

# The Value of Love in Terms of Ontological, Epistemological and Social Harmony in George F. McLean's Writings

Emanuel Sălăgean \*

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**ABSTRACT** • The theme of “love” is very present in George F. McLean’s writings, but in this paper, we will refer to three major directions. First, love has an ontological character for him, by the nature of its source and divine manifestation, because “God is love” (1 John 4: 8). Secondly, love is the reason that makes the context favorable to the epistemological experience, at the same time being a tool that facilitates knowledge. And thirdly, love is the ingredient without the social harmony cannot be achieved. McLean is interested in these issues because he is concerned with some functional applications that can make significant contributions to self-knowledge and self-affirmation, as well as to establishing effective relationships between people from different cultures or religions.

**KEYWORDS** • George F. McLean, ontology, epistemology, social harmony, love, person

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In George F. McLean’s writings, we find an original approach by which he relates to love, especially in the way he understands the nature of love and its role in the existence of the person or social communities. Being a phenomenologist, on the one hand, and having concerns for concrete answers to existential dilemmas, on the other hand, McLean grasp through his works certain approaches to this topic so present in theological and philosophical writings. For example, although we find in his books numerous ref-

\* *Adventus* University, Cernica (Ilfov), Romania • [emanuelsalagean@hotmail.com](mailto:emanuelsalagean@hotmail.com)

erences to the three terms used in Greek for love (ἔρως [*eros*], φιλία [*philia*] and ἀγάπη [*agape*]), he is not concerned with certain semantic comparisons. Nor can he refer to love as a motive for awakening the most ardent emotions, as Descartes<sup>1</sup> writes of this feeling in “The Passions of the Soul”. McLean avoid the utilitarian or instrumentalist model that focuses only on the effects of love, whether we are talking about a love of “goodwill or lust,” if we mention the distinction made by Descartes. And last, but not least, McLean is not concerned with the “metaphysics of love”, according to the model proposed by Ortega y Gasset, or by the duality of the human being manifested by the fundamental division between masculine and feminine present in a “culture of love”<sup>2</sup>, as its the Spanish philosopher wanted it.

Yes, McLean is also interested in a humanity in which the "culture of love" predominates, so he seeks love in areas and themes where it seems to be less and less present as a result of tendencies to hide values in public life and concerns that are intended to prohibit the metaphysics and the expression of the sacred. In fact, he believes that love is part of the existence of the human being because in any culture man is defined primarily in relation to the divinity and human landmarks that represent the true social models and ideals of life. In McLean's view,

„the human person is not, as in Aristotle, the servant of nature, but the image of God. Human life is understood then primarily not in terms of physical change, but of Divine light and love. Divine light and love, however, are not distant and unreachable. Christ, like Confucius and others, laid down concrete patterns in which this has been lived and experienced by peoples through the centuries”.<sup>3</sup>

Trying to provide an answer to these tendencies that encourage narcissistic individualism and foster the atomization of society, McLean refers to love presenting its divine origin and its indispensable role, both for personal formation and affirmation, as well as, for the establishment and proper functioning of human communities. His starting argument in this regard is that “reason in its first and basic philosophical articulations was religious”,<sup>4</sup> and McLean believes that at the base of every culture are religious elements that

<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, *Pasiunile sufletului* (București: Ed. științifică și enciclopedică, 1984), 99.

<sup>2</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *Studii despre iubire* (București: Humanitas, 1991), 6.

<sup>3</sup> George F. McLean, *Ways to God, Personal and Social at the Turn of Millennia: The Iqbal Lecture, Lahore* (Washington D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1999), 172.

are founded on love, hope, and faith (1 Corinthians 13:13).<sup>5</sup> In addition, the idea of ontological love is also present in the mythological vision where it all begins

„from the union of an earlier pair of gods, while all such pairs are descendants of the one original pair, Earth and Heaven. Further, the procreation of the gods proceeds from each of these pairs precisely as united in love”.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the theme of love is very present in his writings, but in this paper, we will refer to three major directions. First, love has an ontological character for him, by the nature of its source and divine manifestation, because “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Secondly, love is the reason that makes the context favourable to the epistemological experience, at the same time being a tool that facilitates knowledge. And thirdly, love is the ingredient without the social harmony cannot be achieved. McLean is interested in these issues because he is concerned with some functional applications that can make significant contributions to self-knowledge and self-affirmation, as well as to establishing effective relationships between people from different cultures or religions. So, let’s start with the ontological nature of love in McLean’s writings.

## Love and ontology

The need to have an ontological vision of love is even expressed by the common-sense remark “I am also a human!”, which draws attention to the

<sup>4</sup> George F. McLean, *Faith, Reason and Philosophy: Lectures at The Al-Azhar, Qom, Tehran, Lahore and Beijing* (Washington D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), 59.

<sup>5</sup> McLean argues in favor of this Christian theological model and traditional believes that “the positive virtue of love is our real basis for hope.” See George, F. McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures: Living Together in a Global Age* (Washington D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004), 196.

