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## REQUIEM: AN INDIGENOUS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CATHOLIC LITURGY IN VIETNAM

(A case study of Lộc Hòa parish, Tây Hòa commune, Trảng Bom  
district, Đồng Nai province)

***Abstract:** This text uses the view of the historical Particularism to explain the indigenous characteristic of Vietnam Catholicism through the ancestral worship. The western Catholic culture has no custom of ancestral worship like the Vietnamese culture; however, it has the traditional liturgy as the Requiem Mass offered for the repose of the souls of the dead on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November. In Vietnam, this rite is not only a celebration for the repose of the dead, but it also absorbs the native mentality of the soul, the afterlife, the relationship between the living people and the dead through the ancestral worship custom of the Vietnamese. This indigenization process has turned a Catholic liturgy into a rite characterized by the Vietnamese culture. It is one of the important rites of the Vietnamese Catholics; this is not only manifested through the amount of believers who have attended this Mass, but it is also realized through the awareness, thoughts of the believers towards the ancestral worship.*

***Keywords:** Ancestral worship, historical particularism, indigenization, Catholic liturgy.*

### 1. Introduction

According to the view of the historical Particularism, each culture has its own path of development, features and values. Cultural change of each ethnic group is caused by the interaction among cultures in a geographic and historical environment. This process is extremely complex without any general rule<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is not true that the

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ethnic group with lower civilization is forced to give up its culture in order to passively accept the culture of a higher level of civilization. The article uses the perspective of the historical Particularism to explain the relationship between the Western Catholic culture and the Vietnamese culture reflected in the spiritual life of believers. The process of communicating between the two cultures has created two value systems at the same time, the values of the Vietnamese was not completely lost. Believers have incorporated their local cultural value into the Western Catholic cultural value, in other words they has made it indigenous. The paper presents the Catholic liturgy pray for the deceased believers in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese Catholics to prove this localization. This ritual shows the simultaneous existence of two values which govern the awareness; attitudes and behavior of believers' community make a Catholic liturgy integrated with the indigenous consciousness of the soul after the death, the afterlife and the relationship between the living and the dead. The indigenization of Catholicism is reflected in the ancestral worship of the Vietnamese Catholics.

By spreading the Catholicism out of Europe, perhaps the Church always desires to build Catholic nations all over the world. Unlike Buddhism, Catholicism does not accept the tradition of “Three teachings”, as well as, the existence of many religious beliefs of the Vietnamese<sup>2</sup>. When the Vietnamese converted to Catholicism, they received the Catholic faith and the cultural elements associated with Catholicism, so they had to renounce many traditional cultural elements which are not suitable with the Catholic faith. According to Alexandre de Rhodes in the work “*History of the Tonkin kingdom*” (Histoire du Royaume de Tunquin), the Vietnamese quickly renounced their belief in deities and demon to believe in God. However, it was not similar to the ancestral worship<sup>3</sup>. The ancestral cult of the Asian Churches caused the confusion, controversy and divisions of Catholic theologians, missionary societies, and missionaries for many centuries. The society of Jesuit missionaries permitted the Catholics keep this custom after elimination of superstitions and

considered it as social custom; While many other missionary orders in Vietnam completely banned it, the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (Société des Missions étrangères de Paris) as an example<sup>4</sup>.

The Vietnamese Catholics as well as non-Catholics believe in the immortality of the human soul, death is not the end, but a continuation of a new life in the afterlife, if the living is interested in doing useful work for the dead he/she will receive intercession (Catholic doctrine), blessing (the belief of the Vietnamese). However, the differences between the Western Catholic culture and the Vietnamese traditional culture, along with historical reasons, have made these similarities become unfamiliar to each other, have led to misunderstanding and a gap between the Vietnamese non-Catholics and the Vietnamese Catholics.

