the formation of a distinct collective identity by Vietnamese Catholics abroad.

Cardinal Nguyễn Văn Thuận did not live to see the beatification of his fellow "martyr" under communism. Almost immediately after his own passing in 2002, Vietnamese all over the diaspora flocked to support the Nguyễn Văn Thuận Foundation established by his younger sister, Nguyễn Thu Hồng, in order to advocate for his beatification.¹¹⁷ His case did not need much effort to be popularized. Even at the time of the initiation of Marcel Văn's beatification process, Nguyễn Văn Thuận himself was already a prominent figure of Vietnamese refugee Catholicism. Thuận was the nephew to the two most prominent Vietnamese Catholic figures of the modern period, Ngô Đình Diệm, President of South Vietnam, and Ngô Đình Thục, Archbishop of Huế. Thuận himself was eventually appointed Archbishop of Saigon on April 23, 1975, only seven days before the Fall of Saigon. Thuận writes in his memoir, "Five Loaves and Two Fish" regarding his arrest: "When the communists came to Saigon, they told me: 'The appointment of a bishop a week before

we arrived in Saigon was a conspiracy between the Vatican and the imperialists in order to organize anti-communist activities later.”¹¹⁸ Sentenced into solitary confinement at a re-education camp for 13 years, Thuận writes that he befriended his prison guards, who helped him smuggle out a series of books written from his cell to Vietnamese Catholics in his diocese.¹¹⁹ These books - the most famous of them titled “Road of Hope” - contained a set of encouraging messages that promoted love and hope through Christ in everyday life. By the time he was released and expelled to Rome in 1991, Nguyễn Văn Thuận was highly regarded around the world as the embodiment of Catholic holiness through his continued advocacy for love and hope despite his imprisonment and exile.

Thuận’s example helped him become one of the most popular figures among Vietnamese refugees who shared his experiences and felt comforted by his writings. John Peter-Phạm, a boat person residing in the United States, writes that those in Vietnam, Christians and non-Christians alike, would carry his writings with them despite government efforts to halt them. He goes on to describe how Thuận’s writings achieved international popularity as he, like many others, carried copies of Thuận’s writings as one of the only possessions brought with him his escape by boat. These writings would eventually be translated to English and French and disseminated to Catholics around the world. At the same time, however, Thuận did not intend for himself to become the symbol of the refugee community, explicitly stating that he avoided writing about communism, politics, and his life in the re-education camp so as to not draw the focus of his messages to himself. Regardless, Vietnamese Catholic refugees all over the world praised his life as the quintessence of Vietnamese martyrdom. As John Peter-Phạm went on to write as the introduction of Thuận’s later-published book:

This task [of defining the term ‘martyr’] is made all the more difficult by significant changes in the meaning of the once-specifically Christian designation of “martyr.” In the time of the early Fathers, the martyr was anyone who had testified to the truth of Christianity by steadfastness in faith despite hardships, peril, and even death.

Later, although not always consistently, the designation became reserved for those who had sealed their faith with their blood during the persecutions...

The martyr is one who gives witness, even if he does not necessarily die in the process of proclaiming the truth. This is a particularly important development if humanity is to continue deriving inspiration from its martyrs—the increasingly delicate sensitivities of world opinion rarely permit outright murders anymore, although systematic campaigns of oppression are occasionally ignored and allowed to run their course.¹²⁰

John's introduction serves to connect the traditional meaning of a "martyr," or one who was executed for their loyalty to Christ, with that of its "modern" meaning, that is, one who has endured "systemic campaigns of oppression" because of his or her witness to Christ. Under that meaning, Nguyễn Văn Thuận is described as representing the best of an entire population of "modern martyrs" who were forced to flee their country due to religious persecution. Vietnamese refugee Hy K. Nguyễn, who later joined the Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas, wrote a foreword to Thuận's book, "Road of Hope":

Vietnamese Catholics in Vietnam and abroad came to Cardinal Thuan not because he was a Cardinal or because he was the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, but because he was a witness and a reflection of their hope and their life: those who remain in Vietnam and suffer in prison, those who are separated from their families and are forced to live far from their homeland. When reading *The Road of Hope*, Vietnamese Catholics see their own life experiences in it, while other readers gain insight into a small part of history which Vietnamese Catholics have experienced. All readers discover the example of a profound spiritual life.¹²¹

Vietnamese Catholics, especially those who had suffered under communist re-education camps as Nguyễn Văn Thuận had done, were able share their sufferings through Thuận's works and find a common sense of "martyrdom" that accompanied their exile from Vietnam. The resonance with the Vietnamese refugee community abroad was overwhelming. When Thuận decided to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Our Lady of La Vang at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C., over 10,000 Vietnamese-Americans traveled to listen to him speak.¹²² Tens of thousands of Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese Catholics

alike attended his funeral in 2003, presided over by Pope John Paul II himself. In his eulogy, the pope affirmed Nguyễn Văn Thuận's example as a modern Vietnamese martyr:

We might wonder where he found the patience and courage that have always distinguished him. On this subject, he confided that his priestly vocation was mysteriously but truly bound to the blood of the martyrs who died in the last century while they were preaching the Gospel in Vietnam. "The martyrs", he [Thuận] noted, "taught us to say yes - a yes without conditions and limits to the love of the Lord. But the martyrs also taught us to say no - no to flattery, to compromise, to injustice - even with the intent of saving one's own life" (Road of Hope, Rome 2001, p. 107). He added that it was not a question of heroism, but of fidelity, developed by looking at Jesus, the model of every witness and martyr. It was a heritage to be accepted every day in a life full of love and gentleness.