<sup>6</sup> George F. McLean, *Ways to God*, 123. See George F. McLean and Patrick J. Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy: The Hellenic Emergence* (Washington, DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1997), 9–11, where the authors claim that Hesiod came to the conclusion that there is a cosmic force by which all natural phenomena are brought about, and he considered this force to be, “Eros, Love, one of the oldest and mightiest of gods.” (p. 11)

need for appreciation, respect, support or protection. It is obvious that such a message has significance only in the dialogue between two people, not between a human being and a robot, but we must also get familiar to such dialogues that it is not difficult to imagine because we will see them more and more often in the future in our increasingly digitalized world. Also, the fact that there are different ways of expressing love, towards pets (protective), towards nature (ineffable) and towards personal car or other accessories (instrumentalist), to name just three examples, is another argument that requires this clarification of the ontological nature of love in an increasingly liquid society and that makes it progressively difficult to distinguish between people and things.

Although ontological love includes the three types of love mentioned above, it is much more than that. George F. McLean considers that there are three levels of manifestation of love, one between subject—object, the second between subject—subject, and the third between subject—Being in a metaphysical horizon.<sup>7</sup> He argues that these levels are present in all cultures and religions, the last level being the one that determines the reports of the first two. In addition, another argument that McLean makes in favour of the ontological nature of love is that of the Holy Trinity.<sup>8</sup>

One of the last occasions on which McLean publicly affirmed this conviction was at the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 when he attended the “Metaphysics for the Third Millennium Conference” in Rome, where he gave the presentation entitled “Metaphysics and Culture: The Bridge to Religion”. This theme of ontological love was developed by presenting the attributes of God, which in contrast to Aristotle Prime Mover, indeed “does know and love us”.<sup>9</sup> By extension, this vertical relationship through which divine love is transmitted to human beings can be achieved further and between people at a horizontal level.

McLean develops this idea in other works, being concerned with the way in which the contemporary man who is living in an increasingly globalized world understands the ontological nature of love. He believes that under-

<sup>7</sup> George F. McLean, *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence* (Washington, DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 125–127.

<sup>8</sup> George F. McLean, *Ways to God*, 284.

<sup>9</sup> George F. McLean, “Metaphysics and Culture: A Bridge to Religion,” *Proceedings of the Metaphysics for the Third Millennium Conference* (Rome: September 5–8, 2000), 187–210.

standing this aspect helps the man of the third millennium to be an individual

„person and have personal rights without being individualistic, selfish and antipathetic towards others. As created out of love they are unique to the degree of the divine love and freedom with which they were created”.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, this ontological nature of love also carries a creative power that remains active as long as man remains in relationship with the Creator in the subject-object relationship.

Thus, there is a reflection of God's creative love that is seen in a way of life with values and principles that are related to the rational structure of the mind and the visible and metaphysical reality. In other words, love in its ontological character points to what is visible, but at the same time transcends it in power and significance<sup>11</sup>, referring to what Lonergan called “prior world”.<sup>12</sup>

Although McLean does not use this “prior world” formula, he refers to the first form of love that man experienced at first in his direct relationship with his Creator. This relationship is representative for what McLean calls “Subsistent Love”, and argues that “it is a gift that deserves to be given”.<sup>13</sup> As Nelson Mandela said that people who hate must be taught to love, be-

<sup>10</sup> George F. McLean, *Unity and harmony, Love and Compassion in Global Times* (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2011), 85.

<sup>11</sup> See George F. McLean, *Ways to God*, 347–348.

<sup>12</sup> See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 112. Lonergan refers to the moment of creation when the world was in the initial state of representation of the Creator through love, a world that did not yet use a language to explain love, but itself was the expression of love. Thus, he believes that love can be best understood in this “immediate” world that appeared after the act of creation in which everything was an overwhelming testimony of divine love, which is in fact the origin of love. Therefore, he considers that this is a unique moment through which the creative value of love can be understood. “But the prior word in its immediacy, though it differs in intensity, though it resonates differently in different temperaments and in different stages of religious development, withdraws man from the diversity of history by moving out of the world mediated by meaning and towards a world of immediacy in which image and symbol, thought and word, lose their relevance and even disappear”. What Lonergan wants to emphasize is that “immediate”, “prior world”, cannot be expressed in any symbol or word, it represents creative love and the Creator, the One who is the origin of love.