The Requiem Mass offered for the repose of the souls of the dead on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November has been a long tradition of the Western Catholicism. It is similar to the “filial piety” tradition of the Vietnamese. Therefore, this rite received easily the native mind of the Vietnamese on the reverence, the memory of the deceased. In Vietnam, this liturgy is one of the most important activities of Catholics, solemnly organized and characterized by the indigenous cultural thinking.

Through participatory observation and deep interviews at the Lộc Hòa parish to study the liturgy, it shows one of the ancestor worship activities of the followers as well as demonstrates the Catholic indigenization by remembrance, pray for the soul of the deceased in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese Catholics.

## **2. Some characteristics of the Catholic community in Lộc Hòa**

The Lộc Hòa parish is located in the Lộc Hòa hamlet, Tây Hòa commune, Trảng Bom district, Đồng Nai province. Before the year 1969, the parishioners did not live in this area and there was no inhabitant. In 1969, a priest sent some soldiers' families of the South Vietnamese Army from the urban area to settle there. They only lived around the church area where was covered by blockhouse to avoid the fire from both sides. The Catholics in Lộc Hòa have been migrants since 1954, but they had lived in many other places in the South. They

have been there since 1969, most of them have been from urban areas, and a number of new parishioners have begun to increase after 1975.

The Lộc Hòa Catholic community always tends to preserve its cultural values; however, the process of co-operation with other communities has led to exchanges and reception of the other cultural values. Therefore, this migrant Catholic community has its own cultural features.

The Catholics of Lộc Hòa settled with other religious communities and they were not the majority of the population like many other migrant parish communities in Đồng Nai. At present, the Catholics of Lộc Hòa live together with a large number of migrants working in the Bàu Xéo Industrial Zone with many different cultural and religious elements. It has had many impacts on the spiritual life of the Catholics there.

### **3. The traditional remembrance of the deceased soul of the Catholic Church**

After the Constitution *Ex quo singulari* in 1742, the Church of Rome disallowed the adherents in the Far East, including the Vietnamese Catholics can worship their ancestors to traditional ritual because the theologians believed that this worship is religious activity, expresses the believer's belief in the deceased, and influences the faith of the one God of the Catholic doctrine.

However, the Church does not forbid believers to remember the ancestors, the deceased parents because it is not only a commandment, but it is also a law of Christianity in general and of Catholicism in particular. This tradition was originated from Judaism and then it was transformed into Christianity. The Bible mentions mandatory things, advice on the responsibility of the living to the dead.

The fifth commandment speaks to honouring parents. Exodus 20:12 says "Honour your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you".

The Old Testament, Books of Sirach, Chapter 3: 1-16 says:

"Those who honour their father atone for sins.

They store up riches who respect their mother.

Those who honour their father will have joy in their own children, and when they pray they are heard.

Those who respect their father will live a long life; those who obey the Lord honour their mother....

Those who neglect their father are like blasphemers; those who provoke their mother are accursed by their Creator”.

The Catholic law does not only oblige believers to honour their parents while they are alive, but also to remember, to pray for the souls of their ancestors so that these souls can be free from sin.

Through the teachings of the Catholic Bible, there is a similarity in the understanding of “filial piety”, the memory of the deceased among the Catholic doctrine and the ancestral worship of the Vietnamese. The difference is only reflected in the ritual practices between Western and Oriental culture. However, the cultural difference was not properly understood and solved before the Second Vatican Council, which brought many disadvantages to the missionary work of the Catholic Church and to the life of Eastern Catholics<sup>5</sup>.

In the face of great changes in all aspects of the world, the Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council (1963 - 1965) in order to perform the renewal in which there is a change in attitudes toward the Eastern culture and religions. The Church has corrected its mistakes in the past and showed teachings consistent with the doctrine, the time and the cultures of the Eastern followers. The policy of cultural integration in non-European Catholic areas is one of the changes in the Church. The Church does not only accept the Eastern rite in worshipping ancestors, but it also teaches followers the obligations as follows:

- Firstly, reverence, gratitude and obedience to parents in the right things.

