



Love founded in God: The fruits of love 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*. Firstly, this article discussed Kierkegaard's lack of clarity about the fruits of love, even though he stresses their divine origin. Secondly, it reflected on his argument that, even though deeds are more important than words, words remain necessary because of the need to express love to others. In a following section he points out that neither specific words nor particular works of love can demonstrate that love exists. One needs to distinguish between works of love and the attitude with which works are done. Thirdly, it pointed out how Kierkegaard argues that the inability to demonstrate love unconditionally does not negate that love is to be known by its fruits. It is rather a personal incitement to love for the sake of love itself. Noting that there is no direct relationship between the fruits of love and the actual effects our love has on others, he points to the fact that the result of love is in the hands of God. He then argues that though fruits of love may be invisible, they become apparent in the strength of our love. The only responsibility we have is to follow love as the divine movement of our heart. In the final part of his reflection, Kierkegaard notes that there is no other way to enter into the reality of love than to believe in it. This implies that one should be careful of making demands on someone in a loving relationship. What is needed is to become rooted in love as the divine source of the heart so that one will understand that this unseen reality is the foundation of existence in which one is known by the Other, whose essence is love.

Introduction

In the second part of the first reflection of Søren Kierkegaard's book *Works of Love*¹, he writes about the fruits of love. In it he speaks about various dimensions of love and these can best be analysed by following the different perspectives that he develops in the reflection. This article continues the analysis of Kierkegaard's first reflection, which was begun in the article entitled, 'The hidden life of love: The function of the Bible in Kierkegaard's "Works of love"'.²

The fruits of love

The distinction between the leaves and the fruits of love

The tree is known by its *fruits*. It is true that the tree is also known by its *leaves*, but the fruit is still the essential mark. Thus if you identified a tree by its leaves to be such and such a tree but in the fruit season discovered that it bore no fruit, you would then know that it was not the tree that according to the leaves it purported to be. It is exactly the same with the recognizability of love. The Apostle John says (1 Jn 3:18), 'Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth.' To what can we better compare this love in words and platitudes than to the leaves of the tree; words and phrases and the inventions of language may be a mark of love, but that is uncertain. In one person's mouth the same words can be so full of substance, so trustworthy, and in another person's mouth they can be like the vague whispering of leaves. In one person's mouth the same words can be like the 'blessed nourishing grain',² in someone else's like the sterile beauty of the leaf.³

(Kierkegaard 1995:11–12)

Returning to the sentence, 'a tree is known by its fruits', Kierkegaard makes a distinction between the fruits and the leaves of a tree. Both can be used for identification, but the fruits are still a more essential mark of the tree. For example, we could recognise a tree by its leaves and mark it as one

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.Here Kierkegaard is referencing Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger, *Morgen-Vandring, in Langelands-Reise. I Sommeren 1804, Poetiske Skrifter*, I-II (Copenhagen 1805), I, pp. 363, 364.

3.Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:12–13): 'Træet kjendes paa Frugterne; thi vel kjendes Træet ogsaa paa Bladene, men Frugten er dog det væsentlige Kjende. Dersom Du derfor kjendte et Træ paa Bladene at være dette bestemte, men Du i Frugtens Tid opdagede, at det bar ingen Frugt: da vilde Du herpaa kjende, at det egentligen ikke var det Træ, som det ved Hjælp af Bladene udgav sig for. Just saaledes er det ogsaa med Kjerlighedens Kjendelighed. Apostelen Johannes siger (1 Joh. 3, 18) *Mine Børn! lader os ikke elske med Ord ei heller med Tunge, men i Gjærning og Sandhed*. Og hvormed skulle vi vel bedre sammenligne denne Kjerlighed i Ord og Talemaader end med Træets Blade; thi ogsaa Ordet og Udtrykket og Sprogets Opfindelser kan være et Kjende paa Kjerligheden, men det er usikkert. Det samme Ord kan i Ens Mund være saa righoldigt, saa tilforladeligt, i en Andens Mund være som Bladenes ubestemte Hviskan; det samme Ord kan i Ens Mund være som det *velsignede nærende Korn*, i en Andens som Bladets ufrugtbare Deilighed.'