<sup>13</sup> George F. McLean, *Ways to God*, 181.

cause when they were children they did not hate, as we see children do not make the differences that adults make, McLean argues that we must rediscover this ontological love, with which we come into the world, because it is part of our nature, but which we lose under the pressure of an existence marked by selfish individualism, and nowadays by distance. For McLean, ontological love is the backbone of his system of thought and action, but it is also what gives him confidence in his theological-philosophical project.<sup>14</sup>

This ontological view of love is transferred by McLean to his understanding of theology and philosophy, as Mamuka Dolidze remarks: “Love is wisdom and wisdom is love; that is the motto that we inherited from him. Everyone who knew him, loved him and treated him as a close friend”.<sup>15</sup> This relationship between wisdom and love becomes very important if

<sup>14</sup> Considering George F. McLean’s concern for Paul Tillich’s writings, we may say that McLean’s view about ontological love was influenced by Paul Tillich’s book *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyzes and Ethical Applications* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954). In this book, Tillich has a subchapter entitled “An Ontology of Love” in which he argues that “love moves everything” (p. 25), or shows “the power of love” (p. 26) and demonstrates that “Love is One”, referring to God who is the origin and object of love (p. 27). In fact, he claims that “most issues in social ethics, political theory, and education are due to a lack of understanding of the ontological nature of love”. (p. 24). Also, about the impact of ontological love, see Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper and Row Publisher, 1963), 30–51. In this work, the Protestant pastor shows how the understanding of love according to the ontological model (in relation to God) can bring a new perspective on existence and positive relationships between people. Martin Luther King was highly appreciated by McLean for his ability to bring major changes in society by emphasizing the power of love. This approach (ontological love) is also present in works of other writers, for example Vladimir Solovyov in chapter *The Church as Universal Society. The Principle of Love*, in the book *Russia and Universal Church* (Herbert Ress) (London: The Centenary Press, 1948), 93–96. In his presentation, he starts from the idea that the church is based on the principle of truth (God is The Creator and The Savior), but this principle cannot be limited to historical facts, but must be revealed by universal facts, which means that the author makes a distinction between the objective and subjective nature of faith, the first being related to the universality of faith and to the church, and the second being visible through concrete actions of love that place man in relation to God, who is love. Solovyov claims that this love “cannot be a mere vague, subjective and ineffectual sentiment; it must be translated into a consistent and definite activity which shall give the inner sentiment its objective reality”. (p. 94) Thus, the universal realities that are interpreted as natural acts of divine love are continued and confirmed on a particular level with moral acts of love as an expression of the particular will. In this way, through the divine ontological love, the divine-human relationship, the social dynamics and the unity of creation are realized.

philosophy is seen as it was in its origins, in antiquity and as Pierre Hadot (re)discovered it to us. In fact, what McLean does is to “enliven” ancient philosophy, through ontological love, which becomes a “sacrificial love” specific to Christianity. In this way, in a postmodern time when philosophy and theology are emptied of their relational and experimental nature, being pushed towards an analytical approach, McLean proposes another way of philosophizing or doing theology that integrates people, persons and culture<sup>16</sup> in a metaphysical context and relates them to the One or to the Creator. This is what characterizes his philosophical and theological approach, a concern for inclusion and not for exclusion or separation. This perspective is the personal novelty that Christianity brings to philosophy through the doctrine of the incarnation that upholds the unity between word and deed according to the model, “the Word made flesh” (John 1:14), of love that has its origin in Being and expresses The Being. This is how McLean understands to unite the two dimensions of philosophy, the search for solutions through thinking and ideas, but at the same time assuming the ethical responsibility to implement them. What is proposed in the program of ancient thinkers through political philosophy, is presented differently in the philosophy of the Christian religion through personal involvement and sacrificial love.

In fact, McLean’s love for theology and philosophy is a form of expression of his love for people, as a result of understanding and assuming the ontological nature of love because

<sup>15</sup> Mamuka Dolidze, in William Sweet & Hu Yeping, ed., *George F. McLean: Reminiscences and Reflections* (Washington DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2020), 49. In fact, in McLean’s writings, this relationship between wisdom and love has its origins in the concept he promotes in his works through the phrase “God is Wisdom and Love”. Through this formula that appears in many places, McLean wants to show that God is the source of both, love and wisdom, so the two must be kept together. In addition, those who understand this relationship will become lovers of wisdom, philosophers, how this relationship (knowledge—love) was developed in Greek culture. “He who loves myth is in a way a lover of Wisdom”. Aristotle in George F. McLean and Patrick J. Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy: The Hellenic Emergence*, 127. See also, George F. McLean, *Knowledge of God*, 47; George F. McLean, *Plenitude and Participation* (Washington DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004), 6, 47, 71, 111; George F. McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Islamic Civilizations and Christian Cultures in a Global Horizon*, 74 and 98; George, F. McLean, *Faith, Reason and Philosophy*, p 21, 59 and George, F. McLean, *Ways to God*, 152, 185.

<sup>16</sup> See George F. McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 181–201.

„all things point ahead and relay our attention onward to God. We can love others and life itself fully and without limit, for all share in and lead toward the infinite, subsistent love from which we derive and toward which we are directed in all that we are and do. The life we live from God, in God and toward God is act, meaning and love without limit”.<sup>17</sup>

But this truth of ontological love cannot be expressed and understood if the epistemological nature of love is not made visible, because only in this way can it be understood that there is an order of reality in both the micro and macro cosmos. That’s why he claims that

„the central questions are not merely epistemological, but ontological and ethical, namely, what is the global whole in which we exist, and how can we act in relation to other peoples and cultures in ways that promote a collaborative realization of global community in our times?”<sup>18</sup>

In order to offer valid answers to these questions, McLean proposes an epistemology based on love.

