

## Changes in the funeral customs of Catholic people in Saigon - Ho Chi Minh city (1954 – 2024) – A view from "Cultural Relativity" Theory

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### **Abstract**

*Catholic is a global religion, so Catholic funerals organization expresses Catholic belief in the Resurrection and the cultural nuances of each nation. Over the past 70 years (from 1954 to 2024), the organization of Catholic funerals in Saigon (SG) - Ho Chi Minh city (HCMC) has undergone many changes because of urbanization influence and immigration waves as well as cultural diversity of local Catholic communities. This article will present some characteristics of Catholic funerals in SG-HCMC and important changes in dealing with the deceased's body.*

**Keywords:** Funeral, Vietnamese Catholics, Burial, Cremation, Urbanization

### **INTRODUCTION**

After the Geneva Accords in 1954, Vietnam was divided into two parts: Northern and Southern along the 17th parallel. Nearly one million Vietnamese people from the North migrated to the South, including more than 600,000 Catholics and nearly 2,000 Protestants. The arrival of Catholics from Northern has made the Catholic community in Saigon (SG) and now is Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) more numerous and culturally diverse. After 70 years, this community now accounts for about 8.5% of the city's population, contributing significantly to shaping the city's appearance.

Catholics in SG-HCM include 5 communities residing at 5 gateways of the city in 204 parishes and 21 missionary spots, with three main origins: Catholics who migrated from the North since 1954 Geneva Accords, Catholics from the Central region which settled in Saigon before 1954 and Catholics of Chinese ethnicity, about 3,000 people in Cho Lon area.

As Catholics around the world, for Vietnamese Catholics, one of the pillars of belief is: the Resurrection after death like Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church always attaches great importance to dealing with bodies of the deceased, so many solemn rituals are set for burial. The most recent Instruction of Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith - Vatican in 2016: "Ad resurgendum cum Christo" reaffirms the protocol for dealing with deceased in Instruction "Piam et Constantem" announced in 1963:

Following the most ancient Christian tradition, the Church insistently recommends that the bodies of the deceased be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places. In memory of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord, the mystery that illumines the Christian meaning of death, burial is above all the most fitting way to express faith and hope in the resurrection of the body. The Church who, as Mother, has accompanied the Christian during his earthly pilgrimage, offers to the Father, in Christ, the child of her grace, and she commits to the earth, in hope, the seed of the body that will rise in glory. (Ad resurgendum cum Christo, 2016, 3)

Traditional beliefs of Vietnamese also believe that death only causes the body to perish, but the soul will return to their ancestors. By carefully burying body of the deceased, one will show his filial piety to grandparents, parents or relatives.

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Catholics in SG-HCMC believe that body of the deceased needs to be buried carefully with two levels of meaning, first to express filial piety and remember the deceased, and second to preserve a deceased body in order to wait for the last day of the world, this body will be resurrected and reunited with the soul. Although all Catholics, each Catholic group in SG-HCMC maintains its own unique customs, reflecting regional nuances and origins. Entering the 21st century, funeral customs of Catholics in HCMC have many important changes, which is the phenomenon of choosing cremation instead of burying the deceased's body and the tendency to simplify traditional rituals of Vietnamese culture.

According to the author's investigation in 2018 - 2019, there are at least 1,224 graves in Catholic churchyards in HCMC. All parishes can buy more land in neighboring areas such as Binh Duong province or Long An province, ... but more than five years up to now, only 29 more dead people have been buried in these 1,224 graves. Since 2000, most Catholic families in HCMC have chosen cremation. Only from 2014 to 2024, 08 parish priests were cremated by parishioners and their cremation ashes have been kept in a private place in the church, instead of being buried in a cemetery for priests as usual. This had not happened for the previous 60 years, except some special cases when the bodies of chaplains could not be preserved because of war circumstances. On the contrary, in Hanoi - capital and largest urban of Vietnam, very few Catholic families choose cremation. That means limited urban land fund is an important factor but not the deciding factor in Catholics' burial of deceased at SG-HCMC. This problem comes from the value system and standards of living in urban areas, in other words, from urban culture. Therefore, it is urgent to deepen relationship between the unique "value system" of SG-HCMC and the "change in funeral customs" of Catholics here. The research results will show an overall picture of the interaction of a Western religion in an Eastern urban and how a religious belief flexibly integrates with the changes of times from 1954 to 2024 from the view of " Cultural Relativity" theory

