



The hidden life of love: The function of the Bible in Kierkegaard's 'Works of love'

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This article discussed the use of the Bible in 'Love's hidden life and its recognizability by its fruits', which is the first reflection of Søren Kierkegaard's book, *Works of love*. The article noted that in the first part of the reflection, Kierkegaard points out how easily love is ignored because of its hidden character and because it belongs to the realm of the heart. Consequently, it seems sagacious to trust only those things that we can observe with our senses. But this attitude speaks of self-deception and fear that will bring eternal loss, because it locks us out of love which connects us with the essence of God himself. The article then explained Kierkegaard's argument that love produces fruit which has to be distinguished from other kinds of fruit. This distinction raises the question of discernment between forms that claim to be love and Christian love, which is rooted in eternity. The second part of this reflection focuses on love as the main feature of Kierkegaard's anthropology that springs from the heart, has its origin in God and therefore cannot be penetrated by the tools of logic. This does not imply that we cannot live this love. On the contrary, we need to live it in order to become familiar with it and to understand it from within. However, this familiarity will, in the first place, confront us with love's unfathomableness and its unfathomable connectedness with all existence. The more we become acquainted with the love of our heart, the more this love will lead us into the mystery of God's eternity. A second feature of Kierkegaard's anthropology, which is immediately linked to the first, is the acknowledgement that this love manifests itself as a need with roots in the hunger of the heart. For the purposes of this article, Kierkegaard's use of the Bible in all these parts was analysed and a general perspective on his reception of the Bible was offered.

Introduction

Søren Kierkegaard's book *Works of love*¹ was published under his own name; this is in contrast to his earlier books, in which he used pseudonyms for his authorship. The book consists of deliberations or reflections (*Overveielser*) written in the form of discourses. In his introduction, the English translator of this work, H.V. Hong, points out that these reflections are meant to awaken the reader, with the goal of provoking action. To underline this statement he quotes Kierkegaard's journal entry, written in the year 1847, during which *Works of love* was published:

Reflections do not presuppose the qualifying concepts as given and understood; therefore they must not so much move, mollify, reassure, persuade as *awaken* and provoke men and sharpen thought. The time of reflections is indeed prior to action, and their purpose therefore is to rightly set all the elements into motion. Reflections ought to be a 'gadfly'; therefore their tone ought to be quite different from that of edifying discourse, which rests in mood, but reflections ought in the good sense to be impatient, high-spirited in mood ... An edifying discourse about love presupposes that men know essentially what love is and seeks to win them to it, to move them. But this is in fact not the case. Therefore the 'reflections' must first fetch them up out of the cellar, call to them, turn their comfortable way of thinking topsy-turvy with the dialectic truth.²

(Kierkegaard 1995:469)

In the 'Preface' to *Works of love*, Kierkegaard (1995) explains his terminology as follows:

These Christian reflections, which are the fruit of much reflection, will be understood slowly, but then also easily; yet they surely will become very difficult if someone by hasty and curious reading makes them difficult for himself. 'That single individual' who first ponders whether he will read or not, will ponder lovingly, if he decides to read, whether or not the difficulty and the ease, when they are

1. Original: Kierkegaard, S., 1847, *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger. Nogle christelige Overveielser i Talers Form*, Copenhagen. English translation: Kierkegaard, S., 1995, *Works of love. Some Christian deliberations in the form of discourses*, transl. and eds. H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

2. See also Kierkegaard (1967–1978, vol. 1:641); this journal entry has the heading: 'The difference between an upbuilding discourse and a deliberation'. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1968–1978, vol. VIII 1A: 293) and Kierkegaard (1997, vol. NB2: 176): *Forskjellen mell. opbyggelig Tale og en Overveielse*: 'En Overveielse forudsætter ikke Begrebsbestemmelserne som givne og forstaaede; den maa derfor ikke saa meget røre, formilde, berolige, overtale som vække og pirre ved Mskene og skærpe Tænkningen. Overveielens Øieblik er jo ogsaa før Handling, og det gjælder derfor om at sætte alle Momenterne ret i Bevægelse. Overveielens skal være en *Bremse*, dens Colorit derfor en ganske anden end den opbyggelige Tales, der hviler i Stemning, medens Overveielens skal være i god Forstand utaalmodig, vælig i Stemning ... En opbyggelig Tale om Kjerlighed forudsætter at Mskene væsentligen vide hvad Kjerlighed er, og søger nu at vinde dem for den, at bevæge dem. Men dette er sandeligen ikke Tilfældet. Derfor maa *Overveielens* først hente dem op af Kjælderhalsen, kalde paa dem, vende dem, med Sandhedens Dialektik, op og ned paa deres magelige Tanke-Gang.'

thoughtfully placed together on the scales, are rightly related, so that Christianity is not misrepresented by making either the difficulty or the ease too great. These are *Christian reflections*; therefore they are not about *love*, but about the works of love.³
(Kierkegaard 1995:3)

Kierkegaard's book contains two series of deliberations, each consisting of a number of reflections which can be linked to a biblical verse, as indicated below. The first series starts with a reflection on the hidden life of love. Love cannot be objectified, therefore love can only be known by its fruits or its manifestations (see Lk 6:44). The next reflection is divided into three parts and contemplates the commandment of Christ: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mt 22:39). Each of these reflections has a different emphasis, (1) you *shall* love, (2) you shall love your *neighbour* and (3) *you* shall love your neighbour. In these reflections, Kierkegaard carefully analyses how love can be, or has to be, a commandment, even though love is a case of preferences. This is not to say that he wants to devalue amorousness or friendship; rather, he wants to place this natural affection in the proper perspective. Love demands self-denial and the recognition that, in all mature relationships, God has to be the 'intermediary'. As a consequence, every human being we come across is our neighbour. This demands a thorough reconsideration of our hierarchy of values. Other reflections in this series are: love is the fulfilling of the law (Rm 13:10) and a matter of conscience (1 Tm 1:5), our duty to love those we see (1 Jn 4:20) and to be in the debt of love to one another (Rm 13:8).

In the second series, Kierkegaard describes the internal dynamics of love. He starts from the principle that loves 'builds up' (see 1 Cor 8:1). Spiritually, this means that works of love presuppose that love is in the other person's heart and builds up love in him or her. In the following discourses, Kierkegaard describes, mainly with the benefit of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, how this love operates in the human being. Love believes all things – and yet it is never deceived (1 Cor 13: 7). Love hopes all things and yet is never put to shame (1 Cor 13:7). Love seeks not its own (1 Cor 13:5). Love hides the multitude of sins (cf. Pr 10:12; Pr 17:9; Ja 5:20; 1 Pt 4:8). Love abides (1 Cor 13:3).

The final discourses, however, do not make immediate reference to biblical texts. The first is about mercy and that acts of mercy are essential to the expression of love, even if they do not succeed.⁴ The subsequent discourses have the following titles: 'The victory of reconciliation in love which wins the vanquished', 'The work of love in remembering one's dead' and 'The work of love in praising love'.

3. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:3): 'Disse christelige Overveielser, som ere Frugten af megen Overveielse, ville forstaaes langsomt men da ogsaa let, medens de vistnok ville blive meget vanskelige, om Nogen ved flygtig og nysgjerrig Læsning gjør sig dem meget vanskelige. *Hiin Enkelte*, som først overveier med sig selv, om han vil læse eller han ikke vil læse, hvis han saa vælger at læse, han overveie kjerligt, om dog ikke Vanskeligheden og Letheden, naar de bringes betænksomt sammen paa Vægtsskaalen, forholde sig rigtigt til hinanden, saa det Christelige ikke udgives efter falsk Vægt, ved at gjøre Vanskeligheden eller ved at gjøre Letheden for stor. Det er *christelige Overveielser* derfor ikke om – *Kjerlighed*, men om – *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger*.'

4. Here Kierkegaard uses the paradigm of the poor widow who put two little copper coins into the treasury (Lk 21:1–4).

I have limited the discussions in this article to the first reflection. My purpose is to analyse it from the perspective of spirituality and mysticism. From this perspective, the reading of the Bible is essential and we see the same in Kierkegaard's work. Therefore, the question on which I will focus is how the Bible influences the creative process of thought in Kierkegaard.

'Love's hidden life and its recognizability by its fruits'

Introduction: The Gospel as a point of departure

The first of Kierkegaard's (1995:5) reflections is titled 'Love's hidden life and its recognizability by its fruits'.⁵ This title shows that Kierkegaard is inspired by Luke 6:44: 'For each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.'⁶ The image of a tree bringing forth its own fruits is part of Jesus' discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount.⁷ After a series of blessings, it describes the features of a love that strips us of all our defences:

I tell you who hear: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer also the other; and from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your coat also. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask him who takes away your goods to give them back again. As you would like people to do to you, do exactly so to them. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive back as much. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, even as your Father is also merciful. Do not judge, and you won't be judged. Do not condemn, and you won't be condemned. Set free, and you will be set free. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be given to you. For with the same measure you measure it will be measured back to you. He spoke a parable to them. Can the blind guide the blind? Won't they both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck of chaff that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how can you tell your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck of chaff that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the beam that is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck of chaff that is in your brother's eye. There is no good tree that brings forth rotten fruit; nor again a rotten tree that brings forth good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For people do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings out that which is good,

5. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:5): 'Kjerlighedens skjulte Liv og dets Kjendelighed paa Frugterne.'

6. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:5): 'Thi hvert Træ kjendes paa sin egne Frugt; thi man sanker ikke Figen af Torne, man plukker og ikke Viindruer af Tornebuske.'

7. The Sermon on the Mount is depicted in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 5–7), as well as in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 6:17–49).



and the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings out that which is evil, for out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks. Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? Everyone who comes to me, and hears my words, and does them, I will show you who he is like. He is like a man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation on the rock. When a flood arose, the stream broke against that house, and could not shake it, because it was founded on the rock. But he who hears, and does not do, is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream broke, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

(Lk 6:20–49)

Jesus' discourse makes clear that Kierkegaard's (1995:5) sentence, 'Each tree is known by its own fruit, for figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush', has to be understood in the context of his message of love. Love brings forth its own fruits and it is up to us to listen to this voice of love in the depths of our heart and bring it to life in us by being obedient to it in our deeds or actions. In this obedience to the love of God we are – according to the image at the end of this discourse – 'like a man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation on the rock'. But when we escape this voice of love and instead listen to the other voices of our heart, we will become 'like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation'. In this image, the difference between good and evil, between good and bad fruits, does not have a moral connotation. Here, Jesus is speaking from the perspective of people who are touched by his message and want to follow it. In this perspective, 'evil' means everything that opposes this voice of love. This is why he says: 'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord", and do not do the things which I say?' We can only find the answer to this question in our heart. We want to listen to this voice of love, but are afraid of the consequences. In some way or another we know that this voice of love will strip down all our defences. This is too dangerous. This is a reality we cannot live. We have to go back to our sagacity in order to survive in a world that does not accept this love as real. It is precisely here that Kierkegaard starts his reflection about 'love's hidden life'.

The belief in love

To defraud oneself of love

If it were so, as conceited sagacity, proud of not being deceived, thinks, that we should believe nothing that we cannot see with our physical eyes, then we first and foremost ought to give up believing in love. If we were to do so and do it out of fear lest we be deceived, would we not then be deceived? We can, of course be deceived in many ways. We can be deceived by believing what is untrue, but we certainly are also deceived by not believing what is true. We can be deceived by appearances, but we certainly are also deceived by the sagacious appearance, by the flattering conceit that considers itself absolutely secure against being deceived.⁸

(Kierkegaard 1995:5)

8. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:5): 'Dersom det var saaledes som indbildsk Kløgt mener, stolt af ikke at bedrages, at man Intet skulde troe, som man ikke kan see med sit sandelige Øie: da burde man først og fremmest lade være at troe paa Kjerlighed. Og hvis man gjorde det og gjorde det af Frygt for ikke at blive bedragen, var man saa ikke bedragen? Man kan jo bedrages paa mange Maader; man kan bedrages ved at troe det Usande, men man bedrages dog vel ogsaa ved ikke at troe det Sande; man kan bedrages ved Skinnet, men man bedrages dog vel ogsaa ved det Kløgtige Skin, ved den smigrende Indbildskhed, der veed sig ganske sikkert mod at være bedragen.'

With the phrase 'conceited sagacity' (*inbildsk Kløgt*), Kierkegaard expresses his ambivalence with regard to our acumen. We think it is sagacious to be suspicious in order not to be deceived. Therefore, we only want to believe the things we see with our physical eyes. But by acting in this way, we close our eyes to realities we cannot see, such as love. This reality can only reveal itself to us by our taking the risk of believing in it, without having any certainty beforehand. This raises the question of whether this kind of sagacity is really wise. Is it sagacious that we, out of fear of being deceived, deny a reality we cannot see, or is this denial precisely a form of deceiving ourselves, because we want to live in the dream of a secure world? Kierkegaard compares this deceit with someone who is dreaming that he is awake and he asks himself what is more difficult: to wake someone who is asleep, or to wake someone who is dreaming that he is awake?

The next part of his reflection has as its theme this self-deceit in which we try to safeguard ourselves from the pain of being deceived:

To defraud oneself of love is the most terrible, is an eternal loss, for which there is no compensation, either in time, or in eternity. Ordinarily, when it is a matter of being deceived in love, however different the case may be, the one deceived is still related to love, and the deception is only that the love was not where it was thought to be, but the self-deceived person has locked and is locking himself out of love.⁹

(Kierkegaard 1995:5–6)

As in the Gospel of Luke quoted above, Kierkegaard is writing from the perspective of love. Accordingly, he uses words such as 'terrible' and 'eternal loss', because he wants to awaken us from the dream of a self-deceit in which we try to live in a world without love. Indeed, in this world we do not have to bear the pain of being deceived in love, but it also means that we cut ourselves off from the reality of love. In Kierkegaard's view this is 'terrible' and 'an eternal loss', because it is a denial of the reality in which we live. We lull ourselves to sleep by believing that we only have to deal with the reality we can grasp objectively. Therefore, we do not have to relate to the hidden world of love. But, in fact, by locking ourselves out of love, we are digging our own grave, because, with this negation, we deny the loving voice of God that speaks in our heart.