- Secondly, caring for parents when they are alive, life is full of body as well as soul.

- Thirdly, when parents die, taking care of the funeral, doing good deeds, praying and offering for them<sup>6</sup>.

In Vietnam, in the spirit of integration with the indigenous culture of the Second Vatican Council, the indigenous Church has guided and organized the feasts and rituals for the remembrance of the ancestors because this is not only the issue that the followers is interested in protecting the faith and preserving their cultural identity, but it is also the issue that the Vietnamese clergy always care for and resolve. The problem of ancestor worship has greatly influenced the development of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. In addition to the Requiem Mass offered for the repose of the souls of the dead on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, a long tradition of the universal Catholicism, there are also rites of the Vietnamese Church dedicated to remembrance of ancestors.

#### **4. Indigenization the Requiem Mass**

This feast was proposed by St. Odilo, the abbot of Cluny Monastery in France in the middle of the eleventh century, who allowed the members of the congregation to pray for the deceased on November 2, and then this initiative was included in the Rome liturgical calendar. The Tridentino Council (1545 - 1563) emphasized that the prayers of the living will shorten the purification time for the deceased souls in Purgatory. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that “the church is deeply devoted to the dead because of the rite that prays for the dead to be free from sin is an ethic and holy thought”<sup>7</sup>. Thus, on November 2, the universal Church organizes the Requiem Mass for all souls of the dead having the purification in Purgatory. For the Vietnamese Catholics, this rite is not merely a memorial day for the souls of the deceased as stipulated in the Catholic liturgical calendar, but it is also a feast for the remembrance of the ancestors. It has been absorbed the indigenous cultural consciousness. It is a great and important feast of the Vietnamese Catholics.

The current official name of the feast is the Commemoration of all Faithful Departed, translated into Vietnamese as the Prayer for the deceased Catholics. However, the Catholic Church of Vietnam has called the feast as Requiem (Lễ Các đấng or Lễ Cầu hồn). The word “Các đấng” originated from the Sino words as 各等, according to the Vietnamese dictionary, the noun “Các” means all things, “Đấng”

indicates the level<sup>8</sup>. Thus, these two words mean “all hierarchies”, the meaning of words can understand that all souls with their hierarchy. For the Catholic understanding, “Lễ Các đấng” is a rite praying for all souls being purified in Purgatory<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the word 等 has lost its hierarchical meaning because for Catholics, all souls are equal before God, the titles and positions on Earth have no meaning to the soul of the dead. There is a difference between the word and the content, the understanding is according to the Catholic doctrine, but the name is influenced by the Vietnamese culture. A researcher, priest Huynh Tru, said that the characteristics above are influenced by the indigenous culture, by Buddhism, expressed through the daily use and even in the literature of the Confucian scholars like Nguyen Du when writing the work “*Văn tế thập loại chúng sinh*” (A literary writing to worship ten types of spirits). It divided the human soul after death into ten different types. The author Huynh Tru has answered the question of why a Catholic ritual comprises the nuances of indigenous culture. Our ancestors had a cultural integration when created “this phrase” to translate?<sup>10</sup>. It is probably a compulsion to say that this is an active process of integrating into indigenous culture, but language is one of the first important elements of the integration process.

The word Requiem (câu hồn) means, according to Vietnamese dictionary, “pray for the repose of the souls of the dead go to heaven”<sup>11</sup>. However, this word can be understood in another sense as “conjuring” (gọi hồn), “invocation” (chiêu hồn, triệu hồn), this is a common practice in the Vietnamese society that has been existed until today. Of course, the Catholic Church views it is superstition. It is forbidden to practice it, so the Catholics understand the word “câu hồn” means praying for the soul of the dead.