that bears fruit, only to witness that during the fruit season the tree bears no fruit; we would then know that it is not the tree we thought it would be on the basis of its leaves. The same holds true for the recognisability of love. To emphasise this, Kierkegaard uses a quotation from the First Letter of John: 'Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth' (1 Jn 3:18), meaning that in love we have to distinguish between words and deeds and that the deeds of love take precedence. Accordingly, Kierkegaard compares the words of love with the leaves of a tree. Although words can be a mark of love, they are an uncertain mark, because the same words of love can be trustworthy and nourishing in one person's mouth and sterile and barren like leaves of a tree in someone else's. This distinction brings to the fore that the hidden reality of love cannot be grasped in words. Love is communicated beyond the words, like a hidden tune that cannot be objectified. The question Kierkegaard does not answer, however, is why he makes this distinction. After all, the same goes for our deeds or works.

The necessity to express our love in words

But you should not for that reason hold back your words any more than you should hide visible emotion if it is genuine, because this can be the unloving committing of a wrong, just like withholding from someone what you owe him. Your friend, your beloved, your child, or whoever is an object of your love has a claim upon an expression of it also in words if it actually moves you inwardly. The emotion is not your possession but belongs to the other; the expression is your debt to him, since in the emotion you indeed belong to him who moves you and you become aware that you belong to him. When the heart is full, you should not enviously and superiorly, shortchanging the other, insult him by silently buttoning your lips. You should let the mouth speak out of the abundance of the heart; you should not be ashamed of your feelings and even less of honestly giving each one his due.⁴

(Kierkegaard 1995:12)

Although love can neither be objectified in words, nor in visible emotions, this is not to say that we should hold back these manifestations of love. On the contrary, they are the vessels through which our love can be communicated and, as such, have an essential function. Without them love is unable to take effect in us. At this point Kierkegaard makes an important shift. Withholding our genuine utterances of love from the other is not only a form of suppression, but a form of injustice to the other as well. The other, whether it is a friend, a beloved or a child, deserves our expressions of love. In this context Kierkegaard speaks of our debt.⁵ We owe the other our expressions of love, because, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, in this emotion we belong to the one who

4. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:13): 'Derfor skal Du dog ikke holde Ordet tilbage, saa lidet som Du skal skjule den synlige Bevægelse, naar den er sand; thi dette kan netop være, ukjerligt at gjøre Uret, som naar man forholder et Menneske sit Tilgodehavende. Din Ven, Din Elskede, Dit Barn, eller Hvo, der ellers er Gjenstand for Din Kjerlighed, har en Fordring paa Ytringen af den ogsaa i Ord, naar den virkelige bevæger Dig i Dit Indre. Bevægheden er ikke Din Eiendom men den Andens, Ytringen er hans Tilgodehavende, da Du jo i Bevægheden tilhører ham, som bevæger Dig, og bliver Dig bevidst, at Du tilhører ham. Naar Hjertet er fuldt, skal Du ikke misundeligt, fornemt, forfordelende den Anden, kræmpe ham i Stilhed ved at presse Læberne sammen; Du skal lade Munden tale af Hjertets Overflødighed; Du skal ikke skamme Dig ved Din Følelse, og endnu mindre ved redeligt at give Hver Sit.'

5. Here Kierkegaard uses the term *Tilgodehavende*. The lover owes the beloved his or her manifestations of love.

moves us and we become aware that we belong to him. With these formulations, Kierkegaard defines love as a form of immediacy in which we do not act out of ourselves, but out of the other who moves us inwardly. Consequently, 'the emotion is not [our] possession but belongs to [the one] who moves us.' On a more profound level, Kierkegaard connects this movement of love with God as the hidden source of our heart. He is the immediate reality that touches us in the other and moves our heart from within. To interfere in this divine immediacy by keeping this love to ourselves is, according to Kierkegaard, a form of arrogance in which we insult the other through our reserve. We withhold the other what is rightfully theirs, 'by silently buttoning our lips' (cf. Mt 5:13–16; Mk 4:21–23).⁶ Accordingly, Kierkegaard stresses the fact that we have to let the mouth speak 'out of the abundance of the heart' (cf. Lk 6:45).⁷ But love asks for more. Though it is important to express our love in words, these words are the leaves of love. They give the tree of love the possibility of bearing fruit, but, in and of themselves, are barren and unsuitable to eat.

