

The Kingdom of Noise: A Screwtape Letter for the 21st Century

In 1942, C.S. Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters*, an imaginary collection of letters between a senior devil (Screwtape) and his neophyte pupil (Wormwood) on the techniques and tactics for harassing the Enemy (God) and seducing, distracting, and frustrating his followers (Christians). The following is an updated version on this theme.

My Dear Despicable Wormwood,

You magnificent wretch. I am delighted to hear of your progress. Only a year ago you quieted the pandemonium amongst the rank-and-vile with your preposterous notion that a fiery car crash would bring about the glorious completion of your assignment.... Now, thank Satan, you have come to see that a traffic jam or a missing shirt or a slow cashier in the checkout line are far more effective. Your assignment's true colors, crimson and gray, are beginning to show – but be patient, his rejection of the Enemy may take a while. Next, try spoiling his milk or placing a squirrel in his attic.

Good news! The latest commendations have arrived from the Council of the Pit. You impress the lower-downs, my zealous Wormwood. They have heard of your proposals to the Noise Proliferation Committee (NPC). Indeed, places of solitude and moments of silence grow ever more scarce in the Enemy's vast and vulgar dominion. Oh, what euphoria to see his insufferable creatures constantly multi-tasking, rushing to fill the dead air with a cacophony of cell phones and muzak, leaf blowers and motorcycles, 24-hour news and ipods – not to mention car stereos cranked up full-blast and serenading the cityscape with the hellish sounds of hip-hop and heavy metal. Those nauseating humans cannot escape their self-made dungeon of din! My pride bubbles like brimstone, Wormwood.

It is down-wrong delicious that you are able to entice your assignments into believing that quiet and solitude are boring and a waste of time. We must be the demon in the whirlwind, invading their private space, cluttering their innermost being with commotion and non-stop entertainment. Remember: our greatest ally is constant and pervasive stimulation.

Make these loathsome creatures feel empty without an iphone in hand or a TV blaring in the background. Tune their alarm clock to a raucous station with bombastic DJs. Convince them that they need to watch *The Today Show* to keep up with the news. Arrange birthday parties for their urchins at Chuck E. Cheese and for adults at Dave & Buster's. Call their cell phone on their way to work and especially during meals. Put TV screens in restaurants, waiting rooms, and airplanes – anywhere humans might have time to sit and reflect. Make sure every restaurant serenades them with the latest pop tunes, and turn up the volume so it's impossible to have a quiet dinner and a focused conversation.

When the miserable wretches escape into a movie theater to indulge in the latest Hollywood regurgitation of sex and violence and obscenity, be certain to pump up the volume during the previews of "Coming Attractions." Our research shows that nothing bombards their senses or raises their blood pressure any higher than this form of mental abuse. Also, continue offering bargain deals to Six Flags and Walt Disney World for the urchins and gambling casinos for



the “adults,” and convince them that a weekend in the mountains or a hike in the woods is positively boring by comparison.

Over time the humans will grow unaware of the high-pitched ringing in their ears, their heart racing, and their constant craving for more volume and more stimulation. Delightful!

But oh, how dreadful it is if they do notice and, worse yet, begin to reject the delightful opiates we offer. An hour’s walk or a quiet evening alone can be hazardous. Even a drive with a broken radio or CD player carries risk. Peace and quietude, after all, are the Enemy’s handiwork. He waits patiently for them in the stillness, whispering for them to rest or ponder or [gasp!] even *pray* and *meditate!* The very thought sickens me!

I trust you understand what is at stake. If allowed to contemplate the empty pursuits and mindless activities that fill their days, there is no telling what horrific changes they might make in their lives. As long as the volume is high and the lights are flashing, there is little danger of this.

Continue to corrupt with their traditions. Change Thanksgiving into “Turkey Day” and Christmas into the “Holiday Season” or “Winter Solstice.” Most importantly, make Easter into another commercial orgy with celebrations of Easter Bunnies and the Spring equinox. Promote Sunday as NFL Game Day (in the fall and winter), Yard Work Day (in the spring and summer), or Shopping Day (all year-round).

If some still insist on going to church, continue our propaganda campaign to turn worship services into entertainment extravaganzas and orgies of word-mongering that deaden their sensitivities. Convince the pathetic, over-stimulated little idiots that they must make church exciting so as to be “relevant” to the postmodern generation. We must not permit prolonged periods of silence – especially in church! Remember: when allowed to face life as it really is, stripped of the comfort provided by their dizzying distractions, our subjects often choose against our ways. We *must* keep them entertained and distracted!

Keep in mind that silence, solitude, and reflection is a breeding ground for all manner of destructive outcomes. Rest gives them refreshed bodies and clear minds. Clarity draws them to that which we most hate: truth. In such moments their vision grows strong and their purpose is rekindled. I warn you: for Hell’s sake, do not let this happen!

Some demons say it is of lesser importance, but I would advise you to keep all thoughts of old friendships, childhood dreams, or yearnings for simple delights – reading a classic, relaxing with a glass of wine, or meditating in a garden – far from them. These are the noxious things of the kingdom of peace; we, on the other hand, are the agents of the kingdom of noise!

So hurry! Cue the ambulance and the beeping cell phone, and erect the Victoria Secrets and Calvin Klein billboards in the most conspicuous places where they’ll draw the most attention and, with luck, cause the most accidents. Make their heads spin, their eyes dart, and their minds work overtime. As much as possible, create more traffic jams and road rage. Even in times of silence, flash a new thought every few seconds across their distracted, undisciplined minds. We have made great gains in recent years with ADD and AD/HD. But there is still so much we can do.

Now if necessary, you may even need to exploit some of the Enemy’s tools to achieve our ends. Use good causes to keep their schedules jam-packed. Remember: even good music and the occasional good TV show drown-out silence just as the bad ones do.

Remember: Do not grow weary in creating noise, sowing confusion, and promoting random acts of selfishness. I eagerly await your report upon your return from your research trip to Las Vegas – the closest thing we’ve been able to create yet to Hell on Earth!

Your despicable uncle,
Screwtape

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON

