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Sanctification of Jobs: A Ritual to Orient the Economic Behaviors of Catholics in Vietnam

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Abstract

Sanctification of jobs is a ritual that Catholics celebrate to ask God to bless their jobs in the coming year. During this Mass, people will present their jobs to God with the wish that these works will be sanctified and that they will be fruitful and successful. These jobs to be blessed must be genuine, not against the teaching of the God and the Catholic Church. They are, of course, not harmful to

themselves, their families, and society. Through the research regarding people's jobs in Viet Nam, we have come to know that the Mass of sanctifying works in this area helps people to realize the significance of jobs in everyday life. This is an authentic act according to the Catholic Church's teaching and it is to bring glory to God.

Keywords: Catechism, Catholic, Choosing Jobs, Common Deeds in the Jobs, Sanctification of Jobs

1. Introduction

The "Sanctification" term is used in many religions, but perhaps most commonly in the Catholic Church. Accordingly, Sanctification means making someone or something sacred by conducting a religious ritual. For Catholics, Sanctification is God's act of radically changing a person or thing from ordinary to holy to serve God. Sanctifying jobs means doing the jobs that people are and will be doing well thanks to God's blessing through performing the blessing ceremony from the God at the church (Cited from an in-depth interview with a Priest in in Ben Tre, 2020).

The sanctification of jobs is a ritual that takes place on the 3rd day of every Lunar New Year at Catholic churches in Vietnam. This is a Mass aimed at directing the believer's economic behavior towards holiness, reminding believers to be aware of their actions, not for personal gain but to harm others. Each person must work with their own integrity, not cheating, not making fake goods, poor quality goods to deceive consumers in order to gain more profit... Catholics always ask God to bless their work and give them the enthusiasm, health, and intellectual capacity to do well according to God's teachings. This has had a significant impact on the economic behavior of the Catholic community in Viet Nam today. This is also a topic related to the interaction between religious beliefs and the economic activities of people.

This topic has been studied by many foreign scholars, such as Max Weber's 1905 collection of many papers in German entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. This book can be considered one of the first works to deal with capitalism in relation to the interaction between religion and economy in the West. Later, the book was translated into English in 1930 by Talcott Parsons and reprinted several times. In Vietnam, this book was translated into Vietnamese by Bui Van Nam Son, Nguyen Nghi, Nguyen Tung, Tran Huu Quang and published in 2008. Or, the article by Robert J. Barro (2003): "Religion and growth Religion and Economic Growth" in *American Sociological Review* also mentioned the role of religious beliefs in ethics and honesty in the economic activities of followers.

One of the recent studies by McCleary, M. Rachel, and Robert J. Barro with the title "The wealth of religions: The political economy of believing and belonging" published in 2019 also affirms that religious beliefs motivate people to work more productively through values such as diligence, integrity, and thrift. In Vietnam, there are also a number of articles on this topic, such as Nguyen Hong Duong's article on "The philosophy of economic development of religion" published in the *Journal of Religious Studies* (No. 10/2017) [8] affirming the philosophy of religion is towards a humane economy, helping society to develop harmoniously, because "religion does not directly produce material wealth, but it indirectly contributes efforts in the creation of a prosperous and happy society" (p.19). Or, Do Quang Hung's article on "Religion and economic growth, anti-corruption" published in *Front Magazine* in 2018, mentioned religious economic issues, specifically the aspect of religion contributing to economic growth and religion being significant in the fight against corruption. According to the author, religion is both a system of behavior and actions of religious people and a cultural indicator that has a positive impact on business

ethics and the prevention of corruption.

From the perspective of Catholic doctrine, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* book was written by the Vietnam Bishops' Conference and published by Religious Publishing House in 2011 also mentions the following issues: issues on the right to employment, labor, economic initiatives, economic life, fair wages, strikes, contributions to social security, unemployment, concern for human interests,... especially is the sacredness of God in labor (p. 862-863). Or, the *Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, the Testament of the Patriarch of the Cistercian Congregation of the Holy Family...* also mention many contents related to the choice of profession and the principles of professional performance of believers in the Catholic faith.

