

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

# A Closer Look



## Names and stereotypes

"She's a fraidy-cat," exclaimed my daughter, Lynn, about a classmate of hers who refused to go along with what Lynn wanted her to do.

"We don't call people names," I shot back. "It's not nice." It was a typical parental response, admonishing the child not to "name call."

How important are names in our society and how much do they influence what we think about a person, a thing or an ideology? In what ways are names a mask for questionable intentions?

Sometimes names are just fun to analyze. Remember that song "Torn Between Two Lovers?" I don't know what's more stupid, the name of the song or what it's about.

How about "To All the Girls I've Loved Before," another pretty song with a dumb name and dumb, sexist message.

Names that parents give to their children are more important to analyze. Often a child's given name can even

influence his or her chances at success in life.

We gave our daughter the name Lynn probably because we hadn't picked out any girls' names and felt pressured to come up with something in a hurry. I also wanted her to have something simple that people could understand. Now using hindsight, I'm not sure the name Lynn fits my Lynn. Lynn tells me she likes the names Melissa or Kelly better, anyhow, but I feel no compulsion to make a change.

The point is that names are important. Names evoke in us both good and bad thoughts and feelings. It's OK to be a Catholic in Rochester, for example. On the other hand, calling yourself a Catholic in some of the places in the South where I've lived takes more guts than one might think.

I remember one time a telephone operator in Jackson, Mississippi, burst out laughing when I gave her my last name. She apologized, saying that she

just hadn't heard a name like Bartolotta before.

Last week I received a form letter from U.S. Rep. Fred Eckert, outlining his recent decision to vote for military aid to the Nicaraguan contras. Every time Congressman Eckert talked about the Nicaraguan government, he referred to it as "Sandinista communists." It struck me how his referring to them as communists created by itself a great obstacle toward understanding the delicate problems in that country.

Perhaps the worst name to call someone in our society is a communist. Why? Probably because we Americans picture a communist as a stout, armed soldier dressed in a gray uniform who will soon join forces with his waiting comrades to break into our homes, eat our food and steal our children. We may imagine this man permanently stationed in our home, sleeping in our bedroom.

When Salvadoran Alejandro Gomez was arrested a few weeks ago, Immigration and Naturalization Service officials charged him with being a communist. Even information that Gomez *may have been* a communist at one time does not necessarily make him a communist *now* any more than does St. Paul's anti-Christian escapades before his conversion necessarily make him an historical Christian-hater.

People change. But apparently, for some, it is easier to discredit the enemy by calling him a name just before doing him evil. That's what they did to Jesus just before they killed him. They named him "rabblrouser," that is, one who was inciting the people to riot.

Our society, I believe, encourages people to name something as a way of categorizing, of understanding it better and, in that way, controlling it. As Christians, however, we are encouraged to look beyond the labels placed on people and into the eyes of human beings created by the same God. Isn't that what Jesus did when he used his human eyes to pierce the souls of the people he met? He refused to let predetermined names influence him and his opinions of people. That is why it was unimportant to him when a woman was named "prostitute" or "adulteress" or when a man was named "thief" or "tax collector."

Have we really looked beyond the name and into the eyes of a Marxist, of a Sandinista, of a contra, of a wino, of a South African? Have we sought to know the soul of the person?

If Christians cannot do this, then who can teach our children to see as God intended — to see as God himself sees — beyond the name and into the heart?

## Obituary:

### Johanna R. Miceli, 94, former president of Italian Women's Civic Club

Johanna R. Miceli, a parishioner at St. Ann's Church in Hornell for 15 years, died May 17 at the age of 94. A Mass in Miceli's honor was celebrated on May 28 at St. Ann's.

Miceli was born in Menfi, Sicily, a town of about 20,000 people near the Mediterranean Sea. Arriving in America at the age of one, she settled with her family in a German section of Brooklyn. In 1915, she received her bachelor of arts degree from Hunter College. She later acquired her master's

degree at the University of Rochester.

In 1916 Miceli moved to Rochester and began her teaching career as a substitute. During 1917 and 1918, she worked at Adler Brothers Clothing factory two nights each week to teach English and citizenship to the foreign-born. She then taught at Number 15 School for one year; Number 3 School for 13 years; and then at Jefferson High School for nearly 25 years. In 1945, Miceli was executive secretary of the Committee on Italian Relief for Italy. Yet another important committee

on which she served was the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Mutilated Children of Italy.

During the war years, she sold war bonds and stamps and put in countless hours at the Red Cross. She also served as a member of the Office of Price Administration and Ration Board. She retired from teaching in 1955. While at Jefferson High School, she organized the Florentine Society in order to get young people interested in their heritage

and to foster a continuation of their education. Scholarships were provided through the efforts of the members of the Florentine Society.

From 1955 through 1959, she taught English and citizenship classes at the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union.

Miceli also participated in the Lilac Festivals held annually in Highland Park and the United Nations Programs at the Eastman Theater.

## COURIER-CROSSWORD

### Last Week's Answers

#### Across

1. NICHOLAS
7. ONO
8. ALAS
10. TAPER
12. TNT
13. UP
15. JR
16. ELF
19. NL
20. UA
21. DOMINICAN
23. AT
24. DEE
25. NG
26. ERR
27. ENDA
28. STAR

#### Down

1. NOTRE DAME
2. INA
3. COP
4. LA
5. ALT
6. SAN JUAN
9. STRANGER
11. RUNNER
14. PLIERS
17. LOT
18. FM
22. IDEA

*"Christ calls us all to be perfect. If we are going to operate a radio station we must try to do it perfectly. We reach people who could not be reached in any other way. A priest can't go into every home, but a radio can. Remote areas receive us . . . places that a car could never reach. We reach them! . . ."*

—Charlotte Phelps

Charlotte Phelps, a young Liberian woman, serves as director of the Catholic Radio Station in her West African country. Her specialized work and the work of others is made possible by your contribution to the Propagation of the Faith.



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## WE'RE MOVING!

**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.*