

# Revisiting C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* of 1941 and exploring their relation to 'Screwtape proposes a toast'



**Author:**  
Raymond M. Potgieter<sup>1</sup>

**Affiliation:**  
<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Theology,  
North-West University,  
Potchefstroom Campus,  
South Africa

**Corresponding author:**  
Raymond Potgieter,  
ray@csmdist.com

**Dates:**  
Received: 13 June 2016  
Accepted: 28 Sept. 2016  
Published: 03 Dec. 2016

**How to cite this article:**  
Potgieter, R.M., 2016,  
'Revisiting C.S. Lewis'  
*Screwtape Letters* of 1941  
and exploring their relation  
to "Screwtape proposes a  
toast", *In die Skriflig* 50(1),  
a2168. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1.2168>

**Copyright:**  
© 2016. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work  
is licensed under the  
Creative Commons  
Attribution License.

**Read online:**



Scan this QR  
code with your  
smart phone or  
mobile device  
to read online.

According to the Bible, human history unfolds with the overarching presence of God and the limited presence of the devil. Though the fall of humankind into sin resulted in lasting consequences the Judeo-Christian tradition has had little trouble in identifying this distinction. But it is when the devil (and his followers) seek to challenge God's dominion that the role of God becomes sullied through the seeming victories of the devil. C.S. Lewis was signally aware of spiritual warfare. He explored this in many of his writings, but it was especially *The Screwtape Letters* that fired the imagination of personal spiritual warfare. These were in story-like fashion from the perspective of demons in conversation with one another in the attempt to corrupt, dominate and destroy particular human subjects. The wider applicatory value of these letters is manifested in Lewis's final letter from Screwtape: it is this letter that addresses the education system and shows how, from the devil's perspective, matters such as the desensitisation of evil, normalising of forms of violence and deceit all bear evidence of the shifting moral adjustments Lewis identified in the education system of his day. The consequence of this has taken on the semblance of normality so that this normalisation constantly adjusts to the on-going progression towards still weirder and deeper forms of evil.

## Is there still place for a or 'the' devil today?

When the devil visited Eve in the Garden of Eden, he came with his own personal history into the unfolding history of humankind. Aquinas (*ST* 1.63.5) explores the devil's history in the fall of the angels suggesting that it was a test<sup>1</sup> for all angels. Good angels were rewarded with beatific vision gaining something (more) of God's essence. Other angels rebelled and lost grace to become bad angels or demons (McCurry 2006). Pascal (2002:148, par. 820) on the other hand is concerned with the strategy of the devil.<sup>2</sup> He says Jesus revealed that the devil cannot favour doctrine that destroys himself (devil) and that Christ is able to destroy the devil's power over the heart.

This is not quite the picture today that seeks to demythologise the devil at best or to relegate him to past historical transcendent abstraction of the imagination – the substance of tall tales. Lewis reminds us that the story of the devil is more complicated than that. One also has to ask what the devil means to a third millennium citizen and the church. The idea of a devil might easily be relegated to an idea, but not from the perspective that ideas have consequences. That is questionable. Rather, ideas are arbitrary evidence if the epistemological reduction<sup>3</sup> of Sir Francis Crick, Nobel Laureate and co-discoverer of the DNA molecule, is to be believed. Crick (1994) claims:

That you, your joys and your sorrows, your memories, your ambitions, your sense of personal identity, your free will, are in fact nothing more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. (p. 3)<sup>4</sup>

Within this clash of theological and material worldviews, the devil does not have any possibility of existence in humankind in which any chance alignment of nerve cells and molecules define personal existence and determine behavioural and cognitive functions and experiences (views propounded by Dennet 1996; cf. Menon 2014:88). The question to be faced at this material<sup>5</sup> level is

1. Aquinas quotes Augustine (Schaff, *City of God* 14.3:378–389), concurring that pride and envy were also reasons for the devil's downfall and desire to be 'like God' (Is 14:13–14; cf. Ezk 28). This passage was strongly disputed by Calvin (2005:442; cf. Youngblood 2000:171) to refer to Satan.

2. It must be borne in mind that empiricism moved away from deductive reasoning emphasising the role of the mind to a new location, viz. that of experience. This opened a new source of knowledge and of interpreting the world and its reality. Pascal actually met with Descartes in 1647, but later criticised him for the abuse of God in his system. Pascal's own encountered experience was in 1654 (Byrne 1996:75–76, 78).

3. See Lennox (2007:54–55, 164ff.) on a discussion on reduction and, for instance, the unresolved matter of the complexity of 'concept of information', which may be explained in terms of present-day physics and chemistry even though its operation in retaining and transferring information, may be understood.

4. This statement is often referred to as 'His astonishing hypothesis' (cf. Crick 1994:87).

5. Lewis tends to refer to various philosophies by lumping them together under the title of 'materialism' or 'naturalism' or similar expressions.

whether these neural pathways of the brain only refer to ethnological, philosophical or psychological fantasies in the animal awareness of the mind (Dennet 1996:170–171).

An essential part of spiritual pedagogy and, in particular, an attempt to negotiate Christian spiritual life, must reflect some concern if there is no interest in the devil and his<sup>6</sup> works. When faced with a modern worldview, which denies a spiritual dimension of reality outside of that which may be explained as part of neurological gymnastics of the brain and its mind, it is a temptation to go with the popular flow. That would be to deny the testimony of the Bible, the church and much of religious history. Philosopher, Anthony Flew – for many years a convinced atheist – argued that the only reasonable and good explanation for life’s origin and nature’s complexity is a super-intelligence (Lennox 2007:10). Lewis said ‘Men became scientific because they expected law in nature, and they expected law in nature because they believed in a lawgiver’ (quoted by Lennox 2007:20).

