

## Article

# The Evolutionary Masks of Love: Continuities between Judeo-Christian Religious Love and Modern Secular Love

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to establish a series of links between some of the main religious formulas that arise in Judaism and Christianity and the romantic and confluent love characteristic of modern societies. To carry it out, firstly, we analyze love in historical Judaism, reflecting on the Ahavah formula, the predominant formula in this religious context. Secondly, to study the Christian drift of love, we first analyze how the emergence of this new religious faith (Christianism) provokes a change in the Jewish way of understanding it (love). Subsequently, we analyze some of the three main formulas in which love materializes in Christianity: Agape, Caritas, and Amor Sui. Regarding modern love, we first carry out a contextualization focused on the processes of secularization and individualization, and their impact on it. Afterwards, we present the main features that define both romantic and confluent love, and finally, we analyze the Judeo-Christian characters inherited for such types of love. The methodology used focused on a literature review and theoretical reflection based on this review. The research carried out allows us to establish sociological continuities between Judeo-Christian religious love and modern secular love in the terms used throughout the paper.

**Keywords:** sociology of religion; sociology of emotions; Ahavah; Agape; Caritas; Amor Sui; romantic love; confluent love; secularization; individualization



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## 1. Introduction

In 1991, Merlin Donald published *Origins of the modern mind: Three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition*. Although he is not the first to raise his voice against the evolutionist conception that emphasizes the discontinuities between the different phases through which the evolution of societies has passed, his proposal appears as a systematic analysis focused not so much on the ruptures as on the inter-phase continuities. As he points out clearly in a later paper, his model is “a cascade, or cumulative model: previous adaptations are preserved, following the principle of conservation of gains.” (Donald 2012, p. 54). That is, if we want to understand social change in all its complexity, or any social phenomena, we must not only pay attention to elements of rupture but also of continuity (Donald 1991, 2012). In social evolution, as pointed out by Bellah, “nothing is ever lost” (Bellah 2011, p. 13).

Our work will focus on the social fact of love. Taking up what was commented in the previous paragraph and connecting it with love as our object of study, in this sense, our affirmation reveals that we cannot understand the current forms of love from the absolute rupture between the secular and the religious, but that in order to attend to the complexity of both love and social change, the aim of this paper will be to analyze the connections with the Sociology of Religion and the Sociology of Emotions, a series of continuities between religious love and secular love; specifically, we are going to analyze a series of continuities between love in its Judeo-Christian religious version—specifically concentrating on Historical Judaism and Christianity—and the dominant typologies of love in the societies of what Charles Taylor has defined as the Secular Age (Taylor 2007): confluent and romantic.

Before continuing, we would like to point out that although in accordance with the typology of religious evolution developed by Robert N. Bellah (1969), we are aware that there were two previous religious stages<sup>1</sup> and that love had a meaning and a role in them in terms of belief and religious practice, our starting point, and, therefore, our focus of interest, is situated in the scenario of the third religious stage (historical) in Bellah religious evolution, in which, little by little, a love that is becoming personified and individualized begins to be perceived.

First, we focus on the analysis of love in historical Judaism, which we articulate under two headings: one in which we carry out a contextualization centered on the transition from archaic Judaism to historical Judaism, and the other in which we develop the notion of Ahavah, understood as the basic formula of love that develops in this scenario. Second, in Christian religion, which emerged as a split from historical Judaism, love will also play a major role. To analyze it, we first dwell on the transition that leads from historical Judaism to Christianity and that provokes a transformation in the way of understanding love. Once this task has been accomplished, we present some of the three main formulas of love that develop on the stage of Christianity: Agape, Caritas, and Amor Sui. This last social form serves us as a bridge between religious love and modern secularized love. Third, in modern societies, love also plays a major role, but in a scenario of secularization and individualization. Thus, to understand the modern developments of love and its main formulas, romantic love and confluent love, we will first contextualize the epoch in which these two types will develop, examining the impact of secularization on them and, especially, of individualization. Subsequently, we approach romantic love and confluent love and, finally, we explore, according to the analysis previously realized, the Judeo-Christian characters inherited by one and the other, that is, the continuities between this kind of religious love and the secular modern love. This research allows us to confirm continuities between Judeo-Christian religious love and modern secular love in the terms used throughout this paper. As can easily be seen, in each section we carry out a double exercise: first, a contextualization that provides us with sociological keys to understand the transformations that occur around each of the concrete manifestations of love studied and a second exercise in which we delve into the features of each typology of love.

## 2. Results and Discussion

### 2.1. Religious Love in the Context of Judaism and Christianity

One of the key features that help us to understand the religious transformation that Judaism underwent during the historical stage is the role played by love in the context of the alliance that Yahweh established with his people. This notion of love, articulated through such varied formulas as Hesed or Ahavah, is the axis on which some of the most outstanding ethical prophecies pivot, such as those of Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, or Jonah (Sicre 1992), and which are developed between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C., coinciding with what Karl Jaspers (1994) refers to as the Axial Age. In the same way, love also occupies an important place in the conceptual plot of the book of Deuteronomy or 'Second Law', which was written during the VII century B.C., more specifically during the reigns of Manasseh and Josiah (Bellah 2011, pp. 308–9).

Subsequently, Christianity, a religious movement born as a sect (Weber 1979; Troeltsch [1912] 1931) in the bosom of historical Judaism (Eisenstadt 1986, p. 227), will develop the idea of Agape<sup>2</sup>, a type of love that transcends the Covenant and becomes one of the basic axes, a "central place" (Nygren 1932, p. 41), on which this new religious formula will pivot. As we shall see, however, it will do so without breaking radically with the tradition established in the prophetic books and in Deuteronomy. Later, St. Augustine will introduce the concept of Caritas (a term that Luther questions), understood as the only type of love that allows access to eternity and mystical union with God. In this scenario, the analysis on Amor Sui is also relevant to our work. We understand that, although he establishes an absolute dependence of the individual with respect to the divinity, his proposal confers a protagonism to the subject that he had not enjoyed until that moment, reinforcing with it

the drift initiated during the Axial Age (Jaspers 1994) with the emergence of the theoretical culture (Donald 1991), which is none other than that of the human being questioning himself in search of meaning and salvation.

Based on what has been pointed out in the previous paragraphs, the objective of this section is to approach the notion of religious love both in historical Judaism and in the origins of Christianity, pointing out that both types of religious love represent a first stage or moment in the development of a notion of love that will gradually be affected by two powerful modern social dynamics: individualization and secularization.

### 2.1.1. Love and Historical Judaism

From the Divine Monarchy to the 'Yahweh Alone' Movement and the Establishment of Love

Numerous authors (Bellah 2011; Eisenstadt 1986; Mattuck 1984; Uffenheimer 1986; William Robertson Smith 1882; Assmann 2006; among others) coincide in pointing out the capital importance of the 'Yahweh alone' (Smith 1971) movement to understand the transformation that took place in Judaism in the transition from the archaic stage to the historical one.

For Bellah (2011), the 'Yahweh alone' movement, its appearance and its institutionalization, provokes the transition from an archaic religion based on the existence of a divine monarchy (Uffenheimer 1986, pp. 149–50) to a clearly axial religiosity in which love will play a fundamental role<sup>3</sup>. In this transition, Bellah distinguishes two milestones on which we will dwell briefly: the first, linked to the emergence of ethical prophecy, and the second, with the appearance of the 'Second Law' or Deuteronomy.

The key to understanding the first milestone lies in the social recognition acquired by the prophets as an intellectual elite (Weber 1979; Eisenstadt 1986, pp. 4–5), as authorized voices, 'chosen' by Yahweh to reveal the 'Truth' to his People. This recognition is explained, in part, thanks to a series of sociological keys that we will now briefly enumerate. In the first place, these prophecies arise in a context of deep social and political crisis in both the southern kingdoms (Judah) and the northern kingdoms (Israel). Secondly, the words of the prophets reveal a kind of exhaustion of both henotheism<sup>4</sup> and archaic religiosity, in which the monarch plays a key role in the mediation between Yahweh and his People and, therefore, in the relationships they establish. Thus, the context of crisis and the identification between political and religious power are essential elements for understanding the success of the 'Yahweh alone' movement, that is, the transformation experienced by Judaism, which will have a direct impact on our object of study: love.

