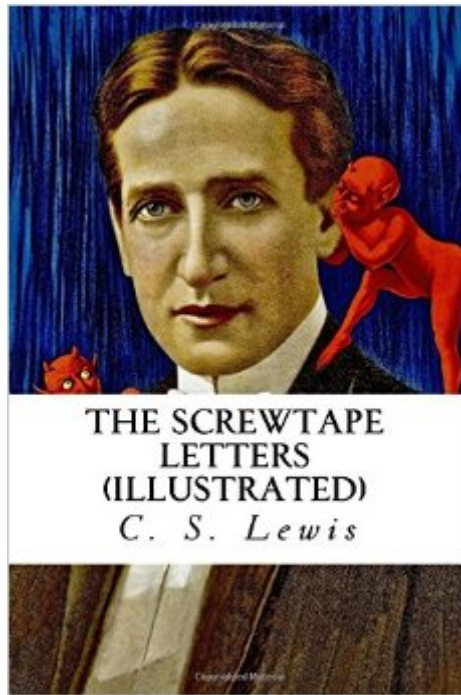


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The Screwtape Letters: Illustrated



Synopsis

I have no intention of explaining how the correspondence which I now offer to the public fell into my hands. There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight. The sort of script which is used in this book can be very easily obtained by anyone who has once learned the knack; but ill-disposed or excitable people who might make a bad use of it shall not learn it from me. Readers are advised to remember that the devil is a liar. Not everything that Screwtape says should be assumed to be true even from his own angle. I have made no attempt to identify any of the human beings mentioned in the letters; but I think it very unlikely that the portraits, say, of Fr. Spike or the patient's mother, are wholly just. There is wishful thinking in Hell as well as on Earth. In conclusion, I ought to add that no effort has been made to clear up the chronology of the letters. Number XVII appears to have been composed before rationing became serious; but in general the diabolical method of dating seems to bear no relation to terrestrial time and I have not attempted to reproduce it. The history of the European War, except in so far as it happens now and then to impinge upon the spiritual condition of one human being, was obviously of no interest to Screwtape.

Book Information

Paperback: 98 pages

Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (September 6, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1537511734

ISBN-13: 978-1537511733

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (1,976 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

I'd recommend this be one of the first books you read as you start your spiritual journey. This is a profound book that will jolt you awake from your apathetic musings and stir you to the depths of your

soul. I was a Christian for 12+ years before I picked up this little volume and it was of inestimable worth for me, but I regretted not having read it much sooner. It's one of those books (like E. L. Prentiss's "Stepping Heavenward") that feels like it was written JUST for you. "Screwtape Letters" has that same feel - that C. S. Lewis crawled into your consciousness and described every mental battle you've ever had - and explains that those subtle arguments which steered you away from spiritual growth, were cleverly disguised devilish whispers. As Lewis points out, the path to hell is a gentle slope. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn how to differentiate between God's thoughts and the lies of evil. "Screwtape Letters" pulls back the curtain and reveals evil's best kept secrets and oh-so subtle tricks.

Today I loaned a copy of "Screwtape" to a young woman - the receptionist where I work -- who just celebrated her 21st birthday. I HOPE she enjoys it, even as I wonder if a fifty year old book could strike a chord with her -- the way it did with me, when I was her age. She seemed eager enough to borrow a copy (I have two) just as soon as I described the book's delightful premise: "Screwtape" I told her, "is letters from a senior devil to a junior devil - and it's the funniest thing C.S. Lewis ever wrote - Have you heard of C.S. Lewis?" I asked. "No? Well he authored 'Narnia.'" (Neither of us has seen the movie yet.) I told her 'Screwtape' is funny because (like all good humor) it seems so TRUE. Or at least you want to BELIEVE it's real, as 'Screwtape' the experienced devil coaches his nephew 'Wormwood' in his first assigned task: to "secure the damnation" of his 'patient' -- a young man who has just become a Christian. As with "Narnia," the story unfolds in wartime (WWII) England. That's a long time ago for someone 21 years old and "I'm really interested" I said "to find out if the 'dialogue' of this book still speaks to someone your age." "Personally, I think it would make good movie" I said. "It has been made into a talking book - read, I think, by John Cleese - the funny guy who starred in the movie 'A Fish Called Wanda' - I read somewhere he's recorded a version of 'Screwtape.'" "----So . . . after loaning that copy of "Screwtape" today, I opened, at random, my OTHER copy -- it fell open to page 24 -- and I re-discovered why I've loved this book so much for so many years. It's the sort of book you can open almost anywhere - years after you first read it -- and find yourself laughing out loud - and falling in love once again, with the written magic of C.S. Lewis at his 'finest hour.' Well here, if you can spare two minutes -- get comfortable and see if this random sampling, from page 24, "Chapter IV" -- 'speaks' to YOU:----"My dear Wormwood, The amateurish suggestions in your latest letter warn me that it is high time for me to write to you fully on the painful subject of prayer . . . "The best thing, where possible, is to keep the 'patient' (the young man who is spiritually up for grabs) from the serious intention of praying. When (someone like him) is an adult,

