



Reflections

June 2013 - *The Dangers of the Inner Ring*

Bullied at boarding school by cliques, and later having the smug satisfaction of being part of the intelligentsia, Lewis knew both the hurt of being ostracized and the attraction of being accepted by “the inner ring,” those groups that thrive on snobbery, and other forms of exclusion. In an oration at Kings College, London, Lewis said,



My main purpose in this address is simply to convince you that this desire [to be part of the inner ring] is one of the great permanent mainsprings of human action. It is one of the factors which go to make up the world as we know it—this whole pell-mell of struggle, competition, confusion, graft, disappointment, and advertisement, and... Unless you take measures to prevent it, this desire is going to be one of the chief motives of your life, from the first day on which you enter your profession until the day when you are too old to care...

Over a drink or a cup of coffee, disguised as a triviality and sandwiched between two jokes, from the lips of a man, or woman, whom you have recently been getting to know rather better and whom you hope to know better still—just at the moment when you are most anxious not to appear crude, or naïf or a prig—the hint will come. It will be the hint of something which... the public, the ignorant, romantic public, would never understand: something which even the outsiders in your own profession are apt to make a fuss about: but something, says your new friend, which “we”—and at the word “we” you try not to blush for mere pleasure—something “we always do”. ...And you will be drawn in, if you are drawn in, not by desire for gain or ease, but simply because at that moment, when the cup was so near your lips, you cannot bear to be thrust back again into the cold outer world. It would be so terrible to see the other man’s face—that genial, confidential, delightfully sophisticated face—turn suddenly cold and contemptuous, to know that you had been tried for the Inner Ring and rejected.

...Of all passions the passion for the Inner Ring is most skillful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things.

...Once the first novelty is worn off, the members of this circle will be no more interesting than your old friends. Why should they be? You were not looking for virtue or kindness or loyalty or humour or learning or wit or any of the things that can be really enjoyed. You merely wanted to be “in”. And that is a pleasure that cannot last.

The momentary satisfaction of being part of the in crowd, or the clique is never worth the compromise. It only leads to a loss of integrity and to an endless search for acceptance.

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”

Hebrews 11:24-26 (NIV)

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, “The Inner Ring.” Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1965, pp. 61-64.