

Forum Column

"Inarticulate?" Some Replies

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

If it were considered proper for a columnist to surrender his entire space for a half dozen times in succession, I should do so now.

Since the appearance of "Inarticulate, But Why?" on this page several weeks ago, replies have continually poured in. All of them are interesting. Many of them are extraordinarily fine. Some of them are so provocative of argument that if I were to present them, this column would become a forum. The Editors would not approve of that. So let's have just a few today and a few a week from today. After that I must desist—at least temporarily. But I thank all who have written. I consider their contributions immensely helpful. I beg the indulgence of those from letters I have not space to quote, and also I ask forgiveness of those who have written at great length but whom I have to quote with extreme brevity.

For the sake of those who did not see the original article, let me explain that it was in substance a query as to where educated Catholics hide themselves when attacks are made upon the Church and why they remain inarticulate.

Without comment, therefore, I present a few sample sentences here and there out of letters which if printed entire would fill this whole issue of the CATHOLIC COURIER.

"Providence, R. I.: Westbrook Fegler recently quoted Benjamin Gittlow, telling how a Communist spends his day: he buys his Communist paper on the way to work and may arrive early to spread leaflets without being noticed. At noon he will be engaged in some noon activity of the party of his Communist union faction. After work, instead of going home, he will go to party headquarters to attend committee meetings. After 8 o'clock he may have to attend a union meeting or a meeting of his party branch. After the meeting he probably will go back to headquarters to get instructions for the next day's activities. If a Communist can work so hard against a great nation, why don't Catholic laymen and women do more for Christ's cause? Laziness and the smug, misdirected idea of American liberty, is my answer."

"New York, N. Y.: I was surprised and disappointed to learn the measure our clergy take in subordinating lay activities. I approached one pastor with the idea of conducting open forums on religious issues in the school auditorium. I was politely informed such a thing 'was preposterous.' Likely to lead to abuses."

"Louisiana: We are the sheep. I have never known sheep to turn in their own defense. They habitually flee before the dogs or wolves that attack them. Their defense is left to the shepherd."

"New York City: Lay Catholics are subservient to the organization of the Church, and they are never permitted to forget it. The hierarchical constitution of their Catholic world is never absent from their consciousness. Little wonder, then, that it becomes second nature for the layman to salute and follow orders."

"Mount Vernon, N. Y.: Being a convert with a most bigoted family, I think that one is forced to

assume the same attitude toward the world as the Jews of home. And that includes avoiding 'controversial' words. One can spend years patiently answering questions about Catholicism only to find that the persons are not in the slightest bit interested in what the answer is to their question."

"Chicago, Ill.: I have had what I privately call a spiritual reawakening. It began with buying the revision of the New Testament. I read through it and again. It was something new—believe it or not. I recently purchased an excellent work, a one volume Church History, by Father Lamy, and read it. Again, the revision of Kieckhefer on how looking into Chapman's Homer. I was vaguely aware of the outlines of Church History, but again, not once in my entire Catholic education, had the story of the Church been presented in such a fashion, clear and coherent, or even presented at all. I bought and read Hilaire Belloc's 'How the Reformation Happened.' For the first time, I feel that I have a somewhat adequate understanding of what I've made a start of, of this tremendously significant movement. But I didn't get it in school."

"Cleveland, Ohio: Is it not possible that through indoctrination with the concept of the authoritative character of the Church may be responsible for the fact that the burden of defense is put upon those in authority, namely the Hierarchy and clergy? My generation did not have training for leadership."

"Massachusetts: I was a member of the Catholic Alumni Sodality, composed of prominent physicians, judges, lawyers, professors, politicians and school officials. Surely, I thought, amongst this galaxy of intellectuals will be found loyal sons of the Church, men who would feel that an insult to their Mother was a stab at their own hearts. Day after day at the nauseous propaganda for the Reds flooded the papers I searched, alas, vainly, for any reply from the educated laity. I resolved to do something myself. I gave my nights and days to a study of modern Spanish history, learning Professor Pears' 'The Spanish Tragedy' to mine of information almost by heart. When I felt adequately prepared I began to write a few letters to the papers. The Herald threw my notes into the waste basket. The Transcript published every letter, one twelve hundred words long, in which I answered in detail the charges of Walter Cannon, M.D., of the Harvard Medical School, the mouthpiece then of the 'Liberals.'"

