



Reflections

October 2017 – *WHEN FAITH BECOMES A MEANS*

C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* was first published in 1942, during the Second World War. One of the subjects Lewis addresses in the book is the danger of using Christianity to support a "cause". 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:

I had not forgotten my promise to consider whether we should make the patient an extreme patriot or an extreme pacifist. All extremes, except extreme devotion to the Enemy, are to be encouraged. Not always, of course, but at this period. Some ages are lukewarm and complacent, and then it is our business to soothe them yet faster asleep. Other ages, of which the present is one, are unbalanced and prone to faction, and it is our business to inflame them...

If your patient can be induced to become a conscientious objector he will automatically find himself one of a small, vocal, organised, unpopular society, and the effects of this, on one so new to Christianity, will *almost* certainly be good. But only almost certainly. Has he had serious doubts about the lawfulness of serving in a just war before this present war began? Is he a man of great physical courage – so great that he will have no half-conscious misgivings about the real motives of his pacifism? Can he, when nearest to honesty (no human is ever *very* near), feel fully convinced that he is actuated wholly by the desire to obey the Enemy? If he is that sort of man, his pacifism will probably not do us much good, and the Enemy will probably protect him from the usual consequences of belonging to a sect. Your best plan, in that case, would be to attempt a sudden, confused, emotional crisis from which he might emerge as an uneasy convert to patriotism. Such things can often be managed. But if he is the man I take him to be, try Pacifism.

Whichever he adopts, your main task will be the same. Let him begin by treating the Patriotism or the Pacifism as a part of his religion. Then let him, under the influence of partisan spirit, come to regard it as the most important part. Then quietly and gradually nurse him on to the stage at which the religion becomes merely part of the 'cause', in which Christianity is valued chiefly because of the excellent arguments it can produce in favour of the British war-effort or of Pacifism. The attitude which you want to guard against is that in which temporal affairs are treated primarily as material for obedience. Once you have made the World an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing. Provided that meetings, pamphlets, policies, movements, causes, and crusades, matter more to him than prayers and sacraments and charity, he is ours – and the more 'religious' (on those terms) the more securely ours. I could show you a pretty cageful down here.²



As we go through life, nearly all of us are involved in supporting a variety of "good causes", including ones that may be charitable, political or religious. While this can often be commendable, a good cause can be a source of idolatry if it distracts us from following Christ, i.e., from loving God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. Are you involved with any "good causes" that are distracting you from following Christ?

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.
This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

MATTHEW 22:37b-40 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, HarperSanFrancisco, 2001, pp. 32-35.