

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



The plight of refugees

"Give me your tired, your poor..." reads the inscription on the Statue of Liberty. It is a message as pertinent today as it was 100 years ago. During this centennial year, Americans are invited to evaluate how our country is responding to the cry of today's refugees who seek asylum. The message is also meaningful to Christians who are working with refugees in Central America.

Three generations ago, my grandfather, Salvatore Bartolotta, temporarily leaving his wife Rose in Italy, sailed past the statue in New York Harbor and eventually settled in Fairport. He had little formal education, but did possess a good amount of natural intelligence which he used to help other Italian immigrants, particularly those who lived near him on State Street in Fairport.

My grandfather was later credited with founding the San Sebastian Society, a self-help organization designed to provide financial aid to families who fell victim to sickness. Meanwhile, my grandmother raised nine children in the midst of a depression.

The point of my story is probably obvious. Grandpa and Grandma Bartolotta were allowed to take literally the message of the Lady who speaks for all of America. I believe I can say without bragging that the Bartolottas have made and continue to make a contribution to society.

Eighty years later, the message on the statue remains the same, but this time refugees come from the South, not the East. And their reasons for fleeing are similar and yet, in a sense, different. Central American refugees flee for their lives, while their predecessors sought freedom and opportunity.

While U.S. government officials deny the vital seriousness of the situation in Central America, other non-partisan groups of international reputation tell a story of oppression and murder there. In El Salvador, for example, in recent years, thousands of civilians have been murdered. Recently, a friend in Brazil wrote to me after a priest he knew was murdered simply for helping poor farmers. The examples go on.

Constructive dialogue with our government over the refugee situation must also go on. The Alejandro Gomez situation is a case to consider. Is Gomez being made an example in order to cover up government policies in Central America, which are being called into question by the sanctuary movement both nationally and locally?

Surely the Lady does tell the truth as she opens her arms to the world. My own life here in America bears witness to that. The Lady speaks the truth as she sees it for all people, for all refugees who seek to huddle beneath her torch.

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 7:11-17; (R1) 1 Kings 17:17-24; (R2) Galatians 1:11-19.

The book of Kings traces the story of the Hebrews from Solomon (960 B.C.) to the destruction of the temple (586 B.C.). After Solomon, the kingdom split in two: Israel in the North, and Judah in the South. During the reign of Ahab (873-853), Israel hit religious bottom, for the iniquitous queen, Jezebel, had forced the worship of Baal-Melkart upon the northern nation.

To meet the crisis, God raised up one of Israel's greatest prophets, Elijah. Like a meteor, he flashed upon the stage of history and announced a three-year famine by God to bring the erring nation to its senses.

In the last year of the famine, Elijah boarded at the home of a widow in Zarephath, near Sidon. Presumably she was a pagan, but, like Rahab, she so respected the prophet that she prepared a scanty meal for him before she cared for her son and herself. As a reward, her cruse of oil and meal never failed until the famine ended.

Later, however, her son sickened and died. The widow, in accordance with the pagan theology of her time, interpreted the disaster as God's punishment, through His prophet, for some fault she had committed. Rocking her son on her lap she asked, "Why, O man of God, have you done this to me?" Elijah sought to teach the widow that God does not mechanically reward the good and punish the evil. So he took her son and carried him to his little room on the roof. Elijah applied mouth-to-mouth resuscitation three times and prayed. And the life-breath came back to the child. The widow learned that Elijah's God is a God of mercy, who does not condemn, but protects and saves. Well might the widow have responded, "I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me."

The gospel is the story of another widow whose only son had died, and of another greater than Elijah. The widow was from Naim. In Arabic the word "Naim" means "asleep." Like Sleepy Hollow, Naim was perhaps a sleepy town or the town where a youth's death became in reality only a sleep.

One of the purposes of Luke's gospel was to impress upon his readers the tenderness of Christ. His gospel has been called "the gospel of mercy." He alone records this miracle. No picture could be more full of piety and compassion. A widow in those days was a marginal person — a nobody. She had no social security; her sole hope was her only son, yet he had been taken away from her. Nobody asked Jesus to perform this miracle. The mute appeal of human sorrow and distress moved Him. He said to the widow, "Do not cry." Then he raised the young man from death and, like Elijah, gave him back to his mother. As when Zecharias received his speech again at the naming of John the Baptist, fear at first seized all; then all began to praise God who "has visited His people."

The young man can well represent God's people, for, like him, they had been dead to the Spirit, and Jesus was among them to bring them back to life.

As for the Gentiles, persecuted in Luke's day, this story would certainly have pointed out the compassion of Jesus and give them hope — the hope that God still can draw life from death.

