

GEORGE FRANCIS MCLEAN: A PHILOSOPHER IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY

Hu Yeping

Revised and edited by William Sweet

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, USA

George Francis McLean is a philosopher in the service of humanity. At present he holds the titles of Professor Emeritus at the School of Philosophy of The Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington, D.C., and Director of the Centre for Culture and Values. Yet anyone who knows him knows that this says only a small part of who he is. Over the years, McLean has been a scholar and a teacher, but most importantly he has worked to democratize philosophy – promoting the research of philosophers coming from many different cultural traditions, and publishing the academic work of teams of scholars from countries and regions around the globe.

Since 1993, when McLean took early retirement from his teaching position, he has worked full-time promoting global philosophical dialogue and cooperation. He has lectured in dozens and dozens of countries, traveling to places where key philosophical and cultural issues are debated. He has helped to bring together professors from many countries and regions in order to create an opportunity for dialogue, communication, and cooperation, and to assist in building teams who, through their scholarly work, will be able to contribute to answering the vital questions of the day. In addition, each year, McLean invites professors from different countries to come to Washington to participate in a 10 week seminar on such philosophical issues as “The Relation Between Cultures,” “Freedom and Choice in a Democracy,” “Diversity in Unity,” “Civil Society and Social Reconstruction,” and “Globalization and Identity.”

But McLean serves philosophy and philosophers in other ways as well. As the general editor of the publication series “Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change,” sponsored by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP), he helps to bring the work of philosophers

from the farthest reaches of the planet into the public eye. Much of this work is published in edited volumes, the result of regional teams working together on themes of common interest. McLean carefully edits each paper in every volume, as he prepares them for publication. Over 100 volumes have been published to date; in addition to marketing through regular channels, they are distributed free of charge to 350 university libraries throughout the world, particularly to institutions in developing countries. The full text of most of these volumes is also made available on the internet (see www.crvp.org). For McLean, the dividends from the dissemination of ideas is of far greater interest than the dividends from sales.

George McLean has devoted not only his mind, heart, and hands but his energy, his financial resources, and virtually every waking hour to this philosophical endeavor. For McLean, philosophy is a vocation, and his support for global dialogue stems from a deep sense of faith, hope, and love.

There are, McLean believes, many philosophical traditions, cultures, and schools that seek the truth. His metaphor for this is that there are many roads that lead ‘to the holy mountain’. The present volume of essays – and other volumes like it, appearing in several languages and in several countries – are tokens of the respect and deep appreciation for all that George McLean has done for the cause of philosophy and to help philosophers of different cultures, languages, and traditions to come ‘to the mountain.’

I. A STRONG SENSE OF FAITH

George McLean has a faith that holds that communication and cooperative activity is possible among philosophers from all philosophical traditions – and that it is important to enable those of different traditions to bring their contributions ‘to the table’ and thereby (to use another metaphor) to build bridges among the very different world views. But some may ask how he came to have such a ‘faith’?

George Francis McLean was born on June 29, 1929 to a Scottish-Irish Catholic family. His great-great grand parents on both sides of his family came to the United States from Ireland 150 years ago. McLean

grew up in Lowell, Massachusetts, the earliest developed industrial community in the United States. His grandparents were shopkeepers. His father, Arthur McLean, served as a Lieutenant during the First World War, and afterwards was a clerk at the city post office. His mother, Agnes McLean, was a grammar school teacher.

George McLean was the second youngest of five children (three boys and two girls). When he was young, he was quiet and timid but, as his sisters say, fond of reading. At the age of 11, at St. Margaret Church in Lowell, where he was baptized, McLean made up his mind to dedicate his life to what he refers to as his “family” – the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a Catholic missionary community founded by Eugène de Mazenod, a French priest. The Oblates’ chief mission is to help the poor, the neglected and the abandoned across the world. After high school, McLean went to Newburgh, New York, for study at Our Lady of Hope Seminary.

