

“The Screwtape Letters” by C.S. Lewis
Parallels with the Ascetic teaching of the Orthodox Church¹
by Aidan Hart

When I first read “The Screwtape Letters” I was shocked. The book exposed a whole interior world which, though my own, I hardly knew. Although amply flavoured with Lewis’s wit, humour, fresh images and surprises, it came as a sobering revelation. I felt that I had stumbled across a top-secret enemy document which proved that a lot of my friends - that is, cherished thoughts, opinions, fantasies - were in fact enemy spies and saboteurs.

My respect for *The Screwtape Letters* has not changed over the decades, especially as now a member of the Orthodox Church I see so many parallels with the two thousand year tradition of Orthodox ascetic writings. It is these parallels, some of them, which I would like to explore today.

In particular I shall refer to two twentieth-century Orthodox ascetics and writers who were roughly contemporary with Lewis. One is Elder Joseph the Hesychast, a Greek monk of Mount Athos who died in 1959, and of peasant background. The other is Archimandrite Sophrony, a Russian of aristocratic background who also lived on Athos, before eventually founding a monastery in Essex four years before Lewis’s death. Father Sophrony died in 1993.

So we have three people from three countries, of three different backgrounds - one peasant, one aristocratic, one academic. It should not be surprising that the two Orthodox monks of Athos have the same teaching as one another regarding the wiles of the evil one - which of course is the theme of *The Screwtape Letters*. But what makes the teaching of an Anglican Oxford don so similar to theirs?

As far as I know, Lewis did not study the ascetic writings which were so dear to the other two, books like *The Philokalia*, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* and *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, although he may have studied some of the western monastic works, like those of St John Cassian, and he certainly knew the writings of Saint Athanasius the Great.

I am left with the impression that what primarily led C.S. Lewis to the same conclusions as these two Orthodox monks is a precise and frank observation of his own inner life and the wiles of the demons attacking him. To me the remarkable thing is that he did this so accurately without, it appears, the aid of the long tradition of ascetic writings, which are like ordnance survey maps of the soul. I am told that Lewis said that he did not write about temptations which he himself did not undergo. One has the comforting suspicion that he, like Elder Joseph and Father Sophrony, wrote what he knew and not merely knew about.

Union with God

Let’s start at the end: To what end, according to *The Screwtape Letters*, did God create the human race? If we don’t know this, we can’t know what Screwtape, Wormwood and their “Father Below” are trying to keep their patient from, and the infernal logic of their tactics will remain a mystery. Lewis

¹ A talk given to the C.S. Lewis Society at Peusy House, Oxford, March 7th, 2000.

conveniently gives us his answer to the question quite explicitly: God created man so that man could be united with Him, in a union of love and by participation in His divinity. Screwtape explains to his nephew Wormwood:

One must face the fact that all the talk about His love for men, and His service being perfect freedom, is not (as one would gladly believe) mere propaganda, but an appalling truth. He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself - creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself: the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct. (Letter 8)

The important truths of this passage are firstly that the human person's union with God is without compulsion - it is the fruit of man's freely choosing to enter it. Secondly, knowing God means to be filled with Him, to participate in His life. Thirdly, union with God is not a melting pot but preserves the distinctiveness or "otherness" of the human person. It is a union without destruction of personhood.

In these three truths Lewis is following the tradition of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox writers have described this union of the divine and the human with such terms as divinisation, deification, and theosis (from the Greek word for God, *theosis*). They say that this deification is a fruit of synergy, the "working together" of God's energies with human energies. That great Church father of the fourth century, Saint Athanasius the Great, said that God became man so that man, by grace, might become god. It could well be from Athanasius that Lewis received this teaching on deification, as well as from Scriptural texts like 2 Peter 1:4, which speaks of the call to "become partakers of the divine nature".

The recently published *Letters* of Elder Joseph bear ample witness to this union of the soul with God - a union which the Elder himself knew from experience:

A true monk is a product of the Holy Spirit. When through obedience and hesychia² a monk's senses have been purified, his nous³ has been calmed, and his heart been cleansed, he then receives the grace and enlightenment of knowledge. He becomes all light, all nous, all lucid...The heart burns with divine love, and he cries out, "Hold back, my dear Jesus, the waves of Thy grace, for I am melting like wax." Truly he melts, unable to bear it. His nous is caught up into theoria⁴. A mixing occurs; he is transformed and becomes one with God to the point that he

² *hesychia* is from the Greek word meaning silence, stillness. In this context it means a state of heart free of inner disturbances, whether from thoughts, captivity to habitual sins (called passions), or being ruled by external circumstances.

