



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

Reflections

March 2018 – *CHANGE AND PERMANENCE*

One of the topics C.S. Lewis addressed in *The Screwtape Letters* was the natural enjoyment people have for change in their lives and how the devil can twist this into something very different. In this book, Lewis is writing from the devil's perspective — showing us his temptation playbook. In one of the letters, senior devil Screwtape counsels his nephew Wormwood:

The horror of the Same Old Thing is one of the most valuable passions we have produced in the human heart — an endless source of heresies in religion, folly in counsel, infidelity in marriage, and inconstancy in friendship. The humans live in time, and experience reality successively. To experience much of it, therefore, they must experience many different things; in other words, they must experience change. And since they need change, the Enemy (being a hedonist at heart) has made change pleasurable to them, just as He has made eating pleasurable. But since He does not wish them to make change, any more than eating, an end in itself, He has balanced the love of change in them by a love of permanence. He has contrived to gratify both tastes together in the very world He has made, by that union of change and permanence which we call Rhythm. He gives them the seasons, each season different yet every year the same, so that spring is always felt as a novelty yet always as the recurrence of an immemorial theme. He gives them in His Church a spiritual ear; they change from a fast to a feast, but it is the same feast as before.

Now just as we pick out and exaggerate the pleasure of eating to produce gluttony, so we pick out this natural pleasantness of change and twist it into a demand for absolute novelty. This demand is entirely our workmanship.

This demand is valuable in various ways. In the first place it diminishes pleasure while increasing desire. The pleasure of novelty is by its very nature more subject than any other to the law of diminishing returns. And continued novelty costs money, so that the desire for it spells avarice or unhappiness or both... But the greatest triumph of all is to elevate his horror of the Same Old Thing into a philosophy so that nonsense in the intellect may reinforce corruption in the will... The Enemy loves platitudes. Of a proposed course of action He wants men, so far as I can see, to ask very simple questions; is it righteous? is it prudent? is it possible? Now if we can keep men asking 'Is it in accordance with the general movement of our time? Is it progressive or reactionary? Is this the way that History is going?' they will neglect the relevant questions. And the questions they *do* ask are, of course, unanswerable; for they do not know the future, and what the future will be depends very largely on just those choices which they now invoke the future to help them to make. As a result, while their minds are buzzing in this vacuum, we have the better chance to slip in and bend them to the action we have decided on.¹



Do you find contentment both in the routine pleasures of life as well as in exciting new experiences? How does thinking about permanence affect you in considering proposed courses of action?

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”
HEBREWS 13:8 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, HarperSanFrancisco, 2001, pp. 135-139.