

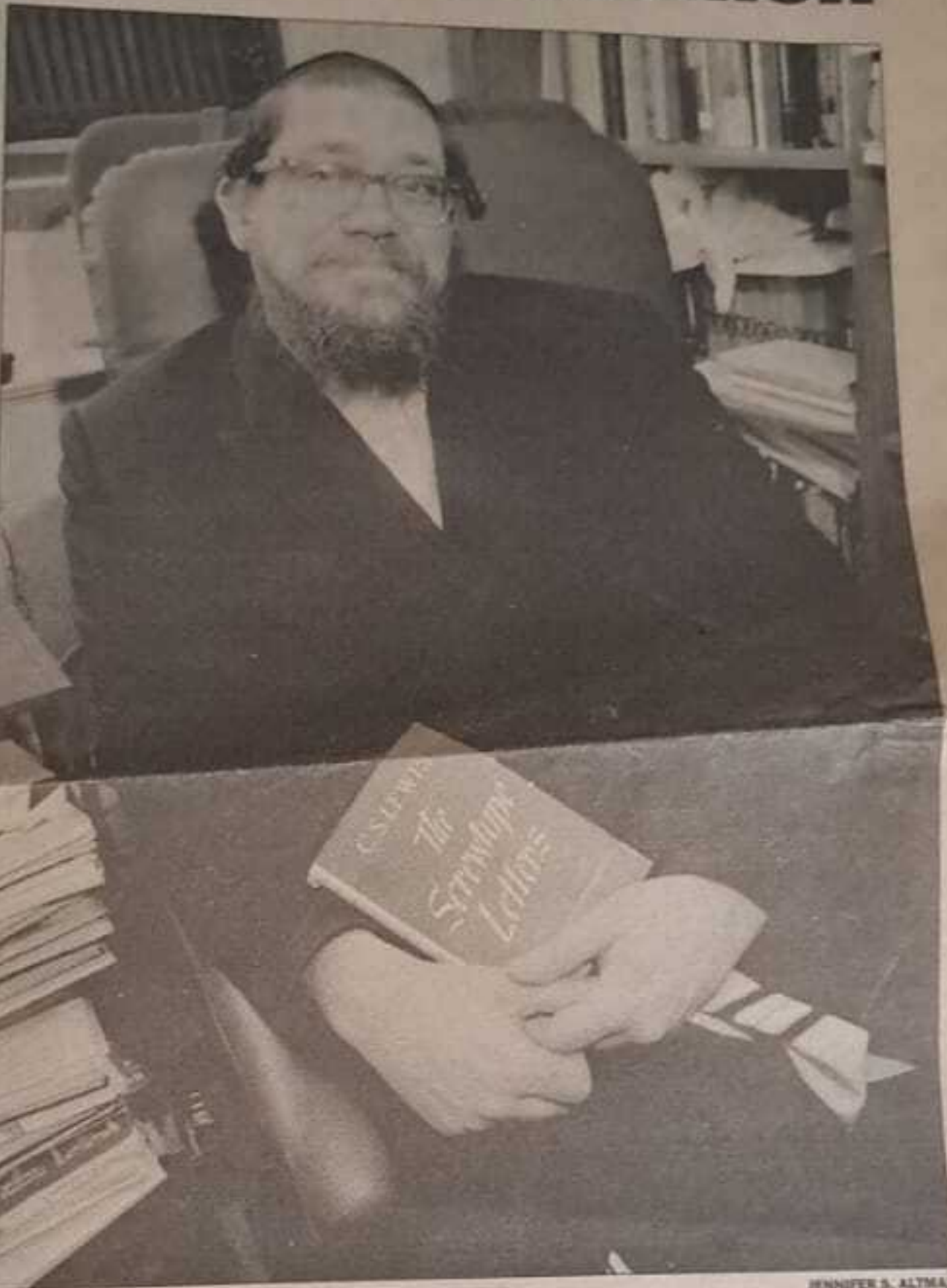
Rabbi gets a bit devilish

UNDER EVERYDAY circumstances, nobody would call Rabbi Mayer Schiller a devil's advocate, but circumstances at the Immaculate Conception Center in Douglaston, Queens, were not everyday.

