

God Brought the Hungarians: Emigration and Refugee Relief in the Light of Cold War Religion

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The ample literature on the Hungarian refugee crisis of 1956/57 has focused on its diplomatic and political aspects, mentioning the role of religions and faith-based organizations only in passing. This study seeks to address this lacuna by focusing on religion as an element of the Cold War, a motive for emigration, and an organizing framework for refugee relief. The chronology begins with the end of World War II. Austria, the country of first asylum, and the United States, the dominant financier and resettlement country, are the primary geographic focus. Reflecting the preponderance of Catholics in the Hungarian migrants' population, special attention is given to Catholic Relief Services, though Jewish aid organizations and the World Council of Churches are not neglected.

Keywords: religion, Hungarian refugees, Catholic Relief Services, World Council of Churches, Camp Kilmer

Current interest in the refugee phenomenon has inspired valuable new research on the Hungarian refugee crisis of 1956/57. The crisis was the focus of several panels at the *1956 and Socialism* conference in Eger in September 2016, and it was the theme of an issue of the journal *Világtörténet* published several weeks later.¹ Authors have rightly pointed out the role of the Cold War conflict in determining the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution, the flight of 200,000 citizens to Austria and Yugoslavia, and their warm reception and, for the most part, fairly rapid resettlement. There are many worthwhile publications in Hungarian, German, and English about the international and local aspects of this crisis.²

Historians have generally mentioned religious factors only in passing. In this essay, I call attention to several non-government archival collections which few historians have consulted, and I examine the phenomenon of Cold War religion, Hungarian religious identity as a motivating factor in the decision to emigrate, and above all the role of faith-based relief organizations. The chronological frame begins in the immediate postwar period, providing the prehistory of the

1 *1956 és a szocializmus*; *Világtörténet* 6 (38), no. 3 (2016). A study by me was published in both forums.

2 Ibolya Murber's fine recent study begins with a good survey of Hungarian and Austrian scholarship: Murber, "Az 1956-os magyar menekültek," 123–28. For American scholarship, see my "A befogadás kulturája" and "Hungarian Refugees of 1956" and Pastor's "The American Reception."

Hungarian crisis before focusing on the aftermath of the Revolution. The politics and resolution of the crisis were international, but Austria and the United States played unique roles and receive most of my attention. Nearly all the refugees who left Hungary in 1956/57 and earlier came through Austria, where they were granted initial asylum and the opportunity to settle, repatriate, or travel onward. The United States proved the most popular destination of resettlement for both economic and political reasons, and ultimately the United States accepted more refugees than any other country. The United States was also decisive in the financial, political, and organizational resolution of the refugee crisis of 1956/57.

Religious persecution had led to many earlier waves of emigration in the history of Europe. This was especially the case in early modern Europe, and indeed it was fundamental to the establishment of Geneva in Switzerland as the center of international humanitarianism. Three centuries after Geneva provided a home and ecclesiastical center for Calvinist fugitives, it became the birthplace of the Geneva Conventions (1864–1949) for the treatment of non-combatants in wartime, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Nations, and, after World War II, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and many related agencies.³

Cold War Religion

One of the important memory sites for Hungarian Americans and historians of the refugee crisis of 1956/57 no longer exists today: Camp Kilmer in Piscataway, New Jersey. The closed army camp was reactivated in November 1956 as the central reception center for Hungarian refugees to the U.S., and in five months received more than 32,000 of them. Americans greeted the new arrivals with

3 Geneva was the most important of several cities where I conducted research for this study. I would like to express thanks to the following staff who provided valuable assistance: Heather Faulkner at the UNHCR, Kerstin Lau at the International Organization for Migration, and Barbara Sartore at the International Catholic Migration Commission in Geneva; Johann Weißensteiner at the Diözesanarchiv Wien and Walther Pröglhöf at Caritas der Erzdiözese Wien [Caritas Zentrale Wien] in Vienna; Agnes Maleschits at the Diözesanarchiv Eisenstadt in Eisenstadt; Éva Sz. Kovács at the Állambiztonsági Történelmi Levéltára in Budapest; Mary Brown of the Center for Migration Studies in New York, Kate Feighery of the Archives of the Archdiocese of New York in Yonkers, and Albert C. King of Special Collections and University Archives at Rutgers University. Fellow historians Gusztáv Kecskés, András Nagy, Tamás Stark, and Éva Petrás as well as my anonymous referees were generous with advice but should be absolved of any responsibility for my errors. I'm also grateful to the Rutgers University Libraries for granting a brief research leave that enabled me to prepare this study in the middle of a busy academic year.

banners and signs bearing the inscription: *Welcome [to America]*, in English and in Hungarian. A Hungarian in Camp Kilmer explained to Eileen Egan of Catholic Relief Services: “The words mean, in our way of expressing it, ‘God brought you.’ That is ‘Isten Hozta.’ You say this to guests whom you welcome gladly.”⁴ The Hungarian phrase appears in at least one decidedly unreligious context in American political history: President Bill Clinton employed it as a toast welcoming President Árpád Göncz in 1999, and he claimed it had appeared on streamers welcoming exiled statesman Lajos Kossuth to New York in 1851.⁵ We do not know the intention behind the use of the Hungarian phrase during the Hungarian crisis, but it will serve here as a gateway into a discussion of the ways in which religion and politics overlapped at the time.

The Chairman of the President’s Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief, Tracy S. Voorhees, is at the center in both government photos below. In the photo on the right, he is welcoming a refugee ship in Brooklyn, and in the photo on the left he is at Camp Kilmer. The others appear to be exclusively American officials. Voorhees was very attentive to the impact of public image: he wanted



Figure 1. U.S. Army Official Photographs from 1956 preserved in the National Archives and Records Administration. In the public domain; from the 1956 refugee collection of the Blinken OSA Archivum. Accessed October 5, 2017. <http://www.refugees1956.org/2017/01/21/1956-hungarian-refugees-in-the-us-photo-gallery/>.

4 Egan, *For Whom there is No Room*, 236.

5 “Remarks at the State Dinner Honoring President Árpád Göncz of Hungary, June 8, 1999,” in *Public Papers of the United States Presidents, William J. Clinton*; the streamers welcoming Kossuth in New York are recounted in László, *Napló-töredék*, 141—with some ambiguity as to whether the inscription was in Hungarian.

the world to see the contrast between humanitarian America, with its peaceful use of the military, and Soviet oppression. The reference to God would have been invisible to most Americans, but it was not lost on the Hungarians (the text in the photo, “Isten hozott,” is the same phrase as the phrase cited above, “Isten Hozta,” but using the informal form of address in Hungarian). God was missing in Communist Hungary’s public discourse, but was prominent in that of contemporary America.