In offering our last farewell to this heroic herald of Christ's Gospel, let us thank the Lord for giving us, in him, a shining example of Christian loyalty to the point of martyrdom. He said of himself with striking simplicity: "In the abyss of my sufferings ... I never shut anyone out of my heart."¹²³

Through the pope's affirmation, Nguyễn Văn Thuận had become not just a character limited to the Vietnamese diaspora, but an international figure representing the very best of both the Vietnamese refugees and the Church of Vietnam. The same pope who had canonized the first Vietnamese martyrs in 1988 and connected their sacrifices with the plight of the Vietnamese refugee community would later cement that connection with a new martyr in Nguyễn Văn Thuận. In 2016, Pope Francis would later grant Thuận the title of "Venerable," one step closer to beatification and eventually sainthood.¹²⁴ Despite attempts by the Holy See to proclaim Nguyễn Văn Thuận's example as the model for not only Vietnamese refugees, but also the Church of Vietnam as a whole, Nguyễn Văn Thuận's works remain restricted in Vietnam. As the Vietnamese government and the Holy See under Pope Francis continue to strengthen their relationship since the official establishment of a permanent representative in Vietnam in 2018, both sides are keen to maintain their tenuous association.¹²⁵ However, the process of Nguyễn Văn Thuận's beatification and canonization remains a sticking point in this relationship, especially due to

Thuận's unique connection to prominent South Vietnamese historical figures and his own symbolism to the Vietnamese diaspora as a communist prisoner and refugee.¹²⁶

Inadvertently, Cardinal Nguyễn Văn Thuận's unique life had also attracted many Catholic circles attempting to tie nationalism for the defunct Republic of Vietnam with the Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity. Hà Minh Thảo is one Vietnamese refugee in the United States who published over twenty articles in VietCatholic news – one of the largest Catholic newsletters in the world that has a strong readership among the Vietnamese refugee community - ranging from the responsibility of Vietnamese Catholics to fight against communism, to patriotism for the Republic of Vietnam, and even to the necessity for Vietnamese Catholics to “Make America Great Again” by voting for Trump in the 2020 U.S. election. In one article, she describes Thuận as a “famous anti-communist bishop” whom the communist government was so afraid of bringing to trial during his 13 years of imprisonment because they knew he was innocent.¹²⁷ She then relates the narrative of Nguyễn Văn Thuận's reaction to the assassination of his uncle, Ngô Đình Diệm:

Mrs. Hiệp [Thuận's mother] said, with a slight hope, 'Your uncle has dedicated his life to the Fatherland. It is not unusual for a national hero to be martyred. He is one who made a vow to God. Thus, nothing is too much when the Lord calls him home to the Father's house.' Thuận bowed his head in obedience and followed her into the chapel thinking: "Lord, I believe that You died in the hands of the Son of Man. Death saved the Son. But for what reasons did the Son have to die like that?"

It is impossible to verify the accuracy of this narrative, which has turned the life of Nguyễn Văn Thuận into something resembling the legend of a mythical hero. Regardless, it is this mythicization of Thuận's life as a national hero who maintained both his faith and identity against the “evil” of communist rule that is significant. Although Thuận had made it a point in his writings to forgive those who imprisoned him, distancing his personal life from his message of love and hope, Hà Minh Thảo asserts a nationalist narrative that ties his “martyrdom” with that of his anti-communist uncle. She attempts to tie the heroism of Ngô Đình Diệm, whose aggressive stance

against communism is portrayed as that of a martyr executed for his faith in God, to the suffering of Nguyễn Văn Thuận under communist imprisonment. Similar ‘legends’ of Nguyễn Văn Thuận’s life circulated in a number of internet blogs, including diasporic nationalist websites unaffiliated with Catholicism, such as the Việt Tân Party and Tiếng Gọi Công Dân.¹²⁸ In advocating for the overthrow of the communist government, figures such as Nguyễn Văn Thuận were used by these parties and organizations to bring a religious element into anti-communist nationalism.

Another legend that has been widely shared among diasporic blogs is the story of a priest named Thanh Lăng who had supported the communists and was one of the witnesses that led to Nguyễn Văn Thuận’s expulsion to the Vatican. Before his death on December 1988, Thanh Lăng was reported to have sent a 39-page letter to Nguyễn Văn Trung, a former professor of literature in the University of Saigon who later fled to Montreal, Canada, announcing his public repentance for his sins against Nguyễn Văn Thuận and the Catholic Church as a whole.¹²⁹ Like the story about Ngô Đình Diệm, the actual contents of the letter were nowhere to be found, yet the same extracts of its contents were copied and disseminated all over refugee and nationalist blogs and websites.

