

which now consist of 118,000 troops, can take any territory they choose—but only if they attack in force.

Our walk on the highway was also instructive about what it will take for the Soviets truly to win the war. The point of departure for a Soviet strategy is to control the Afghan-Pakistani border, thereby cutting resistance supply routes. If Moscow tries to seal the border in the same way it holds the highways—a string of small outposts—it will have to send in at least

500,000 troops; and pacifying the countryside will require still more reinforcements. It is worth recalling that when President Johnson was contemplating the major escalation of the U.S. commitment in Vietnam, his military advisers told him it would take 700,000 to one million troops and seven years to do the job.

Afghan resistance forces have two advantages. The first is depth of

defense—Afghanistan is a large, rugged country. The second is depth of conviction. Moscow might think that in international politics right and wrong are not decisive factors. But justice is not irrelevant to the balance of power, for a just cause can create a powerful motivation to prevail, especially among troops who act more like warriors than soldiers.

Although the word *mujahed* literally means “one who undertakes a great effort,” it is usually translated poetical-

ly as “holy warrior.” That is an apt characterization. The *mujahedeen* tell all visiting journalists that because the Koran orders the faithful to “fight the invader” the Soviet-Afghan war will continue as long as even one Russian is still in Afghanistan and one Afghan is still alive to fight him. This observation is usually made in a matter-of-fact manner. But no one should be misled by the tone—for them it is simply a matter of fact. In Afghanistan, the Age of Faith never passed. □

Rael Jean Isaac

## SANCTUARY SCOUNDRELS

Movement politics in a humanitarian guise.

On March 24, 1984, as the bells pealed, a caravan of twenty-eight cars pulled into the grounds of Weston Priory, a Benedictine monastery in the Green Mountains of Vermont. The cars were adorned with signs: “U.S. Out of Central America,” “Stop the Guns to Central America,” “This is a Freedom Train.” At the head of the procession was a brown van, blaring marimba music and carrying Felipe and Elena Excot and their five children, illegal aliens from Guatemala. Weston Priory was the destination of a week-long, 1700-mile journey to eight cities, in which the caravan had been met at each stop by TV cameras, reporters, and hundreds of church supporters. On pulling into the monastery, Felipe Excot told an Associated Press reporter that he felt “a duty to tell Americans how governments supported by their tax dollars force Christians in Central America to bury their Bible and hide their communion wafers.”

Such hoopla is typical of a movement that calls itself, incongruously, the new underground railroad. In Seattle, sanctuary families have been greeted by the mayor while the chief of police assigned them a special escort. The accompanying publicity is crucial,

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for while officially its goal is purely humanitarian, the real goal of the movement is to achieve guerrilla victories in Central America and to bring the “revolution” home—to the United States.

By last winter approximately 250 churches and twelve synagogues had declared themselves “sanctuaries.” More impressive than the relatively small number of participating churches (compared with the 339,000 churches in the U.S.) has been the endorsement of church bureaucracies. While the Na-

tional Conference of Catholic Bishops and even the normally activist United States Catholic Conference have steered clear of the sanctuary movement, the Protestant mainline church organizations, ranging from the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church to the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, have lent official moral—and financial—support.

The movement is spreading outward from the churches. In the past several years, we have seen how local com-

munities have grown accustomed to forging their own independent foreign policy in accordance with the nuclear freeze movement (hundreds passed freeze resolutions or declared themselves “nuclear free zones”). At this writing Chicago, Madison, St. Paul, Ithaca, Olympia, Duluth, Berkeley, Seattle, and Cambridge have declared themselves sanctuary cities; many more have such declarations in the pipeline.

Actually, these resolutions are more of symbolic than practical importance. Seeking simultaneously to satisfy activists and reassure ordinary citizens, politicians sometimes find themselves in the position of claiming that what they describe as a tremendously important humanitarian undertaking will, nevertheless, have no ramifications for the taxpayer. In Seattle residents were told that declaring the city a sanctuary will not bring more refugees to it, will not make refugees eligible for any benefits, and will not bring federal penalties upon the city. But the chief practical consequence of these resolutions lies in the encouragement they give to would-be immigrants in Central America, where, according to the *New York Times*, word of these declarations has spread rapidly. There they are wrongly construed to mean that if an immigrant can reach any one of these sanctuary cities, he is safe from the immigration authorities.

For all the peripheral civic activity, churches remain at the heart of the



sanctuary movement. It began on March 24, 1982, the second anniversary of the assassination of El Salvador's Bishop Oscar Romero. The Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, led by its pastor, John Fife, publicly announced it would serve as a "sanctuary" for undocumented refugees. A day earlier the church threw down the gauntlet in a letter to then Attorney General William French Smith: "We are writing to inform you that Southside United Presbyterian Church will publicly violate the Immigration Nationality Act 274 (a)."