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In Vietnam, Catholic funerals customs in SG - HCMC from 1954 to 2024 is a new topic, without many works. The two most directly related works can be mentioned as the M.A. thesis "Understanding the funeral rituals of Vietnamese Catholics in urban today (case study of Minh Duc parish - Ho Chi Minh City diocese)" by Nguyen Thi Thuy, Ethnology major at HCMC University of Social Sciences and Humanities, completed in 2013 and the Doctor thesis: "Funeral rites of Vietnamese Catholics in Ho Chi Minh city after the Second Vatican council (case studies of Tan Lap and Tan Dinh churches)" by Ta Duy Linh, completed in 2020 at Tra Vinh University. Both of authors chose to study the case of three parishes: Minh Duc parish (Nguyen Thi Thuy, 2013), Tan Lap parish and Tan Dinh parish (Ta Duy Linh, 2020).

Besides, there are a few scientific articles related to the topic of Catholic funerals in Vietnam such as: "Differences between Catholic funeral rites & Buddhist funerals" (2016) by Charles Infosino, "Inculturation and Symbiosis Through Ritual Practice: Catholic Funerals in the Northern Delta of Viet Nam" (2023) by Le Thi Cuc.

For this research, the selected subjects are all parishioners living in Saigon - HCMC including 204 parishes with many differences in cultural nuances and historical backgrounds.

On the same topic "Catholic funerals and its relationship with the influence of local culture", there are many studies throughout the world and Asia over the past two decades, but for a closer approach to this topic, we can review some typical research projects such as:

"Remembrance and Hope in Roman Catholic Funeral Rites: Attitudes of Participants Towards Past and Future of the Deceased" (2004) by Thomas Quartier, Christiaan Hermas and Anton H.M.Scheer; "Cross-cultural beliefs, ceremonies, and rituals surrounding death of a loved one" (2006) by Sandra L. Loba, JoAnne M Youngblut and Dorothy Brooten; "Differences between China and the West: Research on the Catholic Funeral in China during Late Ming and Early Qing" (2010) by Q.Xiao, ...

Especially in Asia, however, most of them are case studies, such as: "A Literature Review of the Development, Purposes, and Religious Variations of the Funeral Ritual" by Codi Leigh Smith published in 2017, "Cremation in Hong Kong: Catholic, Anglican, and Secular Perspectives" by James W. Ellis published in 2020. In 2021,

two scientific articles provide a lot of new knowledge about Catholic funerals are: "Christian Influence in the Bau-Jagoi Bidayuh Traditional Funeral Customs" by Yvonne Michelle Campbell & Damien Anak Mikeng, and "Religious Practices On Honoring The Dead: Need For Contextualized Christian Formation", written by Julio Ramillo A. Mercurio. Most recently, we can mention "Catholic funeral traditions and alterations due to COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications to compliance of health protocols" by Helen B. Boholano, Ed.D. and Remedios C. Bacus, published in 2022. These two authors studied the challenge of solution from celebrating funerals for Catholics according to traditional customs amid a serious situation that requires health protection.

Although not overlapping with this article topic, the above-mentioned works have provided a lot of practical experiences and multi-dimensional informations, helping this article refer to more implementation methods.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

This article chooses Functionalist approach with "Cultural Relativity" theory of Franz Boas and Malinowski. The most common feature, Cultural Relativism theory of these two scholars holds that it is impossible to evaluate one value system by looking at another value system, "cultural characteristics are best understood, when viewed considered in a specific cultural context containing those cultural characteristics" (Gary Ferraro & Susan Andretta, 2010). This article examines transformation of the life value system of a Catholic community, specifically the celebration of funerals, under the pressure of changes in urban environment and the effort to maintain Catholic faith as a a minority community.

Vietnamese Catholics have maintained close ties with the Vatican for nearly 500 years. Therefore, there seems to be no change in belief as has been the case in some Anglican churches (Andrew Nolt, 2021) or some parts of South America.

