



The Vietnamization of Personalism: The Role of Missionaries in the Spread of Personalism in Vietnam, 1930–1961

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Lorsque l'État associé du Vietnam acquit son indépendance et qu'un référendum établit une République du Vietnam après son regroupement au sud du 17ème parallèle, le personnalisme communautaire devint l'idéologie maîtresse du gouvernement de Ngô Đình Diệm. Plusieurs observateurs critiques de l'époque dénigrèrent ce personnalisme comme une pâle imitation de la pensée originelle d'Emmanuel Mounier. L'objectif de cet article est de montrer, au travers du parcours intellectuel de deux missionnaires, Alexis Cras et Fernand Parrel, comment le personnalisme français s'est transformé pour devenir une pensée politique proprement vietnamienne.

In September 1957, Ngô Đình Diệm, the president of the Republic of Vietnam landed in Canberra. Waiting on the tarmac to greet him was Governor-General William Slim and Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies. Ngô Đình Diệm then inspected an honor guard from the Australian Royal Air Force, which duly fired a 21-gun salute in his honor. However, something seemed unusual in this ceremony. Ngô Đình Diệm did not look like a chief of state on an official visit. According to an Australian journalist covering the event, the man was a “small but striking figure in a royal blue silk frock coat, long white trousers and black

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mandarin hat.”¹ Unlike his Australian counterparts who wore perfectly sharp business suits, Ngô Đình Diệm was dressed as a nineteenth-century Confucian scholar.

This peculiar appearance led many critics of the Republic of Vietnam to call Diệm a fraud, and his embodiment of Confucianism, an anachronism “in the age of the atomic bomb.”² Despite those impressions, his dress code was neither a mere relic of the past, nor a sartorial faux pas. For Diệm, his dress was quite real, natural, certainly Vietnamese. It was also part of an attempt to tailor Personalism, an ideology he had borrowed from the West, to the particular needs of the Republic of Vietnam. Historian Edward Miller has shown that in the hands of Diệm and his brother Ngô Đình Nhu—its true theoretician—Vietnamese Personalism was a modern project, rather than the restoration of archaic Vietnamese traditions.³ Yet there was a substantial difference between Personalism, as it was first conceived by its French creator Emmanuel Mounier in the 1930s, and how the Ngô brothers sought to use it in Vietnam in the late 1950s and early 1960s. How did Personalism spread from France to Vietnam? How did it change across space and time? Did it arrive via the Ngô brothers, or were there other intermediaries?

Vietnamese Personalism in Its National and Transnational Dimensions

To answer these questions, we might start by recognizing that while Personalism first appeared in France, it did not remain an exclusively French affair. Emmanuel Mounier, a progressive French Catholic intellectual, elaborated Personalism as an alternative to both capitalism and Communism in the 1930s. Mounier’s Personalism focused on the inherent value of the individual in the face of suffocating politico-economic systems that had emerged with force by the early twentieth century and showed their limitations through the 1930s economic recession. Personalism mainly criticized the oppression of the capitalist system. While it advocated a social revolution to free the human individual from his subservience to capitalist exploitation, Mounier rejected Marxist materialism, which reduced human societies and history to a story of capital production and class struggle under the control of an equally oppressive single-party state. Instead, he countered, the Person had both material and spiritual needs—he was free to exist

regardless of the collectivity or any other dominant structure, and was not an isolated individual but was in relationship with the rest of society.⁴ Mounier was the first to combine preexisting ideas of a Christian humanism and existentialism with the need to implement social revolution. He developed his ideas further in the 1930s and invited other intellectuals to join his literary magazine *Esprit*.

Personalism, however, spread well beyond the borders of France itself and into the non-Western world via colonial connections. Indeed, the Republic of Vietnam was not the only place where Personalism influenced postcolonial politics. Many 1950s political leaders in former French mandates and colonies also staked a claim to Personalism in their political programs.⁵ Senegalese leaders Léopold Senghor and Mamadou Dia stressed that African Socialism could only succeed when focusing on the Personalist man.⁶ Syrian intellectual Michel Aflaq created the Baath Party and used Personalism to promote an Arab nationalism based on the values of Islam.⁷ Fouad Chehab, the first president of Lebanon, worked closely with the intellectual René Habachi, believing that Personalism could surpass Communism because it did not ignore the spiritual nature of human beings.⁸

Yet how or why those ideas emerged in those places remains unclear. Scholars have long studied the spread of religions and secular ideologies from one side of the globe to the other. Paris served as a hub for the spread of anti-imperialist ideas among future leaders, such as Ho Chi Minh, Messali Hadj, and Zhou Enlai.⁹ Personalism was no exception to this globalization of ideas. Syrian intellectuals Michel Aflaq and Zakī al-Arsūzī studied at la Sorbonne, and Ngô Đình Nhu, from Vietnam, at l'École des Chartes in the 1930s. Even after independence, Paris remained a preferred destination for Vietnamese intellectuals keen on learning more about Personalism.¹⁰ However, the migration of intellectuals to the Métropole does not tell us how Personalism was later mediated and transformed through time and space in Vietnam itself.

In the case of Vietnam, Personalism obviously carried strong Confucian overtones as Ngô Đình Diệm's official visit showed. Edward Miller attributes this transformation of Personalism to Diệm's Orientalist views and to his admiration for the revolutionary Confucian scholar Phan Bội Châu.¹¹ While his work gives invaluable insights into the inspirational sources of Diệm's beliefs, this article suggests that there was more to Personalism than its connection to the Ngô family. Indeed Diệm's embrace of Personalism was part of a wider Vietnamese interest in this belief system and how it would be tailored to meet specific

Vietnamese needs. Second, while young Vietnamese could discover Personalist ideas by going to France, much like their counterparts in the Middle East, there was another channel through which Personalism flowed into Vietnam. This was through French Catholic missionaries who had been living and working in Vietnam for decades, several of whom embraced the progressive ideas of Mounier and other Catholic intellectuals. Two such French missionaries, Alexis Cras (1909–1962) and Fernand Parrel (1907–1992), were instrumental in adapting French Catholic ideas and their Personalist variants into Vietnamese terms and did much to spread them into Vietnam. Thus, to understand more fully why Personalism emerged in Vietnam in the mid-twentieth century, we need to take this missionary connection seriously, as well as ask ourselves why some Vietnamese, and not just the Ngô family, latched onto Personalism in order to deal with Vietnamese problems. Rather than writing off Personalism as some sort of aberration, by looking at its transnational entry into Vietnam and its reception at the local level, it might be possible to understand why some Vietnamese in the postcolonial Republic of Vietnam saw in the Christian social doctrine a “third way” for the country’s political and economic development.

The Divergent Paths of Colonial Rule and Missionary Work

J. P. Daughton has shown that despite Republican ambitions to export the French Revolution, colonial administrators needed the help of missionaries on the ground in order to rule lands about which they knew little.¹² But Republican colonial officials on the ground in Indochina or Algeria also carried their ideas with them, and distrust of missionaries in the empire was often real. While increasing tensions between the colonial state and missionaries led to administrative disputes or legal decrees on religion in Indochina, one central reason why some missionaries became increasingly estranged from colonial rule was because both colonial policies and Catholicism had changed a lot since the late nineteenth century.¹³ Just like the colonial state, missionary work was not monolithic. While Vietnamese Catholics may have looked towards the French for protection in the mid-nineteenth century against the oppression by Vietnamese monarchs, by the 1920s Vietnamese Catholics were keen on running their own Church and freeing it from foreign control. Scholars have made it clear that French missionaries and Vietnamese Catholics were hardly an unchanging, procolonial,

or homogeneous group. Nor did Catholicism inside or outside Vietnam remain untouched by two world wars, the economic depression of the 1930s, the rise of “isms”—such as communism, fascism, and capitalism. Emmanuel Mounier’s Christian Personalism was part of a progressive Catholic thought emerging from older and wider transformations in the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church, especially in France, reconsidered its position towards capitalism and its role in the colonies. At the end of the nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of May 15, 1891, rejected both socialism and unregulated capitalism, and called for a greater Catholic involvement against social injustice. Many priests in France engaged in temporal matters, ranging from the organization of Catholic Action, a movement designed to spread the faith among working classes and bring the social and humanist Christian doctrine to them, to the creation of political parties in the years 1910–1920 until this last initiative was discouraged by Rome itself.¹⁴ New initiatives appeared the following decade, with the creation of the Young Christian Workers (*Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne*) and the Young Christian students (*Jeunesse étudiante chrétienne*), in order to renew and increase the influence of the Church among those populations. The 1930s economic recession and the *Front populaire* inspired the renewal of the clergy’s involvement in social action and gave rise to the worker-priests movement between 1941 and 1944, where priests shared the life of factory workers to accomplish a double mission: participate in relieving social inequalities and proselytizing among the working class.¹⁵