Like the narratives mentioned above, most of these legends and associations with Nguyễn Văn Thuận as a nationalist hero are featured in VietCatholic News Agency, established in 1996 by two Vietnamese refugees, Father John Trần Công Nghị, a priest from Phát Diệm diocese who fled to the United States, and J.B. Đặng Minh An, a boat person currently residing in Australia. As of December 1, 2021, VietCatholic was ranked as the 12th most watched Catholic channel on Youtube, with 366,000 subscribers and over 182 million total views.¹³⁰ In addition, the agency has also been one of the main mediums through which Vietnamese Catholics linked South Vietnamese nationalism (or anti-communism at the very least) to the Vietnamese Catholic population around the world.

One of the news agency's key characteristics is its relative openness to articles submitted by any member of the community, rather than being limited to staff journalists. Some of these articles were not related to Catholicism at all, and other articles expressed strong nationalistic or anti-communist views reposted among a variety of different Vietnamese-language websites. In this way, a multitude of views from the refugee community were able to be reposted and disseminated to a primarily Vietnamese Catholic readership. Dr. Trần An Bài, a former professor of criminology at Vạn Hạnh University and judge under the Republic of Vietnam, wrote one article in VietCatholic regarding June 20, 1954, the day Vietnam was split by the Geneva Accords, as “Ngày Quốc Hận Hồng” [Pink National Resentment Day].¹³¹ Attempting to re-memorialize a day in context to “Ngày Quốc Hận Đỏ” [Red National Resentment Day], referring to the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, he laments that the 1954 holiday is not given equal attention among the refugee community as a day that should be mourned in Vietnamese history, especially in relation to Vietnamese Catholicism. Crediting Northern Catholic migrants with rejecting communism and “voting with their feet” through their mass exodus into the South, Bài denounces Hồ Chí Minh as an ambitious figure who valued “independence, freedom, and happiness” more than “human life.”¹³²

In another article, copied from the nationalist website Tiếng Gọi Công Dân – with its readership primarily consisting of refugees that support the overthrow of the communist government - Bài boldly criticizes Pope Benedict XVI's “half-hearted political approach” in assenting to the Vietnamese government's demands to remove Archbishop Ngô Quang Kiệt, former Archbishop of Hanoi.¹³³ On October 8, 2008, over 150 parishioners, monks, and priests from the parish of Thái Hà took to the streets following the government confiscating their church grounds to be given to a state hospital.¹³⁴ Due to the archbishops' inability to quell the demonstrations, the mayor of Hanoi, Nguyễn Thế Thảo, called for Kiệt's removal as archbishop.

Pope Benedict XVI later asked Kiệt to resign on May 10, 2010.¹³⁵ The protests were finally quelled in February of 2011 after multiple arrests of Thái Hà parishoners. Bài contrasts Pope Benedict XVI's attempts of reconciliation with the Vietnamese government with Pope John Paul II's "continuous and fierce denunciation of the communist regime," lamenting that while his predecessor had given safe haven to exiles, Pope Benedict had turned Archbishop Kiệt into an exile himself.¹³⁶ Bài's many articles in VietCatholic represent one of many perspectives that attempt to demarcate the incompatibility between Vietnamese Catholicism and communism.

Interestingly, following Pope John Paul's death in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI's approach to Vietnam-Holy See relations had in fact remained relatively unchanged in favor of dialogue with the Vietnamese government. The difference between Pope John Paul II's papacy and that of Pope Benedict XVI was in the response of the Vietnamese government. During Pope John Paul II's reign as pope between 1978-2005, although he opposed communist ideology as incompatible with Catholic ideology, he advocated for a policy of "soft power," which aimed to grow Catholic presence in communist countries through dialogue while at the same time tacitly supporting nonviolent movements against communism.¹³⁷ On May 1, 1980, the Holy See allowed the reestablishment of the Vietnamese Catholic Conference of Bishops, calling on Vietnamese Catholics to "live for God and for Christ in the healthy lifestyle of their people, and, as good citizens, they must truly and actively cultivate patriotism."¹³⁸ Despite Pope John Paul II's attempts between to foster dialogue, the Vietnamese government had largely ignored Vatican entreaties and continued with its confiscation of Church property, arrests of Catholic clergy, and restrictions on freedom of religion. In turn, Pope John Paul II had turned to the Vietnamese Catholic refugee community and the Vietnamese Catholic hierarchy as a means of continuing to connect with Catholics in Vietnam. By the time Pope Benedict XVI had become pope in 2005, the Vietnamese

government was in a much more stable position to rebuild ties with the Holy See. On January 25, 2007, Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng met with Pope Benedict XVI for the first time, and in 2011, the Holy See appointed its first unofficial envoy to Vietnam.¹³⁹ Because of the changes in prospects of reestablishing ties with Vietnam, Pope Benedict was much more inclined to give in to certain demands from the government, such as asking Archbishop Kiệt to resign. In a post-John Paul II era in which the Holy See had increasingly attempted to warm ties with the communist government, Vietnamese refugees like Bài had also increasingly attempted to use their distinct voice built up over the past thirty years to remind Catholic hierarchy to continue to advocate for religious freedom in their home country.

