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Victims of Atheist Persecution

Transnational Catholic Solidarity and Refugee Protection in Cold War Asia

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Introduction

In 1954, the Geneva Conference ended the First Indochina War by dividing Vietnam into two temporary zones. Military troops had to regroup to the communist zone in the North or the noncommunist zone in the South. Civilians could also join the zone of their choice for 300 days. As a result, more than 800,000 civilians left the North to move to the noncommunist zone (Figure 3.1).

Many Western newspapers published the story of Vietnamese escaping communism. The French Catholic journal *Missi* sent its editor in chief to cover the story. Father Naïdenoff gave a vivid depiction of their ordeal. A photograph showed a man lying on the deck of a boat, with one hand on his forehead and the other one holding a crucifix to his chest (ECPAD 1955a). The accompanying caption read: “A poignant vision of faith. In the deepest sleep, they hold a crucifix which serves as an identity card in their exodus to freedom” (Naïdenoff 1955a). The importance of the Catholic faith in the exodus was paramount.

The Vietnamese Catholic community had grown since the first missionaries in the seventeenth century to almost two million. Although they made up only 10 percent of the Vietnamese population, 80 percent of the civilians moving South were Catholics (Bùi 1959; Nguyen 1995; Nguyen 2016). Others were Buddhists and Confucianists, and only 1,000 were Protestants. Donations from Catholics abroad reached such proportions that an Auxiliary Committee for the Resettlement was created to distribute them (Phạm 1955). Why was there a Catholic dimension to this migration? Why was one’s religious affiliation important in this displacement and in the worldwide response to it?



Figure 3.1 A young man lies down on the deck of a boat transporting him from Phat Diem to the regrouping point in Hai Phong, circa October 1954; photo by Établissement de communication et de production audiovisuelle de la Défense, <https://www.ecpad.fr/presse/> (©Jean Lussan/ECPAD/Défense/NVN 54-166 R6).

Most studies have focused on the resettlement of these refugees (Hansen 2008, 2009b; Picard 2016). Instead, this chapter analyzes the relationship between their religion and refugee protection. It shows that refugee protection is best understood as a relationship that is intentional, dynamic, and dialectical. Catholic charity extended its support to other coreligionists across the globe because they considered they are part of the same family. But the dispatch of Catholic emergency relief overseas was neither automatic nor universal. The 1954 refugee crisis shows that missionaries and high members of the hierarchy, often former refugees themselves, channeled international Catholic aid into Vietnam for both religious and political reasons. This network did not appear in 1954, but years earlier in China and Korea, under the Japanese occupation and the civil wars. Religious authorities and missionaries fleeing communist rule sought both protection and new partners in their ongoing struggle against



Figure 3.2 Refugees disembark the French boat, *La Pertuisane*, in Haiphong and wait to be transported to Southern Vietnam, circa October 1954; photo by Établissement de communication et de production audiovisuelle de la Défense, <https://www.ecpad.fr/presse/> (©René Adrien/ECPAD/Défense/NVN 54-158 R2).

expansion. This shows that humanitarian mobilization can serve political interests and that refugees are not only victims of persecution. They are also proactive actors seeking recognition and becoming the spokespersons of a common front (Figure 3.2).

Western Churches and Cold War Refugees

Refugee protection is not neutral. It also allows states to make gains in terms of scientific knowledge, trade networks, or military recruitment by selecting the refugees they protect. Even the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees let states pursue their own interests and use protection to denounce a political enemy (Goodwin-Gill 2008). Thus, refugee protection is an intervention that

is both humanitarian and political. Humanitarian aid coming from religious networks emphasizes the ideals of solidarity among members of the same religious tradition, and charity toward others. Yet protecting refugees can serve both humanitarian and political objectives. This was obvious during the Cold War.

Contrary to the idea that the Vatican carried out a crusade against communism (Jacobs 2004; Manhattan 1984), Catholics did not follow the same policy toward communism (Chadwick 1993; Kent 2002; Lüthi 2020). In Asia, the Vatican's greatest concern was not communist expansion, but the risk of a schismatic church (Wiest 1999). What the Holy See feared was the creation of national churches, loyal to Beijing or Hanoi rather than to Rome (Naïdenoff 1956b). This was horrifying because of a demographic reality: proselytism had to take place in Asia and in Africa, where population growth was the fastest (The International Catholic Migration Commission and Foundation 1954). An article in *L'Actualité religieuse dans le monde* confirmed this: "In Asia, only 1% of Catholics," "Substantial progress in Africa," and "Europe in Decline" ("La situation religieuse" 1955). Keeping non-Western Catholics within the Roman Catholic Church was a matter of survival. So shortly after Chinese Communist victory, the Vatican issued *Ad sinarum gentes* in 1954, urging Chinese Catholics to remain faithful (Mungello 2015: 64).