## The Don and the Devil

By 1942, the date of first publication of *The Screwtape Letters* (Lewis 1946), the devil seemed to be in fashion (O’s 1942:400). Dennis Wheatley had already popularised fiction with the devil featuring in ways that kept readers on the edge of their seats.<sup>7</sup> It must also be remembered that it was during the dark days of the Second World War that the book was published. There was little to commend it as being entertaining or amusing. The book deals with satire written as a series of letters from an older devil, a demon called Screwtape (ST), to a younger demon Wormwood (WW). The purpose of the correspondence from the demonic uncle to his equally demonic nephew is the damning of the soul of a man referred to as ‘the Patient’, quite literally ‘the human target’ marked for a fall as he is steered away from God (‘the Enemy’) (Lewis 1946:11).

The letters were published serially from 9 May 1941 to 28 November 1941 in the Anglican Weekly, the Guardian and subsequently compiled into a book and the first edition, dated 5 July 1941, introduced readers to the demonic dialogue. The original handwritten manuscript is kept in The Berg Collection of English and American Literature in The New York Public Library without a preface. Regarding the preface, Lewis does not wish to tell his readers how the correspondence fell into his hands. A handwritten preface and typed manuscript, dated 5 July 1941 and kept in The Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College, includes a cover letter, dated 20 October 1941 (cf. Dickieson 2013). There are hints from Lewis that it was the hero of the Space trilogy, Dr. Elwin Ransom, who got the script and had it translated. When the book was published in the Time Magazine (1947) it was summarised succinctly in an article headed, ‘Don versus Devil’, featuring Lewis on the front cover.

6. Here it refers to the masculine form – not that the devil is more or less male than female and vice versa, but because the masculine form has been used traditionally and will be suffice for the purposes of this article.

7. I can testify firsthand to the experience when reading Wheatley’s books as a teenager.

Lewis’s work appealed to a wide audience and his own lifelong struggles with matters of faith and personal holiness allowed him to gain uncanny insights into the everyday struggles of Christians-in-the-pews (cf. Lewis 1947). Here is no pulpit orator removed from the person in the pew. As a child he suffered a domineering and distant father, the early demise of his mother, struggled with unanswered prayers and unhappy years of schooling at Wynyard boarding school (the ‘concentration camp’) leading him to eventually reject God at 15 years of age. But it was possibly recognising the almost imperceptible manner in which God (the Enemy in the *The Screwtape Letters*) engineered his return to Christianity, to himself and eventually to his Son.

As a Christian he was intensely involved with theological matters, always claiming his lay-status. From extensive reading of Lewis’s writings I can only come to the personal conclusion that this claim probably was an ingenious ploy (cf. Lewis 1958). It allowed him the freedom to explore the Christian faith without necessarily becoming embroiled in particular and finer doctrinal points.<sup>8</sup> More to the point for this article, this became evident in his popular literature for children, exploring the messianic figure of Aslan, the Ransom trilogy, which investigates planetary time before the fall and demonic forces and influences. Lewis (1970:183) has not, of course, been alone in pursuing such tacks in fiction. ‘My task was ... one of turning Christian doctrine into the vernacular’ as is evident in, for instance, his famous *Mere Christianity* (Lewis 1958). Over time the book was emulated and in particular the 15 Luciferian spiritual war letters of Peter Kreeft (1998) ‘The Snakebite Letters’,<sup>9</sup> Randy Alcorn (2001) ‘Lord Foulgrin’s Letters’<sup>10</sup> and Alcorn, Alcorn and Alcorn (2001) ‘The Ishbane Conspiracy’.<sup>11</sup>

But what particularly concerns this article is *The Screwtape Letters* (Lewis 1946) and its sequel essay ‘Screwtape proposes a toast’ (Lewis 1977). The latter is inevitably seen to be a follow on from the former, suggesting a capitalising on its popular appeal and responding to a number of requests to continue the demonic conversation. While there must be some truth in these assessments<sup>12</sup> my own opinion is that ‘Screwtape proposes a toast’ actually came about in Lewis’s concern for the subtle way in which the education system in Britain was being influenced and steered. For that reason he used the popularity of his former letters to sound a strong warning to the audience already familiar with the former letters. It would be presumptuous to claim that the direction

8. McGrath (2014:165–168) addresses the same matter of Lewis’s lay theological status.

9. Snakebite writes to Braitwister, revealing diabolical strategies for undermining American society through, for instance, sex, abortion, liturgy, theology, religious education, church attendance and more.

10. Lord Foulgrin writes to Squaltaint giving advice on how to steer Jordan Fletcher and his family away from entering heaven. Foulgrin’s failure results in his arrest by demonic police.

11. Now stripped of his title, Foulgrin continues under the tutelage of his former trainer, Ishbane, to torment the Fletcher family.

12. I am well aware of Lewis’s own reflections on writing *The Screwtape Letters* found in ‘Screwtape proposes a toast’ and other pieces (Lewis 1977). The point I am making is to suggest the underlying cause for writing the final Screwtape letter. ‘The idea of something like a lecture or ‘address’ hovered vaguely in my mind, now forgotten, now recalled, never written. Then came an invitation from *The Saturday Evening Post*, and that pressed the trigger’ (Lewis 1977:10, [italics in the original]). My inference is of course that a lecture needs a subject to address.

education was taking, was demonically steered or subject to some dark stratagem.

