

Why Satan Wants Us to Remain Childish

A presentation on C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*
Ralph Wood, Baylor University, Waco, Texas 76798-7040
E-mail: Ralph_Wood@baylor.edu; Website: http://homepages.baylor.edu/ralph_wood

I. The demonic desire for an infantile church and culture

- A. The satanic notion that we are meant to be carried like babies (Letter II), thus doing what St. Paul describes as drinking milk rather than taking solid nourishment (1 Cor 3:1)
 - 1. As it has triumphed in our culture through orgiastic mindlessness
 - 2. But also in our churches through spiritual sentimentality, which is easy and unearned sentiment, and which Flannery O'Connor likened to pornography.
- B. Hence Screwtape's offense at God's making us "his free lovers and servants" (Letter II) and thus his friends whose lives have been transformed as our heads rule the passions through the chest (Letters VI & X),

II. The chief satanic strategies of distraction

- A. From the life of prayer (Letter IV)
- B. From the life of concentrated study (Letter I) (Letter V)
- C. By the denial of death through "contented worldliness (Letters V and XXVIII)
- D. By having us concentrate on the future (Letters VI and XV)
- E. By upon the "trough" periods of our lives (Letter VIII)

III. Thus Lewis's call to adult faith

- A. His classical understanding of education as training in virtue (Aristotle) and of the Christian life as formation of the outward and public life which constitute the Body of Christ.
 - 1. By mortifying the seven deadly sins:
 - a. Pride (*superbia*)—overcome by Humility and Modesty
 - b. Sloth (*acedia*)—overcome by Zeal and Diligence
 - c. Avarice (*avaritia*)—overcome by Charity and Generosity
 - d. Anger (*ira*)—overcome by Patience and Peacefulness
 - e. Envy (*invidia*)—overcome by Kindness and Satisfaction
 - f. Gluttony (*gula*)—overcome by Temperance and Moderation (cf. Letter XVII)
 - g. Lust (*luxuria*)—overcome by Chastity and Self-Control
 - 2. Also by vivifying the four classical virtues as they have been infused by divine grace:
 - a. Prudence (Wisdom)
 - b. Justice (Righteousness)
 - c. Courage or Fortitude (Martyrdom)
 - d. Temperance (Asceticism)
- and by cultivating the three uniquely Christian and theological virtues:
 - a. Faith
 - b. Hope
 - c. Love
- B. Hence the final victory in the life to come but also glimpsed here and now
 - 1. When we become ever more fully ourselves by losing ourselves (Letter XV)
 - 2. When we take true pride in our accomplishments (Letter XV)
 - 3. And when we experience "the final stripping and complete cleansing" (Letter XXXI).