

CATHOLIC PARISH COMMUNITY IN HO CHI MINH CITY: A SUBCULTURE APPROACH

Abstract: *The Catholic parish in Ho Chi Minh City is a multi-linked community. It expresses the common characteristics of Catholicism in Vietnam, as well as, a distinct mark in the process of development. The Catholic parish community shows specific cultural features in comparison with the other urban communities. This study raises a question about urban communities in contemporary society.*

Keywords: *Community; Vietnamese Catholics; parish; subculture.*

Introduction

Concepts of community¹, community studies, urban lifestyles, urban subcultures have taken a lot of the ink of sociologists, from classics like F. Toennies, E. Durkheim, G. Simmel to Chicago school in the 1920s and 1940s with R. Park, E. Burgess, L. Wirth and others such as R. Nisbet, R. Redfield. T. Parsons, R. Putnam... The most recent perspectives such as those of D. Harvey, M. Castells have linked urban development with broader society in the context of industrial capitalism.

According to the sociologist P. Berger, modern society with the formation of cities is marked by the disintegration of communities, he writes: “Modernity involves the progressive weakening, if not destruction, of the... relatively cohesive communities in which human beings have found solidarity and meaning throughout most of history”². Rural communities have had the same fate as above, so what will urban communities be like?

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Objective and method of the article

A community is made up of social bonds. Community concerns “... a particularly constituted set of social relationships based on something which the participants have in common – usually a common sense of identity”³. In the above sense, the parish is fully qualified as a community, because “ the parish is a community of believers residing in a sustainable area within the diocese, to gather the People of God together, carrying out the mission entrusted by Christ, the sacrifice of adoration of God, learning and proclamation of the Gospel, exercising community charity in the Church and society. Parish pastoral care is entrusted by the diocesan bishop to the parish priest”⁴.

In a larger society, to maintain its existence, each community has its activities, behaviors, norms, and values that form what is called “subculture” or “group culture” by the social scientists. In its simplest sense, subculture refers to the values, beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles of a minority group in broader society. The culture of this group is different, although still linked with the dominant culture⁵. Marshall refers to subcultural theory as follows: “... the core idea of the subcultural theory is of the formation of subcultures as a collective solution to, or the resolution of, problems arising from the blocked aspirations of members, or their ambiguous position in the wider society”⁶.

This article aims to explore a particular type of community in Ho Chi Minh City that is parishes of Catholics, as a community, subculture in a larger space. It discusses the formation, bonds and changes in this type of community and examines whether the fate of these communities is as predicted by P. Berger. To do this topic, we have used the method of observation, in-depth-interviews on the field of parishes, combined with document research.

Referring to the parish communities in Vietnam historically must include the works of Đỗ Quang Chính⁷ (2007a, 2007b); a parish community in the North by F. Houtard (1981)⁸; on religious

practices and social relations in Hồ Chí Minh City parishes by Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa (1990a, 1990b, 2010)⁹; of the Institute for Religious Studies, by Nguyễn Hồng Dương (1992)¹⁰; on the organizational structure of parishes in Đồng Nai and Rạch Giá (Nguyễn Đức Lộc, 2013)¹¹; about young people and families of Xuân Lộc parishes (Diocese of Xuân Lộc, 2015)¹², and Lê Minh Tiến (2018)¹³.

1. Formation of parish communities in Ho Chi Minh City

Historical documents show that from the years 1641-1645, many Catholics fleeing the Nguyen religious persecutions went to Chợ Quán, Đông Phố (Gia Định), Cù lao Phố (Phố Isles), Lái Thiêu, Bến Gỗ to live and do business. This created the first parish communities in the South. According to Father Juan Antonio Arnedo (1660-1715), the Jesuit missionaries followed the immigrants to Saigon in the late seventeenth century. Around 1700, Father Emmanuel Quintao - a Jesuit, came to work in Cù Lao Phố (Biên Hòa) and Chợ Quán, and in 1723 gave it to Father Francois José García. Chợ Quán Church was built in 1727 and Chợ Lớn church in 1730.

Then, the religious persecutions of Vo Vương Nguyễn Phúc Khoát (1738-1765) created a new immigration wave of parishioners from the Central to the South.

After the war between Tây Sơn and Nguyễn, Nguyễn Ánh ascended the throne in 1802, thanks to Bishop Pigneau de Behaime (Bá Đa Lộc), built for him the Tân Xá palace near Thị Nghè canal, where it was used as a bishops' house. In 1820, King Minh Mạng ascended the throne and issued decrees banning Catholicism, but in the South, thanks to the patronage of Tả Quân Lê Văn Duyệt, the governor of Gia Định, the southern lay people were less persecuted. In 1832, Lê Văn Duyệt died, a few parishioners joined the Lê Văn Khôi movement, making the Huế court even more persecuted: Chợ Quán church was destroyed in 1834, parishioners had to flee to Gò Vấp, An Nhơn, Xóm Chiếu.

Table 1. Data on Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City (1963-2018)

	1963 (a)	1974 (b)	1984 (c)	1995 (d)	2000 (e)	2008 (f)	2018 (g)
Population of HCM City		3.150000			5.063871	6.114.871	8.640.000 (2017)
Catholics	567.455	516.000	435.672	467.115	541.302	651.046	686.938 +300.000 immigrants
Priests:				417	466	576	888
-diocesan priests	583	416	416			316	355
-religious priests	25	125	133			260	533
Male religious	503	2.450	1558	383	745	945	1.263
Female religious	1936			701	2.674	3.110	4.861
Parishes	263	159	176		231	231	203 + 30 branches
Major seminarians		80		67	65	61	147 (SG diocese)
Minor seminarians		706			437	275	
Primary schools	338 (991.870 pupils)	195 (157.982 pupils)					170 (kindergartens, classes of affection...)
Secondary schools	56 (30.748 pupils)	74 (89.050 pupils)					
Professional, technical schools		5					
Universities		1					
Charity & health care centers	28 hospitals: 100 charity homes	66					79
Catechists						5.243	8.250

Sources : Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa (2010) and 2018-2019 data updated.