In 1949, McLean was sent to Rome, for studies at the Gregorian University. He remained there for seven years: three years in philosophy and four years in theology. For a young student, it was a mind-opening experience. At the scholasticate where he lived there were over 100 seminarians from many different countries. Living together with such a large group of people with varied cultural backgrounds provided him with a special opportunity to learn how to live with others in a harmonious and friendly way. The experience was unique because French was spoken at the residence, Latin was used in the classes, and Italian was the local language. In 1955, McLean was ordained an Oblate priest and, in 1956, he was called back to the United States to pursue a doctorate in philosophy at The Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington.

In 1958, McLean finished his doctorate with a dissertation on Paul Tillich, and began teaching at CUA as well as at the Oblate College. Tillich (1886–1965) was an influential Protestant theologian, who broadened the understanding of religion by defining it as a person’s ‘ultimate concern’ – insisting that everyone has some religious commitment and that the mythic quality of religious narratives play an important role in people’s lives. Tillich’s writings provided McLean with an intellectual bridge from the Catholic tradition to the broader Christian horizon.

In 1960, McLean was asked by the School of Philosophy at CUA to organize a summer philosophy workshop; he did this every year until 1968. In the United States – and throughout the world – the 1960s were a period of great change and instability. In Africa, anti-colonial movements fought for national independence from foreign domination; in Asia, the two major communist powers – the Soviet Union and China – periodically engaged in hostilities with each other; in Europe and North America, people sought equal civil rights and demanded more freedoms. Protest marches and demonstrations took place everywhere, and new movements emerged that challenged existing institutions and traditional life styles.

As this turmoil and these changes continued, many questions arose. What should people do? What means should they use? Could philosophy play an active role in social and cultural change? In order to answer these questions and to help sort out these puzzles, McLean organized the summer workshops thematically, choosing such topics as philosophy and technology, reason and belief, and the value of the study of classical philosophy and ethics. He invited many of the most influential philosophers of the time to lecture in the mornings and opened the discussion to all participants in the afternoons. More than 100 philosophy professors and students, as well as others who were searching for answers, came to Washington to attend the workshop each summer. This work gave McLean experience that later enabled him to play significant roles in a number of professional philosophical organizations.

Because of the success of the workshops, McLean was asked by Professor James A. Weisheipl, O.P., the President of the American Catholic Philosophical Association (ACPA), to be its Secretary, a position he held for 15 years (1965-1980). During these years, McLean enhanced the work of the ACPA by including in its publications a ‘chronicle’ of philosophical events happening around the world, by organizing membership drives, by establishing a placement service for graduating students seeking employment in philosophy, and by organizing the annual meetings of the ACPA and editing and publishing the proceedings.

In 1968, McLean went to Vienna to attend the World Congress of Philosophy. There began his involvement with the work of International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP). From 1978 to 1988, McLean served on the Board of Directors of FISP, developing policies

for the World Congress of Philosophy and other philosophical meetings sponsored by FISP. McLean's contributions to philosophy at the international level increased when, in 1974, Professor H.D. Lewis of King's College (London) and President of the International Society for Metaphysics (ISM), appointed McLean Secretary of that organization. In the same year, McLean began his service as the Secretary of the World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies (WUCPS) (with Professor Carlo Giacon of Italy, the Director of the *Enciclopedia Filosofica* and the then-President of the World Union). McLean held both of these positions from 1974 to 1998. In the following year, in 1975, McLean participated in the founding, and served as the first Secretary for, The Inter-university Committee on Research and Policy Studies (ICR) and The Joint-Committee of Catholic Learned Societies and Scholars (CLS).

One of the first fruits of McLean's international activity was his initiation of a series of conferences, beginning in 1976, that were sponsored by the International Society for Metaphysics. These conferences took place in major centers around the world – in Shantiniketan (India), New York, Jerusalem, Bogota (Columbia), Nairobi, and in other locales – on the themes of the human person, society, and culture. Some of the papers presented at these meetings were later published by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy in volumes titled, *Person and Nature*, *Person and Society*, *Person and God*, and *The Nature of Metaphysical Knowledge*. Following each subsequent major conference of the ISM, collections of papers were published; volumes in preparation include: *Society and Unity*, *Society, Truth and Human Rights*, *Society and the Good*, *The Metaphysics of Culture*, *Metaphysics, Culture and Symbols*, *Metaphysics, Culture and Nature*, *Metaphysics, Culture and Values*, and *Metaphysics, Culture and Morality*.