In Vietnam, the number of Catholics counted in 2019 was 5,866,169 (General Statistics Office, 2020, p. 21) ^[6]. Research on the interaction between religion and economic activities in this community of believers has not been interesting yet. There are some articles and books that were written related to religious life, mainly focusing on the cultural and social aspects of Catholic believers in this region. Therefore, this article is an attempt to understand the impact of religious life, and religious beliefs on the economic activities of believers, namely the choice of profession and the performance of professions of Catholics in Viet Nam nowadays.

The article uses survey data in December 2020 in Catholic communities in the Southwest and Central Highlands of Vietnam. This field data source is analyzed from 15 in-depth interviews of dignitaries and believers, and 128 questionnaires in these two regions. The article's contents focus on issues such as sanctifying jobs, choosing jobs, and performing jobs according to current Catholic ethical standards.

2. Sanctification of Jobs: A Ritual Embodies Catholic Doctrine on the Orientation of Believers' Jobs

During the three days of the Traditional New Year (Lunar New Year) in Vietnam, the Catholic Church of Vietnam spends the third day of the year celebrating the sanctification of jobs for the believer community in the parish where they reside.

On this day, believers come to the church to not only give thanks to God for creating human beings and all things but also to present their jobs that are and will be done to ask for God's blessings in the new year (Cited from an in-depth interview with a Priest in Can Tho, 2020). The Jobs that can be presented to God in this rite of Sanctification are the jobs that are suitable according to God's will done to feed the family, serve the community and society. In the Constitution, chapter III, number 34 of the Second Vatican Council, it is mentioned that "... in making a living for themselves and for their families, all men and women who work effectively to serve society have a reason to believe that by their own labors they continue the work of their Creator, serve their brethren, contribute their merits to the accomplishment of God's will in history" (Franois De Sales, Happiness, 2018). Therefore, Catholics must choose suitable jobs according to their abilities, such as those involving physical labor, mental labor, or spiritual labor (service, association with God). to perform. The Catholic view is that "everyone can choose for himself a job according to his or her own ability and according to the circumstances, environment as well as the assignment of the mass

organization, as long as those jobs must be beneficial to them." benefit society and glorify God" (Cited from an in-depth interview with a Priest in Ben Tre, 2020). This is also mentioned in the Testament of the Patriarch of the Cistercian Congregation of the Holy Family: "For our part, do not act cowardly; If you are strong, you will work hard, if you are weak, you will work light. If you consider it in a family, you can see that clearly, you don't need to say long words" (Cited from the Teachings of the Cistercian Patriarch). In carrying out their work, believers "must respect the frameworks of morality and social justice in order to fulfill God's will for man" (Vietnam Bishops Conference, 2011, p. 863). Because, according to the Bible, God has entrusted the earth to man to cultivate, preserve, and maintain and increase wealth is seen as an act of justice toward oneself and toward others. God also puts each person in a garden suitable for them such as fields, factories, factories, lecture halls, stages... and wants people, whether they are intellectual workers or manual workers, to try to do it. working hard to be profitable according to the degree of ability God gives (Cited from an in-depth interview with a Priest in Ben Tre, 2020). Therefore, man must work diligently, must use all his strength and wisdom given by God to profit according to His will. The Catholic Catechism also points out that, from a moral point of view, acts such as "speculation, artificially fluctuating prices with the aim of profiting for oneself but causing damage to others; bribe, falsify judgment of those who are obliged to decide according to the law; appropriate and use collective property as their own; irresponsible business, tax fraud, forgery of checks and invoices, excessive spending, wastefulness, willful damage to private or public property..." (Vietnam Bishops Conference, 2011, p. 857) are all considered dishonest and are not allowed, because Catholic morals do not allow them. Thus, for Catholic doctrine, the choice and exercise of a profession in economic activity is for the purpose of profit, but must be ethical in the solidarity of people with each other, and the expression of governance. the good of man to God's creation.