## The Screwtape Letters briefly analysed

### Something about the letters

Lewis actually wrote two books that shared in the interesting approach of subjecting man: *The Screwtape Letters* (1946), and later on God (1970) to scrutiny from the two different perspectives. In the first book – a series of essays in the form of letters – the devil is judge and man is in the dock, but by the mid 1950's God was in the dock (Lewis 1970). This latter volume is a more scholarly approach comprising a compendium of essays.<sup>13</sup> This is an about-turn as God is generally viewed as Judge, but demonstrates Lewis's individuality in coming to matters of theology.

Lewis's purpose for writing this epistolary novel, was to explore 'the psychology of temptations from the other point of view' and to highlight the 'immortal consequences of seemingly insignificant choices' (Lenten study n.d.) in the form of letters. Not only does this give evidence of his fertile imagination 'We can argue and argue all we like for Christianity, but unless we touch the imagination, we will leave people cold and disinterested' (Casey 2013), but in my opinion there is more. It is also an apologetic defence of the faith by negative inference as it is told from the perspective of demons. The reality of spiritual war is taken seriously (cf. Eph 6:12) '[O]ur struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the ... Spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

A more focused purpose is that the Christian walk-of-faith is told from the perspective of the devil in the process of attempts to damn their subject's soul from the perspective of verisimilitude. Lewis adds an important caveat in his preface that 'not everything that ST says should be assumed to be true'. This becomes evident in, for instance, the Arminian debate<sup>14</sup> on whether one can lose one's salvation once having gained it which is strongly contested by persons who lean to a Calvinistic point of view. There are, however, more: These letters cover a variety of subjects that sensitise Christians either toward God or away from him. Subjects such as sex, love, pride, gluttony, failure to pray, war, falling in love, et cetera, are explored. Lewis, the apologist, gives insight into demonic tactics and he shows with great effectiveness why things actually go wrong for Christians and why things are wrong, not to be confused with what is right.

Lewis (1946) penned 31 imaginative epistles or letters<sup>15</sup> from a senior demon, ST writing to his nephew, WW,

13. With few exceptions all the essays date from the 1940's and 1950's.

14. Arminian claims to scripture are for instance: Matthew 7:21–23; 24:13; Romans 11:20–23; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; 15:2; Galatians 5:4; Hebrew 3:14; 6:4–6; 1 Timothy 4:1; James 2:26, et cetera. Calvinist claims include John 3:6; 3:16–18; Romans 3:24; 4:4, 5, 22–24; 6:23; 9:1, 9, 28–30; 11:6, 29; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30; Philippians 1:6; Colossians 1:13, 14; Hebrew 5:9; 7:25; 12:5–11; Pete 1:5; 1 John 1:6–9; 5:11, 13, 16, et cetera.

15. It may also be termed with some justification as a 'parody' with its underlying comic emphatic making for a satirical impact. See, for instance, Lewis's presentation of Hell and its representatives. It stands in direct contrast to that of Heaven and its representatives and does not follow the traditional 'fire and brimstone' opposition to 'paradisical bliss and angels with harps'.

a demon-in-training. The unreliable ST<sup>16</sup> is upbeat about mentoring his nephew in targeting a person who is a believer in God. The purpose of this mentoring is, of course, to set WW on a course of human destruction. In that respect, it is implied that ST had had some success on this matter and was keen to share his insights with his nephew. It seemed that ST had had success with sex, pride and gluttony. Lewis used this masterfully. All does not go the devil's way. The reader is immediately met with two quotes paging towards the index, which in O's' opinion (1942:400), served 'as his (Lewis) guiding texts'. One is from Luther (quoted in Boynton 2012:138),<sup>17</sup> 'The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.' The other is from Thomas More 'The devill ... the prowde spirite ... cannot endure to be mocked' (Lewis 1946:7).<sup>18</sup> Something else Lewis may have gleaned from the epigraphs of Sir Thomas More (1478–1535) and Martin Luther (1483–1546) was their creative references to the devil. Luther, for instance, calls the devil 'Mr. Stretch-leg' (Luther 1979:54.74), 'strong giant' (p. 90.263); while More (1986:107), in creative but graphic language, refers to his machinations as, for instance, the 'devil's sleights/craft' contrasting between 'God's miracles and the devil's wonders' (p. 111).

When Lewis concluded the 31 letters, he pursued it with a final letter<sup>19</sup> from ST titled 'Screwtape proposes a toast' (Lewis 1977:9–27). It continued the same 'technique of "diabolical ventriloquism"' (Coyle 2010:3). For good measure Lewis (1977:5) reminds his readers that 'Screwtape's whites are our blacks and whatever he welcomes we should dread.' For instance, God is the 'Enemy' and, and 'the patient'<sup>20</sup> is actually the intended victim whose soul is at stake and who is targeted for the vilest corruption. It is not seen from a Christian perspective. In other words a continual exercise of the mind is necessary.