Protecting vulnerable Catholic refugees overseas would have been the perfect opportunity to intervene in this matter. But Rome delegated this responsibility to national churches. Pope Pius XII's 1952 apostolic constitution, *Exsul Familia Nazarethana*, created institutions reflecting the needs of a more global Christian world. It also considered that the Vatican was not responsible for providing humanitarian relief. Since the eighth century, Pilgrim's Halls proliferated in Rome, welcoming Saxons, Franks, Frisians, Ethiopians, Hungarians, or Armenians. "This experience proves that the sacred ministry can be carried on more effectively among strangers and pilgrims if it is exercised by priests of their own nationality or at least who speak their language" (Pope Pius XII 1952). The Catholic faith was universal. But its networks of solidarity worked best within subcultural communities.

Refugees in Asia were high on the list of Western churches. Representatives of the Holy See and national Catholic relief associations met at the International Catholic Migration Congress in 1954, to discuss how Catholics engaged, supported, and received population movements. Papers on refugee crises discussed the situation in camps in Germany and Austria or the displaced population in Trieste. Yet a priest from the French Secours catholique also

presented the exodus of the Northern Vietnamese Catholics, guided by their priests in the search of freedom of religion (de Rochcau 1954). Another paper reviewed the crisis in Hong Kong. Thousands of refugees, including 6,000 foreign Catholic missionaries, lived in horrible conditions (Donders 1954: 263). The final statements of the conference included one on refugees. It appealed to all Catholics to provide aid to Hong Kong or Macao and to “make known in their respective countries the courage and the faith of those hundreds of thousands of Catholics who have chosen to leave all their possessions in order to continue their lives as Christians” in Vietnam (Potulicki 1954: 390). Catholic solidarity extended its protection beyond international law. While the 1951 Convention only protected the population displaced by events happening in Europe before 1951, Catholic relief also reached out to non-Western refugees, especially those fleeing communism.

National churches did not contribute equally to the Vietnamese evacuees. Catholics in the UK, Germany, and Belgium raised funds for them. The French weekly *Missi* initially collected 900,000 francs. *Le Figaro* also raised thirty-seven million francs (Ély 1964: 225). Yet this paled compared to American Catholics who donated the equivalent of 700 million francs in the first year alone (Naïdenoff 1955a, 1956a). Of all national churches, the American National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) was the most powerful.

After the Second World War, American Catholic aid went to diverse humanitarian crises. But relief to the victims of communist atrocities came as a priority. For the year 1957, only 30 percent of all the goods and gifts donated overseas went to Asia, of which only 13 percent came to Vietnam (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1957). In absolute terms, Vietnam was a small beneficiary, ranking after Poland, and just before Germany. But regarding the number of Catholics living in these countries, this aid was significant. There were only 5.6 million Catholics in Vietnam, compared to 35 million and 26.2 million, respectively, in Poland and Germany. Yet the amount allocated to Vietnamese Catholics was colossal. The dollar value per potential Catholic beneficiary for Vietnam ranked third in Asia, just after Japan and Formosa, two other places that, just like Vietnam, were both new lands of proselytism and bastions against communist expansion. The organization was not shy to support Washington’s escapee program, which granted asylum and provided help to people fleeing communism (Catholic Relief Services 1954). Although many other populations received help, Catholics facing communist expansion was one of American Catholic’ priority.

Then who decided which emergency situations were worthy of assistance? And who demanded to focus on certain situations over others? While American

Catholics donated for humanitarian reasons, political reasons, or both, a few individual activists kept the situation of the church in Asia at the forefront of American concerns. These activists came together into a Catholic arc of resistance against communist expansion, which originated in China.

The Birth of a Catholic Arc of Resistance

The generosity of Catholics from the United States and elsewhere in the Western world did not materialize in a vacuum. Key actors, such as missionaries and prominent members of the Catholic hierarchy, strove to attract and keep Cold War Asia among the Western churches' priorities.

