



STUDIES

IN
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

COMPOSING A SACRED SPACE

*A Lesson from the Catechismus
of Alexandre de Rhodes*

HUNG T. PHAM, S.J.

46/2 • SUMMER 2014

THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

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the first word . . .

On one of those long, dark, gloomy evenings, say between the Super Bowl Sunday and opening day, when conversation in the rec room seems a bit more labored than usual, you might try this parlor game. Take an old *Catalogus*, (the older the better; fifty years would be just about right) and flip through the pages, just randomly noting the names. If the document comes from the East Coast, the listings would probably look very much like the Dublin phone book. How many Murrays and O'Briens can you find in five minutes? If the catalogue comes from the Middle West, it might read like a village registry from Bavaria. Of course. The names follow the immigration patterns from Europe in the nineteenth century. As the years pass by, the Jesuit catalogues have clearly become more catholic, with Italian, Polish, and Latino names appearing far more frequently. These days, it's not too much of a stretch to imagine some communities asking the minister why they have to eat corned beef and cabbage on March 17, when Saturday is the usual night for take-out from Taco Bell, or Domino's Pizza, or the chow-mein parlor around the corner. For the most part, we seem to have gotten along pretty well with our ancestral stew, despite an occasional rough edge to the humor or insensitive comment. Fair enough. Even the best melting pots burn the beans once in a while.

Over the last few years, we've spiced the stew with a generous dash of Vietnamese names. For the mathematically or sociologically minded among our readers (your dark secret is safe with me), you might take a look at the current national *Catalogus*. We now have thirteen Nguyens, as compared to only seven Murrays and eleven O'Briens. It looks like the championship remains with the fourteen Murphys, but the race has gotten decidedly closer in the past few years. Those more friendly to numbers than I might want to check out the average ages of the different groups to get a sense of the probable trend.

For most Americans of my generation, give or take a decade or two, the word Vietnam remains unsettling. It inevitably stirs memories of that tragic war that strained the fabric of American society for nearly twenty years. Ending with a decisive American defeat in April 1975, those terrible days have begun to fade into history. Think of it. People nearing their fortieth birthday were born after the war ended. We can't allow the memory to fade, but attempting to reconstruct the period for undergraduates raises an odd paradox.

This was the most photographed war in our history. Walter Cronkite's voice accompanied the film footage every night on CBS, but the war was singularly empty of heroic images, like Washington's crossing the Delaware, the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima, or storming Omaha Beach. From this war the icons have a tragic tinge to them. We can recall the handcuffed prisoner suspected of Viet Cong affiliation being shot in the head, and the helicopter on the roof of the American embassy in Saigon, as dozens of civilians struggled to board before the city fell in 1975. Most chilling of all, a naked child in the midst of other children, running in terror from a napalm attack. Even Maya Lin's powerful monument in Washington lies in a dark wound in the earth, bearing only the names of those who lost their lives there. Ghostly images of visitors reflected on the polished black marble surface powerfully unite the living with the dead.

These images haunt the present even as their immediacy fades. Every year some film-history course or other will scratch the tender nerve with its reference to the war. Students born at the waning of the twentieth century need help in grasping issues that for us elder cineastes seem obvious. Surely colleagues in many other departments likewise find themselves poaching in the forests of historians as they try to explain the relevance of a point in literature, theology, economics, philosophy, and possibly even science. It's certainly true in film studies. A simple comedy, like Robert Altman's *M.A.S.H.* (1970), for example, needs a lengthy preamble of history before the absurdist farce makes any sense. It's ostensibly set in the Korean War, but is clearly aimed at Vietnam. For twenty-year-olds, too often the separation of the two wars seems fuzzy, and perhaps even a bit of the Pacific theater of World War II may further blur the picture. What seems innocent but irreverent entertainment now was considered subversive then. Students have no knowledge of peace marches, Kent State, My Lai, and the draft, which of course led to draft-card burnings, demonstrations, and arrests on many college campuses. With the country still at war, the nation's wounds were still too raw for comedy.

Locating the action in Korea provided a respectful distance from the horrors of the day. It provided cover for an indirect critique of the Vietnam War and a scathing satire of the U.S. military, two objectives that were certainly off limits while American service personnel were still fighting and dying there. The conflation of the two wars is further explained by the fact that the book was written by H. Richard Homberger, an army surgeon in Korea, but it did not appear in print until 1968, when the Vietnam War was at its peak and nearly fifteen years after the armistice in Korea. The author used the pen name Richard Hooker. Realizing the timeliness of the work and its box-office potential among younger audiences, 20th Century Fox acquired the property, but historians agree that at least fifteen directors refused to touch it, until the relatively unknown Robert Altman, a Creighton Prep alumnus, took up the project. Students screening the film today cannot believe that the war was such a

delicate issue in 1970. And students today can't believe that someone who remembers all this is still functioning rationally—more or less. And finally, to make me feel like the last surviving veteran of the War of 1812, the fact that the film was recycled into one of the most popular television series in history seems quite puzzling to a generation raised on Pay-Per-View, TiVo, Netflix, and a dozen other services that bring programming to a laptop or smart phone for private rather than communal viewing. Why would so many people watch the same program on the same night every week and then discuss it over the water cooler the next morning? Awesome!

M.A.S.H is not the only film that drives me into an amateurish attempt to explain Asian history. Vietnam films pop up with some regularity in the curriculum of various courses, but not by design. Each year, my classes look at Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and De Palma's *Casualties of War* (1989). The first shows the pathology of violence through the descent into madness of the character played by Marlon Brando and the near madness of the character played by Robert Duvall. The second deals with a horrible war crime and the army's effort to cover it up. Who is the real casualty of war, the victim or the perpetrator? Or more pointedly, the war-ravaged country of Vietnam or an America that lost faith in its institutions? These two themes, madness and atrocity, dominate the Vietnam genre, unlike the more traditional models of the war film. The thought of offering an entire course on the subject has crossed my mind, but briefly. The literature on the topic discouraged me, not because of the intrinsic violence—many other genres are equally violent—but because of the relentless recurrence of these two themes. It's too depressing.

The one film of note that addressed Vietnam in the traditional manner of the war genre was *Green Berets*, a John Wayne epic of 1968. The date is important. The nation still had reasons for optimism because of its superior fire power. The soldiers under Wayne's command were helping to establish an independent nation, freed from the threat of Communism. The relations between the Americans and Vietnamese were cordial, battle lines were clear, and predictably the Americans won every encounter with the Vietcong. As the war dragged on in the real world, Hollywood fell silent, as witnessed by the difficulties of getting *M.A.S.H.* onto the screen. The standard Hollywood screenplay offers a beginning, a middle, and a neat ending when all the loose ends are finally tied up. This war had no ending in sight for many years, and even then the projected ending was not predictable or acceptable. Hollywood took notice, and turned away.

Several years after the war ended, the industry focused on the returning veterans who brought the traumas of war home with them. Noteworthy are Ashby's *Coming Home* and Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, both in 1978. Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) showed the physical as well as psychological toll taken on veterans. Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and Stone's *Pla-*

toon (1996) explored the inner dynamics of training and combat respectively. In scene after scene they show the tragic waste of human resources. In this they go back all the way to Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a pioneer sound movie from 1929, made in a period when Erich Maria Remarque, on whose novel the film is based, grappled with the terrible—and, as it turns out, useless—carnage that nearly destroyed Europe in the war to make the world safe for democracy. In the Vietnam films, combat collapses into tragedy by friendly fire, ambush, positions taken or lost, or taken and then lost, haphazardly, with no real objectives attained or even identified. The war seemed so senseless, but that is the precise point of the films of the 1970s and 1980s.

By contrast, the classic films of World War II feature clear battle lines with allied armies marching inexorably toward victory. Think of Schaffner's *Patton* (1970) or *The Longest Day* (1962), a film with multiple directors. The narrative skeleton changes little from Dwan's *Sands of Iwo Jima* 1949 or Wellman's *Battleground* (1949) to Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Audiences knew the enemy by sight and, looking through the rearview mirror of recent history, they knew who would overcome all obstacles and endure until victory.

Enough of films and the efforts of some antiquarian film teachers to bring students beyond the mesmerizing effect of watching combat action to question what the films are saying about history and what they say about the society that produced and viewed them. The point is that for many Americans, the term Vietnam holds only negative connotations. Many place names do. Do we, regardless of age and experience, know anything about Hiroshima or Anzio or, for that matter, Waterloo, other than at one time many people lost their lives there in the flow of historical events?

Clearly, as the growing number of names in the *Catalogus* suggests, Vietnam holds much more relevance for us than the memories of the terrible war we keep recycling in our films. The names represent a new strand in the fabric of the American Society. These Jesuits, whether born in Asia or in the thriving Vietnamese communities in the United States, bring an ancient Catholic and Jesuit heritage to our largely European-American numbers. Thanks to the scholarly efforts of Hung T. Pham in this current issue of *STUDIES*, we can recapture the flavor of the traditions that go back centuries before the colonial period of French Indochina. Embarrassed by my own ignorance, I asked Father Pham to provide a few facts that might provide a context for his essay, as our readers begin to investigate the importance of the *Catechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes. Here are a few key events that he selected.

On January 18, this coming year, we will commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Jesuit in the land that is now known as Vietnam. The first Jesuits came from Japan, when a persecution drove many Christians from the country. The first native Vietnamese brother appears in the *Catalogus* of the Japanese Province (in diaspora) in 1669 and the

first priests in 1694. Until the time of the Suppression, approximately 160 Jesuits served in Vietnam, 13 of whom were native-born Vietnamese.

The Jesuits returned to Vietnam in 1957, shortly after the French ceded colonial control after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. At the end of the American War, the government in Hanoi confiscated most of the Jesuit property and sent the remaining Jesuits to labor camps or reeducation centers. Some activities continued, but mainly underground. In 2007, Father Kolvenbach created the Vietnamese Province from the territory that had once been part of the Chinese province and then became an Independent Region. At that time there were 127 Jesuits serving the people of Vietnam, including 40 priests, 44 scholastics, 20 brothers, and 23 novices. In 2013 the number had risen to a total of 197 Jesuits: 1 bishop, 46 priests, 99 scholastics, 20 brothers, and 33 novices. They work in parishes, seminaries, and retreat centers in both the north and the south.