To conduct research, this article is also limited in terms of research object, research space and research time. The scope of research is Catholic community in HCMC, the research space is the current HCMC area, which before 1975 corresponded to the place name "Do thanh Saigon, Gia Dinh and surrounding areas". The survey time was limited from 1954 - when the migration of many Catholics from the north to the south of Vietnam happened, until now - 2024, lasting 70 years.

Starting from a Functional perspective with the "Cultural Relativity" theory, this topic is researched using three main methods:

Fieldwork method: the author of this artical observed and recorded funeral processes at 152/204 parishes in HCMC for more than 20 years from 2004 to 2024. In addition, we also surveyed burials and cremations at Binh Hung Hoa cemetery, the largest cemetery in HCMC

Comparison method: we compared data and frequencies of phenomena appearing at funerals to create a table to compile statistics on changes in Catholic funeral organization process.

Documentation systematization method: photos and videotapes of many funerals before 1975 were collected and arranged them into categories to provide material for the article.

## **CONCEPTS OF DEALING WITH THE DECEASED'S BODY BY CATHOLIC FAITH AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF VIETNAMESE**

As mentioned in the Introduction, the Catholic Church believes that "The human body will be resurrected on the last day", death is a temporary rest to wait for the day of resurrection, so before the Second Vatican Council – Vatican II (1962 - 1965), Catholics handle the deceased's body in only way that is burial and ignore the ways of dealing with the deceased's body according to local customs (Giacomo B., 2003).

By burying the bodies of the faithful, the Church confirms her faith in the resurrection of the body, and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity. She cannot, therefore, condone attitudes or permit rites that involve erroneous ideas about death, such as considering death as the definitive annihilation of the person, or the moment of fusion with Mother Nature or the universe, or as a stage in the cycle of regeneration, or as the definitive liberation from the “prison” of the body.

Furthermore, burial in a cemetery or another sacred place adequately corresponds to the piety and respect owed to the bodies of the faithful departed who through Baptism have become temples of the Holy Spirit and in which “as instruments and vessels the Spirit has carried out so many good works” (Ad resurgendum cum Christo, 2016, 3)

In Asia, burial - in accordance with the spirit of the Vatican's directive - is widely performed in two forms including: wall grave burial (vertical cemetery, popular in Islam community in India, Philippines, Timor Leste, Israel, Taiwan or put in rock caves like in Bali, Indonesia) and underground burial (popular in China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Korea). In addition, there are many other customs of dealing with the dead body in Asia: cremation (popular in Thailand, Cambodia, and Buddhist countries, especially Theravada Buddhism), sky burial (popular in Tibet), water burial (popular in Hindu community - India).

Vietnamese culture also has a similar view to Catholicism when most of Vietnamese respect the dead body and burial, believe that the greatest happiness after ending a life's journey is to have a beautiful, peaceful grave with an idiom "living - a home, dying - a tomb". Except for a few minority communities such as the Khmer, the Brahmins Cham and some small groups of Chinese ethnicity.

However, SG-HCMC is a bustling riverside metropolis, with more than 8 million people gathered in a space of only 2100 square kilometers. Therefore, funerals of Catholics in SG-HCMC also have their own mark. First, most Catholic funerals at SG-HCMC are held flexibly, promoting simplicity according to the geographical conditions and living circumstances of modern urban areas. Second, Catholics in SG-HCMC are also at the forefront of applying the scientific and technological advances and achievements of the era in which they live to organize funerals for their relatives while avoiding violating religious teachings from Church. Third, because of heterogeneous origins, despite its simplicity, each Catholic area in SG-HCMC still inherits the traditional customs of its own community or integrates non-Catholic customs from other nearby places.

### **FLEXIBILITY AND SIMPLICITY IN ORGANIZING FUNERALS FOR CATHOLICS AT SG-HCMC**

Following the New Testament, the teachings of Catholic Church and the tradition of respecting the bodies of the dead (I. Al-Furaiji & Abd H. Al-Qaisi, 2024) , moreover, Vietnamese Catholics also believe that the dead are still part of parish community, continuing to accompany the living.