For the prophets, it is the worship of multiple divinities and the consequent lack of fidelity and love to the one true god that has brought Jewish society to the situation in which it finds itself. Consequently, the background of the social and political problem is, for them, religious in nature, and since the problem is religious, the solution to it must also be religious. The way of salvation is the veneration and unconditional faithful love towards the one and only true god, Yahweh.

In the same way, the prophets advocate an unmediated religiosity, a relationship with the divinity without intermediaries of any kind, one in which the interaction takes place directly between the super-sensible being and the community that venerates him<sup>5</sup>. Thus, between Yahweh and his people a covenantal, intimate, loving relationship is articulated that transcends the archaic logic centered on royal mediation and sacrifice.

This transition from an archaic religiosity to a historical religiosity (Bellah 1969) can also be analyzed in terms of charisma. In the emergence of ethical religiosity, this charisma is gradually transferred to the person, in this case the prophets. Subsequently, we will witness a second process of transference when this charisma is routinized (Weber 1979) in the form of a sacred book becoming the bearer of that 'portable' charisma (Jung 2012) that will gradually replace the temple. Portable religion (Jung 2012; Bellah 2011), which emerges during the Axial Age, lays the foundations for the emergence of religiosities that, subsequently, will have a clear individual (Luckmann 1967; James 1902) or personal (Beck

2009) component. Specifically, it will not be until the emergence of the printing press, in the middle of the fifteenth century, and the universalization of literacy that this religious formula will be able to develop its full individualizing potential.

In this process of individualization of charisma, the work of the prophet Isaiah (8th century B.C.)<sup>6</sup> stands out, since, in the first place, he acts as a compiler of the written prophetic tradition<sup>7</sup>, basically of his principles of justice and love as the basis of the ‘new’ identity of Yahweh (Mattuck 1984, pp. 50–54). And, secondly, because he establishes bridges between prophethood and monarchy and, therefore, also with the archaic priestly religious hierarchy. Moreover, the role played by Isaiah allows us to connect ethical prophecy with the second milestone: the one linked to the importance of Deuteronomy for the consolidation of the ‘Yahweh alone’ movement. The first thing to note regarding this question is that this text definitively places at the center of the religious scene the Covenant established between Yahweh and his People and, from it, a direct relationship—although not yet individualized—between the divine being and the human being based on fidelity and love. Secondly, the figure of Moses is highlighted above that of any other ethical prophet, thus turning him into a ‘super-prophet’ (Geller 1996).

In short, the prophets act as an intellectual ‘advance guard’ that plays an active and crucial role in undermining Henotheistic religiosity and the divine monarchy (nuclear elements in archaic religion in Bellah’s terms), proposing a new ‘historical’ (Bellah 1969) religious formula based on the Covenant between Yahweh and his people, understood as Deuteronomy or ‘second law’. In this covenant, the love between the divinity and his community becomes one of the main axes from which this new religiosity is structured.

#### Love in the New Covenant Scenario between Yahweh and His People

In a work entitled “The Main Hebrew Words for Love” (2009), Cezar-Paul Harlaoanu carries out an in-depth analysis of the two terms most used in the Torah to refer to love: Ahavah and Hesed. It is not the purpose of this work to study in detail what differentiates them. What we want to accomplish by way of introduction is to record both the presence of different terms to explain the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people and the polysemy attached to both and then briefly focus on the analysis made by Walter Brueggemann (1997) of the term Ahavah, which is the most used in the Hebrew Bible (Harlaoanu 2009, pp. 51–52; Begum 2022).

With regard to Hesed, and after associating it with notions such as mercy, kindness, compassion, grace, zeal, or pity—according to the context in which they are used in the prophetic books of Jeremiah, Micah, or Zechariah—Israel I. Mattuck (1984, pp. 74–76) bets on encompassing all this polysemy around the idea of the “ethical principle” of “dynamic love”, which is hidden behind the double affirmation of Leviticus: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18) and “Love the foreigner as yourself” (19:34). But this love is not limited to the interaction between human beings, whether near or far, but is also the basis of their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Even Yahweh’s own attitude towards his people is called, in some passages (Mattuck 1984, p. 76), Hesed. In short, for Mattuck, Hesed would be one of the fundamental principles from which the transition from archaic religion to historical religiosity can be certified. Sins will no longer be related to worship, they will be ethical faults of love and faithfulness, as pointed out by Bellah (2011, p. 301) and William Robertson Smith (1882, p. 164).

Having briefly analyzed the term Hesed, let us focus on Ahavah. As Harlaoanu points out, “It is interesting to see that [...] covers a quite big area of meanings [...]. [It] represents a very strong feeling, like an inner force which gives impulse in performing a pleasant action, in obtaining the desired object or in assuming the self-sacrifice for the happiness of the loved ones” (Harlaoanu 2009, pp. 52–53). Alysha Begum pointed out the following: “The root of the word ‘Ahavah’ is ‘Ahv’ [...] ‘Ahavah’ has a deeper meaning, and it is connected directly not just with the emotions but with the ‘action’ and ‘obedience’ [...] ‘Ahavah’ is all about giving and sharing unconditionally [...] It’s strongly an action. It

is not something that happens to us, but it's a condition that we create when we give" (Begum 2022, pp. 4–6).

Brueggemann adds, regarding Ahavah, that "Three clusters of uses of the term in this context of Yahweh's generative inclination toward Israel" (Brueggemann 1997, pp. 414–15). The first cluster would be linked to its use in Deuteronomy (i.e., 7:7–9) and to the main role it represents in the context of the covenant between Yahweh and his people. The love here exposed is intimately related to the maintenance of the Covenant (Bloom 2006, p. 167; Deuteronomy, 10:12). Deuteronomic love is, then, the vehicle that allows the covenant to be sustained.

Brueggemann develops the second cluster from the book of Hosea (3:1 and 11). In this case, for the prophet, the main cause of the 'evils' afflicting his people is the lack of correspondence to the unconditional love professed by Yahweh. He uses for this purpose the well-known metaphors of the 'unfaithful wife' (3:1) and of the 'son' who does not correspond to the love displayed by his father (Bellah 2011, p. 301; William Robertson Smith 1882, p. 167). Here, the fundamental thing is that the people are being unfaithful to the 'father' or 'husband', thus moving away from the right path. In this cluster we again perceive a clear ethical dimension linked to what the people should do and do not do, which is none other than to love their god. Now, Yahweh is the betrayed husband, the unrequited father, but, and this is important, he is also a close being, husband, and father, a relative<sup>8</sup>, the closest thing to oneself that any person can have. This is important to point out, as it implies a clear rapprochement, an acquisition of sociological familiarity in the relationship between the divine and the human, and a reflection of the family forms in the society of the time.

The third cluster is developed by Brueggemann (1997) from the prophetic book of Jeremiah (31:3–4). This time Yahweh appears as Israel's savior. A god who professes, now indeed, unconditional love for his people. Implicit in this unconditionality is the soteriological and gracious component linked to the one god. This argument, which, as we saw, was already present in Hosea, Brueggemann also identifies in the prophecy of Isaiah (43:3–4). In this sense, love and the soteriological character of theodicy are joined by the question of election. Israel is the people chosen by Yahweh, his favorite, the reason why he loves him.

In summary, the importance that 'Ahavah' acquires in this Jewish religious scenario certifies that "the political covenant between the divine king and his vassal nation is transmuted into the covenant of love between the divine bridegroom and his bride (...) creating a personal, concrete relationship of love between each child and his divine savior" (Uffenheimer 1986, p. 152).

Christianism, as we will see in the following section, will abandon the particularistic path of the alliance established between Yahweh and his people to project itself as a religiosity with a markedly universal character in which love plays a role of the first order in terms of salvation.

### 2.1.2. Love and Christianity

#### From Historical Judaism to Christianity

The centrality given by the 'deuteronomic revolution' (Bellah 2011) to the covenant between Yahweh and his people, a particularistic tendency, overlaps some other tendencies, e.g., universalistic, that could already be clearly observed in some of the prophetic texts and even in some passages of Deuteronomy itself. In historical Judaism, there is a dynamic tension between the universal and the particular (Eisenstadt 1986, p. 132; Stroumsa 1986, p. 254) from which the particular emerges victorious. This tension, and, above all, the different response given to it, will be at the basis of the emergence of a new sect (Weber 1979; Troeltsch [1912] 1931) within Judaism: Christianity. In fact, where Judaism was betting on the particular way, Christianity will advocate the universal way; where Judaism defended the particularity of the covenant mediated by love, Christianity understands love as the basis of the new relationship between God and humanity. As Eisenstadt points



out, the rise of Christianity provokes “two basic changes in relation to the Jewish faith and religion. First was the transformation of the political and primordial elements from their connection with a specific people into much more general, universal, less specifically national or “ethnic” elements -although not necessarily totally negating these elements, as was later the case in Israel. The second [...] was the weakening of the emphasis on contractual or covenantal relations between God and His people” (Eisenstadt 1986, p. 236).

