

ON THE NEIGHBOR: A READING OF KIERKEGAARD'S WORKS OF LOVE¹

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Abstract

This essay examines the concept of the neighbor in Soren Kierkegaard's "Works of Love". It examines Kierkegaard's understanding of the teaching of Christ: "*You must love your neighbour as yourself*", as a commandment, and how it is connected to the love of God. It then relates this to the writings of Levinas on "the other".

I

The question "Who is the neighbor?" (Luke 10:29-37) was asked of Jesus Christ by a lawyer long ago, and that question has continued to be asked in order to remind those who claim to be a Christian. It is not so much to know who the neighbor is but how to be a neighbor. The story of the Good Samaritan puts the question itself into question. In the words of Kierkegaard, "Christ does not speak about knowing the neighbor but about becoming a neighbor oneself, about showing oneself to be neighbor just as the Samaritan showed it by his mercy" (Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* later will be used WL, p.22).

The question "Who is the neighbor?" is a question that Kierkegaard connects to the commandment of love. This is evident in the very title of his book *Works of Love*, that talks, "not about love but about works of love". "There are indeed only some works that human language specifically and narrowly calls works of love, but in heaven no work can be pleasing unless it is a work of love" (WL, p.4) In the teachings of the Church, there is nothing more important than love which is ground for all other teachings. Jesus Christ, in his summary of the whole law, says, *You*

must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: *You must love your neighbour as yourself.* On these two commandments hangs the whole Law, and the Prophets also”. (Matthew 22:37-40). Both the two commandments go together. We could not accept the first without the second, which means “anyone who loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:21). This is not a guiding principle that you “ought” to love your neighbor, it is the commandment: you ‘must’ love your neighbor. For Christianity, Jesus Christ is the clear witness of this sacrificial love for the other person. To give priority to the other without concern for self-salvation is the way that Christians can build up their relationship to God through their neighbors. Father Zossima, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, says: “Strive to love your neighbor actively and constantly. In so far as you advance in love you will grow surer of the reality of God and of the immortality of your soul” (Dostoyevsky, 1999, p.64). Our love of God is made practical through our love of our neighbor. Christians could not claim the love of God while being indifferent to the other. “Anyone who says, ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, is a liar, since a man who does not love the brother that he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen” (1 John 4:20). For Kierkegaard, “Love for God and love for neighbor are like two doors that open simultaneously, so that it is impossible to open one without also opening the other, and impossible to shut one without also shutting the other” (Kierkegaard, 1978, p.487).

This paper explores Kierkegaard’s views of the Christian teaching of love of neighbor. The first part deals with the views of Kierkegaard, while the second connects these ideas concerning the neighbor with Levinas’s reflection on “the other”.

II

The second commandment in the Gospel of Matthew 22:39, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” is the ethical commandment. A commandment implies an obligation to obey. Kierkegaard says, “All you have to do is to obey in love” (WL, p.20). He states: to love is a duty

(WL, p.24). It is not a matter of choice, but it is “eternity’s shall” (WL, p.37). This commandment implies the duty, the duty to love your neighbor. He says, “Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured against every change” (WL, p.29). A love often changes to hate and jealousy because that love is merely spontaneous love. But when love secures itself in duty, it relates itself with eternity. It never becomes habit. It is guards against all despair. He says, “Despair is to lack the eternal; despair is not to have undergone the change of eternity through duty’s *shall*” (WL, p.40-41). He might want to point out the main characteristic of Christian love which is different from other forms of love. The Christian love, for him, is a commandment. Jesus, in his last teaching, said to his disciples: “the command I give you is this, that you love one another” (John 15:17). When love commands you, it is your duty to love even though it will bring you suffering. Suffering will not make you lose your hope, or make you despair, because the duty to love binds you with eternity. Philip L. Quinn, in his article *Kierkegaard’s Christian Ethics*, makes the following observation:

