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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

JÉRÔME AAN DE WIEL

Ireland's Post-War Humanitarian Aid to Europe, 1945–1950: Catholic Networking, Remembrance and Missionary Tradition in Action

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores Catholic Ireland's aid to devastated post-war Europe between 1945 and 1950, an event quasi unknown in Ireland or continental Europe today. And yet, masses of unearthed archives show that Irish humanitarian aid extended from Normandy all the way to the streets of Tirana and the Greek islands. The memory of the Great Irish Famine of 1845 (the 100th anniversary was in 1945) played a role in the country's collective response to the post-war catastrophe. The chapter throws light on the efforts of the Irish Catholic Church in organizing relief operations, using a transnational Catholic network in Europe and the United States. Relations between the Irish government and the Vatican are explored, notably concerning the government's cooperation with the International Red Cross located in Protestant Geneva. There was relief competition between denominations in post-war Europe as some countries wished to return to their Christian roots after the horrors of Nazism and Fascism and were also now facing the Soviet atheistic threat in the emerging Cold War. Some continental clergymen believed that Ireland's humanitarian aid was a reflection of its missionary efforts in past centuries.

The history of Ireland's post-war humanitarian aid is quasi unknown in Ireland or on the European continent, Irish historiography having focused on the controversial questions of the country's neutrality during the Second World War and its insularity in the post-war years, leading to 'history wars'.[1] As to the history of post-war relief, it is attracting more and more academic attention, having before been frequently incorporated into studies dealing either with the end of the war or the beginning

1 Mervyn O'Driscoll, '"We Are Trying to Do Our Share": The Construction of Positive Neutrality and Irish Post–War Relief to Europe', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 27 (2016), 37.

of the Cold War, an approach that has been described as 'problematic and inadequate'.[2] Another pertinent argument is that the post-war aid given by 'small' countries was dwarfed by massive American aid and therefore soon forgotten.[3] Ireland's important humanitarian efforts east and west of the Iron Curtain fell into oblivion. Today, nobody knows that about 3.2 million Hungarians got 200 grams of Irish sugar each, which represented nearly 35 per cent of the population, a fact recognized by the Ministry of Food in Budapest. Equally unknown is that the first foreign (non-Allied) supplies to be distributed in all four Allied sectors of Berlin and the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany were Irish, or that some Greek political detainees were given Irish clothes.[4] Like Switzerland's, Ireland's humanitarian efforts were a '*nationale Aufgabe* [national task]',[5] in the sense that not only the government was involved but also the people, the Churches, firms, factories, voluntary organizations and aid agencies.

This chapter explores the Catholic aspect of Ireland's relief operations as humanitarianism implemented through the country's foreign policy was an affirmation of Irish Catholic identity. Giving to those in need was an act of Christian solidarity between the nations based on the Christian principle of charity. The Church, especially Archbishop John Charles McQuaid of Dublin, played a main role in inciting people to participate and in assisting Éamon de Valera's government in organizing relief. The people were asked not to forget that during the Great Irish Famine in 1845 other nations had come to the country's rescue. Thus, the past connected to the present in 1945. Also, the nascent Cold War was an ideological battlefield between the democratic and Christian West and the Godless communist Soviet Union and its satellites. The Vatican much appreciated Catholic Ireland's humanitarian efforts east or west of the Iron Curtain as relief was a way to

2 Jessica Reinisch, 'Introduction. Relief in the Aftermath of War'. Special issue in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 3 (July 2008), 372.

3 Bernd Haunfelder, *Schweizer Hilfe für Deutschland 1917–1933 und 1944–1957* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2010), 14–15.

4 Jérôme aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2021), 407–8, 311–12, 317; 426–7.

5 Haunfelder, *Schweizer Hilfe für Deutschland 1917–1933 und 1944–1957*, 11; 16.

consolidate Christianity. However, its interference in Irish decision-making was not above controversy.