In the early 1970s, McLean began to work with philosophers in Latin America, especially in the countries along the Andes. A series of colloquia on moral education was held in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, and Brazil. Within a few years, McLean had lectured in virtually all the countries of Central and South America. Then, beginning in 1977, McLean participated in the organization of colloquia, in association with the Academies of Sciences of several countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The aim of these meetings was to build

bridges for joint philosophical reflection and to enable exchange with philosophers of Western Europe.

Since 1987, a similar series of colloquia with the Academies of Sciences in Beijing and Shanghai, and with Peking, Fudan and other universities in China have been held. A number of corresponding volumes have been published: 25 from Central and Eastern Europe and 20 from China.

In 1983, McLean founded The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) as an extension of the two specialized philosophical organizations – The International Society for Metaphysics and The World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies. The objective of the Council is to break through ideologies in order to engage deep human concerns, to bridge traditions and cultures, and to seek new horizons for social transformation. It aims to mobilize research teams to study the nature, interpretation, and development of cultures; to bring their work to bear on the challenges of contemporary change; to publish and distribute the results of these efforts; and to organize both extended seminars for deeper exploration of these issues and regional conferences for the coordination of this work.

Starting in the early 1980s, through visits, lectures, and regional conferences, McLean has been involved with the work of philosophers at a number of African universities. His initial trip to Africa brought him to some 12 universities. McLean has since made subsequent visits – to dozen universities in 1996 and to several more in 2000 – to a total of 22 universities.

As dialogue with the Islamic world has become more pressing, McLean has also focused on work with Islamic scholars. In addition to organizing conferences in countries where Islam is a powerful force, he gave lectures in Egypt, Mali, Senegal, Morocco, Tunisia, and in Asia (e.g., in Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia), including several Central Asian countries.

Throughout all this it is McLean's sense of faith that underlies his work. The initiatives undertaken by the World Union and by the ISM – and, more recently, the special work of the RVP – are tangible results of the faith that underpins McLean's efforts. As McLean describes it, the goals of the RVP are to assist scholars in understanding and appreciating

their own culture and the values that shape aspirations and motivate actions; to help philosophers to understand other cultures and to develop a positive yet critical appreciation thereof; and to build cooperation among peoples by overcoming tensions and promoting peace and cooperation on a global scale.

McLean believes that culture is the foundation of human life, and that it is necessary for spiritual cultivation and social progress. A community develops its distinctive character through its history by formulating its values and virtues, and it is through its patterns of social life that freedom is developed and exercised. By culture, then, McLean means the capacity of the spirit of a people and its ability to act creatively in shaping all dimensions of life – material and spiritual, economic and political, artistic and scientific. It involves a whole life, which is characterized by unity, truth, goodness and beauty. It shares deeply in meanings and values of life of the people. “Culture is a renewal, a reliving of origins in an attitude of profound appreciation. This leads us beyond self and other, beyond identity and diversity, in order to comprehend both.” In all of this, a sense of faith is necessary. The role of philosophy, then, is to help people carry on “the living faith of the dead” and bring their respective cultural heritages forward to face and respond to change.

II. A POSITIVE SENSE OF HOPE

The last century witnessed enormous human tragedies and spectacular human achievements: world wars – cold and hot – the holocaust, the confrontations of ideologies, dramatic social changes, the astonishing development of science and technology, and the communications revolution that accompanied it, and so on. These have affected virtually every aspect of everyday life. Philosophy understood as the way of searching for universal truth has also undergone change. The Cold War split the world into antagonistic camps; for a long time there was no real dialogue, communication, or exchange, but only isolation or confrontation between philosophers of East and West. In some countries, philosophy was employed merely as a tool to serve certain ideologies; in some places it was reduced to a narrow and specialized subject; and for some philosophers, philosophy was merely a pragmatic

and analytical tool that had nothing to do with the search for the meaning of life.