According to Kierkegaard, then, three things threaten to destroy our loves: changes in our inclinations and feelings, changes in the objects we love, and the unhappiness, pain, and suffering that can lead to despair. Such things often do destroy erotic loves and friendships. Love of neighbor will not be vulnerable to the first two of them only if it is a duty and so compliance is motivated by a sense of duty independent of inclinations, feelings, and mutable characteristics of the neighbor. It will not be vulnerable to the third of them, Kierkegaard suggests, only if it is a duty whose source is eternity, a duty imposed by a divine command, so that divine assistance can be relied upon if needed to make compliance a real possibility. In short, only the love that is obedient to the divine command is immutable. (Quinn, 2006, p.357)

The question “Who is the neighbor?” puts ourselves into question. Is it possible for me to love everyone even before I know him or her? Is it possible for a person – a sinful person like me – to perform the

duty of love? If I take seriously this commandment to love, I probably will be ready to be deceived, to be a fool in the eyes of the other. I have to be courageous enough to stand firmly on the foundation of Christian love. Without divine grace, how can it be possible for humans to perform the duty of love? Quinn's remarks on the need of divine assistance for human to do the command of love is quite true. Merold Westphal, in the book *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, insists, "Ontologically speaking, neighbor love is grounded in the mysterious God relation without which it would be impossible" (Westphal, 2008, p.56). He claims that Kierkegaard walks the same path as Luther, Augustine, and Paul, in terms of law and grace, commandment and enablement. Without God's grace, we are too weak to overcome our natural inclination. Quinn also says, "Kierkegaard's God is the Lutheran God from whom salvation comes through faith alone (*sola fide*). We do not earn righteousness through the merits of our works of love" (Quinn, 2006, p.366). As human being, we always need God in order to perform the duty of love. To love the neighbor, according to the commandment, is to love everyone. "Since everyone is my neighbor, the commandment to love my neighbors as myself becomes the commandment to love my enemies" (Westphal, 2008, p.56). After you shut your door and pray to God, the person you see when you open the door is your neighbor to whom you have to perform the duty of love. We often look for a person who meets and matches our desire, a perfect object of our love, to whom we want to love and be loved. But Christian teaching of love does not offer you a choice to perform the duty of love, it commands you to love the ones you see, or even the most terrible and ugly enemy. For Kierkegaard:

Therefore if you want to be perfect in love, strive to fulfill this duty, in loving to love person one sees, to love him just as you see him, with all his imperfections and weaknesses, to love him as you see him when he has changed completely, when he no longer loves you but perhaps turns away indifferent or turns away to love another, to love him as you see him when he betrays and denies you. (WL, p.174)

The question "Who is the neighbor?" redirects us to the question

how to be neighbor, or how to be the Good Samaritan, or how to perform the duty of love to everyone. For Kierkegaard, “The category “neighbor” is like the category “human being”” (WL, p.141). We have to love all human beings. How shall I love my neighbor? “As yourself” is very brief and precise, nothing more or less. You shall love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. “As yourself” is the way you love your neighbor. This commandment presupposes self-love, and this self-love shows the way to love our neighbor. M. Jamie Ferreira observes that Kierkegaard’s account of “as yourself” serves five main purposes – it is meant (1) to “open the lock of self-love”, (2) to teach a person “proper self-love”, (3) to be a standard for our love of others so that it is not more than love for ourselves, and (5) to remind us that we have been loved by God (Ferreira, 2008, p.88).

How shall I love my neighbor as myself? Kierkegaard says: To love yourself in the right way and to love the neighbor correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing (WL, p.22). For Kierkegaard, Christian love does not teach us to do away with self-love but to make it in the right way. But how do we love ourselves in the right way? He concludes: you shall love yourself in the same way as you love your neighbor when you love him as yourself (WL, p.23). To love the neighbor is to love yourself, and to love yourself is to love the neighbor. This seeming puzzle is clarified when we understand that the love between self and neighbor is grounded on God’s love. According to his prayer: “how could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you God of love, source of love in heaven and on earth” (WL, p.3). Human love is originated from God, because God is love. God is ineffable, indescribable. Love is also the same. There is no way to take account of Love without taking account of God. It is “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” (WL, p.10). We recognize love by its fruit, i.e., by its works, Works of Love.