Ireland's desire to give a helping hand to Europe

It is first necessary to set Ireland's aid into a wider international context. On 18 May 1945 in the Dáil, Éamon de Valera announced a relief scheme of £3 million (approximately €126 million) worth in supplies, divided into five equal parts between France, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. The fifth part was given to the International Red Cross which would look after aid in central and eastern Europe, including Germany. It was that part which was going to be controversial as Irish supplies would be distributed during the gradual communist take-over in these countries, the Irish government accusing the communist regimes of not giving enough to their Catholic populations, notably in Hungary and Yugoslavia. De Valera's initiative was unanimously approved by all political parties. It was also decided to make no difference between helping the victorious or the defeated nations.[6] In that, Ireland was closer to the philosophy of the International Red Cross than to the approach of the Allies who had initially decided to punish Germany and who did not put the feeding of its civilians on top of their agendas. Helping the German population was not in the remit of the recently created United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) of which Ireland was not a member. Ireland not having the necessary merchant fleet to transport the supplies, it was explained that it was up to the beneficiary countries to come to collect them. The relief budget for Europe was renewed several times. In all between 1943 and 1951, the Irish government and parliament voted £8,400,020 in favour of relief, although £3,747,603 was actually spent. The discrepancy between the two figures is explained by the facts

6 Dáil Éireann, Dáil Éireann Debate, 97/7, 'Committee on Finance. Statement by the Taoiseach: Distress in Europe', 18 May 1945, <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1945/05/18/00007.asp>, accessed 15 February 2022.

that it proved too difficult to export cattle, which was an important part of the aid programme, and also that packing materials for canned meat were difficult to find. There were other similar explanations.[7]

There are different motives for the Irish government's decision to give a helping hand to Europe. Briefly, there was a fear of being internationally isolated after the country's neutrality during the war. Much needed humanitarian involvement offered the opportunity of a comeback on the European stage. There was some peer pressure as fellow neutrals Sweden and Switzerland had made their intentions clear to help Europe. Ireland could not be seen to do nothing. There was the weight of the past as 1945 marked the 100th anniversary of the Great Irish Famine. Back in 1845, European countries had sent aid to Ireland, and government and Church leaders now asked the Irish people not to forget that fact. It has been argued that the Great Famine had been 'relegated to being a slogan and a taboo for generations' and that it was 'hardly commemorated at all in the 1940s'.[8] That might well be, but research shows that the Irish people were asked to remember it in post-war years and to donate generously to continentals in need,[9] which they did. In their exhortations to help, the clergy mentioned the famine. Michael Browne, the Bishop of Galway, declared that 'the people of Europe came to the aid of this country at the time of the famine a century ago and it was only right that we should now give in return from our abundance'.[10] For example, during the famine and after Pope Pius IX's appeal for aid, a committee in Paris had collected 500,861 French francs which had been forwarded to the Irish hierarchy.[11] Now, time had come to show the same spirit of Christian solidarity with the distressed continentals.

7 National Archives Ireland, Department of Foreign Affairs (NAI, DFA), embassy series, Holy See, 24/74, Department of External Affairs to Irish ambassador to Holy See, April 1955.

8 Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The Great Famine and Today's Famines', in John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy eds, *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2018), 650.

9 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, 63–4.

10 'Now Is the Time to Repay Europe', *Connacht Tribune* (5 May 1945).

11 Grace Neville, '"Il y a des larmes dans leurs chiffres": French Famine Relief for Ireland, 1847–84', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, XIX–2 (2014), <http://rfcb.revues.org/261>, accessed 15 February 2022.

But besides these political and historical considerations, de Valera's government was above all driven by a sincere desire to help. So was the population, who had no political motives at all: 'From the early twentieth century, the Irish public's vision of the developing world was dominated by images from missionary magazines and the – often deeply personal – recollections of relatives, neighbours and friends who lived and worked in far flung mission stations across Africa, Asia and Latin America.' Among many, an important notion developed that Irish values were associated with Christianity, justice and peace.[12] Having been part of the British Empire, numerous Irishmen and women had emigrated to distant lands and some had become members of Catholic orders and were involved in missionary activities in the world. In 1945, 'that sense and that identification with missionary work was channelled into aid for Europe where extraordinary bleak circumstances were prevailing'.[13]