Thus, it can be said that a combination of Catholic doctrine with the Vietnamese language made the Catholic rituals to be familiar with Vietnamese believers. We have known that when missionaries translated the Bible, the books into Vietnamese for evangelisation, they must be supported by the Vietnamese people. Therefore, it was the Vietnamese who gave these phrases to translate. Their cultural

mind affected to translation. For the missionaries, their mission is elimination what is contrary to the doctrine and combination the similarity in understanding terms to ensure the integrity of the doctrine, the intimacy, to be easy to understand, to accept of believers. Priest Huynh Tru also commented that “Lễ Các đấng” is not really true to the Catholic doctrine, it can be used without obstruction in the Vietnamese culture context”<sup>12</sup>. Thus, it is possible to realize the indigenous consciousness absorbed into a traditional Catholic rite through the name of the feast.

The Requiem Mass for all souls of the dead who are having the purification in Purgatory is related to the belief in Heaven, Purgatory, Hell and the relationship between the living and the dead in the Catholic doctrine. Through the understanding of the believer, the natural harmony of the Vietnamese indigenous cultural thinking and the Western Catholic doctrine can be seen.

The conception of Catholics and the Vietnamese traditional view shows that death is not the end, death is a start of a new life. According to the traditional view of the Vietnamese people, when people die they will start a new life in another world where their ancestors are living. The Catholics believed that when a person dies, the soul will go to the Heaven, or in the Purgatory or the Hell for the sins committed.

Those who committed crimes without repentance and reception the merciful love of God will be eternally in hell<sup>13</sup>. Hell is a place of imprisonment the sinful spirits. Hell does not have material fire, but it is a situation in which human beings are permanently excluded from communion with God and Saints<sup>14</sup>.

For the minor sins, human beings need to be purified in purgatory to achieve the holiness to enter into the joy of Heaven<sup>15</sup>. Purgatory means purification, purifying the sins committed. Purgatory is the word that is often used to describe purification, in contrast to eternal punishment. It is often misunderstood because they evoke the image of the prison where the soul is imprisoned and punished for repaying the sin committed. Actually, purgatory is neither a place, nor a process, but it is a sacred state. It is not also an external imposition as

a manner required by a court, but it belongs to the nature of sin, because sin makes man separate from God and neighbour<sup>16</sup>.

Heaven, Purgatory and Hell are three places where the soul will arrive after leaving the body depended on the purity or sin that they committed while they live. According to the Catholic doctrine, the three places above are not just a specific place, but they are a state that human being have or eternal loss God<sup>17</sup>. However, the Vietnamese Catholics consider these are specific places, there are rewards, punishments. Heaven is the place where people live happily, Purgatory is the place where people suffer the penalty for penance, but it is lighter than in hell, Hell is the place where people will be imprisoned for life with the most painful penalties.

All believers, who answered the questions as mentioned above in our deep interviews above, did not mention the state of having or losing God as the reward or the punishment for the souls after the death. This is not abeliever's denial or contradiction of the doctrine, but they think of specific places that are the images of the reward or the punishment of God towards the human beings' work in the Earth.

Catholics' thoughts can be seen as the influence of the indigenous cultural minds with the idea of causes and effects as "benevolence, good fortune", "iniquity, bad luck" embodied by images of punishment in the hell of Buddhism. Catholics often use the images of the law, the prison in the Earth to visualize the punishments in hell according to varying degrees of serious crime.

In a study, priest Phan Tan Thanh stated that reflection on the hell or heaven of Christianity should be enlightened in faith: having or losing God. It must clean the thinking of hell as a prison where detains criminals, we need to understand the nature of hell is "the situation of losing of God, far away from God"<sup>18</sup>. The Catholic doctrine indicates punishment in hell "The principal punishment of hell is to be separated eternally from God..."<sup>19</sup> Priest Phan Tan Thanh also stated that the purification of purgatory was accompanied by some kind of pain, but it is not the sensory pain. The priest cited the Saint Thomas 'words that the hunger for heaven is enough to make it worse. If

sinners in hell suffer from being forever far away from God, losing God, and the purified souls must go through desolation: their desire to come God is true love, it is enough to “burn their heart”. They are suffering from love, because they did not come to God enough. Being temporarily far away from God will help them appreciate love, becoming more worthy to love God indefinitely<sup>20</sup>.

