

The Diabolical Desire That Our Marriages not Result in Romance

A presentation on C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*
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I. Our culture as it is built on instant gratification and perpetual entertainment

A. Lewis's final essay, "We Have No 'Right to Happiness'": "That fatal principle [that the purpose of life is to have a good time], once allowed [into the marital realm] ... must sooner or later seep through our whole lives. We thus advance toward a state or a society in which not only each man but every impulse in man claims *carte blanche*. And then, though our technological skill may help us to survive a little longer, our civilization will have died at its heart, and will—one dare not even add 'unfortunately'—be swept away" (*God in the Dock*, 322).

B. A culture in which the Eye has triumphed over the Ear (ST, XX)

1. The triumph of the youth cult and the dread of growing old
2. The resulting masculinization of women's bodily appearance, conforming it to the coke-bottle shape, or else bulimia and anorexia become pandemic
3. The difference between seeing with and through the eyes
4. What it would mean to cultivate marriages built on the friendship of hearing and listening (FL, 152)?

II. Hence the need to understand true Eros in relation to true Venus

A. Eros as the love which drives us out of ourselves, so that we care drastically for the Beloved, not wanting to slake sexual thirst but to enjoy and delight in the person of the Other (FL, 133-35).

B. Venus as bodily desire that reminds us that we belong to the animal species, and thus as something that should be made more comical than superserious, as our culture has done (FL, 138-41).

1. The body as neither Pagan temple nor Puritan prison but Brother Ass (FL, 143).
2. And thus made more distinctively *us* when clothed than when naked and stripped (FL, 147).

III. When Eros (not Venus alone) becomes Demonic

A. By way of the satanic notion that "being in love" is the sign of true love (ST, XVIII) when in fact it can be either favorable or unfavorable to marriage (ST, XIX).

1. Hence our assumption that marriage is an "extended date," so that "I love you" really means "I love me and want you," with the result that almost 55% of all American marriages end in divorce.
2. The counter-evidence of the first 1300 years of Christian existence, wherein nearly all marriages were arranged, as they often still are in Asia and Africa.
3. Our misunderstanding of Paul's warning that "It is better to marry than to burn" (FL, 137-38).

B. Because Eros becomes imperious in its demand that all other loves be subjected to it (FL, 150, 154, 156).

IV. True marriage preserves Eros and Romance by vows that "do the work of Eros when Eros is not present" (FL, 159)

A. Hence it is based on "fidelity, fertility, and goodwill" because it means that "the good of one self is to be the good of the other" (ST, XVIII) in a life of *courtesy* (FL, 158).

B. True love, therefore, is not blind but bound, self-bound by an unbreakable promise. (G. K. Chesterton)

C. Hence Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prison letter to his niece Renate Schleicher as she was about to marry: "Marriage is more than your love for each other, for it is God's holy ordinance, through which he wills to perpetuate the human race till the end of time.... In your love you see only the heaven of your own happiness, but in marriage you are placed in a post of responsibility toward the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal—it is a status, an office.... It is not your love that sustains your marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love." (*Letters and Papers from Prison*, 42-43)