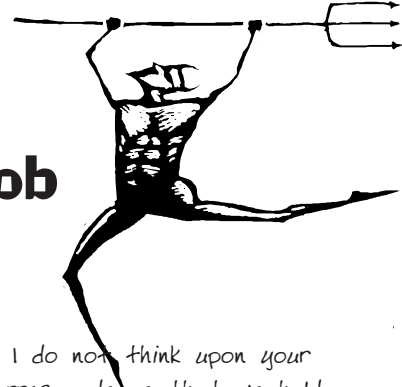




Letter to Slumgob



DEAR SLUMGOB,

Believe me, my dear student, not a day goes by in which I do not think upon your well-being. That is why I never fail to continue this delightful correspondence that we hold together, even during the times which you call your slow periods, such as the one you are in now. You say that you feel discouraged over the embarrassingly trivial sins you have accomplished in your patient over the past few months, and that his weightier sins are somewhat rare and short-lived. But I would bid you do not lose heart. Naturally, as a young tempter you are anxious to report spectacular sins for your patient; but your youthful over-ambition will hamper long-term results. Remember that there are no "trivial" sins. Every little blemish in your patient's character counts. As long as you are slowly pulling the young man away from the Adversary's sway, gradually edging him from the Light, you are on the road to success. Murder and larceny are no better as sins than smugness if smugness will do the job.

The opposite is also true—if he makes tiny bits of progress toward the Adversary each day, regardless how small the steps, it is cause for alarm. Few things are more dangerous in a human than daily progress; for with every passing day there is an unseen strengthening of resolve and steeling of the will which go together to make his eternal destiny look increasingly bleak. This is the shape that our battle with the Adversary happens to take on: each side advancing upon each soul by small, quivering steps. For the most part, we do not have the ability to produce a terrible, ghastly fiend in a single day; and apparently neither does the Adversary produce holy saints in a day. Each side labors constantly and (almost) tirelessly to win as many souls as it can before that last Day in which the whole war ends, the soldiers and aftermath are assessed, and the victor is finally declared.

And there is one key element in the makeup of human nature that will, in the last analysis, decide the outcome of the war: the human will. All our hopes and dreams, our labors and strivings—as well as those of the Adversary—rest upon this one essential factor. That is, the central aim of our fighting is to gain maximum control over their wills. Of course, it would have been far more pleasurable to attack the loathsome creatures by simply swooping down, slaughtering them, and carrying off their souls to our dark abyss. But the Adversary has refused for us (as well as for Himself) the method of force, in order that they might have the "choice" to favor either our dominion or the Adversary's. I am now that, seen in this light, you might consider it a petty ordeal, rather below a demon's dignity, to have to solicit the capricious wills of the contemptible brutes instead of just using sheer force; but that is a mode of work we all must adjust to.

But enough generalities—what we care about at the moment is the spiritual state of your patient. And before you begin your inexperienced



babble about "utterly corrupting his will" or "blackening it to a shade darker than charcoal," I must tell you about a tactic that has proven by our Research Division to be reliable for patients like yours. In order gain command of his will, your primary goal should be to separate his Will from his Mind as far as possible. What does that mean? For example, you have complained to me recently how your patient has contracted the undesirable habit of reading his Bible everyday. Of course, the optimum behavior we would hope for any human would be that he not read his Bible at all; but your patient's condition will need the special treatment I am about to describe.

Bible reading is not as bad as it seems as long as what passes through his mind while reading does not end up in his will. That is, no matter how emotionally moved he seems to be by a particular passage, if he fails to carry it out after he has closed his Bible, there is little to worry about. You may let the dupe sit and read the Sermon on the Mount all he wants and enjoy the "lofty serenity" of the words, provided that he is lulled into thinking that living the words out is as easy as the mere reading of them. For when he begins to treat the Sermon on the Mount merely as a piece of fine poetry, he will fail to recognize how dreadfully difficult the Adversary's commands really are. So long, that is, as he is reading it as a piece of art rather than as battle orders to be carried out, his actions will never follow through-his will shall be frozen though his emotions dance. Have you noticed what a sigh of pleasure he evokes when reading "go the second mile" but how rarely he is willing to go the first mile when actually asked by someone else? It is because the phrase entered his mind easily enough but never made it to his will.

When either his mind or will are affected to any degree, the symptoms are very easily detected. His mind (or emotions) produces mainly sighs, which do not pose a very great challenge to our work; but his will produces action, which is precisely the symptom we want to avoid at all costs. For the more he acts upon what he reads, the quicker he will follow subsequent commands and the faster he will approach the Adversary's realm. Contrariwise, the less he acts, the easier it will be to keep his soul in something of a vegetable state, and the less resistance we will encounter in bringing him safely into our realm. Ultimately, however, after you have frozen his will, you should proceed to freeze his emotions as well; for even his emotions, though not very dangerous, still have small sparks of life that, if left unchecked, could reactive a frozen will.

This is a very subtle way of acquiring the allegiance of a patient who has strayed from our father's path as far as your patient has. For as the Adversary well knows, each human's true allegiance is signified not by the symbols worn about his or her body, but by the state of the will. That is why the Adversary makes such a fuss about aligning the humans' will with His own and all: He never numbers His army by how many are sitting on the field reading the battle plan, or by how many are wearing the official uniform, but by how many actually go out into the battle and fight. Therefore, you need not worry about persuading the young man to formally join our side right now; just get him to sit passively on the Adversary's side and do nothing. His passivity will progressively weaken his will until a point at which you may begin making substantial advances upon his soul. I will be awaiting your next report shortly.

YOUR TRUSTWORTHY TEACHER,
QUAGMIRE