East European Communists persecuted religion both on ideological grounds and in order to eliminate autonomous centers of resistance. This pattern was important for the emerging association in the West of anti-Communism with religious identity. The nexus of the Cold War and religion in the U.S. has attracted the attention of much recent scholarship. Dianne Kirby writes in her contribution to the *Cambridge History of Christianity*: “The concept of the Cold War as one of history’s great religious wars, a global conflict between the god-fearing and the godless, derives from the fact that ideology, based on and informed by religious beliefs and values, was central in shaping both perceptions of and responses to the USSR.”⁶ The Jewish conservative Will Herberg argued in his popular 1955 book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* that American ethnic history had evolved toward a common “framework,” “the American way of life.”⁷ He went on to claim that this framework might even be seen as a jointly held religion. The American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote in 1960 that Communism’s threat was stymied “by the historical dynamism of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.”⁸

This was America, where politicians’ declarations of faith still respected the strict separation of churches and state. But what about Europe? Pope Pius XII had been cautious in his stance toward the Third Reich in World War II, arguably because of the dangers posed to the Church in occupied Europe and to the Vatican itself. Communism posed no such existential threat to the Vatican, though in postwar Italy it was a serious political threat. The Pope’s encyclical denouncing contemporary atheism, *Anni Sacri* (1950), did not name Communism or the Soviet Union, but it left no doubt about the Pope’s view of Soviet religious policy. The emerging Christian Democratic parties, while they grew out of the Catholic political tradition of protecting the weak and favoring a mixed economy, shared the American condemnation of Communism and

6 Kirby, “The Cold War,” 285.

7 Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, 88.

8 Kirby, “The Churches and Christianity in Cold War Europe,” 196.

support for the Atlantic alliance. They generally had the support of religious leaders in these stances.⁹ The Holy See rejected Communism even more strongly than did West European political leaders. Its decree of July 1949 stated that “Catholics who ‘profess, defend or propagate’ communist doctrine should be excommunicated as apostates.”¹⁰

The dominant status of the Catholic Church in Austria was governed by the formally still valid Concordat of 1933, which had been suppressed by the Third Reich and subsequently restored, but not recognized by the Austrian socialists. European governments typically contributed to the financial support of the churches, but rarely interfered in their administrative decisions.¹¹ In the U.S., the homeland of Cold War religion, religious organizations supported themselves solely through private donations.

Religion and the Refugee Relief Agencies

Both in North America and in Western Europe, the churches supported agencies for the care of the disadvantaged members of society that organized hospitals, food assistance, and missionary activity, both at home and abroad. Of greatest impact were the Catholic agencies, the National Catholic Welfare Conference-Catholic Relief Service in the U.S. and Caritas in most European countries. Protestants and Jews had analogous organizations.

These agencies were engaged in refugee relief, and not only in their home countries. Both Hebrew and Christian scripture stipulates that the faithful should practice hospitality and compassion to strangers in their midst. The Book of Exodus recounts an escape from slavery to freedom and asserts: “You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9). The Gospel of Matthew recounts the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt, and Luke recounts Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan and concludes with the admonition to “go and do likewise.” The Acts of the Apostles downplay the importance of borders and preach the common humanity of people, regardless of ancestry. Christians

9 Kirby, “The Cold War,” 301–03.

10 Luxmoore and Babiuch, *The Vatican and the Red Flag*, 65.

11 On Austria: Köchler, “Das Verhältnis von Religion und Politik.”

and Jews don't always observe these principles, but the principles inspire their refugee relief activity.¹²

Jewish mutual aid and Christian missions signaled the entry of the U.S. onto the international humanitarian scene in the late nineteenth century. As the country entered World War I in 1917, its government encouraged the mobilization of religious organizations to meet anticipated humanitarian needs. The massive population movements of World War II created an even greater challenge for armies and a role for non-governmental agencies. The leaders of the advancing Allied forces, especially in the U.S. Army, realized that they needed help. It was natural that they turned to the International Committee of the Red Cross and its national affiliates. The religiously based agencies were more diverse, but the spiritual dimension enabled them not only to raise funds rapidly (at which the Red Cross was very adept), but also to mobilize a broadly based network of agencies and communities for volunteer work. The need and opportunity created a conundrum in American law, however: in view of the separation of church and state, what would be the nature of the collaboration between the government and the religious agencies? The solution was to create on the one hand a federal office to accredit the NGOs (the prevailing term was voluntary agencies) and, on the other, a private organization consisting of these accredited agencies, which would coordinate their work and interface with the government. The private organization, established in 1944, was the American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service (ACVAFS). A central principle of the ACVAFS was the primacy of service over sectarianism. The Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs rapidly became the ACVAFS's most active component.¹³

European countries faced less of a challenge in coordinating the voluntary agencies because they had a history of financial and political involvement in the churches. Organizations analogous to the ACVAFS arose in all West European countries in the immediate postwar years, and they were themselves coordinated beginning in 1948 by the Standing Conference of Voluntary Agencies Working for Refugees.¹⁴

12 Hollenbach, "Religion and Forced Migration," 447–51. All scriptural passages in this paragraph appear as cited by Hollenbach.

13 Reiss, *ACVAFS: Four Monographs*; Nichols, *The Uneasy Alliance*. Reiss was a long-time staffer of the ACVAFS who was very involved in its refugee and migration committee. The records of the ACVAFS are preserved and available for research in Special Collections and University Archives at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. Nichols is one of the few historians who has consulted them.

14 Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time*, 542; Kupke, "James J. Norris," 241.

The chief religiously based agencies that were engaged on behalf of refugees were those of the Catholics, the Jews, the Lutherans, the Quakers, and the World Council of Churches.

The Catholic agencies in most countries bore the name Caritas and operated under the authority of diocesan bishops, but with a national federation for coordination. In the wake of World War II, the American counterpart would soon dwarf each local Caritas in its resources. During the war, it assumed the name War Relief Services-National Catholic Welfare Conference, renamed Catholic Relief Services (CRS-NCWC) in 1955. The CRS established offices in most European countries at the end of the war, both to distribute food and clothing but, increasingly after 1948, also to coordinate resettlement into third countries. A board of American archbishops and bishops met periodically in Washington, DC to oversee the WRS/CRS, and it was encouraged in its work by the Holy See. The coordinator of all of the activities of the CRS in Europe was a Catholic layman and former religious brother from New Jersey, James J. Norris.¹⁵

Pope Pius XII promulgated his apostolic constitution *Exsul Familia Nazarethana* [*The Exiled Family from Nazareth*] in 1952 to affirm the compassionate concern of the Church for migrants, including the practice of appointing missionary priests for migrants of their own nationality. The document placed the newly founded International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) in a historical and doctrinal context.¹⁶ The ICMC, led for the first ten years of its existence by Norris and based in Geneva, would coordinate aid to migrants by country-based agencies, organize international conferences on the subject, and publish a journal entitled *Migration News* beginning in 1951.¹⁷

Two major agencies and then the newly emerged State of Israel were the principal sources of Jewish relief. The American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) worked largely to aid Jewish communities in place, while the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was older, not as well funded, and focused largely on migrants and resettlement. In light of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, the relief work of these agencies relied less on scriptural injunctions than on fundamental solidarity.¹⁸ Zionism and resettlement in Israel were less of a

15 Kupke, “James J. Norris.”

16 Tassarolo, ed., *Exsul Familia*.

17 This journal is not identical with the later *Migration News*, published at the University of California at Davis since 1994.

18 In his account of the JDC’s work during the Hungarian crisis, Theodore Feder, its director for Austria, wrote: “The story of the American Joint Distribution Committee is not necessarily a story of religion...its

concern for these organizations than they were for the Jewish Agency, which was formed in Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel and then supported by the new state afterwards.

The World Lutheran Federation (WLF) served to bring together the variants of this denomination, which reflected various organizational and doctrinal solutions in their respective countries. The *Evangelisches Hilfswerk* was an important Lutheran relief organization for postwar Germany and Austria, where the initial focus of refugee relief was on the eleven million German expellees from the East. The American branch of the WLF serving refugees was the Lutheran Relief Service, LRS.