For Kierkegaard, to love neighbor as yourself is not open to love someone and indifferent to some other. The neighbor is someone who is nearer to you than anyone else (WL, p.21). Nearer to you than anyone does not refer to your favorite friend or loved one, but to those who are in front of you. Then the neighbor, for him, means “all people” (WL,

p.21). The neighbor is the one you have to love even before you know her/him. The Christian teaching on love of neighbor commands you to “do” even before thinking – calculating, making distinction, etc. Thinking, and calculating lead you to make distinctions among people, and as a result you are tempted to select your preferential ones. You will be trapped into your self-love where there is no place for neighbor in the Christian meaning. Your preferential person will be your second self. Kierkegaard says, “The Christian doctrine, on the contrary, is to love the neighbor, to love the whole human race, all people, even the enemy, and not to make exceptions, neither of preference nor of aversion” (WL, p.19) It teaches you to be a neighbor through doing the duty of neighbor. Kierkegaard says, “The one to whom I have a duty is my neighbor, and when I fulfill my duty I show that I am a neighbor” (WL, p.22).

III

For Kierkegaard, Christian love of neighbor is very different from erotic love and friendship. He makes the distinction between preferential love (erotic love and friendship) and Christian love. This distinction points out the unique characteristic of Christian love of neighbor which is the form of “self-denial’s love” (WL, p.55). Erotic love and friendship exclusively select only the beloved and friend which is the form of “self-love”. “For this reason the beloved and the friend are called, remarkably and profoundly, to be sure, the *other self*, the *other I* – since the neighbor is the *other you*, or, quite precisely, the third party of equality. The *other self*, the *other I*” (WL, p.53). Erotic love selects only the beloved, and friendship selects only friend and group of friends excluding the other person from the circle. Then this preferential love of both erotic love and friend, for Kierkegaard, is not open for the *other you*. They are just looking for someone who can represent the *other I*. For Kierkegaard, the preferential love, at the end, reduce the other you to be the other *I*. He says, “But erotic love and friendship are the very peak of self-esteem, the *I* intoxicated in the *other I*. The more securely one *I* and another *I* join to become one *I*, the more this united *I* selfishly cuts itself off from everyone else. At the peak of erotic love and friendship, the two actually do be-

come one self, one *I* (WL, p.56). The finality of the path of preferential love whether erotic love and friendship will lead to self-love. This self-love is exclusive. Then he says, “Take away the distinction of preferential love so that you can love the neighbor” (WL, p.61). The neighbor is to whom you have duty to love before you make the distinction, you categorize the similarity and dissimilarity, before you reduce him/her to be the other self. By our natural inclination we tend to love only and want to be loved by particular people. To love neighbor is to love everyone, or anyone that you encounter, and it seems to be against our natural tendency. The Christian love of neighbor teaches us to extend the love beyond our natural inclination. That is why Christian teaching of love has to be founded by the commandment. The commandment corrects our natural inclination. The Christian teaching of love is firmly based on self-denial. It uplifts the standard of worldly love where the reciprocal relation is needed, to love and to be loved at the same time. For Christianity, the reciprocal relation is just optional, not compulsory. For Kierkegaard, “Love is not a being-for-itself quality but a quality by which or in which you are for others” (WL, p.223). Without the other, you cannot perform the second commandment. You are not for yourself, but you need the other to whom you can perform the duty of love. The Christian has to prove that they are not just preaching love in order to be loved. On the contrary, they love the neighbor, or love the other unconditionally. Because “to be loving means: to presuppose love in others” (WL, p.224). To love even the enemy (Matthew 5:44-46) has always challenged our natural inclinations. But the lifting of love from the preferential love to the universal love for humankind is the main characteristic of Christian love, moving beyond erotic love and friendship. Whereas erotic love and friendship is based on preferential love, the Christian love is based on the love of neighbor. “Insofar as you love the beloved, you are not like God, because for God there is no preference... Insofar as you love your friend, you are not like God, because for God there is no distinction. But when you love the neighbor, then you are like God” (WL, p.63).

Reading Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* raises many questions of how to love neighbor and translate neighbor into everyone including our enemy, and how to love without distinction whether our beloved, friends, and neighbors. Is erotic love and friendship always trapped in self-love?

Finally, is it possible to perform the love of neighbor? To perform the duty of love including our enemy is really against our natural tendency. Kierkegaard points out the difference between preferential love and Christian love by taking account of self-love and self-denial love to be the main theme. Whereas preferential love is based on self-love, Christian love is based on self-denying love. The self, or the *I*, is the way to justify your love for neighbor whether your love is finally returning to the *I*. Then the *I*, for him, has to open for the other *you* to be loved by the *I*, and even the *I* is rejected by the *you*. For Kierkegaard, there are no worldly struggles to regret, “Christ’s life is really the only unhappy love... For this reason, his whole life was horrible collision with the merely human conception of what love is. It was the ungodly world that crucified him; but even the disciples did not understand him” (WL, p.110). Worldly love is quite different from the Christian teaching of love.

Do we have to sacrifice our preferential love for Christian love? Kierkegaard does not intend to eliminate the preferential love for the neighbor. On the contrary he says, “Just as this commandment will teach everyone how to love oneself, so it also will teach erotic love and friendship genuine love: in loving yourself, preserve love for the neighbor; in erotic love and friendship, preserve love for the neighbor” (WL, p.61-62). Kierkegaard does not deny preferential love but try to open it for the neighbor. The Relationship between the love and beloved, between friend and friend, should not be closed just among the couple and the circle of friends. But it should also be open for neighbor to have a place in that circle. “Christianity has not come into the world to teach this or that change in how you are to love your wife and your friend in particular, but to teach how you are to love all human beings universally-humanly” (WL, p.142-143). Kierkegaard does not mean to love wife, husband and friend as the way you love you neighbor. To love human beings universally does not mean to love everyone in the same manner. We cannot love everyone because “everyone” is quite abstract. Everyone can turn to be no one. We can love each one in particular, and everyone turns to be each one in particular when we see individually. While we are with our loved, “love the beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let your love for the neighbor be the sanctifying element in your union’s covenant with God” (WL, p.62). While we are with friend, “Love your friend honestly and devotedly, but

let love for the neighbor be what you learn from each other in your friendship's confidential relationship with God!" (WL, p.62) Stephen Minister gives a concluding remarks on this point:

Kierkegaard's point is not that the God relationship overwhelms or short-circuits the love relationship, but that the God relationship makes possible the genuine love relationship between two particular human beings. Without the resources of the God-relation, Kierkegaard does not think one can love a particular other as that particular other ought to be loved. The fact that the love relationship originates in God has a very significant implication for Kierkegaard. (Minister, 2008, p.237)

Kierkegaard is not against all forms of self-love, or preferential love. He just wants to make it right according to the Christian teaching of love. He realizes the phrase "As yourself does presuppose self-love, that there is nothing inherently wrong with our natural inclinations. "For Kierkegaard the legitimacy of self-love and the "as yourself" is in part a matter of consistency. If we cannot exclude anyone, we cannot arbitrarily exclude ourselves; similarly, if one has reverence for God's creation or God's gifts, one must have reverence for one's self as well" (Ferreira, 2008, p.92). For Kierkegaard, to make it right is to do away with all forms of selfish self-love rather than self-love itself. Selfish preferential love is always exclusive. He invites us to practice the unselfish-love by testing ourselves how to relate with one who is dead. "The work of love in recollecting one who is dead is thus a work of the most unselfish, the freest, the most faithful love. Therefore go out and practice it; recollect the one who is dead and just in this way learn to love the living unselfishly, freely, and faithfully" (WL, p.358). The dead person cannot give you any compliment, he or she is silent to you and there is no gift to return to you. If you keep practicing this love unconditionally for the dead person, you also have to keep doing the same to all persons. Then the duty of love according to the second commandment does not end with death but it is the eternal duty. He says, "The duty to love the people we see cannot cease because death separates them from us, because the duty is eternal" (WL, p.358).