### Structuring the demonic correspondence

*The Screwtape Letters* seem, in my opinion, to group themselves quite logically into ST advising his nephew WW on how to effectively plan and execute the Christian's downfall, and the second group of letters subtly record demonic frustration and failure.<sup>21</sup> For convenience the following headings are used:

- Letters 1–12: According to plan: leading the attack towards a fall.
- Letters: 13– 31: All is not going according to plan: the way back to the Enemy.

16. Reminiscent of Jesus speaking about the devil in John 8:44.

17. O's conveniently ignores Luther's text and only mentions the Roman Catholic, Sir Thomas More.

18. The spelling follows that of Lewis. More's editor Stevens (More 1986:126) translates it into the vernacular as 'the proud spirit cannot endure to be mocked'.

19. Not only was the style of diabolical conversation imitated in new ways as shown above, but a more modern approach to what Lewis would have had to say about times more recent (cf. Bryant 2004).

20. While it is quite legitimate to do a word study of the words that Lewis employs in this epistolary, this article assumes that the reader will be *au fait* with some.

21. There are a number of other possible classifications available which a cursory internet search will reveal. Simply type 'Screwtape letters review' into your search engine of choice. Most popular structured classifications prove to be in the form of study guides developed for congregational or personal use.

While it is possible to deal with the demonic correspondence one letter at a time for the sake of space and brevity, these are lumped together under the various sections as indicated above, and generally, but not exclusively deal with recurring themes. This following example should give an indication of the potential harm which may befall anyone careless enough not to take the devil and sin seriously.

## Letters 1–12: According to plan: Leading the attack towards a fall

### Letters 1–3: Establishing ground rules

ST's nephew, WW is tasked with supervision over a specific patient. To that end, ST takes on the role of a benevolent uncle, counselling his nephew in demonic strategies which he had used to great effect in the past. For that reason he establishes his credentials reminding WW of the hundreds of persons who sojourned in the Enemy's (God) camp and are now safely ensconced in their demonic kingdom:

I have had patients of my own so well in hand that they could be turned at a moment's notice from impassioned prayer for a wife's or a son's soul to beating or insulting the real wife or son without a qualm. (Lewis 1946:22)

Also accompanying these demonic credentials are the insightful comments about the use of the argument to prove the truth of a matter (Lewis 1946:11–12). WW is taught to endeavour to shift the search for truth and embed the prevailing argument in a quagmire of relative comparisons of differing opinions that never come to final conclusions, making belief impossible. Implied in Letter 1 (Lewis 1946:11–14) is the underlying suggestion that this strategy is particularly effective applied to religious persons professing some type of religious faith.

In Letter 2 (Lewis 1946:15) WW expressed a strong degree of displeasure when he fails to prevent the person under consideration from becoming a Christian. The wily older devil now counsels his nephew into a revised attack 'All the *habits* of the patient, both mental and bodily, are still in our favour' (Lewis 1946:15, [*italics in the original*]). WW is inclined to go to extremities so that his charge will succumb to gross sins. ST regards his suggestions as amateurish (Lewis 1946:24). To that end WW is to exploit these habits regarding relationships to the church and its members as well as personal relationships with his mother at home. The effort is to stimulate an over-critical view of the members and of his mother in the process, elevating himself to the rank of not being appreciated, short-changed, a consequence of prayerful self-introspection – all this is the content of Letter 3 (Lewis 1946:20–23).

What comes to the fore is that the status of the person targeted is aptly termed 'the Patient'. Lewis seems to display uncanny insight here, for the term implies need of cure and thus entails the attention of a physician of the soul. Thus far the cure, suggested by Lewis, has been one-sided and demonic.

### Letters 4–9: Spirituality in times of national and personal crises

Lewis (1946:24) now focuses on the spiritual dimension - in particular that of 'the painful subject of prayer'. It must be borne in mind that these letters were written in the context of the Second World War. Lewis had been wounded and did not return to the front during the First World War. It is easy in war-time to question God and to wrestle with the fact that his people are to be found on opposing sides. In this sense the church may serve as an ally of diabolical intent as people learn to deprecate failure and fail to see how God could be in control.

Because the Patient is a newly-converted Christian, ST's advice is to, for instance, exploit the 'parrot-like' (Lewis 1946:24) type of prayer inherited from childhood. Prayer must never be directed at the Enemy, but centre on the person himself or on some confusion or blend of ideas about the incarnation and deity with attempts to appropriate experiential feelings validating the experience of God. Lewis (1946:25) quotes from Coleridge (1772–1834),<sup>22</sup> the son of an Anglican vicar, who supplanted meditation for prayer. 'That is exactly the sort of prayer we want'. This puts paid to bodily position as a sign of humility or reverence. Sokol (2001) interprets this as:

Satan does not appear in our everyday lives through massive displays of pyrotechniques, or on one of the four horses of the apocalypse, or even as the dark, ominous shadow in the corner. That is all Hollywood and quite unreal. Satan knows, as our Lord has taught, that all of life, love, and faith occur in the small and sometimes insignificant (to us for the moment) elements of everyday life. (p. 57)

ST dampens WW's enthusiasm when the European war breaks out on 1 September 1939. It is not about the anticipation of human carnage abetting their demonic task, but the risk that worldliness can become a national cause. In fact the situation of suffering often reveals a faith worth dying for (Lewis 1946:32). On the other hand it does allow for the opportunity to steer the Patient into extreme patriotism or pacifism (Lewis 1946:40). This is a worthwhile avenue for WW to explore, not for the moment alone or to neglect capitalising on fear, but to ensure that it becomes a way of life, a state of mind (Lewis 1946:35) – a state of mind so degenerate that it will not allow for restoration of previous relationships such as this between mother and son. Letter 7 (Lewis 1946:39–43) also attends to the reality of the devil's existence – in this instance WW. But ST is wily and experienced and directs WW to conceal his presence and allow concepts such as 'forces' as possibilities of the existence of unexplained powers. Such beliefs will make the Patient remain a sceptic or materialist.