Therefore, according to the data we investigated, in the 70 years from the 1954 migration to 2024, Catholic parishes and other Catholic organizations in SG-HCMC have opened and rented up to 167 cemeteries. Among them, parish communities opened 135 cemeteries for parishioners, SG-HCMC dioceses opened 6 cemeteries for priests, other Catholic Religious orders opened 14 cemeteries for monks and leaders of compatriots from old parishes in the north, before the 1954 migrating, opened 12 cemeteries to bury old compatriots. Cemeteries were established and then cleared, and another cemetery was born. In the 1980s - 1990s, HCMC had more than 100 Catholic cemeteries coexisting.

**Table 1. Total number of cemeteries of Catholics in SG-HCMC from 1954 - 2024**

Parish cemetery belongs to SG-HCMC diocese	Cemetery of fellow parishioners in the North before 1954 migrating to the South	The cemetery for priests was established by the Archbishop	Cemeteries for monks were established by Catholic religious orders	Total
135	12	6	14	167

Source: Author's statistics based on field data

However, since 2000 until now, Catholic families in SG-HCMC have begun to switch to using cremation for their relatives deceased bodies.

The number of Catholic cemeteries in SG-HCMC decreased rapidly. Some were cleared by the city government for other uses, for example in 1985: Tan Dinh holy land became Pham Van Hai market, Tu Duc parish cemetery became Tu Duc market, Binh Tho churchyard became Thu Duc Children's House. Some other cemeteries were

not cleared by the government but were also abandoned by Catholics because they switched to cremation, such as Bac Ha parish cemetery, Hoa Hung parish cemetery, Holy land of Lazarus,...

The compromise between maintaining the Catholic church's belief in resurrection in the tradition of burying the dead and cremation in urban conditions has become a difficult problem. On one hand, Catholics in HCMC want to maintain the form of burying the dead according to the teachings of the Catholic Church and the spirit of Vietnamese culture. On the other hand, cremation has many outstanding advantages in urban spaces where land is limited. Besides the pressure on land fund, industrial life in urban areas is also short on time. Choosing to bury will require time for visits and death anniversary ceremonies, spending more money to build a grave, and when the grave is damaged, it must be repaired, reburied, etc. Understanding the situation, the Second Vatican Council – Vatican II (1962-1965) allowed parishioners, in addition to burial, to use cremation, with the condition that it must come from truly difficult conditions and not for the purpose of expressing opposition to resurrection belief. As the "Ad resurgendum cum Christo" – 2016 about cremation:

In circumstances when cremation is chosen because of sanitary, economic or social considerations, this choice must never violate the explicitly-stated or the reasonably inferable wishes of the deceased faithful. The Church raises no doctrinal objections to this practice, since cremation of the deceased's body does not affect his or her soul, nor does it prevent God, in his omnipotence, from raising up the deceased body to new life. Thus cremation, in and of itself, objectively negates neither the Christian doctrine of the soul's immortality nor that of the resurrection of the body. (Ad resurgendum cum Christo, 2016, 4)

And the disposal of ashes after cremation:

When, for legitimate motives, cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area, which has been set aside for this purpose, and so dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority. (Ad resurgendum cum Christo, 2016, 5)

However, cremation in HCMC only became popular after 2002. Data from Binh Hung Hoa cemetery office shows that from 1986 to 2003 there were more than 70,000 graves, of which 12,104 were Catholic graves, but from 2004 to 2016, 13 years, only 122 new graves were added, of which only 4 were Catholics. On the contrary, when counting 800 Catholic funerals performed by eight large funeral companies in HCMC in 2017 and 2018, the number of funerals accounted for 94%.

