The Screwtape[1] strategies

Hamstringing the impact and influence of Christian schools

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Dear Wormwood,

It's been quite some time since I gave you serious written advice on how to entrap the human species. Unfortunately that dastardly fellow from Magdalene College, C.S. Lewis, leaked most of our communication and spread it far and wide. Notwithstanding the current spate of ubiquitous hacking, this email should reach you safely.

To avoid misunderstanding I'll set out my instructions in an orderly fashion (Always work and think strategically, nephew!). Before launching into serious educational matters, allow me to mention some ordinary 'stuff'.

"There is nothing like shopping therapy! You must whisper to them that it beats prayer 'hands down'"

An update on the global landscape

First, congratulations Wormwood! Your efforts in the western world—my former territory of labour—appear to be paying handsome dividends. Keep all those busybodies, in particular those who want to know about the Enemy and his eternal plan, focused on being consumers. I used to remind them, "when the going gets tough, the tough go shopping". It rarely failed. Especially for the materially oriented, there is nothing like shopping therapy! You must whisper to them that it beats prayer 'hands down', anytime. Convince the earthlings, as most advertising currently does, that when their stay on this planet is coming to an end, the one with the most toys wins. If you can do that Wormwood, it's GAME OVER for them.

Second, as for my work in the developing world, I've had a devil of a job, but we must 'hang in' there. In these places, most people—many with very few possessions—actually believe that the Enemy loves them supremely and wants each one (imagine the ghastly thought) in his promised eternal kingdom!

To make matters worse, the Comforter-Counsellor (who goes by either or other monickers) has made it difficult for me to combat the sickening interest in and devotion to the Enemy that the human vermin in some Asian countries has shown. For instance, in one country, the Lamb's followers have reached catastrophic numbers; much to our disgust.

Of course, as we know, our master has different plans. A significant membership drive should increase Lucifer's legions, all of whom will receive a warm welcome to the nether regions.

Third, from my experience, never ever make the mistake of confronting the Lion/Lamb (he changes roles) head on. Hell no; that's the worst thing you could do! And don't overplay your hand like those loose 'atheist canons' e.g. Dawkins and Hitchens. The latter, I assume, has now gone to our father's house; but don't take it for granted. The Lion/Lamb (together with the Comforter-Counsellor) intervenes and advocates freely when any miserable earthling shows the slightest interest in deserting our ranks. Remember that infamous day when the Enemy snatched victory from the jaws of defeat? It was on Golgotha Hill outside Jerusalem, almost two millennia ago. The miserable creature on the Lamb's right escaped us, much to our chagrin, and the predicted great fall of our "father-now-below" occurred on that fateful weekend. Shameful, Wormwood! We mustn't face a predicament like that again.

By the way, it is encouraging that you are making some progress on another front. The deconstruction of words such as marriage, family, truth, values and morality, in the public arena, can only favour our interests.

Several of my minions from Down Under have informed me that Christian schools are growing in number, in the antipodes. Apparently some are going from strength to strength. This is *not* good news and I'm afraid some effective measures need to be taken immediately. So now I turn specifically to outlining the serious business of my communication.

Strategies for negating or minimising the impact and influence of Christian schools

General

I notice there is a renewed interest in magic in children's books. Many of the young today couldn't be bothered with boring fairy tales and the like. But they've been happily following the adventures of the 'hero' (and his associates) from the school at Hogwarts, in droves. What better age group to start with, than the young?

Opportunism, Wormwood! Never under-estimate what a little tinkering with the spirit world can lead to for many of the Muggles[4]. On the one hand, almost everyone thinks it's only a little harmless, creative fun, while on the other, some alarmists on the Enemy's side help our cause immensely through exaggeration

and irrational claims that are laughed out of court. In either case our undertaking is helped; mind you, but only if we can keep those eager beavers, who have what the Counsellor appallingly calls *spiritual discernment*, out of the way. Slobgub, my deputy, contends the whole thing is a waste of our time, but I think that if the Enemy can get exposure from *The Chronicles of Narnia*; the 'flip side' is that we can use a similar strategy to achieve *our* goals. Thus, alertness to opportunity should always be one of our general guiding strategies. A revival of interest (Dare we hope for practice?) in a little natural religion or primitive paganism is certainly to our advantage, dear chap.

