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C. S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters: First Ever Full-cast Dramatization of the Diabolical Classic*. Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Radio Theatre, 2009. 4 CDs and 1 DVD. \$39.99. [www.screwtape.com](http://www.screwtape.com)

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Focus on the Family Radio Theatre has produced another first-class dramatization of a classic book. Its most recent production creatively and engagingly enhances C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. It is hosted by C. S. Lewis's stepson Douglas Gresham, and it stars Andy Serkis, who plays Gollum in Peter Jackson's blockbuster trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, as the voice of Screwtape.

The dramatic reading of *The Screwtape Letters* is 4.5 hours long (including Lewis's preface and Gresham's background commentary). It also includes about thirty minutes of ten original songs and forty minutes of documentaries on a DVD.

I listened to the drama twice, first only listening to the audio and second listening while reading Lewis's original text. The audio does not abridge the text, but it embellishes it—otherwise it would be a monologue since Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* consist of thirty-one letters from the senior demon Screwtape to his nephew and apprentice Wormwood. The embellishments include dialogue between Screwtape and his nephew Wormwood, between Screwtape and his servant Toadpipe, and between some of the demons' human "patients." Most of the letters end or begin with fabricated scenes set in either hell or London during World War II, and some occasionally skip, rephrase, or otherwise alter small portions. For example, the last paragraph of letter 19 in Lewis's



original is moved to the end of letter 18 in the dramatization. And letter 16 ends like this in the dramatization:

The real fun is working up hatred over styles and approaches to worship: stand or sit or kneel; lower the head, raise one's arms; traditional or modern music. These issues are an admirable ground for our activities. Without them the church might become a positive hotbed of charity and humility.

That may sound prophetic, but it is somewhat anachronistic. Lewis did not write that, though I suppose it communicates his general spirit.

Lewis masterfully “teaches in reverse” by wryly using demonic points of view to enforce a biblical one. He calls it “diabolical ventriloquism.” Here is a summary of each of Screwtape’s letters that advise Wormwood how to tempt his “patient” (who becomes a Christian between letters one and two):

1. Make him preoccupied with ordinary, “real” life—not arguments or science.
2. Make him disillusioned with the church by highlighting people he self-righteously thinks are strange or hypocritical.
3. Annoy him with “daily pinpricks” from his mother.
4. Keep him from seriously intending to pray at all, and if that fails, subtly misdirect his focus to himself or an object rather than a Person.
5. Don’t hope for too much from a war [in this case, World War II] because the Enemy often lets our patients suffer to fortify them and tantalize us.
6. Capitalize on his uncertainty, divert his attention from the Enemy to himself, and redirect his malice to his everyday neighbors and his benevolence to people he does not know.
7. Keep him ignorant of your existence, and make him either an extreme patriot or an extreme pacifist who regards his cause as the most important part of Christianity.
8. Make good use of your patient’s series of troughs and peaks (i.e., “the law of undulation”), and beware that the Enemy relies on the troughs more than the peaks.
9. Capitalize on trough periods by tempting him with sensual pleasures (especially sex), making him content with his moderated religion, and directly attacking his faith as merely a “phase.”
10. Convince him to blend in with his new worldly acquaintances.
11. Understand the four causes of laughter (joy, fun, the joke proper, and flippancy), and shrewdly use jokes and flippancy.
12. Don’t underestimate the power of “very small sins” because “the safest road to Hell is the gradual one.”
13. Don’t allow him to experience real pleasures because they are a touchstone of reality.
14. Make him proud of his humility. Use both vainglory and false modesty to keep him from humility’s true end.
15. Make him live in the future rather than the present.
16. Encourage church-hopping.
17. Encourage gluttony through delicacy rather than excess.
18. Convince him that the only respectable ground for marriage is “being in love.”
19. Understand that the Enemy does not genuinely love humans. (But we don’t know what his real motive is.)
20. Don’t give up if your direct attacks on his chastity fail. Try to arrange a desirable marriage.

21. Convince him to use the pronoun “my” in the fully possessive sense of ownership (e.g., “my time,” “my boots,” “my wife,” and “my God”).
22. Understand that the Enemy has filled His world full of pleasures and that you must *twist* them before you can use them.
23. Encourage him to embrace a “historical Jesus” and to treat Christianity as merely a means to a political end such as social justice.
24. Confuse him with spiritual pride for being part of an elite set.
25. Replace “mere Christianity” with “Christianity And” by increasing his horror of “the same old thing” and thus increasing his desire for novelty.
26. Sow seeds of “unselfishness” during his courtship.
27. Twist his prayers.
28. Guard his life so that he grows old because real worldliness takes time.
29. Defeat his courage, and make him a coward.
30. Capitalize on his fatigue, and manipulate his emotions with the word “real.”
31. His end is inexplicable, but we *must* win in the end.

Kudos to Focus on the Family Radio Theatre for imaginatively dramatizing Lewis’s brilliant, diabolical classic.

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