### Love and epistemology

If we accept this ontological nature of love, the educational process must be viewed from this perspective, because the primordial act of divine love on His part not only invites us, but even compels us to respond with love, but also represents, says McLean “the centre of our life and the prime mover of our acts of knowledge”.<sup>19</sup> This is what Augustine stated it so beautifully: “I have not first loved You; it is You who first loved me”<sup>20</sup>, a situation to which McLean refers to education as informative notions, but especially to

<sup>17</sup> George F. McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man* (Washington DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003), 10.

<sup>18</sup> George F. McLean, *Religion and cooperation between civilizations Islamic and Christian cultures in a globalization horizon* (Washington DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), 51.

<sup>19</sup> George F. McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures: Lectures in Qom, Iran* (Washington DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003), 47.

<sup>20</sup> George F. McLean, *Unity and harmony, Love and Compassion in Global Times* (Washington, DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2011), 33. McLean considers that here Augustine uses a dialectic of love because “life, light and love” come from Him. See George F. McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 5–7.



moments of wisdom that gives meaning to life, but these moments are taking place in the context of love.

To support the ontological nature of love, as well as its necessity in relation to education and wisdom, McLean refers to the Kantian discourse which shows that human responsibility must relate to a reality that cannot be reduced to the laws of physical nature. This reality reflects the nature of freedom and spirit, these two elements (freedom and spirit) define the person and correspond to the being. And for McLean, the relationship between Being and person is also established through knowledge and love because both the being and the person are concerned with infinity, absolute and commitment. Therefore, he puts together the desire for knowledge with the need to love because:

„to understand the personal characteristics experienced in our own life, we need to understand ourselves not as functions of matter, but as loving expressions of unlimited wisdom and creative generosity”.<sup>21</sup>

This argument is also supported by the fact that the process of education does not take place exclusively in descriptions of scientific and empirical data but arouse in both teachers and students' reactions of love and admiration or feelings of hatred and rejection.

Therefore, McLean does not agree with the approach proposed after modernity when the human mind was directed with priority to what is necessary and exactly. He justifies this choice by arguing that education without love is below the level of development that man can reach, because human existence and relationships transcend the categories that can be nominated only by rational method without empathy. Thus, McLean leads the educational experience beyond a formal and mechanical path, to a dynamic environment where there is freedom and love. In fact, McLean points out that without this ontological perspective in education, it can lead to methods that do not value the human being because

„freedom is by definition not necessitated, and love, as self-giving, is essentially unique and spontaneous. If freedom and love are the highest of human realities, then the search for what is required for them (and hence manifest by them) promises an especially penetrating exploration into the heart of being itself”.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> George F. McLean, *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence*, 70.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 57–58.

In addition, to support the need for such an approach in education McLean refers to Heidegger's argument that shows the importance of love and ontology in the pedagogical act for conveying a normative vision based on values. The ontological nature of these values can be seen in the fact that they refer to

„Being and its characteristics of unity, truth and justice, goodness and love, not simply as empty ideals but as the ground of things, hidden or veiled, as it were, and erupting into time through conscious and free human beings in history”.<sup>23</sup>

Is the loss of this aspect of love the reason why in our society we are talking more and more about a failure of education and why new pedagogical methods and educational strategies that are urgent expected to be adapted to children and young people? Should this be the reason why more and more educators are referring to emotional intelligence, regarding to the development of relational skills and the value qualities that define a person's desire to assume the professional and moral training as well? Unfortunately, this period of pandemic has shown us once again that the relationship, especially supported by love, is indispensable, not only necessary for the educational process. It is not surprising that those who suffered the most in these months of medical crisis, after the medical staff and those who were contaminated or lost a loved one, were teachers, pupils and students. There are very worrying statistics and studies about the adverse impact that this medical crisis has had on children and young people who are now in their studies, but the most certain information about this situation is likely to come in the next months and years.<sup>24</sup>

An additional important aspect that McLean brings up when he is talking about the role of love in the experience of knowing is the contribution of the family in supporting the educational process. Therefore, he argues that

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>24</sup> A recent study of The World Bank shows that a child who learn in the time of pandemic in Romania will reach only 58% of its productivity potential in adulthood, i. e. it will be more than 40% below what it should be. This will be reflected in the income he will get, in the quality of his adult life and later on his children through what he offers to them. This study shows that children are also passed on a social heritage, not just a genetic one. <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/economie/digi-economic/in-urma-pentru-tempre-un-studiul-bancii-mondiale-arata-ca-un-copil-nascut-azi-in-romania-will-lose-over-40-percent-of-potential-1370135>

„one who is raised in a loving and generous family will be more able and more liable to make place for love and generosity in one's interpretation and response to life, just as one who lives in a more calculating, manipulative and exploitive environment is less likely to factor love into one's thinking”.<sup>25</sup>

In this regard, McLean also refers to Aristotle's description of the wise man who is portrayed as a person who love wisdom or a philosopher, “as one capable of universal and difficult knowledge, of greater than ordinary certitude, of identifying causes, and of seeking knowledge for its own sake”.<sup>26</sup> This explanation shows us that the act of knowing also requires a sustained emotional commitment of involvement and dedication through love, both by the one who wants to learn and by the one who is the teacher or by those who can support an educational approach.

