

Loving the refugee

From the Editors in the [September 30, 2015](#) issue



Syrian refugees strike at the platform of the Keleti railway station in Budapest, Hungary, on September 4. Photo by [Mstyslav Chernov](#) via [Creative Commons license](#)

When thousands of refugees from Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East risked their lives to make it to Hungary, fleeing war in their homelands, the country's prime minister declared that he needed to secure his nation's borders so as "to keep Europe Christian." The migrants "have been raised in another religion," said Viktor Orbán, "and represent a radically different culture."

Few things would better reflect a deeply Christian culture than showing hospitality to these desperate strangers. Concern for the stranger is embedded in scripture. "The Lord your God . . . loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing," says Deuteronomy 10:18. The book of Hebrews, recalling a text from Genesis, says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

The world is in the midst of perhaps the greatest refugee crisis of the modern age, with over 50 million displaced persons—the greatest number since World War II. European countries face a considerable challenge in coordinating the reception of refugees and finding a proportional way to share the burden—but it is a challenge they can meet. Turkey and Lebanon are already hosting more than 1 million displaced Syrians, and Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan are each hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Some regions are conspicuously absent in responding to the crisis. Amnesty International points out that the rich Gulf countries—Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain, which are located near the crisis region and have funded some of the groups fighting in Syria—have offered no resettlement places to Syrian refugees. Wealthy countries like Russia, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea have also failed to respond.

The United States is one of the top funders of relief aid to refugees, sending some \$4 billion to the region. But so far its resettlement of Syrians has been meager. Since the civil war in Syria began, fewer than 1,000 Syrians have been admitted.

President Obama could and should expand the target number for admitting Syrian refugees when he sets the refugee ceiling in the coming weeks. Congress should take up a bill, called Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS, which would expedite asylum applications from Syrians and Iraqis.

But government is not the only actor in the crisis, though it is a crucial one. Pope Francis underscored that truth when he directed the Vatican to take in two refugee families and called on parishes and monasteries to do the same.

The wrenching dislocations of World War II were often pitilessly ignored by the world. Nevertheless, many citizens of the United States and other countries tell stories about how governments and religious agencies intervened to help their families start new lives—lives that have enriched and diversified nations and local cultures. What story will be told of our time, and of us?