But today's movement has other roots—mainly in the secular political organizations in "solidarity" with Central American guerrilla groups. This is not to say that the sanctuary movement consists of religiously motivated humanitarians manipulated by left-wing secularists. On the contrary, the religious leadership of the sanctuary movement shares the politics of the secular left. Their themes are repeatedly emphasized in many of their writings: for example, in *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad*, a new, Maryknoll-sponsored book by Renny Golden, a former nun, and Michael McConnell, a United Church of Christ minister, who together serve as chief "theologians" of the movement. In this literature one finds a cornucopia of radical clichés: Some are rich *because* others are poor; the United States, the great force for evil in the world, has "manufactured" the poverty of the south ("It had been imported and imposed upon them"); virtue and hope are incarnated in Nicaragua, to which Golden and McConnell pay tribute: "We acknowledge the Nicaraguan people fighting for its life even now, and the church of the people, which has lived revolutionary hope in the midst of devastation."

The mechanics of sanctuary vary from church to church. The question of whether to become a sanctuary is sometimes decided by a vote of the church membership as a whole, sometimes by a parish council or church (or synagogue) board. Once a church decides to become part of the movement, the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, the coordinating body of the sanctuary movement, usually undertakes the responsibility for "matching" a church and a refugee, with the church, like a would-be adoptive couple, sometimes waiting for up to two years until an appropriate match is made.

The refugees generally come from Mexico via Tucson through the efforts of the Tucson Ecumenical Council. Refugee selection has been described by Rob Huesca, whose credentials as a former intern for the *Nation* magazine earned him a part in the

process during his year's stay in Mexico. Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, who are selected in Mexico after referral by groups in El Salvador and extensive interviews, must not only oppose U.S. policy but "express a willingness to relate their experiences publicly on arrival in the United States." And the refugee-in-sanctuary can indeed be kept busy. Rene Hurtado, for example, a Salvadoran in sanctuary with St. Luke's Presbyterian Church in suburban Minneapolis (and of whom, more shortly), related his

pageant. This caused some turmoil among church members when it was discovered that they were not married, an omission subsequently rectified. But Federico was solid politically. He told an interviewer that he would not become an American citizen because he would have to pay income taxes used for weapons for the anti-guerrilla Guatemalan government. He complained also that the American people "do not concern themselves with liberty, justice, and respect for the individual."

## In Seattle, sanctuary families have been greeted by the mayor while the chief of police assigned them a special escort.

story to more than 150 groups, ranging from union assemblies to meetings of the Fort Snelling Air Force Reserve, in places as far afield as Illinois and Oregon. Although precise figures are difficult to discern, there are at present probably no more than 500 refugees in sanctuary in the U.S. Their importance obviously derives not from their numbers, but from the political use to which they can be put. As Golden and McConnell put it: "Sanctuary, at its best, has not been a place to hide in, but a platform to speak out from."

The Chicago Religious Task Force asks that the church keep on the premises for at least two weeks the refugee or refugee family assigned to it. During this initial period, the refugees are supposed to be monitored around the clock. The refugee, for example, may be housed in a Sunday school room converted into a bedroom, while in an adjacent room someone is continuously on guard, providing companionship and security from the Immigration Service. In practice, security problems are more apt to plague the guard. The movement's literature warns that young women have been frightened by vigorous romantic overtures from their wards.

In some cases, however, refugees are kept in churches for a much longer period. The Riverside Church in New York City harbored a Guatemalan couple and their son for sixteen months in the building's tower, moving them only recently when the Immigration Service showed up to serve a summons requiring the couple to testify in Tucson at the trial of eleven sanctuary workers. In a pattern typical of refugees in sanctuary, the couple, who gave their names as Ana and Federico, would wear bandanas over their faces at services, but walk in the street with their faces uncovered. Ana, Federico, and their young son Carlos played the Holy Family in the church's Christmas

In other cases, refugees are not harbored in churches at all, but kept in homes of congregation members or placed immediately in apartments. Sometimes several churches (or churches and a synagogue) take joint responsibility for the needs of a family housed elsewhere, making the declaration of sanctuary only symbolic, an assertion of moral virtue without risk. For example, none of the eleven Reform synagogues that has declared itself a sanctuary has actually harbored a refugee.

