**The Screwtape Letters**

**Week Four: The Rational Animal (Sex and the Human Creature)**

Letter XIX, “In the meantime, get it quite clear in your own mind that this state of *falling in love* is not, in itself, necessarily favourable either to us or to the other side. It is simply an occasion which we and the Enemy are both trying to exploit. Like most of the other things which humans are excited about, such as health and sickness, age and youth, or war and peace, it is, from the point of the view of the spiritual life, **mainly raw material**.” (75)

**Theological Anthropology**

Genesis 2:7, “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Screwtape VII (40), “Humans are amphibians—half spirit and half animal. (The Enemy’s determination to produce such a revolting hybrid was one of the things that determined Our Father’s withdraw of his support from Him.) As spirits they belong to the eternal world, but as animals they inhabit time. This means that while their spirit can be directed to an eternal object, their bodies, passions, and imaginations are in continual change, for to be in time means to change.”

2:21-25, *“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*

*“Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”*

cf. Screwtape XV (62-63) – eternity and time

cf. Screwtape II (22) early in the temptation, “All the *habits* of the patient, both mental and bodily, are still in our favour.” (we can leverage the material)

cf. Screwtape IV (29) – “At the very least, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; for they constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls. It is funny how mortals always picture us putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.”

**Understanding Sin**

Thesis 1: Sin separates us from God and causes our spiritual death.

Thesis 2: All sin is equal in its power to separate us from God.

Thesis 3: Not all sin is equal in its harms to ourselves and others

**C.S. Lewis on Sex**

**1. Romantic Theology**

Cf. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

And this brings me to the other sense of glory—glory as brightness, splendour, luminosity. We are to shine as the sun, we are to be given the Morning Star. I think I begin to see what it means. In one way, of course, God has given us the Morning Star already: you can go and enjoy the gift on many fine mornings if you get up early enough. What more, you may ask, do we want? Ah, but we want so much more—something the books on aesthetics take little notice of. But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to *see* beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is what we have people air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves—that, though we cannot, yet these projections can enjoy in themselves that beauty, grace, and power of which Nature is the image... For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day *give* us the Morning star and cause us to *put on* the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of the morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get *in*. **When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory,** or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch... (*The Weight of Glory,* 43-44)

Venus Infernal – eros run amok

“For natural loves that are allowed to become gods do not remain loves. They are still called so, but can become in fact complicated forms of hatred” (*TFL*, 8).

“Eros by his nature invites it. Of all loves he is, at his height, most god-like; therefore most prone to demand our worship. Of himself he always tends to turn ‘being in love’ into a sort of religion” (*TFL*, 110-111).

Screwtape XX, “You will find, if you look carefully into any human’s heart, that he is haunted by at least two imaginary women—a terrestrial and an infernal Venus, and that his desire differs qualitatively according to its object. There is one type for which his desire is such as to be naturally amenable to the Enemy—readily mixed with charity, readily obedient to marriage, coloured all through with that golden light of reverence and naturalness which we detest; there is another type which he desires brutally, and desires to desire brutally, a type best used to draw him away from marriage altogether but which, even within marriage, he would tend to treat as a slave, an idol, or an accomplice. His love for the first might involve what the Enemy calls evil, but only accidentally; the man would wish that she was not someone else’s wife and be sorry that he could not love her lawfully. But in the second type, the felt evil is what he wants; it is that “tang” in the flavour which he is after. In the face, it is the visible animality, or sulkiness or craft or cruelty, which he likes, and in the body, something quite different from what he ordinarily calls Beauty, something he may even, in a sane hour, describe as ugliness, but which, by our art, can be made to play on the raw nerve of his private obsession.” (*The Screwtape Letters*, XX, 77-78)

**2. Our Culture and Sex**

“They tell you sex has become a mess because it was hushed up. But for the last twenty years it has not been hushed up. It has been chattered about all day long. Yet it is still in a mess. If hushing up had been the cause of the trouble, ventilation would have set it right. But it has not. I think it is the other way round. I think the human race originally hushed it up because it had become such a mess. Modern people are always saying, ‘Sex is nothing to be ashamed of.’ They may mean two things. They may mean, ‘There is nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that the human race reproduces itself in a certain way, nor in the fact that it gives pleasure.’ If they mean that, they are right. Christianity says the same. It is not the thing, nor the pleasure, that is the trouble. The old Christian teachers said that if man had never fallen, sexual pleasure, instead of being less than it is now, would actually have been greater. I know some muddle-headed Christians have talked as if Christianity thought that sex, or the body, or pleasure, were bad in themselves. But they were wrong. Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body—which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body, that some kind of body is going to be given to us even in Heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy. Christianity has glorified marriage more than any other religion: and nearly all the greatest love poetry in the world has been produced by Christians. If anyone says that sex, in itself, is bad, Christianity contradicts him at once. But, of course, when people say, ‘Sex is nothing to be ashamed of,’ they may mean ‘the state into which the sexual instinct has now got is nothing to be ashamed of.’

“If they mean that, I think they are wrong.” (Mere Christianity, “Sexual Morality,” Book III.5)

**3. Two Defences against sexual temptation:**

1. Honor the nature of the garden.

It is no disparagement to a garden to say that it will not fence and weed itself, nor prune its own fruit trees, nor roll and cut its own lawns. A garden is a good thing but that is not the sort of goodness that it has. It will remain a garden, as distinct from a wilderness, only if someone does all these things to it. Its real glory is of quite a different kind. The very fact that it needs constant weeding and pruning bears witness to that glory. It teems with life. It glows with colour and smells like heaven and puts forward ant every hour of a summer day beauties which man could never have created and could not even, on his own resources, have imagined. If you want to see the difference between its contribution and the gardener’s, put the commonest weed it grows side by side with his hoes, rakes, shears, and packet of weed killer; you have put beauty, energy and fecundity beside dead, sterile things. Just so, our “decency and common sense” show grey and deathlike beside the geniality of love. And when the garden is in its full glory the gardener’s contributions to that glory will still have been in a sense paltry compared with those of nature. (*The Four Loves*, 117)

2. Humour

“I believe that we are all being encouraged to take Venus too seriously; at any rate, with a wrong kind of seriousness. All my life a ludicrous and portentous solemnization of sex has been going on” (*TFL*, 97).

We must not be totally serious about Venus. Indeed we can’t be totally serious without doing violence to our humanity. It is not for nothing that every language and literature in the world is full of jokes about sex. Many of them may be dull or disgusting and nearly all of them are old. But we must insist that they embody an attitude to Venus which in the long run endangers the Christian life far less than a reverential gravity. We must not attempt to find an absolute in the flesh. Banish play and laughter from the bed of love and you let in a false goddess. (*The Four Loves*, 99)

**A Few Highlights from Screwtape**

IX – “The attack has a much better chance of success when the whole man’s inner world is drab and cold and empty.”

 “All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden.” (44)

XVII – 69 – “On that, as on every other subject, keep your man in a condition of false spirituality.”

XIX – 75 – “Instil into him an overweening asceticism and then, when you have separated his sexuality from all that might humanize it, weigh in on him with hit in some much more brutal and cynical form.”

**Group Questions:**

1. How does recognizing our amphibian nature (material/spiritual) challenge your ideas about sex and intimacy?

2. How have you seen pride and malice grow up in the church—and in yourself!—relating to Christianity’s public responses to sexuality?

3. How is Screwtape tempting us today with respect to sexual sins?