



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

Reflections

February 2017 – *MY TIME? MY BODY? MY SOUL?*

One of the subjects C.S. Lewis addressed in *The Screwtape Letters* was the sense of ownership. In this book, Lewis is writing from the devil's perspective — showing us his temptation playbook. In one letter, senior devil Screwtape writes to his nephew Wormwood:

The more claims on life... that your patient can be induced to make, the more often he will feel injured and, as a result, ill-tempered. Now you will have noticed that 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...

You must... zealously guard in his mind the curious assumption "My time is my own"... You have here a delicate task. The assumption which you want him to go on making is so absurd that, if once it is questioned, even we cannot find a shred of argument in its defence. The man can neither make, nor retain, one moment of time; it all comes to him by pure gift; he might as well regard the sun and moon his chattels. He is also, in theory, committed to a total service of the Enemy...

The sense of ownership in general is always to be encouraged. The humans are always putting up claims to ownership which sound equally funny in Heaven and in Hell and we must keep them doing so. Much of the modern resistance to chastity comes from men's belief that they "own" their bodies — those vast and perilous estates, pulsating with the energy that made the worlds, in which they find themselves without their consent and from which they are ejected at the pleasure of Another!...

We produce this sense of ownership not only by pride but by confusion. We teach them not to notice the different senses of the possessive pronoun — the finely graded differences that run from "my boots" through "my dog", "my servant", "my wife", "my father", "my master" and "my country", to "my God". They can be taught to reduce all these senses to that of "my boots", the "my" of ownership... we have taught men to say "my God" in a sense not really very different from "my boots", meaning "the God on whom I have a claim for my distinguished services..."

And all the time the joke is that the word "Mine" in its fully possessive sense cannot be uttered by a human being about anything. In the long run either Our Father or the Enemy will say "Mine" of each thing that exists, and specially of each man. They will find out in the end, never fear, to whom their time, their souls, and their bodies really belong — certainly not to them, whatever happens. At present the Enemy says "Mine" of everything on the pedantic, legalistic ground that He made it: Our Father hopes in the end to say "Mine" of all things on the more realistic and dynamic ground of conquest...¹

We know from the Psalms that "(t)he earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it..."² But even more, as Christians we belong to God because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Let us remember that we are stewards rather than owners of what God has given us, and glorify Him through our time, souls, and bodies.

"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19b-20 (ESV)



¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, HarperSanFrancisco, 2001, pp. 111-115.

² Psalm 24:1 (NIV).