The humanitarian engagement of the Quakers was of long standing, and organized in the twentieth century as the Friends Relief Service and its American arm, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Reflecting the relatively small membership of this denomination, the AFSC engaged with needy communities of all religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Ecumenical activists inspired the eventual foundation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva in 1948, whose arm for refugee relief was Church World Service. The WCC's membership included most Protestant and Orthodox churches and often worked closely with the Lutherans and Quakers. Roland Elliott of Church World Service wrote about his encounter with Hungarians at the border with Austria: "I have seen the face of Jesus Christ, as His Church is struggling to meet this tragic and heroic situation...we have the privileged responsibility of opening our homes to those who come to the U.S.A."¹⁹ The words of Gaither P. Warfield, the Director of the Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief, may adequately summarize the thinking of many Protestants. He wrote in 1958 that "Christian charity says that needy people, even panhandlers, are personalities, loved by God and precious in his sight."²⁰

The Catholic Church was not a member of the WCC, and the anxiety of some Catholic leaders about CWS contact with Catholic migrants helped inspire the establishment of the ICMC. Norris, whose Catholic piety and doctrinal orthodoxy were never in doubt, was quite happy to collaborate with his non-

primary purpose is to serve the needs, physical as well as spiritual, of distressed and persecuted Jews in all parts of the world." Feder, "Ecclesiastical Care of Hungarian Refugees: Jewish Refugees," 131.

19 Nichols, *The Uneasy Alliance*, 90. The letter to CWS officials is dated December 12, 1957 by Nichols, but based on context appears to have been written a year earlier.

20 Warfield, "Is the Good Samaritan Outmoded?," cited in Chiba, "The Role of the Protestant Church," 22.

Catholic counterparts. I found no evidence that his clerical superiors in the CRS had a problem with this. Indeed, he had a good working relationship with the Holy See's Deputy Secretary of State, Msgr. Montini, the later Pope Paul VI.

Two accounts of the refugee work of the CRS and WCC during the 1950s by Edgar H.S. Chandler and Eileen Eagan reveal significant similarities in these organizations' service to migrants around the world. Chandler, the Director of the WCC's Refugee Service and President of the Standing Conference of Voluntary Agencies Working for Refugees in 1959, was an American Congregationalist. In his view, the refugee worker was a sort of missionary, but one with a "soul on fire" to help one's fellow human in need, anywhere and regardless of nationality and denomination. His 1959 account of the WCC's refugee work only occasionally mentions the religion of WCC staffers and their clients around the world.²¹ Eagan was a long-time staffer of the CRS. She wrote, "Thomas Merton recalls to us that we will find Christ in the rejected, the refugee 'for whom there is no room.' We will only find Christ if we find room for the forsaken ones in our heart."²² Eagan's book only rarely mentions the WCC, and Chandler's the CRS. It may be that these groups represented different fundamental attitudes toward social service. In the view of Edward Duff, the Catholic approach was more communitarian, while that of the Protestants was predicated on the faith of the individual.²³ By analogy, the Protestant and Orthodox churches organized themselves on an explicitly national basis. The WCC, however, was no less international than the Catholic Church.

According to Allied and Soviet estimates, each bloc was caring for roughly seven million displaced persons (DPs) in September 1945. Repatriation and resettlement of many of these people took place over the course of two years under the auspices of the United Nations, but the task of providing care for migrants in place fell principally on the voluntary organizations. The expulsion of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary by 1947 increased the unsettled population in occupied Germany again, and again the volunteer organizations were needed. Two new categories of migrants moved westward into Central Europe in 1946–48: Jewish survivors and opponents of the emerging Communist regimes. We will now turn to these groups as they relate to Hungary.

21 Eagan, *For Whom there is No Room*; Chandler, *The High Tower of Refuge*.

22 Eagan, *For Whom there is No Room*, 370.

23 Duff, appendix "The 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' Emphases," in *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches*, 309–20.

The Hungarian Refugee

The number of non-Jewish DPs from Hungary in the western occupation zones at the end of the war has been estimated at 112,000, of which 16,000 had been repatriated by September 1945.²⁴ 118,000 DPs from Hungary were registered in Germany in 1949.²⁵ Many DPs were politically conservative, including adherents of the last wartime Hungarian government. Hungarian Primate Cardinal Mindszenty encouraged émigré priests to provide spiritual care for Hungarians who remained abroad. The Holy See appointed a former military chaplain who had come to Germany with the retreating Hungarians, Zoltán Kótai, as supervisor of pastoral care for Hungarian Catholics in Germany and Austria, and he served in this position in 1946–50. In January 1946, he reported that 109 Hungarian priests were active in Germany and Austria. The Protestant Hungarians also had their émigré clergy, and in greater numbers than the Catholics, whose bishops urged priests to stay with their parishes in Hungary if possible.²⁶

Jewish survivors of the Hungarian Holocaust were also present among the DPs in Germany and Austria. Scandalously, they were often housed alongside their former German and Hungarian persecutors in the camps, but with a lower caloric ration. An American rabbi in the U.S. Army's chaplain corps, Abraham J. Klausner, was an early witness to these conditions, and an American Protestant scholar named Earl G. Harrison, the U.S. representative on the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, toured the camps with the assistance of the European director of the JDC and wrote a report that was instrumental in rectifying these injustices.²⁷

A study commissioned by the World Jewish Congress indicated that 165,330 Jews had survived the Holocaust in Hungary and remained there at the end of the war. This figure may not adequately account for changes in borders, migration, and self-identity.²⁸ A wave of anti-Semitic incidents in Hungary during the spring of 1946, more or less tolerated by the police, prompted many survivors to leave Hungary. Financial support from the JDC and World Jewish Congress and the collaboration of the Hungarian National Bank facilitated the

24 Dunai, "Élet a galutban," 60.

25 Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció életrajza*, 53.

26 Ibid., 24.

27 Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichab*, 57–62; 76–81.

28 The figure is examined by Tamás Stark in *Hungarian Jews During the Holocaust*, 88–95.

resettlement of 15,000 Hungarian Jewish survivors.²⁹ This emigration was part of an international movement and a complex organization known as *Brichah*, flight, which brought perhaps 250,000 Jews out of Central Europe between 1945 and 1948.³⁰ The total post-Holocaust Jewish emigration from Hungary up to 1956 may have been as high as 50,000. 17,000 Jewish refugees may have gone to Israel and less than half that number to the U.S.³¹

Aid to Hungary's religious groups in money and in kind was substantial after the end of the war. The JDC recommenced operation in Hungary at the end of 1944, and it had an office in Budapest from February 1945 until it was forced to close in 1953. The value of support for Hungary during this period is recorded as nearly 50 million USD, prompting a historian to refer to this aid as a "small Marshall Plan for Hungary."³² The JDC managed to maneuver for years in the complex politics of the anti-Fascist but also increasingly anti-Zionist regime. The CRS was able to open an office in Budapest at the end of 1945, but it had to close it earlier than the JDC, in 1950. Aid to Hungary raised by the American Catholic bishops was small compared to that from the JDC, recorded as 631,600 USD in Hungary in 1947–50.³³

The early closure of the CRS office in Budapest reflected the difficult position of the Catholic Church in Hungary, whose combative leader, Cardinal Mindszenty, was arrested in 1949. As was its custom in other countries, the ACVAFS established a committee to coordinate the activity of its member agencies in Hungary, but it only functioned from 1946 to 1948. Its chairman was Henry E. Muller of the Unitarian Service Committee, whose coreligionists constituted one-tenth of one percent of the population according to the 1949 census (Catholics were 70.5 percent, Calvinists 21.9 percent, and Jews 2.7 percent). New agencies joined the committee in 1947, and the agencies' food and clothing aid reportedly had the support of Prime Minister Lajos Dinnyés, but at its last meeting in June 1948 the members reported that operations in Hungary

29 Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon*, v2: 1849-től a jelenkorig, 880.