Although the majority of VietCatholic's audience includes former refugees, the countless articles that continue to report on religious persecution in Vietnam in VietCatholic have also increasingly drawn a base of domestic Vietnamese Catholics drawn into this particular anti-communist collective identity.¹⁴⁰ These articles helped internationalize the issue of religious persecution of Catholics in Vietnam and allowed Vietnamese refugees to participate in what was already a small, dissident movement of domestic laity and clergy since 1975.

This dissident movement in Vietnam began in 1977 as a fringe movement of Catholic clergy with two speeches coordinated by the Archbishop of Huế, Philippe Nguyễn Kim Điền and his secretary, Thaddeus Nguyễn Văn Lý.¹⁴¹ Initially, far from being a dissident movement, the Vietnamese Catholic hierarchy had accepted the fate of the nation and encouraged all Catholics to contribute to the rebuilding of the country. While the Holy See had historically been opposed to communism and remained strong actors in the Republic of Vietnam until 1975, they had also maintained a firm anti-war stance between 1954-1975 and presented themselves to the new regime after 1975 as supporters of the mission of Christ regardless of political ideology or government.

Taking his cue from the Holy See and Vietnamese Catholic Church, Archbishop Nguyễn Kim Điền had also initially welcomed the reunification of the country in 1975, but he was also more vocal than other bishops in his advocacy for freedom of religion in Vietnam and the rights of Vietnamese Catholics. Before the war had even ended, Archbishop Nguyễn Kim Điền wrote a letter to his parishoners on April 1st, 1975: “We invite priests, religious, and laity to rejoice and willingly and enthusiastically cooperate with all people of good will, under the direction of the Revolutionary Government to rebuild the homeland after so many breakdowns and mourning, in order to bring free, full, and happy for the people of the family.”¹⁴² However, only two years later, the tone of his letter had changed dramatically in first speech:

After liberation day, when I heard the government announce a policy of freedom of religion, I was very happy and excited. This enthusiasm is evident in my earlier statements. But two years have passed and I no longer feel happy, because in reality religious freedom does not exist. Masses have been restricted and Catholic monks were not allowed to travel to serve God's people. For example, they were not allowed to go to the new economic zones to celebrate. Many churches were occupied and others were not allowed to hold services...

During the past two years - please allow me to express my opinion honestly - the Catholic people have not been satisfied in the slightest. Whatever they do, where they are, they feel oppressed and overpowered. At the school, students hear slander against Catholicism and the professors insult Catholicism....

For Catholic workers, civil servants, professors, social workers, even though they are good workers, they are not allowed to continue their work, simply because they are Catholic. When Catholics are denied a job, when they encounter difficulty, they ask to know why, and they are told specifically that if they leave Christianity or if they stop going to church, they will no longer be in difficulty.

During the National Assembly session in Ho Chi Minh City, a member of the Central Committee made the opinion that Catholics should only be considered second-class citizens. The government often declares that all men are equal before the law, that all minorities are equal. Our current population is 50 million, of which there are about 45 million Kinh people, and 5 million belong to 60 ethnic groups. While there are at least 3 million Christians, in reality they do not enjoy the same citizenship as others.

Over the past two years, the Christian people in our province have worked hard and I believe the government knows it. As a workforce, they have nothing to blame. During elections, they are disciplined. Yet what they don't have is citizenship.¹⁴³

Although Archbishop Điền had initially welcomed the change of regime so long as there was a commitment to freedom of religion, he became increasingly exasperated by the ways in which Catholics were discriminated at every level of society. For most Catholics who made the decision to flee by boat between 1975-1985, this perceived discrimination was central to their decision to escape. Lương Lê, a child of Northern Catholic migrants but born and raised in Cam Ranh Bay, recounted in his oral history that he was rejected from all the colleges he applied to because of his Catholic identity. Looking back at his decision to leave with his family, he emphasized that had he stayed in Vietnam as a Catholic, he would not be able to find employment and would stay in poverty for the rest of his life.¹⁴⁴ Northern Catholic migrants who experienced communism in the North felt an even greater sense of discrimination and necessity to escape. Lương's father, Paul Lê, had fled to the South in 1954 from his Catholic village in Móng Cái because the Việt Minh had arrested their clergy and prohibited the villagers from attending church.¹⁴⁵ When the communists took over their village in 1975, he remarked that just like in the North, those who had worked in the church were arrested, many of them close friends of his since their time in the North. According to Desberat, communists placed even heavier controls and discriminatory policies on areas of Northern Catholics that were deemed as potential reactionaries.¹⁴⁶ Many villages, she asserts, were broken up and forced to relocate into New Economic Zones as a means of controlling these potential dissident groups. Paul Lê felt that his family could no longer survive under communist rule where he was not allowed to attend church nor find employment because of discrimination against his Northern Catholic identity.