Despite these challenges and divisions, McLean's work has long exhibited a sense of hope, for he recognizes the universality of the search for meaning in all cultures and traditions. This is what has commonly been described as a metaphysical view.

McLean insists that metaphysics – and philosophy in general – should not separate themselves from life experience, and that philosophers should actively engage what is going on in the world. Once when he was in Bogota, Columbia, for a conference of the International Society for Metaphysics, a professor told him that people there were not interested in metaphysics but rather wanted to know the meaning of life. McLean immediately replied that that was exactly what metaphysics was about.

McLean, then, is a metaphysician, and his philosophy is based on his Christian understanding of the loving relations of the Trinity and its extension to the transcendental principles of the true, the good, and the beautiful. He believes that the meaning of life is to look for the true, to act for the good, and to enjoy the beautiful. Of course, these are far from uniquely Christian values. For example, McLean found in the Hindu concepts of *sat* (existence), *cit* (consciousness), and *ananda* (bliss), a corresponding understanding of how particular actions and persons are seen through the One or as the manifestations of Brahman and, hence, contribute to living in a way that is truly just, good, and meaningful.

In 1999, on the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, McLean published a series of lectures given in Lahore, Pakistan, entitled *Ways to God: Personal and Social at the Turn of Millennia*. In this book, he systematically traces metaphysical being from totemic myth and ritual, to the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions, to systematic Christian philosophy, through to Islamic mystical and existential understanding. In *Persons, Peoples and Cultures in a Global Age: Metaphysical Bases for Peace between Civilizations* (published by the RVP in 2004), McLean goes deeper into being (*esse*), looking for the metaphysical foundations of person through culture, relation, and gift.

McLean's sense of hope in overcoming division and in promoting exchange can be seen in his efforts to build bridges among philosophers, particularly including those from the 'east.' After meeting Professor

Janusz Kuczynski of Poland, the founder of the journal *Dialogue and Universalism*, at the World Congress of Philosophy held in Varna, Bulgaria in 1973, McLean was invited to come to Warsaw in 1977, in order to explore the possibility of exchange and dialogue with Polish philosophers. After a year's planning, the first meeting was held in Munich in 1978 with 8 philosophers from Poland and 8 philosophers from West Europe and North America – a very rare encounter between philosophers from both the East and West. A second meeting was held the following year in Bellagio, Italy.

During his 1977 visit to Poland, McLean also went to Krakow to take part in a meeting of Polish Catholic philosophers organized by then-Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (now Pope John Paul II), and spent a week with him in Krakow. In 1978, McLean, as the Secretary of the World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies, returned to Krakow to work with Cardinal Wojtyla to convoke a meeting of 60 Catholic philosophers from Poland together with an equal number of philosophers from other countries.

In 1977, McLean also went to Moscow and met Professor Vadim S. Semenov, Editor of *Philosophy*, the journal of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This led to contacts with other Russian philosophers and, later, to colloquia with philosophers from other Academies of Sciences – of Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Georgia, and Lithuania.

In 1978, McLean visited Romania. Professor Ion Bansoiu recalls that one day he saw a foreigner who seemed lost, sitting on the curb along the street near the University of Bucharest. Bansoiu went over and asked the foreigner what was he looking for. The foreigner (McLean) told him that he was looking for the Philosophy Department of the University. Since Bansoiu was a philosophy professor at the University, he took him to the Department office. Thus, cooperation with philosophers in Romania began.