Post-war international politics

The Second World War had devastated Europe. Over 40 million people had died.[14] Jews and other human beings deemed to be inferior had been barbarously exterminated by the Nazi regime. Millions of children were orphaned or semi-orphaned. Millions were wounded. Many millions were homeless, and other millions were uprooted and waiting for repatriation. Besides this human misery, entire cities and towns had been levelled to the ground. There were 55 million cubic meters of rubble in Berlin.[15] Walter Ulbricht, the future leader of communist East Germany, described

12 Kevin O'Sullivan, '"Ah, Ireland, the Caring Nation"; Foreign aid and Irish State Identity in the Long 1970s', *Irish Historical Studies*, XXXVIII, 151 (May 2013), 481.

13 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, 3.

14 Ian Kershaw, *The End; Hitler's Germany, 1944–45* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 376.

15 Richard Overy, *The Bombing War; Europe; Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 638.

the city as 'a picture of hell'.[16] Ninety per cent of Warsaw was obliterated.[17] Much infrastructure was destroyed, like all bridges between Paris and the mouth of the river Seine,[18] which would hamper relief operations. As the *New York Times* put it starkly: 'Europe is in a condition which no American can hope to understand. [It is the] New Dark Continent.'[19] In addition to that misery, other problems soon surfaced: cold, disease, hunger and failed harvests. About 2,500 calories daily of healthy food are required for a man to live well and about 2,000 for a woman. But that was not the ideal-case scenario in post-war years. In June 1945, for instance, Germans in the American-occupied zone had an official ration of around 860 calories. During the war, the Germans had sarcastically joked: 'Better enjoy the war – the peace will be terrible.'[20] If peace there was going to be.

Indeed, rapidly after the cessation of hostilities, the western Allies were at loggerheads with the Soviet Union and the Cold War followed. Although initially not planned, Germany remained divided. The Soviets imposed their ideology in central and eastern Europe, whereas the Americans became the leaders of western world, guaranteeing the defence of democracy and religion. For decades, the study of religion during the Cold War was neglected although more studies have seen the light recently.[21] Pope Pius XII was vehemently anti-communist. If he had remained rather silent against Nazism during the war, he lost no opportunity in publicly denouncing godless Communism during the Cold War. In 1947, the Vatican had accepted US President Harry S. Truman's logic of containment against the Soviet

16 Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich; From the Liberation of Vienna to the Berlin Airlift* (London: John Murray, 2008), 95; 104.

17 Tony Judt, *Postwar; A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 82.

18 Ibid.

19 Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent; Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), xiv.

20 Judt, *Postwar*, 21.

21 Dianne Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), ix.

Union.[22] Truman sought to mobilize all religions into a crusade against the Soviets and began by approaching the Vatican. In eastern Europe under Soviet domination, there were about 50 million Catholics who theoretically constituted a counterweight to Marxism.[23] For the Kremlin, the pope and his Church were out for world domination and were a threat.[24] In western Europe, it was important that the economic situation improved as rapidly as possible as an unstable situation was a godsend for local communist parties who could denounce the inefficiency and ruthlessness of capitalism and democracy and hope to win elections. Therefore, everything should be undertaken to combat communist infiltration. Moreover, after years of Nazism, Christianity was regarded as a weapon to combat a possible return of Nazism or a communist takeover in the western occupation zones of Germany.[25] German minds needed to be urgently de-Nazified. The population had been singularly out of touch with its Churches between 1933 and 1945, and some ecclesiastics had been seriously compromised with the Nazi regime. The post-war years offered a serious opportunity for a comeback of the Churches, and 'salvation lay in re-discovering the religious roots in Europe, in its true Christian heritage, and in the teaching of the Catholic faith …'.[26] Therefore, Ireland's aid in Europe would not only be a pure act of humanitarianism but would also acquire a political edge. The Irish Catholic Church was fully aware of the unfolding political situation in Europe.

22 Frank J. Coppa, 'Pope Pius XII and the Cold War: The Post–war Confrontation between Catholicism and Communism', in Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War*, 51; 56.