Archbishop Điền's speeches were immediately censored, and his secretary, Nguyễn Văn Lý, including many others, were sentenced to 20 years in prison for disseminating the speeches.¹⁴⁷ Upon his release, Lý internationalized the issue of religious persecution by publishing the first

issue of *Tự Do Ngôn Luận* [Freedom of Speech] on April 8, 2006, which became widely circulated by the U.S. government and the Human Rights Watch.¹⁴⁸ In one article, titled “Calling for the Freedom of Information and Speech,” Nguyễn Văn Lý forcefully called for support from the international community and Vietnamese refugee community:

We are calling on Vietnamese compatriots overseas, governments and international organizations to help break down the Vietnamese government’s barriers that block and conceal information, by creating techniques to bypass firewalls, setting forth conditions that compel the Vietnamese government to respect Freedom of Information and Speech if they would like to join or associate with the any international organizations, transferring necessary and important information to our country regarding freedom and democracy through modern media, and by quickly and vigorously defending Vietnamese fighters for human rights and democracy. We hope that this will soon dissolve the Vietnamese communist regime in a peaceful and civilized manner.¹⁴⁹

Shortly after the publication of the newspaper, Nguyễn Văn Lý was arrested on February 2nd, 2007, and sentenced to a combined 13 years of imprisonment, sparking outrage in the international community about the state of human rights in Vietnam.¹⁵⁰ Vietnamese refugees all over the world, especially Vietnamese Catholics, responded to Ly’s message for religious freedom and incarceration vigorously. From 2002-2011, VietCatholic had published over 120 articles focusing on condemning the arrest of Nguyễn Văn Lý and urging Vietnamese refugees to pressure their local governments and churches to impose sanctions on the Vietnamese government. In response to the arrest, Father Trần Công Nghi, the Northern Catholic priest who founded VietCatholic, issued an official statement:

Faced with what is happening in Vietnam, a number of figures who spoke up for religious freedom, demanded human rights, fought for the right to form a political party were detained by the Vietnamese communist police. In recent weeks, as Father Nguyễn Văn Lý has been placed under arrest and questioned about his political views, we [at VietCatholic] are speaking out against the policy of religious repression and their lack of respect for the Vietnamese people's right to freedom of expression. We demand that the Communist government of Vietnam immediately release Father Lý and the other freedom fighters who are being held and imprisoned by the communist tyranny of Vietnam.

We also ask everyone to continue to pray for the peace of Father Lý and all those who are fighting for human rights, freedom, justice, democracy and especially religious freedom in Vietnam.

Especially with the rise of the internet, in which VietCatholic and many other blogs would be able to reach Catholics in Vietnam who had advocated for religious freedom on their own for the past thirty years. VietCatholic, which had initially been mainly circulated within the refugee community, now had become active participants in the Catholic dissident movement in Vietnam. VietCatholic's website was subsequently banned by the Vietnamese government's firewall after Trần Công Nghi's statement, a testimony to the influence that Vietnamese refugees had on the Church of Vietnam through the rise of the internet.¹⁵¹ In addition, with new connections able to be made between the Church of Vietnam and the Vietnamese Catholic refugee community through the internet, the issues of religious persecution in Vietnam had also suddenly become important issues for the international community.

As the massive outcry by Vietnamese Catholic refugees gained the attention of international human rights organizations and the U.S. government, it also cemented the Vietnamese Catholic community as a political identity. On May 2nd, 2007, the United States House of Representatives passed a resolution in a 404-0 vote calling on the Vietnamese government to unconditionally release Nguyễn Văn Lý and other "prisoners of conscience."¹⁵² In Australia, the Vietnamese Catholic community rallied together through the Archdiocese of Sydney to submit a petition of 2,653 signatures calling for the release of Nguyễn Văn Lý. Their congressman forwarded their petition to the Australian ambassador to Vietnam, who had eventually presented it to the Vietnamese government.¹⁵³

Despite this recognition, the response by local governments remained limited to resolutions without action, and Vietnamese Catholics continued to press for Nguyễn Văn Lý's release for the next five years, shaping a key part of how international governments approach Vietnam today.

Joseph Cao was one of the most prominent figures in maintaining pressure on the U.S. government. The first Vietnamese-American ever elected in Congress, Cao previously served as an advisor to the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops and board member of Mary Queen of Vietnam Church in the Northern Catholic community of Versailles, Louisiana. As a devout Catholic of Northern descent himself, Cao's election as a Republican in a majority-Democratic district was largely attributable to the political activism among Vietnamese Catholics in that community. As Eric Tang and Karen Jeong et al. both note, the political activism through the democratic process by the Vietnamese Catholic community in Versailles was one of the first among Vietnamese refugee communities, born out of major dissatisfaction with the Louisiana government's response to Hurricane Katrina.¹⁵⁴ Similar to decisions by Northern Catholic villages to leave to the South in 1954, the fight against the government was primarily organized and led by the local clergy, specifically the clergy of Mary Queen of Vietnam Church.

