

Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

The Screwtape Letters- by C.S. Lewis

Part 3: Freewill¹

I happened to be in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the day after the tragic shootings at the Amish school. The next morning, the newspaper had an article explaining how the Amish would not turn toward psychologists to deal with their grief, but rather, they would turn toward their faith in God. The article described the beautiful simplicity of Amish faith and the trust they have in God. While many of the statements that were made about their faith could have been applied to Catholicism, one statement could not.

The newspaper stated the Amish believe that everything that happens, good or bad, is part of God's plan. Centuries ago, the Church dealt with this question of predestination and came to the conclusion that we are truly free and, therefore, not everything that happens is God's intentional will. As Christians, we believe that God gave us freewill so that we can freely choose to love Him.

Lewis' eighth letter from the experienced demon, Screwtape, to his nephew, Wormwood, is one of the most important that he wrote. Covering the topic of freewill, Screwtape poetically elucidates on why God gave it to humanity. In disgust for God's generosity, he writes:

We [demons] want cattle who can finally become food; [God] 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 [Satan] has drawn all other beings into himself; [God] wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct.²

According to Screwtape, God desires to fill the universe with "little replicas" of Himself, not by forcing us to be like Him, but by lovingly wooing us to choose Him.³ Knowing that true love requires a free choice, God has given us freedom. The very freedom that allows us to choose Him, also allows us to choose horrible evil. The moment God interferes to stop a freely chosen evil act to happen, He crosses a line that would undo His very nature, love. To keep us from freely choosing evil would mean to keep us from freely choosing to love Him.

Using the image of a father teaching his son to walk, Screwtape writes, "He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles."⁴ Freewill is precisely this "[taking] away [of] His hand."⁵ He is not a puppeteer, making us do this and that, but a father who hopes his children are like him.

Screwtape suggests that all demons need to be aware of how God helps humans to grow in freewill. First, God gives to us *feelings* that cause us to want to choose Him. Screwtape seems to think that these feelings are fairly easy to attack and misdirect. Next, God takes away the feelings and invites us to choose Him based on the *desire* that we have for Him. This is a little more difficult for demons to attack. Lastly, God invites us to choose Him based on neither emotions nor desires, but simply because we make it our intention—a pure act of the will. This intentional act is the highest and most pure form of love.

As we keep the Amish in our prayers, as well as all of the people who have been affected by school violence, we know that these terrible tragedies are not things that God can directly stop. They end when we freely choose to love the God who first loved us and calls us to be His children.

¹ This article is part three of a twelve part series that I am writing on C.S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters.

² The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis, HarperSanFrancisco, 2001, pg. 39.

³ Ibid., pg. 38-39.

⁴ Ibid., pg. 40.

⁵ Ibid., pg. 40.