Now, you may wonder, what are our priority targets in this campaign? Simple Wormwood; I'll draft a cross-section for you.

Teachers

Our arch enemy, the Lion, was foremost a teacher when he lived among his earthlings. That's why he wreaked such diabolical damage, and anyone today following his example will do likewise. So be aware, nephew.

Your most strenuous and cunning efforts should be directed at reducing the ranks and disrupting the efforts of teachers who are thoroughly committed to the Enemy's educational enterprise—both in their personal lives and competent teaching ministry.

Expressly convince secondary teachers that as a 'blanket' rule, practitioners of excellence have always thought of themselves as teaching, above all, *subject specialisations* rather than students. We don't want any empathy and caring coming to the fore in classroom learning. This could lead to students and teachers perceiving themselves to be on the same team. What next might the Enemy's troops think of, Wormwood? For us it should be 'strictly business' in any educational 'tug-of-war'.

There is, of course, another line of attack, in contrast to the above. Let students and teachers be 'buddies', appearing on each others' Facebook pages, exchanging phone numbers and encouraging students to address teachers by their first name—even in class. By using what the naïve and inexperienced consider to be *camaraderie*, we twist a legitimate idea and metamorphose it into something else; thereby creating potential for much mischief. We've accomplished results, similarly, through swaying earthlings to wrongly employ what is essentially 'neutral' technology, whether ancient or modern, to further our undertaking. Thus sharp knives are turned into murder weapons (instead of being scalpels in the hands of surgeons, as the Enemy would have it) and SDHC cards become electronic storage devices for corrupting pornography rather than technology for making the Enemy's Message more easily available to people in 'closed countries'—code language for places where we have the thought police on our side and where they threaten people with imprisonment or worse.

Let's return to teachers, Wormwood. If success is not forthcoming, seek out teachers who've become apathetic. (The Lion refers to this condition as Laodecian, I believe.) Better still, single out those who have given up on their calling entirely. The latter are mostly a discouragement to their colleagues, to say nothing of poor role models for students, but *we* gleefully count them as useful co-workers. They, although no longer interested in the Enemy's cause—instead, in many cases, being interested in entitlements, remuneration and share prices—prefer not to leave their comfortable positions and the comparative 'calm' of the private education sector for the 'rough and tumble' of government schools in low socio-economic urban or country areas. Use your wiles, Wormwood, to increase the power, influence and numbers of these teachers. I assure you, it will sap the vitality of *any* school under the banner of the Enemy. Guaranteed!

Who should be some of your other targets?

> ***"Your most strenuous and cunning efforts should be directed at reducing the ranks and disrupting the efforts of teachers"***

Principals

By any means, persuade the Enemy's school administrators to lower the bar in regard to spiritual criteria when employing teachers. Suggest that they should be a little more broad-minded in their approach. After all, it could be perceived as "discriminatory" if they were to ascertain from applicants (either personally or from their CV) if they had experienced a personal encounter with the Lamb that they could relate.

A ruse that has worked well in the past is the notion that *bigger* is not only *better*, but more beautiful and 'bolder in faith'. Thus, using this reasoning, large enrolments are obviously an indicator not merely of *quantity*, but of *quality*, and as we know, parents vote with their feet to enrol their children in schools that have a good name. Wormwood, earnestly usher principals in the Enemy's schools to equate quantity with quality. That error of judgement, as we know, is a form of pride disguised as self-congratulatory satisfaction. And it can lead to many others, I assure you.

You may have noticed that most of the principals have an active prayer life; an abhorrent practice by our standards, but much loved by the Enemy. The Lamb laid down the groundwork for this practice and it can do us untold damage when these administrators cast all their heavy burdens on the Enemy and ergo, they regain their drive and spiritual equilibrium. Before

long, we could have the staff as a whole taking up this vile habit. I dread to think what might result if they'd have staff devotionals—even short ones—before the commencement of each school day. Wormwood, disrupt this abominable discipline! Do whatever it takes! Overwork them; principals and staff alike. Run them off their feet. Keep them constantly busy with the *urgent* rather than attending to the *important*, so that they're too tired to talk to the Enemy at any time of day or night. Soon this whole prayer business will be dragged down to the level of auto-suggestion, we hope, or perhaps neglected altogether. Wormwood, remember, if you don't succeed at first, try again.