This religious delocalization, which had already begun in Judaism with the transition from the temple to the book understood as a portable sacred device (Jung 2012; Gil-Gimeno and Capdequí 2021), reaches with Christianity a new dimension regarding the relationship between Yahweh (now God) and his people. Thus, in Christianity, the chosen people, whom God loves, is no longer the Jew, but the whole of humanity. Circumcised and Gentiles form a new religious community of the elect whom God (no longer Yahweh) loves because they are human beings. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to love neighbors and strangers, as prescribed in Leviticus (19:18), because there are no longer strangers, since the whole of humanity is God’s child. Therein lies the character of its truth and universality, and that is the reason why faith is expressed through love of God and neighbor (Qinping Liu 2007, p. 682). Truth and grace acts through love as Kierkegaard (1949)<sup>9</sup> also reminds us through his expression of divine love as ‘middle ground’, and which takes the form no longer of Ahavah but of Agape.

But, to overcome the particular way, it was necessary for the Covenant to lose the weight it acquired in the deuteronomic tradition. In this sense, the words attributed to Jesus of Nazareth are key: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Mathew, 22:35-4013). These words allow us to reorient Levitical and Exodus religiosity and, therefore, also that of Deuteronomy. Thus, although the Law is present in the conversation we have just reproduced and continues to have an important weight in Christianity, love displaces the Covenant as the backbone of religious logic in a new scenario in which, now, the axial tension between the universal and the particular is resolved in favor of the former. Likewise, in this scenario of weakening of the ethno-cultural dimension in the relationship with God, the individual in himself as well as in his relationship with the divinity acquire a greater protagonism. As Bellah (1969) points out, the religious action of the historical stage is that aimed at answering the question that human beings ask themselves about their salvation, in an axial socio-cultural context in which second-order thinking (Elkana 1986) is progressively imposing itself. In this new scenario, three types of Christian love emerge: Agape, Caritas, and Sui love.

### Agape

The teachings of Jesus of Nazareth paved the way for the emergence of a universalist religious doctrine of salvation based on love, but if there is a key figure in the development of the way of Agape, it is Paul of Tarsus. For him “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans, 13:10); it is more than the Law. According to Badiou’s interpretation of St. Paul’s work, Agape would be “to this universal address that faith, or pure subjectivation does not constitute on its own” (Badiou 2003, p. 87). In St. Paul, Agape would be the driving force that pushes towards faith, which implies, in a context of historical religion, that it is a force that directs towards truth and salvation (the meaning of life).

In this same sense, Anders Nygren, in his classical work *Agape and Eros* (Nygren 1932, p. 48)<sup>10</sup>, points out that Agape is “Christianity’s own original basic conception”, a “fundamental motive”, because it gives this creed three vertebral qualities: it makes it a unified whole, determines its structure, and gives it its specific character. In addition, this same author (Nygren 1932, pp. 75–80) also makes an analysis of the traits that define Christian love (Agape, in his own terms) and which would be the following:

1. It is spontaneous and unmotivated. The true religiosity of Jesus is based on the relationship of love between the human and the divine<sup>11</sup> (Hegel 1978, p. 295); in fact, with Jesus the divine enters the world as man, since he is the Son of God and Son of

Man (Álvarez 2005, p. 47). Moreover, the love revealed by Jesus surpasses all limits, refuses to be controlled, and is determined only by its own intrinsic nature. In fact, as Nygren points out, “Motivated love is human; spontaneous and unmotivated love is Divine” (Nygren 1932, p. 75). Through this quote we can notice a tension still present today in Christian theology: that between divine love and human love (Arendt 1996), celestial and popular (Plato 1871), or, between Agape and Eros (Nygren 1932)<sup>12</sup>. As we can see, for Nygren Agape is a love, a force, fundamentally spiritual that starts exclusively from the divinity, while Eros would be a love with a more carnal character, more material and human. Behind this positioning, one glimpses the sociological tension, also properly axial, between this and the other world (Eisenstadt 1986) as a means of access to the sacred or as a path to salvation. In this scenario, carnal love is presented as an inadequate method of conducting spiritual life. It distracts and takes away from the sacred. This hiatus between this and the other world allows us to characterize and sociologically explain the Agape-type love described by Nygren. Both the tension between spheres of action and the dependence of the saeculum (of the century, of the intra-worldly) on the extra-worldly speak to us of a context of meaning in which the dualism that Bellah (1969) speaks of as characteristic of the historical stage of religion is produced. The fact is that, in this context, the Agape type of love acts as an ambivalent element that, as Marcel Hénaff explained with respect to sacrifice (Hénaff 2010), at once separates and communicates, gives and achieves in doing so;

2. We have pointed out that, through Agape, the particularistic distinction between neighbors and strangers is resolved, since God becomes the father of humanity, regardless of the origin of persons. Despite this, this father is no longer driven by jealousy or distrust, but by understanding. He has ceased to be an unrequited lover and husband, becoming *Abba*. Not only in a father, but in ‘dad’, thus introducing a marked emotional–affective component, taking a step further in the closeness between the suprasensible being and the human being based on the existence of an affective, loving, paternal–filial relationship between the two. In the same way, the opening of Christianity towards the universal is a first and important step taken in the field of religion regarding the self-understanding of humanity as a whole (Bellah 1969) and regarding the gradual acquisition of the importance of the subject in the relationships with the sacred;
3. It is the driving force of the relationship with God<sup>13</sup>. It is only through Agape that the human being meets God. Undoubtedly, behind this idea, we find the arguments of Badiou (2003) and Kierkegaard (1949)<sup>14</sup>, who understand Agape as a mediating force between the divine and the human. We find it interesting to point out that, through this feature, a distinction is established between God and Agape. As a driver of the relationship with God, Agape is something distinct from divinity. From this perspective, it could fulfill two functions: either as a mediator, as an instrument of communication between God and humanity, developing the tasks performed by institutions such as the *regia* during the archaic period, sacrifice in ritual religiosity, or the Covenant in axial Judaism, or as a force that drives this mediation, not as a basic sacred force. In all these cases, Agape would always be subordinated to God;
4. It is creative, it creates value, it creates love. “Agape is creative love [...] is a value creating principle” (Nygren 1932, p. 78). Based on this statement, the fourth trait seems to point to a definition of Agape different from the one developed so far. While in the previous features Nygren establishes a clear distinction between God and Agape, in this last one the difference is not so clear. Agape as a value-creating principle could be interpreted as a kind of liberation (an end to the relationship of subordination) of the latter with respect to God. It could point to a kind of sacralization of Agape or an identification between God and Agape. In establishing this identification between God and Agape, Christian love would play a role like that represented by other forces such as *numen*, *tapas*, *mana*, *orenda*, or *wakan* in other religious traditions, it would be

considered the force, the energy, the breath behind the sacred. In this context, Agape would cease to be a means to an end.

Points 3 and 4 of Nygren's analysis of Agape generate controversy about the impact or weight of Agape-type love in Christian theology, as Oord (2010) has pointed out. As far as our purpose is concerned, we find it interesting to point out that both interpretations can be used to explain the transition from a love with a clear religious imprint to another of a secular character. Regarding the identification of Agape as an element of mediation between the divine and the human (point 3), we can interpret that what has taken place is a process of means–end conversion. That is, what in the symbolic context of the Middle Ages is interpreted as a means, with the passage of time and the arrival of secular modernity becomes an end, in this case, a sacred or sacralized element (love). If we focus on Agape as something sacred (point 4), what we would have witnessed is a process in which the characterizations of the historical sacred would have entered into crisis, but not the sacred. *In this scenario, the reference 'god is agape' would have been transformed into 'love is sacred'.*

#### Caritas<sup>15,16</sup>

We concluded the previous section by pointing out that the different approaches to the notion of love understood as Agape cast a series of reasonable doubts about its background, since, according to them, Agape could be understood both as a privileged means of access to the sacred and as the very force, the breath, the sacred breath (Nygren 1932). Well, if we turn to Augustinian philosophy this doubt is quickly dispelled, since it does not admit the possibility of identification between God and love. For him, love is always a means, one that allows connecting the individual with God, either through remembrance or longing (Appetitus): "Caritas is but the road that connects man and his ultimate goal" (Arendt 1996, p. 33). For better understanding the idea of Caritas, we must situate it in a broader framework of analysis within the thought of Saint Augustine.