The immaturity of a love that does not go beyond words

But one should not love in words and platitudes, and neither should one recognize love by them. Instead, one should know by such fruits, or by the fact that there are only leaves, that love has not reached its full growth. Sirach says warningly (6:4[3]): 'If you devour your leaves, you will destroy your fruit and you will be left standing like a withered tree.' By words and platitudes as the sole fruit of love, it is known that a person has prematurely torn off the leaves and thus he gets no fruit, not to mention something more terrible, that sometimes the deceiver is known by his very words and platitudes. Thus immature and deceitful love is known by this, that words and platitudes are its only fruit.⁸

(Kierkegaard 1995:12)

To devour the leaves of a tree is to take away the tree's possibility of bearing fruit. Here Kierkegaard quotes the Deuterocanonical book of Jesus Sirach, which warns us not to turn into an enemy instead of a friend. These evil passions will consume us and will leave us like a dead tree without any leaves or fruit.⁹ Kierkegaard's explanation is more nuanced; he wants to make a distinction between the words or the expressions of love and love as a movement in itself.

6. Jesus speaks of 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' in order to highlight our obligation to share the experience of the divine love with others. In love and the pain this brings about we are participating in God's love. Hiding this love in order to avoid the pain it causes is hindering God in his work of becoming known to the world.

7. The heart can bring forth good and evil fruits, according to its attachments. When we listen to the divine voice of love in our hearts and become obedient to it, then our heart produces good fruits.

8. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:13): 'Men elske skal man ikke i Ord og Talemaader, og kjende Kjerligheden derpaa skal man heller ikke. Derimod skal man snarere paa saadanne Frugter, eller paa, at der kun er Blade, kjende, at Kjerligheden ikke har faaet Væxtens Tid. Sirach siger advarende (6, 4) *opæd Dine Blade, saa skal Du miste Dine Frugter, og lade Dig selv staae som et tørt Træ*; thi netop paa Ord og Talemaader som Kjerlighedens eneste Frugt kjender man, at et Menneske i Utide har revet Bladene af, saa han ingen Frugt faaer, for ikke at tale om det Forfærdeligere, at man paa Ord og Talemaader stundom just kjender Bedrageren. Altsaa den umodne og den bedrageriske Kjerlighed er kjendelig paa, at Ord og Talemaader er dens eneste Frugt.'

9. Sirach 6:1–3: 'Say nothing harmful, small or great; be not a foe instead of a friend; A bad name and disgrace will you acquire: "That for the evil man with double tongue!" Fall not into the grip of desire, lest, like fire, it consume your strength; Your leaves it will eat, your fruits destroy, and you will be left a dry tree' (New American Bible).

When love is only expressed in words and platitudes, then it is clear that 'a person has prematurely torn off the leaves and thus he gets no fruit'. Love is more than words alone and when only words are left, that is surely a sign that love has become infertile and cannot bear fruit any more. The situation becomes worse when words are used as a cover for a love that does not exist. It is important to note here that Kierkegaard does not say anything about the fruits of love itself. The only thing he asserts is that words as an expression of love are important, but cannot be identified with love in itself. Words can even betray us when the speaker of those words only uses them to make us believe that he loves us. Words, as such, are indifferent; as a consequence we have to concentrate on something that comes with the words, but cannot be seized by them.