One of Cao's first act as congressman was to cosponsor legislation to re-designate Vietnam as a "County of Particular Concern" over the "communist government's oppression over disputed land of the Vietnamese Catholic Church."¹⁵⁵ His subsequent legislation echoes similar priorities on religious freedom in Vietnam. Cao then sponsored a bill designating May 2nd, 2009, as "Vietnamese Refugees Day" in the United States, passing both houses of Congress unanimously.¹⁵⁶ In speeches regarding Cao's bill, members of Congress whose districts represent a strong Vietnamese refugee community made pointed references to religious persecution. Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, representing the 1st District of Nebraska, remarked,

Today, Vietnamese American refugees gather across this Nation to raise awareness of concerns affecting their loved ones back in Vietnam. Lincoln's Vietnamese American community has been particularly concerned with religious freedom and Vietnam's two-child policy. And I have tried to make it a priority to urge the Government of Vietnam to uphold its stated commitments to religious freedom. I

deeply value the active civic engagement of the Vietnamese American community in Nebraska with regards to these and other important human rights issues.¹⁵⁷

Zoe Lofgen, representing the 19th district in Santa Clara, California that boasts a massive Vietnamese population, also stated,

I have the privilege of representing many Vietnamese-Americans in San Jose, California, and can attest to this first-hand.

Unfortunately, I cannot speak with the same warmth about the situation inside Vietnam. To this day, the Vietnamese government refuses to respect the basic human rights of its own citizens. Reports by the State Department, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and non-governmental and Vietnamese American organizations document egregious abuses of free speech and expression, religious liberty, and many other fundamental freedoms.

So today I rise to honor the experiences of Vietnamese refugees, and to commend the Vietnamese Americans who have successfully rebuilt their lives in the United States while fighting for the rights of those left in Vietnam.¹⁵⁸

As demonstrated by both of the representatives' statements, Vietnamese refugees' voices had no longer been confined to the actions of community members themselves but had been made salient into a distinct political identity whose influence reaches the highest levels of government. In addition, the statements also highlight that much of this political identity is premised on the fight against religious persecution in Vietnam, an issue prominently emphasized by Vietnamese Catholic networks that have been taken up by the broader refugee community as a means to continue to criticize communist Vietnam.

Northern Catholic communities, from the likes of VietCatholic and the Versailles community, are notable examples of how Northern Catholic individuals took advantage of their strong community ties from their pre-1954 Catholic communities and in the South and built a collective identity of Vietnamese Catholicism in the diaspora. This collective identity had been made into a salient political identity, with religious persecution used as a connecting link between the refugee community and the Church of Vietnam. For a refugee population whose ties to their homeland becoming more distant - and with the growing liberalization of Vietnam, their cause for

anti-communism becoming less pronounced - religious freedom continues to be framed as a central issue for both the Catholic community and the refugee community as a whole.

Conclusion: Prospects for the Vietnamese Catholic Identity

When over 800,000 Northern Catholic migrants migrated to the South in 1954, they brought over a specific set of traditions, organizations, experiences, and devotions that overwhelmed the nature of the Church in the South. Rather than being assimilated into the South, their close-knit community and support from the South Vietnamese/American governments allowed them to dominate already-established Southern Catholic communities, who in turn had to assimilate their traditions into these new Northern Catholic migrant enclaves. Northern Catholic migrants reimagined their centuries-long connection to the Vietnamese martyrs in the form of anti-communism, helped propagate a new devotion to Our Lady of La Vang based on their refugee experiences, and reestablished a number of Catholic organizations that were distinct to their exclusively Northern Catholic way of life.

As both Northern and Southern Catholic lifestyles had become increasingly nationalized into a single Vietnamese Catholic identity under the Church of Vietnam, that identity became uprooted following the events of April 30, 1975. Churches were closed down, religious activities were restricted, clergy were arrested, and Catholics, especially those of Northern descent, were discriminated against in higher education and employment. The collective Vietnamese Catholic identity that had been restricted in the country migrated with the millions of Catholic boat people who hoped to preserve their way of life overseas. What had been exclusive to the Northern Catholic migrant identity in 1954 had become part of a broader Catholic refugee identity. “Modern” Vietnamese martyrs under communism were popularized in connection to that of the martyrs of the past, shrines and parishes dedicated to Our Lady of La Vang appeared wherever refugees

resettled as a way of expressing gratitude for their safe journey overseas, and both the martyrs and Our Lady of La Vang had become quintessential models of a Vietnamese Catholic identity for the organizations like the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement. With the support of the Holy See and local Catholic hierarchy in these resettled areas, Vietnamese Catholics were empowered to build their own refugee identity separate from their homeland, and many features of their distinct identity had found their way back to the Church of Vietnam and became adopted by Vietnamese Catholics at home. In this process, pre-1954 Northern Catholic traditions have been maintained as a central component of the Church of Vietnam both domestically and overseas. The contribution of Northern Catholics to the collective identity of Vietnamese refugees is only one small focus that helps elucidate the nature of the Vietnamese refugee community and how the history of certain identities and groups have helped build the unique Vietnamese diaspora community that we know today.