In order to correct the deficiencies mentioned above, to fulfil the pedagogical objectives, to refresh the educational system and to prepare young people for life, both professionally and morally, George F. McLean supports the epistemological value of love. The model he proposes confirms what Goethe has already stated very clearly: “We are shaped and fashioned by what we love”. Therefore, we need to remember what has been known for a long time, but it seems that it has been forgotten lately, namely that the process of knowing mediated by love is more efficient. In addition, such an educational experience makes the meeting between the two (teacher and learner) take each to a higher level of knowledge and moral development. McLean warns that this experience of education cannot take place or is par-

<sup>25</sup> George F. McLean, *Ways to God*, 149. McLean emphasizes in other papers the important role of the family (and the relationship) in the process of education and reminds that from an early age children show that they have the potential and the desire to love and attach to those around them, and these qualities are manifested until the end of life. Therefore, he argues that “it is very good when people, but especially children, live in a family or in a social environment that encourages the expression of love. Following such an experience, “one is able to take account of the full meaning of each thing and freely to relate oneself to others in the coordinating virtue of philanthropia, the love of all humankind”. See George, F. McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 78 and 197, where McLean shows that values are most effectively conveyed in an educational climate of love. Charles Taylor also refers to this idea, claiming that “the real world is utterly indifferent to us, and even to a certain degree dangerous, threatening. As children, we have to see ourselves as surrounded by love and concern, or we shrivel up”. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 561.

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, in George F. McLean, *Ways to God*, 126.

tially lived if the second dimension of human personality is not developed, as Piaget argues: “the affective, by which we respond to things with feelings and emotions, such an empathy and love, or rejection and hate”.<sup>27</sup> This perspective is also argued by McLean in a comprehensive article entitled “The Person and Moral Growth: The Dynamic Interactions of Values and Virtues” published in “Love as the Foundation of Moral Education and Character Development”.<sup>28</sup>

Another way in which McLean tries to draw attention to the important role that love plays in the process of education is the distinction he makes between the dynamics of the mind and the dynamics of the heart. The experience of the last centuries has confirmed to us that the preoccupation with priority for the mind leads to a disjunction between reason and the complexity of the experience of the human being and thus an idealistic, abstract, conceptual and distant reality is established. To restore the full picture, McLean discusses Tillich’s “ultimate concern” argument and claims that by “looking into not only mind but our hearts, we discover the most basic reality in terms of our concerns”. These preoccupations of the soul are nothing but “phenomenological expression of the divine as this is reflected in human consciousness. Like a giant telecommunication dish or a tuning fork, your heart resonates to being”.<sup>29</sup> In this sense we can see the difference between the dynamics of the mind and the dynamics of the heart. If in the first case, the cognitive experience is centred on the accumulation of information and somewhat its control, in the second approach we are dealing with the absolute infinity in relation to which the human mind is limited, inadequate and which it cannot comprehend. McLean points out that the success of the heart,

„is not in terms of its ability to include the other within itself, but in terms of its ability to reach out to the other and to let it be. Thus, in love or benevolence one supports the other person and promotes his or her freedom to be. *Ultimate concern* is marked then not by the limitations of human knowledge, but by the greatness of the divine”.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> See George F. McLean, “The Person and Moral Growth: The Dynamic Interactions of Values and Virtues” in *Love as the Foundation of Moral Education and Character Development* (Washington DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998), 191–207.

<sup>29</sup> George F. McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 99.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

McLean not only supported the role of love in the educational process, but also practised this model. In the last work written to honour him, several authors noticed his preoccupation to transmit information in a context of love. I quote here only what Carlos Eduardo Maldonado wrote:

„What most struck me was his soft manner, his extremely gentle mood, the soft tone of his voice, the peace he irradiated—all this, combined with an extreme intelligence and an open-minded attitude—the closest expression to wisdom, ever. [...] I never met as wise a philosophy professor as George McLean. All the others were clever and smart, no question about that. Some had a very refined sense of humour, and others were distant and rather indifferent to the world and the surroundings. Nonetheless, up until today, I have never met anyone who combined knowledge and gentleness, erudition and kindness, intelligence and warmth so well. I am sure that every single person who had the chance to meet and to come know George McLean experienced something similar, even if they expressed it differently”.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, in addition to the ontological nature of love, McLean also reveals the epistemological function of love, but his ultimate goal is to put these two qualities together to help establish and develop the social harmony.

### Love and social harmony

George F. McLean believes that the society of people who understand the ontological component of love and in which the process of education is mediated by love will be under the sign of harmony and unity. Social harmony appears, in McLean's view, when each individual begins to see life not only from the perspective of the responsibility to survive, but also as an opportunity to create and communicate through love and to assume a transformative role for the good of the social community and the environment in which he/she lives. Therefore, for McLean,

„to be then is not simply to fall in some minimal way on this side of nothingness, but rather to partake of the totality of being and the meaning of the whole of being, and indeed to be a realization of the whole in this unique contraction or instance. It retains its identity but does so in and of the whole.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Carlos Eduardo Maldonado, in William Sweet & Hu Yeping, ed., *George F. McLean: Reminiscences and Reflections*, 107–108.