Missionaries connected Catholics in China to international networks. They did not defend imperialist interests as many of them had in the previous century. Instead, they spread new ideas and practices which supported Chinese Catholics' nationalism, self-organization tactics, and a sense of resistance during the civil war. The Belgian missionary Vincent Lebbe was a pioneer in inspiring Chinese Catholic nationalism. He advocated for the creation of an entirely Chinese church served by Western missionaries (Gillet 2012; Young 2013: chapters 8–9). The missionaries he trained worked every day to free the Chinese church from imperialism and the domination of Western missionaries. This determination to make the church genuinely Chinese and independent from external interference inspired some of them, such as Raymond de Jaegher, to become just as opposed to communist rule. The Japanese imprisoned the missionary and released him in 1945. In Beijing, he organized a refugee shelter until communist authorities expelled him in 1951. He traveled to Belgium, then back to Asia, and raised awareness about “communist atrocities” in his memoirs, *The Enemy Within* (de Jaegher 1952, 1959a). He also formed the Free Pacific Association, whose purpose was to connect Chinese Catholics with overseas networks and unite all people of the Pacific area into one economic and moral stronghold against communism (de Jaegher 1959a, 1959b, 1221962).

American Jesuits created lay associations involved in propagating the faith or charity work, capable of sustaining the growth of Catholics as a grassroots movement even without the clergy members' initiative (Strong 2018: 285–94; Mungello 2015: 52). But this success put a target on their back (Mungello 2015: 59–62). Communist authorities imprisoned and then executed Father Zhang Boda, an American missionary of Chinese descent, for hindering the recruitment of soldiers for the Korean War. His death sparked violent confrontations between

Chinese Catholics and communist authorities (Clark 2017: 213; Mariani 2011: 59; Mungello 2015: 59–62).

Last, the Columban Fathers sent Irish missionaries who came with their lived experience in Ireland, which included resistance against British occupation in Ulster, particularly since the 1916 Easter Rising. While they opposed transferring responsibilities to local priests (Hoare 2006: 66), they still inspired a spirit of resistance and provided contacts overseas. The Legion of Mary, headed by an Irish Columban priest, mirrored the underground mobilization techniques of Chinese Communists (Mungello 2015: 58; Mariani 2011: 47–52). Just a few years after its creation in 1948, it mobilized over 2,000 youth at a time. As a result, it also became a target of communist repression (Mariani 2011: 61). Their periodical, *The Far East*, informed Irish and American Catholics of the state of the Chinese church. Columban father Patrick O'Connor became the chief news correspondent for the News Catholic Service Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam in 1945. In 1948, the apostolic nuncio in China, Archbishop Riberi, requested that he create a news agency under the Catholic Central Bureau, the *Hua Ming News Service*, which suspended its activities the following year (Columban Fathers 2017: 109). His reporting proved capital in generating support overseas. In those three cases, missionaries inspired a fiercely independent church and connected it with the rest of the Christian world. Yet the most proactive agents in creating a transnational network of solidarity were not missionaries, but higher members of the Catholic hierarchy.

Monsignor Paul Yu Pin, the archbishop of Nankin, was a key architect in creating a solidarity network. In 1937, he had to remain in the United States, after the Japanese occupying China had offered a bounty for his capture. There, he visited dioceses and met congressional representatives in Washington, where he launched a periodical and created a cultural institute to raise awareness about the Japanese invasion (de Jaegher 1959a). His intention was obvious: Chinese Catholics had to find allies. The United States would be the most powerful of them all. The archbishop then returned to Chongqing, to the new headquarters of the Guomindang. During these years, he supported Korean independence fighters who sought refuge there (Choi 2016). When the Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949, the government expelled all the foreign missionary or recalcitrant members of the Catholic hierarchy. Paul Yu Pin went into exile again. He sought refuge in Taiwan, from where he continued to reach out to Catholic networks overseas.

His activism only matched American Cardinal Francis Spellman's passion for Asia and opposition to communism. During the Chinese civil war, Spellman

visited the Nationalist government in Nankin, together with Monsignor Paul Yu Pin. There, he ordained fourteen Chinese priests, “some of whom, if things continue to deteriorate, may become martyrs,” he reported to the archdiocese in New York (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1948: 2). After the Chinese nationalists evacuated to Taiwan, Spellman again caused a sensation by saying mass in the largest auditorium of the island. To continue this tradition, an official of the apostolic prefecture in Taipei imagined that only Paul Yu Pin could fill his shoes and lead the mass conversions (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1952).