We cannot understand the background associated with Caritas without referring, once again, to the historical religion (Bellah 1969) and to the existence of dynamic tensions between the transcendent and mundane planes. This duality is linked to two types of love, Cupiditas, worldly and "wrong" (Arendt 1996, p. 17), and Caritas, of divine origin: the "right" (Arendt 1996, p. 17)<sup>17</sup> and nuclear element to establish communication between the two spheres of action.

As Arendt (1996) rightly points out, the love that develops as Appetitus, whether through Caritas (right) or Cupiditas (wrong), is oriented *Ad Futurum*, something that would forget or disregard a capital foundational fact from the perspective of Christian philosophy: that this creature (human being) who longs for his fusion with the eternal has been previously created by a creator (God). For St. Augustine, this foundational fact provides a first experience of eternity, which is what properly inspires this searching for eternity. This experience, the memory of it and of the absolute dependence that the subject has with respect to the divinity, is what provokes the Appetitus that the human being feels. Love, then, would be the means through which the subject tries to recover, to remember, that foundational act. Subsequently, this memory is the substratum from which hope is projected, the Appetitus of eternity, which manifests itself in the form of Caritas.

To 'make memory' around the origin of the subject's existence is what allows the human being to find the right path towards the future re-encounter with God. This path is that of love, retrospective, that remembers the primordial milestone and assumes the consequences of it. This is why, of the two types of love articulated by St. Augustine, only one serves as a key to access eternity: Caritas love. Cupiditas love is self-referential and does not allow this recall exercise to be carried out. Caritas, on the other hand, implies an explicit recognition of the human being's dependence on God and an abandonment of self, a recognition that what is crucial is not the subject, nor the love he is capable of articulating and professing. God is reached exclusively through Caritas. Only the Caritas type of love makes possible the connection between the shores of the divine and the human.



Now, if we analyze the sociological dimension that lies behind Augustine's analyses of love, what we can perceive, besides the already enunciated dualism (Bellah 1969) between this and the other world, is that in his reflections we can clearly perceive—and this is something that Charles Taylor (1992) has already clearly detected—how the individual is acquiring protagonism with regard to his soteriological condition. What is relevant here is not the existence of God, or the dependence of the human being on the divinity; *the underlying problem is the human being himself, his origin and his goal and the meaning that runs through his existence*. Reflections on love such as those of St. Augustine reveal a social and sociological scenario in which the individual has become the subject of reflection on the world. We cannot yet speak of a sacralization of the individual or of the person, nor of an autonomy of the human with respect to the divine; this is something that will develop with the passage of time. Now, in the Augustinian proposal on love it is clearly perceived how Caritas acts as a bridge that connects the shores of the sacred and the profane (secular). It is the understanding, internalization, and development of caritas that enables the human being to connect with the divine. Therefore, love is the means through which the subject accesses the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of which Rudolf Otto (2012) speaks. What is important here is the human being in search of God. In short, Caritas becomes one of the means through which human beings take control of their destiny in a scenario in which the human being still experiences an absolute dependence on the divinity.

## 2.2. Amor Sui<sup>18</sup> as a Precedent for Modern Manifestations of Love

The journey made throughout this section has allowed us to understand how love gradually acquires weight in the Judeo-Christian religious discourse. At the same time, the individual is taking center stage, becoming a problem in himself that he intends to solve. In a first moment, Ahavah becomes one of the main vehicles of the alliance between Yahweh and his people from which both the Jewish 'second Law' and the prophetic texts are articulated. In a second moment, this alliance acquires a new dimension with the emergence of Christianity, which leaves aside the special relationship between the Jewish people and Yahweh to carry out a proposal in which the people of God acquire a universal dimension. Regardless of their more particular (Judaism) or universal (Christianism) character, what is certain is that both creeds define the relationship between the human and the divine in loving terms.

Thus, having analyzed in depth the different formulas developed by historical Jewish and Christian religious love, the aim of this new section is to establish links between these and some of the main manifestations of love in modernity, in this case, between romantic and confluent love. From our point of view, one of the axes that allow us to establish these links, and on which the collective imaginary of modern societies is articulated, is the gradual importance acquired by the individual, in a first moment, in the relationship with the divinity and, in a second moment, after the entry into crisis of the dualism existing between this and the other world (Bellah 1969). Thus, the Axial Age would serve as the inaugural scenario in which the human being becomes an object for himself (Elkana 1986; Bellah 1969), and from which he begins to construct reality around the search for his salvation, from a more religious perspective, or around meaning, to a more secular perspective: "From the point of view of these religions a man is no longer defined chiefly in terms of what tribe or clan he comes from or what particular god he serves but rather as a being capable of salvation. That is to say that it is for the first time possible to conceive of man as such" (Bellah 1969, p. 74).

The analysis carried out is articulated as a clear example that, in a first stage—the one represented by historical religion, embodied in this study in the Judaism of the covenant and Christianity—this search for salvation is oriented towards the beyond, more specifically towards the supernatural being that dwells outside the walls of the world, a being with whom the subject or the chosen people must ingratiate themselves, basically through love, and on whom they absolutely depend. Now, little by little, this search becomes secularized; that is, it is reoriented towards the saeculum, and, in so doing, the individual progressively

emancipates himself from divinity, freeing himself from his dependence regarding the question of salvation and meaning. In this new scenario, the individual is no longer obliged to ingratiate himself with the divinity to attain salvation, but with himself, love being one of the formulas used to achieve it. One of the guiding ideas of this work is to point out that in the Jewish and Christian historical manifestations (Bellah 1969) we already find the germ of what later, in the modern age, we will call the process of individualization. The different conceptions of love, namely Ahavah, Agape, or Caritas to point out the ones we are working on, necessarily contribute to this acquisition of the individual's strength. But not only that, progressively, as can be deduced from the analysis of the creative dimension of agape presented by Nygren (1932), love becomes the thing sacred. *In modern societies, love is reoriented towards the world without losing its sacred character.*

We consider that, in order to understand this transition from historical religious love to modern secularized love and, more importantly, to establish bridges between the two, it is interesting to dwell briefly on the concept of Amor Sui in St. Augustine, since, in and through it, it is clearly perceived how this individual begins to become, or to feel, responsible in the first person for the soteriological problem: "What Augustine expects of God is an Answer to the question Who am I" (Arendt 1996, p. 25). In this sense, the task that St. Augustine demands of the believer in his process of searching for God is that of carrying out an exercise of self-transcendence; that is, he demands that the believer surpass himself—this is the sociological definition of transcendence developed by Georg Simmel (2000)—or, as the sociologist of religion Hans Joas also points out, he demands an exercise of transcendence understood as "sacredness become reflexive" (Joas 2021, p. 154).

To carry out this task, we will focus briefly on the explanations developed by John Burnaby. According to him (Burnaby 1938, pp. 117–21), there are three derivations of self-love from St. Augustine's perspective: "The first natural and morally neutral, the second morally wrong and the third morally right" (Burnaby 1938, p. 121). The first of these formulas would be related to the "instinct for self-preservation" (Canning 1984, p. 151), and, therefore, lacks an ethical or religious basis. The second, morally incorrect, as Raymond Canning points out, "is to wish to put oneself in the place of God" (Canning 1984, p. 152), "self-assertion rather than self-love" (Burnaby 1938, p. 121), while the third, morally adequate, consists in the love of God, in the absolute abandonment of oneself for the sake of a higher good: God.

Thus, according to St. Augustine, the only valid form of Amor Sui, of love for oneself, is that which starts from the individual but which, at the same time, implies an abandonment of self. Something which, in turn, becomes the key to access to the good, to absolute well-being, to the absence of fear and anxiety, to eternity. In this sense, the only valid type of Amor Sui is the one oriented towards Caritas (Arendt 1996, p. 27). This aspect is also developed by Oliver O'Donovan in *The Problem of Self-love in St. Augustine* (O'Donovan 1980), when he points out that the key for St. Augustine does not lie in whether Amor Sui is right or wrong regardless of the use to which it is put. When self-love is oriented toward knowledge of God or toward fusion with God, such love puts the individual on the right path.