Accordingly, the specific works that Catholics perform in order to present to God on the Day of Sanctification must be those that benefit the social community and glorify God. Catholics are not allowed to do works that are harmful to the community and are contrary to Catholic morals such as theft, robbery, prostitution, production and distribution of pornographic/depraved works, gambling; not participating in criminal organizations/against justice, businesses/economic organizations that wreak havoc on the environment and violate human rights, ruthlessly pursue profits, despite the bad consequences for society... These occupations are not accepted by Catholic doctrine and will not be presented during the Sanctification of jobs and there will be no blessings from God (Cited from an in-depth interview with a Priest in the Central Highlands, 2020).

Therefore, it can be said that the Sanctification of jobs is a special ritual in Viet Nam that expresses Catholic doctrine related to work orientation and professional behavior in the economic activities of believers. According to Priest in Ben Tre province, only legitimate jobs are worthy to be presented to God and pray for his blessings so that the jobs can be developed well to benefit themselves, their families, and the social community, especially towards more glory for God. Therefore, Catholics in Viet Nam always pay attention to this issue in choosing and performing their jobs (Cited

from an in-depth interview with a Priest in in Ben Tre, 2020).

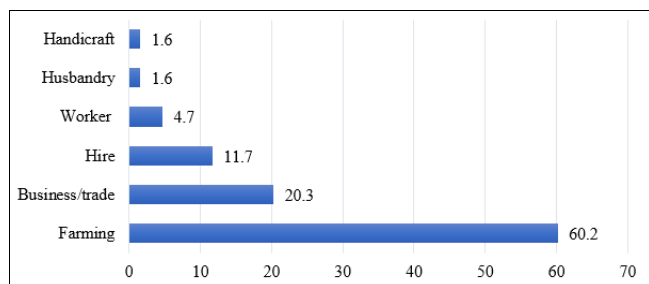
3. Jobs and Jobbing Attitude of Catholics

3.1 Jobs of Catholics

The Southwest region and the Central Highlands of Vietnam are known for their natural wealth, which is very suitable for agricultural and livestock development. The two areas are also long-standing residences of ethnics such as Khmer, Vietnamese, Hoa, Cham (in the Southwest region), K'ho, Ede, M'ngong, Ma, Ba Na, Jarai... (in the Central Highlands). These two areas are also considered to be developed to many religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhism, etc.

Catholicism was introduced in these two areas very early. In the Southwest region, Catholicism was spread around 1670, then many parishes were established such as Cai Mon in 1702 (Ben Tre), Cai Nhum in 1730 (Ben Tre), and Bai San in 1750 (Tra Vinh), Phuoc Hao in 1754 (Tra Vinh), Cu Lao Gieng in 1778 (An Giang), Bo Ot in 1779 (Can Tho)... (Tran Huu Hop, 2012, p. 29) ^[9]. And, in the Central Highlands, Catholicism was spread in the mid-nineteenth century by priests such as Combes, Desgouts De, Dourissbaure An, Fontaine... (Truong Thi Ngoc Anh, 2020) ^[10]. Currently, Catholics in these two areas account for about 35% of the total number of Catholics in Vietnam. They are Vietnamese, K'ho, Ede, M'ngong, M'ngong, Ba Na, Jarai...

Currently, Catholics in these two areas live on income from agricultural activities and business/trading; the remaining few live on income from wage jobs, or workers... The analysis results of the questionnaire also show that more than 60% of surveyed households have their main income from farming activities and over 20% income from business/trading activities; the remaining few rely on income from wage jobs, workers, and livestock (see Fig 1).