In the midst of these historical transformations, Catholic intellectuals also elaborated new, surprisingly progressive ideas. Years before Emmanuel Mounier imagined Personalism in the 1930s, Catholic intellectuals started rethinking the role and reason for being of men in capitalist societies. Jacques Maritain revived Aristotle’s and Saint Thomas Aquinas’s works rejecting a purely materialistic account of human beings. To those thinkers, man was both material and spiritual. This led Maritain to call for an “Integral Humanism.” “Integral” here referred to the men’s material and spiritual needs. “Humanism” consisted in the inherent drive of human beings to perfect themselves in three areas of human life: in the spiritual world, human beings had to nurture their faith in the Supreme Being; in the temporal world, human beings sought to improve their lives in political, social, and economic terms; yet human beings also perfected themselves by “acting as a Christian,” that is, in achieving in the temporal world what the essence of being a human—Christianity, its humanist and social doctrine—prescribed.¹⁶

The existentialism of this third claim tried to reconcile the chasm between essence and existence and made the connection between the two spiritual and temporal dimensions of human self-fulfillment. Jacques Maritain claimed that it was Saint Thomas who had been the first existentialist, as he had declared that “the truth of things is an upshot of its existence.”¹⁷ He joined other Catholic philosophers, such as the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, who developed variants of this Christian existentialism—this time, insisting that freedom was the precondition of existence and that men were free from the state or any other collectivity.¹⁸

Thus, both Christian humanism and Christian existentialism preexisted and strongly influenced Emmanuel Mounier, who combined into the equation the urge for social revolution.¹⁹ Not all claims from those Catholic intellectuals were compatible with one another. Mounier’s opposition to Maritain was real. While the latter’s neo-Thomist views advocated the realization of a Christian society, the former promoted the development of many forms of spirituality and not just Catholicism. Yet as historian Michel Winock has shown, Maritain was central in the creation of Mounier’s magazine *Esprit* precisely because they shared the same Christian existentialist view of human beings.²⁰ Nikolai Berdyaev influenced Mounier just as much. Ignace Lepp, a Catholic philosopher who knew the two intellectuals very well, declared that Mounier admired Berdyaev during his early years as an intellectual. He felt they shared two points in common. Both considered that Catholic institutions had failed the humanist and social values of Christianity, and believed that the spiritual world was not detached from the economic, political, and social reality of human beings, but informed human action in the temporal world.²¹ Mounier’s Personalism was thus one manifestation of new Catholic ideas that defended the Christian vision of man and the urge to implement a social revolution.

All of those changes and new ideas emerging in Rome and France moved into French colonies via Catholic missions, including in the mandate territories in Syria and Lebanon, as well as in Egypt. Before they had reached the French territories, they first emerged in China, where Belgian missionaries promoted the idea that Western missionaries should serve local bishops and refrain from being related to the expansion of imperialism. Father Vincent Lebbe not only created the *Société auxiliaire des missions*, based in Louvain, to train such missionaries, but also petitioned the Vatican in 1918 and served as a major source of inspiration for Pope Benedict XV’s encyclical *Maximum Illud*, calling for the creation of National Churches the following year.²² He also created the *Foyer des*

étudiants d'Extrême-Orient in the suburbs of Paris to host Chinese Catholics and non-Catholics, and later other Asian students, including Ngô Đình Nhu, who participated there in the Action Sociale Indochinoise, an association discussing capitalism and Marxism and the Christian doctrine of labor.²³ Moreover, Charles Keith has shown that the involvement of foreign and Vietnamese priests in social activities dates back to the interwar years, when the economic and social consequences of the 1930s recession led several lay and ordained Catholics, including missionaries, to take action against the social inequalities and poverty generated by capitalism. Key missionaries and individuals, such as Father André Vacquier, Fernand Parrel, or the French customs officer Gilbert Jouan, played a crucial role in organizing the Catholic Action or the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor.²⁴ In other words, the French Catholic involvement in social issues had spread to Indochina.

What is less known, however, is that the philosophical component of this revival circulated as well. Christian humanism and Christian existentialism deeply influenced missionaries, how they perceived colonial rule and colonial subjects. Missionaries often criticized the lack of political and cultural reforms in Indochina. Yet it was during the Indochina War, between 1946 and 1954, that they expressed most forcefully how their conception of man differed, and called for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

A Humanist Criticism of the Indochina War

While most French missionaries oscillated between support of the French War in Indochina (1945–1954) and careful neutralism, Alexis Cras, a Dominican missionary from the Lyon archdiocese, denounced the cultural origins of the Indochina conflict.²⁵ Just a year after his ordination in 1932, Cras spent three years in Hanoi, at la Maison Lacordaire, a student residence created by Dominican missionaries. He arrived in Vietnam for the second time in 1938 to become the secretary of Mgr. Drapier, the apostolic delegate in Hue, until he was chosen to become a teacher at the Lycée Louis Pasteur, and later, the priest of the Dominican Church in Hanoi.²⁶ During all those years, he did not openly oppose colonial rule and even welcomed Vichy Indochina's reforms. But the armed conflict in Indochina starting in 1946 pushed him to call for a mutual understanding between France and Vietnam.

Cras traveled to France in September 1947 to meet with political leaders of the centrist party Mouvement républicain populaire, and intellectuals such as Georges Duhamel.²⁷ The missionary also visited a student residence created by the Dominicans in 1948, L'Eau vive, Centre international de formation spirituelle et doctrinale, where Lebanese students yearned to create an Arabic Thomist university, and Vietnamese students, who occupied the whole ground floor, sang Vietnamese patriotic songs without fearing the surveillance of the colonial Sûreté.²⁸ This trip was also the opportunity to publish articles in *La Vie intellectuelle*, a left-wing Dominican periodical edited by Father Augustin-Jean Maydieu, a priest imprisoned and tortured during the German occupation of France. Using each time a different pseudonym, he explained to the French public why he was perfectly suited to analyze the conflict.²⁹ In an article penned in 1948, he urged French Catholics to empathize:

A priest should not be involved in politics. He does not have the authority to decide when and where people should become independent; he has however, I believe, the right to be so close to the men to which he devoted his life, that he starts feeling the way they feel, and begins to consider their aspirations as his own.³⁰

This one-of-a-kind position, not exactly midway but somewhere in between France and Vietnam, allowed him to have a broader perspective than French Catholics in the Métropole. It was, in his words, an attempt to “convince and strive for a reconciliation.”³¹ While Alexis Cras was critical of the Vietnamese responsibility for the failure of a negotiated settlement, he mainly condemned the French authorities’ myopic view of Vietnamese nationalism.³²

Cras feared that the French stubbornness in ignoring the Vietnamese desire for independence and unity threatened to “erase from the collective memory the magnificent achievements of eighty years of protectorate rule” and reminded his readers that “France, just a century earlier, had helped inspire the greater unification of Italy.”³³ According to Cras, French authorities, the French public, and even French intellectuals misunderstood the Vietnamese desire for unity and independence. In a 1947 article published in a French Christian magazine, he further developed this idea when he exposed his vision for the future of missionary work.³⁴ In this article, he claimed that all the moral and financial support from French Christians to their missionaries overseas was doomed to fail if their task was reduced to imposing a westernized religion on a foreign land. Cras insisted

that it was important for missionaries to learn the local culture, and in the case of Vietnam, to understand the Vietnamese language

not only as a communication and sign system, . . . some sort of algebra, but it is also as what it is in reality: the gesture that reveals the soul to the outside. The missionary's duty is to bring about an epiphany for people. But it is also important to talk in a language people can understand. One must therefore use words which can be understood, as well as styles, images, dialectics and any rhetorical device to produce a new manifestation of the Divine Word, an incarnation that would become genuinely Chinese, Annamite or Japanese.³⁵

According to Alexis Cras, the propagation of the faith, just like colonialism, could not come down to a one-way teaching. Any tutor had to understand and embrace the local culture. Just like the way social and Christian humanism had called men to perfect themselves with education, so was Alexis Cras calling the French to understand the Vietnamese.

Culture, according to Alexis Cras, could not be reduced to "the sum of cultural influences," such as two essentialized Greco-Roman and Asian civilizations, supposedly different from one another. It was also, in his view, the personal work of improving and training oneself, so that eventually such a person could "transcend and criticize any culture in order to make that culture his own, any human values that are discovered in different cultures, or in antiquity."³⁶ Culture, in his view, was not only the reified representation of monolithic and exclusive civilizations, but it was also the mental process of understanding the unfamiliar. This second meaning of culture was not an impossible task that the French had never accomplished before, he claimed. Just like European artists who traveled through time to rediscover Greek and Roman literature during the fourteenth-century Renaissance, so should the French public mentally travel through space to understand Vietnam better.