As we can see, the human being turned into a problem for himself, who seeks to attain salvation, and has a clear protagonism in the reflections of St. Augustine. In fact, in his work, we find an explicit recognition that the human being has a say in his salvation, despite his absolute dependence on God. For Augustine, even if the answer to the question of salvation is God, and even if the proper means to attain it is right love, that is, Caritas (not Cupiditas or worldly love), the underlying problem is neither God nor love, but the individual, a being who seeks answers that will enable him to transcend his worldly state of fear and anxiety. Therefore, despite the fact that the individual's room for maneuver is very limited due to the absolute dependence he experiences with respect to the creator (divinity), and that in the work of St. Augustine the subject is always considered an instrument, a means, *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, and never an end in itself, we understand that his reflections can be recognized as a milestone on the road to the processes of modern

individualization. In the same way, little by little, love will also gradually free itself from its dependence on the divinity, from its condition as a means, as understood by St. Augustine, becoming a primary source of access to meaning and transcendence and acquiring different masks such as romantic love or confluent love.

In short, with the passage of time, we will witness, on the one hand, the emancipation of love and of the individual regarding divinity, which experiences a clear and progressive loss of preeminence and social weight. On the other hand, in modern societies, secularized love will sometimes, and not exclusively, play the role of a substitute for God, thus becoming, finally, the answer to the question of meaning and salvation<sup>19</sup>.

### 2.3. Judeo-Christian Legacies of Modern Love

#### 2.3.1. Love Has Been Secularized without Losing Its Religious Trace

As we have indicated in the previous section, love basically adopts three elements from the Jewish and Christian religions. In the first place, love for oneself and one's neighbor, love in personal relationships, becomes a fundamental axis, a central meaning (Ramírez 1979, p. 44; Schnell 2000, p. 111; Nygren 1932)<sup>20</sup> both religiosity of believers, from Christian Agape, and of society itself in Modernity. Secondly, there will be a gradual secularization of love that will lead, in Modernity, to the individual and love gradually emancipating themselves from divinity. Thus, ultimately, secularized love will replace God himself and will become a possible response to the meaning of human existence and salvation. And, thirdly, that personal salvation and the individual will end up becoming the basic problem of social life, thus representing a decisive milestone on the long Western road towards the society of individualization.

Perhaps, the 'hegemonic' thesis (Casanova 2012) of secularization articulated through the mantra "The more modern a society is, the more secular, and the more secular, the less religious" (Casanova 2009, pp. 1056–57), has proven to be the least relevant component of sociological theory on modernization. Thus, although, apparently, in secular society religion was relegated to the private sphere, the modernization that culminated at the end of the eighteenth century did not lead to the destruction of the influence of religion, but to the development of new types of religiosities, among which stand out, among others, the "modern civil religions" (Bellah 1970, p. 204; Parsons 1974, pp. 202–11).

This explains why Sociology has ended up accepting that "in the complex texture of love very diverse threads are interwoven, ranging from the biological-sexual to the mythological or imaginary" (Morin 1998, pp. 1–3) and with different origins, to the extent that in love converge the sacred and the profane, the mythological and the sexual. Indeed, in it "nothing is ever lost" (Bellah 2011, p. 13) since previous stages are preserved, reorganizing themselves under new conditions. In this sense, the progress or historical evolution of love is not linear, since the forms of the past coexist with those of the present, so that, in the latter, there remain vestiges of the ways of understanding love of our ancestors.

Consequently, witnesses of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian civilizations will be preserved in Western love, in its fundamental types—'Platonic Eros', 'Christian Agape', 'courtly love' and 'passionate love'—and in the two modern models of love—'romantic love' and 'confluent love'—which are their heirs, preserving a line of continuity in their development. Our proposal focuses on rescuing and analyzing those elements of continuity that are already present in the developments of love in the axial Judaism and Christianity scenario and that we can identify in the modern typologies of romantic love and confluent love.

In prehistoric human beings, subjects merge with the totality of nature and its rhythms and, therefore, love is seen by them as cosmic and sexual (Ramírez 1979, p. 47). In Ancient Greece, Plato considers Eros to be a mystery that links human beings with the divine, insofar as it constitutes a 'daimon', a divinity that dwells within the human being. Moreover, this Platonic Eros is exercised through the contemplation of bodily beauty, in the carnal love that is seen in each body. But, at the same time, this Eros moves the human being from the sensible to the suprasensible and hence its religious character (Ramírez 1979, p. 48), without forgetting that Platonic Eros constitutes a type of ideal love, a source of energy

(Cruz 2010, p. 217) that leads, through successive stages, to a dissolution of individuality (Ramírez 1979, p. 50) and to an encounter with the superior Idea.

Of Christian Agape, we have already analyzed its main characters, although it can be emphasized that Agápē (Greek: ἀγάπη) is the Hellenic term to describe a type of unconditional and thoughtful love, altruistic, which seeks the welfare of the beloved (Ramírez 1979, p. 53), which is defined by giving before receiving and, therefore, by self-sacrifice (Ferrer et al. 2008, p. 590; Gil-Gimeno and Capdequí 2021)—as it happened in the Jewish Ahavah, with self-sacrifice for the happiness of the beloved. Moreover, it is transcendent and becomes a path of personal salvation for the lovers, as in axial Judaism and Christian Agape.

‘Courtly love’, predominant in the Middle Ages, builds a syncretism or synthesis between the rhetoric of Eros, human love, and Agape, or love of God, although it divinizes profane love (Gerli 1980, pp. 316–18) and becomes a “religion of love” (Green 1970, pp. 42–46), precedent of the modern one. Moreover, it develops a “cult of the beloved” (Ivanovici 2011, p. 389), by placing the woman at the center, by integrating in her all the ideals of the lover, an echo of the Platonic Eros, and by sharing the gift of salvation, in addition to the ‘martyrdom’ and the ‘penance of loves’. Likewise, courtly love, for example, in literature, effects a certain secularization (Zahareas 2001, p. 647ff.), insofar as the moral bond it establishes is no longer between God and the human being, but between man and woman.

Finally, ‘love passion’ or ‘aristocratic love’, which appears in the fifteenth century and remains to this day, is universal like Agape without excluding the affirmation of the personal (Ramírez 1979, p. 53) and while consolidating love as a concept and as a carnal and spiritual, sexual and emotional, whole, although not necessarily linked to marriage (Herrasti 2019, p. 248). Moreover, it is closely linked to sexual attraction, something decisive in this model of love. Now, this does not constitute only a carnal sexuality, since it is also an intense, and even ‘dramatic’, form of loving, so strong that it uproots people from the world, disconnects them from the daily routine by deconstructing them from society and, in short, disorganizing social relations; hence, this type of love endangers social duty and order. For all these reasons, passionate love represents a type of religious fervor and becomes the model of the later ‘romantic love’, which, however, presents differentiated characters.

Thus, ‘romantic love’, which emerges at the end of the seventeenth century and defines the first modernity, is, consequently, an inheritance of the ‘courtly love’ of the feudal system (Elias 1994, p. 325ff.) and of the ‘passion love’ characteristic of the absolutist aristocracy, linked in turn to ‘Platonic Eros’ and Christian ‘Agape’. Likewise, ‘confluent love’, the other modern type of love (Giddens 1992, pp. 43–63), constitutes an evolution of the romantic one. Therefore, the religious imprint on all these types of love is more than notable and has not disappeared in Modernity, as we will see below.

### 2.3.2. The Central Meaning of Love in Modern Society

Indeed, it can be pointed out that, just as it happened in the Jewish religion, which replaced the primitive covenant with love, and in the Christian religion, with its universal scope, in modern societies love has a cardinal significance. This is made explicit in the fact that this feeling constitutes a new form of religiosity (Alberoni 2005, p. 242), secular or earthly (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2008, p. 233ff.), and, in short, a way of achieving a status of “secular religion” (Parsons 1974, p. 217; Beck 1995, p. 184) or—as in ‘courtly love’—of “religion of love” (Parsons 1974, p. 220; Tenenbaum 2022, p. 23).