Work with philosophers in Central and Eastern Europe – like the work that McLean (through the RVP and related groups) has supported throughout the world – has gone through three stages: (1) retrospective: retrieving insights from the rich resources of the tradition of the region; (2) prospective: developing concepts concerned with values and rights,

based on the resources discovered in the first stage; and (3) international: enabling scholars to address the many challenges involved in moving into closer relations with the European Union and with the international community in general. This retrospective activity has resulted in the publication of eight volumes of essays, on such issues as the philosophy of the person; solidarity and cultural creativity; tradition and the challenge of Czech political culture; language, values and the Slovak nation; national identity as an issue of knowledge and morality; and personal freedom and national resurgence. (These volumes were published by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy in cooperation with the Paideia Publishers in Bucharest.) A further 14 volumes have appeared, which discuss such issues as: national, cultural and ethnic identities; harmony beyond conflict; models of identity in post-communist societies; interests and values: the spirit of venture in a time of change; values in Islamic culture and the experience of history; values and education in Romania today; Lithuanian philosophy: persons and ideas; Islamic and Christian cultures: conflict or dialogue, and so on.

The building of relations that McLean has been involved in in Central and Eastern Europe has also been repeated in China. McLean had wished to visit the People's Republic of China from the early 1970s. Then, however, the country was in the middle of the Cultural Revolution and had cut off connection with the outside world. Only in the early 1980s, after the Chinese government initiated economic reforms and an open-door policy, were there possibilities for Chinese to visit other countries and for foreigners to enter. In 1986 in Hawaii, McLean met Professor Tang Yijie of Peking University, and together they planned meetings which would be held every other year in China. In 1987, a first colloquium with Chinese philosophers, on the theme of "Man and Nature," was held at the Peking University in Beijing. In 1988, at the World Congress of Philosophy held in Brighton, England, McLean met Professor Wang Miaoyang of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and invited him to another meeting in Leuven, Belgium, following the World Congress. Since then, there has been continuous cooperation with the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. In 1991, while in Shanghai, McLean visited Fudan University and met Professor Liu Fangtong and

other professors. Thus began cooperative work with philosophers at Fudan University.

In 1999, McLean organized a series of small conferences in which he invited 11 Chinese philosophers to visit six universities in India, in order to come to know better the Hindu roots of Chinese Buddhism. And, in 2001, McLean invited 7 foreign professors to come to China to participate in twelve colloquia held at universities and Academies across China. There, the focus of the discussion was: How can philosophy contribute to the process of social transformation? What role should philosophers play in helping people face the many challenges of the modern and postmodern world? These and subsequent colloquia have involved understanding and examining Chinese and discussing ways of responding to contemporary change, particularly concerning: the human person and society; Chinese cultural traditions and modernization; the humanization of technology and Chinese culture; beyond modernization: Chinese roots for global awareness; economic ethics and Chinese culture; civil society in a Chinese context; and the cultural impact of international relations.

To honour his efforts in bringing Chinese philosophy into closer contact with the outside world, McLean was made an Advisory Professor by Fudan University, Shanghai, in 1994, an Advisory Researcher by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences in 1998, and an Advisory Professor by the Jiaotong University, Xian, in 2000. The Chinese philosophers who know McLean refer to him as a “sage,” a term which signifies the highest respect given to intellectuals in China.

III. AN OPEN SENSE OF LOVE

Kant says that to love is to do good; love also involves an openness to and a respect for others that requires a willingness to listen to others and to hear them on their own terms. Love reflects faith and hope. It requires us to look closely at reality – at what is hidden and what is open to all – and to be willing to share both the joys and struggles of life. This unity of love, hope, and faith is characteristic of religion, and McLean believes that the religious lies at the root of all cultures. In fact, as he writes in *Faith, Reason, and Philosophy: lectures at the al-Azhar, Qum,*

Tehran, Lahore and Beijing, “reason in its first and basic philosophical articulations was religious.”

Philosophy as an intellectual discipline helps us to look at reality from a critical distance, to provide a rational analysis, and to express what we see in conceptual terms. But love for others requires us to read between the lines – to see the shift of human awareness from the vertical to horizontal, from object to subject, from the material to the spiritual, and from the quantitative to the qualitative. This shift provides an opportunity for all peoples and all cultures to pursue self-realization, self-consciousness and self-perfection actively. Philosophy, as reason, implies theory, rationality, and abstraction; the love that is reflected in religion draws on lived experience, shows openness, and allows intimacy. The two complement and enhance each other, rather than contradict and weaken one another.