And so, the Orthodox rabbi, who teaches Bible and Torah at the Yeshiva University's High School for Boys, found himself promoting the cause of His Satanic Majesty.

At, of all places, a Catholic institution — the pastoral center for the Diocese of Brooklyn, home of 14 Church agencies, 25 retired priests and 25 college-age seminarians.

In a way, yes, the devil made Schiller do it. "I've never done anything like this before," he says, "but, I thought it was a good way to present a



JENNIFER S. ALTMAN

FAMED TOME: Rabbi Mayer Schiller holds a copy of "The Screwtape Letters," which he says he first read when he was 12 and still enjoys to this day.



RELIGION
CHARLES W. BELL

perspective on evil."

The occasion was the 100th anniversary of the birth of C.S. Lewis, the British writer and ardent defender of Christianity whose works include "The Screwtape Letters."

Screwtape was the name Lewis gave the senior devil who wrote a series of popular, fictional letters advising his young nephew Wormwood, an apprentice devil, on the most fiendish ways to win human souls for Satan.

More than 50 years after its publication, Lewis' satire about good, evil and human nature remains a best seller and divinity school requirement.

Schiller got involved because he's a member of the New York branch of the C.S. Lewis Society, which celebrated the centenary last weekend at Immaculate Conception.

"I first read 'Screwtape' when I was 12," says Schiller,

formerly of Brooklyn and Queens and now of Munsey, in Rockland County, "and I liked it enormously. I still do."

So when he was asked to participate, Schiller turned to "Screwtape." He delivered a parody that skewered the sorry state of human morality and ethics as seen through the eyes of the devil's right-hand fiend.

Some of Schiller's version is wickedly to the point. In his version of Screwtape's world, there's praise for the "glorious mass slaughter and suffering" of war. For the "delicious frenzy" of patriotism. For the "silly bourgeois props" of civility, decency, manners,

modesty, loyalty and love. (See related story for more excerpts).

Schiller says he got the parody idea during a national C.S. Lewis conference at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Ill., earlier this year.

He's written many articles and two books — one tellingly titled "The Guilty Conscience of a Conservative" — but the "Screwtape" satire was a first foray into fantasy.

Schiller, a self-termed conservative and graduate of a Hasidic institute, has taught for 22 years, the last dozen at Yeshiva University's all-boys' high, on the upper West Side.

He was not raised Orthodox, but, he says, as he grew more socially and politically conservative, Orthodoxy seemed religiously natural and logical.

He was asked to join the C.S. Lewis Society, which has about 500 members, most in the New York area, after speaking to a Catholic group a few years ago.

Schiller is married and has two children and four grandchildren.

"So far," he says, "I haven't written them any letters giving them any advice on anything, but one of these days, I might."

'Out the window, we tossed decency'

How the bad guys won the West in Rabbi Mayer Schiller's fanciful revision of "Screwtape":

"We stuck to our strategy of pushing 'isms.' Nationalism. Communism. Freudianism. Democracy. In America, at times, we dressed things up in the colors of sociology and progressive education.

"We took control, but softly and slowly. We made life coarse and ugly.

"Out the window, we tossed decency, civility, manners, modesty, loyalty and love. We had them babbling about 'free-

doms' one day and 'phobias' the next, and we came to dominate their very lives.

"No mass rallies. No forced catechisms. No, we had a far better tool. We had television. Absolute mind control.

"We moved slowly. Dress became slovenly and language . . . cheap and abusive. Reserve and dignity were mocked. . .

"Now, things are going well as a whole, but in our business one never knows.

"Remember, stay in touch with your leaders in Hollywood, Wall Street and Washington. . . ."