Source: Survey results by questionnaire in 2020

Fig 1: Main source of income from economic activities of Catholic families (unit: %)

The reason why most Catholics choose farming as their main occupation for their livelihood is because these areas are considered the largest agricultural areas of Vietnam. The people here, including Catholics, have long lived by farming, taking agriculture as a livelihood for themselves, their families, and their communities. *"Farming is already a traditional occupation of Catholics here. There are many fields, gardens, and fields here, which were discovered early, the land is good and easy to grow, so this profession is the best and brings the most stability to our lives"* (Cited from an in-depth interview with a believer, 57 years old, in Can Tho, 2020).

According to Catholic doctrine, farming is one of the true jobs, because it is a job that requires both physical and

mental strength of man. In order to get good results from this job, farmers not only use their physical strength to work in their fields but also use their intellect in choosing varieties, choosing planting time, caring techniques, etc. That is one of the jobs that forces farmers to work hard to make a profit. When farmers work with both their physical and mental strength to create benefits, they will receive God's reward and be blessed by God. This was also mentioned in the *"Parable of the silver bars"*. This parable referred to God's praise and reward for those who are diligent, trying to use the capital given to them by God for profit; and punish those who are lazy and do not know how to work to profit from the capital provided. That capital is time, health, youth, talent, and also the energies and natural resources present in this universe. This capital is created by God and given to humans to use (Cited from an in-depth interview with a priest in Ben Tre, 2020).

In addition to farming, Catholics also work in other Jobs such as business/trade, hired labor, work, etc. The number of these jobs (according to the questionnaire survey) is not much, but it is also one of the jobs that they choices to make a living for themselves and their families. These are also considered genuine jobs according to Catholic doctrine. Because, workers still have to use the capital that God gives such as health, opportunity, and intelligence to work and make profits. *"Works such as trading, doing business, being a worker, being a craftsman... if they don't violate Catholic principles such as destroying the environment, making illegal profits, etc. encouraged to practice to support themselves and their families"* (Cited from an in-depth interview of a priest in the Central Highlands, 2020). When performing these jobs, believers always try their best to get the best source of income, but they also believe that such profit should not come from unrighteousness. That's why, when we went to ask the local government for permission to study the livelihood of the Catholic community in the Southwest region and the Central Highlands, we learned (information from the government), Catholics in these two areas always comply well with the provisions of the law. Catholics almost do not participate in illegal activities of the state such as gambling, cockfighting, theft, robbery, etc. Explaining these issues, a priest in Can Tho said, that Catholics are educated in Catholic doctrine and ethics from an early age. Catholic doctrine has been instilled in each person. This affects their lives, including whether they should or should not do something in society. *"Having been born into a Catholic family, learning catechism is natural. Learn from an early age to form a Catholic personality and live together in the Catholic moral community. It is this that affects every behavior of Catholics including in their work. They always adhere to Catholic moral principles so as not to commit bad things that harm them and the community, so here there are almost no criminals who are our Catholics"* (Cited from an in-depth interview with a Priest in Can Tho, 2020).

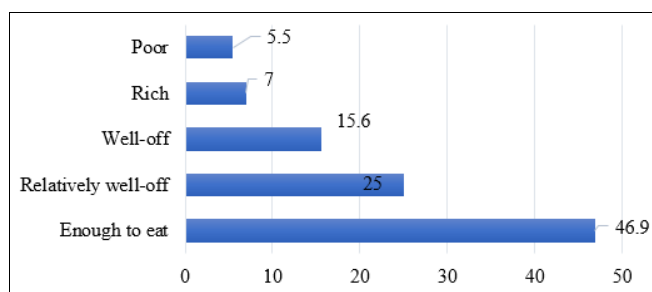
3.2 Jobbing Attitude of Catholics

Genuine jobs not only bring good benefits to themselves and their Catholic family but also aims to more importantly glorify their God. This is manifested in the jobbing attitude of the believer. That is when doing work, each believer must become perfect, and professional; must eliminate deceit, injustice, wickedness, and callousness; towards a good working environment and a happy and prosperous life in

