

Dear Friends,

Since Dr. Ralph Wood's lectures at St. George's will focus on two books by C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Four Loves*, I'm posting the study guides he's prepared for his literature classes that read these two books. It will not be necessary to read or reread these books in preparation for his lectures in October, but it will, no doubt, be helpful.

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The *Humanitas* Project

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## Study Questions on C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*

keyed to the HarperCollins edition, 2001 (ISBN 0-06-065293-4)

prepared by Ralph Wood, Baylor University

1. To what *genre* does this book belong? How does Lewis give us a hinted answer by his choice of epigraphs from Martin Luther and Thomas More? Why, in his Preface to the 1961 edition, does Lewis warn against taking the demonic either too seriously or not seriously enough? Which is the greater problem in our time? Why, in this same Preface, does Lewis declare that, strictly speaking, Christians do not "believe in the Devil"? What does he mean in also observing that "No being could attain a 'perfect badness' opposite to the perfect goodness of God; for when you have taken away every kind of good thing (intelligence, will, memory, energy, and existence itself) there would be none of him left"? Why does he also say that "I never wrote with less enjoyment," and why (in his recorded version of the *Letters*) does he adopt a flat, midwestern American accent?
2. Who are "Our Father Below" and "the Enemy," and what is the wicked pun at work in "the Miserific Vision"? What is the *theological* significance of giving all of his demonic characters such ugly names as Slubgob, Glubose, Wormwood? What particular associations should we make with the name the chief devil himself, Screwtape? Why is Screwtape not worried that the young Christian convert is seeing "a good deal of his materialist friend" (1)? Why does it come as a surprise that *argument* serves God rather than Satan (2)? Why is better to subvert Christians by means of newspapers (and television!) than by allowing them to remain "shut up alone with [their] books" (3)?
3. Why are "disappointment and anticlimax" such powerful tools of Satan in undermining the young Christian? What is the all-important transition from "dreaming aspiration to laborious doing" (7)? Why is the devil angry that his Enemy wants to make "all these disgusting little human vermin into what He calls His 'free lovers' and 'servants'"? What theological doctrine is alluded to in the devil's disgust with God's "inveterate love of degrading the whole spiritual world by unnatural liaisons with the two-legged animals"? Above all, why does the God who desires human freedom "refuse to carry" his disciples (as in the sappy poem entitled "Footprints

in the Sand”: see the wicked parody “Buttprints in the Sand” posted on Blackboard!)? What crucial distinction does Screwtape draw between the demonic desire to produce *cattle* and the divine desire to make *servants* and *sons* and *daughters* (38-9)? Why can God not “ravish” but only “woo” (39), insisting that his people stand on their own and do their duties (40)? Why can God not “‘tempt’ to virtue as [the demons] do to vice” (40)?

4. Why, again to our surprise, does the Devil’s minion want to *weaken* the life of the Christian by keeping him “very ‘spiritual’” and thus by having him concentrate on “the inner life” (11-12)? And when he prays at all, wanting him “to aim at something entirely spontaneous, inward, informal, and unregularized” (15)? Why is Satan convinced that “whatever [people] do with their bodies affects their souls” (16). Why, therefore, is Screwtape opposed to an outward and public and *habit-centered* Christianity that cultivates the virtues and overcomes the vices (28)? Be sure that you can list all seven of each! Why is the *fantasy* located on the outer rim of our concentrically circled selves, the *mind* in the middle region between, but the *heart* and the *will* at the very center? Which of the virtues listed on 51 are the hardest to develop?

5. Why does Screwtape declare that “the demons are not to hope too much from a war,” not even from the bloodiest war in human history—World War II (22-23)? What does this claim reveal about Lewis’s own stress (over against Sayers) on personal versus corporate evil? Does God “make prizes” of suicidal terrorists who thought their causes good and were thus “following the best they knew” (23)? Why, in his view, is “a contented worldliness” (24) a better means than war of ruining authentic faith? Why will Screwtape later declare that “Prosperity knits a man to the World” (155)? How does Lewis prophesy the new idolatry of life (and thus the new terror of death) in the sentence at the bottom of 23 and top of 24? What is also prophetic about the triumph of *boredom* as the chief sign of Satanic victory in the modern world, where “cards” (and their contemporary equivalents) are a better means than murder for enticing us down the safe and gradual road to Hell (60-1)? And why also does “the routine of adversity” often wear “out a soul by attrition” (155)?