Also, I strongly encourage you to use stealth. Entice principals to engage marketers who employ motivational slogans like, *I can change the world*, etc. in the Enemy's schools. As you know, it's easy for us to manipulate trendy aspirational parlance. In the past, we have enlisted the service of mottos, like the above, as the guiding light for the exploits of many of our esteemed hell-bent collaborators—Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot, not to mention the recent 9/11 newcomers and Anders Breivik. Such catchy but nebulous mottos can serve our purposes well, Wormwood. They extol individualism (the opposite of the horrid selflessness and collegiality, co-operation and fellowship nurtured by the Enemy) and reveal absolutely nothing about what kind of world the change will lead to, simultaneously promoting an earthling self-confidence based on arrogance. For us, this is the perfect recipe: It leaves the Lion out of the change equation and should ensure our ultimate success, Wormwood. Mission accomplished!

But don't become too over-confident and excited. There are still more geese to pluck.

School boards/councils; boards of governors

These bodies are very influential in appointing key administrative personnel. In decision-making processes, Wormwood, guide them to appoint principals who are managers rather than leaders. It serves our cause much better if leaders concern themselves with the administrivia of education rather than the big picture. The last thing we want is leaders who can cast a vision (the worst ones are those who are biblically competent), get their staff behind them in support, and then actually work towards achieving the Enemy's goals.

> ***Keep boards occupied with finances and the prestige of the school. Don't ever let them contemplate what a* faithful *school might mean***

You can get a lot of traction, by some board members (who you can influence) arguing that to have a *successful* school is paramount. So, always keep boards occupied with finances and the prestige of the school. Don't ever let them contemplate what a *faithful* school might mean. Matters are made worse if this group buys into the principal's vision and the whole bunch team up with the Enemy. What often follows, you might easily imagine—pure anathema!

School fees are necessary for funding the Enemy's educational endeavours, as you well know. There are some parents who are sufficiently financial to meet the expenses, but there are also others who find it a real struggle. Wormwood, your task is to reassure board members that they are occupying the high moral ground when they use weasel words such as taking *responsible action*, and *financial viability*, when they raise school fees, knowing all along that the rate of increase will disqualify students from financially challenged families from attending. Consequently we notch up another victory for Mammon.

There is another matter that needs raising. It concerns influential individuals who might put to the board that a serious study of Scripture should become a regular part of the school curriculum—a suggestion originating from the Comforter-Counsellor, no doubt. It should be rebutted strongly by those susceptible to your purveyed doubts, on the grounds that there is no more room in what is an already overcrowded curriculum. Wormwood, your doubters should argue that (as we see it) it might be considered proper that the Enemy's teachings be studied on his day, in his house, but *not* in school. Our job then is to find all kinds of spurious reasons why the young earthlings should give these gatherings in the Enemy's house a miss.

Speaking of the young, here are a few additional tips for you.

Students

Wormwood, you'll have done well if you can manage to degrade the behaviour of senior students during schoolies week. This will set the standard for future years. By all means prevent them from engaging in service projects, whether at home or abroad, during this 'winding down' period. Many of the beastly little things are likely to come back changed and inspired, spouting: "Awesome, cool, fantastic," often feeling compassionate and empathetic towards the have-nots of their world. If they infect the Year 10 and 11 students, worse is to follow.

May I remind you of our Mephistophelian and utilitarian maxim: Always aim for the least good and the greatest evil? Sell to the young the notion: One's youth should be hedonistically savoured and celebrated and that the serious stuff of life—which is OK *if* they really want to pursue it—should be kept for adulthood; much later. As you can see, my dear fellow, Faustian bargains can still be made today and experienced fiends always pave the road to Hell with good intentions.