- (a) Episcopal Conference of Viet Nam (2004), *Viet Nam Catholic Church. 2004 yearbook*. Hà Nội. Publ. Tôn giáo, pp. 695, 705.

- (b) In 1965, a part of Saigon Diocese was split to establish two new dioceses: Phu Cuong and Xuan Loc; *ibid.*, p. 695.

- (c) Catholicism and Nation. (1985) *10th Anniversary of National liberation*, p.36;

- (d) Trương Bá Cần (ed.), *Vietnamese Catholicism - After 50 years: 1975-1995*. Catholicism and Nation.

- (e) *Communion* (Periodical) October 2000, pp. 171-173

- (f) Website of Viet Nam Episcopal Conference <http://v2.hdgmvietnam.org>; retrieved on oct. 13, 2008.

- (g) Archdiocese of HCMC Notebook 2019 ; <http://hdgmvietnam.com/chi-tiet/tp-sai-gon-tp-hcm-31504>

Since 1858, the war between France and Việt Nam devastated many parishes and a lot of Catholics were arrested. After the French occupied Saigon (2-1858), religious establishments were rebuilt,

such as Xóm Chiếu church, Tân Xá palace, many new parishes were established such as Chợ Quán, Cầu Kho, Chợ Lớn, Cầu. Bông (Gia Định), Chí Hòa, An Nhơn, Gò Vấp, Hóc Môn, Bà Điểm, Tân Hưng. In 1877, the Notre Dame Cathedral was constructed. In 1924, Tây Đàng Trong¹⁴ the apostolic diocese was renamed to Saigon apostolic diocese. In 1938, the Holy See split a part of the diocese to establish Vinh Long diocese (including the provinces of Vĩnh Long, Bến Tre, Trà Vinh, Sa Đéc and a part of Cần Thơ province). After being separated, the Saigon diocese had 80 diocesan priests, 27 missionaries, 12 religious priests, 82,375 parishioners divided into 13 religious counties, 58 parishes and 152 annex parishes.

In 1954, Sài Gòn diocese received nearly one million immigrants from the North, many of whom were Catholics. Some believers stopped at Sài Gòn diocese and then settled in Rạch Giá, Tây Nguyên... In 1963, Sài Gòn diocese had 567,455 parishioners, 583 diocesan priests, 25 religious priests, 503 male religious, 1936 female religious, 263 parishes and 284 annex parishes. In 1965, a part of the Saigon Diocese was split to form two new dioceses, Phú Cường and Xuân Lộc

By 1974, the Sài Gòn diocese included 516,000 believers distributed in 159 parishes, 416 diocesan priests, 125 religious priests, 2,450 male and female religious.

Thus, according to statistics, by 2018, the diocese has 233 parishes including 203 main parishes and 30 annex parishes (see Table 1). In terms of time, the main parishes were established as follows: before the twentieth century: 22 parishes; from 1900 to 1953: 17 parishes; 1954-1958: 71 parishes, this showed that the influence of the North Catholic migration was strong; 1958-1963: 30 parishes; 1964-1975: 83 parishes; after 1976: 10 parishes.

2. Parish - a multi-linked community and its cultural features

2.1. Linking through the process of parish formation

In the past, in areas where there were no parishes, the process of forming a parish was usually as follows: several believers living close to each other. At first, their religious activities were family or inter-family based. Gradually as the number of parishioners increased and had better acquainted with each other and better material conditions, they would work together to campaign for a simple church to be a place for common prayers and it was more favorable if a priest comes to celebrate Mass on solemn occasions. The church plays a very important role, if in the past, in the Vietnamese traditional village, Đình (communal house) was the living center of the village, then for Catholics church was the center of their religious activities. Moreover, if the Đình has only spring and autumn activities every year, then the Church is a place where parishioners come regularly, at least once a week.

Many places have churches, but not all churches have a resident priest, because in the past there were very few priests. For example, in 1792, Bishop Bá Đa Lộc reported on the Congregation for the Mission that about 60,000 parishioners have scattered within 355 parishes (main and annex parishes) but only 11 priests¹⁵. And usually, when churches have a resident priest, they become the main parish.

Previously, when the number of priests was too small, the Synod of Hải Phố (Hội An) in 1672, in article 4, stated: "Where there are many believers but there are no priests or preachers, people must choose one who is wise and virtuous to visit people in death agony, baptize a child or those who are dying and must return his or her name to the bishop or the diocesan superior... And Mr. Trùm (Chief of the religious community) is in charge of this function"¹⁶. And when the parish develops, it will form a Ban Chức việc (Parish Mission Board), or also called Ban Trùm Họ, Ban Quói chức, Hội đồng Giáo xứ (the Board of Parish Heads, the Board of Ministers, the Parish Council...) - is the intermediary between the parish priest and lay people. The Board of Ministers is now known as the

Parish Pastoral Council, which in Hồ Chí Minh City archdiocese most recently has a Regulation on the Parish Pastoral Council signed in 2015, by the late archbishop Bùi Văn Đọc.

Thus the formation of the parish requires four factors: the gathering of believers, the built church, the care of a priest and the parish executive board.

The statistics on the year of parish establishment above show: before 1954, there were only 39 parishes, but only from 1954 to 1958 there were 71 more parishes established by believers migrating from the North, accounting for nearly 2/3 of the total number of parishes in Saigon. Thus, parishes in Hồ Chí Minh City can be divided into two main categories: parishes that have existed for a long time in the South and those originating in the North that migrated from 1954. Previously, according to the historical documents, parishes in Đàng Trong are called “họ” (“family”, “religious family”), such as Họ Gò Thị, Họ An Chi, Họ Lái Thiêu, Họ Chợ Quán ... and in Đàng Ngoài is called “xứ” (“land”, “region”, “country”).

The word “họ” in the original language means “family”, “relatives”. So our ancestors in the past used the word “họ” to highlight the close connection between believers, between co-religionists as members of a family. In the North, the word “xứ” is used instead of the word “họ” in the South. The word “xứ” used to indicate a large administrative area, for example, Thanh Hóa xứ, Nghệ An xứ, Hải Dương xứ. In the past, when the mission began, the number of priests was very small, so each priest took care of such a big country. Later, when the number of priests was greater, then each priest, each of them would live in a small country (= parish), and in an “xứ” there are many annex parishes¹⁷.