The Catholic Church, and the Society of Jesus, have a history of surviving and even thriving in hostile environments, but the story of Vietnam stands out as one of the most glorious chapters in that history. As readers will discover from reading Father Pham's monograph, much of the explanation for this success story stems from the wisdom of one missionary, who patiently studied and respected the traditions of the ancient culture. His work set the template for presenting the Christian faith as thoroughly compatible with the religious traditions and sensibilities of the people of Vietnam. We're grateful that Father Pham has enabled us to appreciate that the Church in Vietnam today can trace its history back to the evangelization of early Jesuits who took their inspiration from Alexandre de Rhodes.

Richard A. Blake, S.J.

Editor

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COMPOSING A SACRED SPACE

A Lesson from the Catechismus of Alexandre de Rhodes

Early Jesuit missionaries entered Asia during a period of intense political and social upheaval. The surviving catechetical instruction of one such pioneer proposes a formula for establishing the Church among the peoples of Vietnam. The principles of adaptation that it outlines have their roots in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

I. Catechetics and Adaptation

According to the *Formula of the Institute* from Pope Paul III in 1540, the Society of Jesus was “founded chiefly for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine and for the propagation of faith by the ministry of the word, by spiritual exercises and works of charity, and specifically by the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity.”¹ Practically, early Jesuits interpreted this mission to mean teaching catechism. Thus being a Jesuit also meant being a catechist. According to the Constitutions, members of the Society, from novices to the fully professed (including rectors and provincials) were required to teach catechism (*Cons.*, 49, 437). The First and Second General Congregations instructed “every professed of three or four vows and every formed spiritual coadjutor to teach Christian doc-

¹*The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), p. 4, v. 2.

trine to children and uneducated persons for forty days, continuous or interrupted.”² As a result of this dedication, Jesuits were also responsible for publishing and translating over 500 catechisms, most notably the *Parvus catechismus Catholicorum* by Peter Canisius, which was reprinted 120 times during his lifetime alone.³

Early Jesuits not only wrote the texts but also focused on methods of presenting them. Resisting the tendency to make catechesis more an exercise of the mind and memory than an initiation into Christian life and practice, these catechists strove to instruct the mind, to ready the will to action, and to inflame the soul to devotion. As men schooled in the Spiritual Exercises, Jesuits understood “catechism” as the education and cultivation of one’s personal and intimate relationship with God in Christ. These objectives fostered a catechetical pedagogy that stresses adapting and accommodating to the place where the learning takes place, to the persons who do the teaching, and to the students themselves. As a result, the catechetical tradition of the early Jesuits demonstrates a rich tradition of adaptation and accommodation to the challenging cultural contexts that they encountered.

Recently, catechesis has been brought up again as the forefront of the Church’s effort of evangelization. The most recent publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that the crucial role of catechesis in the life of the Church is “not only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more her inner growth and correspondence with God’s plan, which depends essentially on catechesis.”⁴ As a result, the *Catechism* strives to expose and adapt the Church’s doctrines in such a way that will lead her members towards maturation in faith, mainly through “putting down roots in personal life and its shining forth in personal conduct” (23). However, the main practical ques-

² *For Matters of Greater Moment: The First Thirty Jesuit General Congregations*, ed. John W. Padberg, S.J., Martin D. O’Keefe, S.J., John L. McCarthy, S.J. (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), GC I, d. 138; GC II, dd. 58, 65.

³ F. J. Buckley, “Catequesis,” in *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, ed. Charles O’Neill (Rome–Madrid: IHSI–UPComillas, 2001), 715. Hereafter this source will be abbreviated to *DHCJ*).

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II, 2nd ed. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Digital Edition, United States Catholic Conference 2011), [7].

tion remains: how can the adaptation of the Church's doctrines to various cultural contexts be envisioned and practiced?

After having openly admitted that there is a lack of any method for adaptation "by design," the *Catechism* makes "such indispensable adaptations . . . the responsibility of particular catechisms and, even more, of those who instruct the faithful" (24). In other words, the *Catechism* leaves the responsibility up to the creativity of the catechists and catechumens to develop and exercise such a method of adaptation to their needs. Individual creativity is highly valued, but without any kind of model to guide such creativity, the practice of adaptation in catechesis remains either stagnant or without direction. As a result, the catechism is at risk of becoming more a process of memorizing doctrines than that of understanding and applying contents of the Catholic faith to daily practices.

How does the rich tradition and experience of the Society of Jesus offer support and assistance to the Church

in this vital ministry? In this *STUDIES* essay I would like to point toward the *Cathechismus* composed by Alexandre de Rhodes (1593–1660) and published by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome in 1651, arguably the most complete catechism of the "most perfect institution of catechists in India and Japan,"⁵ as a model of adaptation in teaching catechism. Rooted in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius, de Rhodes's *Cathechismus* exemplifies how early Jesuits adapted and accommodated their catechesis to the highly complex and diverse religious and cultural context of seventeenth-century Vietnam.

How the *Cathechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes accomplished this task we will study in three parts. First, I will provide a brief introduction to Alexandre de Rhodes himself, namely, his Jesuit vocation and

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the Japanese government moved towards its closed-door policy that included expulsion or persecution of Christians, fewer Jesuits, if any at all, were sent to Japan.

⁵ Cecilio Gomez Rodeles, *La Compañía de Jesús catequista* (Madrid: Imp. de Gabriel Lopez del Homo, 1913), 397–8.

how it led him to Vietnam. This first part will highlight the difficulties and challenges that faced de Rhodes as well as the urgent need of the community for whom the *Cathechismus* was composed. Second, after having presented a brief introduction and outline of this work, I will analyze how the *Cathechismus* incorporated the “composition of place” to create a sacred space of encounter for Vietnamese in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Third, this issue of *STUDIES* will draw some lessons from de Rhodes’s *Cathechismus* that are applicable to the ministry of catechism in the Church today.

II. An “Afterthought” Mission

Neither Alexandre de Rhodes’s mission to Vietnam nor the Vietnam mission itself was the original plan of Jesuit superiors in East Asia. Instead, both were unexpected consequences of the Japanese mission’s misfortune and, surprisingly, of a request from a non-Vietnamese layman. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the Japanese government moved towards its closed-door policy that included expulsion or persecution of Christians,⁶ fewer Jesuits, if any at all, were sent to Japan. Christians who had resided in Japan sought ref-

⁶ Towards the end of his shogunate, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) issued two imperial edicts in January and February of 1614, charging Christian missionaries with disseminating “evil laws” disrespecting traditional doctrines. Consequently, Jesuits along with other religious and Christians were either persecuted or deported and sent to Macao and Manila. However, a few Jesuits remained underground in Japan to sustain the surviving Christian community. During the following shogunate, Christian persecution became more severe. Japanese, Christian and non-Christian, were burnt alive if found helping Christian missionaries. Missionaries were executed. In 1622 the “Great Martyrdom” in Nagasaki witnessed the beheading of thirty Christians and the other twenty-five among the martyrs. Not only death but also apostasy brought an end to the Jesuit mission in Japan. As Japan turned inward and became increasingly suspicious and hostile to foreigners, the country violently closed its door to the outside world. Though Japan was closed and no Jesuits were left in Japan, the Japanese Province of the Society of Jesus remained active in exile. Its members were active in Macao, India, Tibet, Laos, Cambodia, Siam, Tonkin and Cochinchina. See *The Making of an Enterprise*, by D. Alden (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 130–140; G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 142–84; J. Ruiz de Medna, “Mártires Jesuitas víctimas de la fe en Japón,” *DHCJ*, 3:2541-15; see also *The Christian Century in Japan 1549–1650*, by C. R. Boxer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

uge in neighboring kingdoms such as the Philippines, Macao, Cochinchina, Tonkin, Siam, and Cambodia.⁷ Most of Jesuits who had been residing in Japan left for Macao and waited to be sent on a new mission.⁸

The Mission and the Missionary

At the request of Fernandes de Costa, captain of a Portuguese merchant ship, Jesuits were sent “to advance the glory of God in Cochinchina (modern Vietnam).”⁹ At first, Father Carvalho, the provincial of the Japanese Province, sent various Jesuits to start a mission to minister to the Japanese Christian community in Cochinchina in the beginning of 1615.¹⁰ Subsequently, more Jesuit priests, brothers and Japanese catechists were called to extend the ministry to the native Vietnamese.¹¹ Alexandre de Rhodes was among the group of Jesuits who were sent to

⁷ *Mission de la Cochinchine et du Tonkin gravue et carte Géographique* (Paris: Charles Douniol, 1858), vols. 2–3. By 1636 Japan completely closed itself from other countries through the Closed Country Edict (Boxer, *Christian Century*, 439).

⁸ Prior to the Christian Expulsion Edict in 1614, a detailed account of the Jesuit mission in Japan sent to the general in Rome in 1612 reported 116 Jesuits, of whom there were 1 bishop, 63 priests, and 52 brothers, all of whom were responsible for two colleges, two houses, one rectory, and twenty-four residences in Japan. After the Edict, only 27 Jesuits remained behind and in hiding (Boxer, *Christian Century*, 321, 326–7).

⁹ C. Borri, “An Account of Cochin-China,” *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam*, ed. O. Dror and K. W. Taylor (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2006), 89–185, 139; C. Đô, *Dòng Tên trong xã hội Đại Việt 1615–1773* (The Society of Jesus in the Grand Viet, 1615–1773); Wichita Falls: Nhà xuất bản Tôn Giáo–Antôn & Đuôcsáng, 2006), 17–18.

¹⁰ The first group of Jesuits who arrived in Cochinchina included Francesco Buzomi (1576–1630), Diogo Carvalho (1578–1624), and Antonio Dias (1585–?).