Given the selection process, it is not surprising that the Salvadorans and Guatemalans in sanctuary tend to speak a uniform rhetoric. Felipe Excot, for example, the Guatemalan whom we encountered above, told a symposium of sanctuary activists meeting in Tucson last year that the people's oppressors in Guatemala "are in alliance also with wealthy families from the United States and also from Israel." Another Guatemalan in sanctuary, an army deserter, told the same conference that sanctuary was a symbol of solidarity with the people of Central America in the struggle against "U.S. and Israeli imperialism." American organizers of the movement speak, if anything, an even harsher rhetoric. Stacey Merkt, one of the first sanctuary workers to be brought to trial for transporting aliens, describes her sense of "standing in the belly of the beast. The reality of destruction, oppression, and injustice is so tightly and subtly woven into the fabric of our lives that we don't see it." For Jim Corbett, widely credited as the founder of the movement, "our message is simply that . . . the people of El Salvador and Guatemala are being tortured into resigning themselves to established patterns of subjugation—that is, to military rule of a wealthy elite that acts as the agent of U.S. domination."

The movement's organizers are thus

troubled by the tendency of some churches to see sanctuary as simply a humanitarian effort, a form of refugee resettlement work. Many of the congregations that have become sanctuaries first worked with refugees from Vietnam and saw helping Salvadorans and Guatemalans as an extension of their former activity. The Chicago Religious Task Force has expressed its frustration: "What is the value of a sanctuary church that continues its support (by silence, by vote or by whatever) for U.S. policies in Central America?" Those selected for sanctuary are supposed to counter this tendency and often prove adept at it. On hearing the story of one Salvadoran in sanctuary at a Seattle church, an impressed church member arose to say that he was reminded of the people of Israel: the refugees had left Egypt (El Salvador), wandered through the wilderness (other countries), and finally reached the promised land (the U.S.). The refugee countered: "Far from feeling I have left Egypt, I feel I have come to Egypt." As one of those present noted, the congregation then asked itself, "Is the U.S. Egypt? Is Reagan Pharaoh?"

At a Presbyterian conference on sanctuary, the refugees in attendance formed their own work group to demand that stopping U.S. intervention be the primary goal of the movement. No wonder that Golden and McConnell point to the importance refugee testimony has had in compelling "most sanctuary congregations into direct attempts at trying to stop United States intervention in Central America."

Since individuals in sanctuary can have little doubt what the movement's leadership wants from them, it is inevitable that some beneficiaries of the movement have come to give their hosts an extra measure of what they desire. Some truly extraordinary tales have come to be told. Take the case of Rene Hurtado, who described himself as a reformed Salvadoran death squad member. In a series of press interviews with Minneapolis newspapers over several years, Hurtado portrayed his previous actions in a progressively more lurid light. Secure in his status as a former death squader, Hurtado said he had participated in killings, applied electric shocks, torn the skin off his victims, and even raped a woman on a public street. His torture techniques, he said, were taught him in a month-long course by U.S. Green Berets. Not surprisingly Hurtado was in great demand as a speaker. By 1985 he felt sufficiently secure from arrest by immigration authorities to have his own apartment and even his own listed number in the Minneapolis telephone book. Unfor-



unately, his tale of torture lessons given by the Green Berets caught the eye of General John Vessey, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose subsequent investigation led to Hurtado's arrest by the Immigration Service in February 1985, as he attended an adult education class. (The National Council of Churches promptly posted most of his \$50,000 bond.)

Hurtado now had a problem. To avoid deportation he had to apply for political asylum under the terms of the Refugee Act of 1980, which specifically excludes those who have persecuted others. It also turned out that Hurtado's story after his arrest differed in crucial respects from his earlier testimony. David Beebe, deputy director for the INS in St. Paul, noted that in his first application for asylum, made before he entered sanctuary and after his first apprehension by the Immigration Service in 1982, Hurtado had written that he was on a Salvadoran government death list; at a later hearing, also held before he entered sanctuary, he said he was on a guerrilla death list. His new attorney denied there were any contradictions and argued that newspaper interviews had seriously misrepresented what Hurtado had said. Indeed, in his new application for asylum, Hurtado now claimed he had never been a member of a death squad and had never killed anyone.

The Hurtado episode reveals how eager sanctuary activists are to believe in American evil-doing. In their book, for example, Golden and McConnell describe an unnamed Guatemalan sergeant in sanctuary in Ohio who also claimed to have learned the torturer's trade in military school from "U.S. soldiers." One of these soldiers was apparently quick to take offense; when a member of the torture class made fun of his accent, the American soldier

shot him point blank. This Guatemalan sergeant makes Hurtado sound like a Boy Scout. His unit, he reports, disposed of children under four by cutting off their heads, of those five and over by beatings (to save ammunition), and those twelve and over by torture. The sergeant himself pales compared with his uncle. The uncle apparently disliked his in-laws, and offered the sergeant a chance for advancement if he would dispose of them by massacring the entire village they lived in. The sergeant's uncle also boasted that he had killed 3,500 people single-handedly—which certainly qualifies him for a place in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Guinness, however, requires some authentication; the sanctuary movement does not.