23 Dianne Kirby, 'Harry Truman's Religious Legacy: The Holy Alliance, Containment and the Cold War', in Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War*, 77–8; 79; 90.

24 Anna Dickinson, 'Domestic and Foreign Policy Considerations and the Origins of Post–war Soviet Church–State Relations, 1941–6', in Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War*, 29.

25 Francis Graham–Dixon, *The Allied Occupation of Germany; The Refugee Crisis, Denazification and the Path to Reconstruction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 117.

26 Rosario Forlenza, 'The Politics of the *Abendland*: Christian Democracy and the Idea of Europe after the Second World War', *Contemporary European History*, 26, 2 (2017), 271.

The country's humanitarian aid

Space is lacking here to detail the relief activities undertaken by Ireland between 1945 and 1950. Briefly, as mentioned above, the government's relief scheme rapidly became a national task in which many participated. Hundreds and hundreds of tons of supplies were sent to the continent and the government's official aid became known in French as the *Don Irlandais*. But the people and voluntary organizations also made their own donations and organized fundraising events. The clergy was often involved in the collection of supplies. In Ballyporreen in County Tipperary, Fr O'Gorman was full of praise for his parishioners and congratulated them 'on their generosity in subscribing towards the relief of starving Europe'.[27] One reader wrote to the *Irish Independent*: 'I decided that by surrendering my butter ration I could salve my conscience to some extent, and accordingly have forwarded last week's ration to the Red Cross Society for European relief.'[28] The *Kerryman* fully supported County Kerry's efforts for Europe 'In The Name of Christian Charity'.[29]

The clergy liaised with organizations such as the Irish Red Cross Society (IRCS) or the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Both in turn liaised with their counterparts on the continent. By July 1946, the St Vincent de Paul had collected £5,700.[30] The IRCS initiated a £500,000 fundraising drive, which was too ambitious, but by November 1946, £177,687 had been raised nevertheless.[31] Limerick diocese raised £5,100 for distressed children after Pope Pius XII's appeal.[32] In the early days of May 1945, when the war had still not ended, Dublin saw the arrival of French Jesuit Fr Robert Jacquinot who hoped to obtain the Irish hierarchy's support for Pius XII's International Committee of Catholic Charities. He explained

27 'Mitchellstown Mirror', *Kerryman* (15 June 1946).
28 'Suggestions by Readers: Anxiety to Relieve Distress in Europe', *Irish Independent* (13 April 1946).
29 'Kerry Asked to Help Red Cross in Great Work', *Kerryman* (9 June 1945).
30 'Society's Aid for Children in Europe', *Irish Independent* (19 July 1946).
31 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, 176–7.
32 'Things That Matter', *Limerick Leader* (6 May 1946).

that 'very substantial supplies' had already been provided by the American National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC). The hierarchy lost no time and organized a nationwide collection in the churches which raised £10,000 in about six months' time. The first Catholic dignitary to contact the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, was Johannes de Jong, the Archbishop of Utrecht when he learnt about Ireland's £3 million relief scheme. In a letter in Latin, he wrote that the Netherlands were critically in need of supplies (after the dreadful '*hongerwinter*' of 1944–5). McQuaid contacted Joseph Walshe in the Department of External Affairs in Dublin to inquire and was later able to reassure de Jong that supplies worth £600,000 would soon be available for the Netherlands.[33] The Catholic administrative structure and network throughout Europe was evidently a great advantage in the organization and distribution of relief. Nowhere was this more evident than in Italy where religious orders and institutions played a key role in distributing Irish supplies, notably sugar, butter, cheese and clothes.[34]

In Germany, the first Irish supplies were distributed in Freiburg im Breisgau in the French-occupied zone. The choice of Freiburg was not left to mere chance as it was located near the Swiss border, therefore within immediate reach of the activities of the International Red Cross. Nuns were in charge of the distribution operations as was frequently the case in Catholic areas in Europe. Archbishop Conrad Gröber wrote: 'May God bless the Emerald Isle and its merciful inhabitants! This prayer I repeat for the day, this is my exhortation to the Catholics of my town and diocese that they never may forget Ireland, whose missionaries in times of old also brought us the doctrine of the Cross and our Saviour. Thus past time with its spiritual needs and present time with its physical and spiritual needs join hands.'[35] Gröber knew his history since Irish missionaries had been very active in that part of Germany many centuries ago.[36] In Paderborn in the

33 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, 115–16.