This line of reasoning led Lewis into the everyday personal experiences of being a Christian. ST educates WW on the law of undulation in Letter 8 (Lewis 1946:44–47). Experiencing the undulation of high and low points in the Christian walk is the historical experience of all who claim to be Christians. Underlying this ambivalence is their makeup: 'Humans are amphibians – half spirit and half animal' (Lewis 1946:44).

<sup>22</sup> See Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1816:61–64) from 'The Pains of Sleep' (1803).

The tension between body and spirit, which ST explores, indicates such troughs and highs that are, however, only for a season. Otherwise they would be regarded as permanent states. Nevertheless, the Enemy uses these to 'gain permanent possession of a soul' (Lewis 1946:45). Before becoming critical of Lewis's theological stance here, it is important to contextualise what he means through ST's explanation. Demons want to devour humans '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' (Lewis 1946:45). Although the language is extreme, it is therefore, in my opinion, suggestive of demonic ownership. Lewis then explores the freedom of man in the process of becoming more and more absorbed into God or into the devil. To the chagrin of ST, the love of the Enemy for the Patient and other Christians seems too effective in spite of the freedom, accorded them, to react diverse to the law of undulation.

Letter 9 (Lewis 1946:48–52) explores the trough. ST advises WW that the trough itself will not give him the Patient's soul. His demonic advice is to twist the feelings and interpretations of the Patient whilst experiencing this low in his spiritual walk. It must come across to the Patient that the initial experiences of the Enemy were false, over-reactions on the Patient's part, simply 'a religious phase' (Lewis 1946:51). To conclude: there is no antithesis – the present is all there is.

#### **Letters 10–12: Progress**

ST is delighted with the progress his nephew is making. The Patient's new acquaintances are just the sort to abet the demons evil intent: a measure of scepticism, of superior attitude towards minions who succumb to simple faith matters. This attitude is also to be encouraged in different manifestations: when fraternising with persons with whom the Patient does not necessarily agree with, but tolerates from a state of self-induced superiority (Lewis 1946:56). Letter 11 explores the continued progress of the Patient due to the successful strategies of ST and WW adding the perversions that may be successfully implemented when laughter, joy, humour, flippancy are subtly perverted at the expense of another and make light of spiritual matters. Here Lewis also shows some insight into understanding the nature of demons. ST cannot adequately explain the cause of true joy – it escapes his twisted reasoning (Lewis 1946:57).

With uncanny insight, ST now warns WW that the consequence of the aforementioned pathway may stir up pangs of conscience within the Patient. The game could be spoilt for WW unless the state the Patient is in becomes permanently embedded. Prayer and reading the Book will become boring. Motions subjected and governed by moods of necessity, need not to bother WW at all. It will be the minor or small sins that add to the spider's web into which the Patient has fallen – not the major spectacular sin that will keep him in the present state. 'Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts' (Lewis 1946:65).

## **Letters: 13–31: All is not going according to plan: the way back to the Enemy**

### **Letters 13–15: Damage control**

Not all is going according to plan. WW let the Patient slip through his fingers (Lewis 1946:66). ST distances himself from his nephew when the Patient experiences the realities of pain and pleasure of spiritual changes associated with a restored relationship with God (Lewis 1946:68). It was the reading of a book and a contemplative walk by himself that stirred the Patient to repentance of his sin. The Patient has matured. But ever the demon, ST says, 'It remains to consider how we can retrieve this disaster' (Lewis 1946:69). First of all ST counsels that the mental and emotional experiences, due to repentance that the Patient had experienced, must not be allowed to translate into action. While the demons are masters at discerning true repentance, ST is wily enough to suggest to WW that he should encourage the Patient in humility but to a degree where it becomes subconscious pride in his own abilities to be humble (Lewis 1946:74).

With the war continuing, people are finding that they are coping by accepting it as a way of life. ST now counsels WW to address the matter of time: to focus the attention away from the present, past and eternity to the uncertainty of the future (Lewis 1946:76–77). The great philosophical theories of humanism, evolution and communism all feature to some extent on the uncertainties of the future. Though the Enemy also deals with the future, it is the anxiety, the deliberate desperation to control the future and so on, that the Patient should be steered into.

### **Letters 16–17: Church and enjoyment of a meal**

Faith begins to evidence in action as the Patient commits to a church. ST, yet again, has a demonic strategy. No church is perfect. So WW is instructed to focus on the church's weaknesses in the parish (Lewis 1946:81–85) and to encourage church-hopping. This will allow the Patient to explore alternative churches in which a range of attitudes to the Christian faith are taken such as generous allowances of latitude in belief, or a church where dogma is a stricture upon faith and more. WW, however, has his own agenda. To ST's chagrin, he focuses on the Patient's eating habits, encouraging gluttony (Lewis 1946:86–90).