**Table 2. Survey of cremation and burial rates of Catholics according to 08 funeral companies in SG-HCMC**

Funeral company	2017		2018		Total/ratio	
	Burial	Cremation	Bury	Cremation	Bury	Cremation
An Lac	2	48	0	50	2	98
An Lac Dinh	0	50	1	49	1	99
Hieu Tho	5	45	4	46	9	91
Hiep Phat	7	43	8	42	15	85
Tan Lap	1	49	0	50	1	99
Tan Hoa	4	46	7	43	11	89
Tien De 2	5	45	3	47	8	92
Xuan Tho	1	49	0	50	1	99
Total	25	375	23	377	48 6%	752 94%

Source: Author's statistics

As late of April 2024, there are only 46 Catholic cemeteries left in the whole city, of which only 26 cemeteries still accept burials, the most are being in the eastern area (Thu Duc city, 11 cemeteries) and the total capacity of these 26 cemeteries are 1,195 graves left. With the current ratio of options between burial and cremation, this number of graves can be used for another 15-18 years. After that, maybe Catholics in HCMC will stop doing burials.

Compared to HCMC, Hanoi city is the capital of Vietnam, however, the choice of cremating the deceased's body for Catholics here is few, the cremation of monks and priests is almost not yet. In Hue and Da Nang cities, the number of Catholic families choosing cremation is higher than in Hanoi but still at a low level.

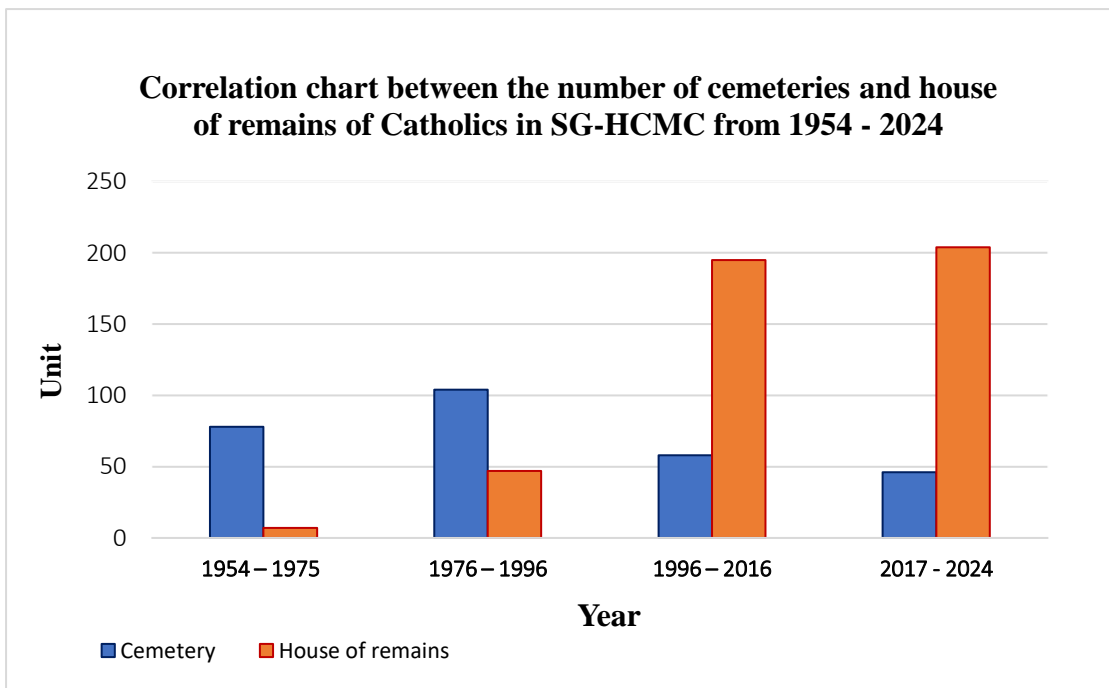
Nguyen Hong Duong (2013) explained that this is a unique feature of Catholic funerals in Ho Chi Minh City: "Many parishes and parishes in Ho Chi Minh City, due to unfavorable burial conditions, have their relatives deadbodies cremated. The remain ash is stored in an urn. The parish reserves a place for private urns" (p.217). Based on the number of houses storing ashes in parishes, after 70 years, from 7 to 204, we can see a shift in the form of burial to cremation of deceased's body in HCMC gradually becomes a norm.