Nowhere are the sanctuary movement's real priorities more apparent than in the double standard it applies to Nicaraguans who appeal to it for help. The last several years have seen a rising wave of Nicaraguan immigrants, largely made up, like the Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigration, of young men unwilling to serve in the army and eager to find work. Since most cannot prove they are *individual* targets of persecution they do not qualify for refugee status, a situation similar to that of the Salvadorans and Guatemalans. What is different is that they have fled a "progressive" regime.

And for the sanctuary movement, this makes all the difference. John O'Leary, who worked earlier with Vietnamese refugees, created an organization in Washington called New Exodus after discovering the ban that church and Central American solidarity groups had put on Nicaraguans. Himself a member of the National Lawyers Guild (the major U.S. affiliate

of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, an international Soviet front), O'Leary says the guild leadership told him that "it was not politically correct to criticize the Sandinista government, because it would damage [the Sandinistas'] credibility." New Exodus now gives help to Nicaraguans as well as Salvadorans and Guatemalans.

Consider also the transformation of Casa Romero, a Roman Catholic-sponsored shelter in San Benito, Texas. Once at the cutting edge of the sanctuary movement, it has now become a genuine humanitarian shelter open to any immigrant. After the arrests last year of two directors and an assistant on charges of smuggling aliens, Bishop John Fitzpatrick appointed a new director, Sister Ninfa Garza. Earlier the four-room shelter was considered overcrowded if it contained thirty people; by November 1985 it sheltered 205 refugees, including in almost equal numbers aliens who had eluded the border police and those who had been caught and were free on bond. A majority of these refugees were Nicaraguans, a reflection of the shifting composition of the alien tide coming over the Mexican border. When it came to obtaining legal help, Casa Romero found that Proyecto Libertad, a legal group helping the area's sanctuary movement, wanted no part of the Nicaraguans. Sister Garza told a *Washington Post* reporter: "The lawyers made it so clear that they would help some and not others that they made it difficult for us. The Nicaraguans would ask, 'What is wrong with us? Why are we different?'" Jeff Larsen of Proyecto Libertad explained why they were different to the same reporter. "We find that most Nicaraguans are really here because of the economic situation. A lot of people in this office would be upset taking their cases." (As the *Post* reporter observed, Larsen sounded just like the lawyers for the INS describing Salvadorans and Guatemalans.) Larsen did not like what had happened at Casa Romero: "The church has backed down and the place is run by Nicaraguans."

While Nicaraguans are kept away from sanctuary churches, these churches cannot wholly avoid other contradictions inherent in the movement. Frequently, for example, those taken into sanctuary seek to bring over other members of their family. It being an article of faith that such people are in acute danger, requests like these should be considered matters of life or death. Yet as Golden and McConnell point out, using funds for such purposes "means pouring into resettlement work finances that could go toward further organizing of conscientization efforts

toward stopping the war." Faced with such a request, the Cincinnati Sanctuary Project decided to redouble its fundraising efforts so as to bring over the other members of the immigrant's family and continue organizing work against Reagan's Central America policy. But it made clear to the family-in-sanctuary that it would not continue this type of rescue if other refugees made similar requests. In the words of the project's Suzanne Dorge: "We were caught on the horns of an ethical dilemma. How could we be most faithful to the Central American plea for solidarity—by stopping U.S. aggression or by saving a few more lives?"

The interplay between the sanctuary leadership and the hard-core left does much to explain why political considerations tend to override humanitarian ones within the movement. The cooperation extends from organizing efforts to publications to legal support activities. For example, members of the Chicago Religious Task Force and the National Lawyers Guild combined forces to produce a legal handbook, *Sanctuary and the Law: A Guide for Congregations*, which looks forward to appeals to the United Nations (a favorite National Lawyers Guild ploy) to deter the U.S. government should it crack down on churches in the movement. To a considerable extent the National Lawyers Guild, along with the Center for Constitutional Rights, a "public interest" law firm created by guild activists, have served as the legal arm of the sanctuary movement. In May 1985, the Guild and the Center together filed suit on behalf of over seventy religious organizations seeking to end all deportations of Salvadorans and to block federal prosecution of sanctuary workers on the grounds that such prosecution violated their right to the free exercise of religious faith. (The Center for Constitutional Rights also served as counsel in a similar suit filed in January by the Presbyterian Church and the American Lutheran Church.) And the Guild and the Center are involved in the case brought by the government against sanctuary activists in Tucson.