¹¹ By 1618 Francisco de Pina (1585–1625), Christopher Borri (1583–1632), Antonio Fernandez (?–1630), and Pedro Marques (1577–1657) joined Buzomi in the Jesuit mission in Cochinchina (*Dòng Tên trong xã hội Đại Việt*, 50–53, nn. 46, 49, 50, 51; complete names of all Jesuits can be found in “Pièces justificatives” of *Voyages et travaux des missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jesus: Mission de la Cochinchine et du Tonkin*, publiés par des pères de la même Compagnie (Paris: Douniol, 1858), 386–95. Among the Japanese brothers were Saitō Paulo (1576–1633) and Tsuchimochi José (1568–?), who came to Cochinchina in 1620. Saitō left Cochinchina in 1622, returned to Macao, studied theology, and was ordained to the priesthood by 1625. He went back to Tonkin in 1629 and left for good in 1630. Later, he was captured and martyred in Nagasaki in 1633 (J. Ruiz de Medina, “Saitō, Shōzaemon Paulo,” *DHCJ*, 4:3465–6; and Tsuchimochi José. Among the lay catechists was Nishi Tomé (J. Ruiz de Medina, “Vietnam,” *DHCJ*, 4,3953–68; *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam*, 35 n.86).

Cochinchina in 1624. In fact, these were de Rhodes's own words testifying to the situation and reason for his being sent to Vietnam:

Seeing the doors to Japan closed, our superiors believed God had permitted this misfortune that those in Cochinchina might be opened to the holy Gospel. In the year 1624 they sent Fr. Gabriel de Mattos—who until recently had been in Rome as Procurator for our provinces—as Visitor to the Cochinchina mission, and gave him five fathers from Europe as associates, of whom I had the honor to be the fifth, and one Japanese who was well versed in Chinese characters.¹²

As honored as de Rhodes had felt in being sent to Vietnam, his desire and love originally were aimed towards Japan. Who was this Jesuit? And how did his journey lead him to Vietnam? How did he adapt and fare in his newly assigned mission?

The Missionary

Alexandre de Rhodes was born into a family of Jewish descent in Avignon in 1593. Previously, his grandparents had escaped the Iberian persecutions, changed their name from Rueda to Rhodes, settled in Avignon and worked in the silk business.¹³ Because of the discriminatory climate against the Jewish converts and against their admission to the Society,¹⁴ de Rhodes's entrance to the Society was only possible through the endorsement of the family's donation of three thousand li-

¹² Alexandre de Rhodes, *Voyages et missions* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1653), 71. The English translation is taken from S. Hertz, *Rhodes of Vietnam: The Travels and Missions of Father Alexandre de Rhodes in China and Other Kingdoms of the Orient* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1966), 49. Hereafter this source is abbreviated to *Voyages et missions*.

¹³ Robert Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews: Jesuits of Jewish Ancestry and Purity-of-Blood Laws in the Early Society of Jesus* (The Netherlands: Koninklijk Brill, 2009), 151; H. Chappoulie, *Aux origines d'une église I*, 3n.1.

¹⁴ Though Ignatius and the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus did not exclude anyone from being admitted into the Society, d. 52 of the Fifth General Congregation (1593–94) stated that “no one will hereafter be admitted to this Society who is descended of Hebrew or Saracen stock. And if any one of them will have been admitted by mistake, he should be dismissed from the Society as soon as this impediment has been shown to exist. . . . No superior, not even the superior general himself, may give dispensation from it; and hence it is hereafter to be kept entire and inviolate in the Society” (*Matters of Greater Moment*, 204).

brarum to the foundation of the Jesuit College in Avignon.¹⁵ On April 14, 1612, Alexandre was admitted to Saint Andrea al Quirinal Novitiate and subsequently enrolled in the studies at the Roman College¹⁶ (the same novitiate and college where Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) resided and studied forty years earlier).¹⁷ “In this holy Order rather than others,” de Rhodes confessed of his desire to enter the Society, “it is easier to go to those beautiful lands, where so many souls perished because of the lack of preachers.”¹⁸

Residing at Saint Andrea Novitiate and subsequently studying at the Roman College at the beginning of the seventeenth century, de Rhodes’s early formation in the Society took place during one of the most exciting and challenging times as “winds” of fresh ideas swept over the cultural and scientific terrain of Europe.¹⁹ In 1611 the college’s leading science faculty member and “one of the most brilliant mathematicians of his generation,”²⁰ Christopher Clavius (1537–1612), directed the college toward the most recent scientific studies and helped build the school into one of most famous scientific institutions in Europe.²¹ It

¹⁵Maryks, *Synagogue of Jews*, 151, 216.

¹⁶J. Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine de 1552 à 1800* (Rome: IHSI, 1973), 215.

¹⁷ Matteo Ricci entered St. Andrea Novitiate in Rome in 1571 (R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 12).

¹⁸ Alexandre de Rhodes, *Divers Voyages et missions* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1653), 5. For biographical background and the journey of de Rhodes to Vietnam, please see *ibid.* and its Vietnamese version, *Hành trình và truyền giáo*, trans. Hồng Nhuê (TP. Hồ Chí Minh: Ủy ban đoàn kết Công giáo, 1994); A. de Rhodes, *Histoire du royaume de Tonquin et des grands progrès que la prédication de l’évangélie y a faits en la conversion des infidèles* (Paris: Chez Baptiste de Venet, 1651); P. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in the Seventeenth Century Vietnam* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998); E. Torralba, “La date de naissance du Père de Rhodes,” *extrait du Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises* 35, no. 4 (1960): 683–80; A. Retif, *Les héritiers de Saint François Xavier, Librairie arthème fayard* (Paris 1956), 80–91; J. Freches, “Les portugais en Asia: Alexandre de Rhodes et la filiales portugais,” *Arquivos do control cultural português* (Paris: Fundação calouste Gulbenkian, 1972), 4:536–48.

¹⁹ William V. Bangert, *A History of the Society of Jesus* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986), 180.

²⁰R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 14.

²¹ M. Colpo, “Colegio Romano (Universidad Gregoriana desde 1873),” *DHCJ*, 1:848–50, 848.

was Clavius who officially welcomed into the college Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), whose recent astronomical investigation would one day be known as “one of the most famous intellectual controversies of the seventeenth century.”²² In education, the *Ratio studiorum*, which was officially approved and issued in 1599, provided the college the flexibility to adapt itself to the ongoing changes. While Latin remained the primary language in education, the use of vernacular or national tongues

The persecution in Japan at the beginning of the seventeenth century served both as the inspiration for de Rhodes to go to the Jesuit mission in Japan and also as the main obstacle that kept him out of Japan.

became more popular both inside and outside the classroom. Textbooks in the vernacular also appeared and became widespread.²³

Regarding mission, the Roman College experienced and witnessed the process that led to the birth of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in

1622 and its clash and tension with the former Portuguese and the Spanish patronage systems in the Jesuit mission in Japan, China, Philippines, and Vietnam.²⁴ The college itself provided a great missionary ambiance, serving both as host for various Jesuit discussions and as part of the decision-making process concerning certain Jesuit policy and practices in Japan and China. In January 1615, at the order of Father General Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615), the faculty of the Roman College discussed the petition of Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628). Sent by his Jesuit superior

²² D. Mungelo, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1985), 26.

²³ Bangert, *History of the Society*, 182. As early as 1556, Ignatius actively began the process of installing a printing press at the Roman College with the purpose of publishing cheap textbooks for poor students and to facilitate the distribution of classical texts. The printing press began to publish in 1557 and continued for seventy years (Colpo, “Colegio Romano,” 848).

²⁴ L. Lopetegui, “San Francisco de Borja y el plan misional de san Pío V: Primeros pasos de una Congregación de Propaganda Fide,” *AHSI* 11 (1942): 1–20; A. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 184–9; Bangert, *History of the Society*, 183–87.

in China, Father Trigault sought permission to allow the priest's head to remain covered while celebrating Mass and to adopt Chinese as the liturgical language.²⁵ The college approved Trigault's requests on January 6, 1615. Ten days later, the college's decision was confirmed by the Holy Office, granting Jesuits "permission for priests to wear a head-piece while celebrating Mass, permission to translate the Bible into literary Chinese, and permission for Chinese priests to celebrate Mass and recite the canonical hours in literary Chinese."²⁶ Three years later, such a decision was overturned due to opposition from Jesuits in Japan represented by Gabriel de Matos (1571–1634),²⁷ who arrived in Rome in 1617.²⁸ The conflicting petitions from Father Trigault and Father Matos demonstrated the complexity and vitality of the Japanese mission and inspired young Jesuits to apply for the mission.²⁹

Such a mission-oriented atmosphere further deepened de Rhodes's original desire to go to the Indies. After the novitiate and during his four years of theology, de Rhodes started asking to be sent to Japan, especially after having learned about the Christian persecution there. He repeatedly sent his request to Fr. Claudio Acquaviva and his successor, Fr. Mutio Vitelleschi. Finally, his prayer was answered; his request had been heard. On Easter Sunday 1618, de Rhodes received

²⁵George Dunn, *Generation of Giants Generation of Giant: The Story of Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), 162.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷During the provincial congregation in 1614, Father Matos was elected to be the province's procurator and sent to Rome, arriving there in 1617. Upon his return, he was named rector of the Jesuit college in Macao in 1620, and Visitor of the Jesuit mission in Japan and China in 1621. In 1624 he made a canonical visit to the Jesuit mission in Cochinchina. Unable to enter Japan on account of the persecution, he spent his remaining years in Macao (Dunn, *Generation of Giants*, 166; J. López-Gay, "Matos, Gabriel de," *DHCJ*, 3:2578; *Voyages et missions*, 71).

²⁸Dunn, *Generation of Giants*, 166.

²⁹Phan speculated that de Rhodes had probably met Trigault while he was in Rome since his assignment was also to recruit more missionaries for the China mission. Furthermore, perhaps it was Trigault who encouraged de Rhodes to write the general to express his desire to go to the mission in 1614 (Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 40).

