

Christ in Prophecy

Interview 63: Screwtape Letters Commentary, Part 1

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Part 1

Tim Moore: Well, Nathan and I have come to Oklahoma City, to the set and the studio of Prophecy Watchers here to interview Mondo Gonzales. Mondo, thank you for letting us come here to interview you on location.

Mondo Gonzales: It's been great to have you guys.

Tim Moore: And really, I say interview, this is going to be a dialog, but you have a certain specialty that is a passion of yours. Before we even dive into that tell us a little bit about your background, how you came to be affiliated with Prophecy Watchers.

Mondo Gonzales: About 18 months ago, a friend of mine, L.A. Marzulli, who we all know most people know he was out skiing in Tahoe. And the short story is, as we were talking, Bob and company had been looking to find a co-host. And Bob and L.A. are good friends. And a phone call came and L.A. is like, hey have you ever considered Mondo. And I had I had met many of the Prophecy Watchers people on a trip to Israel a couple of years ago. And so we just never connected, but God's timing wasn't there. But as of about really 18 months ago, God's call came and we moved from Tahoe to Oklahoma City to help, join the Prophecy Watchers team.

Tim Moore: Wow, so God had a plan for you even for you being on that ski slope that day in Tahoe.

Mondo Gonzales: It's true, yeah.

Tim Moore: Wow.

Nathan Jones: You've been a wonderful addition to the program, Mondo. I know particularly my parents watch the show almost religiously, and they're saying you're doing a fantastic job.

Mondo Gonzales: Oh, I appreciate that.

Nathan Jones: Helping Gary. So thank you so much. Well, hey, we're going to be talking about C.S. Lewis' book, "The Screwtape Letters." Before we do that, can you explain what's your fascination with C.S. Lewis? And because I don't know if people realize how much you love C.S. Lewis as a writer. I love C.S. Lewis as writer. But what got you into reading Lewis?

Mondo Gonzales: I think originally I'm an apologetic guy, especially as a pastor. I also kind of have a big mouth, and since first as a new Christian, you go out and evangelize and what happens? You know people challenge you. And so they challenge you with skeptical questions. And so C.S. Lewis is known as being a great apologist for his book, "Mere Christianity."

Nathan Jones: What was the time period that he lived in?

Mondo Gonzales: He was born in 1897, died in 1963. He died on the exact same day as JFK, actually. So his death was overshadowed by that assassination, you know.

Nathan Jones: So most of his writings then we're probably World War II era?

Mondo Gonzales: Yeah, absolutely. And then really I think he became, his most productive writings was really from 1940 until 1963 when he died. But the "Mere Christianity" was right about 1943, 1945, in that area, World War II. He was called to give, again the world that Europe was in a major war, and he was called to give responses to understanding some of the chaos. And so in reading "Mere Christianity" and naturally people think, well, have you ever read "The Screwtape Letters?" And so I was like, well, sure, oh, no, I haven't I will. So, I remember reading them I would say probably, Oh, man, certainly 20-25 years ago. And I started reading it. And there's a basic plotline, you know, that you can get a little bit here. But I had no clue it was way over my head.

Tim Moore: So for our viewers who may not be familiar with "The Screwtape Letters" and just by confession, I also love C.S. Lewis as a writer. He's one of my favorite authors from the 20th century. And again, a gifted describer of the Christian faith as he boils it down to mere Christianity, a phrase he actually cites in this book. But for someone who's not familiar with "The Screwtape Letters," how do you come to be in possession of these letters? Or how did you come up with this idea, what is it really all about?

Mondo Gonzales: So this is a great background is he's in church one day, and he tells a story, and he's in church and this thought comes to him about writing a series of letters from an evil perspective or devilish advice. And so he's just thinking, hey, I want to write about the art of temptation. And so he's like, well, he was a fictional writer, we know him from "The Chronicles of Narnia" and other books his Perelandra series. But he's like, okay, I'll create this fictional world where you have a senior demon, senior devil, we don't want to say demon, the senior devil he uses the word devil named Screwtape, who is writing to a junior tempter, and he's going to give him advice on how to tempt humanity. And so he writes a series of 31 letters, giving again this junior tempter advice, and the tricks because Screwtape has been around awhile, he's been in the bureaucracy that he, C.S. Lewis writes in such a world that he talks about I live in the admin world. He writes maybe like a military where there's all everybody's got departments, there's an intelligence department, there's the theological department, all these things he does in his fictional world. But Screwtape is writing and saying, hey, let me give you the advice of how to best do it and things to avoid. So Screwtape, in one sense, is a very good theologian in how to tempt humanity.