The eternal heart of love

In the next paragraph, Kierkegaard focuses on the difference between love as a fleeting emotion and love that establishes itself in the heart eternally. For him this is an essential condition for bearing love's *own* fruits:

It is said of certain plants that they must form a heart. In like manner one may also say of a person's love: If it is actually to bear fruit and thus be known by its fruit, it must first of all *form a heart*. It is true that love proceeds from the heart, but let us not be hasty about this and forget the eternal truth that *love forms* the heart. No doubt everyone has experienced the fleeting feelings of an indeterminate heart, but in this sense to have a heart by nature is infinitely different from forming the heart in the eternal sense. How rarely does the eternal get so much control over a person that love in that person begins to establish itself eternally or to form the heart. Yet this is the essential condition for bearing love's own fruit by which it is known.¹⁰

(Kierkegaard 1995:12–13)

We often confuse love with fleeting feelings. Accordingly, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between a natural heart that is moved by the unsteadiness of our emotions and a love that wounds us from within. Love naturally proceeds from the heart, but most of the time we are too hasty and too forgetful to give this love the chance to become rooted in our life. We appreciate the pleasant feelings of love, the warmth of friendship and togetherness. But the moment love becomes difficult, because it does not fulfil our wishes, we want to run away from it. It is precisely in this moment that Kierkegaard wants us to become silent for the eternal voice of love. In this silence we become aware that love has a logic which is different from our natural sagacity that avoids pain. This will only imprison us in our own perspective. Love, as the breakthrough of the reality of the other, overthrows this perspective and leaves us with the option of accepting

10. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:13–14): 'Man siger i Forhold til visse Væxter, at de maae sætte Hjerter; saaledes maa man ogsaa sige om et Menneskes Kjerlighed: skal den virkelig bære Frugt, og altsaa være kjendelig paa Frugten, da maa den først sætte Hjerter. Thi vistnok udgaaer Kjerligheden fra Hjertet, men lad os ikke illsomt derover glemme dette Evige, at Kjerligheden sætter Hjertet. Et ubestemt Hjertes flygtige Rørelser har vel ethvert Menneske, men det i den Forstand at have Hjerte af Naturen er uendelig forskjelligt fra det i Evighedens Forstand at sætte Hjerter. Og hvor sjældent er maaskee ikke just dette, at det Evige faaer saa megen Raadighed over et Menneske, at Kjerligheden i ham kommer til evigt at fæstne sig, eller til at sætte Hjerter. Dog er dette den væsentlige Betingelse for at bære Kjerlighedens egne Frugt, paa hvilken den kjendes.'

or denying this immediacy that calls for our obedience in love. In this context, Kierkegaard speaks of the eternal that gains 'so much control over a person that love in that person begins to establish itself eternally or to form the heart'. With this expression he conveys that there is a tension between our sagacity that asks for security and control and this commandment of love that asks for our surrender in awe. The eternal truth of love can form a heart in us, but only if we surrender ourselves to this love. Only then love can bear its own fruit in us.

Recapitulation

Although Kierkegaard does not mince words when it comes to the divine origin of love, he is less clear about the fruits it presses forward. We have the tendency to identify these fruits with the works or deeds that express our love. However, Kierkegaard is much more cautious and questions this fixed idea by endorsing it and then gradually pulling it to pieces. He starts this section with a quotation from 1 John 3:18: 'Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth.' This quotation affirms that, in love, deeds are more important than words. Accordingly, Kierkegaard compares the words of love not with the fruits, but with the unfruitful leaves of love. Nevertheless he combats the idea that words do not matter. Words may be less reliable than deeds, but as expressions of love they are of importance and, moreover, we are obliged to express them when love demands us to do so. Here Kierkegaard formulates love's basic principle: in love we belong to the other. When the other really moves us from within, then we owe it to the other to express this emotion, because, in this, we are immediately moved by God, who is the hidden source of our love. Destroying these leaves by not expressing what really moves us, is taking away love's ability to bear fruit in us (Sirach 6:1–3). What it actually means to bear fruit, Kierkegaard does not tell, he only describes the conditions in which love can become fruitful in us. The first condition is that love can only become alive in us, if we are prepared to express our love. The second condition is that love has to form a heart in us. With this image, Kierkegaard expresses the need for love to become eternally rooted in our existence. Normally love has its origin in the unsteadiness of our emotions. This love flourishes and perishes, but is too superficial to become fruitful in our life. However, the moment this love overthrows our own perspective, and we have nowhere else to go, then love forms an eternal heart and will gain the possibility of bearing fruit in us.