"Hollywood, Florida: I had written a letter to Good Housekeeping Magazine regarding 'The Neighbors' and I enclose copy of the letter I had in reply. The editor says: 'Our last object in publishing anything is to offend nobody. You may be sure that all of us here are genuinely sorry that the poem appeared.'"

"Illinois: Educated Catholics lack faith in Christ. In all my years of Catholic schooling I never went to the public schools; the personal, living, mountain-moving faith of the Saints was so formalized, so rationalized, one would say, that it didn't occur to me to even think of imitating them. Our Lord was so catechetically presented that by the time I reached college I was bored to death with religion. The fact was we just took things for granted, little realizing that we depended on God for our very breath."

"Tarrytown, N. Y.: Too long have we Catholics suffered from the 'not-expedient-malady' and to you we are grateful for an opportunity to awake from an undesirable lethargy."

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STRANGE BUT TRUE Little-Known Facts for Catholics

By M. J. MURRAY

Advertisement for 'OUR LADY OF LITIAN' featuring a religious scene and text about the book's content and availability.

EDITORIALS

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slackers. Christ in another place warns that he who putteth his hand to the plow and looketh back is not fit for the Kingdom of God. Lent is a season in which the priest is urged in Holy Writ to warn the people of their sins, not to renege to uphold them for their stout courage. The purpose of this is to lead them to more perfect service of God.

Love for Christ and His message led a certain woman in the old in praise of the Blessed Mother of God, whose Son was doing so much good for men. His word, His seal for souls, His constant striving for the adherence of His hearers, impressed her, forced her to cry out her praises for Mary. Christ did not rebuke her for praising His holy Mother; but He impressed her and her companions in the crowd that greater blessings would go to those who relied on Him and His word, than on any relationship however holy. "Rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it."

Ignoble Device of Expediency

Principle is a fundamental element of truth and honesty. Its value cannot be measured in money. It is not a garment that a man may wear on special occasions. It is not a pose that may be assumed to meet emergencies. It is never an extraneous thing, which a man may take up merely as a weapon with which to make his fight in life. Above all, principle must not be mistaken for policy, because policy often is simply another term for expediency. Principle is an inherent

thing that reaches into the very core of a man's character and is part of him. Rev. John Cavanaugh in the Deaver Register.

Sound New Order

A new order in the world depends upon better men and women. Better men and women are those who believe in God and obey His laws. That is why Pope Pius XII has said that a new and better order is not the work of the State and Church only, but depends largely upon each individual doing his part by leading a Christian life. Selected.

FIVE and TEN Years Ago--

From Mar. 22, 1938, Edition: With 3,000 persons present, His Excellency, Bishop O'Hara, presided at the National Federation in Columbus Circle Centre auditorium marking the fourth anniversary of consecration. Services were sponsored by the Knights of Columbus and brought State Deputy William J. Armstrong from Albany.

From Mar. 22, 1938, Edition: His Holiness, Pope Pius XI responded to the noble Catholic sentiments of Spain's General Francisco Franco to avoid as far as possible heron wrought by aerial bombardments and received reassurance in a filial reply from the Nationalist Forces leader.

pages in this unusual book. These last are the best, for, with the mask torn off, Screwtape tries to make Wormwood write with the truth about the Beastlike Vision.

"This animal, this thing begotten in a bed, could look on Him, What is blinding, suffocating fire to you, is now cool light to him, is clarity itself, and wears the form of a Man. All the delights of sense, or heart, or intellect, with which you could once have tempted him, even the delights of virtue itself, now seem to him in comparison but as the half-nauseous attractions of a raddled harlot would seem to a man who hears that his true beloved whom he has loved all his life and whom he had believed to be dead is alive and even now at his door. He is caught up into that world where pain and pleasure take on transcendent values and all arithmetic is drowned."