Father General Vitelleschi's approval to go to the Jesuit mission in Japan.³⁰

The Journey

In October 1618 de Rhodes left Rome for Avignon to visit and to bid farewell to his family. From Avignon, traveling through Barcelona, he reached Lisbon at the end of January 1619. On April 4, 1619, he sailed from Lisbon with five other Jesuits³¹ and arrived at Goa on October 9, 1619.³² The persecution in Japan at the beginning of the seventeenth century served both as the inspiration for de Rhodes to go to the Jesuit mission in Japan and also as the main obstacle that kept him out of Japan. Upon his arrival at Goa, Jesuit superiors asked the newly arrived missionaries to wait until the persecution quieted down before going to Japan.³³ Consequently, while waiting, de Rhodes actively engaged in various ministries in Goa and its surrounding area, learning Kanarese, preaching and hearing confessions in the same language of Salsette, and catechizing orphan children whom he had "chased and captured" for baptism.³⁴ After two and a half years, he left Goa for Macao, still anxiously awaiting his admittance to reach Japan. De Rhodes arrived in Macao on May 29, 1623.³⁵

Throughout his journey, de Rhodes proved to be an observant learner who maintained a deep respect for the diversity of cultures. In Salsette, he was struck by the effectiveness of preaching done in the native tongues. As a result, he strove to do the same.³⁶ Passing through the Fishery Coast, he watched how the local people harvested pearls in oysters from the sea and was in awe of their generosity in offering them

³⁰*Voyages et missions*, 6.

³¹ Besides de Rhodes, the five Jesuits were Geronimo Maiorica (1589–1656), Diego Mursius, two other Portuguese and one Italian (*ibid.*, 12–3). On Geronimo's life and work, see B. Ostrowski's doctoral dissertation, "The Nôm Works of Geronimo Maiorica, S.J. (1589–1656) and Their Christology," presented at Cornell University, January 2006.

³²*Voyages et missions*, 8–18; J. López-Gay, "Rhodes, Alexandre de," *DHCJ*, 4:3342.

³³*Voyages et missions*, 21–22.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 22–26.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 44.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 24–25.

to the Church.³⁷ In Ceylon and the Kingdom of Negapatam, he noticed the abundance of natural resources as well as the kindness of the Franciscans.³⁸ In Malacca, he detected not only the wind pattern that determined the harbors' weather, but also the shape and size of the fruit as well as the lack of flowers in the vicinity.³⁹ In China, he took notes not only of the population but also the streets and the rivers. He paid close attention to what people ate and drank as well as to how they greeted one another. Though he remained censorious, he was able to make the distinction between China's different religious practices and customs. He learned and gained certain knowledge of China's history and stayed hopeful about its conversion.

More notable than his observant attitude and openness toward learning native languages and practices was his conviction about accommodating and adapting the Gospel to the native cultures. While sojourning in Goa, he observed how poorly the new converts were treated by the missionaries, even to the point of being forced to give up their native dress. De Rhodes expressed distress and anger toward those unjust ecclesial demands.⁴⁰ For him Christian conversion entailed an ongoing process that grounded itself in something much deeper than external appearances and habits. We hear of his "acute distress" in these lines:

I saw that ordinarily much honor and kindness are shown those who are still pagans, and then after they're baptized they don't even rate a glance. And what's more, when they become converts, they are forced to give up their native dress, worn by all pagans. One can hardly believe how hard it is for them, and I don't know why they are asked a thing our Lord doesn't ask of them and that furthermore keeps them from Baptism and heaven. For my part, I well know that in China I vigorously resisted those who wanted to oblige new Christians to cut their long hair, which the men all wear as long as the women's, and without which they

³⁷Ibid., 30–31.

³⁸ 33–35.

³⁹ 37.

⁴⁰Ibid., 21.

aren't able to circulate freely about the country, nor have entry into society. I used to tell them the Gospel obliged them to lop off their spiritual errors, but not their long hair.⁴¹

Encouraged by such a conviction of how the Gospel was to be preached and inculturated, de Rhodes arrived in Cochinchina in December 1624.

The Challenges

Though de Rhodes was not the first Jesuit to arrive in Vietnam, he was the first of that order who labored in both Cochinchina and Tonkin, the two Vietnamese-speaking kingdoms at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁴² At first, de Rhodes was overwhelmed by how the Vietnamese language sounded like “birds twittering,” at which he admittedly confessed to losing “all hope of ever being able to learn the language.”⁴³ After having spent ten years in Vietnam, six and a half in Cochinchina, three in Tonkin with sporadic expulsions among these years, the language problem remained minute compared to the utter complexity and diversity of Vietnam's history, politics, and religions.

⁴¹Hertz, *Rhodes of Vietnam*, 12–13. Italics are mine.

⁴² In the early-seventeenth century, the Vietnamese-speaking territory consisted of the northern kingdom Tonkin, whose capital was located at Ke Cho, modern-day Hanoi, and the southern kingdom of Cochinchina, whose capital was Huê. By the middle of the century, Cochinchina expanded its military power and dominance into the Mekong plain and, by the end of the century, established a major administrative center at Saigon, modern-day Ho Chi Minh City. In 1804 Emperor Gia Long united all the territories and named the country “Vietnam.” See *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina and Samuel Baron on Tonkin*, intro. O. Dror and K. W. Taylor (Ithaca: Cornell University 2006), 15–18; R. Jacques, *Portuguese Pioneers of Vietnamese Linguistics*, trans. Rita F. Unson (Bangkok: Orchid Press 2002), 14.

⁴³ *Voyages et missions*, 72. In the seventeenth century, the linguistic landscape in Vietnam consisted of four main spoken and written languages. “Middle Vietnamese,” also known as the Cochinchinese or Tonkinese language, was the spoken dialect of the majority of the country's inhabitants, or the *Kinh*. Sino-Vietnamese (or *Hán Việt* in Vietnamese), which was identical to the written language of China, remained the language of a privileged minority of literate persons. The language of ideograms was used mainly as a written language, whose codification had a long and rich history rooted in Chinese script, and whose pronunciation was known only through tradition. Finally, *chu Nôm*, which was written using syllabic glyphs generally translated as “demotic characters or script,” presented a linguistic attempt of Vietnamese to remain independent from Chinese (Jacques, *Portuguese Pioneers*, 46–50).

To his credit, de Rhodes was able to trace Vietnam's independence from China back to "more than eight hundred years" and the split between Cochinchina and Tonkin to "not yet fifty years."⁴⁴ While the two kingdoms were separated, de Rhodes observed that they both shared the "same laws and almost same customs."⁴⁵ Though the Vietnamese had won their independence from the Chinese, de Rhodes lamented that they remained subjected to Chinese beliefs, especially in their "superstitions." Thus, he wished that as the Vietnamese had successfully liberated themselves from foreign domination politically, they could also do so religiously. Such understanding and desire were part of the foundation for de Rhodes's criticism and attack against Vietnam's Tam Giáo (The Three Religions), namely, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, all of which according to de Rhodes had originated from either China or India.⁴⁶

Even worse, in de Rhodes's assessment, various religious principles and superstitions that had been imported from China and India were becoming more "superstitious" once adopted and incorporated into Vietnamese's religious practices.⁴⁷ These were his words:

In Cochinchina, there are numerous temples and pagodas where numerous idols are worshiped and praised. No matter how small or large a village, no matter how filthy or poor their condition, every village has a temple or a pagoda to which people closely attach themselves. . . . Twice a month, at the beginning of the month (lunar calendar) and at the full moon, people come to the temple filled with thick smoke and incense, pray and offer their sacrifice. No matter how poor a person is, all bring something and place it at the foot of the statue covered with dust. They kneel and prostrate four times, their faces drop closely to the ground. Then they chant and pray. (69)

⁴⁴ *Voyages et missions*, 62, 82.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁶ Alexandre de Rhodes, *Phép giảng tám ngày. Catechismus in octo dies divisus. Catechisme divisé en huit tours* (T. P. Hồ Chí Minh: Tu sách Đại kê, 1993), 104–24. Hereafter this source will be abbreviated to *Catechismus*.

⁴⁷ De Rhodes, *Histoire du royaume Tunquin*, 69. Translation is mine, unless otherwise noted.

In addition, he observed that “no other race or country in the whole world pays more respect and reverence to the soul and body of the dead than do the Vietnamese.”⁴⁸ For de Rhodes, though he considered these religious acts and rituals to be “superstition,” the overwhelming religiosity of the Vietnamese was irrefutable.

Regarding the religious landscape of Vietnam, Leopold Cadière, a renowned French anthropologist who spent more than sixty years in the country studying Vietnam’s cultures and religions, described it as a “thick forest” that was made up of rich and intricate dynamic and interactions among various “enormous ancient trees” with their

Consequently, a three-way relationship evolved among the Portuguese, the Jesuits, and Vietnam’s Lords with their respective royal courts.

“leaves and branches.”⁴⁹ The “enormous ancient trees” that Cadière referred to consisted of *Tam Giáo* (the Three Religions) and Vietnam’s indigenous religion or *Đạo Thờ Trời* (The Way of Heaven). The historical background and devel-

opment of these religions and their relationships in Vietnam remain beyond the scope of this investigation. However, in a couple of paragraphs I would like to point out that, before the arrival of Christianity, these religions maintained harmony and complemented one another in their religious practices and understanding.

Being the cultural and religious medium, Vietnam’s indigenous religion served as “the matrix that binds” all religions in Vietnam together, meanwhile transforming each of them into “Vietnamese.”⁵⁰ In other words, how a religion could flourish in Vietnam depended largely on how successfully it could identify and integrate itself with the basic characteristics of *Đạo Thờ Trời* (the Way of Heaven), namely, be-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁹ Leopold Cadière, *Croyances et Pratiques religieuses des Vietnamiens* I:1–2; H. Đô, Van hóa, tôn giáo, tin ngưỡng Việt Nam dưới nhãn quan học giả L. Cadière chú bút tạp chí *Bulletin des amis du vieux Hue* Đô Thành Hiếu Cổ 1914–1944 (Vietnam’s Cultures and Religions in the Perspective of L. Cadière, Chief Editor of the *Bulletin des amis du Vieux Hue* 1914–1944; Huế: Nhà xuất bản Thuận hóa, 2006), 103–5.