Alexis Cras claimed that the main reason why it was important to find commonalities across civilizations was not uniquely tied to the Indochina War and the need to negotiate a peaceful solution. It was also because the two possible meanings of culture pointed to the same fundamental origin:

The opposition of the Orient to the Occident is vain after all, regarding high culture; in one case or the other, culture is always about the human being, about

the swaying and diverse human being, about the opportunity-rich human being, about the human being gifted by the nature with versatility, who strives for perfecting exact knowledge and thereby maintains even better the awareness of a continuity between nature and human beings.³⁷

Alexis Cras insisted on the fact that both the French and Vietnamese shared this common interest in the perfection of the human being. Most importantly, this reasoning showed that in the eyes of the missionary, human beings could neither be reduced to their material needs, nor idealized in spiritual terms. It was, just like Catholic intellectuals had stressed in France, how men accomplished, in the temporal world, the humanist and social doctrines of their spiritual beliefs, which reconciled the gap between the spiritual and the temporal, as well as the difference between the East and the West. Only by accepting this could one truly achieve a dialogue between civilizations. This intellectual journey shows how the missionary, in his quest to find cultural bridges between the East and the West, eventually came to the conclusion that the Person was the most important commonality between those civilizations.

All those calls for a greater understanding between the East and the West did not mean that Alexis Cras was opposed to colonization. He never advocated the end of French political patronage and even suggested that civilizations were not exactly equal to one another.³⁸ But the writings of Alexis Cras nevertheless suggest to what extent Christian humanism penetrated his thinking and pushed him to call for a better understanding of Vietnamese aspirations. His humanism not only influenced his calls to his fellow French nationals; it also permeated his training of the Vietnamese elites and influenced how Personalism transformed into a genuinely Vietnamese philosophical thought.

Translating Catholic Ideas into Vietnamese Terms

Alexis Cras's criticism of the war showed how deeply he believed in Christian humanism. He was perhaps one of the most important intermediaries in the spread of progressive Catholic ideas into Vietnam. Yet his role as a cultural broker and as an interpreter of French Catholic philosophy did not start with the Indochina War, but years before as he assumed important responsibilities in the training of a young Vietnamese elite. The work of Alexis Cras in training

Vietnamese students takes us back to 1941, when Admiral Decoux launched major reforms in Vichy Indochina in the fields of economic and cultural policies.³⁹ Among the various youth groups organized, the Dominicans from the Lyon province created the Cercle de la Renaissance (*Câu lạc bộ phục hưng*) in 1941.⁴⁰ From the outset, the Cercle received substantial support from the colonial authorities.⁴¹ Yet the objectives of the Cercle were not tied to the promotion of the colonial government, French heroes, or a transnational French patriotism. Its main objective was to train a Vietnamese elite.

Just like the Foyer des étudiants d'Extrême-Orient in the outskirts of Paris, the Cercle hosted both Catholic and non-Catholic students. In a pamphlet, the Dominicans explained that they were driven by the spirit of "Christian civilization and Christian humanism" as they helped students transition to their professional life and embrace the *Révolution nationale*.⁴² Moreover, one objective of the Cercle was cultural: conferences introduced new ideas to complete and not replace the existing culture, with the purpose of exploring topics that were not part of the school curriculum, but that were deemed important to "anyone who strives to become an honest human being with an open mind."⁴³ In fact, the Cercle was training Vietnamese students to become humanists.

While the full program of those conferences still remains a mystery, it seems that the main goal of the Cercle was to promote a Vietnamese cultural renaissance, through the rediscovering of early literature and legal code under the fifteenth-century Lê dynasty and its leaders' attempts to revive Confucian values.⁴⁴ In other words, the Cercle was essentially a forum for the revival and transmission of Vietnamese classics. It was also within the Cercle that Alexis Cras imagined new ways to represent in Vietnamese terms Western theological and philosophical thought. In order to better portray Catholicism, he ordered in 1941 a lacquer painting of the Nativity scene from a Vietnamese Buddhist artist, Nguyễn Gia Trí.⁴⁵ The priest had prepared sketches detailing his vision: he wanted the Nativity scene to look precisely as if the birth of the Messiah had taken place in Vietnam. The clothing would be long *áo dài* tunics, and the landscape would be reminiscent of the mountains of the North.⁴⁶ This painting, arguably one of the oldest representations of a genuinely "Vietnamese" Nativity, is a testimony of Cras's relentless drive to translate Catholicism into Vietnamese terms. Catholicism, a Western religious doctrine, needed to become Vietnamese. So too, should Western philosophy and the ideas of French Catholic intellectuals find local equivalents and Vietnamese forms of expressions.

One of the first written records of this original methodology, however, does not come from Alexis Cras himself, but from one of his first students and close friends, Father Bửu Dưỡng. The man was a member of the Imperial Family who had been raised in a Buddhist background until his discovery of French philosophers convinced him to convert to Catholicism, and later join an order. Father Bửu Dưỡng dedicated his PhD dissertation to the comparison of the beatitudes of Saint Thomas and Sakyamuni, focusing on the similarities between the highest bliss attained by the contemplation of God and the Buddhist nirvana.⁴⁷ It was only in 1947 that Cras also produced an article analyzing the parallels between Christian charity and the Confucian principle of reciprocity.⁴⁸ Later on, his famous article on the Personalist undertones of one of the landmarks of Vietnamese literature, Khái Hưng's 1933 *Hồn bướm mơ tiên* (The butterfly soul dreams of immortality), formed the pinnacle of his work.⁴⁹ Not only did the missionary attempt to analyze the novel that epitomized the birth of modern Vietnamese literature, but he also used it to elaborate the concept of the Person, a human being moved by both material and spiritual needs; a person who was free to choose how to exist despite dominant structures and in constant relation with the rest of society. According to Cras, these were universal principles that had already manifested themselves in the 1930s Vietnamese literature movement *Tự lực văn đoàn* (Self-strengthening). In other words, the writings of Khái Hưng and the individualism of the whole movement already echoed Emmanuel Mounier's Personalism, even though Mounier and Khái Hưng had never met. Thus, Alexis Cras's humanism and involvement in the training of the Vietnamese elite created a tradition of merging Eastern and Western philosophical thought in Vietnam, and this unique methodology contributed to the Vietnamization of Personalism. However, it is important to situate this emerging Vietnamese thought in its equally important historical context. For Personalism would have never acquired such a large audience had it not been imagined as an alternative to the spread of Communism in Vietnam.

The Right Timing for the Takeoff of Vietnamese Personalism

Following the Chinese Communist victory in 1949, the Indochina War became one of the hottest spots of the Cold War. Chinese and Soviet support of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam led the United States to throw its weight behind the French and recognize, the following year, the French-backed Associated State

of Vietnam. From then on, the stakes of the war completely changed. While it is well known that many Vietnamese Catholics defected from the Việt Minh as soon as the pope and the Vietnamese clergy condemned Communism in 1951, it was also at this point in time that many intellectuals set out to find alternative ideologies to capitalism and Communism.⁵⁰

A long article published in the newspaper *Tinh Thần* (Spirit), whose title referred to Emmanuel Mounier's literary magazine *Esprit*, explained what could be the ideological foundations of Vietnamese nationalism in 1949:

If one looks at world views [*vũ trụ quan*], interpretations of human societies [*nhân sinh quan*] and historiography [*lịch sử quan*], it is possible to see that the main foundations of the Nationalist doctrine lies in the life and in the psychology of human beings, just like many philosophers had already claimed: Aristotle, Plato as well as many Western and Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, etc. Those foundational elements are:

- 1) The respect for the SPIRIT [emphasis in original], which refers to the respect of the freedom of belief and the freedom of religion.
- 2) The respect for the HUMAN BEING, which includes the respect for one's private life, especially the respect for one's ETHICS (the Chinese call it VIRTUE).⁵¹

What composed a society and explained historical change was the spirit and the ethics of human beings, which were common to both Eastern and Western philosophical thought. Without yet naming it Personalism, the article suggested that the ideology guiding Vietnamese nationalism could ground itself in the human being and its quest for self-perfection.

Other articles in the same newspaper explained what were the assumptions behind idealism (*Duy tâm*), materialism (*Duy vật*), and realism (*Duy thực*). They reproduced a handbook of philosophy that was originally published in 1946 in Bùi Chu, the epicenter of Vietnamese Catholic nationalism during the Indochina War, and was "not intended for the expert in philosophy, . . . but discusses the indispensable questions in deciding the path to be followed for the future of the nation and the people as well as the entire human kind."⁵² Idealism reduced human beings to their spirit alone, whereas materialism limited historical change to class struggle. Instead, realism proved to be "a Third path in between those two polar opposites."⁵³ Most importantly, the manual was trying to popularize

philosophy for the Vietnamese readership and give metaphysical and more fundamental reasons to oppose Communism. This also suggested that the Cold War was not just about geopolitical alliances; it was also an ideological inquiry into the best ways to make sense of human societies and historical change.