<sup>32</sup> George F. McLean, *Religion and cooperation between civilizations Islamic and Christian cultures in a globalization horizon*, 53.

Thus, we can understand that when this relationship between the part and the whole is initiated within the social group, being supported and regulated by love, each person is valued and the community lives an experience of harmony and unity that dynamically enhances the potential of each individual from the community. This relational climate is based on “creative love of the divine and concerning the basic generosity of being”, although this state is always in conflict with the tendency of the human being to assert himself and herself, as Sartre said: “in-himself” and “for-himself”.<sup>33</sup> In addition, McLean believes that existence needs a “metaphysics of being” that can best be expressed through

„love, for it is this which gives meaning to humanity. This is not an arbitrary construct reflective only of the human, but a sharing by all in that bliss which is eternal and gives temporal life great meaning and beauty. One key manner in which to look at human life then is that of gift, reflection thereupon should provide the foundation projecting one into cooperation with others as neighbors in a life whose purpose is sharing in eternal bliss (Ananda)”.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, a phenomenology of unity is realized and this can be defined as a state of well-being based on relations in both directions, both from the individual to society and vice versa, and all these relations are in connection with the divine.

In fact, McLean shows that social harmony is conditioned by accepting the reality that God is the source of love and knowledge. To argue this statement, he refers to Thomas Aquinas who claims that “participating beings are known and loved by this same act of Knowledge and Love by which the One knows and loves itself”<sup>35</sup>, mainly that human beings do not exist as a result of chance or necessity, but as a result of the wise creative act manifested by love. Therefore, each person’s life is a consequence of the subsisting love and takes place in relation to it, and if it is lived with this perspective must be in harmony with others and with nature. In addition, ontological

<sup>33</sup> George F. McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 185.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas of Aquinas in George F. McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 69. See also, George F. McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 16–19, chapter *Implications of the Fifth Way to God*, where McLean points out that the fifth way in which Thomas argues for God’s existence opens up a perspective on the social harmony that can be achieved through love.

love bases the character of social interactions on close relationships and communion, as is argued in other non-Christian religions or cultures (McLean recalls Buddhism), not on distant connections and struggles in which the individual self prevails.<sup>36</sup> And the purpose of this philosophy of participation is to help the human being

“to understand that life lived in imitation of creative Love will bring oneself and others into that same Love which, having been the Alpha, must also be the Omega of all”.<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately, McLean notes that in recent decades in Western society there has been a process of alienation when individualism and privacy take precedence over social experience and public space. He calls this phenomenon

„bitter experience in our times with the so-called scientific view of history. Further, rationalists, captivated as they are by reason, have often forgot the additional humane dimensions of affectivity, mutual concern and love. Reason is in danger—and itself can be a terrible danger, not only theoretically, but practically if this be forgotten”.<sup>38</sup>

In the same idea Lonergan observes a growing presence of resentments at the societal level and considers that

“perhaps its worst feature is that its rejection of one value involves a distortion of the whole scale of values and that this distortion can spread through a whole social class, a whole people, a whole epoch. So, the analysis of resentment can turn out to be a tool of ethical, social, and historical criticism”.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See George F. McLean, *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence*, 104, where McLean shows how the Christian concept of love, as understood in the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, is found in the principles promoted by Confucius. His examples refer to the way children should honor their parents or the respect that each one should show towards those in the family or community. Also, to support the presence of the principle of love in relationships and how it can be valued even better, McLean refers to the Confucian doctrine. For example, the relationship of obedience, justification and family obligation between wife and children on the one hand and husband on the other hand, can be improved with a relationship based on involvement and love. Thus, the transition is made from a limited and erroneous father to the “God as Father whose love and justice the human father is to imitate and to whom one has ultimate allegiance”. George F. McLean, *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence*, 104.

<sup>37</sup> George F. McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, page 71.

<sup>38</sup> See George, F. McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 89.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 33.

Therefore, McLean argues that mutual respect for one's fellow man or culture is not enough to achieve genuine social harmony, but love is needed because relationships between people should not be seen as a necessity and usefulness, but from a vision of complementarity and accessibility that highlights the immense reserves of human experience and creativity. But more than that, this approach is based on the inexhaustible source of divine love that guarantees social harmony.

But for this unity to be achieved through love, McLean argues, every person in the community needs to be fully viewed (body, mind, and soul), independent (distinct/unique), and recognized for their potential for love. change and communication with others. When this relationship between the part and the whole is initiated within the social group, being supported and regulated by love, each person is valued and the community lives an experience of harmony and unity that dynamically increases the potential of each individual in the community. Thus, a phenomenology of unity is achieved that can be defined as a state of well-being based on relationships in both directions, equally from the individual to society, and vice versa, and these relationships being related to the Divine.