⁵⁰ P. Phan, *Vietnamese–American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 49.

lief in heaven and filial piety. In such a medium, the understanding of *ngghiệp-qua* (consequence) in Buddhism, the acknowledgement of *sô mênh* (fate) in Confucianism, and the appreciation of *vô vi* (non-contrivance) in Taoism were religious values that had deeply penetrated and rooted themselves in the hearts and souls of the Vietnamese.⁵¹ Thus, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism together served as the religious, social, and philosophical foundations that worked harmoniously to hold Vietnamese society together.

To the Vietnamese, a clear distinction among the three religions neither existed nor was deemed necessary. On the relationship among different religions in Vietnam, Phan observes, "There is a strong tendency among the Vietnamese to unify all religions. This is particularly true with regard to Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, which the Vietnamese often refer to as *tam giáo đồng nguyên*, literally 'three religions with the same principle or origin.'" ⁵² Furthermore, both Phan and the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh agree that their religious beliefs consist of elements that belong to all three religions.⁵³ Consequently, how to integrate Christianity into Vietnam's religious medium, while maintaining a harmonious relationship with the Three Religions, remained the chief challenge for de Rhodes and other Jesuit missionaries at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Vietnam.

Theologically, even after having been converted and committed to the faith religiously, certain Christian concepts and beliefs remained difficult for the Vietnamese to comprehend. Commenting on newly converted Vietnamese-Christians, de Rhodes compared their spirit and zeal to those of the Apostles and martyrs of the Early Church.⁵⁴ Deeply moved by their devotion, he was convinced that "it's there (in Coch-

⁵¹T. Võ, *Lịch Sử Văn Học Công Giáo Việt Nam* (History of Vietnamese Catholic Literature; Sài Gòn: Nhà Xuất Bản Tu-Duy, 1965), 49. "Nghiep qua" can be understood as the result or consequence of one's action even beyond death. "Sô mênh" can be translated as fate. In *Mission and Catechesis*, Phan translates the Taoist ethic of "vô vi" as "non-contrivance" to convey the Taoist belief that "human conduct should not be contrary to the spontaneity of Tao."

⁵² Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics*, 48.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 49; Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 12.

⁵⁴ *Voyages et missions*, 99; de Rhodes, *Histoire du royaume de Tunquin*, 308–12.

china), and not in Europe, that one learns to experience the Passion of our Lord.”⁵⁵ However, the Mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption continued to pose a great challenge for de Rhodes and other Jesuit missionaries to explain. We read de Rhodes’s testimony on this matter:

Throughout many years of my teaching the pagans, I have never seen anyone back down from the faith due to the unfathomable mystery of the Holy Trinity. On the contrary, they have harder time comprehending the Incarnation. . . . The great pain which we have remains in how to convince them of the One God who is truly of spirit, immortal and eternal, who reigns from heaven crowned in glory, could take on human flesh, born into time, endure all sorts of pain and suffering, and die like all other human beings.⁵⁶

Politically, de Rhodes’s and the presence of other Jesuit missionaries in Cochinchina and Tonkin depended largely on the three constituencies: the Lords and the royal courts, the presence of the Portuguese merchant ships, and the opportunity for trade these ships presented. From the beginning, while Jesuit missionaries had gained favor with the Lords of both kingdoms, they quickly realized that the royal motive was based mainly on their desire to maintain alliances and trade with the Portuguese.⁵⁷ In an effort to trade with the Portuguese, both Cochinchina and Tonkin strove to gain an upper hand in arms and military supplies to battle each other. Consequently, a three-way relationship evolved among the Portuguese, the Jesuits, and Vietnam’s Lords with their respective royal courts. The Lords kept Jesuits in their royal courts to attract the Portuguese to their respective kingdoms for trade. The Portuguese relied on the Jesuits for their knowledge of the royal courts and the people to advance their empire. Jesuits took advantage of their influence in the royal courts both to get funding for their mission from

⁵⁵ *Voyages et missions*, 122.

⁵⁶ De Rhodes, *Histoire du royaume Tunquin*, 176–7.

⁵⁷ G. Baldinotti, “Relation dv voyage fait av royavme de Tunquim nouvellement decouvert,” *Histoire de ce qui s’est passé es royaumes d’Ethiopie en l’année 1626, jusqu’au mois de Mars 1627: Et de la Chine, en l’année 1625 jusques en Febrier de 1626. Avec une briefve narration du voyage que s’est fait au royaume de Tunquin nouvellement decouvert* (Paris: Chez Sebastien Cramoisy, 1629), 193.

the Portuguese and to gain permission to move freely and to evangelize among the Vietnamese. However, such a relationship between the royal courts and Jesuits proved to be fragile and problematic, especially in the absence of the Portuguese ships and the trade they promised.

Furthermore, the favor bestowed on Jesuits and Christianity by the royal courts cultivated jealousy among leaders and practitioners of other Vietnamese religions. During those periods of this fragile relationship, Christian teachings were vulnerable to attack and condemnation. Most notably, Christian teaching, which insisted on monogamous relationships, ran, not only against commonly accepted cultural practice at the time, but also opposed royal endorsement of polygamous practices. Such practices were encouraged because of the benefit of increasing the population for military purposes and warfare. Furthermore, concubines who were dismissed by their husbands as a condition for the reception of baptism into the Christian faith, were often left abandoned and in poverty. Consequently, these women sought and formed alliances with influential eunuchs at the royal court to strike against Jesuits and the Christian teaching of monogamy. Consequently, Christianity was often attacked and accused as *tà đạo* (false religion) or *Hoa Lang Do* (Portuguese religion) and as a threat to national stability.⁵⁸ Jesuit missionaries were expelled.

In addition, Jesuits who exercised their ministry in both Cochinchina and Tonkin were often suspected of being “spies” for one kingdom over the other, especially during the time when conflict between the two kingdoms intensified.⁵⁹ As a result, Jesuits were periodically ex-

The main objective of the composition of place was to make the retreatant not only to “be present” to the event or mystery contemplated but also “as though it [the event or mystery] was being done for the retreatant alone.”

⁵⁸ *Đại Việt Su Ký Toàn Thu* (Complete History of the Great Viet), 19:4a–4b (I am grateful to A. Tran for this reference). Also, de Rhodes refuted this misunderstanding in his *Catechismus* 25 (“Neque verò dicatis hanc esse Lusitanorum legem”).

⁵⁹ Both Baldinotti and de Rhodes were accused of being spies for the Lord of Cochinchina (G. Baldinotti, “Relation dv voyage fait av royavme de Tunquim nouuel-

pelled from the country.⁶⁰ Therefore, from early on, de Rhodes and his fellow Jesuit missionaries recognized the importance of training and forming native catechists who would continue to carry on the teaching of Christianity in the absence of the Jesuit missionaries and, more important, to teach the Christian faith in such a way that the Vietnamese could claim it as their own.

The Responses

Following what had been done in Japan, de Rhodes and the Jesuits in Vietnam selected certain respected members of various Christian communities and trained them to be catechetical teachers. Their task consisted of accompanying and assisting Jesuit missionaries in their teaching as translators or animators. Moreover, as the Jesuits left, they resumed the leadership role, gathering community members, teaching catechism, and leading the community in their daily prayers and devotional practices.⁶¹ Most remarkable, women were also selected for these important positions in the church by the Jesuits.⁶² De Rhodes admitted that “it was these (women and men) catechists,” who were empowered and mainly responsible for the great progress of the Church in Vietnam, instructing and accompanying the catechumens in their conversion process, and leading them towards baptism.⁶³ To assist these catechists in their ministry, de Rhodes composed the *Cathechismus* as a manual for them to use both in teaching others and for their own ongoing training and formation.

lement découvert,” 197–98, and *Tunquin* respectively).

⁶⁰ De Rhodes spent almost ten years of his missionary career in Vietnam, three in Tonkin, six and a half in Cochinchina. He was obliged to leave Tonkin once. And at five different times for various reasons, he had to leave Cochinchina (Hertz, *Rhodes of Vietnam*, 70, 110).

⁶¹ A. de Rhodes, “Relation de la mission du Tonkin,” *Mission de la Cochinchine et du Tonkin avec gravure et carte géographique* (Paris, 1858), 3–61, 38–39: “réunir les fidèles dans les églises ou chapelles; présider aux exercices de piété; faire le catéchisme et meme les exhortations chrétiennes telles étaient les principales fonctions de ces utiles collaborateurs du missionnaires.”

⁶²Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 101.

⁶³ *Voyages et missions*, 103.

III. The *Catechismus*

The *Catechismus*, which was printed for the first time in Rome by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1651, is composed in parallel columns: the left in Latin and the right in *chu quốc ngữ* (Vietnam's modern script). Being the first publication in *chu quốc ngữ*, the *Catechismus* holds an important role in the history of Vietnam's modern script.⁶⁴ The manuscript of de Rhodes's *Catechismus* has not been found. Structurally, the *Catechismus* was divided over the course of eight days. Thematically, each of the eight days consisted of reasoning and teaching on the true Way of the Lord of Heaven, the relationship between the Lord of Heaven and creatures, creation and the fall, the history of humanity: the true "way" from Judea and the false "way" from China, teachings of the Catholic Church, the Incarnation, Jesus' passion and resurrection, and the end time. It was the expectation that those who had gone through the eight-day teachings of the *Catechismus* would be ready to renounce their former way of life and receive baptism, thus entering the Catholic Church.⁶⁵

Peter Phan's *Mission and Catechesis: Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam* (New York: Orbis 1998) has already provided an extensive investigation and analysis of the *Catechismus's* author, its historical, religious, and cultural context as well as its theological themes and content. For the first time, the *Catechismus* was translated and presented to English-speaking readers. To its credit, the *Mission and Catechesis* did recognize certain parallel elements between the *Catechismus* and the *Spiritual Exercises* (nos. 144–52). However, due to its focus and its scope of investigation, significant aspects of the *Exercises*, which underlined the *Catechismus's* foundational approach to those theological issues, were either insufficiently studied or

⁶⁴ Alexandre de Rhodes was part of the concerted effort to develop Vietnam's modern script. His work in *chu quốc ngữ*, particularly his *Dictionnarium annamiticum, lusitanum et latinum*, was drawn from other Jesuits, namely, Fr. Gaspar do Amaral and Fr. Antonio Barbosa. Roland Jacques, *Portuguese Pioneers of Vietnamese Linguistics prior to 1650* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2002), 12n.5. For more on the development of *chu quốc ngữ*, please read C. Đỗ, *Lịch sử chu quốc ngữ, 1620–1659* (The history of *chu quốc ngữ*; Frisco: Antôn & Duôcsáng, 2007), 105–23.