Now if the prospect of "victory to the people" and "an end to U.S. Imperialism" is compelling to the sanctuary leadership, it is not enough to motivate the average churchgoer to defy the law. For this a powerful emotional appeal is necessary, and activists have found it in the claim that churchgoers who fail to declare sanctuary will be sending individuals back to torture and death. This claim was first made in 1982 by the Chicago Religious Task Force in its organizer's manual, which cited an Amnesty International study





as evidence that as of August 1982, 30 percent of all refugees deported from the United States and Mexico to El Salvador had been "tortured, maimed, or murdered upon their return." A temporary problem arose when Rona Weitz, Amnesty International's Area Coordinator for Latin America, disclaimed the figures, saying "for the record, none of the facts or figures attributed to Amnesty International in the organizer's guide published by the Chicago Religious Task Force are ac-

dominates the fund-raising efforts of the sanctuary movement. A letter sent to 1.3 million people uses, as its banner head, the lines: "Shall the guest in our house be sent away to certain death?" And below a picture of a small child with a scarf tied over its face, the letter begins: "Why is this child wearing a mask? Quite simply, to prevent his being identified and murdered in cold blood if the U.S. government succeeds in forcing him and his family to go back to certain death . . ."

## The movement's organizers are troubled by the tendency of some churches to see sanctuary as simply a humanitarian effort.

curate." It turned out that the source was Donovan Cook, the activist pastor of University Baptist Church in Seattle, who had used the figures in a sermon after someone mistakenly told him they came from Amnesty International. But if the figures had no basis in fact, they were nonetheless far too valuable to be abandoned. Indeed, as recently as March 1985, the Religious News Service was still reporting that "the proliferation of sanctuary churches across the country has resulted, in part, from the announcement by Amnesty International . . . that up to 30 percent of Salvadorans who are deported disappear after their return."

Actually, the fictitious 30 percent figure is modest compared to some of the predictions made by sanctuary activists concerning the fate of the 500-1,000 people the INS returns each month to El Salvador and Guatemala. Gary MacEoin, one of the founders of the sanctuary movement, describes deportees returning to what is "for some, a mercifully quick bullet to the brain; for others mutilation, rape, and the drawn out agony of torture." In their 1985 book *Golden and McConnell* say of those forced to return: "They know that their chances of survival, once they disembark at the airport outside San Salvador or Guatemala City, are slim. The road from Ilopango Airport to San Salvador is known as the 'road to death.'" The left-wing evangelical journal the *Other Side* is equally dire: "They return to near-certain persecution and death." And Jesse Jackson is even more emphatic. Welcoming a Salvadoran family into sanctuary in Operation Push, he described the "concentration camps" in which the deportees were "awaiting deportation and certain death." Similarly the Rev. Robert McAfee Brown has declared flatly that the U.S. is "shipping them home to firing squads."

The "return to death" theme

Are these charges in any way valid? After the "Amnesty International figures" were discredited, the American Civil Liberties Union conducted a study which it hoped would serve as a substitute. It compared the names of 8,500 deportees with a list of 22,000 victims of human rights violations. After nine months of work the ACLU found only 113 "possible" matches among the names, and only twenty-five where in its own estimation there was better than an average chance that the match was accurate, i.e., one-third of 1 percent of the total. In short, it was unable to make a single positive identification. Not surprisingly the ACLU abandoned the study, claiming in 1985 congressional testimony that it had been undertaken simply to "raise questions" and create enough "doubts" to justify a suspension of deportations until a definitive study could be done.

Stung by the charges, the State Department conducted its own investigation. It had the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador follow up on a random sample of 482 deportees. Of these, 145 could not be reached because they had given fictional or incomplete addresses, and thirty-nine (according to relatives) had returned to the United States. Of the close to 200 who were interviewed (or whose families were interviewed), none reported harassment upon their return. One deportee had been killed by the guerrillas, apparently in a case of mistaken identity.

Critics of the State Department study have made much of the fact that seventy-three returnees could not be interviewed because they lived in areas deemed dangerous as a result of guerrilla activity. But no one disputes that the Communist insurgency in El Salvador has made parts of the country dangerous: the claim of the sanctuary movement and the ACLU is that those who return are in *special* peril, singled out for torture and assassination. The Geneva-based Inter-

government Committee for Migration, which since the end of 1984 has met all deportees upon their arrival, has found no cases of human rights violations of deportees. In a follow-up it noted the chief complaint of deportees has been the difficulty of finding work.