34 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, 226–7.

35 Erzbischofliches Archiv Freiburg (EAF), Nachlass Conrad Gröber, Korrespondenz mit den Besatzungsmächten, letter to the Irish people by Gröber, 23 April 1946.

36 Mervyn O'Driscoll, 'West Germany', in Mervyn O'Driscoll, Dermot Keogh, and Jérôme aan de Wiel, eds, *Ireland Through European Eyes; Western Europe, the EEC and Ireland, 1945–1973* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2013), 10–13.

British-occupied zone, a group of Irishwomen working for Lady Antrim's Catholic Committee for Relief Abroad organized 'feeding schemes' for the local population. They became rapidly known as the '*Irische Damen*'. They also liaised with the IRCS and set up a scheme to send 100 needy German children to Ireland for a convalescence stay (sending children for such stays abroad happened throughout western Europe).[37]

Catholic help for all

A striking aspect of Ireland's aid was that despite its strong Catholic character, there was no religious sectarianism and people of all faiths received supplies; in other words, need was the guiding principle, not religion. In Albania, for example, the population was composed of Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics and Jews and all tasted Irish sugar or powder milk.[38] It was the same with Protestant populations in the Netherlands, Germany and Hungary. The best illustration of this is the important distribution of Irish sugar in Budapest. A remarkably detailed list in the Budapest City Archive shows exactly where and to whom the sugar had been distributed. Some 540 groups and institutions were the lucky recipients, including Catholics, Protestants, Jews (who had been very lucky to survive the last-minute bestial onslaught of the Arrow-Cross fascists) and even members of the political police![39] In a letter addressed to 'Dear Fellows' (probably meaning Irishmen and women in general) in Dublin in July 1947, the *Evangelisches Hilfswerk* (Evangelical Welfare Organisation, mainly Lutheran) in the American-occupied zone of Germany described what

37 'Rooskey, but not Roscommon', *Irish Independent* (20 October 1956).

38 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*. See paragraph entitled 'Albania', 414–18. No evidence has been found indicating that certain religious groups were discriminated against during the distribution of Irish supplies.

39 Budapest City Archive, HU–BFL–IV–1409–C–1947–IX–11549, report by Hungarian Ministry of Welfare, Department VI/3, undated but very likely 1946. The author is most grateful to Dr Szilvia Lengl's (Berlin) translation.

the recipients of Ireland's aid felt: 'Many people recognized that international cooperation of Christian brotherhood is a reality to be pondered by all who had lost their faith in Jesus Christ in these years of misery and tribulation.'[40] In 1946, Cork decided to adopt Cologne, the idea being to prioritize the sending of supplies to the once majestic city on the Rhine, now a pile of rubble. Contacts were initiated with Cardinal Josef Frings, an opponent of Nazism, who was extremely grateful and replied that all supplies could be sent through Caritas, the Catholic national aid organization with international networking possibilities. In his letters of thanks to Cork, Frings emphasized the Catholic aspect of the relief operation, writing about 'good Catholics of Ireland'. This surprised the city's lord mayor, Michael Sheehan, who replied to him that not only Catholics were involved but that 'persons of different denominations have contributed generally to our collection'.[41] Frings was also most grateful to Archbishop McQuaid for providing help so much so that he subsequently authorized the setting up of a branch of the Legion of Mary in his city.[42] The Legion had originally been founded in Dublin in 1921, was composed of lay volunteers, and looked after the spiritual needs of Catholics.