³ The *nous* is the eye of the heart, the highest spiritual sense of the human person.

⁴ *Theoria*: Greek for vision, the ultimate stage of closeness to God, where the person beholds the Lord transfigured because he or she are themselves transfigured. "In Thy light shall we see light."

*cannot recognise or distinguish himself, just like iron in a furnace becomes one with the fire.*⁵

This image of iron in the fire is an important one, used often by the Church Fathers to describe the ineffable union of man with His Creator. When united, iron and the fire's heat seem indistinguishable. And yet they are distinct in essence because if the iron is taken out of the fire it returns to its cold state and the fire continues undiminished. As Screwtape grudgingly admits, God "wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct".

The whole tone of Screwtape's letter also clearly shows the envy behind the demons' hatred of man. They can't stand the fact that God offers to man the divine glory which they themselves once had, before their fall. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!"⁶ cried the prophet Isaiah of Lucifer. And what is even more infuriating to the demons is that these human creatures destined for divinisation are made of flesh - mere flesh, blood and bone. God "really loves the hairless bipeds" spits Screwtape. "This animal, this thing begotten in a bed, can look at [God]" (Letter 31).

Eternity in the Present

It is clear then that the demonic aim of all temptations, and therefore of Screwtape's advice, is to keep people from drawing near to, and finally jumping into, the fire of God. And the furnace of this fire is Eternity. But ironically, Screwtape obligingly tells us, this Eternity is entered into through the Present. Hence Screwtape's many exhortations to Wormwood to keep his patient from the Present, from truly entering the task or struggle at hand:

The humans live in time but our Enemy destines them to eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them chiefly to attend to two things, to eternity itself, and to that point of time which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity...Our business is to get them away from the eternal, and from the Present. With this in view, we sometimes tempt a human (say a widow or a scholar) to live in the Past. But this is of limited value, for they have some real knowledge of the past and it has a determinate nature and, to that extent, resembles eternity. It is far better to make them live in the Future...It is the most completely temporal part of time - for the Past is frozen and no longer flows and the Present is all lit up with eternal rays...nearly all the vices are rooted in the future.

(Letter 15)

For Father Sophrony, prayer, profound prayer from the depths of the heart, was the chief door to eternity, for prayer is rooted precisely in the Present. One can only pray if one is with God in the present, and not dreaming about the past or the future. Father Sophrony describes the early stages of his own spiritual journey:

I was living in two worlds. One I apprehended through sight, hearing and the rest of my physical faculties. In the other world I was spirit only - all listener, all expectation. I tried hard to see -

⁵ *Monastic Wisdom*, Elder Joseph the Hesychast, Arizona, 1998, page 240.

⁶ Isaiah 14:12

*but saw with other eyes. These two widely distinct worlds were not divided in prayer. In the daytime prayer flowed in the tangible world. But at night prayer carried me into an immaterial, spiritual sphere - I do not know how to label the infinity that embraced me.*⁷

Another state which helped Father Sophrony to remain in the present was pain of heart, an ontological pain which came from a profound tension between longing for union with the Divine and an equal awareness of how far he was from this union. Yet it was this very pain which led him to the waters of life, because it so completely absorbed him and concentrated him in the present - and therefore in eternity.

*My thirst to know God was unquenchable - however much I prayed, however deeply I yearned, my spirit was never satisfied. Such was my ‘cup’ on Mount Athos....But it was this very atmosphere of spiritual pain that gave birth to an understanding of the greatness of man. And is not this sacred pain one of the channels through which the Supreme God communicates with His creature, gradually giving him knowledge not only of created-cosmic being but of Him Himself?*⁸

Self Knowledge

If the final aim of Screwtape and Wormwood is to keep their human “patient” from God, the essential task prior to this (hinted at by Father Sophrony’s words above) is to keep him from himself:

The deepest longings and impulses of any man are the raw material, the starting point, with which the Enemy has furnished him. To get him away from those is therefore always a point gained. (Letter 13)

If man is made in God’s image, then it is in his nature to long for his divine Archetype. To know one’s true self is to know that one longs for union with God. To be ignorant of one’s true nature leads to a fruitless search for satisfaction elsewhere, in created things.