However, according to priest Phan Tan Thanh, believers often discuss the sensory punishment (*poena sensus*) that is burned by fire as being mentioned in the Bible<sup>21</sup>. In fact, the Vietnamese Catholics understand that purgatory, hell is a place the souls are suffering painful punishment by fire. “When mentioning purgatory, people just pay attention to “purgatory fire “which express suffering at this stage. People even base on their imagination to imagine the penalties that correspond to previous sins: those who love eating and drinking will be dry their throats, and those who are accustomed to sin on the tongue their tongue will be burned. This image is likely the Buddhist hell”<sup>22</sup>.

“There are many punishments of God in hell. There is the Devil with horns, tail, it is very fierce. It is the leader in hell; it has the right to chain people. The fire here is hotter than the fire on the Earth. We do not dare to put our hand in the fire of the kitchen while the fire in hell is hotter than the fire in our kitchen how can stand the sufferings. Being shackled, being burned by fire in eternity, and never being forgiven”. (*Interview with a female, 63 years old, a farmer, on November 2015*).

Hell has toads or devils, torments. It cannot stand the hell, those who have entered hell, no one can ask for pardon”. (*Interview with a male, 65 years old, a farmer, on November 2015*).

As a result of the influence of indigenous cultural minds, the Vietnamese Catholics often pay little attention to theological reflection in the spiritual reward or penalty as having or losing of God’s love but they mainly concerned about the physical reward or penalty with specific images.

According to the Vietnamese conception, when people die they will start a new life in the afterlife, they have the same needs as the living

ones, so the living people will offer food and necessities for the dead. According to the Catholic doctrine, the most important thing for the dead is the prayer for them, because the dead are not able to pray for themselves but only through the prayers of the living to hope for the redemption of the sin that was committed on earth to soon return to the kingdom of God. It is the only way that a living person can make for a dead. The Vietnamese Catholics always trust in their prayers for their deceased relatives. They hope their relatives to be rested, free from any problems and quickly return to heaven.

The Requiem Mass is an opportunity for the believers of Lộc Hòa parish to pray for the souls, before the liturgy they are ready to prepare thing called “clean up the soul” in the Catholic term. Each person prepares his/her soul being pure, turns his/her heart to God, offers the most sincere prayers for the souls of his/her ancestors. In particular, every believer will confess, receive Communion, do charitable works, pray for the dead.

A common prayer day for all the souls who are purifying in purgatory according to the Catholic faith but when the ceremony takes place through the reception of the native Vietnamese culture, this ceremony brings further reflection on the ancestor worship mentality. Believers pray for all souls, especially pray for the souls of ancestors. There is a concretization of prayer; it is not only of the common prayer for all souls. On this occasion, believers will ask the priests pray for the souls of the dead.

In Lộc Hòa, when asking prayers for the souls, believers often put money into an envelope (the saint's name of the souls written outside the envelope). They ask prayers for specific souls, souls A, B ... (soul of grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, and relatives), soul of Tiên Nhân (relatives died for a long time ago), fetal souls and all souls.

For the Vietnamese believers, although they always believe that God is everywhere, knows everything but it seems that in the minds of believers, asking for prayers with the saints' name of souls will ensure that God will know the living is praying for whom, and the benefits of

prayer will be given to these souls. It does not only show the relationship between the prayers and the deceased, but it also expresses the care of their ancestors, and their prayers will add benefit to the souls. This is reflected in the fact that the parishioners of Lộc Hòa ask prayers for specific souls although the meaning of the rite on 2<sup>nd</sup> November is the feast for all souls.