When the parishioners of the North migrated to the South, they wanted to bring their whole parish and diocese with them, so sometimes they took the original diocesan name and named the places they came to settle: we see there are Hà Nội parish, Hà Đông

parish, Bùi Chu parish, Lạng Sơn parish, Thanh Hóa parish, Thái Bình parish (in Gò Vấp district), Phát Diệm parish (in Phú Nhuận district); or merging the names of two original dioceses, such as Bui Phat parish (Bùi Chu, Phát Diệm) (district 3); or the name of an original diocese with the local immigration name: Bùi Môn (Bùi Chu, Hóc Môn); or take the original names of the original parishes such as Kẽ Sặt, Hoàng Mai (Gò Vấp district...); or take the name of the old parish and add the word “Tân” (= new), as Tân Thái Sơn (Tân Phú district) is a combination of Tân Sơn Nhì - the place of destination and Thái Bình (the North)... They carry not only the name of the parish site but at the same time, both economic profession, organizational and ritual characteristics.

2.2. Economic links

In urban areas, a family is no longer a production unit, this is the difference between urban and rural areas in general. However, due to historical history, there are economic links in some parishes in Hồ Chí Minh City. Since 1954, many religious families migrated from the North to bring careers in their hometowns to the South. Parishes of Bình An, Bình Thái - district 8, are famous for a time with the woven mat profession, parishes in Tân Bình with semi-mechanical textiles. Gò Vấp parishes with the profession of making firecrackers (formerly) and animal husbandry; and since the profession of making firecrackers is no longer allowed, many households turn to make pork rolls (chả giò). They link and help each other in job transmission, search and divide consumption markets. Gò Vấp is also famous for Xóm Thuốc parish. Xóm Thuốc is a place where tobacco plants are grown, so that the elderly people can wrap them in thin tissue paper called Gò Vấp rolled-up tobacco: “Gò Vấp rolled-up tobacco is very delicious, dear, how can you leave me?” (folk song). Later, Xóm Thuốc processed tobacco cultivation for Bastos, Méliá of France. Today, due to urbanization, Xóm Thuốc no longer grows tobacco.

Some parishioners in suburban districts such as Hóc Môn, Thủ Đức, Củ Chi used to grow rice. And due to the concentrated habitation, in the years 1976-1988 of the socialist reform, these peasants joined the agricultural cooperatives, group of production at that time. Also due to the spirit of hard work, collective character, high cooperation, many cooperatives, production groups have won many titles, such as in Thủ Đức district, Chân Phước Cầm Parish Group, Group 7 of Hiệp Bình Commune, Group 19 - Phú Hữu Commune; in Hóc Môn district, Group 5, Tân Thới Nhì commune; in Củ Chi, Tân Thành cooperative with parishioners of Bắc Hà, Ấp Đình... In District 8, Chiến Thắng Cooperative, Ward 9 with 60% of whom are parishioners; in Gò Vấp district, parishioners account for 80-85% of members of Thành Công and Quyết Tiến cooperatives¹⁸. But now, due to the process of urbanization, the economic links almost cease to exist.

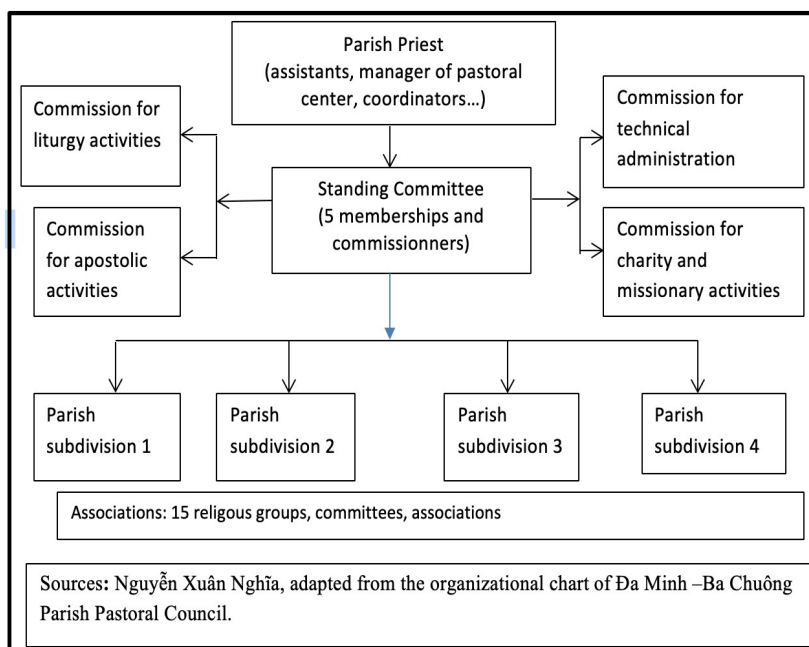
2.3. Organizational links, groups, associations and other activities

Talking about subculture is talking about a social sub-system, a social organization. Subculture is associated with a social sub-system within a broader cultural and social system¹⁹.

Since its inception in ancient times, parishes have had their governing apparatus formed with the Job Board (Ban Chức việc), which is now officially called the Parish Pastoral Council - which is the intermediary between the parish priest and the lay people. Previously, the Job Board consists of Mr. Trùm (Chief of Job Board), Mr. Câu (Mr. Trùm's collaborator who supervises parish activities), Mr. Biện (chief of parish subdivision)... Now the Parish Pastoral Council is organized with the Standing Committee and members. The Standing Committee includes Chairman, Vice Chairman of the Interior, Vice President of External Affairs, Secretary, Treasurer and members (if necessary), with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Besides, “To facilitate pastoral work, the parish district is divided into more or less parish subdivision, traditionally called ‘xóm đạo’ (catholic neighborhood), ‘xóm giáo’, ‘giáo họ’ (annex parish). Each parish subdivision has boundaries suitable for the pastoral work and activities of the parish and has an Executive Board consisting of the Head, Deputy, Secretary, and Treasurer. Depending on the situation of a parish, large or small, or the entire Executive Board, or the head of Executive Board, is a member of Parish Pastoral Council” (Article 7, Statute of the Pastoral Council of the parish 2015). (See Figure 1). Members of the parish subdivision Executive Board are often very close to the Catholic households in the area.