In Letter 21 Lewis alludes to another result of our being created in the divine image. It means that we cannot know God as some exterior object. We can only know Him as the subject and ground of our being. If the pure in heart shall see God, it is because they have become God-like. They behold God “as in a mirror” as St Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18. And so the demons try to make us ignorant of the awesome dignity and majesty of our divine image. They are then free to replace the living God with a caricature, an object which we believe we can possess:

...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 whom I exploit from the pulpit - the God I have a corner in.’ (Letter 21)

For Father Sophrony the name of God, I AM THAT I AM, says it all. This is the divine name revealed to Moses at the burning bush:

⁷ *On Prayer*, Archimandrite Sophrony, Essex (1996), page 41.

⁸ *ibid.*

Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your Fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM.' (Exodus 3:13,14)

Father Sophrony explains something of what this name means:

I AM THAT I AM. Yes, indeed, it is He Who is Being. He alone truly lives. Everything summoned from the abyss of non-being exists solely by His will. My individual life, down to the smallest detail, comes uniquely from Him. He fills the soul, binding her evermore intimately to Himself.⁹

Surveying things from a characteristically fresh and surprising angle, Lewis identifies one means of self-knowledge as pleasure, an experience of “real positive Pleasures.” Our patient’s repentance, his “second conversion” described in Letter 13, was occasioned by the enjoyment of two such simple pleasures. The first was “reading a book he really enjoyed and not in order to make clever remarks about it to his new friends”. The second was to take a walk, alone, through countryside he really liked. Lewis’s philosophy behind this doctrine of legitimate pleasure is explained nicely for us by Screwtape:

The characteristic of Pains and Pleasures is that they are unmistakably real, and therefore, as far as they go, give the man who feels them a touchstone of reality. (Letter 13)

After his initial conversion, the “patient” had slipped into a role play, a keeping-up-with-the-intellectual-Jones’s. This had divorced him from himself, for he could not truly enter into what he was doing in the present but merely use the present as a means of achieving some utopia in the future. And it was simple, sincere pleasures which revealed the farce, because they were an undeniable experience of the present. Screwtape remonstrates with Wormwood:

Didn’t you foresee that it would peel off from his sensibility the kind of crust you have been forming on it, and make him feel that he was coming home, recovering himself? As a preliminary to detaching him from the Enemy, you wanted to detach him from himself, and had made some progress in doing so. Now it is all undone. (Letter 13)

Is this potentially positive role of pleasure shared by the Orthodox tradition? Yes, in particular through an attitude of thanksgiving which acknowledges God as the giver of all good things.

But the Orthodox ascetic tradition also recognises the enigmatic response to pleasure in a fallen world - as surely Lewis did. It is all too easy to become attached to the pleasure itself and forget the Giver. To help prevent this, the Orthodox tradition has always linked feasting with fasting, not only concerning food but all good things. We fast from all animal products throughout Great Lent and at other times of the year, and couples are enjoined to abstain from sexual intercourse before communion. This means that pleasures are kept the agents of love, rather than masters of man. It also means that because the pleasure is enjoyed with blessing, it becomes a sacrament of eternity experienced in the present.

⁹ *His Life is Mine*, by Archimandrite Sophrony, London (1977) page 26.

Screwtape's letter includes a beautiful phrase worth dwelling on - "coming home". It echoes the parable of the prodigal son. The beginning of the prodigal son's homecoming was that "he came to himself". Christ said that "the kingdom of God is within you", and expanded this in other words, like: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). Elder Joseph the Hesychast speaks of two, apparently contradictory homes which man must become mindful of if he is to know God: the earth, from which our bodies were fashioned, and secondly, the divine image in us:

..we are all human, born of dust...we are clay, we are ignorant.

Clay robs clay. Clay insults clay...[Man] does not care about whence and where he is, how he was born, what his purpose is, where he will end up, what is to come after this...forgetfulness and ignorance have devoured all of this self-knowledge...

In the beginning God did not make man to be like this, to suffer and to grieve, but he made him equal to the angels; only slightly did he differ from the angels. He made paradise in Eden and placed him there to rule as a king with free choice and free will.

He bound him with only one commandment, so that it would show that he is governed by Someone superior.¹⁰

The Heart

Lewis identifies the heart and will as the battle ground of spiritual warfare. It is in the heart that man remembers paradise - or forgets it. It is here that he decides, or doesn't decide, to return home. Much of Screwtape's advice is therefore directed towards guiding the patient away from this "dangerous" faculty:

Think of your man as a series of concentric circles, his will being the innermost, the intellect coming next, and finally his fantasy...you must keep on shoving all the virtues outward till they are finally located in the circle of fantasy, and all the desirable qualities inward into the Will. It is only in so far as they reach the Will and are there embodied in habits that the virtues are really fatal to us. (I don't, of course, mean what the patient mistakes for his Will, the conscious fume and fret of resolutions and clenched teeth, but the real centre, what the Enemy calls the Heart). (Letter 6)

This tripartite division of the soul is common to the Church Fathers, although they vary in details. What is important is that they all state that the spiritual heart is the centre of the human person, and place the rational faculty (what Lewis calls the intellect) on a lower level in the hierarchy.