In Lộc Hòa, besides praying at the church, the parishioners regularly pray in the convent, in the male religious orders, priests still hold daily Masses in the chapel. Many parishioners prefer to pray for relatives in the religious order monastery rather than in the church. On 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2015, we conducted field trip in Lộc Hòa parish cemetery; people were cleaning the grave to prepare for the rite on 2 November. We met a female believer about 60-year-olds who are asking a priest for prayers (this priest is also cleaning the graves of relatives at the cemetery). This woman gave money to the priest and said that “I ask prayers for my husband, the soul named..., the souls of the ancestors, the orphan souls and all souls” (extract the interview diary October 2015). She repeated many times the saint’s name of her husband for fear of priests forget. Then, I asked why she did not attend a ceremony at the church instead of praying in the convent, she said “The rite in the church prays for many souls, while in the convent, the whole family attend the ceremony, it is likely the rite is dedicated to my family” (extract the interview diary, October 2015).

The rite in the convent is not open to believers; it is mainly dedicated to the male friars who are studying there. In Lộc Hòa, the parishioners ask for the prayer ceremony, people will attend the Mass with the priests and the friars. A representative will come to ask the ceremony, then the whole family will attend the Mass praying for the dead. Believers believe that more and more people pray, the souls have more grace of God, God will forgive sins and souls will return soon to heaven.

By asking for prayers, it also shows the ordinary thoughts of believers, the thoughts influenced by the indigenous cultural values that have penetrated into a Catholic ritual. Asking for prayers is a

good thing, God knows everything, the Vietnamese believers obviously understand this doctrine but even though in the spiritual aspect, they still like the saint's name of souls, private Mass, the individuals attend Mass, they cannot be confused with others, so they wholeheartedly offer their prayers. Because it is not only God knows but it is also the witness of the soul of the dead for the hearts of descendants on the Earth, which also represents the unbroken bond between the descendants and their ancestors. It also shows a mutual penetration of values in the process of cultural exchange of two cultures in the spiritual life of Vietnamese Catholics.

The Catholics regularly ask prayer for the deceased. The parishioners pray for the soul of ancestors at any time, it is not only on the day of death or on the feast day of 2<sup>nd</sup> November. Prayers do not only help the dead, but the living will also receives the blessing from the dead. The ancestor worship tradition of the Vietnamese is not only the gratefulness of the deceased, but it is also asking the blessing of the deceased. Probably because of the similarity between these two beliefs that reinforces the belief of the Vietnamese believers in praying for the dead. Asking prayers for souls, besides the affection, obligation, association between the living and the dead, it also shows the reciprocal relationship.

On the rite of 2<sup>nd</sup> November, believers often prayed for the orphan souls (linh hồn Mồ Côi). Prayer for the orphan souls is a cultural feature of the Catholics in Vietnam. The European Catholics pray for the souls are purified in purgatory, but they do not distinguish the orphan souls like the Vietnamese. The "orphan soul" means that the soul has no relatives, no one support the faith life<sup>23</sup>.

In Catholicism, there is no soul called the Orphan because every soul is created by God, "they will call you by a new name, which is named by God" (Is 62, 2)<sup>24</sup>. The name of Orphan (Mồ Côi) is only found in the Vietnamese culture through the understanding of the word of the believer, the loneliness of the deceased on the journey to heaven. These orphan souls have come from the mind of the indigenous culture about "lonely spirit". According to the

Vietnamese Dictionary, the lonely spirit is the soul of the dead without worship”<sup>25</sup>.