Nothing can demonstrate the presence of love

No word can demonstrate the presence of love

Just as love itself is invisible and therefore we have to believe in it, so also is it not unconditionally and directly to be known by any particular expression of it. There is no word in human language, not one single one, not the most sacred one, about which we are able to say: If a person uses this word, it is unconditionally



demonstrated that there is love in that person. On the contrary, it is even true that a word from one person can convince us that there is love in him, and the opposite word from another can convince us that there is love in him also. It is true that one and the same word can convince us that love abides in the one who said it and does not in the other, who nevertheless said the same word.¹¹

(Kierkegaard 1995:13)

Although love asks to be expressed in words, there is no particular expression that demonstrates our love. Love has to be sensed beyond the words. We can speak words of love, but it is our loving attitude that determines if those words become vehicles of love. It is in this sense that Kierkegaard speaks about the invisibility of love. Love cannot be objectified in words. The same expression we use out of love can also be used as its reverse. The same holds true for opposite expressions. When someone uses an utterance as a token of love, it does not mean that the converse statement demonstrates a non-loving attitude. It is important to note here that, in Kierkegaard's eyes, love is not restricted to certain preferable images. Sometimes love can be expressed in words that, from a superficial point of view, seem to convey the opposite. Consequently, we have to ask what love as a form of care for the other really means. Do we really love the other at the moment we choose to avoid a conflict, because we are too afraid to tell the truth? According to Kierkegaard, love can only form a heart in us, at the moment we dare to follow its voice that asks us to be obedient to the invisible truth of the other in many different ways. In this context he uses the term 'believe'. The only certainty love can offer us, is the burning reality of a loving heart and it is up to us to believe in it or not. By doing so we give love the chance to bear its fruit in us.

No work can demonstrate the presence of love

There is no work, not one single one, not even the best, about which we unconditionally dare to say: The one who does this unconditionally demonstrates love by it. It depends on how the work is done. There are, of course, works that in a particular sense are called works of love. But even giving to charity,¹² visiting the widow,¹³ and clothing the naked¹⁴ do not truly demonstrate or make known a person's love, inasmuch as one can do works of love in an unloving, yes, even in a self-loving way, and if this is so the work of love is no work of love at all. You surely have often seen this lamentable situation and perhaps even at times have caught yourself in it, as any honest person will confess about himself, simply because he is not so callous and unloving

11. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:14): 'Som nemlig Kjerlighed selv ikke er til at see, derfor er det jo man maa troe paa den, saaledes er den heller ei ubetinget og ligefrem til at kjende paa nogen dens Ytring som saadan. – Der er intet Ord i det menneskelige Sprog, ikke eet eneste, ikke det helligste, om hvilket vi kunne sige: naar et Menneske bruger dette Ord, saa er derved ubetinget beviist, at der er Kjerlighed i ham. Tvertimod, det er endog saa, at et Ord af Een kan forvisse os om, at der er Kjerlighed i ham, og det modsatte Ord af en Anden kan forvisse os om, at der ligeledes er Kjerlighed i ham; det er saa, at det ene og samme Ord kan forvisse os om, at der boer Kjerlighed i den Ene, som sagde det, og ikke i den Anden, som dog sagde det samme Ord.'