McLean loves to use the image from the book of *Isaiah* (27: 13) in the Hebrew Scriptures, which shows the peoples of the world coming from all directions to converge at the Holy Mountain. Each brings its own special contribution to the whole, shines with its own beauty, and manifests the goodness of the Absolute.

McLean’s sense of love is evident in his efforts to reach out from his own cultural tradition and professional training. Inspired, as we have seen, by the insights of Paul Tillich, in 1969, during his first sabbatical, he went to the Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, at the University of Madras, India. There, he studied the Hindu classics with T.M.P. Mahadevan (1911–1983) and R. Balasubramanian. At that time, the research of the Institute was especially focused upon the Advaita philosophy of Sankara. McLean attended classes in the University and was fascinated by the richness of Hindu philosophy and religion – a richness which enabled him to understand his own philosophy in a deeper and clearer way. Because he loved Indian intellectual life so much, McLean returned there for his second sabbatical in 1977, when he spent three months in Darjeeling, reading through all the commentaries he had collected on the Indian classics. Since then, McLean has gone back to India often, to organize colloquia and to give lectures. To honor his contribution to Indian philosophical life, the Indian Council for Philosophical Research designated him as their Annual Lecturer for 2004,

and invited him to give a set of lectures in six universities across the sub-continent.

During his first sabbatical, McLean also spent six months in Paris with Paul Ricoeur, who gave him the green light to use the facilities and libraries of the universities and to attend whichever classes he was interested in. These experiences in Madras and Paris led McLean to establish, beginning in 1984, a program that mirrored his own intellectual opportunities – the annual 10-week seminars held at the Catholic University in Washington. As noted earlier, McLean invites some 10 professors from 10 different countries, provides basic room and board for the participants, and designates them as CUA Visiting Research Scholars (which makes it possible for them to use the university libraries in the Washington area as well as the Library of Congress). McLean also encourages seminar participants to attend courses related to their research interests. In order to promote the active involvement of local university faculty, McLean founded The Center for the Study of Culture and Values at the Catholic University in 2000.

McLean's work in Asia has extended beyond India and the mainland of China; he has been a frequent visitor to Taiwan where, together with Professors Tran Van Doan and Vincent Shen, he has promoted work on the interface between traditional Chinese and Christian philosophy. He has participated in conferences in Japan (in connection with the work of Professors Tomonobu Imamichi and Noriko Hashimoto) and in the Philippines (with Professor Manny Dy). More recently, McLean has developed contacts with scholars in a number of other countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia.

McLean believes that Islamic philosophy and religion have much to contribute in the development of the present world. In order to understand the dynamic of this, in 1991 and 1992, he went to Cairo, Egypt, to study Islamic philosophy and religion at The Institute for Oriental Studies with Professor G. Anawati; he also gave lectures at the al-Azhar University (the world's oldest university).

In 1998, one of McLean's students from Iran invited him to participate in a conference in Tehran on the issue of security and cooperation. In the following year, he went back to Tehran to attend the first international conference on Mulla Sadra, during which time he was

invited to give a public lecture at Mofid University in Qom, the holy city for Shiite Muslims and the major center in Iran for training Muslim clerics. An Iranian scholar (Professor Musa S. Dibadj) said later that McLean was probably the first non-Muslim – and the first Christian – to give a public lecture in Qom. In 2000, McLean spent a month at Mofid University, lecturing and helping to organize the international meeting on human rights that was held in Tehran the next year.

After the former Soviet Republics in Central Asia established their independence in 1991, McLean began to work with philosophers from that region as well. In 1994, with the help of Professor Vadim S. Semenov, McLean visited Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to give a series of lectures at the University of Tashkent and to discuss plans for future cooperation with Professor Said Shermukhamedov. Later, McLean returned to Tashkent to teach at a summer school – which led to his invitation to Professor Victoriya Levinskaya to participate in the annual seminar in Washington – and subsequent visits to Uzbekistan (in 1999 and 2002) led to the publication of one of the first volumes in English written by Uzbek philosophers.