Love connects with the essence of God

How earnest existence is, how very terrible it is precisely when it in punishment permits the self-willful person to go his own way, so he is allowed to go on living, proud of being deceived, until eventually he is allowed to verify that he deceived himself forever! Truly, eternity does not let itself be mocked; instead it is something that does not even need to use force but, omnipotent, uses a little mockery in order to punish the presumptuous person dreadfully. What is it, namely, that connects the temporal and eternity, what else but love, which for that very reason is before

9. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:6): 'At bedrage sig selv for Kjerlighed er det forførdeligste, er et evigt Tab, for hvilket der ingen Erstatning er hverken i Tid eller i Evighed. Thi naar ellers, hvor forskjellig den end kan være, Talen er om at bedrages i Forhold til Kjerlighed, da forholder den Bedragne sig dog til Kjerlighed, og Bedraget er kun, at den ikke var der, hvor den meentes at være; men den Selvbedragne har lukket sig selv ude og lukker sig selv ude fra Kjerlighed.'



everything and remains after everything is gone. But precisely because love is eternity's bond in this way, and precisely because temporality and eternity are heterogeneous, love can seem a burden to temporality's earthly sagacity, and therefore in temporality it may seem to the sensate person an enormous relief to cast off this bond of eternity.¹⁰

(Kierkegaard 1995:6)

For Kierkegaard, love connects the temporal with eternity. Through love we, as human beings, participate in the eternity of God. This love cannot be separated from the temporal reality in which we live, but constitutes itself as the eternal foundation of it. We can listen to this voice of love, or we can deny it in our 'conceited sagacity'. In this respect, Kierkegaard speaks of our self-wilfulness. We are not forced in any way to be obedient to this voice of love. On the contrary, we have total freedom in it, but it is the freedom to accept or deny the truth in which we live. It is evident that in the repudiation of this truth we are punishing ourselves. In the conviction that only those things exist that can be seen, we lock ourselves up in our temporality or the reality of our senses and become blind to the hidden reality of love. This is, in the eyes of Kierkegaard, 'terrible', because we betray ourselves in it. Not only do we close our eyes to a reality of which we are afraid, but in the pride of our self-deceit we think that this hidden reality does not exist at all. This is what Kierkegaard calls 'the sensate person', or someone who can only trust their senses because they do not have another reality to which they can refer.

In Kierkegaard's language 'eternity' does not refer to an unknown reality after our death, but to God as the eternal source of our physical and temporal world. This reality is hidden in its immediacy and cannot be objectified into something that we can observe with our senses or grasp with the tools of our logic.¹¹ This does not mean it is vague or unreal. As with love, it is something that touches us immediately, but cannot be made visible. The only way to become acquainted with this reality is to enter into a relationship with it. The problem, though, is that between the two perspectives there is an unbridgeable gap. The perspective of the logic of our senses' reality that only believes what can be objectified cannot communicate with a perspective that goes beyond this provable reality, because it takes the risk of listening to the voice of love. For this reason, the claim of love that originates in eternity is a burden for the sensate person. They want to get rid of it because it turns their comfortable way of thinking upside-down.

10. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:6–7): 'Hvor er Tilværelsen saa alvorlig, hvor er den forfærdeligst, netop naar den, straffende, tillader den Selvraadige at raade sig selv, saa han faaer Lov at leve hen, stolt af – at være bedragen, indtil han engang faaer Lov at sande, at han for evigt bedrog sig selv! Sandeligen, Evigheden lader sig ikke spotte, snarere er det den, der end ikke behøver at bruge Magt, men almægtig bruger en Smule Spot for rædsomt at straffe den Formastelige. Hvad er det nemlig, der forbinder det Timelige og Evigheden, hvad er det Andet end Kjerlighed, som just derfor er før Alt, og bliver naar Alt er forbi. Men netop fordi Kjerligheden saaledes er Evighedens Baand, og netop fordi Timeligheden og Evigheden ere ueensartede, derfor kan Kjerligheden synes Timelighedens jordiske Kløgt en Byrde, og derfor kan det i Timeligheden synes den Sandselige en uhyre Lettelse at kaste dette Evighedens Baand af sig.'

11. Dag Hammarskjöld (1962:24) poses this as a fundamental problem in respect to the language of religion. The language of religion tries to give words to this immediate reality and we will never understand this language, if we have no feeling for the fundamental spiritual experience behind it: 'The language of religion is a set of formulas which register a basic spiritual experience. It must not be regarded as describing in terms to be defined by philosophy, the reality which is accessible to our senses and which we can analyze with the tools of logic.'

In this introduction, Kierkegaard makes us aware of a kind of deceit that has its origin in our fear of being deceived. This deceit is called self-deceit and is based on the creation of a fictitious world in which we only trust the reality of our senses. It becomes dangerous the moment we, in our 'conceited sagacity', take this world to be reality itself and become literally blind and deaf to the world of love that is hidden beyond this temporal reality. In order to open ourselves to this reality, we have to take the risk of believing in and listening to the voice of love in our heart. Only in this way are we to come to know the fruits of love.

Recapitulation

The starting point of this reflection is Kierkegaard's plea to believe in a love that, because of its hidden character, is so easily ignored. It may seem sagacious to trust only those things that we can observe with our senses, but this attitude will lock us out of love. Love escapes our perceptivity because it belongs to the realm of our heart. In our fear of being deceived however we have more faith in something that is visible and graspable, than in something that escapes our grip. We trust provable facts, but are hesitant to believe in things we cannot see with our physical eyes. It is within this context that Kierkegaard speaks of self-deception. Love may be invisible; that is not to say that it is not real. People who, in their fear of being deceived, only believe in the things they can observe objectively, deceive themselves. They close their eyes to the reality of love, because it is too dangerous for them to relate to it. Although Kierkegaard is aware that we as human beings cannot escape this tension between belief and distrust, he also knows that once our fear of being deceived becomes dominant we will imprison ourselves in a world that loses every possibility of getting in touch with the hidden reality of love. This is, according to Kierkegaard, 'irreparable' and 'an eternal loss' because it is precisely love that connects us with the essence of God himself.

The image of a tree and its fruits

Love's own fruit

By the fruits we know the tree. 'Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles' (Matthew 7:16). If you want to gather them there, you will not merely gather in vain, but the thorns will show you that you are gathering in vain. *Every tree is known by its own fruit.*¹² It may so happen that there are two fruits that look very much alike: the one is healthful and delicious, the other tart and poisonous. Sometimes the poisonous fruit is also delicious and the healthful fruit bitter in taste. In the same way love also is known by its *own* fruit. If someone makes a mistake, it must be because he does not know the fruits or does not know how to judge properly in the particular case.¹³

(Kierkegaard 1995:7)

The central theme of this reflection is that love is a hidden reality that can only be recognised by its fruits. To underline

12. See Luke 6:44: ἀκαστον γάρ δένδρον ἐκ τοῦ ἰδίου καρποῦ.

13. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:7–8): 'Paa Frugterne kjender man Træet; man sanker ikke Viindruer af Torne, eller Figen af Tidsler (Math. 7, 16); vil Du sanke dem der, da skal Du ikke blot sanke forgjeves, men Tornene skulle vise Dig, at Du sanker forgjeves. Thi hvert Træ kjendes paa sin egne Frugt. Det kan jo være saa, at der er tvende Frugter, som meget nøie ligne hinanden, den ene er sund og velsmagende, den anden beedsk og giftig; stundom er ogsaa den giftige meget velsmagende, den sunde noget bitter i Smagen. Saaledes kjendes ogsaa Kjerligheden paa dens egne Frugt. Tager man fejl, maa det være, fordi man enten ikke kjender Frugterne, eller ikke veed at skjøne rigtigt i det enkelte Tilfælde.'



this, Kierkegaard quotes the Gospel. This time he does not quote Luke, but Matthew, yet the tenor is not much different. What is more important is the sentence of Matthew's he does not quote: 'by their fruits you will know them' (Mt 7:16).¹⁴ This sentence is much too general for Kierkegaard, who wants to stress the character of the fruit itself. Love has its *own* fruit and this fruit differs from all other kinds of fruit we can find or produce. In contrast to the Gospel that distinguishes between good and rotten or evil fruits, Kierkegaard's distinction is less visible. The fruits of love can be very much like other kinds of fruit and to be able to discern between them we really have to look at the inside and taste them. Yet sometimes even this is not enough, because something healthy can taste bitter and something poisonous can taste sweet. With this, Kierkegaard raises the question of discernment. Love seems to be something spontaneous, something we do not have to think about, but because of the similarity between the fruits of love and other fruits, we can easily deceive ourselves. To illustrate this, Kierkegaard uses the example at the beginning of the following section.

Love calls for discernment

When a person makes the mistake of calling something love that actually is self-love, when he loudly protests that he cannot live without the beloved but does not want to hear anything about the task and requirement of love to deny oneself and to give up this self-love of erotic love. Or when a person makes the mistake of giving the name of love to what is weak compliance, to what is pernicious whining, or harmful alliance, or conceited behavior, or self-seeking connections, or the bribery of toadyism, or the appearances of the moment, or temporal relations.¹⁵

(Kierkegaard 1995:7)

Kierkegaard's primary term for love is *Kjerlighed*, which refers to our ability to become attached to another person or reality. This love must be distinguished from self-love (*Selvøkerlighed*) or attachment to ourselves. In practice we have the tendency to mix up these two notions. This is the case when someone stands firm in his conviction that he cannot live without his loved one, but is not willing to take the perspective of the beloved into account. Engagement in love always calls for a form of self-denial. If we really want to get involved with the other, then we have to be prepared to leave behind the images we project on the beloved, because otherwise we only fall in love with ourselves and the desires we have. This is the self-love that has to be given up in our passion to be united with the other (*Elskov*). What is important in this distinction is that Kierkegaard is not arguing against this passionate love. His concern is the way in which we use this passion. Is it only a way to fulfil our needs (*Selvøkerlighed*) or is it a way of really opening one's mind to the hidden reality of the other (*Kjerlighed*)? Kierkegaard regrets, though, that most of the time the term 'love' is used for self-love and that, with

14. See the original Greek translation of Matthew 7:16: ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν αὐτῶν.

15. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:8): 'Som naar et Menneske tager feil og kalder Det Kjerlighed, der egentligen er Selvøkerlighed: naar han høit forsikkrer, at han ikke kan leve uden den Elskede, men Intet vil høre om at Kjerlighedens Opgave og Fordring er, at fornegte sig selv og at opgive denne Elskovens Selvøkerlighed. Eller som naar et Menneske tager feil og kalder Det, der er svag Eftergivenhed, med Kjerlighedens Navn, Det, som er fordærveligt Klynkerie, eller skadeligt Sammenhold, eller forfængeligt Væsen, eller Selvsygens Forbindelser, eller Smigreriets Bestikkelser, eller Øjeblikkets Tilsyneladelser, eller Timelighedens Forhold, med Kjerlighedens Navn.'

it, people deceive themselves into thinking that they speak of love.

As stated before, love connects the temporal with eternity.¹⁶ However, the problem is that we as human beings have the tendency to stick to the temporal, even though we think that in our love, we have had a glimpse of eternity. In this love we are enchanted. It seemingly shows us the flower of eternity, but in fact it only blossoms for a certain period and after this it will perish like all other flowers. This image emphasises the necessity of discernment. Love can easily betray us. Before we know it, we have attached ourselves to the temporary flowers of love, instead of its eternal fruits. It is here that Kierkegaard introduces us to the eternity of love, which is the foundation of Christian love.

The eternal foundation of Christian love

But every tree is known by its own fruit; so also is love known by its own fruit, and the love that Christianity speaks of is known by its own fruits – that it has within itself eternity's truth. All other love, whether it finishes flowering early, humanly speaking, and is changed or lovingly lasts its temporal season, is still perishable and merely blossoms. This is its frailty and its sadness: whether it blossoms for an hour or for seventy years, it merely blossoms, but Christian love is eternal. Therefore no one, if he understands himself, would think of saying of Christian love that it blossoms. No poet, if he understands himself, would think of singing its praises. What the poet sings about must have the sadness, which is the riddle of his own life, that it must blossom – and, alas, must perish. But Christian love abides, and for that very reason it is. What perishes blossoms, and what blossoms perishes, but something that is cannot be sung about – it must be believed and it must be lived.¹⁷

(Kierkegaard 1995:8)

The love that Christianity speaks of is not eternal because it bears the name Christian, but because, in its message, it focuses on the eternity of God's love. This eternity is the source of Jesus' words in the Gospel and to understand these words we have to listen to its hidden voice. Therefore, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between Christian love that has within itself the truth of eternity and all other forms of love that, in their transience, belong to the realm of our temporality. This does not mean that Kierkegaard speaks of two kinds of love. There is only one love, but there is a difference between a love that attaches itself to people and things in temporal reality as such, and a love that is aware of its eternal source. In this love we not only enjoy the people to

16. 'What is it, namely, that connects the temporal and eternity, what else but love, which for that very reason is before everything and remains after everything is gone' (Kierkegaard 1995:6). Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:7): 'Hvad er det nemlig, der forbinder det Timelige og Evigheden, hvad er det Andet end Kjerlighed, som just derfor er før Alt, og bliver naar Alt er forbi.'

17. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:8–9): 'Men hvert Træ kjendes paa sin egne Frugt, saaledes ogsaa Kjerligheden paa dens egne, og den Kjerlighed, om hvilken Christendommen taler, paa dens egne Frugt: at den har Evighedens Sandhed i sig. Al anden Kjerlighed, hvad enten den, menneskelig talt, tidlig afblomstrer og forandres, eller den elskeligt bevarer sig i Timelighedens Aarstid: den er dog forgængelig, den blomstrer kun. Dette er just det Skrøbelige og det Veemodige ved den, hvad enten den blomstrer en Time eller 70 Aar, den blomstrer kun; men den christelige Kjerlighed er evig. Derfor vilde Ingen, hvis han forstaaer sig selv, falde paa at sige om den christelige Kjerlighed, at den blomstrer; ingen Digter, hvis han forstaaer sig selv, vil falde paa at besyngte den. Thi hvad Digteren skal besyngte maa have det Veemod, som er hans eget Livs Gaade: maa blomstre – ak, og maa forgaae. Men den christelige Kjerlighed bliver, og just derfor er den; thi hvad der forgaaer det blomstrer, og hvad der blomstrer det forgaaer, men hvad der er kan ikke besynges, det maa troes og det maa leves.'

whom and the things to which we are attached, but become obedient to the eternal voice of God in them. This is the reason why this love is everlasting. From a human perspective, love depends on the attraction that something or someone has for us in temporal reality. This can last for a shorter or longer period. Christian love, however, can never perish, because it has its roots in God's love for us. This love *is* and can only be lived in our obedience to the hidden voice of God.

The manifest and hidden meaning of the Gospel

Yet when we say that love is known by its fruits, we are also saying that in a certain sense love itself is hidden and therefore is known only by its revealing fruits. This is exactly the case. Every life, love's life also, is as such hidden but is made manifest in something else. The life of the plant is hidden; the fruit is the manifestation. The life of thought is hidden; the expression of it is the manifestation. Therefore the sacred words above speak about two thoughts although they hiddenly speak about only one; the statement manifestly contains one thought but also hiddenly contains another.¹⁸

(Kierkegaard 1995:8)

In this concluding paragraph, Kierkegaard slightly changes the meaning of Luke 6:44 by not mentioning the adjective 'own'. He does not need to stress this word any longer because from now on he only wants to reflect on love and its fruits. The reason why the Gospel states that 'love is known by its fruits' is because love in itself is a hidden reality that can only become apparent in something else. The same is true for life as such. Every form of life is hidden and only becomes noticeable in its manifestations. This can be applied to the life of plants, but also to the life of thought, which is hidden until it expresses itself in a linguistic form. More importantly, though, the same twofold reality can be applied to the words of Scripture. The source of these words is hidden and we can only read the apparent thought of its manifestation, but by reading it we can get in touch with the hidden source of these words, which is the voice of the love of God himself. In the next part of this reflection, Kierkegaard combines both these thoughts in explaining the title of his reflection.

Retrospect

Although the sentence 'For each tree is known by its own fruits' is easy to understand as an image within the context of the Gospel, it is less simple to decipher its message. In a first remark, Kierkegaard emphasises that this sentence in the Gospel of Luke not only stresses the fact that love produces *fruit*, but also that love produces *its own* fruit, which has to be distinguished from other kinds of fruit. With this distinction, Kierkegaard raises the question of discernment. There are a lot of things to which we give the name love that in reality are not love. Self-love, for instance, or love that only blossoms and perishes like a temporal flower. It is here that Kierkegaard introduces the term 'Christian love'. This love

18. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:9): 'Dog naar man siger, at Kjerligheden kjendes paa Frugterne, saa siger man dermed tillige, at Kjerligheden selv i en vis Forstand er i det Skjulte, og netop derfor kun til at kjende paa de aabenbarende Frugter. Dette er just og Tilfaeldet. Ethvert Liv, saaledes ogsaa Kjerlighedens, er skjult som saadant, men aabenbart i et Andet. Plantens Liv er skjult, Frugten er Aabenbaringen; Tankens Liv er skjult, Talens Yttring det Aabenbarende. De forelaeste hellige Ord tale derfor om et Dobbelt, medens dog kun skjult tale om det Ene; der er i Udsagnet aabenbart indeholdt een Tanke, men der er tillige skjult indeholdt en anden.'

contrasts with other forms of love, because it is rooted in eternity. In other words, love in the Christian sense is not dependent on our personal preferences, but on the eternal voice of God in our heart that calls for our obedience. According to Kierkegaard, it is on this account that the above-mentioned sentence makes a distinction between love's inner life and the fruit it produces and, in this way, this statement contains two thoughts. Manifestly, it indicates that love can be recognised by its fruits; however, the hidden message is that love itself cannot be made tangible and therefore escapes our perceptivity. As with every form of life, love is hidden and can only be known by its manifestations. Both thoughts are elaborated in the continuation of this reflection.

The divine source of love and its implications

The hidden life of love

Where does love come from, where does it have its origin and its source, where is the place it has its abode from which it flows? Yes, this place is hidden or is secret.¹⁹ There is a place in a person's innermost being; from this place flows the life of love, for 'from the heart flows life.' But you cannot see this place; however deeply you penetrate, the origin eludes you in remoteness and hiddenness. Even when you have penetrated furthest in, the origin is always still a bit further in, like the source of the spring that is further away just when you are closest to it. From this place flows love along many paths, but along none of these paths can you force your way into its hidden origin. Just as God dwells in a light from which flows every ray that illuminates the world, yet no one can force his way along these paths in order to see God, since the paths of light turn into darkness when one turns toward the light – so love dwells in hiding or is hidden in the innermost being.²⁰

(Kierkegaard 1995:8–9)

In this excerpt, Kierkegaard becomes almost poetic in his expressions. The central notion in the text is that the source of love is a hidden reality for us. We do not know where love has its origin, where it dwells and where it emanates from. We only know that it originates in the most inner part of the human being. This place is hidden because it is too intimate for us to describe in objective terms, or even to indicate as a place. Traditionally, it is called the heart. Here Kierkegaard quotes the Book of Proverbs that says: 'Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life' (Pr 4:23). The heart is the place where God, as the hidden source of our life and love, becomes flesh and blood in us. As point of contact though, it will always withdraw itself from our perception. We can enter its space by following its manifestations and listening to its inner voice, but this will only create a lifelong journey towards a source, which will never come within our

19. The Danish original reads: *i det Skjulte* (Kierkegaard 1847:9). This refers to the Father who is in secret, cf. Matthew 6:4; 6:6; 6:18.

20. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:9–10): 'Hvorfra kommer Kjerligheden, hvorfra har den sin Oprindelse og sit Udspring, hvor er det Sted, som for den er Tilholdet, fra hvilket den udgaaer? Ja, dette Sted er skjult eller er i det Skjulte. Der er et Sted i et Menneskes Inderste; fra dette Sted udgaaer Kjerlighedens Liv, thi *fra Hjertet udgaaer Livet*. Men see dette Sted kan Du ikke; hvor langt Du end traenger ind, Oprindelsen unddrager sig i Fjernhed og Skjulthed; selv naar Du er traengt laengst ind, Oprindelsen er endnu bestandig som et Stykke laengere inde, ligesom Kildens Udspring, der just, naar du er det naermest, er laengere borte. Fra dette Sted udgaaer Kjerligheden, ad mangfoldige Veie; men ad ingen af disse Veie kan Du traenge ind i dens skjulte Tilblivelse. Som Gud boer i et Lys, fra hvilket hver en Straale udgaaer, der oplyser Verden, medens dog Ingen ad disse Veie kan traenge ind efter for at see Gud, thi Lysets Veie forvandle sig til Moerke, naar man vender sig mod Lyset: saaledes boer Kjerligheden i det Skjulte, eller skjult i det Inderste.'



reach. In fact, it is the other way around, the more we journey with it, the more we will become aware of its hiddenness as such.