**Table 3 . Summary of the number of cemeteries and Catholic remains in Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City over time**

Number	1954 – 1975	1976 – 1996	1996 – 2016	2017 - 2024
Cemetery (still buried)	78 (78)	104 (101)	58 (46)	46 (26)
House of remains	7	47	195	204

Source: Author's statistics based on data from parishes in HCMC

Data on the number of Catholic cemeteries and the number of parishes storing ashes houses in HCMC by time from 1954 – 1975 (Table 3) is shown in the following chart



**Figure 1.** Chart of number of Catholic cemeteries and Catholic parishes storing ashes houses in HCMC by time from 1954 – 1975

In addition to the decision to choose the form of cremation of the dead body, the spirit of simplicity is also reflected in the omission of a number of different activities and processes in Catholic funerals at SG-HCMC. In addition, increase the convenience of organizing a funeral by using full-service provided by funeral companies.

Funerals in SG-HCMC gradually have fewer mourners. Communication in Catholic funerals has gradually shifted from the nucleus of the village and community spirit with the funeral day as a procession, to the quick and simple spirit of urban life. The parishes in SG-HCMC are no longer have "passing bells" to announce that someone has just passed away as Xuan Loc or Phu Cuong. Many families are also gradually giving up traditional funeral long dress, replacing them with black shirts and black skirts for neatness and convenience. In the funerals of Catholics in SG-HCMC, there is little guidance and direction from the clan leader like in Northern of Vietnam, but mainly families with a deceased person will take care during the funeral.

### **UNIQUE MARKINGS IN FUNERALS OF EACH CATHOLIC COMMUNITY AT SG-HCMC**

The second characteristic is the diversity in funeral organization. Vietnamese mourning has many rituals. Pham Minh Thao (2008) lists up to 16 rituals performed over 3 years, 22 regulations with 181 laws divided into 5 groups (p.152-208). However, Catholics in SG-HCMC organize funerals much more simply. The Catholic community of Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City is also not homogeneous in terms of composition and origin of parishioners, so each community still maintains its own traditions.

There are two folk customs that Catholics in SG-HCMC are influenced in their funerals organization, whether the deceased are bishops, priests or monks. The first custom is "ha tho", before shrouding, the deceased's body is lowered to the ground three times before being placed in a coffin. The custom of "ha tho" is a folk way to make the final verification of death status. The second custom is called "Tam dao quan" in Vietnamese means "three steps to move the coffin safely", including: Light incense to worship before the coffin; touch the coffin to awaken soul of the dead person and moving the coffin to the church.

This custom originates from the custom of "exploiting the coffin moving path" – an old custom from southern of Vietnam. Then, funeral families often break a clay pot, so that the dead person's spirit wakes up and merges with the body to leave, even though this custom against Catholic doctrine. After celebrating funeral mass at the church, undertakers usually carries the coffin and on their shoulders and bows three times in front of the church door to say goodbye to the parish, before continuing their journey to cemetery. To show respect for the dead, the undertakers must use polite words when calling out movements: "raise" instead of "lift up", "fit" instead of "skewer the tree", ...

The placement of coffins in churches in HCMC churches is also not consistent. Many churches place them at the back (ex: Loc Hung, Nghia Hoa, An Nhon, Lam Son, ...) while others place them in the middle or above, near the sanctuary (Phu Binh, Dong Tien, Thach Da, ...). Priest Tran Van Dac, old parish priest of Nam Hoa and priest Nguyen Kim Dien, old parish priest of Tan My, said: "The closer the coffin is placed to the sanctuary, the more it determines the role and efforts of that person while he or she was alive." Meanwhile, priest Nguyen The Thu, professor of Liturgical theology, parish priest of Thang Long, explained: "Because the coffins in HCMC are currently very high and placed on chairs, these coffins easily cover the altar and Eucharist, so they should be placed at the end to maintain solemnity of the last funeral mass."

Originated from loyal immigrants to Southern Ming dynasty or escaping from Taiping Rebellion and Boxers bandits (Lynn Struve A., 1984, 33 ; Nicolas F.Gier, 2014), a few Catholics of Chinese ethnicity in Cho Lon consciousness connected to the Ming dynasty even though it has faded. They often prepare an offering tray with dishes reminiscent of Ming dynasty: red foods that evoke the word "Zhou" – means "red" in Chinese and it is also the family name of Ming dynasty kings, the dishes include: shrimp, pink grapefruit, "nian gao" – Chinese rice cake, etc. Preferred Ming dynasty's high-lidded bamboo shoot style coffin, decorated with many

Ming dynasty historical relics: Zeng Chenggong took back Taiwan, Qin Liangyu heroine, especially the "blue sky and white sun" pattern on the top of coffin.