solidarity with everyone (Cited from an in-depth interview with a priest in the Central Highlands, 2020). This is considered the motto in the jobing attitude of each believer that Catholics must always strive to implement. In farming, they are devoted to their work. *“Once you have worked, you have to pay attention and work hard in your field to get a good source, otherwise there will be no desired harvest, that is God's punishment for those who lazy”* (Cited from an in-depth interview with a believer, 53 years old, in the Central Highlands 2020). When working as workers, they always show diligence. *“Being a worker must also show all your strength and show your diligence, otherwise your salary will be lowered, maybe even fired”* (Cited from an in-depth interview with a 36-year-old believer in the Southwest region, 2020). In business/trade, they respect and strictly comply with professional ethics. *“Trading must pay attention to morality to survive, if you buy fraudulently, sell it without... you can't live, even though you are rich now, but then you will be poor again. It is due to God's punishment”* (Cited from an in-depth interview with a 36-year-old believer, in the Southwest region, 2020).

Catholics are always aware of the importance of diligence; Only in this way can they *“show Catholic faith and morality to God”*, and *“only be blessed by God and increase God's glory”* (Cited from an in-depth interview of a believer 54 years old, in the Southwest, 2020). They always remember and carry out the commandments of God; in which there are such things as God is unique (only worshipping God), not harming others, not coveting what belongs to others... Therefore, in making a living, Catholics always aim *“not harming others, not coveting others, not lying, deceiving”, “do not let others swear the child of God for wrongdoings”...*; *“when you do good, you will receive gratitude or praise from others, this is what the children of God do and also a way to glorify God”* (Cited from an in-depth interview of a priest in the Central Highlands, 2020). Therefore, when commenting on security and order, the information of local officials mostly has good evaluations for the Catholic community where they are in charge.

It is the integrity in their jobs and jobing attitude of Catholics, that the results of the analysis of the questionnaire on household economic norms (self-assessed by them) in the Catholic community in these two areas show, most of them are at the level of relatively well-off and above (total ratio is 49% of 128 surveyed households); the rest is enough to eat (accounting for 46.9%), and poor (see Fig 2).



Source: Survey results by questionnaire in 2020

Fig 2: Economic norms of Catholic families (Unit: %)

In our opinion, this result is due to their diligence, and integrity in their job activities, and also one of the results of the influence and domination of Catholic doctrine regarding the choice and doing of their jobs. Those are always oriented

through the sanctification ritual of jobs held annually at Catholic churches in Vietnam on the third day of the Lunar New Year.

4. Conclusion

Through the case of the sanctification ritual of jobs held annually on the third day of the Lunar New Year at Catholic churches, the research results of the article show that religious beliefs have a great influence on the job choice and jobing attitude of Catholics in Viet Nam. The selection of a job and the jobing attitude must be in accordance with religious ethical standards. It is to choose these jobs that are considered genuine, do not harm the social community and violate Catholic principles; and must do the job to the best of their inherent ability that has been given by God in order to benefit themselves, their families, and the social community; especially directed to the service of God, and increases the glory for God.

Catholics should always view the jobs and the results of the jobs as God's gifts, and the task is to do their best with both physical and mental strength to achieve the best results. However, in order to achieve that, the believer must submit his or her current and future jobs to God through the Sanctification ritual of jobs for blessings. Therefore, it can be seen that the sanctification of jobs is a special ritual that orients the professional behavior of Catholics in Vietnam today.

5. Ethical approval statement

This study was conducted in the Catholic community in the Southwest region, and the Central Highlands, Vietnam in December 2020. The data collection was carried out according to the principle of ethnic fieldwork, with the agreement of the people, and without conflict in the data collection process in the community.

6. Acknowledgment

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8. Conflict of interest and data availability statement

The authors states no conflict of interest and there are no data associated with this article.

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