A copy of this amazing book is being placed in the Catholic Evidence Library for discriminating readers who are not afraid to unmask their own fifth column of temptation.

Library Signpost

Letters From Hell

By Rev. Benedict Emons

The Screwtape Letters By C. S. Lewis (Macmillan) This is a new book. It is by an Anglican minister. All it contains is letters, 21 of them, each about four pages long, supposedly written by Screwtape, a retired devil in Hell, to Wormwood, his nephew on the fighting front of the Infernal Legion. It is just about the cleverest book ever written on the strategy of Evil against Good in the souls of men. The ancient Fathers wrote learnedly and well of the snares of the Devil; this book adds nothing essentially new to their X-ray study of temptations. But nothing that I know of in the Fathers or the theologians quite matches the sardonic brilliance of The Screwtape Letters.

Here you find—imaginatively re-created—the very atmosphere of Hell. God is always "the Enemy," despised and hated because He loves and gives Himself to the "human vermin." He has created . . .

to us a human is primarily food; our aim is the absorption of its will into ours, the increase of our own area of selfhood at its expense. But the obedience which the Enemy demands of men is quite a different thing. One must face the fact that all the talk about His love for men, and His service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda; but an appalling truth. He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome replicas of Himself—creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own; not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in. He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself; the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct.

This Hell is ranged against the Kingdom which God would spread over the earth. The Devils respect the Enemy; they know Him with a terrible clarity; but they do not love Him. They know all His designs—only they know them upside down. And their strategy against the "humans" is deadly in earnest. Like Rommel's in the African desert, it is constantly shifting ground; it retreats only to reorganize. It yields only to find the point of weakness in the advance. The Devils may not know the next move of the opponent; but they know the openings and the wedges which the new shift has made.

"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking

rest; and not finding, he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there; and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first."

The particular victim of the devil Wormwood in The Screwtape Letters is a young man who has been an agnostic, becomes a convert to Christianity, is in danger of reverting because of a meeting with old friends, is saved from that by falling in love with a fine Christian girl, is caught up into relief work during the Blitz, and is finally killed in an air-raid. . . . You don't see any of this directly, but only through the correspondence between Screwtape and Wormwood, whose one concern is for the best strategy to tear down what God (the Enemy) is building up. The old veteran shows the young Wormwood the best points of attack against his "patient." Every new advance toward the Enemy creates a new danger for every one it removes. Evidently, this is Wormwood's first assignment out of the Infernal Military School, for his Uncle Screwtape goes to great pains to instruct him on every loophole of attack.

Every possibility of temptation is analyzed—doubt, uncertainty, spiritual pride, the tendency to judge religion by the people who profess it, domestic friction, depression of soul, necessary sociability with the sophisticated, sexual vanity, moments of frivolity, delicacy of taste, living in the future or moaning over the past, bouts of perversity, monotony, the tyranny of fashion, fear and cowardice in the presence of terror, and several other even subtler forms.

This is, in fact, the chief point of value and interest for me in The Screwtape Letters—the amazing versatility of its psychology of temptation. You can't read it without feeling the twinge of the sensitive nerve again and again. The Psalmist once prayed, "Prove me, O Lord, and burn my reins. . . ." This book will help you do it. It shows us all the chinks in our cozy little selves, where a certain devil stands like an evil sentry.

Or, if I may change the figure, it shows with horrible precision the fifth column which lurks in every human being. For we are a beleaguered city. Some of us the devil wins with hardly any strategy; the fifth column is very numerous in certain Egges. Others are matter for tough siege right up to the end; but they, too, must always be afraid lest the gates be opened from within.

But, thanks be to God, we have an Ally of infinite power. He could win the day at any moment; but He will not force us. Screwtape recognizes this power of the Enemy, and tames it. But there it is, helping us to win against the forces of Hell. And it does what, at the end of The Screwtape Letters. For when the "patient" is killed during the air-raid, he dies in the state of grace. And Screwtape spends his last letter in an effort to torture Wormwood with the thought of the happiness he has failed to destroy. Out of many brilliant