It was not until the late 1940s and arguably even the early 1950s that this line of thought finally became an identifiable ideology called Personalism (*Nhân Vị chủ nghĩa*). It is also unclear who, exactly, was the first person to coin the Vietnamese translation of the Person.⁵⁴ What matters instead is not who, but when this idea came into being. While the Cold War had sparked a sudden awareness of competing visions of the human being, it also brought the first discussions debating and spreading such political awareness.

Two men were central in this endeavor. Ngô Đình Nhu, a member of one of the oldest Catholic families in Vietnam, studied in France and joined the Action Sociale Indochinoise, before returning to Hanoi to work as an archivist. Fearing retribution when the Việt Minh seized power in 1945, he used his connections with the Canadian Redemptorists to hide across Vietnam until he settled down in Dalat.⁵⁵ Fernand Parrel was a missionary from the Paris Foreign Missions who had arrived in Vietnam in 1930, and worked in Saigon and in Mỹ Tho until he was sent to Dalat in 1948. There, these two men organized the first *Semaine sociale* in 1949, which in fact officialized preexisting meetings of 20 or so participants in the street behind the St Nicholas Church.⁵⁶ Huỳnh Văn Lang, the group's secretary, who had previously studied French literature with Parrel in Vĩnh Long, recalls that both esteemed intellectuals and younger students discussed political and ideological writings, such as Marxism, Liberalism, and Personalism.⁵⁷ While those meetings only gathered a handful of intellectuals, in Dalat around Father Parrel, and in Hanoi around Father Cras, such discussions soon started to spread.

Parrel and Nhu traveled to Saigon and Hanoi in 1952 and had "become the peddler of the Church's social doctrine," according to the missionary's memoirs.⁵⁸ The missionary traveled an entire month in August 1953 to Haiphong, Hue, and Danang to give lectures to the clergy and labor union leaders—most of whom were Buddhists.⁵⁹ Once back in Dalat, Parrel published a manual entirely dedicated to the discussion of Liberalism, Marxism, and Catholicism. This book became a useful material substitute for the spread of a progressive Christian social message in a Cold War context bearing down on Indochina.

According to Parrel, the Church had to oppose the growing influence of Communism:

In the face of such a situation, there is only one possible answer for the Church: instill in the masses as much as possible the antidote to Marxism, that is the admirable social doctrine that the last Popes have emphasized.

In this doctrine, the Christian labor unions take a good lead in the prospect of achieving two objectives: to protect the workers . . . , on the other hand, . . . to harmonize the tension between Capital and Labor, which has presently reached a critical point. Yet both tasks originate from the same viewpoint: the defense of the human Person and the self-fulfillment of that very same Person.⁶⁰

Communism was a global threat and it was his duty to warn the Vietnamese population. Although Catholic Action had existed since the turn of the twentieth century in France and since the 1930s in Indochina, only the Cold War turn of the conflict could push the Vietnamese population to embrace the Christian social doctrine as a model, and Personalism as a philosophical foundation for a non-Communist nationalism. This message spread from intellectuals to union workers and eventually made its way to the State of Vietnam itself. In April 1952, Ngô Đình Nhu made his first speech to Catholic officers at the Military Academy in Dalat, in which he stressed the idea that the Person was the supreme value of all societies, and claimed that Liberalism and Communism would forever fail to provide salvation to human societies.

Thanks to the 1789 Revolution, Liberalism has declared that everyone is free. However, one important shortcoming of that ideology is to have failed in establishing limits to the economic and social conditions of such freedom. That is why, in such a regime, workers are free in politics but isolated in economics, and deprived of any means to protect themselves from the domination of the rich. Communism goes against Liberalism, but in fact does not overcome the materialist limitations of the former ideology, and tends to repress everyone under a collective economy.

One ideology gives a distorted impression of freedom, whereas the other gives the illusion of salvation . . . In both cases, it is very much like Satan the devil, promising to humans the power to rule the world in exchange for their soul.⁶¹

It is impossible to determine how this reading of human freedom was received by Vietnamese Catholics. But what is clear is that Personalism was no longer an isolated intellectual debate among missionaries, intellectuals, and students

anymore.⁶² By the time the State of Vietnam regrouped south of the 17th parallel in 1954 after the Geneva ceasefire, most intellectual, social, and military circles were aware of Personalism and of the ideological assumptions Ngô Đình Diệm, Ngô Đình Nhu, and other intellectuals defended. Over the course of the war, the most forward-thinking ideas emerging from French Catholics in the 1950s had emerged in Vietnam as a rallying point in opposing Communism two decades later.

The Heyday of Vietnamese Personalism

Once in the South after 1954, a significant propaganda campaign attacking chief of state Bao Dai for being a French puppet led to a referendum and gave the impression that any privileged relationship with France had ended. Yet this turn of events did not affect our missionaries. In fact, they continued their cultural, political, and social engagement as they had been doing during the Indochina War. Not only were Alexis Cras and Fernand Parrel both present in the South, but the Republic emerging from the October 1955 referendum officially endorsed the Person as the most fundamental element defining its worldview in its constitution.⁶³ Ngô Đình Nhu had developed a Communitarian Personalism through the creation of the Cần Lao Party (Labour Party), which, according to Parrel, was “a fusion of Confucianism, Christianity, Mounier’s philosophy, Maurrassisme, and even legacies of Pétain’s or Salazar’s national revolution.”⁶⁴

The memoirs of Hà Đức Minh, a member of the party’s central secretary committee, give us a glimpse of the underlying reasons behind the creation of the party and its pantheon of ideas.⁶⁵ Hà Đức Minh was a former Việt Minh who was inspired by the Utopian socialism of Proudhon and Babeuf, before turning to Marxism and eventually embracing Personalism after he defected from the Việt Minh in 1948.⁶⁶ He participated in the redaction of *Tinh Thân*; contributed to another publication, *Xã Hội* [Society]; and was in 1953 the main liaison with Nguyễn Tôn Hoàn, the Southern faction leader of the Đại Việt Party, created in the 1930s around the idea of racial survival. Towards the end of the war, under the Associated State of Vietnam, the man created the Vietnamese Social Humanist Party (*Đảng nhân xã Việt Nam*) in the South, which advocated a regeneration (*đuy sinh*) and a communitarian survival (*cộng đồng sinh tồn*).⁶⁷ Yet once Ngô Đình Nhu’s brother, Diệm, became prime minister, and as the State of Vietnam regrouped into the South, it made more sense to gather political activists and

intellectuals from all parts of the country, rather than maintaining regional-based organizations. Hence, the creation of the *Cần Lao Party*.

From the beginning, several philosophical ideas and not just Personalism inspired them: Neo-Thomism, the affirmation of both material and spiritual needs of human beings, and humanism, the conviction that men could perfect themselves with greater intellectual and moral values, both influenced the movement; and Leibniz's Spiritualism underscored further the role of spirituality against materialism.⁶⁸ Interestingly, Hà Đức Minh and his fellow intellectuals considered that "Personalism struck the perfect balance between the East and the West, that is, between Mounier and Confucius as well as Mencius."⁶⁹ These common beliefs among the first members of the *Cần Lao* inspired them to draft a declaration, disclosed when the party was created in August 1954. Considering that men were both material and spiritual, that despite the progress in technology and production, men still suffered from poverty; and that despite the democratic regimes' guarantee to protect individual rights, men were still enslaved by the collectivity, by their spiritual or material conditions. It was the party's objective as a consequence to launch a Personalist revolution to be carried out by the workers.⁷⁰

In such a Republic, where the most important ideas of Christian philosophy would reign supreme, it was hoped that this new state could actually achieve the best results of Christian humanism and Personalism, especially because early members of the *Cercle de Renaissance* in 1942 and 1943 had now become close allies of the party. Not all former students of the *Cercle* backed the Ngô brothers, but at least two became close allies: Võ Văn Hải became the Secretary of the Presidency until the fall of the Republic, and Nguyễn Cao Thắng was the pharmacist heading the *Office Pharmaceutique du Vietnam (OPV)*, an organization taking over from the French after their departure in 1956, which is often considered as the slush fund for the party.⁷¹ Other former *Cercle* members did not become die-hard supporters of the Ngô family or the regime. Yet they strongly promoted the spread of the Christian social doctrine. Once in the South, Alexis Cras re-created the *Cercle de Renaissance* in former French military quarters and taught literature and philosophy to fifty-four refugee students, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, thus training the first Vietnamese experts in philosophy who would later occupy important positions in higher education or public administration in the Republic of Vietnam.⁷² For example, Bửu Dưỡng became professor at the University of Hue; Trần Văn Hiến Minh directed an

influential periodical for Catholic refugees, *Đường Sống* [The way of life]; and Lý Chanh Trung, the Cercle students' secretary, became the Cabinet Secretary of the Ministry of Education.⁷³ Many of those influential students would later contribute to a significant extent to the review *Quê Hương* [Homeland], reflecting the Personalist orientation of this postcolonial Vietnam.⁷⁴ While Alexis Cras was not the only one to introduce Personalism and Catholic ideas to Vietnam, his work had certainly done much to help the Vietnamese tailor Personalism to their needs in the 1950s. He contributed to the introduction of major Catholic intellectuals' writings, such as the work of Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, Nikolai Berdyaev, or Teilhard de Chardin. One Christian magazine even noted that the conversion of young intellectuals to Catholicism increased in Saigon towards the end of 1955.⁷⁵ Alexis Cras continued to teach not only at the Cercle but also at the University of Dalat and the University of Hue, up until he returned to France before passing away in 1962. In other words, the Christian vision of man had become prevalent in postcolonial Vietnam. While not all of its proponents were associates of the Ngô family, supporters of the regime, or even members of the *Cần Lao*, many of those who shared the same Christian ideas occupied crucial positions in the fields of culture, politics, or the economy.