Funerals of Catholic community of former Southern origin still retains traces of their escape from the Nguyen dynasty. Coffins are often not decorated with images of God or Catholic pictures. Just like the custom of breaking a clay pot when moving coffin, the funeral families in this community sometimes pour three jars of wine down to the gate - a ritual to commemorate those who died before on the same of this coffin moving street. The knightly personality of Southern culture is still compromised silently in mourning, even it maybe against Catholic beliefs.

The Catholic community in the south of SG-HCMC, typically the Binh An and Xom Chieu deanary, is greatly affected by the interwoven terrain of rivers and canals. Since then, the hexagonal style coffin has been widely used, especially before the year 2000. The use of this coffin type is that it can dissipate wind backwards and many angles to reduce vibrations. The Catholic community in the north of SG-HCMC maintains the custom of carrying the coffin and marching through the streets for the dead to say "goodbye" to their neighbors and friends, before being placed on van to cemetery. Catholics on both street sides also make sign of Cross and bowed to the deceased, not forgetting to praise something good about the deceased or ask them to convey some prayers to God. This custom shows that parishioners believe that the dead continue to live in the coffin and only truly pass away when the coffin is lowered into the grave or put into the crematorium.

## **PROMOTE THE APPLICATION OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENTS IN FUNERALS**

The last characteristic is the modernity in funeral culture of Catholics in SG-HCMC. The creations: zinc coffin, two-compartment concrete grave,... all originated from Saigon. Two creative experiments by Catholics in burial methods during the Vietnamese war and Renovation period 1986 were bone statues and representative remain that were strictly banned by HCMC Catholic leadership. Bone statues making is to mix cremated ashes with clay to form statues of Virgin Mary or saints , etc., was banned for insulting sacred images.

Representative remain is a form of not being able to find out the body, so bringing sea water, soil or rocks where the person died to worship in home, was banned because of unsanitary and similar to animist beliefs.

When information technology and social networks advanced, Catholics in HCMC quickly grasped the trend with the service of sending friends via email, changing avatars on Facebook to black.

Catholics in SG-HCMC also have access to safe and sustainable ashes preservation services : super durable ashes boxes are advertised to withstand the temperature of lava or earthquakes, even though there have never been any earthquakes in SG-HCMC.

Besides, "stone or glass keepsake cremains" is use high heat pressure to press the ashes into a square stone or crystal core have appeared in some churches, but HCMC Catholic leadership have not yet banned them. Maybe in a few decades, stone keepsake cremains will become popular among Catholics because it is more convenient than storing remains in jars.

In general, funeral ceremonies - an important event in the life cycle rituals of Catholics in SG-HCMC are also influenced by the characteristics of this city, which is simplicity to save space and time; diversity, tolerance and acceptance of differences in each community and promote modernity, flexibly apply scientific and technological advances in ritual ceremonies.

## **CONCLUSION**

Catholics in SG-HCMC are concerned about how to treat the deceased's body. The funeral organization process demonstrates the common belief in Resurrection while also reflecting the unique culture of each community residing in this city.



Along with the development of society, large cities across Vietnam, including HCMC, will have to develop upward living spaces. Similarly, human values also prioritize simplicity and modernity. In the future, some changes in the process of organizing funerals for Catholics in HCMC will take place:

Churches will prepare funeral homes for parishioners to hold funerals like in the US and European countries instead of most Catholic families still placing their loved ones' bodies and holding funerals at home. Materials used in funerals will be selected to be recycled or guaranteed to be sustainable, environmentally friendly and thrifty.

Research on changes in funeral customs of Catholics in SG-HCMC can be expanded and connected with other works on the theme of Catholicism in Southeast Asian cities, becoming a reference model for topics which related to life cycle rituals of Catholics in Asia in comparison with Europe and the world.

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