Kierkegaard portrays human nature as a weak condition which is easily trapped in selfish self-love. The human condition is a sinful one, where it is difficult to respond to the presence of the neighbor. To practice the second commandment is not an easy task. On the contrary, "Practice in Christianity is, of course, hard work" (Quinn, 2006, p.367). For Kierkegaard, there is nothing easy in being Christian. Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard's pseudonym in the book *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragment*, says: To become a Christian then becomes the most terrible of all decisions in a person's life, since it is a matter of winning faith through despair and offense (Kierkegaard, 1992, p.373). It is not a matter what Christian you are but how you are truly to become Christian. And again he says: "to become a Christian is actually the most difficult of all tasks, because the task, although the same, varies in relation to the capabilities of the respective individuals" (Kierkegaard, 1992, p.377).

If you are Christian, you are called not just to admire the teaching of Jesus Christ but to imitate the life of Christ. To be admirer is not the same as to be imitator. If you imitate the life of Christ, you have to be ready to suffer, or even to be crucified like Christ. It might be true to say that the practice of Christianity requires the radical decision to renounce yourself, to move from selfish self-love to self-denying love. You have to follow the divine voice that commands you to love your neighbor as yourself. This question always leads back to the possibility of the practice of love of neighbor. Kierkegaard realizes how high a demand this is when he puts God as the middle position in the relation between person and person. He says, "*To love God is to love oneself truly; to help another person to love God is to love another person; to be helped by another person to love God is to be loved*" (WL, 107). For Kierkegaard, God is the beginning and the finality of human love, from truly self-love to love of neighbor. If God is the middle term between person and person, God would be the foundation where human love grows. Kierkegaard took the word from I Corinthians 8:1, *Love builds up*. Human love builds up on this ground, and "It is God, the Creator, who must implant love in each human being, he who himself is Love" (WL, p.216). And again he adds, "ultimately no human being is capable of laying the ground of love in the other person" (WL, p.219). For Kierkegaard, without God... "how could

one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you God of love, source of love in heaven and on earth” (WL, p.3). Without God’s grace, we are not able to perform the duty of love in which God is the beginning and the end. Kierkegaard leads us to where we cannot continue our journey in Christian life without dependent upon God’s grace. Quinn insists, “If we are required to imitate Christ as fully as possible in our own lives, recourse to grace may be needed twice. Perhaps gracious divine assistance will be needed, at least sometimes, to help us bridge the moral gap when imitating Christ is especially difficult. Certainly gracious divine forgiveness and mercy will be needed in response to our many failures to imitate Christ as we should” (Quinn, 2006, p.373-374).

IV

The question “Who is the neighbor?” concluded with Jesus telling to the lawyer to “Go, and do likewise” (Matthew 10:37). The over two thousand years story of the Good Samaritan still plays in the heart of over billion people in the world. We do not know much of this merciful Samaritan, and in the story we only know his request of the host to take care of the wounded man and his promise to repay the rest when he returns. There is no conversation between the merciful Samaritan and the wounded man. They are two perfect strangers for each other, whereas the one is the unfortunate person, the other one is merciful person. The merciful person helps the unfortunate person without knowing, or questioning about him, or knowing the outcome. Kierkegaard retells the story of the merciful Samaritan. He asks, “would he not have been equally as merciful, just as merciful as that merciful Samaritan, or is there some objection to calling this the story about the merciful Samaritan?” (WL, p.317) For Kierkegaard, this merciful Samaritan still performs the *work of love even if it can give nothing and is able to do nothing*. Because “mercifulness is **how** it is given” (WL, p.327). This is not the worldly standard but it is God’s standard which measures your deepest inwardness. If you are Christian, you will not ask “who is the neighbor?” On the contrary you will “go, and do likewise” obey and perform the duty of love according to the teaching of the commandment.

