

The Screwtape Letters. Lesson 4.

Letter 7: On Getting People to Believe in “Forces” and “Causes”

In this letter, Screwtape advises Wormwood on the question of whether to keep the patient in ignorance of his existence.

Read the marked portions of the first paragraph.

What generated magicians in the past? What generates materialists now? Which one of these is right? What does Screwtape fold forth and hope for as “our perfect work”? How might the devil make use of a worldview that, while not believing in “devils,” believes insistently in “Forces”? How is Wormwood to keep the patient disbelieving in his existence?

Read the second paragraph.

How does extremism work against the interests of the Church? Is there any extremism that is to be desired, from a Christian point of view?

Read the final paragraph.

Here, Screwtape shows how Wormwood can take the patient’s passions (“the Cause,” whatever that may be) and uses it against his own long-term interests, so that in the end, he is lost even as he passionately struggled – and perhaps even sacrificed – for his perceived good Cause. How can this happen? What do we learn from this section?

Letter 8: On the “Law of Undulation”

In this letter, Screwtape reprimands Wormwood for his naïve enthusiasm that “the patient’s religious phase is dying away,” and instructs him on the “law of undulation.”

Read the first and second paragraphs.

In what way are humans “amphibians”? What does Screwtape mean when he writes that humans’ “nearest approach to constancy, therefore, is undulation.” Do you think this is true concerning the nature of our life on earth?

Read the marked portion of the third paragraph.

In this beautiful paragraph, Screwtape highlights a number of critical differences between God and the devil in his goals with and for us. Discuss these.

Read the marked portions of the third paragraph.

“And that’s where the troughs come in.” Where? What is God’s strategy with humans? When is the devil’s cause “never more in danger”? Is this true?