The members selected to join the Parish Pastoral Council are prestigious, exemplary in life following the teaching and way of the Church, have a spirit of service, know how to work collectively, have the necessary capacity for the ministry services, such as health, literacy, professional skills; have time to spend on collective work and as such, are visibly relatively well off economically. Every four years, the Parish Pastoral Council is democratically elected by lay people by secret ballot. In Hồ Chí Minh City today, two ways to vote are common: either parishioner directly elect (such as Vườn Xoài parish, Tân Sa Châu parish, etc.), or through representatives of associations in the parish (Đa Minh - Ba Chuông parish). The first way to vote has the advantage of being direct, but often the majority of parishioners do not know the nominees. The second way, the number of people voting less, but assessing more closely the candidates. In parishes of North origin, reputable parishioners like, including campaigning, to be admitted to the Parish Pastoral Council, but in parishes of South origin, or parishioners of South origin, sometimes there is great pressure to accept positions in Council. Some parishes follow the public financial model, wholly or partially managed by the Standing Committee of Parish Pastoral Council (for example, Vườn Xoài parish, Hà Đông parish, Hạnh Thông Tây parish...)

Figure 1. Organizational chart of Parish Pastoral Council

In terms of gender, there is also the presence of women in Parish Pastoral Council, but often holds the position of treasurer, secretary. There is also the exception: the Chair of the Tân Định Parish Pastoral Council is a woman, or a vice-president like in the parishes of Francis Đa Kao (district 1), Khiết Tâm parish (Tân Bình district).

In addition to the vertical organizational association described above, the parish also has groups and associations. Associations are usually organized by age group, gender, or specific activity. Usually, in parishes, there are the following associations: Eucharistic Youth, Hùng Tâm Dũng Chí, Catholic Scout, Mary's Youth, Holy Mother Association, Legio Mariae, Catholic Mothers, Holy Heart League, Đa Minh Fraternity, Franciscan in the World, Cát Minh Third Order, Laity Charity Association, Caritas Vietnam, Khôi Bình Vietnam, Family with God, Family of God²⁰. But depending on the conditions of each parish, the number of active

associations is uneven. All associations have a priestly direction. Take the parish of Đa Minh Ba - Chuông as an example, there are associations here: Lay Dominican Fraternity (both men and women), Catholic Mothers Association (women, 66 members), Legio Mariae Association (men and women, 98 active members, 326 support-members); Eucharistic Youth Union (2 sexes, 900 children from 5-18 years old; 80 catechists; have their own Mass on Sunday); Martino Serving Group (29 women); Social Charity Group (Annunciation Family, about 50 members, male and female); Parish Caritas Board (2 sexes, 15 members with professional skills); Bible Prayer Group (2 sexes, more than 40 members); God Mercy Association (men and women, about 30 members) Dominican Student Group (male and female, about 30 members, having Taizé prayer time), Rosary Group (about 30 members, majority female), the Media Board, the Đa Minh Fine Arts Board (with the participation of about 30 artists, organizing more than 20 exhibitions, each with over 100 works of paintings, photographs, statues, sculptures); Information Board (in charge of the website: gxdaminh.net; video for lectures; 2 members).

Also, some parishes associated with religious congregations organize theology classes for lay people (Mai Khôi parish, Ba Chuong parish), music classes, vocalist training; foreign language classes (Đắc Lộ Center, district 3).

Some parishes - such as Notre Dame Cathedral (district 1), Tân Định, Our Lady of Perpetual Help (district 3) - have bookstores selling religious publications, books on philosophy, morality, humanity.

Parish organization in the internet age and social network

As mentioned above, the organizational links within the parish are very tight and dense. These links are strengthened and developed in the current internet age. Many parishes have their websites, including the forms shown on blogs, on Facebook, such as the website of Tân Việt parish (Tân Bình district), Hà Nội parish

(Gò Vấp district)...; blog sites of Tân Định parish (district 3), Nam Thái parish (Chí Hòa county, district 10)... ; Facebook pages of Mai Khôi parishes (District 3), Phú Lộc (Phú Nhuận district), Thị Nghè (Bình Thạnh district), Xóm Thuốc (Gò Vấp district), Mỹ Hòa (district 2)... Young people, students also have their websites such as “Thạch Đa Parish Youth” (Gò Vấp district), “Mai Khôi Student” (district 3), “Đa Minh Student” (Phu Nhuan district)... Content of the aforementioned websites often focuses on understanding the Word of God, attached to the liturgical calendar; or informative: association activities, holidays, parish newsletters; or entertaining through music videos, movies related to religion.

2.4. Links from ritual activities

This is the most important link of parishes because the ritual is one of the three key elements of Catholicism. "These three elements include 1) Faith or belief in dogmas; 2) Ritual and 3) Living the faith. Catholics also often mention these three factors in a brief sentence: belief, celebrate faith and live the faith²¹. The main rites are called the sacraments. There are seven sacraments in total: Baptism, Eucharist, Penance (Reconciliation, confession), Confirmation, Marriage, Anointing of the sick, Holy ordination.

Churchgoing (Eucharist, especially Sunday Mass), is seen by some Western researchers as the criterion for classification in three main categories: practitioners (at least, once a week), irregular practitioners (Occasionals) and non-practitioners. The latest practice figures in Western countries show that in France only about 5%, in Italy only 25% of Catholics fall into regular practice. Or close to the figure of an Asian country with more than 80% of the population being Catholic like the Philippines, where the percentage of going to Sunday Mass is 60.9%; Korea 59%. It can be said that the research data of Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa (1990, 2010), of Nguyễn Hồng Dương (1992), of the Institute of Religious Studies and Đặng NghiêM Vạn (2001), of the Diocese of Xuân Lộc (2015) show that the practice rate of Vietnamese Catholics is

among the highest in the world²². And the percentage of Catholics attending Sunday in Hồ Chí Minh City is between 89% and 98%, among the highest in Vietnam.