The cardinal also served as a support in diplomatic offensives against communism, using the Vatican or the United Nations. When members of the Chinese church regrouped in Taiwan, Yu Pin and Chang Kaishek reached out to Spellman again. The cardinal lobbied the Vatican to ask why the papal nuncio to China, Antonion Riberi, was not transferred to Taiwan and whether Rome could send someone else to serve as an apostolic delegate (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1954a). This concerned the spiritual mission of the church. But it was clear that such a gesture was also an attempt to bring the Vatican to recognize Taiwan as the only government of China.

Korean nationalists also seized the cardinal for his support. In May 1951, the Republic of Korea claimed that communists were committing a religious genocide, by eliminating the religious leaders and depriving the 760,000 Protestants and Catholics from their religious ministers (“The Korean Dead” 1951). According to a press release, six bishops and around a hundred religious ministers had been imprisoned or killed. A mass grave of Catholic priests had been found in the province of So. Chungchong (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1951a). As the government was about to press charges of religious genocide at the UN Economic and Social Council, its permanent representative wrote a letter to Spellman, listing the countries meeting at the Economic and Social Council six weeks later, and asking him to do everything in his power to support their initiative (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1951b). Eventually, the Republic of Korea withdrew the charges, but its appeal to Spellman is revealing. His influence was such that he could lobby several governments to back up Seoul’s diplomatic offensive.

Missionaries and certain members of the clergy not only exchanged information and vows about the propagation of the faith. Faced with communist expansion, some of them—often refugees themselves—also reached out to each other to take concrete measures against communist expansion. They used diplomatic channels to oppose communism or raised the awareness of Catholics elsewhere about the dangers of its expansion. Both refugees and protectors

sought allies and a new battleground to fight communism. Many converged in Saigon in 1954.

Vietnam as a Rallying Point

Not all, but many Catholics in Vietnam also opposed communism. The major difference yet is that they initially fought together with the Việt Minh against the return of colonial rule in 1945 (Trần 1996; Keith 2012). It was only after the pope's excommunication of Italian Communists in 1948 and Chinese Communists' victory in 1949 that the Indochinese episcopacy declared that communism was contrary to the Christian doctrine and encouraged the faithful not to engage in any activity that may give an advantage to communism (Trần 1996: 93–5). While many Catholics disregarded this call and remained either supportive or neutral to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, others, especially clergy members and the laity in the dioceses of Bùi Chu and Phát Diệm who had formed paramilitary troops to defend their administrative autonomy, clashed with communist cadres.

These Catholics also created associations connecting them to Catholics overseas. The Vietnamese chapter of the Legion of Mary, created in 1948, inspired a spirit of resistance to its members (Tổng giáo phận Hà Nội 2013). The association provided an important link to other parts of war-torn Asia. Their weekly publication, *Đạo Binh Đức Mẹ* (The Legion of Mary), which started in 1952 in Hanoi, reported on the fate of other fellow Catholics. A feature piece in their first issue informed the readers in Hanoi of Chinese Catholics' experience of communist denunciation campaigns (Tình hình công giáo Trung Hoa 1952). Catholics in Korea, involved in a fierce civil war, enjoyed the same coverage (Hội thanh niên công giáo Triều Tiên 1952) (Tình hình giáo hội Cao Ly 1952). *Đạo Binh Đức Mẹ* also published the letters the pope had sent to Catholics in the Soviet Union (Đức Giáo Hoàng Pio XII 1952). As they read the pages of the periodical, Vietnamese Catholics understood that they were not alone. They were fighting a global threat with their Chinese and Korean coreligionists.

Another important connection to Catholics abroad also came from the efforts of the Ngô family to reach out for help. In 1950, Ngô Đình Diệm, a political leader from one of the oldest Catholic families in Vietnam, went into exile with his brother, Ngô Đình Thục, the third Vietnamese priest ever to become a bishop (Miller 2013: 36–41). Just like Mgr. Paul Yu Pin in China, he was both seeking protection and looking for new allies. He left Vietnam because he learned he

was on the Việt Minh's assassination list. Once overseas, he visited the Vatican, France, Belgium, and the United States. In the United States, he met Cardinal Spellman, and in Washington several congressmen who, years later, formed the Vietnam lobby (Morgan 1997). Despite this, there was still no major Catholic solidarity movement toward noncommunist Vietnam, until the refugee flow in 1954 provided the momentum to do so.

As the regroupment in Southern Vietnam progressed, the population displacement transitioned from a collateral damage into what the West saw as people fleeing communist persecution. Initially, the migration was only



Figure 3.3 Navy Chaplain Lieutenant Francis J. Fitzpatrick and Vietnamese members of the clergy guide refugees transported by the US Navy during Operation “Passage to Freedom”; NARA/US NavyPhotograph/80-G-709243; photo by NARA/US Navy Photograph/80-G-709243, Operation “Passage to Freedom” 1954–1955/NARA/Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington, D.C.

partly Catholic. Refugees from the dioceses of Bùi Chu and Phát Diệm who had already arrived in Hanoi found transportation to the South. But airplanes also transported French civilians and equipment, together with civil servants, scientists, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs following their office or their business partners. It was only after parishes in Northern Central Vietnam experienced problems evacuating to the South that Catholics, more than any other Vietnamese civilians, came into focus (Figure 3.3).

Evidence of obstruction emerged from French ships patrolling the coast. As they traveled up the Đáy River, an increasing number of Catholic refugees reached the ship to request help (Broussole and Provençal 2013). At one point, villagers attempted to reach the sea during the low tide, walking out to a sandbank hoping that a French vessel would pass by before the return of the high tide (Naïdenoff 1955a). Obstructions became more obvious with an incident in Ba Làng, in the province of Thanh Hóa. According to a petition sent to the International Control Commission (ICC), created to oversee the ceasefire's implementation, 10,000 Catholics waited inside the church to move to the South. After Việt Minh cadres tried to dissuade them to leave, a company of the People's Army forced the entrance, captured 200 individuals, and dispersed 200 others (Service historique de l'armée de terre (SHAT) 1955a). Then, the communist authorities arrested five people and dispatched a military section, followed by two more. Tension escalated on February 13, when the army opened fire, claiming the lives of fourteen people (Naïdenoff 1955a). Now, the struggle of Vietnamese Catholics against communism also had its own martyrs. And the evacuation, which captured everyone's attention after the Geneva ceasefire, had become a Catholic exodus.

Transnational Solidarity in Action

When the evacuation period ended, the refugee flow was overwhelmingly Catholic. So was the humanitarian aid and the resettlement. Over twelve national Catholic relief associations sent aid to the refugees and supported their subsistence needs as well as the construction of 189 new churches across Southern Vietnam (Phạm Ngọc Chi 1955: 6). It would be misleading to believe that Catholic relief spontaneously went to Vietnam. The arc of resistance against communism which had emerged in China was instrumental in extending its mobilization to Southern Vietnam for humanitarian, diplomatic, and political purposes.

Cardinal Spellman's interest in the evacuation served as a magnet for the assistance of other important Catholic authorities. Diêm wrote to the cardinal on July 25 to request his support so that Spellman could "project an appeal for help to the free world, and above all to Christians of all denominations in America . . ." (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1954a). A week before calling for the help of the United States and all other friendly nations, the prime minister had already reached out to the archbishop of New York (Prados 2009: 113–14). Compared to all other Western governments and organizations, the archbishop was one of the most resourceful partners (Figure 3.4).

Spellman's visit also triggered a wave of support from other national churches. The Catholic hierarchy in France had not planned to dispatch any official representatives to visit the evacuees' camps. But General Ély urged the French church to send someone when he heard that the archbishop of New York