On another score, manipulate the entertainment media to be a proxy for us, although of course it mustn't be seen as such. In place of school work and study, fill students' minds with the antics of celebrity idols ranging from Justin Bieber and any number of rap stars, to Kylie Minogue and Lady Gaga.

Wormwood, we make progress with the young unsophisticated followers of the Enemy when the media, with our help, make the imaginary world seem real, whereas the representatives of the Enemy in many of their dull weekly gatherings talk of that which is real as if it were imaginary! Dear fellow, by our sheer brilliance, we can make Alice Cooper look like the archangel Gabriel himself. And the human sheep wouldn't know the difference. So ensure that in the Enemy's schools, students somehow don't become attached to any heroes that haven't Hades' approval; i.e. anyone that follows in the Lion's footsteps and who qualifies as role model material.

Should you want a perfect recipe for mayhem, stir up a few of the daring and physical kids (although the potentially sneaky, spiteful and surreptitious will also do) to try out for a bout of bullying. It causes no end of trouble and dismay. Why? Most teachers are likely to dismiss it, because, by 'definition', bullying—physical or cyber—doesn't exist in the Enemy's schools. What a ghastly surprise they are in for, Wormwood! And by the time someone wakes up, the damage is done. You can do further damage by dissuading principals, teachers and students from talking about it openly and publicly taking whole-school measures to deal with it. Good luck with your mischief.

Last, but not least, is another major group that deserves our attention.

Parents

Regarding ownership of schools, keep parents under the apprehension that they have nothing to contribute to the school except the payment of fees. Paint the school board as being legally entrusted with school property and *solely* responsible for the school's operation and welfare. Moreover, convince all those upwardly-mobile parents to regard themselves only as customers who have certain expectations of the school, the most important being that the school's primary function, to the exclusion of all others, is the running of an academic program that guarantees their children a good job. In contrast, dissuade parents from buying into the Enemy's values that are promoted by the school. If you can accomplish this, Wormwood, you can look forward to being promoted to "tempter first-class" status.

Nothing succeeds like success in creating dissonance between home and school. Our best allies are frequently the most personable and respectable of parents; the ones that attend church at Christmas and Easter. When the Comforter-Counsellor turns up in their own lives because of some school-related experience, muster all your wiles, and focus their attention elsewhere; perhaps professional responsibilities or interests. An overseas holiday may also do the trick. Do whatever is necessary! Intentionally deceive them. Put to them that to trust the Enemy and join his ranks is being *fanatical*; far better for them not to take these matters too seriously. Perhaps delay a decision until a more convenient time.

And keep school chaplains from ministering to any of the students' parents. The High Court's decision in Canberra declaring the Commonwealth Government's funding of the national school chaplaincy program invalid was, unfortunately, a Clayton's victory for us. New funding legislation has kept the program intact; a done deal. Absolutely disgusting, Wormwood! However, one thing we can still do: Help the sitcom media portray school chaplains (and all clergy for that matter) as Charlie-Chaplin-like caricatures. Present them as irrelevant comical figures from a bygone era who have reached their use-by-date.

> ***"Help the sitcom media portray school chaplains as Charlie-Chaplin-like caricatures—irrelevant comical figures from a bygone era"***

On this appealing and tempting note I shall conclude my salutary missive. I want you to keep in mind, it is not intended in any way to be comprehensive, my dear fellow, but at least it should point you in the right direction.

Finally, remember to make mischief while the sun shines. We don't have unlimited time, even though deluded earthlings behave as though they do; which is to our credit.

So much for now, Wormwood; I shall be looking forward to receiving a progress report on your endeavours in the middle of the year.

Your affectionate uncle,

Screwtape. TEACH

Endnotes

[1] With acknowledgement to, and written in the spirit of C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape letters*, using the literary device of *inversion*. Hopefully, the device should assist readers to gain insight into and question and critique the tactics used by 'the prince of darkness' in obstructing and 'derailing' anyone looking for the Way, the Truth and the Light.

It should be noted that inversions, however, are a deficient substitute for prayerful and thoughtful study of the principles of biblically based Christian education which readers are encouraged to explore more fully for themselves.

[2] A pseudonym.

[3] A fictional email address.

[4] The term is roughly equivalent to *the non-initiated*.