### **Letters 19–21: Testing love, sex and contemplation of marriage as true commitment to the Enemy.**

Another thing demons cannot understand, according to Lewis, is love. For ST the confusion of 'falling in love' is easily equated with sexual temptation. With uncanny insight Lewis (1946:92) suggests that demonic logic equates to the self: 'My good is my good and your good is yours. What one gains another loses'. On the other hand the Enemy's maxim equates to 'The good of one self is to be the good of another' (Lewis 1946:92). This translates into a bond between couples when consummated sexually.

ST's letter to WW includes some derogatory comments about the principal, professor Slubgob, head of the demons' college (Lewis 1946:91): who he fears will come back to haunt him. Even worse, his nephew reported him to the Secret Police (Lewis 1946:111) questioning the matter of loyalty among demons. For that reason ST backtracks in Letter 19 (Lewis 1946:96–100) for fear of reprisal. His advice: if the Patient is to fall in love then let him do so with a woman who will prove to be a stumbling block to his faith. This is thwarted by the Enemy when WW tries to get the Patient to compromise his virtue sexually (Lewis 1946:101). But the Patient resists these temptations. It is here that Lewis reveals the cracks that appear in the relentless demonic attack. Immediately ST advises that the attack should shift to a girl of proven shallowness. There is little doubt that such a poor choice of marriage partner would deter and infect his spiritual development.

A logical outflow of exploring relationships is experiencing rejection – a theme ST explores in strategizing with WW about the Patient (Lewis 1946:106–110). A sense of futility in getting nowhere may lead to a feeling of being victimised. When this matures, it turns into fault finding and becoming overly critical.

#### **Letters 22–27: Testing of commitments to church, Christian walk, relationship**

The Enemy intervened in WW's direct assaults upon the Patient's virtue. ST advises that he should rather focus on the shallowness of outward beauty to marry the wrong girl that would be detrimental to his spiritual development. To crown it all, the Patient meets a girl whose virtuous life and character brings out the worst in ST, the kind of girl that used to be thrust into the arenas of old (Lewis 1946:111). He complains to WW that 'Nothing is naturally on our side' (Lewis 1946:113). It is of some significance that Lewis comments on noise: the infernal noise of evil's consequences in attempts to dominate the world and the spiritual realm compared to the music and periods of silence of the Enemy and his followers. In my opinion, this signifies the domination that the devil tries to exert through continual onslaught in his attempts at the occupation of the world. Such is the anxiety of ST that he begins transforming into a different form: a centipede (Lewis 1946:114–115). Letter 22 is completed by Toadpipe, his secretary.

It is the fraternising with other Christians that occupies ST in the next letter. The danger of Christian fellowship is palpable and the only way to undermine that is to pursue one of two options: focus on a likeness of the true Jesus such as the historical Jesus or change the focus to a political agenda that dominates any Christian view and makes it subservient to its own goals (Lewis 1946:116–120). But it is also the girlfriend that now comes into the line of fire. Her personal demon, Slumtrimpet (Lewis 1946:121), reveals her naivety in regard to the differences between Christians and non-Christians. This insight into her weakness makes her vulnerable as ST immediately perceives. He sees an opportunity for corrupting her through encouraging her to become convinced that her Christian community is superior to the other. Associated with

this superiority there is also the new knowledge that comes about with 'Christianity and the Crisis/New Psychology/New Order/Faith Healing/Psychical Research/Vegetarianism/Spelling Reform'<sup>23</sup> (Lewis 1946:126).

WW informs his uncle of the couple's courtship (Lewis 1946:131–135). As usual ST puts his demonic finger on the potential for harm between the two persons in love. In courtship the tendency is to maintain a shallow semblance of unselfishness. To scuttle such an illusion, WW will have to ensure that there is a consciousness of the individual that his or her selfless sacrifice is not appreciated. These perceived offences might easily continue to develop and so potentially disrupt their marriage.

While it seems that WW has had some success in distracting the Patient's mind from the Enemy to centre on his girlfriend, it is not quite having the desired effect. In fact, it has led the Patient to pray for help (Lewis 1946:136). The answer, according to ST, is to promote a false spirituality which may be promoted by the sense that the Patient and others like him often do not appreciate the fact that the Enemy is outside the realm of time. Prayers may be answered or not and many forget that Christian history attests to the efficacy of prayer. This, however, is addressed by the historical criticisms that influence how history is understood (Lewis 1946:139–140).

#### **Letters 28–31: Trusting God in doing your duty**

WW is ecstatic about the human carnage that the war has brought about and, in particular, the fact of bombing raids on the cities. ST, however, keeps his young nephew focused on the task of corrupting the Patient and ultimately destroying him for eternity (Lewis 1946:141–145). It is a long life that is needed, in his opinion, or else they stand a good chance of losing him to the Enemy if he should die. With the imminent bombing of the cities, the demons have the choice of encouraging the Patient to hate the Germans, to promote him to the extent where his courage spills over into pride or alternatively into cowardice. ST advises cowardice as it will lead to trust in self and not the Enemy. WW fails as the Patient performs admirably in spite of feelings of cowardice during an air-raid and does so without gloating (Lewis 1946:151). WW observes that the Patient is fatigued and proposes to exploit that. ST adds that the Patient should contemplate the horror of what he had observed (Lewis 1946:153–155).

WW's failure is total, 'You have let a soul slip through your fingers' (Lewis 1946:156). Actually, as the outline above shows, it was from Letter 16 onwards that the imperceptible hand of the Enemy began to manifest in reorienting the Patient towards himself. That is the sovereign hand of God that Lewis wants the reader to recognise.