This secularized or civil religion, on the other hand, creates a grand narrative that compensates (exerts a compensatory effect on) the Society of Individualization, to which we will refer below, which diminishes self-interest and reinforces the affective solidarity—love—of individuals among themselves, an essential part of the original Puritanism (Parsons 1974, p. 222), constituting one of the main characteristics of Modernity.

### The Religious Origins of Individualism in Modern Society

Not surprisingly, from St. Augustine and his *Amor Sui*, and later from Protestantism, Western societies have acquired an emphasis on the individual and individualism through phenomena such as conversion, a personal relationship with Jesus, private devotion, and Bible study (Turner 2005, p. 311). Specifically, the Lutheran branch possessed as its basic concern the salvation of the individual soul of the Christian believer, so that it ‘individualized’ and ‘privatized’ (Luckmann 1967) the religious situation (Parsons 1974, pp. 202–3). This has entailed that individualism has culminated the process of modernization (Beck 2006, p. 173; 2017, p. 209; Lash 2007, pp. 13–29; Bauman 2003, pp. 59–95; 2006, pp. 27–57; 2011, p. 129), that it has become “institutionalized” (Parsons 1974, pp. 218, 223; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2003, pp. 339–55), to the point that it would have been transformed into a kind of religion of modern society (Turner 2005, p. 305). Well, this process has been configured in two stages: ‘the first or simple modernity’, which has a logic of structures, interested in social order, social norms, functions, and roles of individuals within those structures, and ‘the second or reflexive modernity’, dominated by the logic of flows, by a changing and liquid modernity and because it thinks itself.

In this second modernity, which takes shape from the 1960s onwards, a utilitarian or expressive individualism that redefines values by virtue of the personal preferences of everyone deepens. With the emergence of the consumer capitalist society, the ascetic ethos that was at the root of the cult of the individual will collide with the hedonism of a generation devoted to the demand for expressiveness, of love and enjoyment, and which places the experience of the self at the epicenter of the social (Lash 2007, pp. 21–75; Bell 1977, pp. 45–89). But the one we refer to is a ‘commodified’ self, the result of the “fusion of the self and the market” (Kumar and Makarova 2008, p. 325), which, in turn, causes a crisis in the relationship between the individual and the public interest that results in damage to the binding instances and institutions. Consequently, it represents the triumph of an individuation formed by a mixture of flexibility and disintegrating indifference to the common (Sennett 2008).

Furthermore, the individual of this second phase is constructed on a daily basis as an incomplete, indeterminate, and precarious task and therefore has no ‘being’ (something that did occur in ‘simple modernity’). This causes all the risks of society to fall on him, without forgetting that he is forced to solve systemic problems, formerly the competence of the State and of institutions, including religious ones, apart from each and every one of those that are part of his daily affairs. In addition, his biography is more flexible and the result of a bricolage, of a conjunction of dispersed and heterogeneous fragments, among which are those received from the Judeo-Christian culture. Consequently, this individuality, turned into an obligatory destiny, denotes a greater fragility in relationships and the loss of certainties in them (Beck 1988, p. 217), which does not prevent it, at the same time, from being creative—recalling the creative love in *Agape*—and free and, even, from increasing the possibilities of choice, especially the amorous ones.

### Individualism of Sacred Origin in ‘Romantic Love’ and ‘Confluent Love’

Romantic love’ and ‘confluent love’, the two modern types of love, are marked, precisely, by the religious genesis of the society of individualization and by the corresponding evolution of the concept of the individual to which we have just referred. To such an extent is this that the category of the sacred, the religious, the mythical and mystery, has entered into individual love, and there it has taken root in a very deep way (Morin 1998, p. 5). In this regard, it is worth bearing in mind, on the other hand, that the individual constitutes one of the conceptual pillars of ‘romantic love’, an effect of modern subjectivity (Tenenbaum 2022, pp. 29, 32), which, in turn, is the fruit of Protestant conversion experiences that promoted the importance of experiencing a loving relationship with Jesus, in which emotional intensity became a measure of the spiritual. Thus, ‘romantic love’ is a legacy of pietism’s emphasis on emotional conversion and attachment to the person of Jesus. Now, in modern society, individualism has become increasingly emotional and erotic,



since, from the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, an ‘expressive revolution’ began to develop, generated by the subjective individualism of popular culture and by the importance given to choice in lifestyles and values. This occurred first in North America (Turner 2005, pp. 303, 311, 313) and later spread throughout Europe (Meil 2003, p. 2ff.; Meil 2004, p. 421).

It is thus understood that the evolutionary process of love has led to ‘romantic love’, which is more subjective and individualized, to the point that the religion of romantic love has a strong individualistic component, insofar as people love as individual objects also considered as individuals (Parsons 1974, p. 224). But, in practice, this means that the choice of partners is considered to be the sole responsibility of the individual and no longer of his or her family or clan. In other words, for the middle classes, “love provides personal freedom” (Illouz 2009, p. 94), since each person today chooses his or her partner according to his or her own criteria, standards, and personal desires (Illouz 2012, p. 41). Therefore, romantic love is interrelated with the idea of choice—Jewish in origin, in the Ahavah—free choice of the partner and with the consequent conception of freedom and individual self-realization. In any case, one’s own happiness is the ultimate criterion in love matters (Schnell 2000, p. 122).

Moreover, although this type of love is characteristic of the first modernity, it has not “expired” (Bauman 2003, p. 21); it has not disappeared in the second modernity in Europe, Latin America, or North America (Seidman 1991; Elzo 2004, pp. 205–29; Ferrer et al. 2008, pp. 589–92; Ferrer et al. 2010, pp. 16–29; Hull et al. 2010, pp. 345–50; Rodríguez-Santero et al. 2017, pp. 1–13; Pinto 2017; Flores 2019, pp. 287, 295; Astupiña and María 2020, p. 42). Consequently, it coexists with ‘confluent love’ (González 2017, p. 150) and with other amorous, hybridized types (Rondón 2011, p. 89) on which we will not dwell in the present writing.

Also ‘confluent love’ is conditioned by the imprint of the society of individualization. In fact, it is the increase in individualism that has given rise to the appearance of this type of love (Flaquer 1991, p. 70) which, precisely, can be defined by such individualism (Simmel 1986, p. 96; Elias 1999, p. 49; García Andrade 2015, p. 55), by the self-confirmation of the self (of the self) or by the ethics of the personal self-realization of the individual (Flaquer 1991, p. 70; Berger and Kellner 1993, p. 226) and, in short, by the defense of individual autonomy (Ayuso 2015, p. 90). But, at the same time, it tries to open itself lovingly to the other, with clear influence from the Jewish and Christian ethical principle, and, therefore, to understand it. Consequently, ‘confluent love’ brings to its maximum expression the sacredness of the individual (Schnell 2000, p. 121; Durkheim 1973; Joas 2014), that is, the representation of the self as sacred and, simultaneously, the valorization of the sacredness of the other (Giddens 1992, p. 186).

Paradoxically, however, in the context of the society of individualization, in ‘confluent love’, the precept of loving oneself is more deeply charged than the love for one’s neighbor (Schnell 2000, p. 122). Therefore, the free and unclosed construction of the individual members of the couple is pursued and not the fusion of its members, which, as will be seen below, is what romantic love does or what religious love did in its different Judeo-Christian manifestations. In relation to this, in ‘confluent love’ there is a predominance of individual interests over those of the family institution (Mora 2012, p. 102). In fact, these have become sacralized, in such a way that what is really at stake in this form of love is the individual’s fitting into society (Del Campo 2004, p. 452). This same integration was already originally evidenced in the Christian Agape and its rejection of the world, but now it implies a new phase in the relationship of the human being with it.

#### Other Judeo-Christian Characters Inherited in ‘Romantic Love’

The presence of other Judeo-Christian postulates—in addition to the centrality of love, the secularization–relegation dialectic and individualization—survive in ‘romantic love’. And it is this that creates a shared and relational and, therefore, non-individual history, by emphasizing the couple, its true substance (Pinto 2017, p. 579). Thus, it constitutes a fusion love (Alberoni 2005, p. 97; Fromm 2007, pp. 20–40; Luhmann 2008, p. 15), a vestige of the

Unio Mystica of the Christian Agape and the Appetitus of the Augustinian Caritas that drives the fusion with God, which places the lovers beyond the masculine or the feminine (Illouz 2009, pp. 142, 150, 166, 243) and that, in short, longs for human perfection (Ortega y Gasset [1940] 2009, pp. 18–35) and totality (Ramírez 1979, p. 46).