Mass is held every day in a parish church. For example, in the parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (district 3), there are 3 Masses per day, 9 masses on Sunday. The parish of Dominican Ba Chuông each morning has two masses (5h; 5h45) and afternoon, one at 5h30. Every Sunday, 8 Masses, there is a Children's Mass and a Mass in English; in total about 8,000 attending Mass, while the whole parish has 2,300 parishioners. This means that in the parish there are officially unregistered migrants and parishioners coming from other parishes. Nowadays, with the use of projectors and screens located in many convenient locations of the church, all attendees can read prayers together, sing together to create a peaceful atmosphere and sacred communion.

The parish is associated with the ritual cycle in human life. From the moment of birth, usually after a month, the infant is baptized at the parish church²³. From the age of 6, they took basic catechism classes to receive their first communion; then they continue to study the catechism to receive Confirmation (Thêm sức). As an adult, this is not required, but they continue to learn more catechism with their catechists. Before marriage, young men and women attend church teachings on marriage and take the sacrament of Matrimony. When they are old and in the agony of death, the laity is subject to the sacrament of Anointing the sick. In some parishes, “the Fathers visit and have the patient receive the Eucharist on the first Fridays of the month in his home, and if the patient requests it, the Sisters and Ministers will give sickness receiving the Eucharist every Sunday morning at home” (for example, Bình Thái parish, district 8).

Previously, many parishioners chose for themselves the final resting place, the parish cemetery. But since 1975, it is very difficult for parishes to get permission to buy land to build

cemeteries. Before this situation, in surrounded space of the parish church, the “House to keep the remains” (parishes of Tân Việt, Tân Bình district), “House of Peaceful Rest” (parish of Gia Định, Bình Thạnh district) or the “Ancestral House of Resurrection” (Đa Minh - Ba Chuông parish, Phú Nhuận district) is a choice to keep the remains of parishioners who have passed away. Many lineages choose a parish “House of Peaceful Rest” for their deceased loved ones for an easy visit.

On Christmas holidays, parishes all have artificial cave and crib with the Nativity scene. On the mass media, we have seen nearly a kilometer on Phạm Thế Hiển Street (district 8) decorated with lanterns and Nativity scene running along with the parishes of Bình An, Bình Thai. On the occasion of the annual Lent and Easter season, in the parishes of the North, believers re-enact the Passion and Death scene of Jesus. The Lent Contemplation includes kneeling contemplation, standing contemplation, crucifixion contemplation, beside tomb lamenting (Bình Thai parish)²⁴. These folk-performing forms show that the inculturation of Catholicism in Vietnam has existed since the time of Father Đắc Lộ.

Besides the parish level rituals, each religious subdivision (khu giáo) has its patron saint rituals. Moreover, in some parishes in Xóm Mới or Bình An counties, some families also recite the communal evening prayers, especially in May (Roses Month), in October to Our Lady of the Rosary or in March to Saint Joseph; or collective prayers according to family wishes²⁵. Members of the religious subdivision also hold prayers at the home of the recently deceased.

Not only is the center of religious rituals and ceremonies, but on traditional national festivals such as the Lunar New Year, we also find - in the parish church, as in the parish of Franciscan Da Kao, Đa Minh - Ba Chuông, Mai Khôi - the New Year tree (cây nêu) and colorful banner flag (cờ phướn), in addition to re-enactments of the teacher writing Chinese letter on parallel (câu đối), and square

glutinous rice cakes (bánh chưng), yellow apricot trees with red envelopes as the holy fortune (greetings from the Bible). Or the image of the parish priest in the traditional áo dài dress and turban (khăn đóng) is celebrating New Year's Eve mass and wishing parishioners' Happy New Year (parish of Franciscan Đa Kao).

2.5. Parish and welfare links

Since ancient times, once the young parishes were formed, the priests were concerned with the welfare needs of the lay people. These are the educational needs of children in the parish, the needs of lay people in general health care and the need to help disadvantaged groups in society.

The page “History of Gia Định parish” showing that the parish has 12 generations of priests, wrote: “... The second parish priest Desseaume took care of building schools and dug a small creek connecting Cầu Bông canal with the Bà Chiểu market to reduce flooding and raise the church ground, today the creek still exists... Currently, there is a school inside Gia Định Church, which is under State management but it is the Bossuet school founded by the ninth priest - James Huỳnh Văn Cửa. Father Antoni Mạnh then rebuilt and named the Holy Mother for elementary and secondary school pupils... Father Ignatius Hồ Văn Xuân built three churches: St. Joseph Worker (Thánh Giu-se Thợ), Holy Mother 3 (Thánh Mẫu 3), and Our Lady of the Ascension (Đức Mẹ Lên Trời) and also built a technical school... ”²⁶. This is typical of how in a single parish, three types of schools were built: elementary school, secondary school and technical vocational school.

The history of the migrant parish was established in 1954, the Mỹ Hòa parish in district 2, also shows: After the parishioners have settled down, in 1957 “... In the parish, Father Dominican [Vu Bôi Quỳnh] had to build a primary school named Xuan Phong. The school has 7 rooms with classes 1,2,3,4,5 led by Mr. Joseph Nguyen Ngoc Luu...”²⁷.

By 1963, Sài Gòn diocese had 56 secondary schools with 30,748 pupils and 338 primary schools with 91,870 pupils, 28 hospitals with 4,874 hospital beds (Vietnam Bishops' Conference, 2004: 695.). And in 1974, the diocese had 195 primary schools with 157,982 pupils; 74 high schools with 89,050 students; 5 technical and professional schools, 1 university (Minh Đức)²⁸; 66 social and charity establishments²⁹.