My reading then is not so much on whether Kierkegaard interprets the teaching of the commandment correctly, or his view of Christian teaching of love destroys human love and friendship. There are many articles taking account of those points which are very useful for enlarging our perspective of Kierkegaard's view of Christian teaching of love. My reading skips over those parts. I just want to reflect and test myself – whether I can “go and do likewise”. For my part, the test of “Works of Love” is not based on overcoming with argument but practice. Let me quote from Merold Westphal on this point:

It will still be the case that the primary scene on which the narrative of my life is played out will not be theory but practice, not speculation (mirroring) but imitation (mimesis), not representation but response and responsibility. The crucial question about me will still not be How much did he know? but How much did he love?, not How much did he understand? but How much did he undergo?, not How much truth did he gather into his transcendental unity of apperception? but How far was he willing to be dispersed and decentered in love for God and neighbor? (Westphal, 2008, p.91)

I do not think that preferential love is something to be completely uprooted in preference to only Christian love of neighbor. Erotic love and friendship do not necessarily end in selfish self-love. Perhaps proper erotic love and friendship is also the precondition of Christian love of neighbor. Anyone who says “I love neighbor”, and hate the nearest ones such as a wife/husband or friends, is a liar, since a man who does not love the nearest ones cannot love neighbor whom he does not know. Kierkegaard says, “*When this is the duty, the task is not to find the lovable object, but the task is to find the once given or chosen object, lovable, and to be able to continue to find him lovable no matter how he is changed*” (WL, p.159). If we could not love the nearest chosen one, how could you love the neighbor? For my part, I think that proper preferential love is the way we can test ourselves whether we are still firm on the duty of love. Jesus, in the Gospel of John, asks Peter three times to affirm: “Yes, I love you”. If we could not say “yes, I love you” to one’s

husband/wife, or friend, how could we say “Yes” to the other, neighbor. Jesus does not try to uproot the preferential love but tries to make it extend from family love, friendship love to all humankind through the category of “neighbor”. Jesus, in the Gospel of John, speaks the most meaningful words about friendship: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). Jesus called his disciple “no longer servant...I have called you friends” and his friendship with disciples is the best exemplar.

V

Kierkegaard challenges us to think about the neighbor, not in the manner of the one who lives nearby, or those who are familiar to us, but as the unfamiliar - “the other”. The neighbor is that by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested. (WL, p.21). By this account I see the opportunity to relate Kierkegaard’s “neighbor” to Levinas’s “the other”, even though Levinas seems to turn Kierkegaard’s teleological suspension of the ethical (faith) to back to ethics. Whereas Kierkegaard focuses on the first voice of the divine command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Levinas focuses on the second voice of the divine “Do not raise your hand against the boy, do not harm him” (Genesis 22:12). Kierkegaard takes account of love of neighbor and Levinas emphasizes the priority of the other, I see the way that Christian teaching of love of neighbor can be the point where both thinkers can meet and compliment each other. For Minister, “Despite differences of both the merely apparent and real varieties, Kierkegaard and Levinas find common ground in arguing that some sense of ethico-religious subjectivity is the central task and ultimate concern in human life” (Minister, 2008, p.229).

For Levinas, the “Other” (*autre*) refers to alterity, and the “other” (*autrui*) refers to the personal other, or the other person. He introduces the term “alterity” to challenge Western philosophy. He thinks that Western philosophy is too highly preoccupied with the self. He is fond of the metaphor of Ulysses who is always longing for home and contrasts this with Western philosophy is always returning to the self. His most compelling story is that of Abraham who leaves his hometown and never re-

turns. He wants to challenge Western philosophy to leave the self and never return. The movement from the “I” toward the other and never to return to the “I” is the main theme of his philosophy.

For Levinas, the priority of the other over the “I” is constantly reinforced. The other here is not only the other reflected in consciousness but he means the existing other person. His ethics begins with the human relation, and he places ethics to be prior to ontology. He sees ontology as an attempt to know, to thematize, and to appropriate the other. The other is reduced into sameness, as an object to be manipulated. For him, ontology therefore becomes philosophy of power (Levinas, 1969, p.46). The other is beyond any thematization. The other to whom we can thematize is not the other. He says, “Possessing, knowing, and grasping are synonymous of power” (Levinas, 1987, p.90). He is very careful to place the other outside the structure of dialectic. Otherwise the other will be absorbed again into the system, and a part of the totality in which he wants to depart. For Levinas, the irreducibility of the alterity of the other is the moment where the ethical relationship between human beings begins.