The grotesque disproportion between allegation and fact has not prevented the sanctuary movement from continuing to work upon the emotions of churchgoers. But it has forced the ACLU and other movement spokesmen to shift ground. Arguing that Congress should grant extended voluntary departure to all Salvadorans and Guatemalans (i.e., suspend deportation until dangerous conditions cease to exist in their countries), the ACLU now asserts that even if a deported Salvadoran faces no dangers greater than a person who never left El Salvador, conditions there are such as to make it unconscionable to send people back.

In confronting churches ostensibly engaged in a humanitarian crusade, the U.S. government has been uncertain how to proceed. It has had no desire to follow the sanctuary leadership's script and, with TV cameras rolling, drag from a church, over the prostrate bodies of its parishioners, the members of a refugee family. But neither was it possible for the government to encourage, by permanent inaction, the growth of a movement that flouts the law. Typically, when the government finally took action, the movement cried that it had been "targeted"; in fact, for a long time it had been singled out for immunity from prosecution. As INS chief Alan Nelson pointed out, the government in 1984 arrested 18,000 "coyotes" (people who smuggle immigrants for profit) and 5,000 were sent

to jail. After three years of operation, only twenty people in the sanctuary movement were indicted.

The worst scenario from the government's point of view involves long trials ending in light punishment, which only create martyrs and deter nobody. Yet this is precisely what is happening. Jack Elder and Stacey Merkt, both of whom had worked at Casa Romero in its activist period, were indicted and convicted but emerged basically triumphant. Elder spent 150 days in a halfway house. Sentenced to 179 days in jail, Merkt appealed and never served a day. Philip Willis-Conger of the Tucson Ecumenical Council's Task Force on Central America was arrested in 1984 after border police found him transporting four Salvadoran illegal immigrants. The charges were dropped after the judge ruled that border police lacked a "well-founded suspicion" when they searched his car. There is every indication that the government's major case in Tucson against eleven sanctuary workers (whose legal expenses are paid largely by the Presbyterian and Lutheran churches and the World Council of Churches) will have even worse results because of the extensive publicity focused on the government's use of paid informants.

Anti-Americanism and a romantic identification with Marxist guerrillas only partly explain the passion of sanctuary activists. To the movement's leaders, sanctuary is ultimately a way to create revolution in *this* country: to raise the consciousness of the average church member, radicalize him, and prepare him to form base Christian communities on the Latin model, which will then lead to the overthrow of the established order. Golden and McConnell write that Americans need to develop "a revolutionary faith that



demands lifelong resistance to United States structural oppression, domestic and international." Richard Shaull, who has attempted to create such communities in the U.S., writes: "Our own conclusion was that for middle-class persons in the First World, dealing with their own oppression will be a long and painful process. . . . In Latin America this process was greatly accelerated

when repressive regimes began to persecute groups in which such awareness was growing. It may well be that something similar will happen in the First World—and much sooner than we now expect."

Leaders of the movement make no secret of their hopes that a government crackdown could make members of sanctuary churches develop the desired "sense of oppression." Some see the process as already under way. According to University Baptist's Donovan Cook: "From the midst of the politicized, secularized, assimilated church in North America, a new church is being resurrected—an 'insurgent church.'" Golden and McConnell are similarly encouraged: "Liberation theology has walked over the border, incorporated into the exile refugee community. A popular church is emerging in the United States mirroring the grassroots church that began in the wake of Vatican II in Latin America."

"Conversion" is the key. The uniqueness of the sanctuary movement, write Golden and McConnell, is in providing a forum for the oppressed to call the Anglo church "to conversion. . . while linking itself to resistance traditions of the past." Conversion, they insist, is "unauthentic [sic] if it is content with halfhearted commitment or halfway reform. . . . It calls for a complete turning over of the self and the world—that is, revolution. The unity of all humankind depends upon turning the whole world upside down." In short, the sanctuary movement is intended to be profoundly subversive not only of our political and economic system but of our cultural values.

However remote the sanctuary movement's prospects for "turning the whole world upside down," even short-term victories by the movement may have profound consequences—particularly for a humane immigration policy, because the movement makes the category of political refugees meaningless.

The first way it does this is by refusing to accept a distinction between economic and political refugees. El Salvador has traditionally been second only to Mexico as a source of illegal immigrants to the United States, with 350,000 of the presently estimated 500,000 illegals having come before 1979, when the civil war began. This is not remarkable. As Michael Teitelbaum points out in *Latin Migration North*, Salvadorans earn in their own country only 5 percent of what they can expect to earn in the United States. An exit poll conducted at the time of the last Salvadoran elections by the Spanish International Network found 67 percent

of Salvadorans answering "yes" to the question, "Would you emigrate to the United States to work?"