The role of Northern Catholics may allow for further research on the nature of other important historical groups and their impact on community-building in the diaspora. Northern Catholics here have been limited to migrants in 1954 from exclusive, Catholic communities, especially in the Bùi Chu and Phát Diệm dioceses. However, Northern Catholic elites from urban areas or migrants connected to the French army/government were also an important factor in the overrepresentation of Northern Catholics in the army, government, and other political organizations in the Republic of Vietnam, which in turn helped nationalize and internationalize many of the experiences of Northern migrants to the South Vietnamese government and the international community. In addition, while the role of Northern Catholic migrants has been overemphasized in the discourse around Southern Catholicism, little research has been conducted

on the nature of Southern Catholicism in the 20th century that also had a major impact on the formation of a Vietnamese refugee identity in the United States.

Where do we go from here? Today, many of the key characteristics of Northern Catholic identity put forth in this paper, such as the devotion to the Vietnamese martyrs, Our Lady of La Vang, and the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement, have all been revived in some form and exist quite prominently in the domestic Church of Vietnam today. This may possibly be due to the efforts of Catholics who stayed in the country and helped revive many of these characteristics that thrived in the pre-1975 South Vietnam, but like the issue of religious persecution in Vietnam, it is also the influence of the intimate relationship refugee Catholics still have with their counterparts in the homeland. The opposite holds true as well. Increasing numbers of non-refugee Vietnamese Catholics and clergy from Vietnam have immigrated to the countries like the United States and have introduced their own elements of Vietnamese Catholic identity on the refugee population. Youth who had been active in the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement in Vietnam have integrated themselves into various VEYM chapters overseas. New compositions of *Thánh ca* from Vietnam, which had revived itself as a popular youth genre among the still-vibrant dioceses of Bùi Chu and Phát Diệm today, have made their way into many Catholic masses and activities in the diaspora community. While this paper has attempted to identify the formation of a distinct Vietnamese Catholic refugee identity through the perspectives and contributions of Northern Catholic migrants, the growing trend seems to be shifting from the preservation of this refugee identity to the integration of a connected Vietnamese Catholic identity. From a distinct collective refugee identity to a reengagement with issues of religious freedom in the homeland, both sides that both claim themselves as Vietnamese Catholics now exist as interconnected parts of the Catholic Church. The future seems to suggest a clash of the two identities as both sides exchange

elements from almost half a decade of diverging histories. While there are increasingly less members of the refugee community that remember their experiences in the North, their traditions and experiences continue to be exchanged as conversations continue over how to define the Vietnamese Catholic identity.

Notes

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- ¹⁷ Nguyen Thuy-Phuong, "The rivalry of the French and American educational missions during the Vietnam War." *Paedagogica Historica* 50, no. 1-2 (2014): 33; A compilation of several oral histories have mentioned that the military was a common occupation for many newly arrived Northern Catholic migrants. Many of these migrants had served in the French army previously or were part of self-defense militias for their specific Catholic communities. For personal reasons, many also had more reason to join the army in order to quicken the reunification of the country

that would allow their return to a non-communist North. Serving in the military also provided a steady living for new migrants who needed a way to find a job in the South.

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¹⁹ Father Andrej Macjen, *Macjen_Thuan*, (Australia: Don Bosco Salesian Missionaries, 2015), 322.

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²⁶ "ĐỨC ÔNG VINH SƠN TRẦN NGỌC THỤ, NGUYÊN BÍ THƯ CỦA ĐTC, QUA ĐỜI" [Monsignor Vincent Tran Ngoc Thu, Former Secretary to the Pope, passed away], *Tin Tôn Giáo*, Mục Vụ Thụy Sĩ, Retrieved December 11, 2021.

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²⁸ Vincent Trần Ngọc Thụ, *Giáo hội Việt Nam, Tập I: Vụ Án Phong Thánh* [The Church of Vietnam, Volume I: The Case for Canonization], (St. Michael's Printing: Louisiana, 1987), 57.

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¹²⁰ John Peter-Pham, “Introduction.” In *Road of Hope: A Gospel From Prison* by Phanxicô Nguyễn Văn Thuận, (New City Press, 2013), 11-12.

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¹²² Letter from Mrs. Nguyễn Thu Hồng to Nguyễn Văn Thuận Foundation, September 2003.

¹²³ Homily of Pope John Paul II, “FUNERAL MASS FOR CARDINAL FRANÇOIS-XAVIER NGUYỄN VAN THUẬN,” September 20, 2002.