In this sense, the need and desire to love in ‘romantic love’, presupposes human awareness of the limit, of misery, pain, and suffering (Bellah 1999, p. 278)—as in Caritas—and, at the same time, of its search for fulfillment (García-Valdecasas and García 2018, p. 409). That is, it implies a feeling of being in contact with a “more complete” reality (Schnell 2000, p. 121), insofar as it supposes a longing for full realization that, through love, leads to a final communion of the lovers, just as in Agape.

Indeed, ‘romantic love’ fuses individual bodies and souls in a physical and emotional intimacy (Illouz 2009, pp. 29–129), which places value on individual emotional attachment, insofar as an intimate relationship is defined by its ‘individual quality’, since the intimate bond presupposes a distinction from other relationships (Sabido and García 2015, p. 251). It also highlights loyalty, fidelity, as it occurred in the Book of Hosea and Jeremiah, although in these cases it was love for a single god as it already occurred in the case of the Jewish prophets. This results, as in the family love of the Jewish Ahavah, in an institutionalization and familiarization (normalization) of sexuality and ‘romantic love’, enthroned as fundamental principles of marriage, in the ethical, moral and non-physical sense initiated by Ahavah and continued by the Christian Agape<sup>21</sup> (Ramírez 1979, pp. 50–51; Schnell 2000, p. 111). Moreover, the lovers abstract themselves from the outside, entering into a religious fervor that takes them out of the mundane (Turner 2005, p. 315), something similar to Agape’s rejection of the world, while forgetting themselves: a recreation of the abandonment of self to go towards God in the Augustinian Caritas, generating a posture of sacrifice (David and Stafford 2015, p. 232) and of offering (Boltanski and Godet 1995, p. 61) and entering into an ecstasy of the encounter, similar to the sacred (Badiou 2011, p. 34). Hence, ‘romantic love’ becomes the only possible path to a meaningful life (Illouz 2009, pp. 26–178; Tenenbaum 2022, p. 37).

Added to this, the rites, celebrations, and banquets of ‘romantic love’—weddings, baptisms, and worship services, as well as kissing—generate a strong “emotional energy<sup>22</sup>” (Collins 2009, pp. 141, 324) similar to that of Platonic Eros and Agape, as “effervescent” as that of religion itself (Durkheim 2017, p. 156), as well as “an eroticism of religious enthusiasm” reminiscent of ancestral sacred cults (Turner 2005, pp. 311, 315).

Finally, the conception of time of ‘romantic love’ also relates it to the Judeo-Christian religion. And the fact is that this love invents a different and unknown way of lasting in life and, therefore, a new sense of time (Badiou 2011, p. 47). In this regard, it develops a life project, since it represents a way of loving that can only be implemented, in its fullness, in time, that is, that only takes shape in the maturity that it gives to things and people and in the desire for eternity: the imprint of the imperishable love of Yahweh, expressed in the Jewish Ahavah and in the Augustinian Caritas, that, deep down, all this states. In this sense, it is a love that declares itself perpetual, that inscribes eternity in time and that, in short, constitutes a declaration of permanence that unfolds, to the extent of its possibilities (Badiou 2011, p. 63), throughout the course of time.

Thus, as happens with the relationship between Caritas and Redamore according to St. Augustine, it manages to restructure the individual past and the present–future of the couple and to build together their love throughout life, without forgetting that, in the beloved person, the beginning and the end of time converge (Alberoni 2005, pp. 69–71). In addition, it mixes three different temporal categories: the beloved past of lost authenticity, the existential eternal present of intensity and the transcendent timelessness of the sacred (Illouz 2009, pp. 26–178). Hence, ‘romantic love’ constitutes—in the same way as the idea of salvation (Weber 1979) in the Christian religion—a way of domesticating the future, driven by the pretension of controlling contingency, the insecure, and the uncertain (Roche Cárcel 2021, p. 122).

Romantic love' constitutes, therefore, a process without purpose—just as it happens in Christian Agape, which becomes an end, which ceases to be a means—which, paradoxically, is projected into the future, by making the couple develop a task to be performed (Ramírez 1979, p. 58). Therefore, it pursues to last a lifetime, to border on transcendence (Illouz 2009, pp. 26–178; Wolfinger et al. 2009, p. 174; Tenenbaum 2022, p. 37) and even immortality, just like the Christian Agape.

All these characteristics of 'romantic love', in short, are indicators of the continuity between religious love and the secular love of religion in Western societies (Turner 2005, p. 311), and, together with its stylization, its idealization—reminiscent of Platonic Eros—and the worldly salvific hope it promises, have shaped a religious status of its own which, however, lacks the potential to end up fully replacing Christianity (Featherstone 1998, p. 10; Schnell 2000, pp. 111–22).

#### Other Judeo-Christian Characters Inherited in 'Confluent Love'

'Confluent love' pursues the free and unclosed construction of the individual members of the couple, not the fusion—as 'romantic love' does—because what it seeks is to open up to the other and, therefore, to understand him or her. However, it builds lighter personal bonds and, consequently, more fragile, contingent, liquid, fluid, ephemeral, transitory, and uncertain relationships (Crego 2004, p. 1347)<sup>23</sup>, in addition to being informal and immature. Thus, although it may exist today, it will not necessarily do so tomorrow and hence its relationships are very intense (Sarribe 1995, p. 48) and active, without this implying that it will last forever, having as an undesired effect of this inconsistency a constant increase in divorces and separations since 1960–1970, throughout Europe and the world (Quilodrán 2000; García and Rojas 2002, p. 12; Strow and Strow 2006; Ponce 2007, p. 2; Vignoli and Ferro 2009, p. 12; Testor et al. 2009, p. 30ff.; Riquelme Soto et al. 2020, p. 2).

On the other hand, 'confluent love', or liquid love, being instantaneous, can be confused with the short but intense and passionate stage of falling in love. However, in reality it is a type of love in which, by allowing itself to be swept away by the omnipotent instant, in which it is as if—in it—the present, by being saturated with moments, is distinguished from the past and the future, making possible a contrast between illusion and reality. Therefore, this love establishes an emotion of the moment, of the instant that has the value of eternity (Luhmann 2008, p. 132): a trace maintained, as in romantic love, of the eternity of Yahweh's love expressed in the Jewish Ahavah and in the Augustinian Caritas. And, in this, again, we find echoes of the Western religious past, since the summit of transcendent religious experience is of short duration (Schnell 2000, p. 122).

It is a type of love that highlights the *ars erotica*, although this diminishes over time due to its short duration. However, it is not exclusively linked, like 'romantic love', to heterosexuality (Giddens 1992; Bauman 2007, p. 32; Illouz 2009, p. 205), which gives it an air of universality—as in the case of Christian love.

Finally, 'confluent love' transforms the lover into a being for the other, which means that it presupposes the equality of its members and demands that, in the interrelations between them, there be reciprocity, of clear origin in Christian ethics, such as "interpersonal exchange", "intersubjective affirmation" (Ramírez 1979, p. 58), or "intrahuman interpenetration" (Luhmann 2008, p. 233ff.). In fact, it is a more democratic and "negotiating" love (Meil 2006, p. 11ff.) than the romantic one.

This means that this type of love is based on a process of dialogue and, consequently, a day-to-day pact, an echo of Jewish Ahavah love.

### 3. Materials and Methods

This paper carries out a theoretical–sociological genealogy of love focused on the explanation of the main concepts that this phenomenon has developed, on the analysis of the uses and social meanings associated with these terms, and on their evolution over time until reaching modern societies. In this journey, love has been gradually secularized from its religious–historical dimension. For this reason, the methodology focuses on the review

of the specialized sociological literature on the subject and on the theoretical reflection, the main contribution of the authors in addition to the bibliographical selection, on the evolution of the term aimed at highlighting the continuities between love of a markedly religious character, in this case Jewish and Christian, and the secularized forms of modern love, as we have analyzed them.

#### 4. Conclusions

The analysis carried out has allowed us to establish a series of continuities between the notions of religious love developed in the context of Deuteronomic Judaism and Christianity and romantic and confluent love, understood as hegemonic formulas in which this phenomenon is materialized in modern societies.