6. Why is worry over the *future* such fertile territory for Satan (25)? Why does he want us to avoid our present concerns, especially our responsibility for benevolence toward our “immediate neighbors” (28)? Why does Screwtape rejoice that “the Future ... is least *like* eternity”? Why does he claim that “nearly all vices are rooted in the Future” and thus that he wants “a man haggard by the Future” (76-7)? Why are “factions” and “cliques” and “coteries” such useful tools of the Devil? (32) What is deadly about constantly reminding ourselves that “Christians are different than unbelievers” (132)? Why does Lewis regard “extreme patriotism” and “extreme pacifism” as mirror images of the political immoderation that Screwtape wants to encourage (32)? Is it possible to be a radical Christian pacifist while not falling into the demonic snare of making “the World an end, and faith a means” 34)? Yet why is “a moderated religion as good to us [devils] as no religion at all” (46)?

7. What are the *four* sources of laughter, but why are the *two* useful to demons (53-5)? Why are “the positive Pleasures” (64-5) so great a threat to Satan, and why does he accuse God of being a bourgeois “hedonist at heart” (118)? Why have the devils never succeeding in inventing a single true pleasure? Why do they also despise “music and silence” (119), while reveling in Noise (120)? If this is a sign of Hell, can it be located near at hand?!?! How can humility be distorted

into a vice, especially concerning one's own accomplishments (71)? Why does Screwtape not consider obesity (but a certain "delicacy") as the chief sign of gluttony in our time (90)? Why are peevishness and ill-temper and a sense that "my time is my own" (111-12) sure signs of the demonic? How can even unselfishness become a perverse form of sin (141), as demonstrated in this little tombstone ditty by Lewis?

Erected by her sorrowing brothers  
In memory of Martha Clay.  
Here lies one who lived for others.  
Now she has peace. And so have they.

8. Why is Screwtape *right* to ridicule the notion that "the curious, and usually shortlived, experience which [men] call 'being in love' is the only respectable ground for marriage" (93)? How does the modern obsession with romance wreak havoc with the divine notion that marriage enables "The good of one self ... to be the good of another" (94) and thus that its real intention should be "fidelity, fertility and good will" (96)? How did Lewis foresee the triumph of cosmetics and plastic surgery in "the female's chronic horror of growing old," but also the victory of slenderness as the only admirable feminine shape, so that women's "bodies are scarcely distinguishable from those of boys" (107)? Most subtly of all, why does Screwtape relish the modern elevation of "the role of the eye in sexuality" (107)? What other sense organs has it replaced, and why is this replacement demonic? How is this ocular victory related also to our obsessively *fantasizing* (see Question 4)?

9. What is hilariously funny about Screwtape's correspondence taking new form because he has "allowed [himself] to assume the form of a large centipede" (120). Why is this transformation "a glorious manifestation of that Life Force which Our Father [Below] would worship if he worshipped anything but himself" (121)? What are the references to Milton (hint: Note the animal form that Satan assumes in order to whisper temptation into the ear of the sleeping Eve) and Pshaw (hint: The atheist playwright G. B. Shaw was an ardent proponent of spelling reform)? Why does Screwtape yearn to join Wormwood "in an indissoluble embrace" (121), to make him "as dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on"? Why is their only difference that one is stronger than the other (171)? What is the theological importance of these creeping things that devour each other (see Question 3 about cattle vs. servants)?

10. Having failed to tempt young Christian with the World and the Flesh, what final and most deadly "third Power" remains (123)? How is it related to the attempt to reduce Jesus to an historical hero who valued social justice above all else (126-27)? What is equally deadly about our horror of being "*merely* Christian," bored with "the Same Old Thing," and thus fascinated with "Christianity And" (135)? Why do most Christians fail, above all else, in courage, which "is not simply *one* of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point" (161)? Why is Screwtape furious that the dying Christian escaped into Paradise by means of "this final stripping, this complete cleansing" (172)? Why, in his Toast, does Screwtape complain about the perversions of Democracy as producing the paltry quality of the damned souls recently sent to Hell (206-8)?