12. See Matthew 6:1–4.

13. See James 1:27.

14. See Matthew 25:36.

as to disregard the essential, so preoccupied with what he is doing as to forget *how* he is doing it.¹⁵

(Kierkegaard 1995:13)

The evangelical expression that 'each tree is known by its own fruit' (Lk 6:44) seems to refer to our works of love. A real Christian is not judged by his ideas, but by his deeds. Accordingly, the works of love or charity reveal the true heart of a Christian soul. Kierkegaard, however, questions this interpretation in which we identify the fruits of love with a life of charity as such. This does not mean that he calls the importance of these works into question – the title of his book is, after all, 'works of love' – but, in his opinion, neither words nor works can demonstrate unconditionally that we are loving people. Works that traditionally are called works of charity¹⁶ are not indubitable and can be done in an unloving or self-loving manner. In such a case they are not even worthy to bear the name of works of love. The essence of Kierkegaard's argument is that we have to make a distinction between works of love and the attitude with which we accomplish these works. Any honest person will confess about himself that he, at times, was not really fair-minded in these works and did them for other reasons than love.

The importance of a loving attitude

Alas. Luther is supposed to have declared that not one single time in his life did he pray completely undisturbed by any distracting thought.¹⁷ In the same way the honest person surely admits that however often and however many times he willingly and gladly gave to charity, he has never done it except in weakness, perhaps disturbed by an incidental impression, perhaps with capricious partiality, perhaps to make amends for himself, perhaps with averted face (but not in the scriptural sense), perhaps without the left hand's knowing about it,¹⁸ but thoughtlessly, perhaps thinking about his own cares instead of thinking about the cares of the poor, perhaps seeking alleviation by giving to charity instead of wanting to alleviate poverty – then the work of love really would not be a work of love in the highest sense.¹⁹

(Kierkegaard 1995:13–14)

15. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:14–15): 'Der er ingen Gjerning, ikke een eneste, ikke den bedste, om hvilken vi ubetinget tør sige: den, som gjør dette, han beviser ubetinget derved Kjerlighed. Det beroer paa, hvorledes Gjeringen gjøres. Der er jo Gjeringer, som i særlig Forstand kaldes Kjerlighedsgjeringer. Men sandeligen, fordi En giver Almisse, fordi han besøger Enken, klæder den Nøgne, dermed er hans Kjerlighed endnu ikke beviist eller kjendelig; thi man kan gjøre Kjerlighedsgjeringer paa en ukjerlig ja endog paa en selvkjerlig Maade, og naar saa er, er Kjerlighedsgjeringen dog ingen Kjerlighedens Gjering. Du har vist oftere seet dette Sørgelige, Du har maaskee ogsaa stundom grebet Dig selv deri, hvad vel ethvert redeligt Menneske vil tilstaae om sig selv, netop fordi han ikke er ukjerlig og forhærdet nok til at oversee det Væsentlige, til over hvad man gjør at glemme hvorledes man gjør det.'

16. According to Matthew 25:31–46, we traditionally distinguish seven works of charity, (1) to feed the hungry, (2) to give drink to the thirsty, (3) to clothe the naked, (4) to harbour the homeless, (5) to visit the sick, (6) to ransom the captive and (7) to bury the dead.

17. Cf. Lomler *et al.* (1828–1831, vol.II:67, vol.III:199).

18. See Matthew 6:3.

19. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:15): 'Åk, Luther skal have sagt, at han ikke een eneste Gang i sit Liv havde bedet ganske uforstyrret af enhver adspredende Tanke; saaledes tilstaaer vel det redelige Menneske, at han aldrig, hvor ofte end, og hvor mangen Gang end villig og glad, han gav Almisse, har gjort det uden i Skrøbelighed, maaskee forstyrret af et tilfældigt Indtryk, maaskee med lunefuld Forkjerlighed, maaskee for at løskjæbe sig, maaskee med bortvendt Aasyn – men ikke i bibelsk Forstand, maaskee uden at den venstre Haand blev vidende derom – men i Tankeløshed, maaskee tænkende paa sin egen Sorg – istedenfor at tænke paa den Fattiges, maaskee søgende Lindring ved at give Almisse – istedenfor at ville lindre Armoden: saa Kjerlighedsgjeringen dog ikke i høieste Forstand blev en Kjerlighedens Gjering.'