30 Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah*, 320.

31 Stark, *Hungarian Jews During the Holocaust*, 149, 160, 166–67.

32 Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon*, 917.

33 AANY. Table: "Funds Distributed to War Relief Services—N.C.W.C. from Bishops' Relief Campaign February 1, 1947 to October 31, 1950," in War Relief Services Interim Report, Summary of General Report, War Relief Services-NCWC. November 14, 1950. Folder 18: War Relief Services Interim Report, 1950–1957.

were becoming increasingly difficult because of the government's distrust of foreign influence and organizational autonomy.³⁴

The leaders of Hungary's Christian churches and Jewish community were obliged in 1949–50 to conclude restrictive agreements. Marxist ideology saw no constructive role for religious faith, and the Hungarian regime saw none for clergy or organizations not under its complete control. The nationalization of schools run by the Catholic church removed 4,500 members of religious orders from the classroom. In 1950, 11,000 members of orders were expelled from their residences and 59 orders were abolished.³⁵ Protestant and Jewish schools were also nationalized. Show trials led to the imprisonment of Cardinal Mindszenty, his successor as leader of Hungarian Catholics, Archbishop Grósz, and large numbers of other clergy. Lutheran bishop Lajos Ordass was tried and

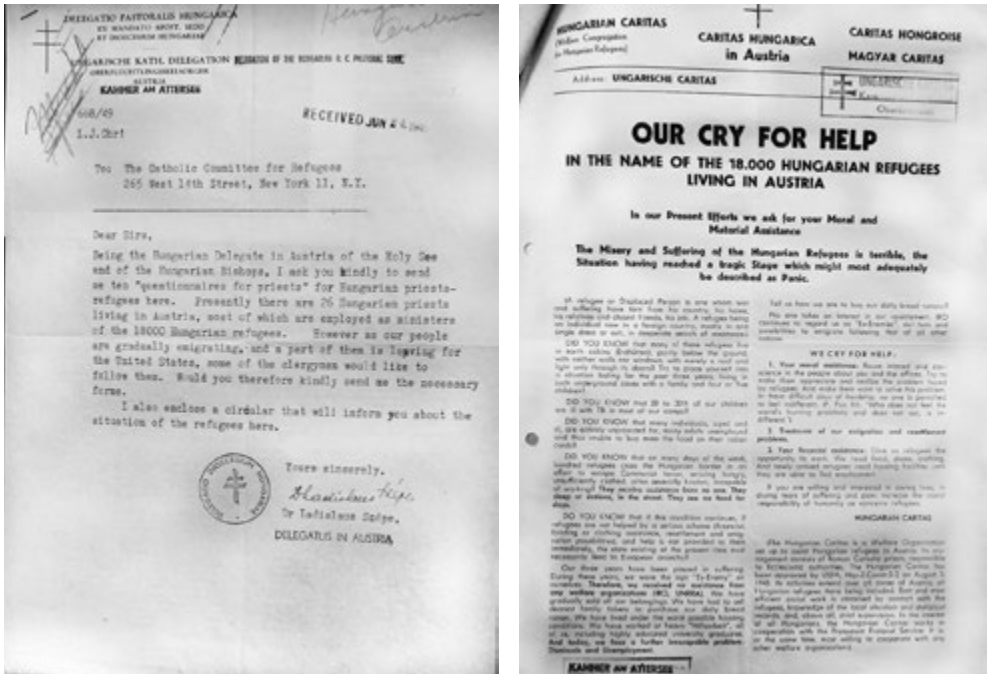


Figure 2. Fr. László Szépe to the Catholic Committee for Refugees in New York, 1949, with an appeal for assistance for Hungarian refugees in Austria from Caritas Hungarica in Austria. Source: Center for Migration Studies. 024. NCWC—Department of Immigration—New York Office and NCWC Catholic Committee for Refugees. Records. General Correspondence. Box 21/31. Reprinted with the permission of the Center for Migration Studies of New York.

34 SCUA. Box 62: Councils Abroad; Box 127: Country Committees, folder: Hungary.

35 The data are taken from *A magyar katolikusok szegvedései 1944–1989*.

imprisoned, and Reformed bishops László Ravasz and László Pap were forced out of public life.

Religious order priests whose schools were closed were for the most part deprived of opportunities to serve as priests. Some found placement in the parishes thanks to the support of bishops who were willing to take this risky step, but many left the country illegally. Law XXVI, promulgated in 1950, defined illegal travel abroad as a crime against the state order because it deprived the country of labor and capital and placed the fugitive in the service of imperialist interests and spies.³⁶ More than 70 Jesuits, Cistercians, and Paulines left the country illegally in this period.³⁷ Those accused of assisting illegal emigration were tried and convicted under Law XXVI.

The CRS sponsored the resettlement of hundreds of Catholic clergy from East Central Europe to the U.S. Fr. László Szépe, the coordinator of the priests serving Hungarian refugees in Austria, wrote to the office in New York in 1949: “as our people are gradually emigrating, and a part of them of them is leaving for the United States, some of the clergymen would like to follow them. Would you kindly send me the necessary forms.” The annual report of WRS to its supervisory board for 1951–52 stated that “415 displaced priests from Iron Curtain countries have been brought to US since 1948.”³⁸

Religious congregations in the diaspora were well supplied with new immigrant clergy. For many emigrants, the loss of the homeland, hunger, the uncertainty of life in the DP camps, and then adjustment to a new homeland after resettlement were dispiriting. The Catholic priests’ sense of mission lent purpose and optimism to their segment of the Hungarian emigration.³⁹ In the reports to Hungary’s spy agency, the harmful influence of the “reactionary” clergy on Hungarian emigrants and their hostile attitude toward the socialist order were repeatedly emphasized.⁴⁰ Religious communities provided an important support network for the recent Hungarian émigrés. To the extent that they had a political orientation, it was indeed decidedly conservative.

36 Horváth et al., eds., *Iratok az igazságszolgáltatás történetéhez*, v1, 300–01; v4, 317–19.

37 Bánkuti, *Jezsuiták a diktatúrában*, 54–64.

38 AANY. Report to the Board of Trustees, War Relief Services, 1 October 1951 to 30 September 1952. p12. Collection Number 023.002. Catholic Relief Services Collection. Box 1, Folders 5, 9: Catholic Committee for Refugees, Annual Reports; Folder 24: Report to the Board of Trustees, War Relief Services

39 Dreisziger, *Church and Society in Hungary and in the Hungarian*; Borbándi, 28

40 ABTL. 3.2.5. 0-8-2001/42, “Szabadságharcosok”: reports on Hungarian émigré communities in 1950; 4.1. A-3177, “Összefoglaló jelentés az egyházi emigrációról”: insights from intercepted émigré and clerical mail, 1959.