⁶⁵ *Catechismus*, 318.

simply overlooked. Thus, for the remaining pages of this essay, I want to investigate how the *Catechismus* adapted the *Exercises*, specifically, its presupposition (*SpEx* 22) and its directives on the “composition of place” (*SpEx* 47, 55, 65, etc.) in responding to the various challenges stated above. Such responses, which are grounded in the *Exercises*, provide deeper insights into the *Catechismus*’s theological themes and content.

The Presupposition

So that both the giver and the maker of the Spiritual Exercises may be of greater help and benefit to each other, it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor’s statement than to condemn it (SpEx 22).⁶⁶

From the first day, the *Catechismus* labored rigorously to demonstrate the existence of the Lord of Heaven for the Vietnamese and in the Vietnamese context. However, such a demonstration was based neither on condemning nor attacking Vietnamese religious practices, but rather on truth derived from natural reason and wisdom. More important, the reason and wisdom, which were used in these arguments, were rooted and well known in Vietnamese idioms and oral literature. Furthermore, de Rhodes strove to adopt and adapt Vietnamese expressions for the *Catechismus*’s theological terms.

Instead of using the Latin word *Deus* to denote “God,” de Rhodes either applied or combined various familiar terms of the Divine in Vietnamese for God, for example, *Đức Chúa Trời Đất* (the Lord of Heaven and Earth), *Thiên Chúa* (the Lord of Heaven), *Đức Chúa Ca* (the Supreme Lord), *Chúa Ca trên hết mọi sự* (Supreme Lord above all things)⁶⁷ For “angel,” he combined the Vietnamese terms *thiên* (heaven) and *thần* (spirit);⁶⁸ for “human soul,” *linh* (spirit) and *hồn* (vital principle).⁶⁹ To

⁶⁶ References to the *Spiritual Exercises* will be taken from *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. and commen. G. Ganss (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992) unless otherwise noted.

⁶⁷ *Catechismus*, 24, 71, 79, 80, 84, 117, etc.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 62, 63, 64, 65, etc.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 116, 117, 118, etc.

denote the “person” in the Trinity, de Rhodes creatively used the word, *ngôi*, as it was used in *ngôi vua* (the throne of a king), and so on.⁷⁰ In doing so, the *Catechismus* made Christian doctrines more intelligible, and therefore accessible to the Vietnamese.

As a result, Vietnamese had neither to travel to distant lands nor to convert to another nationality in order to seek and to find the true religion.⁷¹ On the contrary, Christianity could be found right in the heart of the mind and the wisdom of the Vietnamese. “True religions,” argued the *Catechismus*, “consists of true reason and is the way of right reason. If we follow reason, we are blessed. If we fail to follow reason, we sin.”⁷² Such a truth was echoed in the words of Vietnamese wisdom, “strong cord ties buffaloes’ heads, true reason wins people’s hearts.”⁷³ Thus, true religion, which must be reasonable to the mind and satisfying to the heart, had already existed in the lives and practices of the Vietnamese.

*Looked at from another
perspective, the true and universal
Way of the Lord of Heaven was
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and warmed all nations.*

Grounded in open acceptance and freedom from prejudices in the joint search for truth,⁷⁴ the author of the *Catechismus* actively and openly sought and applied, as foundations for his arguments and aids towards persuasion, reason and wisdom, which were embedded in Vietnamese cultures. Similarly, though the religious practices and devotions of Vietnamese were considered “superstitious,” the strategy found in the *Catechismus* did not aim to get rid of them. Instead, the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 307–9. For more detailed explanation of de Rhodes’s adaptation and adoption of Vietnamese terms, please see Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 135–40, 175.

⁷¹ Earlier, Jesuits in Vietnam learned how the Vietnamese had misunderstood that converting to Christianity meant becoming Portuguese (C. Borri, “An Account of Cochi-china,” in *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochichina and Samuel Baron on Tonkin*, 89–185, 139).

⁷² *Catechismus*, 11.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ S. Arzubialde, *Ejercicios espirituales de S. Ignacio: Historia y Análisis* (Bilbao–Santander: Mensajero–Sal Terrae, 2009), 108.

Catechismus called these religious practices and devotions into critical reflection and sound judgment, striving to restore the “right cosmological order.”⁷⁵ Accordingly, the Lord of Heaven “deserved all of our praises and worship above all things.”⁷⁶ Consequently, all things—including native religious practices and devotion—were holy, as long as they directed the individual towards the Lord of Heaven.

Looked at from another perspective, the true and universal Way of the Lord of Heaven was like the sun, whose light shone on and warmed all nations. No particular nation or no particular race could claim the sun exclusively for its own. In addition, even when a nation had gone through darkness of night, of not experiencing the light, the sun’s existence could not be denied. Its dawn will light up a new day for everyone and every nation.⁷⁷ Thus, every nation, its people, and its cultures possess elements of the light that eventually will lead them to the sun’s existence and as source of life.

The respect and attitude of the *Catechismus* to the native cultures is important, considering the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* understanding of salvation that was at that time operative as the cultural and religious norm in the Church. Also, one must consider such a respect and attitude in the ongoing Chinese Rites and Term Controversy, whose tension and conflict in how to adapt and to accommodate the Christian faith into other cultures and civilization and vice versa, was reaching its climax.⁷⁸ Working in such a theological context and ideology, the

⁷⁵ *Catechismus*, 17–20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

⁷⁷ *Catechismus*, 25.

⁷⁸ It is impossible to give an exact date when the Chinese Rites Controversy began. Some scholars believed that it began in the 1630s. However, all agree that the problem goes back to the earliest presence of the Catholic missionaries in China; in some ways it also traces back to the Catholic priests in Goa and India; perhaps it extends even beyond that to difficulties in Europe in the early days of the Counter Reformation (J. Spence, “Claims and Counter-Claims: the Kangxi Emperor and the Europeans (1661–1722),” in *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, ed. D. E. Mungello [The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, San Francisco, 1994], 15–16). At the heart of the Controversy was the question, “Is it necessary to change a culture in order to adopt a foreign religion? Specifically, do the Chinese who adopted Christianity also have to adopt Western culture?” The Edict of Toleration, issued by Emperor Kangxi in 1692, served as a resounding *no* to these questions. After extensive

author of the *Catechismus* directed his attention mainly to something much deeper than the practical issue of religious ritual and devotion, important though they were.

Starting from native cultures, the *Catechismus*'s goal was to establish "principles, like the creation of the world and the end for which all creatures are made and ordered" and the "foundation on which their faith can rest and be supported."⁷⁹ All was being done under the guidance of the Lord of Heaven whose Spirit and love immanently and intimately permeated all creation, "creating and sustaining all things: together with the sun when it shines; with the fire when it gives heat; with the wind that refreshes; with the water when it permeates the earth; with the earth when it produces."⁸⁰ In all, de Rhodes strove to accentuate the Lord's immanent and intimate presence in creation leading all to life more abundant.

Composing a Sacred Space of Encounter

When a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition will be to see in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place (SpEx 47).

Facing the challenge in which the Vietnamese had struggled in comprehending the mystery of the Incarnation and Passion of the Lord,⁸¹ the *Catechismus* did not provide any theological treatise or exegesis. Instead, following the preparatory prayers found in the *Spiritual Exercises* on the Contemplation of the Incarnation (SpEx 102–104), the instructions of the *Catechismus* directed its audiences to ask and pray for the "interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me." In other words, such a grace, first and foremost, came from God who granted

investigation by the Holy Office, papal decrees issued by Pope Clement XI and Pope Benedict XIV in 1715 and 1742 banned the Chinese Rites and prohibited further debate on the subject. In 1939, Pope Pius XII reversed the Church position (Mungello, ed., "Chinese Rites Controversy," 3–4).

⁷⁹ *Histoire du royaume de Tunquin*, 175–6: "principes connoissables—fondement assuré."

⁸⁰ *Catechismus*, 40–41.

⁸¹ *Histoire du royaume de Tunquin*, 176–7.

to the individual within his or her own cultural and religious context. Like the *Exercises*, instructions found in the *Catechismus* assisted its Vietnamese readers to compose a sacred space of encounter where such a grace was sought and might be given. As a result, while the narrative of the Incarnation and the Passion of the Lord remained universal, the interior faith experience was uniquely Vietnamese. It was in these graceful experiences of personal encounter with the Lord that the Vietnamese could claim and take ownership of the Christian faith as their own, and in doing so, inculturated the Christian faith into the Vietnamese culture.

After having persuaded his readers to reorder their lives and religious devotions to the correct cosmic order, where human beings and all creation were to rightly worship and praise the Lord of Heaven, the author of the *Catechismus* deliberately proceeds from “one degree to the next, arriving at the more difficult mystery, from the immortality of the soul and the afterlife, to the proofs of the Divinity and to Providence.”⁸² It is in the instruction of the *Catechismus*’s Day Seven where we find the contemplation on the Passion of Jesus. In other words, conversion entailed an ongoing process of preparing and disposing oneself to divine grace. However, such a divine grace could be obtained, not only communally through aligning oneself to the correct cosmic order, but also individually through a composed sacred space.