From October 1975, with the policy of “socialist transformation”, the social and educational institutions of Sài Gòn diocese were all assigned to the state for management³⁰. From here on, Catholics are no longer systematically involved in the field of education. But since the government began the Đổi Mới policy (1986), “affection classes” (lớp tình thương) have appeared on the parishes. And the model “affection class”, first appeared in 1989, for children from poor families, migrants and street children was firstly formed in Hồ Chí Minh City, by Ms. Tống Thị Kim Lộc, a parishioner of Chợ Đũi parish (district 1). Another special education model - the people-founded school for deaf and mute children under 8 years old, was established in July 1986 by a female parishioner of Bắc Hà (district 10)³¹. Currently, in parishes, there are more than 25 student residences, besides social restaurants serving poor people, activities to help students during the university exam season, and activities to help people with disabilities (Đa Minh – Ba Chuông, Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish...).

According to 2018 data, in the parishes, with the cooperation of religious congregations, there are 170 educational institutions (kindergartens - affection classes - vocational schools); 63 charity establishments (orphanages, nursing houses and houses for disabilities), 16 medical facilities (clinics, clinics), including many free services clinics such as the Church Charity Clinic An Tôn (district 1), Clinic and free counseling for HIV/AIDS patients in Mai Khôi parish (district 3), Thánh Tâm Tân Định General Clinic, in the church area (district 3), free for poor patients; Nhân Đạo

clinic of Cha Tam parish (district 5); Nhân Đạo clinic of Chợ Quán parish (district 5)...³²

3. Comparison of the parish community in Ho Chi Minh City with some other types of urban community

The field research literature on urban communities in Ho Chi Minh City is limited and often does not follow a common standard for comparison. However, in 1998, we did a small study, following a general outline for comparison, which included four communities: Bình An community including Bình An parish, Bình Thái (district 8), Bảy Hiền community with native textile workers Quảng Nam (Tân Bình district), Hạnh Phúc apartment (district 5) and apartment Lý Chính Thắng (district 3)³³.

From the above study, some observations can be drawn. Although all are the current four urban communities, the two communities of Bình An and Bảy Hiền (hereinafter simply referred to as two communities) still more or less retain the traits of traditional rural communities, while residents of Hạnh Phúc and Lý Chính Thắng (hereinafter simply referred to as two apartments) show an urban and modern lifestyle. We can point out some differences³⁴:

1) Regarding the settling time: The two communities of Bình An and Bảy Hiền have settled for a long time, over 40 years; while Hạnh Phúc and Lý Chính Thắng apartments have only been in the past 20 years (compared with the year the study was conducted in 1998).

2) About population origin: In the two previous communities: a population more or less of the same origin; in two apartments: diverse backgrounds.

3) Concerning careers: in two communities: handicrafts and small industries; in two apartments: service and commercial activities.

4) Regarding income: in two communities: it is generally low; in two apartments: relatively good

5) On family: two communities influenced by lineages and extended family; in two apartments: the nuclear family.

6) About social relations: in two communities: neighbor relationship; in two apartments: neighbor relations are not much, focus on nuclear family relations.

7) In term of culture: in two communities: there is collective rituals, meeting; in two apartment buildings: no common rituals.

8) Concerning religion and belief: in two communities: They play an important role; in two apartment buildings: little, or almost no role, a high proportion of people with no religion or beliefs.

9) Regarding the value orientation: in two communities: to promote moral values; in two apartments: appreciate material values.

Both types of communities above exist in urban spaces, so there should be no simple view of urban communities. Urban is like a mosaic work, each piece has its own unique to learn.

The two apartments mentioned above, show some features of the modern lifestyle, such as the separation between the workplace and the residence, the objective behavior towards social relationships, privacy respect. But there, solidarity is weak, the population only cares about material issues, such as improving infrastructure, improving general services.

While the two communities of Bình An and Bảy Hiền still retain many traditions due to factors of immigration, occupation, religion... Of course, the collective spirit is higher, but there are some limitations. as production in the residential area leads to pollution, regionalistic mindset.

4. Religious lifestyle in the parish community, cultural values and social capital

4.1. Cultural values

Why do parishes not only focus on religious ceremonies, not concentrate on internal religious beliefs, but also have a lot of

activities in many fields of education, health care, and social work? The answer, under the sociological viewpoint, is to create social prestige. However, it is necessary to deeply understand the religious feelings of the parishioners. Catholicism is often called the religion of love and Catholics make it clear: “Faith without works is dead faith”. Their religious beliefs must be manifested in an act of charity, as the teaching: “... What you did for one of the least of My brothers is that you did for Me” (Mt 25: 31-46).

Different from the mindset of Westerners - especially in Europe and especially France - consider religion a private matter of individuals, Vietnamese Catholics, with a tradition of ritualism inherited from Confucianism, wanting to clearly show his religious identity, keeping faith is to confess his faith to everyone, expressed through wearing an image, a rosary on his body, making a sign of the cross during meals with others; in the family, a solemn altar is set up with many images; for families that have conditions, they will place a large statue of God and Mother Mary in their front yard, on the balcony or the terrace so that everyone can see it.

Therefore, before 1975, Catholics in the South and especially in Hồ Chí Minh City, with strong and spectacular developments on both the political and societal levels, unintentionally came to such an attitude that many have criticized it as “triumphalism”. Father Piero Gheddo showed that Catholics under the Ngô Đình Diệm regime had special power and privileges. “The temptation for a triumphalism is very strong and the whole Church (South), with only a few exceptions, falls into the above temptation”³⁵. Gheddo also explained that this triumphant attitude was due to having a Catholic head of state, after centuries of being excluded from the margins of society and because “the mentality of the Asians is very fond of the outward appearance and promote organization”. Father Trần Tam Tĩnh, later, also called the church in the South a “church of victory” (Église triomphale)³⁶.

However, after 1975, the Catholic educational and social institutions were “publicized” and placed under the administration of the state. The Church no longer has external means to propagate and manifest the religious values she has chosen. Some authors call this an opportunity for Catholics to “purify”, no longer assimilate the development of faith with the expansion of socio-political influence, as “an opportunity for the Church. live in poverty and serve”³⁷. But the religious values - charity, love, service to others - are always motivating, so when it is easier from the Đổi Mới policy (1986), the parishes form the “affection classes”, social facilities and activities to help those in difficulty and disadvantaged in society.