This is not to say that there are no political refugees from El Salvador; there are, which is why the State Department granted political asylum to several hundred Salvadorans last year. (El Salvador ranks fourth in the number of asylum claims granted.) Moreover there have been, and probably still are, grounds for complaint in the way Salvadoran claims are treated. Only a handful of people were granted political asylum in 1980 and 1981 when

points out, in so doing the sanctuary movement undermines a "tradition of political pragmatism religious groups have evolved in working with the government on refugee questions" since World War II. By precipitating a broad church-state conflict with their claim to a religious exemption from immigration law, says Nichols, sanctuary leaders "guarantee reprisals rather than resolution, and the refugees will be the losers." This realization has prompted the American Jewish Committee, the Center for Migration Studies, and the International Rescue

**Secure in his status as a former death squader, Hurtado said he had participated in killings, applied electric shocks, torn the skin off his victims, and even raped a woman on a public street.**

the death squad activity was at its height. In 1981, the U.N. High Commission on Refugees sent a mission to monitor the processing of asylum claims of Salvadorans in California, Arizona, and Texas. A commission staff memo complained that INS practices were designed to secure the return of Salvadorans irrespective of the merits of their claims. The situation has clearly improved since then, for the numbers granted asylum have risen dramatically as death squad activity has declined sharply.

The sanctuary movement's carefully screened refugees tell stories that, if true, should entitle most of them to status as political refugees under the existing system. But the sanctuary movement does not test the asylum process for those taken into sanctuary. It uses the asylum process only in unusual circumstances, such as when an individual in sanctuary, like Rene Hurtado, is taken into custody. Seattle has one of the most active sanctuary movements in the country, and more than a hundred attorneys have offered their services, pro bono, to the movement. Yet the INS director in Seattle told Holt Ruffin of the World Without War Council that in the last three years only two applications for political asylum by Salvadorans have been filed with his office. The movement does not want to make the system work better; in fact it does not care if it destroys the asylum system, if breaking it apart can serve to further its foreign policy goals.<sup>1</sup>

And this is the second way that the sanctuary movement undermines political asylum—by using refugees as a tool to change foreign policy. As Bruce Nichols of the Council on Religion and International Affairs

Committee, although sympathetic to a more generous policy toward Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants, to label the confusion between refugee and foreign policy as among the most dangerous and discouraging trends in recent debate on the immigration issue.



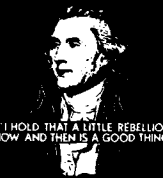





The sanctuary movement promises an end to refugee flows from Central America if its policies are followed. Ironically, some of the largest refugee flows of recent times have followed the "peace" imposed by Communist regimes in places like Vietnam and Cambodia. To be sure, if such peace should come to El Salvador and Guatemala, one can be confident the sanctuary movement will show no more concern for subsequent migrants than they show for the large numbers now streaming from Nicaragua. □

<sup>1</sup>The movement's cynicism is also revealed by the way in which it draws the analogy to refugees from Nazi Germany, an analogy incidentally responsible for much of Jewish support for the movement. The record of the United States (as of most countries in the world) with respect to Jews in the Nazi period was a sorry one. U.S. callousness was probably nowhere dramatized more forcefully than in the refusal to accept the 907 passengers of the *St. Louis* in 1939, thereby dooming most of them to death.

But guilt over our failure in 1939 does not require us to equate deporting a Salvadoran today with sending a Jew to Auschwitz. Remarkably, sanctuary activists do not complain of U.S. indifference to suffering caused by the evil Nazi regime—rather they equate the activities of the U.S. government with those of the Nazi regime. Jim Corbett, for example, speaks of "the Pentagon's final solution to the Third World problem" and asserts: "Sad to confess, we Anglo-Americans seem to share some of the Third Reich's moral insensitivity to technocratically organized mass murder."

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# SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE

## SENATOR SIMPSON FIGHTS BACK

Well, if I might just take one moment to dig the hatchet out of my old bald dome, I will respond to the testy little attacks lobbed in my direction by Tom Bethell ("Senator Simpson's Reward," *TAS*, February 1986, and "Strange New Respect: Cont'd," *TAS*, March 1986), who apparently performs the function of "Washington correspondent" for this publication. Seldom in my twenty years of political life have I witnessed such a rapid-fire assault of drivel. This "Strange New Respect" award may be even stranger than the author. What a dazzler!

Tom Bethell is a complete mystery to me. His grim visage and furtive shadow have never darkened my doorstep. He has never—at anytime—attempted to communicate with me personally in any way—not by letter, phone call, or personal meeting. Damned if I've ever seen the guy. His deep-seated personal aversion for me must then be based on what he has read and heard second, third, or even maybe fourth hand. Is that journalism? It doesn't seem so to me.

