

From the Root to the Fruit

I've always loved music. It's played huge part in my life. So when I look at all that's happening in the world today - the anger, division, hatred and vitriol, it's music that comes to mind.

One song in particular recurs regularly: that classic soul tune from Marvin Gaye 'What's Going On'. *"Mother, Mother, there's far too many of you crying; Brother, brother, brother, there's far too many of you dying"*. Sound familiar? What's going on? Marvin continues: *"Father, Father, there's no need to escalate, War is not the answer: Only love can conquer hate"*.

Only love can conquer hate? What an interesting idea; a plea we find echoed elsewhere. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr once said, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that". That brings another song to mind: the Black Eyed Peas' hit 'Where Is the Love?'

Where is this love that will conquer hate? What is it's source? It doesn't seem to be very evident today, does it? The Christian faith has unique and deeply relevant answers to these questions.

One of the main distinctions of the Christian faith from any other religion is found in the Christian conception of God. The differences make a huge difference.

In John's Gospel, we read: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."*

John attests that 'the Word' was in the beginning. This 'Word' created all things that have come to exist. In other words, 'the Word' is primary and the material universe secondary.

For many cultures this statement represents a complete reversal of thinking. They would argue that the material universe is eternal and therefore primary.

You see, this 'Word' (**God the Son**) is both God, and is also with God. How can this be? It means that there is a 'was/with' relationship; an 'I/you' relationship at the core of who God is.

The Christian faith accepts that God is revealed as a community of persons constituting one being. He was before anything was created. This means that the material universe is not the ultimate. Ultimate reality is found in the person of God, and because God exists eternally as a 'relationship' of persons, relationship is central to all of reality.

The relationship that exists within the Godhead is a relationship marked by love. Scripture tells us that the Son loves the Father, and the Father loves the Son. In fact we are told that God **is** love.

Love existed *before* anything else came to exist because love is grounded in the character of an eternal God and expressed eternally in the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

As apologist Ravi Zacharias (who recently visited Dunedin) put it, "*For the Christian, faith love precedes life*". This constitutes a complete reversal of order from every other worldview, philosophy or religion. In every other worldview, life must precede love.

For the naturalist, a universe must first exist where life has evolved to a point where sentient beings can experience love. Life precedes love.

Worse than that, for naturalism, love is the result of chemical reactions and the preprogrammed drive of DNA to replicate itself. We are at the mercy of our DNA; "dancing to its music", as Richard Dawkins puts it. The consistent naturalist reduces love to lust and inevitably **dispenses** with it in the process. When you look at the western world, do you see a world where love has been reduced to lust?

What about Islam? In Islam, Allah is a monad - one god; one being. If we were to suggest that Allah is loving, then we must ask: 'Who was Allah loving before he created? The answer is of course, no-one! In Islam, life must precede love. Allah must create life - creatures who are capable of love, before he can experience or express love.

Only the Christian faith grounds love in its philosophical foundations. Because love is inherent to the first cause (God), we can expect to see its outworking in reality. Love issues from the root to the fruit. When we don't see love in the fruit, we have every right to conclude that it is not logically consistent with Christian faith.

Conversely, any builder will tell you that the foundations laid determine the kind of building you can build. The same is true in philosophy. If a worldview cannot ground love in its foundations, we shouldn't expect to see its outworking in life.

Our desire and deep need for love lies very close to the core of who we are as humans. Only the Christian worldview provides an adequate foundation from which we can logically say that love is real, eternal and life's ultimate purpose.

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