

Screwtape Letters – Temptation

Background on the Screwtape Letters

This is an epistolary novel, written in the form of a series of letters. The letters are from a senior devil named Screwtape to Wormwood, a novice devil assigned for the first time to tempt a human soul. The letters cover in great detail how a human may be guided to forsake virtue and genuine spirituality and take up corruption, vice, and the deadly sins. The narrative follows the young man and the devil through a series of events and situations. The young man becomes a Christian. He takes up with a popular group of trendy intellectuals. He falls in love with a good girl from a true Christian family.

Throughout the storyline, Screwtape spends a great deal of his writing focusing on the nature of human thoughts and feelings and how they can be manipulated by devils. God, called by Screwtape the “Enemy,” encourages free will, love of neighbors, and genuine faith. The devils, on the other hand, promote malice and hatred towards others, pride in one’s self, and distracted, insincere religious observances. A parallel story is the beginning of World War II and the consequences for the young man and all his friends and neighbors in England. Towards the end of the plot the young man has a conversion experience brought on by simple pleasures. Thus, when he is ultimately killed in an air raid his soul goes to Heaven, leaving the devils frustrated and angry that they have lost him.

Themes

1. How does Temptation Work?
2. What are some Temptations?
3. How is Temptation resisted?

Chapter 1

- p.2 distract people from universal issues and fix their attention on the immediate stream of sense material and teach them to call it ‘real life’.
- p.4 “Do remember you are there to befuddle him”

Chapter 2

- p.5 Church as Ally of the devil
- p.6 Make him dwell on imaginary images of Christians rather than on reality
- p.7 Dreaming aspirations rather than laborious doing

Chapter 5 – The War

- p.23 ‘tens of thousands will have their attention diverted from themselves to values and causes which they believe to be higher than the self
- p.24 ‘how disastrous for us is the continual remembrance of death which war enforces. One of our best weapons, contented worldiness is rendered useless.’

Chapter 10

- p.49 very desirable new acquaintances
- p.49 rich, smart, superficially intellectual, and brightly skeptical about everything in the world.
- p.49 Make use of all his social, sexual and intellectual vanity
- p.50 Delay as long as possible the moment he realizes his new pleasures as a temptation.
- p.51 “Puritanism” —the value the devils have given to that word in the last 100 years is a really solid triumph.
- p.51 Encourage him to live two parallel lives.

Chapter 11

- p.53 Jokes and Flippancy vs. real joy and fun
- p.55 Use of ‘sense of humor’ and flippancy to destroy any sense of shame.
- p.56 Flippancy is the best of all

Chapter 12

- p.57 do not awaken him to a sense of his real position...he must be made to imagine that all the choices which have effected this change of course (taking him out of the orbit of the Enemy) are trivial and revocable.
- p.60 It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing.
- p.61 Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts

Chapter 13

- p. 64 Pain and pleasure are the touchstones of reality—genuine pain and pleasure
- p.65 the deepest likings and impulses of any man are the raw material with which the Enemy has furnished him.
- p.66 real pleasure has a sort of innocence and self-forgetfulness about them.
- p.66 The man who truly and disinterestedly enjoys any one thing in the world, for its own sake, and without caring two-pence what other people say about it, is by that very fact fore-armed against some of our subtlest modes of attack.

Chapter 14

- p.69 All virtues are less formidable to us once a man is aware he has them, but this is especially true of humility...pride at his own humility
- p.70 conceal from him that the true end of Humility is self-forgetfulness. Let him not think of it as self-forgetfulness but as a certain kind of opinion (namely, a low opinion) of his own talents and character.
- p.71 The Enemy's long term policy, I fear, is to restore to them a new kind of self-love – a charity and gratitude for all selves, including their own; when they have really learned to love their neighbor as themselves.
- p.72 Real humility is the doctrine that they did not create themselves, that their talents were given to them.'

Chapter 21

- p.111 peevishness.
- p.111 Men are not angered by mere misfortune but by misfortune conceived as injury.
- p.111 Nothing throws him into a passion so easily as to find a tract of time which he reckoned on having at his own disposal unexpectedly taken from him.
- p.112 "My time is my own"
- P.113 It all comes to him as pure gift. The sense of ownership is to be encouraged

Chapter 22

- p.118 The Enemy is a hedonist at heart..... He has filled the world with pleasures..... Everything has to be twisted before it is of any use to us..... Nothing is naturally on our side.
- p.119 The deadly odor...the impenetrable mystery...the presence of disinterested love.
- p.119 Music and Silence—how I detest them both!
- p.120 Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless and virile.

Chapter 24

- p.130 Spiritual Pride, the strongest and most beautiful vice
- p.132 The naïve idea that outsiders who do not share the same beliefs are too stupid and ridiculous
- p.132 Do not let him recognize explicitly his Christian Pride.
- p.133 Make Christianity a mystery religion in which he feels himself to be one of the initiates.

Chapter 29

- p.159 The war encourages hatred.
- p.160 The best is hatred and fear.
- p.160 Hatred is a great anodyne for shame
- p.161 Cowardice is a problem because it can result in shame and moral awakening
- p.161 A dangerous world can bring moral awakening
- p.161 Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but is the testing point of every one