Tim Moore: So C.S. Lewis is almost using reverse psychology, if you will, to describe the perspective of the enemy who he capital "E" Enemy describes God from Screwtape's perspective. But really he's trying to convey scriptural and biblical truths just through an opposite mirror image, if you will, from the diabolical author, so to speak.

Mondo Gonzales: You know, it's interesting. Yes, because the first time I read it, I didn't know that. Most people just open up the book and I'm like, this book is horrible, you know, I kept the enemy. And so you think for us, the enemy has always been the devil, right? Yeah, the evil realm. But I was like it seems like he's calling God the enemy here. And indeed he was, until I understood the context. So people if they don't understand the context, they're going to be confused and they might even put the book down.

Tim Moore: Well, famously, one guy read his writings, which first appeared in an English newspaper called "The Guardian" and was so offended, an elderly clergyman, he said, "Cancel my subscription. You all are putting out this advice for how to be diabolical." He didn't get it at all. And you've got other stories like that I know.

Mondo Gonzales: Absolutely. Yes.

Nathan Jones: It actually even says a devil's diabolical advice for the capturing of the human heart. That's wicked.

Mondo Gonzales: Yup. And when you read it, yeah, part of it too is it hits close to home. And so this guy who is reading the article, he's like, this is horrible advice! I can't believe that somebody would write this. And yet again, without the context, I mean its satire. I mean, it is a fictional book, but C.S. Lewis had a lot to say. And he had a lot of observations of humanity. Oftentimes in the study guide, I call them foibles. He recognized them and the ways in which our true enemy would try to use them to corrupt us.

Tim Moore: Even in Scripture, God Himself and His prophets oftentimes use satire. So God at one point says as a challenge to the false gods, "Can you predict the future? Yes, if you're gods, then you tell us and you tell mankind what the future will be." Obviously, that is satirical, they cannot. And Elijah at one point tells the prophets of Baal "Cry louder. Your God is probably asleep. Maybe he's in the bathroom, but call louder." And he is mocking them in a satirical manner. And that's really what C.S. Lewis is doing in a backward kind of manner.

Mondo Gonzales: Yeah, 100%. I mean, he uses it as an opportunity to train us. And honestly, apart from the Bible, I've read a lot of books in my life, no doubt, and but apart from the Bible, there has been no greater study that I've seen with the diversity of, we talk about sanctification, about growing, growing more holy and growing more wise in our understanding of overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil. And "The Screwtape Letters" provides, if somebody is willing to get into it, there's I don't think besides the Bible, there's no greater study because it's so diverse in its topics. And what I found teaching it through the years was people say, "Man, I'm so convicted, I feel so convicted." And go, "Well, hey, that's good. We need to grow."

Nathan Jones: Well, speaking about teaching it through the years, I don't think most people know that you're pretty much one of the leading experts on C.S. Lewis' "The Screwtape Letters." You've actually written this wonderful study guide. I mean, we're talking almost 300 pages of study guide as you get into it. Why? I just I want to understand what's your passion for this? Why? Who's the audience that you're writing this for?

Mondo Gonzales: Well, there are two things. Number one is truth, I think, and as a pastor, you want you know, you want your flock, you want the people that you lead to grow, you know, Galatians 4:19, and until Christ is formed in you, I'm not satisfied, Paul said. Right. So he wants Christ formed, and then part of that is the process of sanctification. So when we started reading the book, I said, "Hey, let's go through the Screwtape Letters." This is back in around 2008, I was pastoring a church in Illinois. And so as I started teaching, I found like, oh, this is really difficult. I mean, Lewis' is way beyond I mean, he's a brilliant writer, thinker. And so as I was trying to get into it, there was a couple of study guides. I was desperate as a teacher to try to help people grow in their faith and as to get through the letters. And what I found was there's a couple little study guides that are very cursory, introductory. And so my passion was two things, one was to teach, but secondly was I don't want people to have the same frustration that I did.