Within the Irish Catholic hierarchy, it was indeed McQuaid who stood out, by far, in the organization of relief operations. McQuaid was cosmopolitan, had travelled extensively in western Europe and was fluent in French and Italian. He was also extremely active in charity work in his diocese which led to the creation of the Catholic Social Service Conference. McQuaid is widely reputed for his authoritarianism, but he was also a deeply compassionate man. He knew about the catastrophic situation in Europe, the ongoing international politics and the Vatican's position. He had also much influence on those in the Department of External Affairs who were coordinating the relief operations, namely Secretary for External Affairs Joseph Walshe, subsequently appointed ambassador to the Holy See in 1946,

40 NAI, DFA, 6/419/1/7, Evangelisches Hilfswerk Nassau–Hessen to 'Dear Fellows', 24 July 1947.

41 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, 99–100.

42 John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid; Ruler of Catholic Ireland* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1999), 223 and endnote 28, 473.

and his successor Frederick H. Boland. McQuaid focused his attention on France, Austria, Hungary and Italy mainly. But it was for Hungary that he became deeply involved. The situation in that country was very tense owing to the gradual communist take-over. Cardinal József Mindszenty asked the Irish for help through his representatives in the Vatican. It was a case of extending 'the hand of Catholic fellowship' as the Irish minister to the Holy See, T. J. Kieran, put it to Walshe.[43] Mgr Giovanni Montini (future Pope Paul VI), in charge of foreign affairs and with whom the Irish government frequently dealt in matters of relief, operated as a kind of advisor in the matter. McQuaid tirelessly organized collections of supplies for Hungary, notably twenty tons of clothes, and was in touch with the Hungarian Catholic Action. However, owing to tensions and misunderstandings between the Hungarian Catholic Action, the Hungarian Red Cross and the Hungarian authorities, McQuaid terminated his involvement in 1949. The Catholic Action alleged that the communists were not fairly distributing Irish supplies to the Catholic population, something which turned out not to be correct as were several other similar allegations in central and eastern Europe.[44] People from all backgrounds behind the Iron Curtain received Irish supplies and perfectly knew where they were coming from. No attempt was made by the communists to hide their provenance. But relief, like other things, now became a part of the propaganda battle between East and West. And some of it was not particularly subtle or was founded on rumours.

Hundreds of thousands of letters of thanks from officials, religious dignitaries and ordinary citizens were sent from both sides of the Iron Curtain to Ireland. Simple words of sincere thanks and solidarity between the nations were the main themes in these letters, but also Christian solidarity especially in letters coming from Germany. A Protestant clergyman from Trier deeply thanked Ireland for the sixteen tons of food his city had received. He wrote that 50,000 inhabitants would be fed 'but what is far

43 NAI, DFA, embassy series, Holy See, 24/74, Kiernan to Walshe, 2 March 1946.

44 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, see Chapter Four, 'Archbishop McQuaid to the Rescue', 109–25 and Chapter Five, 'Hungary', paragraph entitled 'Archbishop McQuaid helps Hungary', 397–401.

more crucial is that they will be strengthened spiritually in their dire need'. To him, the *Don Irlandais* was 'evidence of Christian solidarity connecting the nations'.[45] In Munich, Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber wrote to the President of Ireland about 'this renewed evidence of the active sympathy in religion and outlook which the people of Ireland have with us'.[46]

Controversies in the nascent Cold War

However, the history of Ireland's aid to Europe is not without controversy. At the beginning of 1947, unheard-of climatic conditions struck Ireland and for weeks the country was buried under layers of snow and ice with sub-zero temperatures. It became known as the 'Big Freeze'.[47] Under these conditions, some people and newspapers began to question the wisdom of sending supplies abroad. A charity-begins-at-home type of campaign was organized by the *Independent* press group but denounced by de Valera and several bishops. Eventually, the controversy died down when a golden harvest happened several months later and when de Valera was invited to Paris to attend a ceremony to thank Ireland for what it had done for France.[48]

As pointed out earlier, accusations were made that the Hungarian communist authorities were discriminating against Catholics when Irish supplies were being distributed. The same allegations were made in Yugoslavia.[49] The situation was compounded by the show trials of Cardinals Mindszenty

45 Archives Comité International de la Croix–Rouge Genève (ACICR), O CMS C–020, Protestant clergyman (name unreadable) to unknown, 2 April 1946.

