

C.S. Lewis' theory on why so many modern marriages fail

The last several years have seen a rise in articles sounding alarms about the decline of marriage. [A Salon article](#) and its accompanying graph from earlier in the summer are a perfect example.

According to *Salon*, marriage rates have dropped roughly 30 percent since 1980, to 6.9 per 1,000 people, and everything from religious decline to working women has been blamed for the trend. But as *Salon* asserts, neither of these reasons, nor the trend toward cohabitation, fully explain the decline.

So what does?

If C.S. Lewis was alive today, he might have another theory to throw in the ring for consideration.

In a [1942 letter to Daphne Harwood](#), Lewis addressed the issue of "Being-in-love," a state which he implied had overtaken the traditional view of marriage as a partnership to promote social stability:

*"The trouble arises when poets and others set up this thing (good in certain conditions with its own proper degree of goodness) as an absolute. Which many do. An innocent and well-intentioned emphasis on the importance of Being-in-love with one's spouse (i.e. its superiority over lust or ambition as a basis for marriage) is in fact widely twisted into the doctrine that only Being-in-love sanctifies marriage and that therefore as soon as you are tired of your spouse you get a divorce. Thus the over-praising of a finite good, the pretence that it is absolute, defeats itself and corrupts the very good it set out to exalt: and what begins by wanting to go beyond the prayer-book idea of marriage ends by reducing marriage to mere concubinage. **Treat 'Love' as a god and you***

in fact make it a fiend.

""

And is it Being-in-love that really makes the happy marriage work? Isn't it something different – higher? Eros won't do without Agape."

It's hard to deny that modern ideology has made "being-in-love" the primary (if not sole) prerequisite for marriage. Is it possible that in placing so much emphasis on this one aspect, we have turned marriage into something that is to be feared and despised rather than encouraged as a means for familial and social stability?

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