International Organizations and Austria in 1956

Three successive agencies of the United Nations coordinated refugee relief on behalf of the international organization beginning in 1943: the United Nations Refugee and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the International Refugee Organization (IRO), and, beginning in 1951, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Continuing challenges for these organizations included the international dispute about their purpose and the limited funding placed at their disposal. The status of refugee, defined by the Geneva Convention of 1951, prescribed political or religious persecution in one's home country as a precondition, and thus excluded many emigrants from international protection. The Soviet Union favored repatriation of emigrants, and resettlement was supported increasingly by the West as an alternative, but subject to the willingness of the receiving country. Another international agency in Geneva, which focused on resettlement and excluded members of the Soviet bloc, was the Intergovernmental Committee on European Migration (ICEM).

The UNHCR relied upon the Red Cross, ICEM, and the voluntary agencies to compensate for its own limitations. The first High Commissioner, the Dutchman Dr. G. J. van Heuven Goedhart, far from taking a rigidly secular stance, recognized the religious motivation of many voluntary agencies as appropriate and valuable. His address at the international Catholic migration congress organized by the ICMC in the Netherlands in September 1954 followed one by Msgr. Edward E. Swanstrom, the Executive Director of WRS. Applauding the American monsignor's remarks, Goedhart asserted that "the Christian spirit behind the work is the main impetus, the most important impetus, which will lead us to achieve our goal."⁴¹

The goal of refugee relief—resettlement, permanent settlement, or repatriation—was an ongoing challenge for Austria, which received two million refugees after 1945 of whom about 700,000 would eventually remain in Austria.⁴² Some 114,000 so-called old refugees, 20,000 of them living in camps, remained in Austria on the eve of the Hungarian crisis.⁴³ Some were German expellees for whom the Austrian government took responsibility, while others were non-Germans. Thus the Austrian government, UNHCR, and associated agencies were collaborators of long standing; the UNHCR, ICEM, and the voluntary

41 van Heuven Goedhart, "Address," 19.

42 "Flüchtlingsland Österreich."

43 Report of the UNHCR, 17 January 1957, cited by Kecskés, "Bevezetés," 26.

agencies maintained offices in Vienna, and both the ACVAFS and its Austrian counterpart periodically convened meetings of their affiliated agencies.⁴⁴ The achievement of Austrian sovereignty by the State Treaty of 1955 increased the government's ability to address emigrants' needs by eliminating the division of the country into zones of military occupation and reducing the pressure by the Soviet Union for the repatriation of émigrés. The ruling coalition of the two major parties, ÖVP (the People's Party, or Christian Democrats) and SPÖ (the Socialists), was united in its support for sovereignty and refugee relief. The ÖVP supplied Austria's Chancellor, Julius Raab, and Foreign Minister, Leopold Figl, while the SPÖ supplied the Minister of Interior, Oskar Helmer. As we will see, Helmer played a crucial role in the refugee program.

In the spirit of the government coalition, Austria's Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter on social concerns criticizing both liberal capitalism and Communism and calling for social solidarity and partnership, with the traditional Catholic preference for local over government initiative.⁴⁵ The bishops' letter, dated October 16, 1956, was surely in the minds of many Austrian Catholics on the eve of the Hungarian revolution. The Catholic Archbishop of Vienna, Franz König, called upon his SOS Department and Caritas to collect and distribute donations for Hungarians after October 23. Both the Austrian government and the UN General Assembly called for an end to the fighting and the sending of humanitarian aid to the Hungarian people. The leaders of Austrian Caritas and the WCC delivered a major shipment to Győr on October 31, and convoys of Caritas and the Red Cross made it as far as Budapest. Donations of medicine, food, and clothing from governments and private agencies began arriving in Austria and Hungary by land and air. Archbishop König became co-chair of an *Österreichisches Nationalkommittee für Ungarn*, which coordinated aid "with the participation of all welfare groups, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish, public and private." Fr. Fabian Flynn, the head of the CRS office in Vienna, reportedly led two convoys with ten trucks of supplies to Budapest and personally met Cardinal Mindszenty, but was turned back on a third trip.⁴⁶ Other religious agencies were similarly engaged.

44 The Arbeitsgemeinschaft der freiwilligen Hilfsorganisationen is alluded to in the records of the ACVAFS, but I could not locate its records in any Austrian repository.

45 Rusch, ed. *Der Sozialhirtenbrief der österreichischen Bischöfe*.

46 Wycislo, "Escape to America," 326–27. Msgr. Wycislo was the deputy director of CRS. The reader may justly be skeptical about the details of his narrative, since he writes with some exaggeration: "It is conservatively estimated that 85% of the approximately 140,000 Hungarian escapees are Roman Catholics." 332. A report on Flynn's later promotion includes his biography: "Priest Who Aided Freedom Fighters

After the second Soviet intervention on November 4, the aid convoys were no longer able to enter Hungary. There was a new emphasis on refugee relief, which the UN's General Secretary assigned to the UNHCR. On October 28, when 10,000 refugees had already entered Austria, Oskar Helmer declared that his country would grant asylum to any Hungarian who requested it, without examining individuals' motives. Fearing much larger numbers would overwhelm Austria, Helmer wired the countries represented in the leadership of the UNHCR and ICEM on November 4 to ask them to pledge donations and accept Hungarians for resettlement.

Religious Agencies Meet the Refugee Crisis in Austria

The UNHCR and ICEM had access to national governments (among which the American government donated more money and material for refugee relief than any other source), but the voluntary societies had the ability to mobilize rapidly and motivate volunteers. As the flow of Hungarians across the largely open Austrian border swelled on 4 November, Helmer called an emergency meeting of König's committee, and Caritas volunteers began a desperate effort to prepare the former Soviet camp at Traiskirchen. The camp was in terrible shape when the first Hungarians arrived that evening. But many organizations pitched in to get the situation under control. A British Quaker reported:

One sees...all manner of uniforms. A boy scout for instance, suddenly charges up a long flight of stairs; a Catholic priest goes from room to room; a journalist squats on the edge of somebody's bed struggling to get a coherent story on to [sic] paper. All have come to help; everybody wants to do something useful, and it is indeed surprising that out of the chaos little miracles of organization do emerge and impossible things do get done.⁴⁷

Named CRS-NCWC Director of Information," NCWC News Service, November 16, 1961. CMS, NCWC Department of Immigration—General Correspondence. Catholic Conference on Industrial Problems—Catholic Relief Services. Box 10. Folder: Catholic Relief Services-NCWC, Diocesan Resettlement Committees

47 Eileen Taylor, "Life in Traiskirchen," in an AFSC newsletter dated December 1956. In SCUA. Box 82, folder: Hungarian Revolution 1956: Agencies, relief programs.

Having relatively small communities in the countries of resettlement, the Quakers were given the task of overall coordination of clothing distribution in the camp.