On that general picture, the activities of the Parish Pastoral Council, the associations also want to express the democratic spirit of a church of participation and communion, wanting to quickly leave the “clerical” behavior of the past, with “bureaucratic” and “subsidized” behavior. Both the religious leaders in the parish and the laity are aware that in the renewal of the church’s activity, there is no one-way reform of the clergy or the laity, but all activities require collectivity, discuss in a spirit of common responsibility.

The architecture of the parish church, the rituals at the parish expresses a spirit of integration of Christian culture into Vietnamese culture. This is a large topic that requires research. But it can be said that the parishes in the South were influenced by the spirit of “Reformation and Incarnation” of the Second Vatican Council, and later influenced by the 1980 Letter of the Việt Nam Episcopal Conference on “To build in the Church a way of life and an expression of faith that is more consistent with the National tradition”. Therefore, we can understand the expressions of national culture in Catholic rituals, architecture, arts and activities³⁸.

The above general cultural features of Vietnamese Catholics and Catholics in Hồ Chí Minh City do not deny the distinct features of the North and South parishes here. The parishes of North origin due

to the living concentrated in a certain space have allowed to organize and preserve the traditional features in rituals and ceremonies that were once criticized as “external forms”, “traces of village culture”. But what has considered a limitation is now an advantage as urban space becomes more global, bringing the risk of erasing the characteristics of subculture. The “limitations” of yesterday’s tradition help to preserve the identity of today’s religious culture.

4.2. Social capital

If social capital (social capital) is understood as a network of social relations, values, norms, trust, or, in general, social resources to help a social group work effectively, the parish is closely tied to social capital. If according to the typology of R. Putnam (2000)³⁹, the parish has a kind of “bonding social capital” of people of the same religion, but at the same time creates “bridging social capital” through open networking with other groups of people in society.

As noted above, bonds are strong within parishes, helping to create a spirit of solidarity. Parishes are firmly linked, but not closed, communities. Because urban spaces have no clear boundaries with “village bamboo ramparts” as in the past, parishes are open communities: a 1990 study found that about 30% of lay people - most of them young - go to church outside of the parish, they go to any church where a priest preaches with attractive content, in any parish with an engaging atmosphere and activity⁴⁰; many of the choirs serving at the parish are not local parish choirs, for example, in the Mac-Ti-Nho parish, district 1, five choirs serve mass, but three from other parishes. In terms of marriage, only 16% of all marriages occur between men and women of the same parish; the proportion of marriages without the same religion accounts for about 6% of the total number of marriages⁴¹. Charity and education activities are not only for co-religionists but also for all those who are in difficult circumstances.

And finally, through the above description of the use of modern techniques in mass, linking parish activities over the internet, trying to follow a model of democratic governance, parishes in Hồ Chí Minh City wants to combine tradition with modernity in its organization and activities. And this is one of the reasons for the vibrant, lively existence and activity in parish communities today. This combination meets the needs of many walks of life.

Some comments and conclusion

In retrospect, P. Berger's viewpoint of the community dissolution in modern society is not entirely unfounded, especially when we observe, for example, some parishes in Western countries or Đình worshipping festivals in Hồ Chí Minh City. They remain only traces of once-existing communities. However, the data presented above on Catholic parish communities show that this is an exception to P. Berger's statement (?). At the same time, the above data also exposes that some arguments of secularization theory - that the role and practice of religion diminished due to urbanization - are also unstable and vice versa, indeed has occurred a process of desecularization - which is explained as the continuation and development of religion, in term of greater concern for spirituality and the promotion of spiritual values within itself modern society⁴².

The urban environment with an increasingly developed scale forms mass societies, in which people feel lonely, alienated and anomic such as described by É. Durkheim, M. Weber, G. Simmel, L. Wirth. Therefore, social scientists, Diana Kendall for example, have proposed solutions to cope with these phenomena of urban people, at the same time to create a sense of community and protect individual and collective identity, that is joining subcultures such as cultural groups, arts, ethnic groups...⁴³. And is it true that people go to communities, small cultural groups - subculture, to find themselves again through the social bonds that the case of parish communities in Ho Chi Minh City presents a remarkable illustration./.

Notes:

- 1 Catholics in the South today often call "community" as “cộng đoàn”: "parish community X = cộng đoàn giáo xứ X...", "community of religious order Y = cộng đoàn dòng tu Y..."
- 2 Re-cited in J. Macionis (2012), *Sociology*, Pearson: 567.
- 3 G. Marshall (1998), *Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford University Press: 97.
- 4 The Archbishop of Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City (2015), *Canon Law*, article 515, 518.
- 5 A. Edgar, P. Sedgwick (2008), *Culture theory. The key concept*. 2nd Edition, Routledge: 340-341
- 6 G. Marshall (1998), *ibid*: 649.
- 7 Đỗ Quang Chính (2007a), *Integration in Vietnamese society*, Antôn & Đuốc Sóng, San Diego – Montréal; Đỗ Quang Chính (2007b), *Episodes on the history of Vietnamese Catholic Church*. Antôn & Đuốc Sóng, San Diego – Montréal.
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- 10 Nguyễn Hồng Dương (1992), “The religious life of the Catholics in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City”, *Sociology*. Nguyễn Hồng Dương also has many books and articles on Catholic villages in the North Việt Nam.
- 11 Nguyễn Đức Lộc (2013), *Social configuration. The northern Catholic community migrated to the South. From community dimension to individual dimension*, Hồ Chí Minh City: National University of Hồ Chí Minh City Publisher.
- 12 Xuân Lộc Diocese (2015), *Report of the survey on the current situation of families and youth in Xuan Loc diocese after 50 years of establishment and development (1965-2015)*, Xuân Lộc Diocese.
- 13 Lê Minh Tiến (2018), Les Pratiques Religieuses et La Morale En Pratique Des Jeunes Catholiques Vietnamiens. *Journal of Arts & Humanities*.
- 14 From 1844, the Church established *Đông Đàng Trong* diocese: from Gianh river to Luc Tinh; *Tây Đàng Trong* diocese includes: from Di Linh, Luc Tinh (Dong Nai, Gia Dinh, Dinh Tuong, Long Ho, An Giang, Ha Tien) to Kampuchea, including the southern part of Laos.