The Patient was killed in a bombing raid and in spite of many infernal schemes and emotional assaults 'He got through so easily!' (Lewis 1946:157). WW had been defeated, and

<sup>23</sup>Bear in mind that these were considered by Lewis to be the issues of the day and will find little resonance today. In the 3rd millennium the struggle is with matters such as abortion, digital violence, genetically modified foodstuffs, ecology, and so on.

together with ST, out-manoeuvred. An interesting view of Lewis is the meeting with the Enemy who, living in light that blinds 'is suffocating fire' for every demon, yet is gentle and cool to the Patient. ST wants to avenge himself on WW and cannot wait for the meal that will be (Lewis 1946:160).

## ST proposes a toast: C.S. Lewis's concern

Lewis seems to have decided to capitalise on his success with *The Screwtape Letters* to highlight what he must have regarded as an evil pervading the education system in Britain. ST addresses the graduation ceremony at the Tempters' Training College, praising the idea of equality to the detriment of recognition of excellence and achievement.

ST's address to the demonic assembly emphasises the lack of excitement among demons stultifying their activity. The age of great Christians, and the like of saints and martyrs has been supplanted by that of mediocre sinners. According to Lewis (1977:15), 'great sinners grow fewer'. Individual temptation has been supplanted by a commonly shared lifestyle of sin – nothing dramatic, but ensuring damnation. It is this equally shared experience that creates a mono-culture in which all share the same ideals and no one differs from anyone else – be it in expressions of greed, envy or abuse of democratic liberties. A society in which the prayer of young girl is: 'O God, make me a normal twentieth-century girl', and the great offence would be that 'They might (horror of horrors!) become individuals' (Lewis 1977:20). Lewis expresses his horror at the consequences of such reasoning: the education system following this dictum would ensure that no student is allowed to excel; all will receive relatively good marks, failure will become an anomaly to be avoided. 'In a word, we may reasonably hope for the virtual abolition of education when *I'm as good as you* has fully had its way' (Lewis 1977:23, [*italics in the original*]; cf. Davis 2005).

It is a reasonable question to ask whether his publication, *The Abolition of Man* (Lewis 1944), did not, in his opinion, warrant a revisit, hence the particular style of 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast'. Lewis unashamedly roots for concrete values in education and moral values. He rejects relativism. It is a matter of right and wrong, and not a shifting moralism that he advocates (Meilander 2010:119-131). This is accomplished by stating his argument more in terms of a worldview, applicable to any religion and not only to Christianity. This philosophy of education will naturally spill over into society and religion that will have no deeper value than serving as an end in itself (Lewis 1977:25–26).

## A reasonable conclusion and some lessons learnt

Reasons for advocating that 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast' (Lewis 1977) is not really a sequel to *The Screwtape Letters*:

- *The Screwtape Letters* gives advice on thwarting an individual, the Patient. 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast'

concerns an amorphous demonic assembly made up of prominent individuals with no one being particularly distinctive.

- The letters are exactly that. 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast' is an address or lecture to senior devils.
- Whereas the letters concern damnation of a person(s), the 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast' concerns itself with a particular philosophy that, in Lewis's view, was infecting British education suggesting its wider ramifications for society as a whole.

Implied in both the compendium of letters and the single 'Screwtape Proposes a Toast' script, there is the warning that to limit the activity of the devil to individuals at the expense of society is to risk wilful ignorance. The whole of humankind, made up of individuals, is fallen by nature. This is the arena of demonic activity. While the argument could be made that these letters fall into the category of popular fiction, the fact remains that a Christian worldview and knowledge of the Bible and the catechisms will ensure that this generation will be enriched by these accounts as much as the original readers were. It is also manifestly clear that Lewis implies, be it covertly as often as not, that it is the sovereign God, the enemy of the devil, who is finally in control.

The church in the 3rd millennium needs to take particular note of the normalising of evil. Individuals are becoming desensitised to violence, greed, deceit, the taking of lives and more. But this attention should not be at the expense of the individual suffering for his or her Christian testimony that does not equate with society's view of fitting in. Nor does it exempt society from critical commentary based on Christian principles.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that he have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

## References

- Alcorn, R., 2001, *Lord Foulgrin's letters*, Multnomah Publishers, Colorado Springs.
- Alcorn, R., Alcorn, A. & Alcorn, K., 2001, *The Ishbane conspiracy*, Multnomah Publishers, Colorado Springs.
- Aquinas, T., 1947, (*ST*) *Summa Theologica*, book I, viewed 7 December 2015, from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html>
- Boynton, T.J. 2012, *Defrocking the devil: theology of fear*, Xlibris Corporation, Bloomington.
- Bryant, R., 2004, 'Screwtape redux', *The North American Review* 289(5), 4–7.
- Byrne, J.M., 1996, *Religion and the enlightenment: from Descartes to Kant*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Casey, T., 2013, 'Enlarging the imagination with C.S. Lewis', *The Irish Catholic* 7, viewed 21 November 2013, from <http://www.irishcatholic.ie/article/enlarging-imagination-cs-lewis#sthash.QvwZ2Vgr.dpuf> Coleridge, S.T., 1816, *Christabel & c.*, John Murray, London.
- Coyle, D.J., 2010, 'Diabolical ventriloquism: a case study in the rhetoric of eternity with C.S. Lewis's infamous imp Screwtape', MA thesis submitted in partial fulfillment, Communication Studies, Graduate College, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, viewed 21 September 2016, from <http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations>
- Calvin, J., 2005, *Commentary on the book of the prophet Isaiah*, vol. 1, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, viewed 21 September 2016, from <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom13.i.html>