For Lewis the important thing about the heart is that it is the organ of love, because the will resides there. And being the organ of love it is the organ of union, and therefore also the means of true knowledge. Through the reason we can know *about* things, but we cannot know things as they are in themselves. In all this he is in full accord with St Maximus the Confessor.

There is however another, still more central aspect of the heart on which the Church Fathers dwell, and to which I do not think Lewis refers, at least

¹⁰ *Monastic Wisdom*, pages 207, 208

explicitly. In the Greek language this faculty is called the *nous*. This has been described as the eye of the heart. Through it, when purified, we know God, people and all created things in an unmediated way, from the inside out as it were. It is through the *nous*, when it is illumined by the Holy Spirit, that man can behold his Maker. It is not the created *nous* itself that beholds God, but God through the *nous*. Some of the Fathers say that the heart is the essence of the soul, and that the *nous* is the energy of the soul. In a letter to some spiritual children, Elder Joseph hints at the state of one with an enlightened *nous*:

May the God and Lord of all Who dwells in the heavens, Who gives breath and life and everything, and constantly cares for our salvation, send forth into your holy souls the comforting Spirit; may He enlighten your nous as He enlightened the Disciples of our Saviour; may He shine the light of His divine radiance upon your entire spiritual and noetic being; may your whole heart burn with divine eros as did Cleopas's [who, with Luke, met the Lord on the road to Emmaus], and may it leap for joy learning of the conception of the new Adam, and the utter destruction of the old Adam along with all his passions. Then, in this manner, tears will continuously flow every moment like a fountain streaming forth sweetness.¹¹

Purification, illumination and union

As we have seen in his letter quoted above, Screwtape's advice to Wormwood is twofold: guide his patient on a sort of diabolical pilgrimage away from his centre and into the outlying realms of fantasy, and at the same time, make him draw occasional wrong-doing into the very core of his being, so that it becomes second nature. In the light of this it is perhaps pertinent to outline what the ascetic Fathers teach about the opposite of this, the stages of holy pilgrimage.

Many ascetic writers of both East and West identify three stages of the human person's movement toward God. The first is called purification, or practical theology (from the Greek word *praxis*, meaning action). In this stage the pilgrim, calling upon God's grace for help, compels himself to follow the divine commands. Contrary to Screwtape's intentions, such a person is trying to make the occasional good deed into a habitual state. His spiritual senses, including the *nous*, are thereby healed.

This healing leads to the second stage, called illumination or natural theology (*physiki theologia* in the Greek). In this, the pilgrim is granted to perceive the energies of God, the words or *logoi* of God which are at work within creation. The author of the letter to the Hebrews writes that Christ "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power" (Hebrews 1:3). This "word of power" not only brought the universe from non-existence into existence, but also sustains and directs it. Because this vision is of the *logoi*, which are real, it is the opposite of the fantasy used by Screwtape and his lackeys.

¹¹ *Ibid.* page 186

Illumination then leads the pilgrim towards the third stage, which is union or mystical theology, which is union with the Word Himself. The *logoi* thus act like footprints which lead the tracker to Christ Himself.

These three stages are not mutually exclusive, nor are they to be understood too rigidly. Even one in a state of union is still repenting, and it is sometimes a glimpse of divine light which sets a person on the path of repentance, as it did for Saint Paul on the road to Damascus.

Elder Joseph summarises these three stages like this:

Life is divided into three stages: according to nature, above nature, and contrary to nature.

To live “according to nature” is to live according the divine commands, which is something natural for us to do since we are made in God’s image.

To live “above nature” is to perceive the uncreated energies of God shining out through all of God’s creation, as did Moses when he beheld the bush burning but not consumed.

The surprising phrase “contrary to nature” refers to the inexpressible union of a creature, the human person, with the Creator. Joseph uses the term “contrary” to emphasise that this union is completely outside the powers of a created being to achieve. This union can only be the fruit of God’s descent to man in order to take our very own human nature into Himself. This union certainly needs man’s response - it is the fruit of synergy - but the union itself can only be effected by God.