At a higher level, the agency leaders found coordination challenging because of their organizations' independence, missionary impulse, and the extraordinary emergency they faced and wanted to address without delay. Charles H. Jordan was the JDC's Director General for Overseas Operations representing the Standing Conference of Voluntary Agencies. He convened agencies in Vienna on the evening of November 5 in hopes of leaving immediately afterwards for consultations in New York, but decided to delay his departure. The ICEM office reported after talking to him that, "[e]ach voluntary agency evidently wanted its own particular empire protected and there was great difficulty to combine ideas and co-ordinate activities," and "Jordan was thoroughly disappointed with the outcome of the meeting." ICEM for its part disapproved of the desire of Caritas and CRS to move Catholic refugees out of the camps and into smaller, private facilities. ICEM objected to this and resolved to consult Norris about it.⁴⁸

The push by the Austrian government for resettlement, to which ICEM, the UNHCR, and member governments were responding, prompted resistance by the voluntary agencies. Helmer and ICEM preferred to keep the refugees in camps as long as they were in Austria so that they could be registered there and communicate promptly with governments about resettlement opportunities. Caritas for its part claimed that many refugees were deciding in favor of resettlement too hastily, under the pressure of the inhumane and demoralizing conditions in the camps and the recruitment efforts of receiving countries. Traiskirchen, it was reported, could provide places to sleep for only three-fourths of its 4,000 residents, and it lacked electricity and running water. Caritas arranged and helped pay (with support from the government) for thousands of refugees to stay in hotels where they could recover from the shock of their life-changing experience, receive counselling about options for employment, resettlement, or even repatriation ("for no one has the right to deny fugitives their homeland forever"), and decide whether they wanted to travel farther or wait for their

48 IOM. A.R. Driver, Chief, Department of Operations, "Notes on Austrian Position," November 5–6, in International Organization for Migration, Library Archives. Binder: C.I.M. Hungarian Refugees SIT-00-049. Béla Rásky has argued that the voluntary agencies' collaboration was undermined by their "subtle competitive relationship." "Flüchtlinge haben auch auch Pflichten."

relatives.⁴⁹ The program was called *Gastaktion*, “because Christ comes as guest in the person of the refugee.” Its originator was the director of Vienna Caritas since 1950, Msgr. Leopold Ungar, and it was reportedly imitated by the Evangelisches Hilfswerk, JDC, and the Knights of Malta, another Catholic aid organization, which all created similar programs.⁵⁰

In the case of the JDC, more was involved than parallel thinking, let alone imitation. According to the JDC Annual Report,

Because Austria had the greatest difficulty in accommodating refugees—in the beginning the camps even lacked basic necessities—the Austrian Government appealed to the population and to voluntary agencies for help. Jewish refugees also found it difficult to be quartered with some antagonistic elements among the Hungarians and [the] JDC thereupon set up a housing scheme for the placement of 9000 refugees in inns, hotels, furnished rooms and small installations.

This was very expensive, and it was gradually superseded by the establishment of two Austrian camps exclusively for Jewish refugees supported jointly by the Red Cross, the Austrian government, and the JDC.⁵¹ The provision of kosher kitchens was one consideration, but not the only one, since Orthodox Jews constituted only a minority of the Hungarian Jews.

The religious agencies gave special, but not exclusive, attention to their coreligionists. There were variations in the religious distribution of the refugees in 1956–57 compared to the data in Hungary’s 1949 census. Two surveys by the Austrian government⁵² of the Hungarians still present in the country in February and October 1957 found the percentage of Catholics consistent with their percentage in 1949, that of the Protestants lower, and that of the Jews much higher:

49 CZW. “Sinn der Flüchtlingsaktion der Caritas” speaks of 3,000 Hungarians hosted, while “Die Ungarnhilfe der Caritas,” apparently written later, speaks of 7,000. The compilation by Caritas in 2006, “50 Jahr Ungarnkrise,” states that 6098 had been housed by the Caritas *Gastaktion* by January 1957.

50 CZW. “Caritas der Erzdiözese Wien. Caritas-Verband,” Vienna, December 12, 1956.

51 AJDC. Joint Distribution Committee, *1957 Annual Report*, 4.

52 Kern, *Österreich: Offene Grenze der Menschlichkeit*, 78. The original compilation for 1 February is in “Sozialstatistische Mitteilung,” UNOG. Fonds 11 Series 1 Box 304: Statistics—Hungarian refugees.

	1949 census ⁵³	February 1, 1957	October 28, 1957
Greek, Roman Catholics	70.5 percent	68.3 percent	70.1 percent
Reformed + Lutherans	27.1 percent	16.1 percent	18.7 percent
Jews	2.7 percent	10.2 percent	10.5 percent

Table 1. Religious distribution of Hungarians in Austria

The low percentage of Protestants may be in large part a consequence of the emigrants' geographic origin. A later analysis of the emigrants by Hungary's Central Statistical Office provided no religious data, but noted that more than 80 percent of the refugees had a last Hungarian place of residence in Budapest or towns further west, whereas the largest concentration of Protestants was in the east.⁵⁴ In the case of 365 refugees interviewed by the Columbia University Research Project Hungary (CURPH), whose metadata are searchable online, a preponderance of Catholics and residents of Budapest is observable.⁵⁵ One may argue, as does András Mink in examining the CURPH findings, that "Western observers...had an obsolete image of an essentially rural and religious Hungarian society and disregarded the urbanization, industrialization and secularization that had been under way [sic] long before the communist takeover."⁵⁶ The fact remains that governments and relief agencies, and not only CURPH, attached importance to religious categories.

A modest but significant number of clergy left the country. Of the 365 CURPH interview subjects, seven were identified as Catholic priests.⁵⁷ Applying the same ratio for the 200,000 56ers would produce a total of 3,836 priests. The leadership of the Jesuits in Hungary voted after the Revolution to send the thirty novices of its province abroad.⁵⁸ The superior of the Paulines, István Jenő Csellár, had been imprisoned in 1951 for various alleged crimes, including providing assistance for illegal émigrés. Csellár himself joined the exodus after the Revolution, as evidenced by his petition for admission to the U.S. from

53 Central Statistical Office, *1949. évi népszámlálás*, Pt 2, 12.

54 "KSH felmérése az 1956-os disszidálásról, 177; maps for the distribution of the Lutherans and Reformed in 1920, in Balogh and Gergely, *Egyházak az újkori Magyarországon 1790–1992*, 262–63.

55 *Hungarian Refugee Interviews from 1957–1958*.

56 Mink, "Columbia University Research Project Hungary," 13.

57 *Hungarian Refugee Interviews from 1957–1958*. One of the seven answered affirmatively as to whether he was an "active fighter in 1956." "No. 478" was a 28 year-old Franciscan monk.

58 Bánkuti, *Jezsuiták a diktatúrában*, 173.

Austria, along with two other members of his order. He entered the U.S. in July 1957.⁵⁹

The percentage of Jewish emigrants was remarkably high relative to their remaining population, which had continued to shrink after 1949 due to legal and illegal emigration. Given the varying criteria for Jewish identity, historians are cautious in their estimates of the number of Jewish 56ers, ranging from 15,000 to 30,000, from one-fifth to one-third of the members of the Jewish population of Hungary who had remained on the eve of the revolution. Jewish survivors in Hungary were understandably anxious about the possibility of an anti-Semitic upsurge, and this, more than the actual incidents during the revolution, may explain the Jewish exodus.⁶⁰ Fully two-thirds (8117) of the Hungarian citizens granted permission to emigrate legally in the first five months of 1957 emigrated to Israel.⁶¹

A high percentage of all the emigrants chose the United States as their desired destination, between 45 percent and 53 percent in the two Austrian surveys.⁶² More émigrés ended up settling in the U.S. than in any other country, but there were many who, hoping in vain for an American visa, refused to go elsewhere and became demoralized and in some cases suicidal.