And I think many times people will start "The Screwtape Letters" as is teaching it, and I have got this through emails, and they give up because it's too hard. It's too hard to understand the background to where he's going. There's a basic plot line, but to get real deep, he makes reference to all kinds of peoples, places, and times.

Tim Moore: He sure does.

Mondo Gonzales: Lewis was a brilliant scholar. And so the second reason was, "Hey, everybody, I want you to be able to teach "The Screwtape Letters" in your Sunday school class, in your small group, wherever in your home group, you know, for if you want your child as a homeschool person or even a college, if you want to study, I want to give you the tools needed in order to do it. You don't need to be intimidating anymore. Here, I'll guide you every step of the way."

Tim Moore: Well, we're obviously going to make sure our viewers know how to get a copy of your book, "The Screwtape Letters, a Study Guide and Commentary." And really, we're going to plug you into Prophecy Watchers where you can find this resource. And it is a tremendous study. But you talked about C.S. Lewis himself being a great scholar. I'm told that C.S. Lewis had a tremendous library. You could pull any book off the shelf, open it to a page, cite the page, and he could quote from that page. That is a mind that is beyond almost comprehension for me. And yet people might ask, why are we talking about the "Screwtape Letters" on a program focused on Christ in Prophecy? And here's why, folks and we've already kind of set this up in our introduction, but Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, reminds us "for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness," meaning today "against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. And he says, therefore, take up the full armor of God." We have to realize there's a realm beyond our five senses that is in effect today. And you talked about C.S. Lewis having a fictionalized version of how that realm might operate. But really, it's always out there with diabolical intent, and many of the things that Lewis touched on in these letters are, in fact, prophetic. He had things he wrote in the early 1940s that have come to pass just in recent years, or at least are manifest even more. So I think this is contemporary for our time. And I think just as Paul advises us, it's something we have to be wary of, not fixated upon. So how do we balance being aware of, without fixating on the devil and his evil intent?

Mondo Gonzales: One of the other passages that comes to mind is 1 Timothy 4:1 we're in the latter time, now we're in a prophetic context, and a lot of times many will depart from the faith and give heed to what? Seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. And so there's no doubt that as we see the end of the age approach, we look out and we see this war, Ephesians 6:12, we're in a war whether we like it or whether admitted or whether we know it or feel it, if you want to say it that way. But we're seeing this increase in demonic teachings and temptations. We see our particular culture, which has been very protected for most of it because it was very Bible centered, people lived out the armor of God, which protected them, but now they don't. And so it's amazing witchcraft and all these other things. So it's important for us to be equipped to be ready. Another passage I bring up often is 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they're spiritual for taking everything under the obedience of Christ. Why? Because we're going to take down strongholds. So part of "The Screwtape Letters" is brings out these tremendous truths that equip us in these prophetic times. So to me, there's a lot of connection there, it's not just forced. Scripture says that it will become more and more.

Nathan Jones: And it's an enjoyable way to learn about how Satan tries to manipulate us and pull us away from the Lord. I first read "The Screwtape Letters" actually it was an audiobook by John Cleese from Monty Python, who did a wonderful job reading it. And then I saw a one man play where he had memorized and it was like three hours long and he'd memorize the entire book and he performed it. And what's interesting is that he puts a little humor in it because you think that that Screwtape is so kind of fatherly to Wormwood. He's giving him advice. He's worried about him. But as the book goes on and he sees that that Wormwood is not keeping the man away from God, you know, they start getting the threats and the evil and you start feeling it. Just one thing I want to add to this, as Screwtape was writing this, because, you know, we have people say, well, you know, that's getting dark. That's getting into occultism and stuff like that. But Lewis himself decided not to keep writing any more letters for a particular reason, right? Didn't he feel that writing from a satanic perspective was very hard on him?