In order to describe the hiddenness of the divine source of love, Kierkegaard uses the image of God as light, or in a more precise formulation: 'God [who] dwells in a light'²¹, because, as the source of light, God has to be distinguished from the light. Every ray that flows from this light illuminates the world, but no one is able to go in the opposite direction in order to see God, 'since the paths of light turn into darkness when one turns towards the light'.²² In the following part, Kierkegaard warns us not to force our way, inquisitively and brazenly, to its source. It will only punish us with blindness. We cannot grasp love; we can only follow 'the murmuring persuasion of its rippling'²³ (Kierkegaard 1995:9) and take delight in it:

Love's hidden life is in the innermost being, unfathomable, and then in turn is in an unfathomable connectedness with all existence. Just as the quiet lake originates deep down in hidden springs no eye has seen, so also does a person's love originate even more deeply in God's love. If there were no gushing spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither the little lake nor a human being's love. Just as the quiet lake originates darkly in the deep spring, so a human being's love originates mysteriously in God's love. Just as the quiet lake invites you to contemplate it but by the reflected image of darkness prevents you from seeing through it, so also the mysterious origin of love in God's love prevents you from seeing its ground. When you think that you see it, you are deceived by a reflected image, as if that which only hides the deeper ground were the ground. Just as the lid of a clever secret compartment, for the very purpose of completely hiding the compartment, looks as if it were the bottom, so also that which only covers what is even deeper deceptively appears to be the depths of the ground.²⁴

(Kierkegaard 1995:9–10)

21. Cf. 1 Timothy 6:16: '[The Lord Jesus Christ] alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and eternal power. Amen.' Kierkegaard elaborates on this image in the following part of his reflection.

22. John of the Cross (1991:110) uses the same kind of image in order to explain the way God works in our life. For him, though, this darkness has a positive meaning. God does not have another way to reveal himself to us than to enlighten us in such a way that he blinds and deprives us: 'Faith, the theologians say, is a certain and obscure habit of soul. It is an obscure habit because it brings us to believe divinely revealed truths that transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding. As a result the excessive light of faith bestowed on a soul is darkness for it; a brighter light will eclipse and suppress a dimmer one. The sun so obscures all other lights that they do not seem to be lights at all when it is shining, and instead of affording vision to the eyes, it overwhelms, blinds, and deprives them of vision since its light is excessive and unproportioned to the visual faculty. Similarly, the light of faith in its abundance suppresses and overwhelms that of the intellect. For the intellect, by its own power, extends only to natural knowledge, though it has the potency to be raised to a supernatural act whenever our Lord wishes.'

23. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:10): 'sin Rislens nynnende Overtalelse'.

24. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:10–11): 'Kjerlighedens skjulte Liv er i det Inderste, uudgrundeligt, og da igjen i et uudgrundeligt Sammenhæng med hele Tilværelsen. Som den stille Søe grunder dybt i de skjulte Kildevæld, hvilke intet Øie saae, saaledes grunder et Menneskes Kjerlighed endnu dybere, i Guds Kjerlighed. Dersom der intet Væld var i Bunden, dersom Gud ikke var Kjerlighed, da var hverken den lille Søe, ei heller et Menneskes Kjerlighed. Som den stille Søe grunder mørkt i det dybe Væld, saaledes grunder et Menneskes Kjerlighed gaadefuldt i Guds. Som den stille Søe vel indbyder Dig at betragte den, men ved Mørkhedens Speilbillede forbyder Dig at gjennemskue den: saaledes forbyder Kjerlighedens gaadefulde Oprindelse i Guds Kjerlighed Dig at see dens Grund; naar Du mener at see den, da er det et Speilbillede, der bedrager Dig, som var Det Grunden, det, der kun skjuler over den dybere Grund. Som det sindrige Gjemmes Laag, netop for ganske at skjule Gjemmet, seer ud som Bunden, saaledes seer bedragende Det ud som Grundens Dyb, det, der kun skjuler over det endnu Dybere.'

After the image of God dwelling in such a light that, the moment we try to search for his hiding place, we will become dazzled, Kierkegaard explores another image in order to gain insight into the hidden life of love. This is the image of a lake that, in its darkness, hides its ground. The existence of the lake is, in itself, direct proof of the existence of a wellspring, though the water on the surface seems to be quiet and motionless. In the same way love is an unfathomable phenomenon in our existence. We notice that love is an undeniable vitality in our life, but we cannot comprehend where it originates from. However deeply we may be absorbed in love, we will never find the hidden spring of it. For Kierkegaard, this spring 'no eye has seen'²⁵ is God's love. Without this love or, in his own wording: 'if God were not love, then there would be neither the little lake nor a human being's love.' This notion that the love of human beings originates in a mysterious way in God's love is important to Kierkegaard, because it makes clear that love in itself is the gate through which we enter the hidden reality of God's love, which is the immediate source of our love. It is for this reason that only by the act of love, and not by trying to penetrate love as an object of our inquiry, do we become familiar with God. This kind of familiarity brings us more and more into the abyss of God's love. In this perspective, Kierkegaard uses the image of an ever-receding ground. We may think that we sometimes see something that looks like a bottom, but in fact we only see that which, in our self-deceit, restrains us from looking further:

In the same way the life of love is hidden, but its hidden life is in itself motion and has eternity within itself. Just as the quiet lake, however calm its surface, is actually flowing water, since there is the gushing spring at the bottom – so also love, however quiet it is in its concealment, is flowing nevertheless. But the quiet lake can dry up if the gushing spring ever stops; the life of love, however, has an eternal spring. This life is fresh and everlasting. No cold can freeze it – it has too much warmth within itself for that; and no heat can weaken it – it is too fresh in its coolness for that. But hidden it is, and when the Gospel speaks about the recognizability of this life by its fruits, this above all does not mean that we should alarm and disturb this hiding place, that we should devote ourselves to observation or to searching self-scrutiny, which only 'grieve the spirit' and hinder growth.²⁶

(Kierkegaard 1995:10)

The notion of 'eternity' refers to an immutable reality. Temporary reality may change in time; eternal reality does not. For Kierkegaard, this does not mean that 'eternity' is without dynamism. When he states that Christian love is eternal, his message is not that this love is petrified, but that this love has its origin in an eternal source. Human love can blossom and perish; Christian love however cannot perish

25. Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9: 'Things which an eye did not see, and an ear did not hear, which did not enter into the heart of man, these God has prepared for those who love him.' Here, Paul is quoting Isaiah 64:3: 'For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides you, who works for him who waits for him.'

26. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:11): 'Saaledes er Kjerlighedens Liv skjult; men dens skjulte Liv er i sig selv Bevægelse, og har Evigheden i sig. Som den stille Søe, hvor roligt den end ligger, dog egentligen er rindende Vand, thi er ikke Kildevældet i Bunden: saaledes er Kjerligheden, hvor stille den end er i sin Forborgenhed, dog rindende. Men den stille Søe kan udtørres, naar Vældet engang standser; Kjerlighedens Liv derimod har et evigt Væld. Dette Liv er friskt og evigt; ingen Kulde kan isne det, dertil er det for varmt i sig, og ingen Varme kan matte det, dertil er det for friskt i sin Kjølighed. Men skjult er det; og naar der i Evangeliet er Tale om dette Livs Kjendelighed paa Frugterne, da er Meningen for Alt ikke denne, at man skulde urolige og forstyrre denne Skjultthed, at man skulde hængive sig til lagttagelse eller til opdagende Selvbetragtning, hvad kun *bedrøver Aanden* og sinker Væxten.'



because it has its origin in the hidden reality of God's eternal love. In order to understand God's love as an eternal but, at the same time, dynamic reality, Kierkegaard elaborates on the image of the lake. On the surface the lake seems to be quiet and motionless, but below the surface there is an eternal movement of flowing water that emanates from its hidden source. A natural lake can dry up, 'if the gushing spring ever stops', but this lake of love will never dry up, because its hidden source is everlasting.

A question that may be raised is why Kierkegaard uses the image of a quiet lake in order to describe this love that comes from an eternal source in a person's innermost being? Why is this lake of love motionless? Is not love as a passion just the opposite of rest and peace? Although Kierkegaard does not elaborate on this theme, it seems that he wants to make us understand that this eternal love does not push itself forward in our life. It is a reality that we come across in our heart when we become silent in ourselves. Only then can we hear its eternal voice and become obedient to it. This life of eternal love in our heart is, as he calls it, 'fresh and everlasting'. Neither cold nor heat can threaten it because it does not originate in our emotions as such. The divine source of this eternal love however will always be hidden. We can live it by listening to its voice, but at the moment we try to analyse and scrutinise its origin, we are cast out of this immediate reality.

Love's need to be recognised

Yet this hidden life of love is *recognizable by its fruits* – yes, there is a need in love to be recognizable by its fruits. How beautiful it is that the same thing that signifies the utmost misery also signifies the greatest riches! Need, to have need, to be a needy person – how reluctant a person is to have this said about him! Yet we are saying the utmost when we say of the poet, 'He has a need to write'; of the orator, 'He has a need to speak'; and of the young woman, 'She has a need to love'. Ah, how rich was even the neediest person who has ever lived, but who still has had love, compared with him, the only real pauper, who went through life and never felt a need for anything! This is precisely the young woman's greatest riches, that she needs the beloved; and this is the devout man's greatest and his true riches, that he needs God. Ask them, ask the young woman whether she could feel just as happy if she could equally well get along without the beloved; ask the pious person whether he understands or wishes that he could equally well get along without God! It is the same with love's recognizability by its fruits, which for that very reason, when the relationship is right, are said to press forward, whereby the riches are again signified. Indeed, if there could actually be such a self-contradiction in love, it would have to be the greatest torment that love insisted on keeping love hidden, insisted on making love unrecognizable.²⁷

(Kierkegaard 1995:10–11)

27. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:11–12): 'Dog er dette Kjerlighedens skjulte Liv kjendeligt paa Frugterne, ja, og det er en Trang i Kjerligheden at kunne kjendes paa Frugterne. O, hvor skjønt er dog ikke dette, at hvad der betegner det Kummerligste, at det Samme betegner den høieste Rigdom! Thi Trang, at have Trang og at være en Trængende, hvor nødtigt vil et Menneske, at dette skal siges om ham! Og dog sige vi det Høieste naar vi sige om Digteren *det er ham en Trang at digte*, om Taleren *det er ham en Trang at tale*, om Pigen *det er hende en Trang at elske*. Ak, selv den meest Trængende, der har levet, hvis han dog har havt Kjerlighed, hvor riigt har ikke hans Liv været i Sammenligning med ham, den eneste Fattige, han, der levede Livet hen og aldrig følte Trang til Noget. Thi dette er jo dog netop Pigens høieste Rigdom, at hun trænger til den Elskede; dette er den Frommes høieste og sande Riigdom, at han trænger til Gud. Spørg dem, spørg Pigen, om hun kunde føle sig lige saa lykkelig, hvis hun lige saa godt kunde undvære den Elskede; spørg den Fromme, om han forstaaer eller ønsker det, at han lige saa godt kunde undvære Gud! Saaledes ogsaa med Kjerlighedens Kjendelighed paa Frugterne, der just derfor, naar Forholdet er det rette, siges at trænge sig frem, hvormed atter Rigdommen er betegnet. Dette maatte jo ogsaa være den største Marter, hvis det virkelige var saa, at der i Kjerligheden selv kunde være den Selvmodsigelse, at Kjerlighed bød at holde den skjult, bød at gjøre den ukjendelig.'

As human beings we are not proud of being needy, for need is a sign of weakness and not of strength. Hence we are very reluctant to say that we are in need of something or someone. Kierkegaard acknowledges that our need can put us in miserable situations, but this does not mean that need, in itself, is only something we have to rid ourselves of. The fact that we are needy also signifies how rich we are. To illustrate this, Kierkegaard draws on different examples: a poet needs to write, an orator needs to speak and a young woman needs to love. The common need in all those examples is an expression of an innermost urge or desire. When a poet is really a poet from within, then his act of writing is not obligatory but a matter of the heart or an urge from within. This need, or inner drive, belongs to the realm of the human being and can be observed in all of us. To acknowledge and to follow this urge from within will make us 'rich', because it connects us with the divine source of our innermost being: God's hidden love. In this we really become alive and it is a sign of our poverty when we, throughout our life, have never encountered this need.

Love makes us rich, because it brings forth its own fruit. Here Kierkegaard uses the Danish phrase *trænge frem* that expresses the inner urge of this love. Love needs to *press forward* its fruits in our lives. This inner urge can be compared with the young woman's need of her beloved or with the devout man's need of God. They both are in need of the object of their love. The object of love itself, however, is not an object as such, but the immediate influence it has on us. In other words, the fruit of love is our transformation in love.²⁸ This is the way the divine source of love presses itself forward in our love. This inner urge of love to transform us in love is the riches we gain from love. In this sense we can speak of a 'wound' of love that gradually is penetrating our life as a whole. This love started in us the moment we gave birth to it by opening our heart. But, from the beginning, it wanted to press forward its fruits by turning us into loving people.

This description of love, as a hidden reality in our heart that transforms us from within, emphasises the inner dynamics of love. To explain this, Kierkegaard uses the image of a plant. When a plant has 'sensed the exuberant life and blessing within it'²⁹ (Kierkegaard 1995:11), it cannot hide itself by keeping it secret. It has to come to full growth and *press forward* its fruits, even if this love on an external level has to be kept hidden.