## Study Questions on C. S. Lewis's *The Four Loves*

Prepared by Ralph Wood

1. How is Lewis's basic distinction between need-love and gift-love tied to his similar distinction between our nearness to God in both likeness and approach? How are these, in turn, related to the Genesis declaration that we are made in God's "image and likeness" (1:26)? Does it help to say that the *imago dei* in us is fixed and unchanging, despite our fallenness, and thus that there is a built in *need* and desire for God that nothing can extinguish? Yet also that our *likeness* to God is terribly distant because of our sin, thus requiring the radical *gift* of God's saving grace to enable our nearness of approach (bottom 4)? If so, then is it fair to say that the scarred *image* of God is restored in our *justification*, while we become more *like* God in our *sanctification* (16)? Why does the former not require our consent, while the latter does indeed involve our wills (6)? Why does Lewis also insist that our increasing likeness to God must be a matter of transforming our naturally given loves, so that they don't "become demons," even "complicated forms of hatred" (8)? Why, therefore, the need for a proper ordering of our loves to the love of God? (For a schematic of these matters, see my Justification and Sanctification outline on Blackboard).

2. Why are the likings and pleasures that we have in sub-human things immensely important, giving us glimmers of unselfishness (7), yet while not properly qualifying as love in the true sense? Notice that there is a hierarchy present here! What is the ascending relation of the Pleasures (understood both a physical delight and appreciative praise)? Then the love of Nature (why can it not teach but only illustrate? (20). And, finally, love of Country (why is it especially dangerous?) (28-30).

3. Why is *storge* (affection) an indispensable kind of love, without which we cannot do (36, 43)? Why do its chief dangers lie in both a desperate need to be *liked* (41) and an equally desperate need to be *needed* (48-9, 52)? Why does mere affection fear, above all else, *change* in the beloved (46)? Though it may be more blessed to give than to receive [Acts 20:35], why is the right kind of *giving* also immensely difficult (49, 51, also bottom 132)?

4. Why did the Greeks regard *philia* (friendship) as the greatest of the loves because it was the least natural (58-9)? Why is it also the least jealous of the loves, so that to exclude others from friendship is to deny its very nature (61)? What is the mysterious basis of friendship (65-70)? Are there other, perhaps even more important, bases for friendship that Lewis ignores? Is Lewis right to deny the possibility of friendships *between* the sexes (72, 75)? Even if he errs, is there some truth in his claim, so that male-male and female-female friendships differ in certain regards? What is the chief danger inherent in friendship so that, like all other loves, it must be transformed and redeemed (86-9)?

5. How does *eros* differ from Venus-love, mere carnal desire (93)? Why does Lewis make the seemingly strange claim that sexual attraction follows from rather than precedes true erotic love (93-4)? Why does Eros "obliterate the distinction between giving and receiving" (96)? Why does Lewis believe that modern culture takes Venus too seriously rather than not seriously enough, by way of a "ludicrous and portentous solemnization of sex" (97)? Why did St. Francis

of Assisi call his body “Brother Ass” (101)? Why are we least ourselves when naked, most ourselves when clothed (103)? Is there any link to the contemporary obsession with the display of body parts? Why is Christian marriage the only true means of redeeming the errors of Eros? In what very particular and revolutionary way is “the husband the head of the wife” [Eph 5:25] (105-6)? How can a true marriage become a “crucifixion” (106-7)? How is Eros able to “unite the most unsuitable yokefellows; [while] many happy, and predictably unhappy, marriages were love-matches” (108)? Yet why must Eros be redeemed, especially when it is unfulfilled (114)?

6. How can the highest of all human loves, *agape* (self-surrendering charity), serve as an odd rival to God—so that even the love of parents and children and friends can become dangerous (119)? Yet why was Augustine wrong to say that we must never let our happiness depend on loves that can be taken away (121)? Why is it better to say that our loves are disordered because of “the smallness of our love for God, not the greatness of our love for [others] (122)? Why does Lewis insist that true love of God “must not begin with mysticism, with the creature’s love for God” (126)? How does the Divine Gift-Love enable us, above all, “to love what is not naturally lovable” (128)? Why is it the ultimate paradox that we can freely give God’s love “back to him” (128)? How can such holy Charity “work in those who know nothing of [the triune God]” (129)?

7. Why are Lewis’s deepest insights to be found on 131 (“The consequences of parting...”) and 136 (“Only those into which Love Himself has entered...”)?

P.S. It should be pointed out that *agapao* is used for the wrong kind of love in Luke 14:43; John 3:19, 12:43; 2 Tim 4:10; 2 Pet 2:15; and 1 John 2:15a; while *phileo* is used for God’s love in John 5:20 and 16:27, as well as Jesus’s love of his disciple in John 20:2.