Exploring a Third Way in Vietnam

Fernand Parrel also remained influential in the Republic of Vietnam. More than ever, perhaps, he challenged the Communist propaganda declaring that Catholics were traitors to the nation. His office in Dalat published an essay warning against Communist propaganda and translated into Vietnamese Father Dufay's analysis of Chinese Communist repression against Catholics in 1955.⁷⁶ Three years later, he warned that Communism remained a major source of inspiration for the youth.⁷⁷ Again in 1961, he lectured Catholic high school and primary teachers to denounce the Communist materialism hidden behind a nationalist message.⁷⁸ Throughout the Republic, Fernand Parrel remained an outspoken critic of Communism. Yet the reason why he did so was not only because he believed that Communist materialism was incompatible with the Christian faith. One other underlying reason was that he believed that the Christian social doctrine could provide a unique model to Vietnam. He refused to let Marxism have a monopoly in the resolution of major social questions. The Church too, he believed, had

historically been involved in the relief of social and economic problems. And this led the missionary to revisit the history of the Church itself.

In a pamphlet distributed at the celebration of Labour Day, May 1, 1961, he opposed Marxist claims that the Church never supported workers and argued that Catholicism had been standing by the poor since the outset:

Even before the coming of Christ, several texts in the Bible show that the people of God, the little Jewish people, had a more progressive social legislation in comparison with any other pagan societies, even civilized ones like in Egypt, Rome or in Greece, where slavery prevailed . . . When the Son of God chose an incarnation on earth, he did not want a rich environment but a simple household, the house of an artisan precisely because the condition of a manual worker was then the most prevalent . . . When the apostles spread the Gospel across the Roman empire, plagued by slavery, they were blamed for being revolutionaries and for introducing justice in an unfair world, which is why they were persecuted and sentenced to death.⁷⁹

According to Parrel, the Church had always fought against social injustice. He even claimed that servitude in the Middle Ages was just a “transitory stage to freedom.” The priest argued that Catholic professional corporations of various trades and crafts provided men with opportunities for occupational training and social stability, which were eliminated by the French Revolution, leaving men at the mercy of capitalist oppression. Only Pope Leo XIII’s call for greater social justice in the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* inspired the Church’s renewed involvement in social justice, whose manifestation, the International Confederation of Christian laborers, counted more than a million members.⁸⁰ According to Parrel, the Catholic Church had defended the poor, adapted through history, and even inspired in the twentieth century a forward-thinking alternative to the Communist aptitude for solving class conflicts. Ignoring centuries of the French Church’s participation in absolutist rule and serfdom in the Middle Ages, Parrel proved just as amnesic when interpreting the Church’s history in Vietnam.

In his view, the Church had always fought social injustice. While it did not change the land capitalism and did not eliminate land usury, it nevertheless brought positive solutions to social inequalities, Parrel insisted:

The Church did not only reuse a traditional economic structure in the country (peasants used to cultivate communal lands to pay for the pagan cults); it did not only find a legitimate although insufficient way to fund its material needs; it also brought a new hope for justice and humanity: lower rents, easier payments and deadlines, low interest credit lines.⁸¹

Fernand Parrel's selective account of the Church's historical role in the economy and society revealed how urgent it was, in his view, to challenge Communism. It also showed to what extent he was pressuring the Vietnamese not to convert to Catholicism but to embrace the Christian social doctrine, that is, an economic development respectful of spirituality.

It was in this perspective that Parrel recommended the works of *Économie et Humanisme* to Ngô Đình Nhu in 1956.⁸² The founders of *Économie et Humanisme* were Catholic priests based in Lyon in 1941, who sought to explore the economic development of French regions and the Third World.⁸³ Dominican Father Louis-Joseph Lebret, its founder, had written several books advocating a communitarian revolution and a greater solidarity between civilizations in the 1940s. The Personalist inspiration of his economic theories seemed particularly relevant to Vietnam. Just like Alexis Cras and Fernand Parrel, *Économie et Humanisme* had influenced the discussion of social issues in Vietnam years before the end of French colonial rule. Its periodical was part of the readings made available at Parrel's library in Dalat as early as 1948, along with *Le Monde*, *La Croix*, and *Témoignage chrétien*.⁸⁴ The Secrétariat social's first two-week-long seminars, in the summer of 1951, were organized under the auspices of *Économie et Humanisme*.⁸⁵ And Father Lebret, its founder, whose work and vision Fernand Parrel admired, came to visit Vietnam in 1955.⁸⁶ Yet it was not until September 1957 that *Économie et Humanisme* was invited to conduct an analysis of the social and economic situation in the Republic of Vietnam. The result was a four-years-long, two-volume-thick economic survey of the Republic.⁸⁷

The survey explained in its introduction that it sought to measure and understand the "Integral Development" of human societies.⁸⁸ This included the study of several dimensions of human "evolution," which included biological evolution, material evolution, intellectual evolution, and ethical evolution. Yet "human evolution" was not only a measurement used for scientific observation; it also represented the overarching goal of each society, to be achieved through action.⁸⁹ Human evolution, as *Économie et Humanisme* defined it, represented

both an assessment and the ultimate finality of each society. In other words, every parameter of the study was in fact an objective criterion for observation and a target for programmatic action at the same time. At first, this approach did not seem to affect the survey, as most of its methodology seemed substantially similar to any other economic studies. Yet one parameter, religion, clearly stood out from the rest of the study.

The measurement of religion did not refer to the usual sociological identification of religious groups: the proportion of Catholics, Buddhists, and Confucians living in each village. There was a greater depth in the measurement of this criterion. Spiritual life was measured according to different observations: the level of religious impregnation, religious knowledge, the social influence of priest and monks, religious observance, the cult of ancestors, moral sense and obligations, superstitions and magic, as well as the level of practical materialism.⁹⁰ Thus, the observation did not attempt to identify a religious belonging; it measured the breadth of religious awareness.

A large range of values helped assess each of those dimensions. The instructions given to the National Bank's employees conducting the survey gave greater precision in the span of the religious evolution measured.⁹¹ The scale of value used to assess religious impregnation ranged from superficial to conscious and deep; the knowledge of religion, from ignorance to enlightened and complete knowledge; general common sense of moral obligations, from none to excellent; even the measurement of materialist values within the local population ranged from purely materialistic concerns to spiritual issues prevailing over materialistic ones. Thus, religion was not a sociological identifier in the Republic. It was not just a measurement either. Religious awareness was both a criterion for observation and one of the objectives of an integral development. Such an integral development, if achieved by Vietnam one day, had to accomplish a deep impregnation, awareness, and understanding of religious matters, not just Catholicism, but all religions in and of Vietnam. While the *Économie et Humanisme* mission never advocated an active proselytism or conversion as a means to develop the Vietnamese society, it suggested that a "human evolution" in a Personalist revolution required the development of religious values, which did not come down to Catholicism, but also included Buddhism and the cult of ancestors.⁹²

Contrary to the assumption that the Republic of Vietnam only relied on its American advisors, or the vision of the Ngô brothers alone, Parrel's advocacy and Lebet's research project suggest that Vietnamese Personalism was also a

laboratory for the experimentation of a Christian social doctrine.⁹³ In the eyes of Father Lebret, the research process had been so successful that his team conducted another survey on agriculture and fisheries two years later. *Église vivante*, the periodical of the Society of Auxiliaries of the Missions in Louvain, congratulated the initiative as it had encouraged the creation of two consultative bodies, the National Council for Labor and the National Council for Social and Cultural Affairs.⁹⁴ When Lebret was invited by Fouad Chehab to study the economic situation in Lebanon, the priest likened his local team to the Vietnamese economists he worked with, and even invited Fernand Parrel to visit his research project in Byblos.⁹⁵ From an isolated movement, the Church social doctrine had emerged in 1949 as an alternative to Communism, to become an experiment in the Republic of Vietnam and other places in the postcolonial world.

