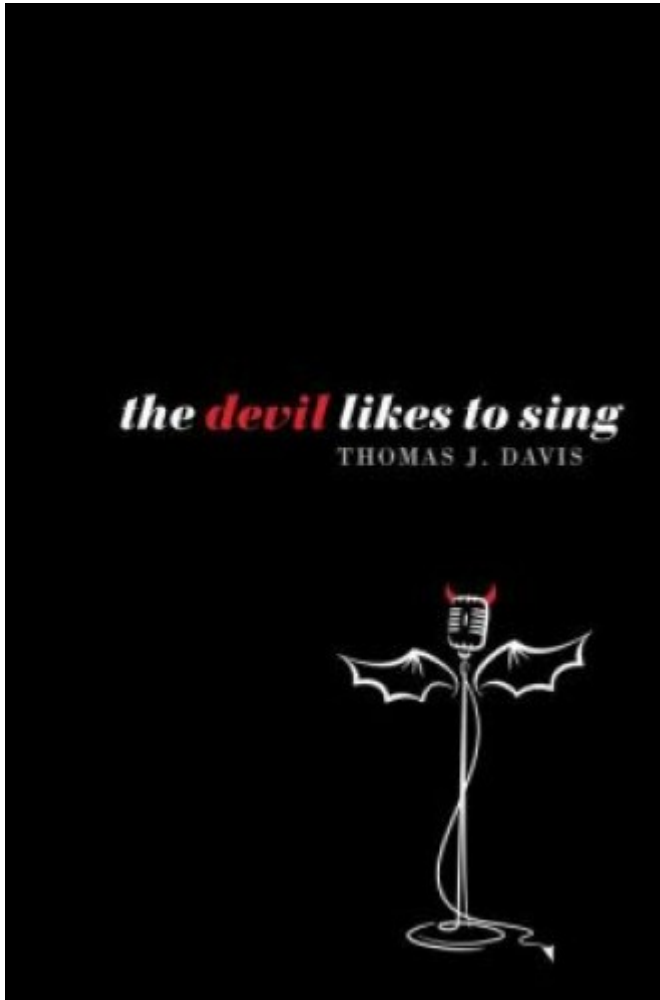


Me and the devil

By [Richard A. Kauffman](#)

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## In Review



### **The Devil Likes to Sing**

By Thomas J. Davis

Cascade

Comparisons between C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* and Thomas Davis's *The Devil Likes to Sing* are inevitable, but I can't go there. When I tried reading

*Screwtape* years ago, I just couldn't get into it. (Let me assure the Lewis fans who just gasped in horror that I have read many of his other books.)

Timothy McFarland, the narrator of *The Devil Likes to Sing*, is ABD from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Despite his failure to get a dissertation approved by his doctoral committee, he hangs around [Hyde Park](#), developing a career as a hack writer of schmaltzy gift books. When his wife walks out on him over his self-possession and selfishness, the devil starts showing up. The devil sometimes looks like John F. Kennedy, sometimes takes on other guises, and sometimes appears to McFarland the way he shows up for the rest of us: merely in his head.

The devil may have been a fallen angel, but in Davis's version the devil is not a complete unbeliever. He accepts the idea of the incarnation, which he saw as a liability when applied to himself—it limited him in time and space. The devil not only likes to sing: he likes church, even the Eucharist. The reason the devil likes church seems based on his own conceit that he has something to say about how the church does its business.

The devil, as it turns out, teaches McFarland a few things about theology. He lectures him on Origen's flesh-denying theology, on Anselm's famous explanation of the incarnation—which in reality was about Jesus' atonement (*Cur Deus Homo*)—on Calvin's *Institutes*, and on the consequences of a very real but limited free will.

McFarland manages to get in a few religious jabs of his own. He grew up in southern Methodism, where getting your heart strangely warmed was what really mattered. But his wife is from a Catholic background, so the Episcopal church seemed a good compromise. McFarland notes this contradiction in the Episcopal Church: the Book of Common Prayer is infused with Augustinianism, but Episcopal preaching is Pelagian through and through. He lampoons his Catholic in-laws' predilection for shrines to the saints and his evangelical parents' corny ideas about evangelism.

The devil encourages McFarland to take up a more serious writing career, to write life as he really sees it—or is it life as the devil sees it? The two later take a day trip to the suburbs together, where McFarland witnesses something (I won't spoil this part of the story for you) that reveals the devil for what he really is.

*The Devil Likes to Sing* is laugh-out-loud funny at places and clever throughout. It is—as McFarland's estranged wife describes his own book—"quirky fun in some spots, sad in others."

Perhaps I should now try reading *The Screwtape Letters* again, don't you think?