McLean has traveled through the other former Soviet Republics – to Turkmenistan (in 1997) where he spent two and half months investigating possibilities of working with philosophers there; to Kazakstan (in 1997, 1998, and 2002), to Georgia (in 1999 and 2001), to Kyrgystan (in 1998 and 2002), and to the Ukraine (in 1997, 1999, and 2001) – giving lectures, participating in colloquia, and organizing meetings. In 2003, to honor his contributions to philosophical development in Central Asia, McLean was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan.

If Kant is right in saying that to love is to do good, then McLean has shown a love that complements his intellectual commitments to help philosophers throughout the world to engage in their own philosophical work. The author of over a dozen books, and editor of some 70 others, McLean has strong philosophical views. Characteristically, however, he lets others speak first – and this reflects the influence of various traditions and cultures on his own work. These influences are many: the Thomistic philosophy and Catholic tradition in which he was first educated; the work of Paul Tillich which provided intellectual tools to engage other

traditions constructively; the critique of modernity of Martin Heidegger; the study of the philosophies and religions of India and Asia, and, of course, the contacts with philosophers from different regions and cultures. But, most of all, it is hermeneutics – which seeks to uncover what is hidden, yet also requires humility from the enquirer, an openness to the existence of different interpretations of texts, and the recognition that no interpretation is final – that underlies McLean’s approach to his work, his concern to bring scholars into dialogue, and his optimism concerning the future.

As we might expect, then, among his recent publications are volumes on *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change (lectures in Chennai/Madras, India)*; *Hermeneutics, Faith, and Relations between Cultures (lectures in Qom, Iran)*; and *Hermeneutics for a Global Age (lectures in Shanghai and Hanoi)*. Here, McLean traces “the nature of hermeneutics and the history of its development from a science to a life process,” argues “how an hermeneutic perspective can enable us better to understand the nature and formation of the religious tradition in which we stand and the role of that tradition in the reading of our sacred texts,” and reflects on “how such an understanding can be transformative in contemporary social life and engage in faithful dialogue with the many cultures and civilizations of the world.” The hermeneutical method, then, provides an intellectual tool to pursue what McLean also knows through his sense of love – that doing philosophy requires listening to others and letting their voices be heard.

CONCLUSION

To honor George Francis McLean for his friendship, for his contributions to scholarship, and for his tireless support of philosophy and philosophers from around the world, his colleagues and friends offer him this token of their appreciation and respect on the occasion of his 75th birthday on June 29, 2004.

At the end of any meeting, colloquium, or gathering, McLean asks ‘Where do we go from here?’ With his deep sense of faith, hope and love, he has devoted himself for decades to serving society through promoting ideas that may serve to bridge cultures and traditions.

Someone once asked McLean what were his motives for traveling to places where philosophy was considered by many in the West to be less developed, and where the social and intellectual situation was difficult. McLean's response was that philosophy is not a 'top down' activity; it is not something to be done in isolation or by a single individual. It comes from the grassroots, from people's everyday lives, and from the culture in which they live. Each people has its own way of living and searching for the meaning of life. Yet it also needs a window to let in new light and new air, and to let its unique character be seen by those outside. In the *Republic*, Plato gives us the allegory of the cave. Only those who climb out of the cave – painstakingly, passionately, and consistently – will come to see the light, the truth, and the Absolute. Philosophy, then, is the exercise of freedom.

Like McLean, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the great leader of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, wrote his doctoral dissertation on Paul Tillich. McLean loves to quote King's famous speech: *I Have a Dream*. Let us end this brief Introduction with the very last part of that speech. These words capture McLean's global commitments and his philosophical vision:

“With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to go to jail together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning

...

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that.

Let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia.

freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children – black men and white

men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last.”