- 15 Đỗ Quang Chính (2007b), *ibid*: 246-247.
- 16 Đỗ Quang Chính (2007b), *ibid*: 251.
- 17 Đỗ Quang Chính (2007b), *ibid*: 241-242.
- 18 Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa (1987), *Characteristics and Contribution of Catholics in Ho Chi Minh City: 1975-1987*, Ho Chi Minh City Catholic Solidarity Commission. (Ronéo document).
- 19 C. S. Fisher (1975), "Toward a subcultural theory of urbanism". *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 80, No. 6, May: 1323.
- 20 Vietnamese Episcopal Conference (2004), *Vietnamese Catholic Church - Yearbook 2004*. Hà Nội, Religious Publisher: 425.
- 21 Nguyễn Nghị (2015), "Living Catholicism and its influence on Vietnamese society (The impact and influence of Catholic rituals on cultural and social development)". *Religious Studies*, no 12 (150): 96.
- 22 Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa's study in 1989 (published in 1990a), on Catholic practices in some parishes in Hồ Chí Minh City, showed the rate of going to Sunday Mass: 1995: 95%; 1996: 95%; 2006: 92% (see Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa, 2010). In the study of Nguyễn Hồng Dương (1992), the rate of going to Sunday Mass in Hà Nội: 86%. In the research of Đặng Nghiệm Vạn (2001), in Việt Nam: 71% - 95%, depending on region, in Hồ Chí Minh City: 89%. According to research by Xuân Lộc Diocese (2015): this rate in Xuân Lộc is 96, 6%.
- 23 From ancient times, in baptism, the missionaries had a spirit of inculturation: "In the celebration of the sacrament, the Jesuit missionaries keep only strictly in the essential points, but then what is supplementary, then actively find ways to imitate them to suit the customs and way of thinking of Vietnamese people... for example They have a habit of putting salt on the hands of adults, men and women, but not in their mouths because people here think it is bad ... They also do not anoint holy anointing on the women breasts, afraid to do that, the husbands will be jealous..." (Launay, *Histoire de la mission de la Cochinchine*, quoted by Trương Bá Cậ̀n (2008), Volume: 17.
- 24 *Ngặ́m* (contemplate) is the Nôm work taken from Sino-Vietnamese, which means to look closely and contemplate. *Ngặ́m* also has another sound is *ngặ́m*. The North uses the word *ngặ́m*, the South uses the word *Ngặ́m* or *Gặ́m* (as suy *gặ́m*). All means think carefully. The word "*Ngặ́m*" in Sino-Vietnamese also means to read slowly, his voice hums like reciting poetry, singing a poem. So the word *Ngặ́m* comes from *Ngặ́m*, which also means contemplating and declaiming.
- 25 Bùi Ngọc Thúy (1997), *Survey on Binh An community, Ward 6, District 8, Ho Chi Minh City*. BA dissertation in Sociology, Hồ Chí Minh City Open University; directed by Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa. Hồ Chí Minh City Open University

- 26 Website of *Parishes in Việt Nam*: Gia Định parish, updated 2018.
- 27 Parish Mỹ Hòa, (updated 2018): <http://giaoxugiaohovietnam.com/>, consulted on April 2nd, 2019.
- 28 Founded in 1972, this is the first private university with a Faculty of Engineering and Medicine. Other faculties: Economy & Business, Agricultural Engineering, Humanities and Arts. Besides, the Southern Catholic Church also has the Đà Lạt University, established in 1957, with 4 university faculties: Business & Politics, Science, Pedagogy, Theology and Literature. According to estimations, from 1957 to 1975 this university educated 26,551 people.
- 29 In 1965, a part of the Archdiocese of Sài Gòn split to form two new dioceses, Phú Cường and Xuân Lộc (Việt Nam Episcopal Conference, 2004, *ibid*: 695), so the number of schools in the Diocese of Sài Gòn in 1974 decreased in the number of students, but the number of students still increased.
- 30 After 1975 and since 1990, the Politburo issued Resolution 24 on religious affairs, defining "Religion is a long-standing problem. Belief and religion are the spiritual needs of a part of the people. Many things in religious ethics are relevant to the building of a new society"; since 1995, in the letters of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference to the Prime Minister, in addition to suggestions relating to pastoral issues, there is always a request for the Church to participate in the field of education and society (for example in letters dated October 1, 1995; October 18, 1997; December 29, 2001 ... (Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa, 2010, pp.181-184). Later, in *the Law on Belief and Religion* (2016), it is stated that churches can participate in the field of education (article 55), but until now, the Catholic Church in Việt Nam has the Hòa Bình College, Xuân Lộc (vocational school), enrollment from 2018-2019
- 31 Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa, Nguyễn Gia Trần, 1989, *ibid*:18
- 32 Hồ Chí Minh City Catholic Solidarity Commission (2018), *Summary report on patriotic emulation movement among Catholics and activities of the Vietnam Catholic Solidarity Committee in Ho Chi Minh City term VII (2013-2018), directions and tasks term VIII (2018- 2023)*, Hồ Chí Minh City.
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- 34 For general results only, about quantitative data please see the original report.
- 35 P. Gheddo (1970), *Catholiques et Bouddhistes au VietNam*. Paris: Alsatia: 189.

- 36 Tran Tam Tinh (1978), Dieu et César. *Les catholiques dans l'histoire du Vietnam*. Paris: Sudesasie, pp. 107-117.
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- 40 Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa (1990a), *ibid*: 10.
- 41 Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa (1990c), “Ho Chi Minh City Catholics on family and marriage issues”. *Công giáo và Dân tộc*, n.784.
- 42 Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa, (2019), “Desecularization: Concept and facts”, *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No. 1,
- 43 D. Kendall (2004), *Social problems in a diverse society*. Pearson: 369.

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