recently re-converted to the Enemy' (Screwtape's term for Christianity's founder) - such as your man, this is best done by encouraging him to remember - or to THINK he remembers - the parrot-like nature of his prayers in childhood."In reaction against that, he may be persuaded to aim at something entirely spontaneous, inward, informal, and 'un-regularized' And what this will actually mean to a beginner will be an effort to produce in himself a vaguely devotional MOOD . . . in which real concentration of will and intelligence have no part."One of their poets, Coleridge, has recorded that he did not pray 'with moving lips and bended knees' but merely 'composed his spirit to love' and indulged a 'sense of supplication.' That is EXACTLY the sort of prayer we want; and since it bears a superficial resemblance to the prayer of silence, as practiced by those who are far advanced in the Enemy's service, clever and lazy 'patients' can be taken in by it for quite a long time."At the very LEAST, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; for they constantly forget what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls."It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things OUT."If this fails, you MUST fall back on a subtler misdirection of his intention. Whenever they are attending to the Enemy Himself we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him towards themselves."Keep them watching their own minds and trying to produce FEELINGS there, by the action of their own wills. (So that) when they meant to ask Him for Charity, let them instead start trying to manufacture charitable feelings for themselves - and not notice that this is what they are doing."When they are meant to pray for courage, let them really be trying to FEEL brave. When they say they are praying for forgiveness, let them be trying to FEEL forgiven. Teach them to estimate the value of each prayer by their success in producing the desired feelings, and NEVER let them suspect how much success or failure of that kind depends on whether they are well or ill, fresh or tired, at the moment."But of course, the Enemy will not meantime be idle. Whenever there is prayer there is danger of HIS own immediate action. He is cynically indifferent to the dignity of HIS position (and to OURS as pure spirits!) and to human animals on their knees He pours out self-knowledge in quite shameless fashion."But even if He defeats your first attempt at misdirection, we have a subtler weapon . . . "After describing that more subtle 'weapon' in detail, -- and it concerns the true nature of God as opposed to the 'composite images' that can be "derived from pictures of the Enemy as He appeared during (His) Incarnation" (20 centuries earlier) Screwtape advises his green nephew:"Whatever the nature of his composite (picture of the 'Enemy') you must keep your 'patient' praying to IT - to the thing that he has made - be it something in his own head or a crucifix on the wall - and NOT to the Person who has made

him."You may even encourage him to attach great importance to the correction and improvement of his composite object, and to keep it steadily in his imagination during the whole prayer. For if he ever comes to make the distinction, if ever he consciously directs his prayers `Not to what I think thou art, but to what thou knowest thyself to be,' our situation is, for the moment, desperate."The good news, says the `senior devil,' is that, "in avoiding this situation - the real nakedness of the human soul in prayer - you will be helped by the fact that the humans themselves do not desire it as much as they suppose. There's such a thing as getting more than they bargained for!"That "more than they bargained for," Screwtape explains (earlier in this same chapter) is that humans (at least the majority, who are far from saints) - "have never known that ghastly luminosity, that stabbing and searing glare (of true self-knowledge) which makes the background of permanent pain in our own lives (as devils).Your affectionate uncle,Screwtape.-----Late in life C.S. Lewis was asked WHY he never wrote a sequel (apart from a few pages entitled, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast"). The greatest of Christian `apologists' replied in effect, that it "hurt" him too much -- to maintain within himself the necessary state-of-mind where he was thinking purely as a devil -- in order that Screwtape's words could pour from his pen onto paper.Living 'inside' "Screwtape" Lewis experienced an exhausting -- even terrifying -- spiritual/psychological torment that he was NEVER prepared to re-visit. Despite the fact this little book was, until "Narnia," his most enduring source of fame - so much so, it got C.S. Lewis onto the cover of TIME magazine -- fifty years ago -- a red cartoon devil on his shoulder, poised -- it seemed -- to whisper sweet words of prideful praise into Lewis' deaf ear.Mark BlackburnWinnipeg Canada

This is NOT a review of the book itself, otherwise it would be an easy 5-star review. Instead, this is a review of this particular printing with a study guide. I purchased this edition intending to use it for leading a Sunday School class on the subject. However, the study guide is extremely short and not particularly useful for much more than casual review of chapters. It certainly isn't at all worth the much larger price of this older edition in comparison to a cheaper copy of a new printing.

This book was assigned reading when I was in 8th grade at a Catholic school. I remember I had no appreciation for it whatsoever at the time. I couldn't relate to the protagonist or his travails in wartime England. Perhaps one needs a little time in this world to appreciate the delicious simplicity of Lewis' allegory. Having read it recently I was struck by the wisdom, strength and genuine spiritualism this book exudes. One needn't, as commented upon elsewhere, be a believer to appreciate this work. Lewis never tries to foist any doctrinaire agenda upon the reader. Neither is he didactic. All that

comes across (to this reader, at least) is a sense of hard-won wisdom. It offers some hints about how we might find a bit of peace and happiness on this earth if we are willing to think a little less selfishly and are able to set our powerful egos aside for awhile. I wish that those readers who wasted their money on The Celestine Prophecy and thought it provided wonderful spiritual insight would turn their attention Lewis' way. Here is the matter simply stated, without some wayward attempts at new-age jingoism.

The Screwtape Letters is Lewis's classic collection of diabolical correspondence. In it, a senior devil gives continued advice to his protégé on how best to tempt his victim and keep him from salvation. Lewis does not propose any concrete doctrine on devils here, and this is not his point. Rather he focuses on highlighting the ways, both large and small, that Christians are distracted from God. Lewis explores the dangers of not being purposeful toward God and life, as well as what happens to people when they give in to temptation. The book is presented as a collection of letters, all from Screwtape to Wormwood. But Lewis does a good job of making the conversation not feel one-sided, and he does a fantastic job with the devils' personalities. In fact the book is rather deeper than this, as there are two other plots going on. First is the fate of Wormwood's man. Second is the relationship between the devils, and the fate of Wormwood. The Screwtape Letters is deeper than it appears, and is thoroughly thought-provoking. Most every reader will find elements in it to which he or she can relate. Christians of all maturity levels can benefit from this book. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

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