Elder Joseph goes on to exhort his reader to endure with patience all the hardships and tests that come his way, for these are the chief means of purification:

When you have passed through all this, which constitutes “praxis” (with the assistance of grace which cleanses you from all the passions), then your nous experiences illumination and is moved to theoria.¹²

The first theoria is of creation: that God created everything for man, even the angels, for his service. How much worth, how much grandeur, what a great destiny man has, who is the very breath of God!...

While thinking such things, the nous is plunged into deep peace and extreme tranquillity that spreads throughout the body, and one completely forgets that he exists in this life.¹³

Elder Joseph is firmly within the Orthodox Church’s tradition in affirming that deification is possible in this life. Do *The Screwtape Letters* teach the same? As we have seen, it is clear that the Letters affirm deification as God’s intention for man, but it is unclear, at least to me, whether or not Lewis believes that it is a real possibility this side of death. Union with God is explicitly referred to in the passage from Letter 8 already quoted: *the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct.*

Perhaps, when he describes man’s ultimate relationship with God, Lewis emphasises the image of *contemplation* more than union. In this he is surely following the Roman Catholic tradition whose mysticism has stressed the beatific vision and imitation, whereas Orthodox have stressed participation.

¹² *Theoria* means vision, spiritual vision, or as Saint Isaac the Syrian more specifically describes it, “a non-sensible revelation of the nous.”

¹³ *ibid.* page 83.

However, may not contemplation and participation be descriptions of the same state? We can only behold God through the Holy Spirit, and so union in the Holy Spirit - that is, deification - is contemplation's necessary precondition. The chief passage on mystic vision given in *The Letters* is found in the last letter, where Screwtape describes the patient's meeting of angels and God after his sudden death in the Second World War:

The degradation of it! - that this thing of earth and slime could stand upright and converse with spirits before whom you, a spirit, could only cower. Perhaps you had hoped that the awe and strangeness of it would dash his joy. But this is the cursed thing; the gods are strange to mortal eyes, and yet they are not strange...when he saw them he knew that he had always known them and realised what part each one of them had played at many an hour in his life when he had supposed himself alone, so that now he could say to them, one by one, not 'Who are you?' but 'So it was you all the time.'....

He saw not only Them; he saw Him. This animal, this thing begotten in a bed, could look at Him. What is blinding, suffocating fire to you, is now cool light to him, is clarity itself, and wears the form of a Man. (Letter 31)

Another important parallel between Lewis and the Orthodox Fathers emerges from this passage. Screwtape obligingly divulges that the fires of hell are not the vengeance of a wrathful God on those with whom He is angry, but is His love experienced as fire by those who did not, and do not, want it. On earth people are protected from the full blast of God's love and glory: in the age to come the clouds of mortality part, and all people, good and bad, live forever in the light and heat of this Sun. Only those prepared for it will experience this Sun as life, whereas those unprepared will experience it as the fires of hell. It is a view shared by Father Sophrony when he writes:

*Turning away from God, the creature, however, cannot find any realm inaccessible to Him. Even in hell Divine love will embrace all men, but, while this love is joy and life for them that love God, it is torment for those who hate Him.*¹⁴

Salvation as Communion

An important feature of Lewis's thinking on the spiritual life concerns man's communal nature. Being made in the image of the Trinitarian God - the Divine Community - man's fall must be a fall from communality, and his salvation a return to communality.

The Enemy... aims at a contradiction. Things are to be many, yet somehow also one. The good of one self is to be the good of another. This impossibility He calls love, and this same monotonous panacea can be detected under all He does and even all He is - or claims to be. Thus He is not content, even Himself, to be a sheer arithmetical unity; He claims to be three as well as one, in order that this nonsense about love may find a foothold in His own nature. (Letter 18).

¹⁴ Saint Silouan the Athonite, by Archimandrite Sophrony, Essex (1991) page 148.

In the Orthodox tradition, particularly in its monastic expression, obedience is central to a person's return to his communal nature. But this obedience is devoid of any authoritarianism, of submission to some restrictive power. The ascetic Fathers rather perceive it as an opening out from the prison of self-will into the fresh air of grace. In fact the literal meaning of the Greek word for obedience, *upakoe*, is "to listen intently". If I want to learn some skill - say, violin making - I seek out a skilled craftsman and put myself under obedience to him, "listen to him intently". I would be a fool to regard his instruction as a shackle; to the contrary, it is liberating and expanding, if I put it into practice. Likewise, obedience to someone in a higher spiritual state than myself, and to the inspired tradition of the Church in general, is a means of initiation into a higher state. It is deliverance from individualism and entrance into communion. Father Sophrony's spiritual father, Saint Silouan, wrote:

The obedient man has given himself over to the will of God and has no fear of death, for his soul is accustomed to live with God, and loves God. He has excised his own will and so neither in soul nor body is he troubled by the conflict which torments the rebellious and self-willed...