46 NAI, DFA, 6/419/4/22/6, N. S. O'Sullivan, Department of the Taoiseach, to Boland, DEA, 4 January 1949, containing Faulhaber's letter to the President of Ireland.

47 For a comprehensive account, see Kevin C. Kearns' excellently researched *Ireland's Arctic Siege; The Big Freeze of 1947* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2012).

48 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, 142–8.

49 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, see Chapter Fourteen 'Yugoslavia', 437–61.

and Stepinac which greatly upset Irish Catholic public opinion. Research in archives proves that discrimination did in fact not occur. But at the time of the emerging Cold War, anti-communism was whipped up to a state of frenzy in Ireland (and elsewhere in the West) and the Catholic Church was leading the anti-Bolshevik crusade. Soon, the Irish government, equally convinced that discrimination was taking place and not convinced of the efficiency of the International Red Cross, could no longer ignore what public opinion and the Church believed. The decision was made to abandon cooperation with the International Red Cross and continue with the National Catholic Welfare Conference led by the American hierarchy and tough on emerging communist regimes in eastern Europe.[50] Information had also reached Dublin from Vatican circles that humanitarian aid beyond the Iron Curtain only served to bolster the communist regimes.[51] In this early East-West confrontation, the Irish Catholic Church did not hesitate to take sides. At the time of the general election in Italy in 1948, the Church, in cooperation with John A. Costello's government, organized money collections for the Vatican to help the Christian-Democrats win against the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) as it was widely feared, including by the Americans, that the communists could gain power in Italy. Around £60,000 were collected in Ireland and transferred to Rome.[52]

Some Catholic circles, notably in Germany and Rome, did not appreciate that the Irish government worked with the International Red Cross in central and eastern Europe. To their minds, Catholic Ireland should distribute its supplies through Catholic channels regardless of the denomination of the recipients. Cardinal John D'Alton, the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, was informed of this by a priest working for the National Catholic Welfare Conference based in Germany. The priest had the support of the Cardinal of Munich, Michael von Faulhaber, in the

50 aan de Wiel, *Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe, 1945–1950*, see Chapter Eight 'Cooperation with the International Red Cross in Geneva', paragraph 'The Catholic end of the affair', 251–60.

51 NAI, DFA, 6/419/7, minute written by Michael MacWhite, Irish minister to Italy, 28 January 1947.

52 Dermot Keogh, 'Ireland, the Vatican and the Cold War: The Case of Italy, 1948', *The Historical Journal*, 34, 4 (December 1991), 947–8.

matter. D'Alton contacted in turn John P. Shanley, the chairman of the IRCS, who guaranteed him that Irish supplies would now be distributed through the German Caritas mainly.[53] Shanley should never have agreed to this as the Red Cross was supposed to be strictly neutral. But such was the power and influence of the Church in Ireland.

It had to be seen that the helping hand was Catholic. There were issues of prestige at stake and possibly some conversions along the way. It was true that in the realm of humanitarianism, the Catholic Church had serious Christian competitors in the Protestant Churches as had been the case after the First World War.[54] Many Protestant Churches in the United States and Britain saw Europe as a continent to re-Christianize after the dreadful years of Nazism and fascism, the same continent that was now facing the Soviet atheistic threat.[55] Souls needed to be saved before it was too late. In 1947, the Vatican Mission in Brussels appealed to the Irish government for aid to be distributed among German prisoners of war. It wrote that it could not hope to 'rivalise' with the Protestant and 'mighty YMCA' (Young Men's Christian Association; the headquarters was based in Geneva). De Valera's government and the IRCS agreed to help.[56]

The reality was that the Vatican was not always favourably impressed that the Irish government cooperated with the International Red Cross located in Geneva, the cradle of Calvinism. It also saw in the organization a kind of relief competitor. Eventually, it asserted its authority and Mgr Montini let it be known to de Valera that it preferred Ireland to stop

53 Irish Red Cross Society Archive Dublin (IRCS), Dublin, unreferenced grey box, Fr Ermin E. Klaus (NCWC) to John D'Alton, 2 August 1946 & Klaus to J. P. Shanley (IRCS), 11 October 1946.