The U.S. was as eager as other countries to expedite resettlement, as was urgently demanded by the Austrians, but it faced certain legal limitations unknown to other receiving countries. A provision in the Refugee Relief Act stated that an entry visa required an *assurance* that the traveler would not become a public charge, and during the period of greatest urgency the voluntary agencies were granted responsibility for assurances based on a quota for their coreligionists. Pierce Gerety, special assistant to the U.S. Secretary of State for refugee affairs, told an emergency meeting of the ACVAFS in November: “The Austrian government wants these people out as quickly as possible.” The committee’s chair, Msgr. Swanstrom, and other agency representatives expressed concern about pressure for rapid action, especially because they did not want to be the ones to decide who would get visas to enter the U.S.⁶³ It was apparently

59 CMS. CMS 023b. United States Catholic Conference. Bureau of Immigration. Records. Series VII: Clergy. Box 145, folder 4423.

60 Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon*, 1032–40; Stark, *Hungarian Jews During the Holocaust*, 168; AJDC. Joint Distribution Committee, *1957 Annual Report*, 3.

61 “KSH,” 177.

62 Kern, *Österreich: Offene Grenze der Menschlichkeit*, 80.

63 SCUA. Box 69: Displaced Persons and Refugees. Folder: Migration and Refugee Problems, Committee on. Minutes. Meeting of the Committee on Migration and Refugee Problems, November 9, 1956.

this peculiarity in American procedures that prompted an agreement between the CRS and ICMC according to which the CRS would focus its immigration counseling on movements to the U.S., whereas the ICMC and Caritas would “counsel schemes both inside and outside Europe.”⁶⁴ Fr. Flynn wrote New York from the Vienna office of the CRS describing the pressure he was under, but he also reported improvement:

Of the thousands of Hungarian Refugees who have already gone to the United States under the emergency and sponsored by CRS I doubt that more than 200 were really thoroughly interviewed. We simply were not given the time [by the Embassy] to do this... Now, as I said before, and thank God, we can act in a more orderly and sensible manner.⁶⁵

The CRS staff in Austria, bolstered by colleagues from neighboring countries and volunteers, numbered 225 in locations around the country. The head of the Salzburg office of the CRS reported that the work was “a nightmare of improvisation” and “not entirely free from confusion,” but succeeded thanks to dedication and collaboration with the many other agencies and organizations.⁶⁶

James Norris wrote that “the sudden Hungarian exodus has constituted the biggest movement of Catholic refugees. Yet Catholic organizations have not been alone in coping with the problem.”⁶⁷ The ICMC’s *Migration News* understandably focused on the Catholic organizations, and indeed they had far more staff working directly with the Hungarian refugees than the other religious agencies. A coordinating committee for government, intergovernmental, and voluntary agencies working on the Hungarian refugee crisis met in Geneva seventeen times between 13 November 1956 and 21 October 1957. The minutes reveal strong engagement not only by the CRS and ICMC, but also by Charles Jordan, representing the Standing Conference of Voluntary Agencies Working for Refugees and the JDC, Edgar Chandler, and various representatives of the

64 UNOG. Victor Beermann [head of the UNHCR office in Vienna] to the UNHCR office in Geneva, December 3, 1956. Fonds 11 Series 1. Box 105. 4/45 HUN International Catholic Migration Commission—Assistance to Hungarian Refugees.

65 CMS. Flynn to Msgr. Emil N. Kamora, Executive Director, The Catholic Committee for Refugees, NY. 1/7/57. In Center for Migration Studies. O24. NCWC—Department of Immigration—New York Office and NCWC Catholic Committee for Refugee. Records. General Correspondence. Box 9/31, Folder: Hungarian Children. Children’s Division.

66 Boyle, “N.C.W.C.-Austria and the Hungarian Refugees,” 17–19.

67 Norris, “Hungarian Refugee Emergency,” 2–3.

UNHCR, ICEM, Red Cross, U.S. Escapee Program, CARE, AFSC, and various smaller agencies.⁶⁸

Recurrent topics in the coordinating committee included the current status of refugee flow into and out of Hungary, the management of the camps by the Red Cross or the Austrian government, and the supply of food and clothing. Both the Catholic agencies and those with fewer staff on the ground in Austria distributed materials collected through their own fundraising efforts as well as those supplied by U.S. government surplus and USEP funds. Within the ACVAFS New York office, the Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs focused on the movement of people, whereas a separate Ad Hoc Committee on Hungary was dedicated to the supply of material within both Austria and Hungary.⁶⁹ The Vienna council of the ACVAFS may have met less frequently (there are relatively few minutes in the ACVAFS archives) because it was so busy actually working with the refugees. One topic documented in the records is the division of proceeds from a fundraising effort on behalf of Hungarian youth. One such breakdown was 56 percent for CRS, 21 percent for the Lutheran World Federation/World Council of Churches, 11 percent for AJDC, and 2 percent each for the Brethren Service Commission, the Hungarian Refugee Service, the International Social Service, the World Ort Union, and the YMCA/YWCA.⁷⁰

Care for the several thousand unaccompanied youth was an increasingly common topic in the committee meetings, especially as the number of Hungarian refugees waned in 1957. The worldwide interest in adopting refugee orphans far outstripped their actual number. The UNHCR, Austrian and Hungarian governments, and the voluntary agencies were all engaged in a discussion about the options for repatriation, resettlement, or settlement in Austria. Many voluntary agencies helped establish group homes and schools for Hungarian young people who resettled in Germany or stayed in Austria.⁷¹

Hungarian intelligence analysis of intercepted mail⁷² reported frequent contacts between the refugees and the clergy in the camps and resettlement communities. Allegations of anti-Communist agitation in these encounters,

68 The minutes of the seventeen meetings are reproduced in Hungarian translation (from the English original) in Kecskés, *Egy globális humanitárius akció bétköznapjai*.

69 The minutes for five meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee on Hungary are online at AJDC.

70 SCUA. Minutes for the meeting of 16 May 1957, in Box 61. Councils Abroad—AUSTRIA—Hungarian Refugee Relief 1956–57.

71 Nagy, *Magyar középiskolák Ausztriában 1956 után*; Cserhádi, “A katolikus egyház szerepe az 1956-os magyar fiatalok beilleszkedésében Németországban.”