Levinas’ ethics begins at the moment of the encounter with the other. When the other shows his/her face, I am commanded to respond to his/her needs. The epiphany of the face reveals to me the commandment that I have to be wakeful and ready to response “Here I am”. The presence of the face of the other put myself into question and I have to depart from myself to serve the other without expecting something return for the self. For Levinas, the departure from the self is the approach to the neighbor” (Levinas, 1989, p.246). This approach to the other is to serve the neighbor. “To be in oneself is to express oneself, that is, already to serve the Other. The ground of expression is goodness” (Levinas, 1969, p.183). To live as a human being is to live for the other, and the other always concerns me. The other is always my business. The other is the person to whom I cannot leave in solitude. Ethics, for Levinas, is all about goodness, mercy, and charity. And this ethics, or the relation with the other, is accomplished through service and as hospitality (Levinas, 1969, p.300). He adds, “I am for the other in a relationship of deaconship: I am in service to the other” (Levinas, 2000, p.161). If these sentences reflect Levinas’s ethics, we could say his ethics begins with service to the

other. His ethics does not begin with theoretical ontology, but with sensible morality. He does not aim at a rational principle as in Kantian ethics, but for him ethics arises in relation to the other and not straightaway by a reference to the universality of a law (Levinas, 2001, p.114). Levinas perhaps wants to echo the words from the Mount of Sinai when he says: The alterity of the other is the extreme point of the “thou shalt not kill” (Levinas, 1998, p.169).

The high demand from both Kierkegaard’s love of neighbor and Levinas’s primacy of the other is quite valuable for the Christian understanding of the second commandment of love. Both open the self to welcome, to serve, to love the other. Westphal says, “The invasion of my innermost identity by this Other is the birth of the responsible self” (Westphal, 2008, p.106). The responsible self is one who follows the teaching of Jesus Christ and has to be ready for the invasion of neighbor. Despite the differences between Kierkegaard and Levinas in so many points, I see both of them still sharing the same ideas about the second commandment to love neighbor, the agape love of neighbor. Westphal ends his book *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* “we find both Levinas and Kierkegaard, united in spite of deep differences, in the conviction that it’s not what you know, it’s who you love that makes you truly human” (Westphal, 2008, p.151). I agree with this as it leaves the the burden on the reader to *become* truly human. I think that Kierkegaard’s love of neighbor can be summarized by the golden rule in the Gospel of Matthew 7:12, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”. Levinas seems to be cautious of a reciprocal ethics because he thinks that it always leads to a return to the self. So he emphasizes an asymmetrical relationship which demands more from himself rather than from the other. Kierkegaard is also cautious of this same movement back to self-love. He therefore characterizes the love of neighbor as a self-denying love. This allows one to open the self and welcome the other.

Reading Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* leads me to be aware of my natural inclinations, sinful conditions, and human limitations, and realize that I have nothing to rely on myself alone in order to carry out fully this commandment. Jesus ends his Sermon on the Mount invoking the two different houses, and I have to ask myself to which house I belong. Westphal

compares “the difference between building on theocentric rock and building on anthropocentric sand (Matt. 7:24-27)” (Westphal, 2008a, p.23). I may very well be the one who builds a house upon sand where it is easy to fall when it is attacked by storm. I am just an admirer who simply listens attentively and sentimentally. I have not built my house upon the solid rock. And yet I hope someday to achieve this. I realize that it is still a long distance from admirer to imitator, and also a long-term work to build my house upon the firm foundation of love, when I can someday “go and do likewise”.

Endnote

¹This paper was presented at IASACT (Institute for Advanced Study in Asian Cultures and Theologies) seminar, Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2 June - 5 July, 2013.

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