

In some of my analysis¹, I have highlighted the dangers of Ian Brown's garbled brand of Christianity. While reading C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*, I found that much of Ian's rhetoric on Christianity could easily be placed within the pages of Letter Twenty-Three of this book.

The Screwtape Letters is a satirical Christian apologetic novel written in epistolary style by C. S. Lewis, first published in book form in February 1942. The story takes the form of a series of letters from a senior demon, Screwtape, to his nephew, a junior "tempter" named Wormwood. The uncle's mentorship pertains to the nephew's responsibility for securing the damnation of a British man known only as "the Patient".

Using footnotes of quotes, and direct links to pages on my website, this essay will attempt to show the ease with which Ian's manipulative presentation of Christianity falls within the domain of this book.

Letter Twenty-Three

MY DEAR WORMWOOD,

Through this girl and her disgusting family the patient is now getting to know more Christians every day, and very intelligent Christians too. For a long time it will be quite impossible to remove spirituality from his life. Very well then; we must corrupt it.

No doubt you have often practised transforming yourself into an angel of light as a parade-ground exercise. Now is the time to do it in the face of the Enemy. The World and the Flesh have failed us; a third Power remains. And success of this third kind is the most glorious of all. A spoiled saint, a Pharisee, an inquisitor, or a magician, makes better sport in Hell than a mere common tyrant or debauchee.

Looking round your patient's new friends I find that the best point of attack would be the border-line between theology and politics. Several of his new friends are very much alive to the social implications of their religion. That, in itself, is a bad thing; but good can be made out of it.

You will find that a good many Christian-political writers think that Christianity began going wrong, and departing from the doctrine of its Founder, at a very early stage. Now this idea must be used by us to encourage once again the conception of a "historical Jesus"² to be found by clearing away later "accretions and perversions"³ and then to be contrasted with the whole Christian tradition.⁴ In the last generation we promoted the construction of such a "historical Jesus" on liberal and [humanitarian](#) lines; we are now putting forward a new "historical Jesus" on [Marxian](#), catastrophic, and revolutionary lines.

¹ <http://www.pdmcauley.co.uk/Analysis/BibleandGnosticism.htm>

² "All the great people have worshipped one god - Aborigines, American Indians, Muhammad Ali, Bob Marley, Jesus." (Ian Brown speaking to The Guardian, 2nd February 2002)

³ "[The Bible] has been tampered with..." (Ian Brown speaking to TOTP, 2005)

⁴ "...the organised churches have hijacked religion off all of us, they've stolen God from us, they've put the priest next to God." (Ian Brown speaking to The Independent, Saturday 22nd October 2011)

The advantages of these constructions, which we intend to change every thirty years or so, are manifold. In the first place they all tend to direct men's devotion to something which does not exist, for each "historical Jesus" is unhistorical. The documents say what they say and cannot be added to; each new "historical Jesus" therefore has to be got out of them by suppression at one point⁵ and exaggeration at another⁶, and by that sort of guessing (brilliant is the adjective we teach humans to apply to it) on which no one would risk ten shillings in ordinary life, but which is enough to produce a crop of new Napoleons, new Shakespeares, and new Swifts, in every publisher's autumn list.

In the second place, all such constructions place the importance of their Historical Jesus in some peculiar theory He is supposed to have promulgated. He has to be a "great man"⁷ in the modern sense of the word—one standing at the terminus of some centrifugal and unbalanced line of thought—[a crank vending a panacea](#).⁸ We thus distract men's minds from Who He is, and what He did. We first make Him solely a teacher, and then conceal the very substantial agreement between His teachings and those of all other great moral teachers. For humans must not be allowed to notice that all great moralists are sent by the Enemy not to inform men but to remind them, to restate the primeval moral platitudes against our continual concealment of them. We make the Sophists: He raises up a Socrates to answer them.

Our third aim is, by these constructions, to destroy the devotional life. For the real presence of the Enemy, otherwise experienced by men in prayer and sacrament, we substitute a merely probable, remote, shadowy, and uncouth figure, one who spoke a strange language and died a long time ago. Such an object cannot in fact be worshipped. Instead of the Creator adored by its creature, you soon have merely a leader acclaimed by a partisan, and finally a distinguished character approved by a judicious historian.

And fourthly, besides being unhistorical in the Jesus it depicts, religion of this kind is false to history in another sense. No nation, and few individuals, are really brought into the Enemy's camp by the historical study of the biography of Jesus, simply as biography. Indeed materials for a full biography have been withheld from men.

The earliest converts were converted by a single historical fact (the Resurrection) and a single theological doctrine (the Redemption) operating on a sense of sin which they already had—and sin, not against some new fancy-dress law produced as a novelty by a "great man", but against the old, platitudinous, universal moral law which they had been taught by their nurses and mothers. The "Gospels" come later and were written not to make Christians but to edify Christians already made.

The "Historical Jesus" then, however dangerous he may seem to be to us at some particular point, is always to be encouraged. About the general connection between Christianity and politics, our position is more delicate. Certainly we do not want men to allow their Christianity to flow over into their political life, for the establishment of anything like a really just society would be a major disaster. On the other hand we do want, and want very much, to make men treat Christianity as a

⁵ "Jesus was basically just an angry guy..." (Ian Brown speaking to Channel 4 in 2005)

⁶ "So I told them that Jesus was the world's first communist." (Ian Brown speaking to Melody Maker, 3rd June 1989)

⁷ See the previous Guardian extract from February 2002.

⁸ "The feeding of the 5000 isn't meant to be taken literally. Jesus spoke to the people and that fed their spirit..." (Ian Brown speaking to The Guardian, Saturday 15th September 2007)

means; preferably, of course, as a means to their own advancement⁹, but, failing that, as a means to anything—even to [social justice](#).

The thing to do is to get a man at first to value social justice as a thing which the Enemy demands, and then work him on to the stage at which he values Christianity because it may produce social justice. For the Enemy will not be used as a convenience. Men or nations who think they can revive the Faith in order to make a good society might just as well think they can use the stairs of Heaven as a short cut to the nearest chemist's shop. Fortunately it is quite easy to coax humans round this little corner.

Only today I have found a passage in a Christian writer where he recommends his own version of Christianity on the ground that "only such a faith can outlast the death of old cultures and the birth of new civilisations".¹⁰ You see the little rift? "Believe this, not because it is true, but for some other reason." That's the game.

Your affectionate uncle,

SCREWTAPE

⁹ "I think music is the nearest thing to achieving Christian ends. It unifies people and sustains them. It uplifts them and makes them closer to love." (Ian Brown speaking to The Guardian, Saturday 15th September 2007)

¹⁰ "You get a great gig at Wembley or somewhere and that is modern Christianity in action." (Ian Brown speaking to The Guardian, Saturday 15th September 2007)