The pain of an unrequited love

Even if a single, particular expression of love, a single impulse of the heart, were, out of love forced back into painful concealment, the same life of love will still find another expression for itself and still be recognizable by its fruits. O you quiet martyrs of an unhappy passion, what you suffered by having, out of love, to hide your love certainly remained a secret; it never became

28. It is important to notice here that the fruits of love cannot immediately be identified with our so called works of love. Love gradually transforms our works in such a way that they become 'works of love'. In other words, the more we open ourselves for the divine reality of love in our hearts, the more this love can become the source of our actions.

29. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:12): 'der fornem Frodighedens Liv og Velsignelse i sig'.

known, so great was your love that involved this sacrifice – yet your love became known by its fruits! And perhaps these very fruits, the ones matured by the quiet fire of a hidden pain, became the most precious.³⁰

(Kierkegaard 1995:11)

To illustrate that the fruits of love are not dependent on the return of one's love, Kierkegaard gives an example of people who foster an unrequited love. Without much imagination it is understandable that they suffer a great deal, because they have to hide their love from the beloved. Kierkegaard therefore calls them 'martyrs of an unhappy passion' (*Elskov*). They suffer because they are alone in their affection and have to keep it a secret. For Kierkegaard, though, this does not mean that this unrequited love is not fruitful. On the contrary, love presses forward its fruits in this situation of nonreciprocal love by transforming us in this love. Kierkegaard even dares to say that these very fruits are perhaps the more precious, because 'they are matured by the quiet fire of a hidden pain'.

Two things are significant in this paradigm. Firstly, love does not have to be reciprocal. Even an unrequited love and the pain we have to suffer because of it, is a good breeding ground for love to press forward its fruits. Secondly, these fruits of love have to be distinguished from our explicit deeds or activities in love. Love 'works' in our love. It generates a process in which our love or passion is transformed in God's love. This hidden work of love is more precious than the actual reciprocity of this love.

Concluding remarks

The second part of this reflection starts with the question of where love has its origin. Kierkegaard's answer to this question is that the source of love is secret or hidden. It is at this point that Kierkegaard develops the main feature of his anthropology, the central notion of which is that love springs from the heart or the person's innermost being and has its origin in God. This 'place' is secret or hidden because we cannot penetrate it with the tools of our logic. To illustrate this he uses an image from Paul's first letter to Timothy in which he states that God lives in an unapproachable light (1 Tm 6:15–16). The love in a person's heart is unfathomable in the same way. We cannot scrutinise love as an object of our inquiry, because it does not have its origin in our temporality, but in God's unfathomable eternity. This does not imply that we cannot live this love. On the contrary, we need to live it in order to become familiar with it and to understand it from within. However, this familiarity will, in the first place, confront us with love's unfathomableness and its unfathomable connectedness with all existence. In other words, the more we become acquainted with the love of our heart, the more this love will lead us into the mystery of God's eternity. A second feature of Kierkegaard's anthropology, which is immediately linked to the first, is the

30. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:12): 'Thi om end en enkelt bestemt Kjerlighedens Ytring, endog et Hjertesked blev – af Kjerlighed trængt tilbage i smertelig Forborgenhed: det samme Kjerlighedens Liv vil dog skaffe sig en anden Ytring og dog vorde kjendeligt paa Frugterne. O, I en ulykkelig Elskovs stille Martyrer; vel blev det en Hemmelighed, hvad I leed ved af Kjerlighed at maatte skjule en Kjerlighed; det blev aldrig kjendt, saa stor var netop Eders Kjerlighed, der bragte dette Offer: dog blev Eders Kjerlighed kjendt paa Frugterne! Og maaskee blev just disse Frugter de kostelige, de, som modnedes ved en skjult Smertes stille Brand.'

acknowledgement that this love manifests itself as a need or an innermost urge. This urge does not have its roots in the hardships of life, but in the hunger of our heart that asks for satisfaction from within. This need is, according to Kierkegaard, our riches. It orients our life and gives love the possibility of pressing forward its fruit in us, even if a particular, specific manifestation of love, were out of love to be pressed back.

Conclusion

It is often said that Kierkegaard uses the Bible to illustrate his own ideas. Considering the number of pages about only a part of a verse of the Gospel: 'each tree is known by its own fruit' (Lk 6:44), we could reason that they have a point. Kierkegaard starts with the very interpretation that the subject of this sentence is love. The direct context of this biblical verse, after all, seems to be more morally oriented, due to the use of terms like 'good' and 'rotten' or 'evil' (see Lk 6:43–45). But this does not alter the fact that the central theme of the Sermon on the Mount is a love that extends to our enemies and those who hate, curse and mistreat us (Lk 6:27–35). It is within this context of a call to a radical love that does not seem to worry about one's own position, that the Gospel of Luke admonishes us not to leave this path in order to defend ourselves or to judge others (Lk 6:37). Love has its own logic and can only be followed when we recognise its inner voice as our guide. In other words, love can only grow in us when we believe in the wisdom of its divine source and do not try run away from it when this love confronts us with the threats of the world. This may be sagacious from a human point of view, but it is disastrous from the perspective of love, that only has the possibility of revealing its hidden wisdom if we are prepared to submit ourselves its divine authority (Lk 6:46). It is within this context that the Gospel speaks of 'good' and 'rotten' fruits. We may be doing nothing wrong and acting as good citizens, when our first priority is to safeguard our own life and to take this perspective as our one and only basic assumption. It will probably help us to become prosperous in a material sense. From the perspective of God's love, however, we will have signed our own death warrant, because this self-concern will exclude us from this hidden source of life that asks us to take the risk of trusting its divine foolishness. Accordingly, Kierkegaard speaks of a 'conceited sagacity'. Objectively, it may seem wise to safeguard our life against the threats of the world and foolish to trust this naked ground of our existence that calls us to a life of selfless love, but, as Paul says: 'the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God' (1 Cor 3:19) and in order to enter this divine reality of our life, we have to leave behind our own sagaciousness.

Kierkegaard begins and ends his reflection on the sentence 'For each tree is known by its own fruit' with a plea to believe in love. We can analyse the Gospel with the tools of our logic or the techniques of literary sciences, but we will never find its eternal truth if we are not prepared to enter the reality of its love. Consequently, it is a *conditio sine qua non* for understanding Scripture. Without this loving attitude we will



always remain an outsider, such as the man in Kierkegaard's (2006:9–11) *Fear and trembling*, who wanted to be a witness to Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah, but was not able to follow him in his faith or love for Isaac.³¹ The same holds true for the above-mentioned sentence, in that it seems to claim that love can be objectively identified by its fruits, but has to be read as a personal encouragement to become fruitful in love. It is probably for this reason that Kierkegaard takes this sentence as his point of departure. He wants to make us aware that we have to distinguish between the apparent meaning of a text and the hidden meaning that only comes to light in the intimacy of the divine-human relationship itself. In the case of this sentence in the Gospel of Luke, the manifest meaning is that love can be recognised by its fruits; however, the hidden meaning is that love cannot be made tangible and escapes our perceptivity.

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31. See also Huls (in press).

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