72 ABTL. 4.1. A-3177, “Összefoglaló jelentés az egyházi emigrációról.”

recruitment into intelligence services, or dissemination of propaganda seem to have been exaggerations. The religious component of these encounters presumed concern for the individual traveler and how he or she might deal with the available choices with the help of a kind word and ready ear, perhaps also with sacraments or prayer. In their committee reports, the WCC and the Catholic agencies emphasized that they had staff who spoke Hungarian and sought out the refugees. On November 23, 1956, Pope Pius named Bishop Stephan László, administrator of the Burgenland province (where most of the refugees entered Austria) and a speaker of Hungarian, as Apostolic Visitor for the Catholic Hungarian refugees in Austria. In this position, László had authority over all Hungarian priests arriving in Austria as refugees and the responsibility of ensuring that priests with knowledge of Hungarian attend to the refugees wherever they were. László published a bulletin in German and another in Hungarian for clergy working with the refugees.⁷³

In the United States, the religious agencies and clergy detailed to Camp Kilmer participated in the processing of refugees, performed religious services, and held weddings. The fifteen members of the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief in Washington, DC included CRS Director Msgr. Edward Swanson, Charles P. Taft (one of the founders of the WCC), and ACVAFS Chairman Moses A. Leavitt of the JDC. Four of the seven voluntary agencies represented at Camp Kilmer were religious in character: the CRS, CWS, HIAS, and LRS. Camp Kilmer's operating manual states:

the NCWC often assigns groups of refugees to a given Diocese, which is in turn expected to work out the actual sponsorships locally within the parishes. In all instances, the Sponsoring Agency is the organization to which the United States Government and the Hungarians look for the finalizing of the resettlement plan, as well as the maintenance of contact.⁷⁴

73 DAE. The archives contain one issue (issue 2) of the German bulletin *Mitteilungen des apostolischen Administrators für die seelsorgerliche der ungarischen Flüchtlinge* and none of the Hungarian bulletin *Egyházi értesítő*. The German bulletin indicates he requested reports from the Hungarian refugee priests, but I'm unable to locate these reports, nor do there seem to be copies of either bulletin in the Austrian or Hungarian National Libraries. Selected documents and accounts of pastoral work among the refugees are published in Gáal, ed., *1956 und das Burgenland*.

74 *Manual of Policies and Procedures*. The passage cited is from E-8, "Functions and Responsibilities of the Sponsoring Agencies."

Many refugees left the camp in response to invitations from relatives or employers without waiting for religious sponsorship. In all, 32,000 refugees passed through Camp Kilmer before it closed in April, 1957. The religious agencies and at least one Hungarian American organization criticized the decision to channel refugees through Camp Kilmer.⁷⁵ On 13 November 1956, the CRS invited diocesan resettlement directors to notify the central office if they were ready to receive Hungarians in large quantities, encouraging them to write: “send us a planeload.” A follow-up circular issued on 3 December stated: “We have had dozens of requests for planeloads of refugees for specific cities... We have agreed that all refugees would come to Camp Kilmer where we would group them for transportation to specific destinations.”

According to the *Resettlement Newsletter* of the CRS, twelve dioceses did receive planeloads, carrying 75-100 people at a time.⁷⁶ Two Hungarian priests organized the reception of the planeload that landed in Chicago on 13 December and apparently supplied the front page headline in the *Chicago Daily Sun-Times*: “Isten Hozta a Szabadság Országába [sic] (Translation from Hungarian: God Brought



A chartered plane awaits first group of Hungarian refugees to be resettled in Detroit. Pictured with refugees before leaving Newark Airport are l. to r. Edward L. Cummings, Asst. Executive Director, Resettlement Division, CIS-NWC, Senator Charles Potter of Michigan; Rev. Andrew Jacobs and Rev. John Nagy of Detroit.



The first group of Hungarian refugees arrived in Chicago on December 13. At the foot of the stairway to the plane, ready to welcome the newcomers, was His Eminence Samuel Cardinal Stritch. First refugees off the plane were a Hungarian physician, his physician wife and their infant son, who cannot be identified for fear of reprisals against their family, still in Hungary.

Figure 3. “Send us a planeload”: The 21 December 1956 issue of the CRS’s Resettlement Newsletter depicts planeloads of people arriving in Detroit and Chicago. CMS 023b. Bureau of Immigration, Box 153. Folder 4857. Hungarians, pt. 2. Reprinted with the permission of the Center for Migration Studies of New York.

75 On the government’s view of Camp Kilmer and its critics, see Niessen, “Hungarian Refugees of 1956,” 129.

76 CMS 023b. Bureau of Immigration, Box 153. Folder 4857. Hungarians, pt. 2 and folder 4858. Hungarians, pt. 3.

You to Freedom’s Country.”⁷⁷ Another paper reported: “A Hungarian refugee broke into a warm smile” at the sight of the headline.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The history of the reception of Hungarian refugees after the 1956 Revolution has generally been recounted as an impressive success story. The refugees in general were highly educated, and they brought with them youthful ambition. They benefitted from growing economies in the host countries, thus it might seem that they were predestined for success in their new lives. We can ascribe the warm welcome they received in part to the Cold War heroization of freedom fighters and victims of Communist repression. This study suggests that the religious or spiritual message in this welcome must also be considered. Voluntary agencies, their donors, and volunteers were not immune to the political milieu, but they were also motivated by their particular, and indeed widely shared, humanitarian mission.

The collaboration between the bureaucrats and the voluntary agencies was largely successful, despite their at times diverging missions. The resolutely upbeat tone of American government relief managers was at odds with the occasionally tense exchanges between the American officials and voluntary agency representatives. In contrast to the positive note in the promotional materials of the President’s Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief, its chair, Tracy Voorhees, regretted the American decision to phase out large-scale refugee relief in the spring of 1957 in response to declining support for the program in Congress. Fr. Flynn, the director of the CRS office in Vienna, spoke to a meeting of Catholic resettlement directors in New York on February 19, 1957. He painted an alarming picture of overcrowding in Austrian camps, and he lamented the flagging support for the refugees among politicians.⁷⁹ The demoralizing waits endured by refugees still stranded in the Austrian camps and cases of unemployment in countries of resettlement prompted some refugees to return to Hungary. Voluntary repatriation reached over 20,000 by 1960.⁸⁰

77 *Chicago Daily Sun-Times*, December 13, 1956, p 1. The Hungarian version (and the English translation) that the paper included in the headline were correct, with only one error in the Hungarian diacritics.

78 Gilstrap, “Chicago Welcomes Hungarian Refugees,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 15, 1956, 6.

79 “Refugee Centers Scored by Priest: Return to Hungary Seen if ‘Indecent’ Overcrowding in Austria Continues,” *New York Times* February 20, 1957, 12.

80 Niessen, “Hungarian Refugees of 1956,” 131–33; Porter, *Benevolent Empire*, 135–52.

The ACVAFS published a report in April 1958 that noted various purported shortcomings in the reception of Hungarian refugees, from the federal government's preference for routing refugees through Camp Kilmer to inadequate attention to humanitarian considerations and inequitable, inconsistent criteria applied in the selection of candidates for resettlement.⁸¹ Fr. Flynn had called in his 19 February address for the U.S. government and the UNHCR to act more responsibly. This would indeed occur in the coming years, as both took on a larger share of the initiative and expense of refugee relief. The relative impact of the voluntary agencies would consequently decline, although they continue to exert some influence to the present day.⁸²

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CMS Center for Migration Studies, New York
CZW Caritas Centrale Wien, Austria. Binder of reports on the Hungarian Crisis
DAE Diözesanarchiv Eisenstadt, Austria. Nachlass Bischof László
DAW Diözesanarchiv Wien, Austria
IOM International Organization for Migration, Geneva, Switzerland. Library Archives. Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, Records
SCUA Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey
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UNOG Archives of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

81 *Report of Fact Finding Committee of the Committee on Migration and Refugee Problems*, April 21, 1958; SCUA Box 69, folder Migration and Refugee Problems, Committee on, and Box 82, folder Fact Finding Committee: Minutes-Memos-Reports-Correspondence 1956–58.

82 Porter, "Epilogue," in *Benevolent Empire*, 205–19; Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics*, especially "The Emerging Independence of the UNHCR under Auguste Lindt," 81–104.

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