The solution proposed by McLean for restoring social relations and establishing new channels of communication is to encourage an attitude of appreciation towards people in the community, especially those from different cultures or religions, and rediscovering the role of imagination in building rational mechanisms that include aesthetic aspects specific to each culture. But more than that, love must not be lacking in this approach because it helps to articulate the particularities characteristic of some individuals or minority groups and facilitates the avoidance of certain tensions that may occur in personal relationships or between smaller or larger social groups. McLean argues that such a social community is achieved through the effort of an individual relational response that particularly affects each person, and thus goes beyond the level of collective-majority approaches that prioritize common needs.

He also points out that such social communities in which tolerance and love are present can be formed regardless of religion or culture. In this sense, he refers to Islam and Christianity when he says that

„a community united in love can broad sense of tolerance and loving outreach even in the midst of tensions is the fruit of Iqbal's religious attitude of appreciation as mediated through a phenomenology of gift. It has been described by Pope John Paul II as a



state in which violence cedes to peaceful transformation, and conflict to pardon and reconciliation; where power is made reasonable by persuasion, and justice finally is implemented through love”.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, such an approach also requires a great deal of concern for the knowledge and willingness to understand others by love. This is what McLean has done, travelling to all continents, visiting dozens of countries, and hosting hundreds of conferences with thousands of participants. Each time Professor McLean made a positive impression and pleasantly surprised the persons with the way he showed his love for all people regardless of their culture or religion. Ouyang Kang confesses that

„I found that, for Professor McLean, there is no divide among different cultures, religions, and ethics. He treated every culture, every country, and every people with the same love, which is a universal love. He organized many conferences in different countries and in different cultures—for instance, in China, Vietnam, Greece, etc.—but he treated all people and cultures equally. This is not easy to do, but Professor McLean was able to handle it. His spirit enlightens us here”.<sup>41</sup>

For McLean, love is the true key to “civic virtue” manifested through social harmony, because love places man in an existential context that challenges him to self-perfection and self-correction, because it opens a horizon in which he understands that love is a result of free will and which refers to the first act of love manifested through the work of creation. Understanding this fact is based on the dynamic process of continuous transformation that man experiences within the community following the invitation to development and progress, whether we refer to openness through enlightenment as understood in Buddhism or Hinduism, or whether we consider spiritual union in which refers to Christianity, as we find it in the apostle Paul’s description, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”. (Galatians 2:20) In McLean’s view, understanding this establishes a context of freedom, provides resources for development even in difficult conditions, and places the human being at the centre of any constructive human social endeavour. Therefore, McLean believes that religions can make a significant contribution to the social harmony that sustains freedom and creativity in an increas-

<sup>40</sup> George F. McLean, *Beyond Modernity: The Recovery of Person and Community* (Washington DC.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2010), 160.

<sup>41</sup> Ouyang Kang, in William Sweet & Hu Yeping, ed., *George F. McLean: Reminiscences and Reflections*, 142.

ingly technical world, because by their nature most religions encourage “a life in which freedom is protected by justice and exercised as creative love”.<sup>42</sup> As an example, McLean compares Confucianism to the Catholic Church’s view, because both sides stands for love and respect for parents, love and responsibility for neighbour (social justice), or for the equivalence of love for God and love for one another by those in the community.<sup>43</sup>

The finality of the perspective that McLean opens when he has in attention this approach “is being in love, through a dialogue of love”.<sup>44</sup> A dialogue in which love is based on an ontological conception, achieves a favourable framework for knowledge and leads to unity and social harmony. In fact, here we have a definition of what it means in McLean’s horizon the ideal that the relationships between people from different cultures and religions be based on love. These are relationships that take into account the qualities of being, overcoming new limits in the field of knowledge to contribute to the realization of communities that are not bordered by cultural or religious barriers and that are not negatively influenced by technical progress. When the ontological, epistemological and social harmony value of love is not preserved, the implications on a personal or social level are multiple, some of which are presented in the table below.

<b>Ontological Love</b>	<b>Love</b>	<b>Epistemology and love</b>	<b>Epistemology without love</b>	<b>Social harmony and love</b>	<b>Social interaction without love</b>
Covenant—commitment	Convention—consent	Tradition	Experiment	Integration/Adding	Remove/Reduction
Reason Will	Lusts/Passion	Becoming/The final cause	Progress/immediate results	Mutual support	Competition
Abnegation	Self-love	Significance	Explanation	Relation	Conflict
Happiness	Satisfaction	Metaphysics	Physics	Friendship	Hostility
Understanding—the wisest yields	Tyranny of force—the strongest defeat	Spirit/relationship/values	Matter/observation/facts	Koinonia—willing to serve	Atomized society—the will for power

<sup>42</sup> George F. McLean, *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence*, 82.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>44</sup> George, F. McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 140.