In this journey, we have seen how the transition from archaic to historical religiosity brings about a profound transformation in the role played by love in religious life and in the secular life of societies. What, at first—in the context of prophetic Judaism and the second covenant between Yahweh and his people—is a love defined perfectly by the term *Ahavah*, Christianity elevates it to a moral universal, acquiring various formulas; the most outstanding of which, as we have seen, are *Agape* and *Caritas*. With the passage of time, something that accelerated greatly with the arrival of modernity and the entry into crisis of the religious-Christian worldview, love continues to occupy a central place, in this case secularized and profoundly individualized.

Our paper has attempted to show that many characteristic and important features of romantic and confluent love have been inherited from axial religious conceptions of love, in the sense in which we have analyzed it in this paper. As we have seen, with the transition towards the historical stage of the evolution of societies, the human being (his salvation) became a problem for himself. Judaism and Christianity try to provide answers to these problems; they try to clarify what is the role of the human being in the world and in its relationship with the sacred instance in a symbolic scenario of dualism between this and the other world. In this scenario, love will play a role of the first order, whether as a response to the demands of the divinity (*Ahavah*), as a mechanism of communication between the human and the divine, as [Nygren \(1932\)](#) interprets the third meaning of *Agape* and also in some interpretations of the Augustinian *Caritas*, or as a sacred element in itself: “*Agape* is God” or “God is love”, something that can be interpreted from the fourth meaning of *Agape*, *Agape* is creative, as analyzed by [Nygren \(1932\)](#). We pointed out throughout the text that although there is a clear theological debate about the interpretation of *Agape* and *Caritas* as a means of access to the divine or as the divine itself, what is a fact is that, in its sociological evolution, love has been acquiring a clear status of sacredness as societies have become secularized and individualized. In this sense, we understand that [Arendt's \(1996\)](#) interpretation of *Amor Sui* is crucial to understand the transition from religious-type love (which we have analyzed from the Jewish and Christian perspective) to the secular-type love, Romantic and Confluent, characteristic of modern societies, since this interpretation transcends the inherent dualism<sup>24</sup> existing between human love (*Eros*, *Cupiditas*) and divine love, articulating the possibility that the human being himself can develop mechanisms or formulas of *Caritas*-type love. This does not imply that St. Augustine was thinking of a human being capable of accessing the divine status, but we understand that, considering that well-oriented *Amor Sui* can be a source of access to true, divine love—*Caritas*—this margin of maneuver that is ascribed to the human is fundamental for the later developments of love that we have analyzed.

With the passage of time, the clear distinction between this world and the other world fundamentally articulated in the Christian scenario, and the dependence of the former on the latter, are called into question, articulating a process of re-enchantment and appreciation of action in the world, understood as a path to salvation. In the same way, with the emergence of modern societies, the individual replaces divinity as the reference element of social life. This is what we define as the process of individualization. This macro-social process has a clear impact on our object of study, but what we have wanted

to point out throughout this paper is that the different masks that love has developed, fundamentally those studied, namely Ahavah, Agape, Caritas, Amor Sui, romantic, and confluent, have contributed decisively to social change in the terms in which it has been produced, something that also helps us to understand the relevance and weight that love continues to have as a source of meaning independent in modern societies of its divine background. In this context, love does not experience a decline as a soteriological instance, but rather a secularization, that is, a functional differentiation with respect to its Judeo-Christian origins.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It is important to note that while Christianity is a religion born during what Bellah defines as the historical stage of religious evolution, Judaism is already present in the archaic stage. Having said this, we would like to clarify that the journey through love in Judaism that we are going to make will begin in the transition from the archaic to the historical stage, in which a religiosity based on the alliance between Yahweh and his people is imposed, and where the first typology of love on which we will dwell is developed, the one that corresponds to the term ‘Ahavah’ and its implications for the analysis of social action.
- <sup>2</sup> We want to clarify that when we say that Christianity develops the concept of Agape love, we are not saying that the term originates in the context of Christianity, but that in this religious formula it acquires great prominence. For more information on this issue see: Oord (2010): *The Nature of Love: A Theology*, St Louis: Charice Press; Boyd (2008): *Visions of Agape: Problems and Possibilities in Human and Divine Love*, Burlington: Ashgate.
- <sup>3</sup> The above statement does not imply that during the primitive or archaic phases love did not have a weight on social life. What we want to emphasize is that, starting from the axial transformation, love will play a fundamental role in Judaism and in its later religious derivations as Christianity.
- <sup>4</sup> Understood as the predominant religious formula up to that time.
- <sup>5</sup> As we shall see, here we can identify a first milestone in what will later become an individualized religiosity in the context of modern societies.
- <sup>6</sup> As we can see, we find ourselves in a transitional scenario between the archaic and historical stages.
- <sup>7</sup> Fundamentally that of Amos and Hosea.
- <sup>8</sup> We find it interesting to note that we find a clear convergence regarding this second cluster between Brueggemann’s perspectives and that defended by Numa Fustel de Coulanges in his classic work on family religion 1984 [1864]: *La ciudad antigua*, Barcelona: Península (Fustel de Coulanges 1984).
- <sup>9</sup> First published in 1843.
- <sup>10</sup> For a critical theological analysis of this work see the following: Oord (2010): *The Nature of Love: A Theology*, St Louis: Charice Press; Carson (2000): “Love”, *The IVP New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.
- <sup>11</sup> It is important to note, as we are pointing out, how in the very reflection of the authors studied, the individual gradually acquires prominence and importance in the relationship with the divinity. This question proves to be very important in understanding the individualized character of modern secular love.
- <sup>12</sup> In the following section, we will see that St. Augustine uses a different conceptualization. He speaks of *Caritas* (which we can identify, with some important nuances, with the idea of *Agape*) and of *Cupiditas* (which can be assimilated, with nuances, with the idea of *Eros*).



- 13 For Nygren this would be the fourth defining feature of *Agape*, for us the third. This inversion of the order with respect to the original responds to a fundamentally narrative need.
- 14 First published under the title *Frygt og Bæven* in 1843.
- 15 Although in the previous section we have emphasized the idea of *Agape* linked to St. Paul, it is important to point out that the notion of *Caritas* also occupies an important place in his thought.
- 16 St. Augustine used the fundamental concepts of *Caritas* and *Cupiditas* to refer to the two fundamental types of love according to its object. Conceived love as a movement of the soul, an appetite bound to a determined object as the trigger of the movement itself. In *Caritas*, =the order in love that prescribes loving God for himself and all other things for God is fulfilled. Moreover, Augustinian dilection implies a double order in love: on the one hand, an order of the things loved and, on the other, an order in the subject who loves. See: (Ferrer Santos and Román Ortiz 2010) and (Alesanco Reinares 2004).
- 17 The above quote confirms what we pointed out above: the difficulties experienced by Christianity in integrating *Amor Mundi* (Tatman 2013), whether it is called *Eros* or *Cupiditas*, into its basic philosophy.
- 18 As pointed out by Arendt: "In order to understand fully the consequences of this operation, we must be aware that Augustine's *Amor Sui*, love of self, can have two very different meanings: the "love of self" that gives rise to perplexed self-searching ("I have become a question to myself") is totally different from the unperplexed self-love that results from this ordered *caritas*" (Arendt 1996, p. 37).
- 19 What we have just commented implies a break with respect to the Augustinian duality between *Caritas* and *Cupiditas*. In the modern scenario, worldly love could perfectly well act as a source of salvation, and, in fact, as we are about to confirm, it does so on occasion.
- 20 Religion provides a basis for meaning (Thomas and Cornwall 1990, p. 219; McGuire 1981, pp. 43–54).
- 21 In the philosophy of J.J. Rousseau, the distinction between two types of eroticism is still present: 'physical love', rooted in sexual instinct, and 'moral love', based on the fantasy of an ideal love object (Taylor 1998, p. 132).
- 22 In sociology, this term has been developed by Randall Collins in his renowned work *Interaction Ritual Chains*, although the first to use the idea was Émile Durkheim in the context of his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* through his concept of "collective effervescence". For Collins, "It emphasizes the differences among the specific emotions as conventionally recognized -anger, joy, fear, etc.- and the social emotion par excellence that I call emotional energy, or E. Durkheim noted that a successful social ritual makes the individual participant feel strong, confident, full of impulses to take the initiative." (Collins 2009, p. 19).
- 23 These characteristics are reminiscent, in a certain sense, of the 'uncontrolled' aspect of the Christian *Agape*.
- 24 In this case, not between this and the other world.

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