

## Excerpt from Chapter 3 of A Civilization of Love, by Carl Anderson

It is the unique contribution of Christianity to have elevated love to the center of human life. Love, of course, has always been known to human beings, and humans have always expressed love to friends and family. As we have seen with the two greatest commandments, it was implicit in the Hebrew revelation, but it was not entirely explicit. And while love was praised by the Greek and Roman philosophers, for them it often seemed to be merely one value among many other values. It was Jesus Christ who revealed to humanity that it is love that lies at the center of the universe, that, in Dante's words, it is love that "moves the sun and the other stars."<sup>3</sup>

But why? Why should love, out of all the values and qualities in the universe, enjoy this privileged position as the source and mover of all things? All religions begin by asserting the existence of a power greater than ourselves, greater than all the forces of nature, visible and invisible, and which has given birth to these forces. For many religions, this power is ultimately impersonal. It is an energy, a dynamic – what the *Star Wars* films call "the Force." The Chinese speak of the *Tao*. For Buddhists, it is the primordial nature of mind. For Western philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, it is "Being." But Christianity differs from these views in one fundamental sense: it teaches that this Higher Power is ultimately *personal*. God is not an impersonal force like magnetism or electricity. God is in some ineffable way like us as persons and relates to us as persons. Genesis tells us that man and woman were made in the "image" and "likeness" of God.<sup>4</sup> It is this "image" and "likeness" that, in a sense, provides a frame of reference that makes possible some understanding of the divine mystery and permits a "personal" relationship with God. In Christianity, God is revealed to exist in a mysterious unity of Three Persons, whose mutual relationship is love.

Divine love, then, implies an *other*. This revelation of a God who exists in a personal communion of love reveals to us profound mystery. Love involves (at least) two persons, two selves. To be two, they must in some way be separate. Yet they cannot be totally separate; otherwise they would have nothing to do with each other; they would not even be aware of each other's existence. There must be a unity, and yet at the same time there must be difference – both symmetry and asymmetry. Because of the analogous nature between God's love and human love, human love retains the requirements of symmetry and asymmetry. So love in some mysterious fashion both separates and connects two individual selves. It *separates* the two because it does not seek to engulf them or destroy them as separate entities. It *connects* them because, by their very nature, they are directed toward another person in a way that enables them to have a loving relationship with each other. And this relationship is fundamentally good. It is satisfying and pleasing and joyful for both.

Thus we might say that the "structure" of human existence is love, given to us in the very form of creation by the God who is love. The world as we know it would not be possible without love. Without this structure of love, everything either would have collapsed long ago into an indeterminate mass or would have been incarcerated in a prison of isolation. It is love and its structure that makes it possible for our world to exist at all. And the first human sign of this structure of love is that man was created in a unity with difference – man and woman.