Mondo Gonzales: Yeah, there's a couple of things to that in the new Preface, Lewis wrote a new Preface in 1961, so just a couple of years before he died, and it appeared in the American version of the book. And he says very clearly in there that this isn't a book about the occult, it's not a book specifically about demonism or whatever. He said, I'm writing a book about temptation. And he just created the fictional world to help. And so I think he felt he as he was writing them, he goes, "Man, through the years, many people wanted me to write more and he goes, you don't realize how much of a grind it was." He had to get his mindset as a Christian into ungodliness and to think the most wicked things you can about people, about motives. And so it was hard for him. He's like, "Man, I just felt dirty and icky."

Tim Moore: But even so, he also testified in that very Preface, he said, "People ask, 'Well, how could you get into the mind of a demon to be able to write from that perspective?' And he said, My own heart showeth me to quote him, show us the wickedness of the ungodly." He said, "It's never farther from my own heart." So I just had to kind of play out those things that exist in my own human nature and take them to the nth degree. And so he did that again in a wonderful way. But obviously trying to convict us, too, to be guarded against the fiery darts of the devil and all of his minions.

Part 2

Tim Moore: Let's jump into the book itself. Let's jump right in and dive in. I'm going to ask one question, though first off, speaking of the era in which C.S. Lewis wrote, who did he dedicate this book to? Another famous author.

Mondo Gonzales: Yes, he dedicated it to J.R.R. Tolkien.

Tim Moore: Which we know of as being the author of "The Hobbit" and the whole "Lord of the Rings" series.

Mondo Gonzales: Very popular right now.

Tim Moore: It is very popular right now.

Mondo Gonzales: But not the "Rings of Power" though.

Tim Moore: Yeah, not the "Rings of Power." So these guys were buddies and they actually played off one another in terms of their ideas that they would roll about. So here's a question I'll

pose to you, and C.S. Lewis testified. Did he actually believe in the devil? What did he say when asked if he believed in the devil?

Mondo Gonzales: He said absolutely. But he's a wordsmith. He's a philologist guy in the sense that he would say, well, let's make sure we define what devil is.

Tim Moore: So let's define what devil means.

Mondo Gonzales: Because he would say if what you mean by devil is someone that stands in opposition to God, then no, I don't.

Tim Moore: In equal opposition.

Mondo Gonzales: In equal opposition.

Tim Moore: That's the key point.

Mondo Gonzales: Because he said God has no equal, God is the only uncreated Creator of others. And so but what he would say is I believe certainly in devil's and the demonic realm, he believed the Bible. He believes was a super naturalist, which is great. But he believed that the opposite of the devil would be Michael. And so and I bring in the Scripture, I bring Scriptures that help show that that's true. Revelation 12 like in prophetic passage that you have Michael and the Devil squaring off. And again, and there's other passages, but he did believe absolutely in a real literal devil and a one who ruled over a kingdom of demons and others that again seeks to tempt humanity. So he had a biblical frame.

Tim Moore: And too often in the West, we think of the devil in his cartoonish figure, either a figure on one shoulder and an angel on the other, or in some kind of red jumpsuit wearing horns and carrying a pitchfork. And all these are cartoonish. And I think they do a discredit because pretty soon you say, oh, that's just that's ridiculous, and it is. But that's not who our enemy is and that's not who is opposed to us even in our faith, day in and day out.

Nathan Jones: Yet Lewis kind of makes the characters of both Screwtape and Wormwood almost comical in nature. Like, okay, we should fear them because they are evil creatures who are bent on destroying us, or at least keeping us from God if we're saved. But in the end it also shows, I think, how petty they are and how insignificant, how easy the Lord could destroy them. Do you think Lewis was intending to demonstrate that the demonic world though a threat to us humans are completely powerless against God?

Mondo Gonzales: Oh, there's no doubt that He believed again that God is supreme. As Christians, though what he was after was showing the ways in which we unknowingly become tempted and to become controlled, maybe in that sense I'm not talking about possessed, but just in the sense of giving in to the flesh. He also despised the medieval renditions of the way demons were presented. I mean, he mocked it. Again he was 100%, he was a Cambridge scholar of English, you know, in the Renaissance period, medieval period.

