

The Soulbane Stratagem: Diabolical Subterfuge That Threatens to Destroy Us

by Norman Jetmundsen

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Group, 2000

(242 pages; \$24.95, cloth)

It was in the mid-1950s that Thomas Merton, telling me, "You need to read this," handed me a book called *The Screwtape Letters*, by somebody named C. S. Lewis. Although I had read nearly every published page of Merton up to that point, I had never so much as heard of Lewis. This polite suggestion by the former, nonetheless, proved to be an important introduction, for C. S. Lewis would come to play a very formative role in my inner world and, eventually, in the narrative imagination of my children. Reading, for the first time, the famous correspondence of the devil Screwtape to his lackluster nephew Wormwood would in due course lead to a more gracious acquaintance with friendlier characters, such as Ransom and Reepicheep and the other denizens of Perelandra and Narnia.

Let us suppose, however, that *The Screwtape Letters*, in defiance of a popular literary bias, were not a work of fiction at all. Fancy for a moment that Lewis did not publish his own resourceful musings descriptive of demonic temptations, but some actual letters written by a real demon named Screwtape to his real nephew demon Wormwood—letters that Lewis had somehow stumbled upon during one of his walks around Oxford. Imagine, that is to say, that the book, *The Screwtape Letters*, were not fiction but actual history.

Such is the engaging premise of another book, here under review, *The Soulbane Stratagem*, by an Alabama lawyer named Norman Jetmundsen. Apparently resting on a some-

what autobiographical base, this is a story of an American graduate student at Oxford, who begins as an unbeliever but is gradually converted as he becomes familiar with both the books and the friends of the great Lewis. This transformation is occasioned, however, by the young man's discovering some mysterious reports by a devil named Soulbane to his superior demon Foulheart. The first installment of this ongoing correspondence, indeed, makes mention of the previous book by Lewis. Just as Screwtape had given instructions to Wormwood on the art of seducing souls into hell. Soulbane rehearses to Foulheart, in these new documents, the progress currently being made against the human race by various demonic activities both in the world and in the church. Astute readers, at all familiar with the current moral state of society, will recognize that these reports do not in the slightest exaggerate our present dilemma.

What about this new book, however? Is it a work of imaginative fiction or an actual historical account about the discovery of some new demonic files? The present reviewer, not wanting to diminish your fun at reading it, will here proffer no opinion on this question. Besides, there is a love interest in the plot, and no responsible reviewer wants to give away the ending.

—Patrick Henry Reardon

Senior Editor Patrick Henry Reardon is pastor of All Saints Antiochian Orthodox Church in Chicago, Illinois.