Right after recalling how Jesus gave over his spirit on the cross and how the centurion exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54), the *Catechismus* instructed those who teach that

here in this moment, [they] must display some *well-chosen* images of our Lord Jesus crucified on the cross for its audiences to contemplate. It is only effective *with arranged candles and incenses*. After having situated [everything] in this setting, the catechist then invites those who are present to *lift up the eyes of the soul and contemplate Jesus as if he is present right in front of your face* crucified on the cross, suffering for your sins unto death. . . . All of this was

⁸² *Voyages et missions*, 96; Hertz, *Rhodes of Vietnam*, 65.

done to save you, *my friend*, and to redeem you, *my friend*, from sin.⁸³

Three important aspects were found in these instructions. First, the composition of the space of sacred encounter, which was deliberately set up with “well-chosen” images and “arranged candles and incenses,” played a significant role in this contemplation.⁸⁴ Second, while composing the space of sacred encounter was important, the center point of contemplation where “the eyes of the soul” must focus was “Jesus as if he is present right in front of our face crucified on the cross.” Finally, the tone in the leading prayer that followed the gaze of the soul changed completely, moving from the neutral and impersonal subjective such as *ai* (whoever) and *ta* (I, me) to the more familiar and personal *ban* (my friend). Each of these aspects, which possessed crucial movement in the Spiritual Exercises, thus deserves further analysis.

The love and affection that de Rhodes and the Christian community shared further exemplified what the Catechismus’s teaching was striving for: to instill and to inspire in its audience to love as the Lord Jesus loved.

The order of activity and movement found in the *Catechismus’s* instruction mirrored the directives that were given by Father Antonio Valentino (1540–1611), a twenty-six-year-old novice master in Rome.

⁸³ *Catechismus*, 232–33 (italics are mine). The original Vietnamese version read, “Đền noi này thì phải lay ảnh nào khéo đúc Chúa Iesu đóng danh trên cây Crux, mà đem ra cho người ta xem, có don cái nến và cái hương thì mới tốt.” Similar to this is the French version: “quelques très belles représentation du Seigneur Christ en croix, avec des cierges et des parfums,” which Phan translated as “some beautiful representation of the Lord Jesus on the cross, if possible with candles and incense” (Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 134).

⁸⁴ Among the early Jesuits, Nadal was famously known for his use of images for contemplation. His works have been translated into English in three volumes, *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2003). For other works on the effectiveness of images on contemplation, please read N. Standaert, “The Composition of Place: Creating Space for an Encounter,” *The Way* 46, no. 1 (January 2007): 7–20; D. Freeberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

In his account of how to give the Exercises, we read, “In the preludes, a person begins by recalling the history, then passes on to the physical picturing of the mystery in the imagination, and from there to the understanding of the points by deep and steady reflection.”⁸⁵

More important, Valentino noted that, “this way of proceeding is natural for human beings and quite suitable for beginners, who proceed more by the senses and imagination than by the intellect.”⁸⁶ Furthermore, according to Father Gil González Dávila, the chief architect of the *Official Directory* of 1599, the main objective of the composition of place was to make the retreatant not only to “be present” to the event or mystery contemplated but also “as though it (the event or mystery) was being done for the retreatant alone, as St. Paul says speaking of Christ our Lord: ‘He loved me and gave himself up for me.’”⁸⁷ Thus, “being present” in the composition of place entailed a “two-sided” movement: while the people who contemplate make themselves present (*hacerse como presente*) to the mystery contemplated, at the same time, the mystery contemplated becomes present “here and now, and indeed in a unique way, to the people who contemplate.”⁸⁸

In a similar fashion, the *Catechismus*'s instructions on composing a sacred place made its Vietnamese audience present to the event of Jesus' Passion. In doing so, this facilitated bringing the Passion home to the Vietnamese in their own religious and cultural context. More especially, with the composition of sacred space modeled after the traditional religious settings of the Vietnamese, “with arranged candles and incenses,” the Passion of Jesus was present to the Vietnamese in a uniquely Vietnamese way. Thus, the Vietnamese and the Passion of Jesus were both being at home and alive within one another. Subsequently, while being at home and alive within one another, the *Catechismus* asked its readers to “watch,” to “see,” to “stare,” to “think,” and to “ex-

⁸⁵ *Directories*, doc. 16, no. 13. Unless otherwise noted, all the directories used are found in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599*, trans. and ed. Martin Palmer (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, doc. 31, no. 161.

⁸⁸ Standaert, “Composition of Place,” 7–20, 10.

amine how the most noble Lord endured such an embarrassing death because of you,"⁸⁹ then to offer a colloquy at the end.

The Colloquies

According to the *Official Directory* of 1599, the "most appropriate place for a colloquy is at the end, when the soul feels itself more elevated by its meditation—for the best colloquies are those which spring variously from one's interior affection."⁹⁰ In fact, the prayer that was followed by the watching, seeing, staring, thinking, and examining consisted of a personal expression of deep interior affection that gradually led to conversion. We read in the prayers directed by the *Cathechismus*:

I am wholeheartedly grateful to our Lord Jesus. . . . I am deeply saddened for my sins. . . . I am sadly remorseful for not having followed the Lord of Heaven. . . . So I committed myself to keep the Lord's commandments . . . to follow the Lord Jesus with all my heart . . . letting go of all idolatries and evil ways . . . and to worship the Lord Jesus, the true Lord of Heaven and my Lord.⁹¹

For de Rhodes, the conversion consistently entailed a process of deep interior movement of the heart transforming the interior life. More concretely, it moved the individual away from devotion to any form of idolatries and moved him or her towards worshipping the Lord of Heaven, the Supreme Lord of all things.

Thus, the "arranged candles and incenses" space of sacred encounter, which the author of the *Cathechismus* mandated, resembled the "thick smoke and incense" from temples or pagodas where he had seen the Vietnamese paying homage to their gods. The religiosity and devotion of the natives, "kneeling, prostrating, and dropping their faces to the ground," remained similar to their "beating the breast and shedding tears." The fundamental difference lay in the answer to the question towards where and to whom were all of these preparations and activities ultimately dedicated and devoted? The *Cathechismus's* answer

⁸⁹ *Cathechismus*, 235.

⁹⁰ *Directories*, doc. 43, no. 129.

⁹¹ *Cathechismus*, 237.

was clear: instead of “kneeling and prostrating at the foot of the statue covered with dust,” they were instructed to “lift up their eyes to heaven, to the well-chosen images of the Lord Jesus.” In doing so, contemplating the Passion of Jesus in the sacred space composed after the pattern of the Vietnamese cultural and religious manner, was very much present, alive, and at home with Vietnamese cultures. And the Vietnamese identified with and were drawn into Christ whom they had contemplated.⁹²

In guiding the Vietnamese to move away from their devotion to “idolatry” and moving towards pledging their allegiance to the Lord of Heaven, the author of the *Catechismus* had an additional motive. In de Rhodes’s understanding, though Vietnam had won political independence from China, the

Rising above all the individual nations and their respective cultures, the universality of the Supreme God, who exists before all things and whose lights give life to all nations, remains as the principle and foundation for all beings.

Vietnamese remained subjected to the Chinese in their “superstitious” beliefs and principles that had taken deep roots in the Vietnamese psyche and were manifested through their religious rituals and devotions. Therefore, moving them away from these “superstitions” and binding them to

the Lord of Heaven would mean complete freedom for the Vietnamese from China.⁹³ While one might question de Rhodes’s limited perspective on Vietnamese religions and his line of thinking regarding freedom for Vietnam, the love and affection which he reserved for the Vietnamese, and vice versa, were genuine and authentic.

De Rhodes, who once was a stranger to Vietnam and who had once lost all hope of ever learning its language, now found a home in the heart of the Vietnamese Christians and their communities. More important, de Rhodes and the Jesuit missionaries in Vietnam took it upon themselves to adapt to the local clothing and native foods. Hav-

⁹² George Aschenbrenner, “Becoming Whom We Contemplate,” *The Way Supplement*, 52 (1985), 30–42.

⁹³ *Histoire du royaume de Tunquin*, 69.

ing refused to wear either the black overcoat, which was often worn by European clergy, or the black silk cassock with black buttons, which were prescribed by the Council of Trent and commanded by the apostolic visitor to Vietnam at the time, de Rhodes wore a Vietnamese robe with large sleeves and a Vietnamese hat. Regarding footwear, he chose *giày da lang* (heelless slippers) which were found most commonly among middle-class Vietnamese. Concerning food and diet, de Rhodes and Jesuit missionaries were enthusiastic in eating various indigenous fruits, and ventured trying native delicacies such as *nuóc mắm* (fish sauce), and drinking tea.⁹⁴

These details, which might seem trivial or unimportant in the process of catechizing, served as significant steps for Jesuits in making inroads to gaining trust and credibility among the Vietnamese. In fact, one of the reasons that explained Jesuit success in their evangelization process in Vietnam was the close and personal relationships that the Jesuit missionaries had developed with the Vietnamese.⁹⁵ A variety of reasons drew the Vietnamese to Christianity and inspired them to convert: first, Jesuits' effective use of zealous and enthusiastic native catechists; second, the change of behaviors especially among those who were in positions of authority and power; third, Jesuit missionaries' personal relationship to the people; and fourth, the elaborate funeral rites and anniversary memorials by which the Christians honored their dead.

During his final farewell to Vietnam, de Rhodes expressed a profound mutual respect for the Vietnamese Christian community. After having been placed under the death penalty and deported from Cochinchina in 1645, and having earlier been expelled indefinitely from Tonkin in 1630, de Rhodes left Vietnam for good on July 3, 1645. On both occasions, de Rhodes recalled how he and the Christian community had grown in love and affection for one another. From de Rhodes's account of his departure from Tonkin, we learn "at last, as we began to sail away, tears again broke out on both sides. We made promises to one another that our hearts would never be separated; to tell the truth,

⁹⁴ Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 76–77.

⁹⁵ C. Đô, *Dòng Tên trong xã hội Đại Việt* (The Society of Jesus in Vietnam 1615–1775; Wichita Falls: Antôn & ĐuộcSáng, 2007), 200.

all that is mine lives in Tonkin.”⁹⁶ And on his final departure from Cochinchina, “that was on July 3, 1645, when I left Cochinchina in body, but certainly not in my heart, as it was with Tonkin. Truthfully, my heart lives entirely in both of them and I cannot believe that I could ever leave.”⁹⁷

The love and affection that de Rhodes and the Christian community shared further exemplified what the *Catechismus*'s teaching was striving for: to instill and to inspire in its audience to love as the Lord Jesus loved. In other words, the personal relationship and love that de Rhodes reserved for the Christian community gave witness to how the mystery of the Incarnation continued to live out and live on in their midst. The sacred space of encounter was no longer a construct or a composition of imagination for prayers, but the concrete living community where the Way to the Lord of Heaven was lived and where the Lord of Heaven's presence was experienced in the heart of de Rhodes and the Vietnamese.

Remaining true to his words, de Rhodes continued to keep Vietnam's Christian community in his heart by laboring tirelessly to establish the native clergy and hierarchy for the Church in Vietnam. In Macao, he petitioned the provincial of the Japanese Province to have an open consultation over the validation of the baptismal formula in Vietnamese.⁹⁸ After having been assigned with the responsibility of recruiting more “preachers” for the mission in Vietnam and of building the native clergy, he arrived in Rome. For the next three years, he frequented the Roman Curia and the Curia of the Society of Jesus, petitioning and consulting on these matters. In 1652 Pope Innocent X sent him to France both to raise money and to recruit more “soldiers” for the mission of Vietnam.⁹⁹ During his stay in France, de Rhodes not only was able to raise funds for the mission but also, more significantly, he was instrumental in inspiring the interest among the founding members of

⁹⁶ *Voyages et Missions*, 113.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁹⁸ C. Đô, *Lịch sử chu quốc ngữ 1620–1659* (History of Vietnam's modern script 1620–1659; Frisco: Antôn & ĐuộcSáng, 2007), 99.

⁹⁹ L. Campeau, “Le voyage du père Alexandre de Rhodes en France 1653–1654,” *AHSI* 48 (1979): 65–85, 66.

the Foreign Missionaries of Paris (MEP—Société des Mission Étrangères de Paris) to continue the evangelization process in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁰

De Rhodes's direct involvement with the mission in Vietnam came to an abrupt end due to the opposition of the Portuguese authority and the silence of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.¹⁰¹ The relationship between the Society of Jesus and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Vietnam certainly merited another detailed investigation. Because of the investigation, and to avoid further conflict with the Portuguese authorities, Jesuit superiors sent de Rhodes to the Jesuit mission in Persia. He left Marseille on November 16, 1654, and arrived in Isfahan a year later. For the next five years, he once again learned a new language and labored in a newly assigned mission. On November 5, 1660, Alexandre de Rhodes died a peaceful death in Isfahan, a year after Tonkin and Cochinchina had been established as two independent vicariates in Southeast Asia.¹⁰² To the end,

¹⁰⁰ Founded by Bishop François Pallu, Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte, and Bishop Ignace Cotolendi in France from 1658 to 1663. From its beginnings the MEP became instrumental in consolidating the authority of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, over the Portuguese and Spanish patronage system in the church mission in French Indochina and neighboring regions. The MEP, which took control over most of the mission territories previously run by the suppressed Society of Jesus and expanded throughout French-controlled territories, thus played an important role in political and cultural affairs between the French government and Asia in the second half of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the MEP has dedicated to building local clergy and promoting local culture and Church through the publication of local dictionaries, grammars, bibles, liturgical texts, catechetical materials, prayer books, and scientific works. Some of the publications were in Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, Chaochou, Hoklo, Thai (Chau-Laos), Annamite (Vietnamese), Japanese, Cambodian, Laotian, Bahnar, Malay, Kanaka, Tibetan, Chamorro, Palau, Kanao, Tagalog, Latin, French, English, Portuguese, German, Italian, Spanish, Korean, Siamese, Tho, Dioi, Ainu and Yap (L. Baudiment, *François Pallu, principal fondateur de la Société des Missions Étrangères, 1626-1684* (Paris Beauchesne, , 1934); J. Guennou, *La fondation de la Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris* (Rome, 1971); *Les Missions Étrangères* (Paris, 1963); H. Chappoulie, *Aux origines d'une église*, 2 vols.; A. Launay, *Mémorial de la Société des Missions Étrangères*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1916).

¹⁰¹ Chappoulie, *Aux origines d'une église*, 1:111; Campeau, "Le voyage du père Alexandre de Rhodes," 73–85.

¹⁰² H. Chappoulie, *Aux origines d'une église* I, 112–3; C. Đô, "Nhà thùa sai Alexandre de Rhodes tù trôn" (The death of Alexandre de Rhodes), in *Tan man lich su Giáo*

the love and affection of the author of the *Catechismus* for the Christian community in Vietnam was shown both in words and in deeds.

IV. Conclusion

In all his experience, de Rhodes met people where the people were, religiously and culturally. He maintained humility and openness by subjecting himself to learning the native language and by adapting himself to Vietnam's cultural practices. In all, de Rhodes engaged the Vietnamese in their cultural context in such a way as to enter into dialogue with them. More important, he was able to acknowledge the divine goodness that had already existed in the native cultures. Subsequently he utilized these elements as means of orienting them towards their ultimate end, the Lord of Heaven. Hastening neither to condemn nor to destroy, the author of the *Catechismus* understood what the teaching of the catechism involved, anticipating the vision of GC 35, "the experience of conversion from and conversion for" demanded from both those who catechized and those who were catechized (d. 2, no. 4). Consequently, de Rhodes taught us that one had to go deeper into the root of the native cultures in order to develop a "certain sense of piety and natural love towards the Creator and primary Principle of their being."¹⁰³ For de Rhodes, conversion took place from inside the cultures, primarily in the hearts of the natives.

Ever mindful of the latent misunderstanding that to become Christian was to become Portuguese, de Rhodes was firm and adamant in instructing the audiences of the *Catechismus* "*Chó có nói: đạo này là đạo Pha-lang*" (not to say that this religion is the Portuguese religion). De Rhodes went on to explain the relationship between the universality of Christianity to the particularity of individual cultures in perhaps the most beautiful metaphor of the *Catechismus*.

The holy way of the Lord of Heaven is light, older and greater than the sun. But, for example, when the sun shines on a coun-

hôi Công Giáo Việt Nam (Some scattered historical facts regarding the Catholic Church in Vietnam; Frisco: Antôn & ĐuộcSáng, 2007), 271–305.

¹⁰³ *Histoire du royaume de Tunquin*, 176.

try, that country is illuminated, while other countries, where the sun has not risen, remain in darkness. Nevertheless, no country, whether in the light or in darkness, can claim the sun to be its own because the sun remains universal and belongs to the whole world. It exists before the kingdom upon which its light shines. So it is with the Holy Way of the Lord of Heaven. Though being introduced to some kingdoms first, it mustn't be considered as the way of that kingdom, but remains the Holy Way belonged to the Lord of Heaven, the Supreme Lord above all things. It is the true and Holy Way, older and nobler than any kingdom on earth.¹⁰⁴

In this metaphor, de Rhodes acknowledged the historical and geographical uniqueness of an individual country and its cultures with respect to the Christian faith. However, rising above all the individual nations and their respective cultures, the universality of the Supreme God, who exists before all things and whose lights give life to all nations, remains as the principle and foundation for all beings.

De Rhodes's experience and interpretation of the universality of the Christian faith and its relationship with individual cultures served as a "forerunner" of the 1659 directives of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith instructing the Vicars Apostolic in Cochinchina, Tonkin, and other foreign missions.¹⁰⁵ Instructions in these directives, much like those of de Rhodes, recognized and preserved the authenticity of the individual cultures and maintained the integrity of the universality of the Christian faith:

Do not make any effort or use any argument in favor of forcing the people to change their customs or traditions, as long as these are not clearly opposed to religion and morality. What could be more absurd than to import France, Spain, Italy, or any other country of Europe into China?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *Catechismus*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ F. González Fernández, "Alessandro de Rhodes e la genesi dell'istruzione di P.F. ai vicari apostolici dell'oriente del 1659," one of the key lectures at the Giornata di Studio su: "Chiesa ed incontro con le culture: a 350 anni dall'Istruzione di Propaganda Fide" (Rome: March 12, 2009), 1–33, 21.

¹⁰⁶ Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, *Collectanea* (Rome, 1907), chap. 10, nos. 300, 103, in *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, by Aylward Shorter (New York: Or-

Finally, underneath these arguments, instructions, and practices, it was de Rhodes's striving to communicate to the users of the *Catechismus* that contained the most foundational insights into the Ignatian vision of the Lord of Heaven and shows how such a Lord had interacted with created beings. Accordingly, the Lord of Heaven was known and could be found only because of a divine choice to remain intimately related and connected with creatures. Echoing the dynamic of the Contemplation to Attain Love found in the *Exercises* (230–237), the *Catechismus* taught that the Lord of Heaven not only created the heaven and the earth, but also remained immanently and intimately within the heaven and the earth.

Without the divine labor and assistance, not a leaf can fall from the tree by itself. . . . Therefore, God, the Supreme Lord, creates and sustains all things: the Lord shines together with the sun that shines; the Lord warms with the fire that warms; the Lord refreshes with the air that refreshes; the Lord permeates the earth with water that permeates; the Lord produces with the earth that produces.¹⁰⁷

These phrases, repeated four times, recalled the Lord of Heaven laboring cùng (together) and với (with) lửa, gió, nước, đất (fire, wind, water, and earth); the four basic elements upon which, according to traditional Vietnamese understanding, all living things were formed. Thus, "all things serve as footprints through which we can envision and imagine the Lord of Heaven."¹⁰⁸ Hence, all peoples and all cultures, because they possessed a glimmer of the divine life and existence, could function as a sacred space of encounter with the Divine. The Lord of Heaven is the Lord of Light, who "from above" continually poured down "all good things and gifts . . . as rays from the sun and rains from their source" (*SpEx* 237) upon all nations and all cultures. The true name of this religion, as proclaimed throughout the *Catechismus*, is the Holy Way of the Lord of Heaven. And the Lord of Heaven is the Lord of Light and of Life.

bis Books, 1999), 155.

¹⁰⁷ *Catechismus*, 40–41 (italics are mine).

¹⁰⁸ *Catechismus*, 44.

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