

Democracy – Excerpts from “Screwtape Proposes a Toast” by C.S. Lewis

The following excerpts come from “Screwtape Proposes a Toast” by C.S. Lewis, a sequel to his popular book, “The Screwtape Letters.” “The Screwtape Letters” was first published in 1942, and “Screwtape Proposes a Toast” followed in 1959.

I selected these excerpts as they struck me as being quite timely in light of the current political climate – where radical voices are clamoring about what they view to be threats to “democracy.”

Lewis is writing in the form of a letter from Satan and his leadership team to their minions trying to guide people away from Christianity. With that in mind, following are the excerpts:

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“Democracy is properly the name of a political system, even a system of voting ...”

“You can use the word Democracy to sanction in [a human’s] thoughts the most degrading (and also the least enjoyable) of all human feelings ... the feeling that prompts a man to say, ‘I’m as good as you.’”

“The claim to equality is made only by those who feel themselves to be in some way inferior. What it expresses is precisely the itching, smarting, writhing awareness of an inferiority which the patient refuses to accept. .. And he resents every kind of superiority in others; denigrates it, wishes its annihilation. Presently he suspects every mere difference of being a claim to superiority. No one must be different from himself in voice, clothes, manners, recreations, choice of food.”

“Here’s a man who says he doesn’t like hot dogs – thinks himself too good for them no doubt. Here’s a man who hasn’t turned on the jukebox – he must be one of those highbrows and is doing it to show off. If they were the right sort of chaps they’d be like me. They’ve no business to be different. It’s undemocratic.”

“Under the influence of this incantation those who are in any or every way inferior can labor more wholeheartedly and successfully than ever before to pull down everyone else to their own level.”

“Young humans now sometimes suppress an incipient taste for classical music or good literature because it might prevent their being like Folks. That people who would really wish to be – and are offered grace which would enable them to be – honest, chaste, or temperate, refuse it. To accept might make them different, might offend against the Way of Life, take them out of togetherness, impair their integrations with the group. They might (horror of horrors) become individuals.”

“[[There is an] overall movement towards the discrediting, and finally the elimination, of every kind of human excellence – moral, cultural, social, or intellectual.”

“Thus Tyrants could practice, in a sense, ‘democracy.’ But now ‘democracy’ can do the same work without any other tyranny than her own. The little stalks will now of themselves bite the tops off the big ones. The big ones are beginning to bite off their own in their desire to be Like stalks.”

“The spirit of ‘I’m as good as you’ has already become something more than a generally social influence. It begins to work itself into their educational system. ... The basic principle of the new education is to be that dunces and idlers must not be made to feel inferior to intelligent and industrious pupils. That would be ‘undemocratic.’ These difference between the pupils – for they are obviously and nakedly *individual* difference – must be disguised.”

“At universities, examinations must be framed so that nearly all the students get good marks. Entrance examinations must be framed so that all, or nearly all, citizens can go to universities, whether they have any power (or wish) to profit by higher education or not. At schools the children who are too stupid or lazy to learn languages and mathematics and elementary science can be set to doing the things that children used to do in their spare time. But all the time there must be no

faintest hint that they are inferior to the children who are at work. Whatever nonsense they are engaged in must have – I believe the English already use the phrase – ‘parity of esteem.’”

“All incentives to learn and all penalties for not learning will vanish.”

“[Teachers] will be far too busy reassuring the dunces and patting them on the back to waste any time on real teaching.”

“Of course this would not follow unless all education became state education. But it will. That is part of the same movement. Penal taxes, designed for that purpose, are liquidation the Middle Class, the class who were prepared to save and spend and make sacrifices in order to have their children privately educated. The removal of this class ... is an inevitable effect of the spirit that says ‘I’m as good as you.’”

“Democracy, or the democratic spirit, leads to a nation without great men, a nation mainly of subliterates, morally flaccid from lack of discipline in youth, full of the cocksureness which flattery breeds on ignorance, and soft from lifelong pampering.”

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[Bob’s closing notes: The reason our nation has survived and flourished for 250 years is that we are a Constitutional Republic – not a Democracy where the majority can impose and force their opinions on everyone else. This is especially true when a tyrannical government can cheat on elections so that the people believe they are making decisions at the voting booth, when in fact the intellectual elite are pulling the strings to generate their desired outcomes. The only protection for this is our Constitutional Republic form of government, coupled with Capitalism which permits every individual to work at improving themselves and their station.]

Excerpts selected by Bob Evely