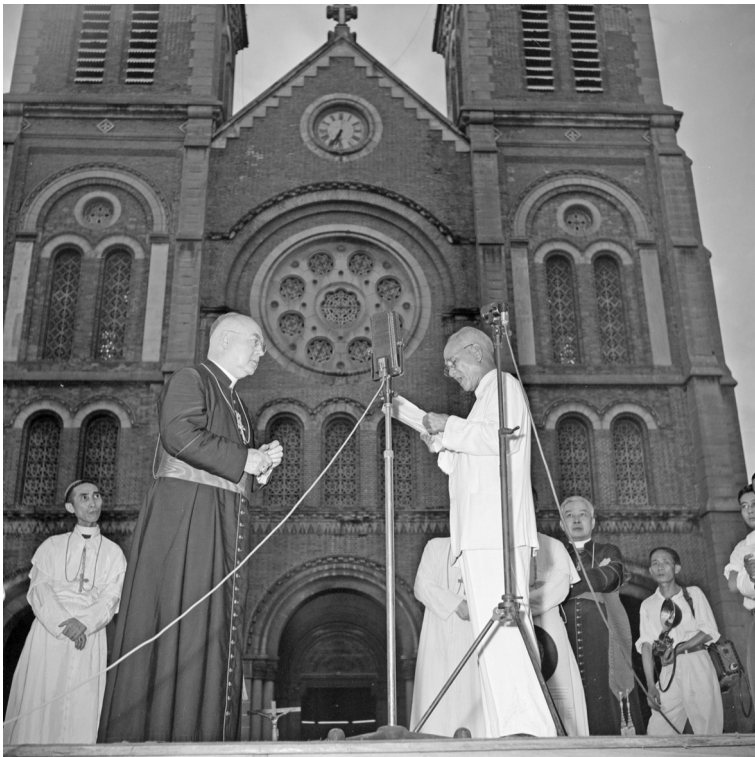


Figure 3.4 Archbishop Francis Spellman listens to a Catholic refugee during a mass he says in front of Notre Dame Cathedral, 1955; photo by Établissement de communication et de production audiovisuelle de la Défense, <https://www.ecpad.fr/presse/> (©Tordjmann/ECPAD/Défense/SC 55-2 R31).

would come to visit. Saigon took Spellman's arrival as a major event. Officials came to cover his arrival at the airport; foreign correspondents followed his visits to refugee camps; around 70,000 people gathered in front of Notre Dame Cathedral to hear him give mass (ECPAD 1955b). The French did their best to generate the same interest for Monsignor Rhodain's trip, with less success. At least, he manifested the solidarity of French Catholics to the humanitarian crisis. So did Catholic dignitaries from Germany and Australia who came to visit refugee camps with Archbishop Paul Yu Pin, because Francis Spellman himself had come to Vietnam.

Cardinal Spellman was not the only important person to raise the awareness of Catholic churches in the West. In fact, his trips and the wave of visits from other dignitaries were one-time gestures. The interest of Western churches could wane. Other activists were central to keeping Vietnam at the forefront of their concerns. Father Patrick O'Connor continued his reporting as the Asian correspondent of the Catholic News Service. Now that the Chinese civil war and the Korean War were over, he focused on South Vietnam. It was his articles on the refugees that made the front pages of all 111 American diocesan newspapers (Jacobs 2004: 136). O'Connor was not just a veteran reporter of previous wars. He was also an important link that continued to feed stories of atrocities to the Catholic media in the United States. According to historian John T. Donovan (2004), O'Connor kept defending a staunchly anti-communist line even in the late 1960s, when the pope was calling for peace in Vietnam. Even humanitarian officers were veterans of battlefronts lost because of communist expansion. Monsignor Joseph Harnett, the director of the Catholic Relief Services, the largest NGOs involved in the Vietnamese evacuation and resettlement, previously worked in Trieste, where the population doubled with refugees fleeing communism, and in Korea, just before moving to Saigon (Kauffman 2005). He too became an important connection between Saigon, Catholics in Vietnam, and Catholics in the United States.

The transnational support received for refugee protection was also an opportunity for Saigon to gain support. For Ngô Đình Diệm, Catholic networks were instrumental for diplomatic relations. Ever since he became the prime minister in June 1954, he refused to take part in the Geneva Conference. After the signature of the ceasefire agreement, he refrained from doing anything that could come out as a recognition of its provisions. Diệm asked the French High Commissioner, General Paul Ély, to request local investigations on communist atrocities in Catholic parishes. He also wrote to Cardinal Spellman seeking American support. The prime minister explained that there were roughly

“25,000 Catholics waiting for French vessels on the sandbanks,” proving once again how cruel and dangerous communist rule was. He also insisted on the peculiar situation which prevented him from seizing the ICC: “With respect to judicial aspects, it is not opportune for the National Government of Vietnam, which has not signed the Geneva Accords, to officially protest against its violation” (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1954b; TTLT2/PThT/An Ninh 1955). The Catholic Church was not only responsible for the spiritual lives of Catholics. It also served as a diplomatic pivot for Saigon.