Nathan Jones: Wow.

Mondo Gonzales: So, he definitely he held the chair, I mean, he was he was a brilliant he was a classicist as well by the time he was little he's learning Greek at five years old. So but so he had that background. But he also would say, hey, but by the way, he loved Dante's rendition. He loved Faust rendition of the way that true evil, when you look at those renditions, he said they're

terrifying. And that's what we should always remember, is that these are real beings who are out for what? For your soul. But talking about petty, he talked about their pettiness between themselves in the preface.

Nathan Jones: Constantly trying to one up each other for power.

Mondo Gonzales: Correct? Yeah.

Tim Moore: I like what Nathan said because he gives two quotes at the beginning of his book, one by Luther "The best way to drive out the Devil, if you will not yield the texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout at him, basically laugh at him because he cannot bear scorn." And Thomas More says "The devil who, with proud spite, cannot endure to be mocked." And so when we mock him, when we when we scorn him and laugh at him, not dismissive of the threat he presents, especially to those who are unsuspecting and unguarded by the armor of God. But when we mock him, he just cannot stand that.

Mondo Gonzales: Yeah. You know, it's interesting, I bring that up in the book because there's a very interesting passage in the book of Jude, and this is one of the places. So let's say this, do we agree with everything that C.S. Lewis ever wrote? No, we do not. He has a lot of theologies that I wouldn't agree with. Do we agree that everything he wrote in "The Screwtape Letters?" No. And so one of the things that you have in there, and I encourage people in the book is always think scripturally. I have over a thousand scriptures referenced in the study guide to help people think. But always to say, hey, do we agree with what Lewis is saying here and how he's maybe presenting it through Screwtape?

So Lewis has a theology that he's presenting through Screwtape or is Lewis presenting something that Screwtape would have in his own diabolical theology? So either way, you're going to get hit going right, you're going to hit going left. But one of the things that I bring up is this passage in the book of Jude, where Jude is talking about false teachers and how they have no respect. And he says to the point that they will even speak evil of glorious ones, "doksas." And so there he says, and you guys know the story where he says, "Even Michael, in disputing over the body of Moses, would not throw a slanderous accusation against Satan, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'" So I say, hey, even though this is where a place I think I would disagree with Lewis in that we are not to mock or to scorn. Because why? Because Michael wouldn't.

Tim Moore: That's a good point.

Mondo Gonzales: He has a position, now granted, that's between him and Lord. I'm not going to reverence him, but he does have a position which is far greater than Mondo Gonzales. And he's going to answer to the Lord on that day. So interestingly, here again, the mocking and the scorning, you think Jude is telling us that even Michael wouldn't dare to do such a thing because of Satan's position. Interesting.

Tim Moore: That's a very interesting.

Nathan Jones: That's a really good point. Well, we as are going through the book, we've talked to kind about the outline and the basics, but how does the pacing go? Like as we have 31 letters, is there can you break down what each letter is? Is there an intro and some advice? And how does each letter's feel go?

Mondo Gonzales: It's fun because again, there's a basic plot line where you have Screwtape writing to Wormwood and saying, "Hey, dear Wormwood," it's like this nice, feigned love because we see later how that comes to play. But you have a patient, Wormwood is assigned to this human being, and the patient gets saved early on. And then he's like, okay, Wormwood, now we need to change our trajectory to he's got saved, now we're going to try to corrupt his spirituality. We're going to try to make him walk away or whatever. And so you see development of the patient through his time period. He ends up, you know, has conversations about his mom. He gets a girlfriend. But then he's under threat of being conscripted in the war. And so you see these issues of life. So that's kind of the overall framework of starting with the patient as an unbeliever getting saved and then corrupting him all the way until the end of the war.

Nathan Jones: Where the full armor of God is on him, right. And he becomes almost incorruptible.

Mondo Gonzales: Well, no, I think the patients...

Nathan Jones: It could still keep going.

Mondo Gonzales: Yeah. Yes. The patient's too young. I mean, he's a new believer, and so he's learning about his own pride and humility in his own place. And you see, honestly, there's several letters where you see Lewis, he's about 43, 45 when he's writing this and you see his own struggles come into the character.