Conclusion

French Personalism spread among other channels, through key missionaries and Catholic intellectuals. Yet despite all the goodwill of Alexis Cras and Fernand Parrel, and the drive of many intellectuals to formulate and implement a Vietnamese interpretation of Personalism, the Republic miserably failed in challenging Communism or in implementing the Church's social doctrine. The regime's authoritarian rule and incapacity to implement political reforms, which would climax with the Buddhist demonstrations and the self-immolation of Thích Quảng Đức in June 1963, completely wiped out from the collective memory and history books the philosophical and intellectual quest at the origins of its ideology. Very soon, critics of the regime criticized the dictatorial nature of the Republic, mocked the intellectual quest of its Personalist revolution, or blamed the Vietnamese Church, as if the Republic, Personalism, and the Church were one and the same. What the intellectual journey of Alexis Cras and Fernand Parrel shows, however, is that Vietnamese Personalism was not a nationwide attempt to convert the population to Catholicism, but the adaptation and transformation of French Personalism and the Christian social doctrine in Vietnam. Three other conclusions also emerge from this creation of a Vietnamese Personalism.

First, Vietnamese Personalism was not an aberration. Ngô Đình Diệm contrasted completely with his contemporary French Personalists writing in

the famous literary magazine *Esprit*, such as Jean-Marie Domenach or Paul Ricœur. He never authored any substantial essay. Nor was the Christian social left reflected much in his policies. But his Personalism was no less authentic and had become orientalized precisely because it came from an intellectual tradition of merging Eastern and Western philosophies.

Second, it is striking to see that the coming of the Cold War to Vietnam sparked the urge not only to take up arms against Communism, but also to discover an ideological alternative. This suggested that the Cold War was not just about the confrontation of international alliances, but was also an intellectual quest for the interpretation of human societies, historical change, and ideas, and not least of all, the question of human freedom.

Third, the examples of Alexis Cras and Fernand Parrel, although not representative and in fact unique of their kind among other missionaries, present fascinating examples of how missionaries reinvented themselves from colonial to postcolonial rule. Their connections and interventions, between France and Vietnam as well as across the globe, even let us imagine that there could have been a Personalist connection during the Cold War that remains to be explored.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Prue Torney-Parlicki, *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism, and Australia's Neighbours, 1941–1975* (Sydney: University of South Wales Press, 2000), 210.
2. John Donnell, "Personalism in South Vietnam," in *Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam since Independence*, ed. Wesley Fishel (New York: Free Press, 1961), 33. Other authors underlining the traditional nature of Ngô Đình Diệm include Denis Warner, *The Last Confucian: Vietnam, Southeast Asia and the West* (Sidney: Angus and Robertson, 1964); Anthony T. Bouscaren, *The Last of the Mandarins: Diem of Vietnam* (Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1965); Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950–1963* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).
3. Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 14–16. On the influence of the Christian social doctrine on Personalism, see Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 196–200.

4. French historian Winock's expression "l'homme tout à la fois libre et solidaire" sums up the concept; Michel Winock, *"Esprit": Des intellectuels dans la cité, 1930–1950* (Paris: Seuil, 1996 [1975]), 25.
5. Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, "Le mouvement personnaliste français des années 1930 et sa postérité," *Politiques et Sociétés* 17, no. 1–2 (1998): 219–37.
6. Quoted in Charles F. Andrain, "Guinea and Senegal: Contrasting Types of African Socialism," in *African Socialism*, ed. William H. Friedland and Carl G. Rosberg (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964), 161. On Léopold Sédar Senghor's Personalism, see *Congrès constitutif du Parti de la fédération africaine Dakar 1-3 juillet 1959* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1959); Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Rapport sur la doctrine et le programme du Parti* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1959); Nadia Yala Kisukidi, "L'influence vivante du personnalisme de Mounier sur la philosophie esthétique et la poésie de Léopold Sédar Senghor," *CONTEXTES: Revue de sociologie de la littérature*, no. 12 (2012), <http://contextes.revues.org/5592>. So was the philosopher Alioune Diop, who contributed with the latter to the concept of *négritude* and engaged in a correspondence with Emmanuel Mounier; Philippe Verdin, *Alioune Diop, le Socrate noir* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2011); Emmanuel Mounier, *L'Éveil de l'Afrique noire* (Paris: Seuil, 1948).
7. Michel Aflaq, *Choice of Texts from the Ba'th Party Founder's Thought* (1977).
8. Stéphane Malsagne, *Fouad Chéhab, 1902–1973: Une figure oubliée de l'histoire libanaise* (Paris and Beyrouth: Karthala and IFPO, 2011), 498.
9. Christophe Charle and Laurent Jeanpierre, eds., *La vie intellectuelle en France, XIX–XX^e siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 2016); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2015), chapter 4.
10. Nguyễn Văn Trung, "Le personnalisme d'Emmanuel Mounier" (PhD diss., Université catholique de Louvain, 1955); Trần Thái Định, "La notion de personne dans la philosophie bouddhique primitive" (PhD diss., Institut catholique de Paris, 1958).
11. On Ngô Đình Diệm's orientalist views, see Edward Miller, "The Diplomacy of Personalism: Civilization, Culture and the Cold War in the Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem," in *Connecting Histories, Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia*, ed. Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). On his admiration for Phan Bội Châu, see Edward Miller, *Misalliance*, 137–40.
12. J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

13. On the administrative disputes, Eric Jennings, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 203–4; on the debate on the *laïcité*, Charles Keith, “Protestantism and the Politics of Religion in French Colonial Vietnam,” *French Colonial History* 13 (2012): 141–74.
14. I rely here on Denis Pelletier, “Les chrétiens de l’autre bord” and “Une gauche sans domicile fixe,” in *À la gauche du Christ: Les chrétiens de gauche en France de 1945 à nos jours*, ed. Denis Pelletier and Jean-Louis Schlegel (Paris: Seuil 2012), 7–51.
15. Tangi Cavalin and Nathalie Viet-Depaule, “La mission ouvrière: La justification religieuse d’un déplacement à gauche (1940–1955),” in *À la gauche du Christ*, 114–15.
16. Paul Richard Blum, “Jacques Maritain against Modern Pseudo-Humanism,” *Congresso Tomista internazionale su l’Umanesimo Cristiano nel III Millennio: La Prospettiva di Tommaso d’Aquino 2004*, 780–91, available at <http://www.e-aquinas.net/pdf/blum.pdf>. This position not only echoed and challenged André Malraux’s 1930s social humanism, which called human beings to transcend their bestiality with culture to improve their human condition, but it also posited that existence precedes essence.
17. Blum, “Jaques Maritain,” 9.
18. Nicolas Berdiaeff, *De l’esclavage et de la liberté*, trans. Samuel Jankélévitch (Paris: Aubier, 1946 [1939]).
19. For a detailed contextual analysis of Emmanuel Mounier’s thought, see Winock, “*Esprit*,” chapter 1.
20. Michel Winock, “*Esprit*,” 40–41.
21. Ignace Lepp, *La philosophie chrétienne de l’existence* (Paris: Aubier, 1953), 132–33.
22. Ernest P. Young, *Ecclesiastical Colony: China’s Catholic Church and the French Religious Protectorate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chapters 8–10.
23. Scott McConnell, *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France, 1919–1939* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1989), 91–92; Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 196–97.
24. Keith, *Catholic Vietnam*, 192–95; on labor unions, Edmund Wehrle, “Awakening the Conscience of the Masses’: The Vietnamese Confederation of Labour, 1947–1975,” in *Labour in Vietnam*, ed. Anita Chan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011), 13–45.
25. See Claire Trần Thị Liên, “Les catholiques vietnamiens pendant la guerre d’indépendance (1945–1954): Entre la reconquête coloniale et la résistance communiste” (PhD diss., Institut d’études politiques de Paris, 1995), on pro-French and neutralist missionaries, 126–28, 293–94; and on the position of Alexis Cras, 128–29, 294–97.

