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Richard Platt, *As One Devil to Another: A Fiendish Correspondence in the Tradition of C. S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters.*

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Richard Platt, *As One Devil to Another: A Fiendish Correspondence in the Tradition of C. S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters.* Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2012. 128 pp. ISBN 1414371667.

Most who come to *As One Devil to Another*, Richard Platt's homage to *The Screwtape Letters*, will already be devotees of C. S. Lewis. They will not be disappointed. Here are many familiar conceits and ideas reviewed and re-argued: the philological arm of the tempters' Training College, for example, the importance of inhabiting the Present, an exposition on 'self-love' adapted from *Mere Christianity*. There is even a Narnian cameo at the end. But it would be wrong to say that the whole is simply *crambe repetita*. As Walter Hooper writes in his preface, the book takes Lewis' work and moves it 'forward', in the sense that Platt considers peculiarities of contemporary life unimagined in 1942, when *The Screwtape Letters* appeared (though on education, *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, first published in America in 1959, remains remarkably prescient of the 21st century).

Platt's literary style owes something to his source of inspiration, but the mimicry is not intended to be precise – a wise decision, since, in the case of Lewis, style was so much part of the man himself that any attempt at exact imitation would have fallen short. Instead, we have vignettes more mannered than those in the original *Screwtape*, and we hear, in turn, of an entrepreneur whose son contracts scarlet fever, a young academic studying English literature, her Christian aunt, a squirrel-feeding scientist, and a gardener who inevitably recalls the figure Mary Magdalene addressed beside the tomb of the resurrected Christ. The heightening of these novelistic elements does not detract from any enjoyment. But part of the power of *The Screwtape Letters* – despite the backdrop of the Second World War blitz – lies in its insistence on the daily insinuation of temptation into people's lives, however ordinary these may be. Of Lewis' human protagonists, we learn very little in fact, and the epistolary emphasis is on argument. As Platt's scenario is more artificial, the letters of his devil Scardagger are correspondingly less intimate than those of

Screwtape. This is unfortunate, since it is the feeling of intimacy with the devil which makes Lewis' book both fascinating and frightening.

That said, ventriloquism on behalf of devilry is not easy, as is clear from attempts by others. Compare, for example, Dorothy Sayers' memorandum from the tempter Sluckdrib, part of a letter of 13 May 1943 that she wrote to Lewis. As good a stylist as Sayers was, Sluckdrib's writing is more ponderous and less readable than anything by Screwtape. It is impressive, therefore, that Platt has been able to maintain a high standard over 31 letters, the same number as in the original. Some will feel that he has too many 'Aunt Sallies', too many targets too easily made the objects of satire: political correctness, the license of the internet, reality television, cosmetic surgery. These are all weighed and, unsurprisingly, found wanting. But Platt also raises more explicitly theological and ethical problems that repay attention, discussing, for example, 'diabolic virtues', the nature of charity, and spiritual presences. There are also sections on controversial aspects of sexual equality and identity that will be of interest, even if one does not agree with the entire exposition.

Above all, then, *As One Devil to Another* makes one asks questions. As with *The Screwtape Letters*, it intends to combat 'nonsense in the intellect' that 'may reinforce corruption in the will'. It forces us to ask those questions which, as individuals, we need always to ask: 'Is it righteous? Is it prudent? Is it possible?' (Letter 25, *The Screwtape Letters*).

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