It's easy to be a critic—any fool can qualify. I often flunk the many litmus tests that are administered in this fascinating village by single-issue groups. I most surely flunked Bethell's test—tri-laterally if I might use the phrase—since I don't seem to measure up on immigration reform, the abortion issue, or the Medvid case. So I doubt very seriously if there is anything I could ever do or ever say that might change that. Although I would still enjoy a personal visit with "the Washington correspondent."

We're all entitled to our own opinions—but Bethell is not entitled to his own facts. The information he uses in both the February and March issues of *The American Spectator* is goofy. Maybe he is too. For the sake of fairness, let's try to get it straight. Unfortunately, Bethell's "reporting" has more loose ends than a \$10 hairpiece.

In the February issue he seems to whimsically suggest that I somehow conduct my business in Washington with the hope that my constituents in Wyoming won't find out what I'm up to. Poor Bethell doesn't know Wyoming—or its people. Those Wyoming citizens are highly articulate, thoughtful, intelligent, well read,

outspoken, and highly opinionated. Yes, I have always had a "peculiar" attitude about public life—I say exactly the same things in Wyoming that I say in Washington, and vice versa. The people in Wyoming know all about me—right back to when I was a ring-tailed kid at Cody High School and the University of Wyoming—and they sure know how I vote. But more importantly they know how to spot a phony too—and I would have been retired very swiftly in 1984 if I had ever tried to pull the wool over their eyes in my first six-year tour of duty. As for campaign promises—in 1978 and 1984 I made only two to the people in Wyoming: that I would work my fanny off—and would try to make them very proud. In the 1984 elections, 78 percent of Wyoming's voters must have figured I had kept that promise during that first trip. Their marvelous degree of support is where I find my personal satisfaction.

During my time in public life I have discovered how to accept a crumb when I can't get a loaf—and how to compromise an issue without compromising myself. I'm proud of that record. I sleep well at night. I am a legislator—sent to Washington to legislate. Legislating is about the driest form of human experience—if done correctly. It means hearings, and amending and creating, and drafting, and compromise and debate. It's hard work. I enjoy it—no, I love it. I have held a total of three press conferences in my seven years in Washington. I didn't come out here to get my suits bleached by the camera lights. I came to work.

In any representative government, the final legislative result is always a compromise. I feel very fortunate to have been able to play a constructive part in drafting and debating some tough legislation over the years. I have dealt with immigration reform, commercial nuclear power, Three Mile Island, Agent Orange, veterans issues, high and low level nuclear waste disposal, various judiciary issues, and the federal budget deficit. It's an honor to be a part of the democratic process.

Then in the March issue, I was absolutely transfixed to read Paul

Weyrich's account (via Bethell) of a conversation he claims to have heard six years ago. Bet Paul wouldn't believe it either. It's almost as if I was supposed to be boisterously and half-arrogantly sitting there babbling into the vapors and suddenly, when I "realized" that Paul Weyrich was in the room, I clutched my throat, froze up, and toppled over on my head.

As to the "Weyrich incident" I'm going to come out there and check your ash trays—to see what you are smoking. I have never—ever—boasted of "stopping the social agenda."

It is even more fascinating to suggest that a senator who was just here two years in 1980 could bully around such intelligent, thoughtful, and forceful persons as Howard Baker and Jim Baker. Howard and Jim both would chuckle at that one!

I have consistently and sincerely stated my concerns over the so-called "social issues." They always have the real potential to be emotional and very divisive—and the clearest and most real part of it all is that you can debate those issues for literally days on end,

and you won't change a single vote. For instance, I have always supported school prayer. I differ with some conservatives on abortion. I've supported sensible anti-busing legislation—but once we have had the full and fair Senate debate, then let's move on with our work. The proponents of any measure, who have had the opportunity for a full debate—and lost—should respect the will of the Senate.

Apparently to substantiate the pungency of his article, Washington correspondent Bethell cites the omnipresent "unnamed Senate aide"—the unelected and most often unelectable person with no mandate from the people, but sometimes simply a hidden agenda all his or her own. I know some of those fine young people. Some are absolute zealots. To paraphrase Santayana, a zealot is someone who, having forgotten his purpose, redoubles his efforts. Lord spare me the opinions of zealots—and share with me always the opinions of those who are down there in the arena sweating, those who have to vote "yes" or "no" and not "maybe," those who came here to



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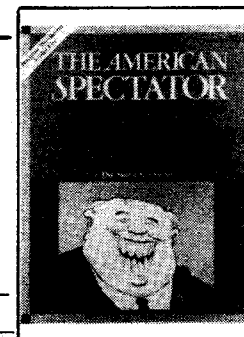
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