26. For short biographies, Annie Nguyen-Velten and Alain Riou, *Un frère dans la tourmente: Lettres du frère Alexis Cras* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2009), 201–11; “Tiểu sử Cha Alexis Cras Đổ Minh Vọng (1909–1962) [Short biography of Father Alexis Cras Đổ Minh Vọng (1909–1962)],” *Sacerdos* 22, no. 8 (1962): 479–80; Phan Phát Hường, *Việt Nam Giáo Sử*, Q. II [History of Vietnamese Christianity, vol. 2] (Saigon: Cứu Thế Tùng Thư, 1962), 376–77; “Cư xá Phục hưng qua các nhiệm kỳ giám đốc” [Throughout the directors of the Renaissance Circle], *Đa Minh Việt Nam*, 12 January 2011, <http://daminhvn.net/da-minh-viet-nam/cu-xa-phuc-hung-qua-cac-nhiem-ky-giam-doc-1061.html>.
27. Claire Trần Thị Liên, “Les catholiques vietnamiens,” 294–97.
28. “Lettre n. 969 de Charles Journet à Jacques Maritain, Fribourg, Assomption 1948,” in *Journet-Maritain, Correspondance*, vol. 3, 1940–1949, ed. Claude Favez et al. (Saint-Maurice: Saint-Augustin, Parole et Silence), 671–75. L’Eau vive was a small dwelling southeast of Paris, where Dominican father Thomas Philippe taught Thomist philosophy to Dominican or non-Dominican seminarians, as well as to students from Christian missions overseas. Jacques Maritain spent his summers there to give lectures when he was not teaching at Princeton University; *ibid.* 633 n. 2; Claude Favez et al., *Journet-Maritain*, vol. 4, 1950–1957, 860–64.
29. Such pseudonyms were Christianus, Michel Brelivet, or François Lemmeret according to the editors of Alexis Cras’s published letters; Nguyen-Velten and Riou, *Un frère dans la tourmente*, 223–24.
30. Brelivet, “Le nationalisme annamite en face des prétentions françaises sur le Viêt-Nam,” *Témoignage chrétien* 16, no. 3 (March 1948): 50–69.
31. Letter from Alexis Cras to his friend Jules Dieu, January 1948, quoted in Claire Trần Thị Liên, “Les catholiques vietnamiens,” 295.
32. According to Fernand Parrel, Alexis Cras once met Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi to encourage him to find a consensus with the French; Parrel, *De l’emploi des armes spirituelles*, 104–5. The priest admonished one of his former students from the Cercle de Renaissance who had joined the Việt Minh. One of the articles that this student had signed in a Vietnamese newspaper gave a simplistic image of the French population in Vietnam, all reduced to ludicrous profiteers; Brelivet, “Le nationalisme annamite,” 59–60.
33. Michel Brelivet, “Pour sortir de l’impasse,” *La Vie intellectuelle* 15 no. 7 (July 1947): 71.
34. Cras, “L’Église missionnaire,” 6–24.
35. *Ibid.*, 11.
36. *Ibid.*, 9.

37. Ibid., 17.
38. Cras was a close friend of the pro-independence Catholic intellectual Nguyen Manh Ha; Nguyen-Velten and Riou, *Un frère dans la tourmente*, introduction; Claire Trần Thị Liên, “Les catholiques vietnamiens,” 139, 562. Yet he sided strongly with Vichy France during the Second World War, advocated for policy changes in the French Union, and even claimed that in the field of culture, the West remained superior in its analytical, organizational, and methodological skills, hence allowing Westerners to keep influential positions; Cras, “L’Église missionnaire,” 23.
39. On the guided economy, see Geoffrey Gunn, *Rice Wars in Colonial Vietnam: The Great Famine and the Viet Minh Road to Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 145–46; and Benjamin Freud, “Organizing Autarky: Governor General Decoux’s Development of a Substitution Economy in Indochina as a Means of Promoting Colonial Legitimacy,” *Sojourn: The Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 29, no. 1 (2014): 99–131. On cultural policies, see Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
40. Raffin, *Youth Mobilization*, 73, explains how other missionaries, such as the Redemptorists, developed their activities under Vichy Indochina.
41. The association first stayed in the former Masonic lodge of Hanoi, until they moved into a new compound constructed next to the Dominican church; Pierre Gueppe, “Le père Alexis Cras: Témoignage,” in Riou and Nguyen-Velten, *Un frère dans la tourmente*, 90. Father Prisset, the father superior, was part of Decoux’s propaganda committee for a student residence in Hanoi as early as 1941, and had personally designed the building and raised the funds for its construction; La cité universitaire d’Hanoi, “Création d’une cité universitaire à Hanoi,” *L’écho annamite*, 10 October 1941, published online at http://entreprises-coloniales.fr/inde-indochine/Cite_universitaire-Hanoi.pdf. Prisset received a substantial amount of money from Admiral Decoux for this construction project; Jacques Decoux, “Amiral Jean Decoux (1884–1963),” in *Good Morning*, the newsletter of the former students of the Lycée Chasseloup Laubat, http://chimviet.free.fr/lichsu/ngcaoduc/gm99_AmiralDecoux.pdf.
42. Alexis Cras, *Le Cercle “Renaissance” . . . et les Dominicains de Hanoi* (Hanoi: Imp. Taupin, 1941), 5.
43. Cras, *Le Cercle “Renaissance,”* 5.
44. “Quá trình thành lập Câu lạc bộ Phục hưng [The creation of the Renaissance Society],” *Đa Minh Việt Nam*, 10 January 2011, <http://daminhvn.net/da-minh-viet-nam/qua-trinh-thanh-lap-cau-lac-bo-phuc-hung-1060.html>.

45. Đoàn Thanh Liêm, “Chuyện về bức tranh cuối cùng của họa sĩ Nguyễn Gia Trí [The story of Nguyen Gia Tri’s last painting],” *Diễn Đàn Giáo Dân*, no. 158–59 (2015): 114–15.
46. For a photograph and a short history of the painting, Quang Thi, “Bức tranh Giáng Sinh nổi tiếng nhất Việt Nam [The most famous representation of the Nativity in Vietnam],” *Tuổi trẻ online*, 25 December 2015, <http://tuoitre.vn/tin/van-hoa-giai-tri/20151225/buc-tranh-giang-sinh-noi-tieng-nhat-viet-nam/1027234.html>.
47. Théophile Boniface Bửu Dưỡng, “La béatitude d’après Saint Thomas et d’après Sakyamuni” (PhD diss., Institut Catholique de Paris, 1943). On the conversion of the “Prince priest,” see Bửu Dưỡng, “Cuộc hành trình của đời tôi [My personal journey],” undated, <http://www.xuanha.net/tg-Manhxeuonkhoa/16linhmucBuuduong.htm>. On the influence of Alexis Cras on the training of Bửu Dưỡng, see Vũ Đình Trắc, *Công giáo Việt Nam trong truyền thống văn hóa dân tộc* [Vietnamese Catholics in the popular traditions and culture] (Orange: Thời điểm công giáo, 1996), 328–30.
48. Alexis Cras, “La charité chrétienne et le principe confucéen de la réciprocité,” *La Vie intellectuelle* 15 no. 3 (March 1947): 6–18.
49. Khải Hưng, *Hồn bướm mơ tiên* [Butterfly soul dreams of immortality] (Hà Nội: Tự lực văn đoàn, 1933) was arguably the novel starting the literary movement *Tự lực văn đoàn*. Cras’s article starts with a thorough explanation of Personalism and then analyzes the novel in detail; Đỗ Minh Vọng, “Nhận vị trong ‘Hồn bướm mơ tiên’ [The person in “Butterfly soul dreams of immortality”],” *Đài Học*, no. 4–5 (September 1958): 101–212. The essay was first published in *Đài Học*, the periodical of the University of Hue, but it was given as a lecture as early as 1956 at the Cercle de Renaissance in Saigon; Nguyễn Văn Lục, “20 năm triết lý Tây phương ở miền Nam Việt Nam (1955–1975) [Twenty years of Western philosophy in Vietnam (1955–1975)],” *Hợp Lưu, Tập san văn học nghệ thuật biên khảo*, no. 89 (June–July 2006): 90–119.
50. On the Catholics’ engagement in the First Indochina War, see Claire Trần Thị Liên, “Les catholiques vietnamiens.” The dissertation, however, does not discuss in detail the history of ideas among Catholics during the armed conflict.
51. “Người ‘quốc gia’ Việt Nam có chủ nghĩa chi không? [Do Vietnamese nationalists have an ideology?],” in *Tinh Thần*, no. 53 (19 August 1949): 2.
52. Tá Chung, “Duy vật và duy thực [Materialism and Realism],” *Tinh Thần* between August 1949 and May 1950; originally taken from the longer version, Tá Chung, *Duy Vật và Duy Thực, Triết Học Phổ Thông* [Materialism and Realism: A philosophy reader] (Phát Diệm: Sao Biển, 1946). Its author, Tá Chung, an inverted formula for “Us” (*chúng ta*), was in fact Father Lương Kim Định, a priest and philosopher. For