In Lộc Hòa parish cemetery, the tombs no names, no relatives admitted were gathered into a separate area, called “orphan tombs”, it is convenient to take care and pray for them. On the ritual occasions, such as the feast of November 2<sup>nd</sup>, when parishioners pray for their family members, they also pray for the “orphan souls”, or when they practice the ritual of chanting in the family, they also pray for the orphan souls. When cleaning the graves of family members, the parishioners also clean these orphan tombs. This reflects the fine cultural tradition of the Vietnamese people, which is the expression of community interest in those who are less fortunate. For the Vietnamese Catholics, praying for the souls that are not their family members expressed the spirit of charity, showed the Catholic morality through the commandment: love your neighbour as yourself. Furthermore, praying for them, people will also receive prayers from these souls.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, the parish priest will offer Mass at the cemetery to pray for the souls. This Mass is a very important celebration of Vietnamese Catholics because it is attended by many priests (priests are working there, priests who were members of the Lộc Hòa parish are working in other parishes to pray for their family members buried in the cemetery). Catholics do not only live in Lộc Hòa but they also go to work and study in the distance, but they come to attend the Mass to pray for ancestors at the cemetery. The gathering of many people at the cemetery shows the solemnity and importance of this rite in the spiritual life of the followers.

For the Catholics, burning the incense sticks is not particularly meaningful, but burning incense in the ritual of chanting or death anniversary of ancestors is common in the Catholics’ family. Before the Second Vatican Council, believers were not allowed to worship with incense, but then they were allowed the incense must have in every ritual of Vietnamese believers. They do not only burn incense in the ancestral altar or graves, but they also do it in the Catholic ceremonies

with incense to God, the Blessed Mother and the saints. Catholics have fused the meaning of burning incense in the Catholic rituals; incense smoke flies up to the sky send prayers to God, to their ancestors, while it is also expressing respect in every prayer of believers.

In every evening of November, parishioners visit the cemetery. On this occasion, if believers visit the graves of parents and grandparents at the cemetery from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup>, the Church will give them special privileges. Catholics will receive the blessing. This gift is not for the living, but it will be given to the dead to help them redeem their sins. Catholics believe that during these rites their prayers will be accepted by God and will forgive for the dead.

In the evening, many parishioners visit the cemetery. Nearly every Catholic family in Lộc Hòa sends a person to visit the graves of the family members. They do not only come to visit the graves, they also receive plenary indulgences of the Church and give it to the deceased. They recite the prayers of their ancestors, including the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory. Normally, believers often visit the grave of the family member in the daytime, while at night; the cemetery is very quiet and has no lights. However, in November, the cemetery is lighted throughout the night, become a crowded and warm place because the feelings of the living dedicate to the dead. For the Catholics, they think the visit the cemetery as a meaningful occasion for the living meet the dead, the descendants meet their ancestors, remember the ancestral grace, imitate the predecessors to live better.

According to the statistics of the Lộc Hòa parish, this cemetery has about 4,000 worshippers celebrate the Mass, which is a very important rite. On this occasion, the companies and enterprises in Trảng Bóm allow the Catholics workers leave the workplace early to attend the Mass. It showed the status and meaning of this rite in the spiritual life of the Catholics.

### **Conclusion**

The ritual offered for the repose of the souls of the dead has showed the indigenization of Catholicism in Vietnam. It also shows

that the ancestor worship tradition has a profound effect on the spiritual life of the Vietnamese Catholics. When they converted to Catholicism, the Vietnamese have not only retained their traditional customs, but they also influenced the Catholic doctrines expressed through the rite. They have made a Catholic ritual with the Vietnamese indigenous cultural consciousness.

This characteristic shows the status of the ancestral worship in the historical context of Vietnamese society and the similarity between the Catholic faith and the ancestor worship tradition of the Vietnamese through the conception of immortal souls, the afterlife and the relationship between the living and the dead. Therefore, these two cultural values quickly merges when they contact, especially Catholics naturally receive the values of ancestral worship custom in their rites. It also demonstrates the viewpoints of the historical Particularism on the cultural values as well as the complexity of cultural change in the process of acculturation. This transformation does not necessarily follow a certain path, a general rule for the whole world. It shows the role of the cultural subject, such as the Vietnamese Catholic community, who were not passive in the process of adopting the Catholic culture, they created their own cultural identities, a cultural value consists of the basic characteristics of Catholicism, is not unfamiliar with its indigenous culture, the worship of ancestors in particular./.

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**Notes:**

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