- Crick, F., 1994, *The astonishing hypothesis: the scientific search for the soul*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.
- Davis, B., 2005, 'Extreme makeover: moral education and the encounter with Aslan', in G. Bassham & J.L. Walls (eds.), *The chronicles of Narnia and philosophy, the lion, the witch and the worldview*, pp. 106–118, Open Court, Chicago.
- Dennet, D.C., 1996, *Kinds of minds: toward an understanding of consciousness*, Basic Books, New York.
- Dickieson, B.D.G., 2013, 'The unpublished preface to C.S. Lewis' *The screwtape letters*', *Notes and Queries* 60(2), 296–298. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjt031>
- Kreeft, P., 1998, *The snakebite letters: devilishly devious secrets for subverting society as taught in tempter's training school*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco.
- Lennox, J.C., 2007, *God's undertaker: has science buried God?*, Lion Book, Oxford.
- Lenten study, n.d. 'Lenten study of CS Lewis' *The screwtape letters* [#3] letter #12 through letter #18', viewed 11 July 2016, from [http://nlp.church/uploads/3/5/1/6/3516038/screwtape\\_letters\\_3\\_lead\\_us\\_not\\_into\\_temptation.pdf](http://nlp.church/uploads/3/5/1/6/3516038/screwtape_letters_3_lead_us_not_into_temptation.pdf)
- Lewis, C.S., 1944, *The abolition of man, or reflections on education with special reference to the teaching of English in the upper forms of schools*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Lewis, C.S., 1946, *The screwtape letters*, Geoffrey Bles: the Centenary Press, London.
- Lewis, C.S., 1947, *The pilgrim's regress, an allegorical apology for Christianity, reason and romanticism*, Geoffrey Bles, London.
- Lewis, C.S., 1958, *Mere Christianity*, Collins/Fontana Books, London.
- Lewis, C.S., 1970, *God in the dock*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
- Lewis, C.S., 1977, *Screwtape proposes a toast and other pieces*, William Collins Sons & Co Ltd., Glasgow.
- Luther, M., 1979, *The table talk of Martin Luther*, ed. T.S. Kepler, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids.
- McCurry, J., 2006, 'Why the Devil Fell: a lesson in spiritual theology from Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*', *New Blackfriars* 87(1010), 380–395, viewed 7 December 2015, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2006.00155.x>
- McGrath, A.E., 2014, *The intellectual world of C.S. Lewis*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.
- Meilander, G.C., 2010, 'On moral knowledge', in R. MacSwain & M. Ward (eds.), *The Cambridge companion to C.S. Lewis*, pp. 119–131, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Menon, S., 2014, *Brain, self and consciousness: explaining the conspiracy of experience, studies in neuroscience, consciousness and spirituality*, Springer, London.
- More, T., 1986, *Dialogue of comfort against tribulation*, Sheed & Ward, London.
- O's, D., 1942, 'The screwtape letters by C.S. Lewis', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 31(123), 400–401.
- Pascal, B., 2002, 'Pensées', viewed 11 July 2016, from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pascal/pensees.html>
- Sokol, D.F., 2001, *The Anglican prayer life, 'ceum na còrach' the true way*, Writers Club Press, San Jose/New York.
- Time Magazine, 1947, 'Religion: Don v. Devil', L/10, viewed 11 July 2016, from [https://www.google.com/search?client=psy-ab&client=firefox-b-ab&q=don+v+s+the+devil+time+magazine&oq=don+vs+the+devil+time+magazine&gs\\_l=serp.12...3603.14327.0.16871.30.30.0.0.0.309.7783.2-27j2.29.0...1c.1.64.psy-ab..1.26.6916...0j0i131k1j0i67k1j0i22i30k1j33i22i29i30k1j0i8i13i30k1j33i160k1j33i21k1.zTHhDfmpo04&pbx=1&bav=on.2.or.&bvm=bv.13338775,d.ZGg&biw=1280&bih=611&ech=1&psi=15HiV8PDOeKEgAbowo2YAQ.1474467176710.3&ei=15HiV8PDOeKEgAbowo2YAQ&emsg=NCSR&noj=1&gfe\\_rd=cr](https://www.google.com/search?client=psy-ab&client=firefox-b-ab&q=don+v+s+the+devil+time+magazine&oq=don+vs+the+devil+time+magazine&gs_l=serp.12...3603.14327.0.16871.30.30.0.0.0.309.7783.2-27j2.29.0...1c.1.64.psy-ab..1.26.6916...0j0i131k1j0i67k1j0i22i30k1j33i22i29i30k1j0i8i13i30k1j33i160k1j33i21k1.zTHhDfmpo04&pbx=1&bav=on.2.or.&bvm=bv.13338775,d.ZGg&biw=1280&bih=611&ech=1&psi=15HiV8PDOeKEgAbowo2YAQ.1474467176710.3&ei=15HiV8PDOeKEgAbowo2YAQ&emsg=NCSR&noj=1&gfe_rd=cr)
- Youngblood, R., 2000, *The fall of Lucifer in The Way of Wisdom: Essays in honour of Bruce K. Waltke*, ed. J.I. Packer & S. Soderlund, Grand Rapids, Zondervan.