Catholic authorities less inclined to support an all-out anti-communist policy also unwittingly supported Saigon’s political campaign. The Vatican did not encourage the preservation of a distinct Catholic refugee identity (Nguyen 2016: 231). It also had to temper Saigon’s anger when it appointed a politically moderate priest, Nguyễn Văn Bình, instead of the president’s own brother (Cardinal Spellman Funds 1956b). Yet Rome had an interest in showing the Vietnamese Catholic refugee crisis as an evidence of both international Catholic solidarity and Catholic influence in the Third World. Years after the evacuation, Saigon used the Northern refugees as an opportunity to shine on the international stage. For example, South Vietnam could not participate to the 1958 Universal Exhibition in Brussels because both Hanoi and Saigon claimed they represented the country. Yet the Holy See dedicated a space in its pavilion to the 1954 Vietnamese refugees. Both Rome and Saigon used the refugees’ successful resettlement for different reasons. But the Vatican was aware that by showcasing the Vietnamese refugees, it was also supporting Saigon’s diplomatic struggle.

Catholic and governmental authorities were not the only ones taking advantage of this historical moment. Many Northern Vietnamese Catholic refugees previously involved in politics, the arts, or the paramilitary considered that the international support they received was a confirmation that they had to rewrite history. They formed selective memories of the First Indochina War and pushed for representations which implied that being a Catholic also involved an opposition to the spread of atheism in wartime Vietnam (Nguyen 2016).

Former refugees of the Chinese civil war also took advantage of the media focus, international support, and historical consciousness arising from the 1954 evacuation. Raymond de Jaegher, the missionary who had escaped both the Japanese invasion and communist rule in China, did not evacuate to Taiwan or return to Belgium, his home country. After creating the Free Pacific Association, he set foot in Saigon, where he became an active member of the Vietnamese chapter of the Asian People’s Anti-Communist League (APACL). The

organization was created at the Chin Hae Conference in Korea in June 1954 to regroup noncommunist countries in Asia into a joint cultural association (Tan 2019; Trần 2013). The English-language publication of the APACL's Vietnamese chapter, *Free Front*, reveals how this joint denunciation of communist atrocities operated. Raymond de Jaegher wrote at least a dozen articles on the communist threat to Malaysia, Burma, and India (de Jaegher, 1957, 1958a, 1958b, 1958c, 1958d). All of them suggested that communism was a threat to virtually every free nation across Asia. With the refugee crisis, religious authorities, missionaries, and political leaders extended the Catholic arc against communist expansion by injecting political objectives into a humanitarian crisis. This increasingly gave the impression that the Vietnamese church as whole—and not just a network of activists—was becoming a key player of anti-communist efforts.

Debating the Role of the Church in Asia

Not everyone agreed with the correlation between refugee protection, Catholic relief, and a global struggle against communism. The influence of key activists in channeling Christian generosity into their own *Weltanschauung* was so obvious that other Catholics became critical of the new face of the church in Asia.

The Christian Century, an ecumenical publication in the United States, criticized the expansionism of Roman Catholic aid in Taiwan (The Christian Century Editors 1958). According to the article, although there were two to three times more Protestants on the island, the NCWC had taken advantage of US surplus food to hold 84 percent of all relief goods imported, leaving the remaining 16 percent to the Church World Service and the Lutheran World Service.

The major problem with this imbalance was that Roman Catholic priests used relief goods as an incentive for newcomers to join the faith and for recent converts to remain with their church. A solution to this situation was to create ration cards, which would be distributed to the needy population of Taiwan. Protestant and Catholic agencies in Taipei agreed to evenly split the distribution of aid, regardless of which agency had imported it, so that no church would have greater material incentives if it used it to proselytize. But things did not go smoothly.

Priests rushed to get cards for their own members. When the proposition was made to split, not the cards but the time of distribution, with one agency distributing all the aid for a month, followed by another, the NCWC backpedaled,

suggesting that this formula could only continue if its outlets were distributing 60 percent of the goods and Protestants were distributing 40 percent. Protestants refused this compromise and took it as further evidence of the “post-World War II and post-Korean War push by the Roman Catholic Church in the whole Pacific area, and in particular to the wide-ranging activities of Francis Cardinal Spellman, who is in charge of his church’s relations with our military forces” (The Christian Century Editors 1958). Poverty relief was not neutral. The American Catholic Church’s reluctance to share the burden with others gave the impression that Catholic aid was also a vehicle for proselytism and political influence.