¹²⁴ In order to become a saint, a postulator must make the case for canonization to the Holy See. “Servant of God” is the title given to a candidate for sainthood whose cause is still under investigation, while “Venerable” is a title bestowed on someone who has not reached the stage of beatification but whose virtue has been recognized by the pope. After the process of beatification, the person will be able to become a saint, by which the person will be canonized. See “Saints,” United States Catholic Conference of Bishops.

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¹²⁷ Hà Minh Thảo, “Vị Giáo Sĩ Bị Tù Không Bản Án” [The Priest in Prison without a Sentence], *VietCatholic News*, June 18, 2013.

¹²⁸ The Vietnam Reform and Revolutionary Party, or Việt Tân, emerged as one of the first major political parties from the Vietnamese refugee community aimed at reforming Vietnam and overthrowing the communist government. Therefore, it is notable that a major political party would use the figure of Nguyễn Văn Thuận, a Catholic priest who refused to comment on politics, to denounce the crimes of religious persecution by the communist government. See Hà Long, “Đại Hội ‘Công Lý’ và ‘Hoà Bình’” [Congress for ‘Justice’ and ‘Peace’], Việt Tân, <https://viettan.org/dai-hoi-cong-ly-va-hoa-binh/>, Retrieved December 11, 2021.

¹²⁹ Francis Khúc, “Tổng Giám Mục Nguyễn Văn Thuận, Nguyên Nhân 13 Năm Lưu Đày Khổ Nhục” [Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Thuận, Victim of 13 years of Suffering and Exile], February 6, 2012, <http://www.memaria.org/default.aspx?LangID=0&tabId=446&ArticleID=36260&Page=1>, Retrieved December 11, 2021.

¹³⁰ “About,” VietCatholic News, <https://www.youtube.com/user/VietCatholicNews/about>, Retrieved December 1, 2021. “100 Catholic Youtube Channels on Church, Bible, Pope, Christ and Gospel News Videos,” Feedspot, November 25, 2021, Retrieved December 1, 2021.

¹³¹ Many in the refugee community refer to the Fall of Saigon as Ngày Quốc Hận, or Day of National Resentment, alluding to the day in which the country of Vietnam was lost to the communists. In this article, Trần An Bài, is attempting to use that term and apply it to the migration of 1954, alluding to the day the “North” of Vietnam was lost to the communists. See Trần An Bài, “20-7-1954: NGÀY QUỐC HẬN HỒNG” [July 20, 1954: Pink National Resentment Day], *VietCatholic News*, July 19, 2007.

¹³² “Không có gì quý hơn độc lập, tự do,” or “Nothing is more precious than freedom and independence” is a widely popularized phrase uttered by Hồ Chí Minh during the Vietnam War in order to rally troops against the South. Bài turns the phrase against itself, suggesting that the communists valuing freedom and independence over human life is one of the key reasons why religious persecution was rampant in the North and forced Northern Catholics to migrate to the South.

¹³³ “Giáo Hoàng hay Quốc Trưởng Vatican : Một đầu hai mặt” [The Pope and the Head of State of the Vatican: One Head with Two Faces], *Tiếng Gọi Công Dân*, January 28, 2013, <https://tienggoicongdan.com/2013/01/28/tien-si-tran-an-bai-giao-hoang-hay-quoc-truong-vatican-mot-dau-hai-mat/>, Retrieved December 11, 2021.

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¹³⁵ “Mayor of Hanoi calls for the removal of Archbishop Kiet,” *Asia News*, October 17, 2008.

¹³⁶ Trần An Bài, “Vạ Tuyệt Thông của Giáo Hội dành cho người theo Cộng Sản” [Excommunication from the Church for those who follow communism], *VietCatholic News*, May 6, 2010; “Giáo Hoàng hay Quốc Trưởng Vatican : Một đầu hai mặt” [The Pope and the Head of State of the Vatican: One Head with Two Faces], *Tiếng Gọi Công Dân*.

¹³⁷ James G. Cussen, “‘A Twentieth Century Tordesillas’: Or How Soft Power Works,” *International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy*, May 11-15, 2011, 31.

¹³⁸ “Thư Chung năm 1980 của Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam” [General Letter of the Bishop’s Conference of Vietnam 1980], May 1, 1980.

¹³⁹ “Vietnamese leader meets pontiff,” *BBC News*, January 25, 2007; Gaia Pianigiani, “Vatican: Envoy to Vietnam Appointed,” *The New York Times*, January 13, 2011.

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¹⁴¹ Sabrina P. Ramet (1990), *Catholicism and politics in communist societies*, Vol. 2, (Duke University Press, 1990), 288-289.

¹⁴² Đỗ Mạnh Tri, “Con đường đối thoại của TGM Nguyễn Kim Điền” [Road of Dialogue by Archbishop Nguyễn Kim Điền]. In *ĐỨC TỔNG GIÁM MỤC PHILIPPÊ NGUYỄN KIM ĐIỀN: CHỨNG NHÂN CỦA SỰ THẬT VÀ LẼ PHẢI*.

¹⁴³ Speech by Archbishop Nguyễn Kim Điền at the Huế Fatherland Front, April 19, 1977.

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