54 Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 283.

55 Axel R. Schäfer, 'Religious Non-profit Organisations, the Cold War, the State and Resurgent Evangelicalism, 1945–90', in Helen Laville and Hugh Wilford, eds, *The Us Government, Citizen Groups and the Cold War: The State–Private Network* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 175–7 and Axel R. Schäfer, 'Evangelical Global Engagement and the American State after World War II', *Journal of American Studies*, 51 (2017), 4, 1069–94.

56 NAI, DFA, 6/419/26, Vatican Mission, Belgium, to IRCS, 2 May 1947; IRCS to DEA, 27 May 1947 & note by Cornelius Cremin, 2 June 1947.

cooperating with the International Red Cross.[57] From then on, the Irish government cooperated with the American National Catholic Welfare Conference, as seen. Also, the Vatican preferred that Irish supplies for Italy be sent directly to the *Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza* (Pontifical Commission of Relief), which would look after their distribution and credit Catholic Ireland, rather than sending them to relief organizations it did not control. It believed that the recipients of Irish aid were not always aware that the donors were Catholics.[58]

Conclusion

Finally, Ireland's humanitarian efforts for post-war Europe were extraordinary as they were a national task involving government, Churches, aid agencies and people. They were all the more extraordinary as the country was not rich and had limited economic means. And yet, Ireland could compare itself honourably with Sweden and Switzerland. Through these efforts, Ireland's Catholic identity was expressed. Some countries in Europe because of their pre-war and war past needed to reconnect with Christianity. Ireland helped in this regard. In 1948, Cardinal D'Alton was invited to attend the ceremony of the 100th anniversary of the cathedral of Cologne. Once home, he declared that 'it is generally felt that the celebrations will do much to raise the morale of the people of Cologne … Everywhere I went I was greeted with expressions of deep gratitude for all that Ireland has done and is doing to help the German people, and especially the children in their need.'[59] The Irish cardinal's attendance was a symbol of the ongoing efforts to reintegrate predominantly Catholic western Germany with western Europe as the Cold War was developing

57 NAI, DFA, 6/419/1/4, Joseph Walshe to Frederick H. Boland, 20 March 1947.
58 NAI, DFA, 6/419/1/4, Joseph Walshe to Frederick H. Boland, 16 September 1946.
59 'Monaghan Co. Home: Discussion at Council Meeting', *Anglo–Celt* (28 August 1948).

fast.[60] Unlike previous centuries, Ireland did not send missionaries to the continent but Christian supplies. Its deeply Christian compassionate aid and the involvement of its people and clergy generated hope in war-torn countries, a will to continue with a different life. It was an act of *gratuità* (the act of free-giving or gifting), implying that those who participated 'in charitable actions are considered to be directly animated by divine grace'.[61] It also implied living for a goal that was bigger than oneself. The Catholic network played a crucial role in this. In July 1949, Montini wrote to Ambassador Walshe that the National Catholic Welfare Conference had informed the pope that the Irish government's help for Europe had been substantial, notably in Germany and Austria. He added: 'His Holiness would have me assure Your Excellency that such continued aid has been a factor of no small importance in the social and physical rehabilitation of the peoples of the war-shattered countries of Europe.'[62] It would be hard to disagree. Ireland's aid was a true act of (Christian) European solidarity. Interestingly, there are many parallels with the way Ireland and its population and Churches have reacted to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Its response to the Ukrainian crisis has been astonishing and is very reminiscent of what happened between 1945 and 1950 although almost nobody knows about the post-war episode.

60 Rosario Forlenza, 'The Politics of the Abendland: Christian Democracy and the Idea of Europe after the Second World War', *Contemporary European History*, 26, 2 (2017), 272–3.

61 Andrea Muehlebach, *The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Italy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 57.

62 NAI, DFA, 6/419/4/22/4, Montini to Walshe, 14 July 1949.