Reason and senses	Senses	The meaning of existence	Clarification of contradictions	Faith/Security	Artificial providence of the state
Unity	Uniformity	Symbols	Signs	Community	Net
Waiting	Anxiety	Nature	Art	Equity	Equality
Evaluation rules	No marks	Faith/intuition	Doubt/Skepticism	Society/Persons	People/individuals
To be	To have	The supreme good	Overcoming fears	Whole/Community	Part/Individual

It may seem hard to imagine that there is such love as described by McLean, even in this time of pandemic when we were saddened by so many difficult situations, we can meet people who have such love. Yes, there were negative facts with people who knew they were in contact with Covid 19 virus and did not say this. That's how we had hospitals that had to be closed because dozens of medical staff were infected with the new virus. We were outraged by those who rush into stores and they made provisions on food without thinking about those who were at work or could only leave the house at certain intervals. Or what about those who have sought to take advantage of the lack of products in pharmacies or to offer services at very high prices just to get rich without thinking about the fact that so many people have lost their jobs or they had much diminished incomes. And when the vaccines were authorized, another window of human vanity and disinterest in fellow human beings opened. Preferential contracts were made, some had more priority than others on the lists for vaccine, started again the talk about the poor and rich countries, or were reported situation with people who jumped the line to get the vaccine.

However, there were enough positive examples that showed that there is a spirit of solidarity, respect for fellow human beings and a desire for social harmony manifested through gestures of love to the point of extreme sacrifice. During all this time, most of the medical staff worked until exhaustion, there were many people who volunteered, especially to do certain services to those who were isolated or could not move. There were impressive moments with people singing together from the balconies and from the windows of the apartments or even from the hospitals. In addition to many other impressive situations, it was the gesture of 72-year-old priest Giuseppe Berardelli who refused to be switched to artificial ventilation so that the ventil-

ator could be used for a younger person. He died on March 15 2020 at a hospital in Lovere (Bergamo province) after refusing to be connected to medical equipment which, according to the quoted source, was bought especially for him by the parishioners.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusions

This is the world we live in, and this was the world McLean lived in, except for the Covid 19 pandemic. There will always be reasons to choose to wait to receive love or to be concerned about giving love. McLean was primarily interested in understanding love as it is offered by the One who is the source of love, a love of ontological value, then he sought love to create the context of epistemological experiences and did everything in his power to develop harmony, bringing together people from different cultures and religions. The articles written about him in the last book printed in his honour are indisputable testimonies of how he understood to convey this ontological love, its epistemological potential and its value for social harmony. We could even say that the way he understood love helped him find unlimited resources to fulfil his projects and the many responsibilities he assumed, to be a “professor emeritus” (the title conferred by CUA) and to be a factor of social harmony for people from different cultures and religions.

Aware of the changes taking place in contemporary society, he has always been concerned with showing the irretrievable losses of existential nature that accumulate with the establishment of the progress brought by the modern Enlightenment program. In his view, if contemporary man loses sight of the multiple dimensions of culture and love, he will be lost in a society in which we have “means without goals, power without purpose, method without metaphysics, reason without life, person without personality, people without society and man without God”.<sup>46</sup>

The way George F. McLean understood and expressed love fits very well with Kant’s description: “To love our neighbour means to do our duty to him with love”.<sup>47</sup> McLean’s academic concerns, as seen in his writings or in his coordinated publications, and his attitude toward those he came in con-

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-coronavirus-23747744-coronavirus-italia-preot-72-animurit-dupa-cedat-ventilatorul-unui-pacient-mai-tanar.htm>

<sup>46</sup> George, F. McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 25.

tact with, show that his intellectual commitment to love was accompanied by wisdom and with a continuing concern to practically support teachers, students, or others who have interacted with him or who he have heard that they may benefit from his help. This attitude can be seen as a response to Charles Taylor's invitation to contemporary man to enter in the "movement for love"<sup>48</sup> that is based on the Love of God "which loves all mankind, and is ready to give without stint, to let go of what I hold in order to be part of the movement of love".<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the life and person of George F. McLean remain a living testimony of the message written by the Romanian novelist Marin Preda: "...if there is no love, there is nothing!"<sup>50</sup> And we could add: but where there is Love, it is all and everything that can make a meaningful existence for every human being and the whole community.

<sup>47</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii practice* (translate by Traian Brăileanu) (București: Paideia, 2003,) 94.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 81. Taylor considers that those can be a part in the "movement of love" who no longer focus much on their own lives and stop sacrificing others endlessly for one's own good. Also, Taylor argues that true social harmony can be achieved when there is no longer this duality of self-love and peer indifference, when personal desires gives priority to love for the common good and self-love becomes love for humanity. (p. 202) Without such love, relationships and social interactions only encourage instrumentalism and materialism, and "the protocols of modern *scientific* and analytic thinking [which] privilege the impersonal *view from nowhere*, the standpoint which is *experience-far*. So, it tends to make us systematically devalue insights which might challenge the understanding of impersonal order, insights which might arise, for example, out of prayer, or in love relations." (p. 555)

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>50</sup> Marin Preda, *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni*, vol. III (București: Cartea Românească, 1980), 333.