- biographical information, see Vũ Đình Trắc, *Công giáo Việt Nam trong truyền thống văn hóa dân tộc*, 331–37.
53. Tả Chung, *Duy Vật và Duy Thực*, 7.
 54. Supporting the thesis that Father Bửu Dưỡng coined the expression, Đỗ Minh Vọng, “Nhân vị trong ‘Hồn bướm mơ tiên,’” *Đại Học*, no. 4–5 (September 1958): 102. Claiming that Ngô Đình Nhu made the first translation of the concept, Huỳnh Văn Lang, *Nhân chứng một chế độ, tập I* [Witness of a regime, vol. 1] (Westminster: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Nghệ, 2000), 295. Yet the first time the term *Nhân Vị* appeared in the newspaper *Tinh Thần* was in a cover article on the Revolution, claiming that “no independence would be complete without the joint liberation of the nation and the Person”; “Khái niệm về cách mạng [The notion of revolution],” *Tinh Thần*, no. 15 (18 May 1950): 1–2.
 55. Ngô Đình Nhu’s wife’s memoirs recall the help of the Redemptorists during the war; Ngô Đình Quỳnh et al., *La République du Việt-Nam et les Ngô-Đình* (Paris: LHarmattan, 2013).
 56. Keith, *Catholic Vietnam, 195–200*; Miller, *Misalliance*, 44–47.
 57. Huỳnh Văn Lang, *Nhân chứng một chế độ*, 282.
 58. Parrel, *De l’emploi des armes spirituelles*, 107.
 59. Fernand Parrel, “Vietnam: Tournées sociales,” *Bulletin des Missions étrangères de Paris* (November 1953): 26–29; Fernand Parrel, “Le Secrétariat social de Dalat,” *Bulletin des Missions étrangères de Paris* (July 1961): 717–20. See also Claire Trần Thị Liên, “Les catholiques vietnamiens,” 555.
 60. Fernand Parrel, “Vietnam: Syndicats chrétiens, Historique et premier Congrès national,” *Bulletin des Missions étrangères de Paris* (June 1954): 517–24.
 61. Ngô Đình Nhu, “Sự góp sức của người công giáo vào hòa bình ở Việt Nam [The contribution of Catholics to the peace in Vietnam],” *Xã Hội* 1, no. 8 (February 1953): 14, 19.
 62. Even Alexis Cras, who had initially been sympathetic to the Việt Minh and to the neutralist stance taken by Catholic intellectuals such as Nguyen Manh Ha, started to lose hope in Ho Chi Minh in 1952, and recognized the benefits of Parrel and Nhu’s attempts to spread the Christian social doctrine; Correspondence between Nguyen Manh Ha and Alexis Cras, quoted in Claire Trần Thị Liên, “Les catholiques vietnamiens,” 562.
 63. The Preamble of the 1956 Constitution declares that one of the purposes of the Constitution is “to create a democracy respecting the Person”; *Công báo Việt Nam*

- Cộng Hòa* [Journal officiel de la République du Vietnam], Phiên họp thứ 44 [Session 44], 9 July 1956, 3150–53.
64. Parrel, *De l'emploi des armes spirituelles*, 115.
 65. Hà Đức Minh, “Tôi là Cần Lao Việt Nam” [I am a Vietnamese Personalist], *Thời Luận*, between September and October 1964, mainly as an attempt to challenge widely held views, following the collapse of the Republic, that the Cần Lao Party was only a screen organization at the service of the Ngô family.
 66. Hà Đức Minh, “Tôi là Cần Lao Việt Nam,” 24 September 1964: 1.
 67. *Ibid.*, 25 September 1964: 4.
 68. *Ibid.*, 29 September 1964: 4. He stresses that their spiritualism was aimed to bring together all religious faiths that strived for the achievement of humanism and Personalism; *ibid.*, 30 September 1964: 4.
 69. Hà Đức Minh, “Tôi là Cần Lao Việt Nam,” 30 September 1964: 1.
 70. *Ibid.*, 1 October 1964: 1, 4.
 71. A Dominican priest remembers their participation in 1943; Đỗ Xuân Quế, “Hong An Kim Khánh Linh Mực,” *Đa Minh Việt Nam*, <http://daminhvn.net/da-minh-viet-nam/hong-an-kim-khanh-linh-muc-1234.html>. On the alleged role of OPV, see Lữ Giang, “Hành tung bí ẩn của một vị sư,” *Gia đình Nazareth Giáo phận Orange*, <http://www.giadinhnazareth.org/node/3102>.
 72. La rédaction, “Le monde missionnaire en 1955: Vietnam,” *Église vivante*, no. 3 (1956): 196–204.
 73. Đa Minh Việt Nam, “Quá trình thành lập câu lạc bộ phục hưng [The process of creating the Renaissance Circle],” 2011, <http://daminhvn.net/da-minh-viet-nam/qua-trinh-thanh-lap-cau-lac-bo-phuc-hung-1060.html>.
 74. Bửu Lịch, “Les idéologiques de la République du Sud Việt-Nam, 1945–1975” (PhD diss., Université de Paris VII, 1984), 39, dismisses Vietnamese Personalism as a “déviation pathologique” of its original French formulation.
 75. La rédaction, “Le monde missionnaire en 1955: Vietnam,” *Église vivante*, no. 3 (1956): 204.
 76. Fernand Parrel, *Để giúp người công giáo giải đáp những vấn nạn Cộng Sản về tôn giáo* [To help Catholics react against the Communist threat to religion] (Đà Lạt: Văn phòng xã hội Đà Lạt, 1955). On the translation of missionary François Dufay’s *En Chine: L’Étoile contre la croix* (Hong Kong, 1952), see his report on the Secrétariat’s activities; Parrel, “Le Secrétariat social de Dalat,” 718.
 77. Fernand Parrel, “Jeunesse vietnamienne d’aujourd’hui,” *Bulletin des Missions étrangères de Paris* (1957): 1019–40.

78. Fernand Parrel, "Dalat, Session catéchistique," *Bulletin des Missions étrangères de Paris* (1961): 585–87.
79. Fernand Parrel, "Dalat, Tract diffusé par le Secrétariat Social à l'occasion du 1er mai," *Bulletin des Missions étrangères de Paris* (1961): 581–84.
80. Parrel, "Dalat, Tract diffusé par le Secrétariat Social," 583.
81. Fernand Parrel, "L'Église et la population rurale au Vietnam," *Épiphanie* (November 1962): 899–908.
82. Parrel, *De l'emploi des armes spirituelles*, 115.
83. Since the work of *Économie et Humanisme* grew in importance, and drew significant support from the French CNRS, it merged into a secular organization, l'Institut international de recherche et de formation en vue du développement harmonisé (IRFED) in 1958; Hugues Puel, *Économie et humanisme dans le mouvement de la modernité* (Paris: Le Cerf, 2004); Denis Pelletier, *Économie et humanisme: De l'Utopie communautaire au combat pour le Tiers-Monde, 1941–1966* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1996).
84. Huỳnh Văn Lang, *Nhân chứng một chế độ*, 284.
85. Parrel, "Le Secrétariat social de Dalat," 717.
86. Parrel considered that *Economie et Humanisme* "had the particularity to find its origins in a spiritualist humanism acceptable for every man who . . . want[s] to work in the proactive respect of the person and to the creation of the greater good." Fernand Parrel, "Les livres: Economie et humanisme et efficacité," *Bulletin des Missions étrangères* (November 1953): 89.
87. Banque nationale du Viêt-Nam, *Mission "Économie et humanisme": Étude sur les conditions de vie et les besoins de la population du Viêt-Nam, 1957–1959*, vol. 1 (Saigon: Banque nationale du Vietnam, 1959).
88. *Ibid.*, 17.
89. *Ibid.*, 11.
90. For example, Banque nationale du Viêt-Nam, *Mission "Économie et humanisme": Étude sur les conditions de vie et les besoins de la population du Viêt-Nam, 1957–1959*, vol. 2 (Saigon: E.H.B.N., 1959), 615.
91. Banque nationale du Viêt-Nam, *Mission "Économie et humanisme"*, 197.
92. However, ethnic minorities' cults were dismissed as superstitious; Banque nationale du Viêt-Nam, *Mission "Économie et humanisme"*, 95. For the different religious practices in the city and in rural areas, see 41, 52.
93. In 1962, the director of the National Bank translated into Vietnamese Lebre's essay exposing the need for an economic development respecting the spiritual nature of human beings; Louis-Joseph Lebre, *Kinh tế duy nhân và văn minh liên đới* [A human

economy and the solidarity of civilizations], trans. Nguyễn Văn Khoa (Saigon: Văn Hữu Á Châu, 1962).

94. Banque nationale du Viêt-Nam, *Mission "Économie et humanisme": L'agriculture, l'élevage et les forêts* (Saigon: Banque nationale du Vietnam, 1961); and Banque nationale du Viêt-Nam, *Mission "Économie et humanisme": Les pêches* (Saigon: Banque nationale du Vietnam, 1961). On the national councils created, "Le monde missionnaire en 1961," *Église vivante* 14 (1962): 199–200.
95. Louis-Joseph Lebret, *Chronique de la construction d'un État: Journal au Liban et au Moyen-Orient (1959–1964)* (Paris: Geuthner, 2014), 59, 304. Parrel also kept fond memories of this visit; Fernand Parrel, *De l'emploi des armes spirituelles*, 153.