*I know a certain monk on whom obedience had laid a heavy burden. He had the gift of the prayer of the heart, and the Lord gave him tears to weep for the whole world; and the Abbot told him: 'This is given you because of your obedience.'*¹⁵

Liturgical Prayer

Lewis perceives another expression of communion - that of liturgical prayer. By it, he suggests, one is taken outside of one's subjective predilections to participate in something higher. When trying to find a church suitable for the destruction of their patient's soul, Screwtape describes to his nephew a certain Vicar whose services fit the bill:

His conduct of the services is also admirable. In order to spare the laity all 'difficulties' he has deserted both the lectionary and the appointed psalms and now, without noticing it, revolves endlessly around the little treadmill of his fifteen favourite psalms and twenty favourite lessons. We are thus safe from the danger that any truth not already familiar to him and to his flock should ever reach them through Scripture. But perhaps your patient is not quite silly enough for this church - or not yet?

(Letter 16)

In contrast to this tyranny of one man's taste, Lewis asserts that the liturgical year assures a freshness both in its comforting predictability and its pleasant variations:

The humans live in time, and experience reality successively...since they need change, the Enemy (being a hedonist at heart), has made change pleasurable to them, just as He has made eating pleasurable. But since He does not wish them to make change, any more than eating, an end in itself, He has balanced the love of change in them by a love of permanence...He gives them in His Church a spiritual year; they

¹⁵ *ibid.* pages 421,422

change from a fast to a feast, but it is the same feast as before.

(Letter 25)

The richness of Orthodox worship says a loud Amen to Lewis's praises of liturgical worship. Some fifteen or more volumes of theologically rich texts are sung throughout the Church year, not to speak of the whole Psalter which is read in its entirety once a week in monasteries, and twice a week during Great Lent.

But there are two other aspects of liturgical prayer dear to Orthodox Christians, which, as far as I can see, Lewis does not refer to in *The Screwtape Letters*. One such aspect is its power to grant a sense of communion with the countless brethren who have used this same liturgy before and are using it today. Perhaps Lewis does in fact hint at this by contrast when, through Screwtape, he likens the Vicar's discarding of the liturgical calendar to a "little treadmill". The Vicar had isolated himself and his flock within the wall of his own likes and aesthetic preferences.

Secondly, the outward forms of liturgical life - church architecture, icons, ritual - are, according to the Orthodox Church's belief, an icon of heavenly worship. Liturgical worship, especially the Eucharist service, is experienced as a means of communion with the heavenly realm. Father Sophrony affirms this when he writes:

The whole Eucharist consists in 'remembrance' - understood not in the usual sense as a recalling to mind only but as an existential entering into Christ's world, into His Divine and human dimensions. Our Passover, and therefore also our Eucharist, is a passage from earth to heaven...

...The fullness of knowledge of the Most High has not vanished from the face of the earth. The Church has preserved and from generation to generation hands on this knowledge and this spirit which are the quintessence of Sacred Tradition. The same Lord's Supper is celebrated day after day. The same prayer is offered up to God by His priests.¹⁶

Conclusion

"The Screwtape Letters" ends with a member of hell describing heaven for us. Perhaps we should end by letting a member of heaven describe hell for us. For this we need to turn to another book by Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. In this book, the writer is taken from hell into heaven by a bus, along with a motley company of others. There he meets various people, including many old acquaintances. Just before he is due to leave the heavenly abodes, his guide, the Scottish writer George Macdonald, shows him a tiny crack in the soil and declares that it was through such a crack in heaven that he and his bus entered. "Do you mean then that Hell - all that infinite empty town - is down in some little crack like this?" remonstrates Lewis...

'Yes. All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your earthly world; but it is smaller than one atom of this world, the Real World.

Look at yon butterfly. If it swallowed all Hell, Hell would not be big enough to do it any harm or to have any taste.'

... 'I see,' said I at last. 'She couldn't fit into Hell.'

¹⁶ *His Life is Mine*, page 89.

*He nodded. ‘There’s not room for her,’ he said. ‘Hell could not open its mouth wide enough.’*¹⁷

¹⁷ *The Great Divorce*, by C.S. Lewis, London (1945), page 113.