Tim Moore: Yes, you do. Yes, you do. Especially during a time of war. And I think that focuses more than anything else. And people who've not lived in a time of great conflict and even in the United States, most people in this country have never felt the threat that the people of England did in the midst of the war. After living through the blitz, after bombings, night after night in London and most of the other major cities in England, they really felt an existential threat to their nation, to their own safety. And so Lewis writes from that perspective, and it really does focus your attention. One thing I'm curious about and I appreciate what you said about we should be careful to mock the things that we really don't fully understand. But how does Lewis describe Satan's appearance? What does he say he kind of looks like?

Mondo Gonzales: You know, this is where again, going back to that Preface, he describes him in a very, he understands the terrifying nature, but he also understands that he comes as an angel of light.

Tim Moore: Yes.

Mondo Gonzales: And so, again, even though he would mock the tights, the red tights, you know, the horns he also recognizes here is a being that is a beautiful being, that is meant to be crafty, cunning and deceptive.

Tim Moore: I think that it is always the reality that sometimes we dismiss, some people get as the famous saying is too fixated, they spend too much time thinking about the Devil. Satan. And others don't think about him enough in terms of realizing that he is always out there nipping at our heels like a lion that prowls about.

Mondo Gonzales: Yes.

Tim Moore: And I actually do like Lewis's fictionalized hierarchy of Hell because I find that it's very prophetic. He describes the hierarchy with rings that to modern readers sound much like a

government bureaucracy today with all of its different departments, and how just absolutely overwhelming it is. And yet it just rolls over people. And boy, it reads like, I'm living through this right now.

Mondo Gonzales: Especially with a military background.

Tim Moore: Yeah.

Mondo Gonzales: One of the things I do in the introduction is I chase down every single department, I list them all out in order just to be thorough. I was like, let's do an introduction of this world. Again there's the Philological Department, there's the War Department, there's the Intelligence Department, there's the lowerarchy. You know, he has it truly as an administrative bureaucracy. And so I give the entire every possible department you might have I find it and I organize it out. As you can see that Lewis was brilliant in his writing, not only he was just fun. It was fun.

Tim Moore: But he understood human nature as well.

Mondo Gonzales: Yes.

Tim Moore: And so some of those natures, having served in the political realm for 13 years, his description of what I would call a dog eat dog mentality in hell, man that is the political realm on steroids. And it's gotten worse than ever before, even in this country, to where your allies are only allies of convenience because they're going to come after you if you're not in favor of another program. It is a dog eat dog world. And again, that's part of our problem culturally today.

Mondo Gonzales: Yeah, no doubt it. And he describes that world again in the bureaucracy of going. They're hungry. What are they hungry for? You know, to steal, kill and destroy, John 10:10, we see that scripturally. So when you take the scriptural and then you take what he says that you're like. Again, let me say this, he will tell you and I have quotes, all kinds of quotes of him, he'll say, I'm not a theologian. You know, I'm a classicist, I'm a medieval literature guy. I'm a lay person in the Anglican Church. And so there are times, again, what I would disagree with his theology, because he wasn't trained in that, but he's still a brilliant thinker. And so in these times, I think many times he was biblical, more biblical than he even knew. And so, you know, it's like, oh, he said this and here's 30 scriptures to back them up. So it's kind of fun to see that way. But what he describes as these beings, they are meant, who are they out for? They're out for themselves. They're out for fear of punishment, and they're hungry for their own self-promotion, self-exaltation, everything opposite of Jesus.

Nathan Jones: Absolutely.

Tim Moore: Mondo, I'll tell you what, this has been so rich and I think there's so much more that we could really explore about "The Screwtape Letters." I'm going to do this. I'm going to make an audible and Nathan, we're going to extend to yet another week because I think there's too much to pack into one episode of Christ in Prophecy. Mondo, will you stay with us for another conversation about C.S. Lewis' insights and "The Screwtape Letters?"

Mondo Gonzales: Absolutely.

Tim Moore: Alright, folks come back again next week when we will continue this conversation. I know it will be a blessing to you. Godspeed.

End of Program