Other dissident voices raised concern about Catholic relief assistance encouraging loyalty to Washington’s foreign policy. British news correspondent Graham Greene had visited Vietnam several times to report on the Indochina War. When he came back in early 1955 to write a feature article on the partition of Vietnam, he was worried by the turn the Vietnamese church had taken (Hammer 1955: 28). In a series of three articles published in the *Sunday Times*, Greene, a Catholic convert himself, gave a dim picture of the Catholic Church in Vietnam.

According to Greene, one of South Vietnam’s key problem was how the Catholic faith had transformed. Contrary to the claim that Catholicism had always been a tool of imperialism, Greene believed that the church had not always been a pawn of the West. But this was now becoming the case. According to him, Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm’s Catholic faith was initially an advantage (Greene 1955a). He even saw similarities between him and Hồ Chí Minh, and between communism and Catholicism (Greene 1955c). Yet important transformations had made the Catholic faith increasingly unpopular.

Graham Greene conceded that Catholics had good reason to flee, as he quoted a doctor in the port of Haiphong claiming that there was a daily average of two atrocities committed, not by central authorities, but because of “the enthusiasm of local partisans or the results of private vendettas” (Greene 1955b). Yet the journalist was quick to recall that “atrocities can happen wherever there is hate, and hate is never confined to one side” (Greene 1955b). The Catholic civilians regrouping to the South were the greatest victim of this transformation of the Catholic Church as they had been abandoned by three “prince bishops with private armies,” who had compromised themselves and “political priests” had whispered to their faithful that “God and the Virgin have gone south” (Greene 1955b). To him, Catholics had to pay the price for the priests’ excessive involvement in the war.

American aid did not dissipate the impression that the Catholic faith had become a political tool. Countless ceremonies for the visits from Catholic officials such as Cardinal Spellman or Cardinal Gilroy, the archbishop of Canberra, gave the

impression that the “Catholic Church is occidental and an ally of the United States” (Greene 1955a). The outpouring of aid for Vietnamese refugees did little to hide American self-interest: “This is not the unobtrusive, spontaneous acts of charity to which the poor are accustomed; the *tentatives de suicide*, the chicken bearing the badge of American aid demand a kind of payment—cooperation in the cold war” (Greene 1955b). Just as Ngô Đình Diệm had become “The Patriot Ruined by the West,” in Greene’s view, the Cold War had corrupted the Catholic faith (Greene 1955c).

Conclusion

The case of evacuation of Northern Vietnam in 1954 shows that although Catholics cherished the principles of solidarity among coreligionists and charity toward others, the way this generosity extended to population overseas reveals multiple interests and interventions from the local to the global level. We can draw three conclusions from this analysis.

First, an analysis of the Catholic transnational solidarity requires an understanding of the institutional structure of the Catholic Church, the political and economic power of national churches, and the role of key religious leaders or missionaries. Although Catholics responded to a clear hierarchy headed by a single authority in Rome, the Vatican did not centralize Catholic relief efforts across the globe. Instead, it was key Catholic leaders and missionaries which channeled the efforts of national churches into Vietnam, for humanitarian and political reasons.

Second, this case study showed that refugee protection served both humanitarian ideals and political objectives. This does not mean that a blind anti-communist sentiment guided every person contributing to the emergency relief. Yet, the main motivation behind the people channeling this generosity toward Asian churches was the containment of communist expansion, civil wars, and the fear of a schismatic church. The links to this chain not only connected Vietnamese to Americans. Foreign missionaries, Chinese, and Korean activists were also part of this network converging in Vietnam in 1954.

Last, refugee protection is a relationship that is dynamic and dialectical. States protect refugees for humanitarian and political interests. Yet refugees also use exile and international recognition to get support for their own cause. Both Paul Yu Pin and Ngô Đình Diệm, foreign missionaries in China, or Vietnamese refugees used their time in exile to regroup and find ways to continue their fight. These refugees sought protection. Yet they also raised awareness abroad and created new alliances to oppose communist expansion.