As for us, the heart of Christ reveals the heart of His Father as one of tender compassion. As a child lost and crying in a supermarket stirs the hearts of all — the very helplessness of the tiny child being what evokes their pity — so our helplessness is what touches the heart of God and moves Him to help us. Thus our plight, far from discouraging us, should ever be a source of hope, for ours is a God who cannot look upon our helplessness and not help.

One of the first encyclicals of John Paul II was on God's mercy (*Dives in Misericordia, Rich in Mercy, 11/30/80*). The Holy Father wrote that Christ, in revealing the love-mercy of God, at the same time demanded from people that their lives should be guided by love and mercy. This requirement constitutes the very heart of the gospel ethos. Jesus expressed this both by the commandment He called "the greatest" and by the beatitude blessing "the merciful." In fact, God measures His own mercy by ours. "The merciful... shall obtain mercy" (R3).

End use of nuclear arms, power plants; coalition urges

A radiation biologist, an anti-nuclear activist, a health education specialist and a Wayne County farmer were featured speakers at a sidewalk gathering in front of the Rochester Gas and Electric building Thursday afternoon, May 22. Sponsored by a coalition of Rochester peace and justice groups, the speakers expressed their concern over the safety of local nuclear installations in light of the Soviet nuclear accident at Chernobyl.

Noting that the symptoms of radiation sickness are similar to those of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), Dr. Jean Douthwright, a radiation biologist from Rochester Institute of Technology, said that scientists do not agree on what level of radiation causes significant biological effects.

"We call today for a sane and timely end to the production of radiation from all sources, both power and weapons," said Michael Affleck, Ph.D., a health education specialist and the director of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality. "We seek a nuclear free Rochester and world. The radiation from a single accident is a health threat to all. The acceptance of such a risk is a moral threat to the life of our collective soul."

Affleck, who has participated in protests at the Nevada Test Site, charged that higher levels of radiation being monitored over the continental United States are not the result of the Chernobyl accident, but rather stem from an April 10 test accident at the U.S. Nevada desert site. The cloud produced by the

Chernobyl accident is traveling at 30,000 feet, Affleck said, whereas radiation in the United States is being detected at 1,000 to 2,000 feet. A burning graphite reactor core would also produce a different type of radioactive isotope than that currently being detected by U.S. scientists, he added.

Other speakers criticized the U.S. for not responding to the Soviet Union's unilateral ban on testing nuclear weapons. "I was in Moscow last year when Secretary (Mikhail) Gorbachev announced the Soviet's unilateral ban on testing nuclear weapons," said Tom Sieling, a carpenter and farmer from Wayne County. "President Reagan's response came while I was there. Instead of joining them in the ban, he invited them to a test in Nevada. I could not answer what his logic was to all the Soviets who asked me why this was so," he said.

Peter R. Mitchell, a spokesman for the Rochester Safe Energy Alliance, was equally critical of the domestic nuclear power industry. "RG&E's Ginna plant typifies the problems indigenous to the industry," Mitchell said. Describing it as "a vastly complex piece of machinery" with as much radiation in its core as 500 Hiroshima-type bombs, Mitchell noted Ginna is being operated by a "company that has yet to solve the problem emergency siren malfunctions."

Although no representative from the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry was present at the gathering, the office released a statement calling for thoughtful reflection on the Chernobyl tragedy.

Mercy volunteers gain experience of ministry

Since 1978, the Mercy Corps Volunteer Program has placed lay men and women who wish to give a year or two of service in communities working in schools, health centers, housing projects, youth programs and many other ministries around the United States. Volunteers live in community and share prayer and reflection on the values of Mercy.

Most participants are young adults re-

cently graduated from college, but the program also includes single parents, retirees and couples of all ages. Applicants are screened and invited to a week-long orientation program before beginning a ministry.

For more information, write Sister M. Ellen Cavanaugh, RSM, Gwynedd Mercy College, Gwynedd Valley, PA, 19437, or call (215)641-5535.

Free eye, ear examinations for pre-school children now

Free eye and ear screenings for pre-school children will be available at 29 locations in Monroe County during the month of June.

To make an appointment for your pre-school child, call the Health Association at (716)271-3540. Appointments are being taken now through June between the hours

of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

This free community event is co-sponsored by the Eye Conservation Committee, the Monroe County Association for the Hearing Impaired, and the Monroe County Health Department.

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PLEASE NOTE: The Courier-Journal is moving to a new location. As of July 1, 1986, the Courier-Journal's new address will be: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624. After July 1, all correspondence should be mailed to the new address. Our new telephone number will be: (716) 328-4340

Thanks for your cooperation.

