

## **Which Book Did C.S. Lewis Least Enjoy Writing**

Near the end of his life, C. S. Lewis revealed that the book he least enjoyed writing was *The Screwtape Letters*.

For many of us readers, that is a staggering thought. How could Lewis fail to enjoy writing a work of fiction that was an almost instant entry into the Western Canon? For those unfamiliar with *The Screwtape Letters*, it constitutes a sort of field manual on the tempting of humans told from the perspective of a devil. Although the devils in the story understand many truths in profound ways, their view of everything is inverted: to them, good is bad and bad is good; God is the enemy and the devil is the good guy. By writing from that perspective, C. S. Lewis provides the reader with an explanation and an insight into the psychology of temptation. There is a spiritual value in illustrating how temptation works, and C. S. Lewis clearly recognized that value. So why didn't Lewis enjoy writing it?

Years after the original book was published, Lewis reminisced in his prelude to *Screwtape Proposes A Toast*, "...though it was easy to twist one's mind into the diabolical attitude, it was not fun, or not for long. The strain produced a sort of spiritual cramp. The world into which I had to project myself while I spoke through *Screwtape* was all dust, grit, thirst and itch. Every trace of beauty, freshness and geniality had to be excluded."

In an interview around the same time, Lewis explained further that "making goods 'bad' and bads 'good' gets to be fatiguing." Lewis makes a fascinating point, and it makes you wonder: if "making goods bad and bads good" is tiring even as a mere literary exercise, consider how spiritually wearisome it must be in real life. Yet, there are those who live in this moral inversion every day.

In much of modern culture - one in which virtues such as material detachment, monogamy, and faith are lampooned while a smorgasbord of sins are publicly celebrated - is there any better explanation for what is going on today than "making goods bad and bads good"? While Lewis found this viewpoint exhausting, there are those who seem invigorated by the process. Yet, while they might be invigorated, those who invert traditional moral equations seem anything but happy and fulfilled. In the place of happiness is a palpable restlessness.

Why restless? Because when one insists on making goods bad, he must do as *Screwtape* did: he must also make God to be the enemy, or make Him seem to disappear. With the rise of atheism and agnosticism, there is an insistence that

God is not only unnecessary for things like peace and fulfillment and happiness, but that He is actually an obstacle to these things. Thus, the mere mention of God garners an objection. As Lewis' Screwtape observed: "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." But man cannot achieve rest by running from His Creator. As Saint Augustine observed: "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."

For those who enjoy Lewis' writing and have therefore developed an affection for the author himself, we can have sympathy for what Lewis endured in writing Screwtape. But the tragedy is not that Lewis inverted his moral perspective for a few months as he wrote; the real tragedy is that so many of us live in a sort of permanent moral inversion. Catholics need to pray for those who, perhaps through no fault of their own, view the world as a drab and dismal place. We need to communicate to them that virtue is exciting, that fulfillment comes not from calling bad "good," but from accepting good as good, and ultimately, that our hearts can find peace, happiness, and fulfillment in God. And only in Him.