As pragmatic people we normally do not question the origin of our work, for our first interest is the outcome. No matter what our motivation is to give to charity, money is money and it will not change its value, whether it is given out of love or not. For Kierkegaard though, love has a side we easily tend to forget because it cannot be objectified to something we see or do. This hidden reality of love may seem insignificant, but is decisive for the quality of our actions. Charity given as a kind of obligation is not comparable with a love that really cares for the other. The donor and the receiver senses the difference very well, because it is immediately felt in the reality of the heart. Accordingly, works of love demand self-knowledge. In order to become obedient to the voice of love we have to become familiar with the interior of our heart and the different movements that can be found in it. The paradigm of Luther shows us how difficult this exercise is. The more we enter the reality of our heart, the more we discover how distracted we are and how much we are motivated by voices other than love itself. Love, as a form of reciprocity in which the other immediately moves us, is a rare event. Most of the time we will find in ourselves a kind of double-heartedness in which we are only partly motivated by the other. Love in the scriptural sense, however, asks for a total surrender. Here Kierkegaard quotes the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus instructs us: 'when you do merciful deeds, do not let your left hand know what your right hand does' (Mt 6:3). This impossible task from our human point of view can only be understood as an expression of the immediacy of love. The moment we are really moved by love, we no longer live in ourselves, but in a kind of self-oblivion, in which we are entirely moved by God as the divine source of our love.

The impossibility of defining this attitude

How, then, the word is said and above all how it is meant, how, men, the work is done – this is decisive in determining and in recognizing love by its fruits. But here again it holds true that there is nothing, no 'thus and so', that can unconditionally be said to demonstrate unconditionally the presence of love or to demonstrate unconditionally its absence.²⁰

(Kierkegaard 1995:14)

For Kierkegaard, the expression 'each tree is known by its own fruit' refers neither to our words nor to our works as such. What is decisive is our attitude. Only when we ourselves are anchored in the hidden reality of love, can our utterances and deeds become vehicles of this movement of the heart and bear its fruits. Once again, this attitude cannot be objectified. There is nothing that demonstrates unconditionally that we are acting out of love or not. This does not mean that love cannot be sensed. As immediacy, however, it will always elude the grasp of our objectivity.

Retrospect

Neither specific words nor particular works of love can demonstrate that love exists. They can become vehicles of

20. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:15): 'Altsaa, hvorledes Ordet siges og fremfor Alt hvorledes det menes, altsaa, hvorledes Gjerningen gjøres: dette er det afgjørende for at bestemme og for at kjende Kjerligheden paa Frugterne. Men atter her gjælder det, at der er intet, intet *Saaledes*, hvorom der ubetinget kan siges, at det ubetinget beviser Kjerlighedens Tilstedeværelse, eller at det ubetinget beviser, at den ikke er der.'

love, but, as such, they are neutral. With this, Kierkegaard undermines what is traditionally called the works of charity (see Mt 25:31–46). They are not indubitable and can be done in an unloving or even a self-loving manner. The essence of his argumentation is that we have to make a distinction between the works of love and the attitude with which we accomplish these works. This 'how' of the works is more essential than the material work itself. To explain this attitude, the author uses the example of Luther, who stated that not one single time in his life did he pray undisturbed by any distracting thought. We are diverted when, in our orientation towards the other, we revert to our own cares. Love, however, asks for a single-mindedness in which the other becomes our one and only point of reference. This asks for our surrender in love. Only when we forget ourselves in love, can we be moved by God as the divine source of our love. This process, however, remains hidden from the objective eye. As a consequence, Kierkegaard concludes that 'there is nothing, no "thus and so" that can unconditionally be said to demonstrate unconditionally the presence of love or to demonstrate unconditionally its absence'.

The personal imperative of love

The Gospel's encouragement to become fruitful in love

Yet it remains firm that love is to be known by its fruits. But those sacred words of that text are not said to encourage us to get busy judging one another; they are rather spoken admonishingly to the single individual, to you, my listener, and to me, to encourage him not to allow his love to become unfruitful but to work so that it *could* be known by its fruits, whether or not these come to be known by others. He certainly is not to work so that love will be known by the fruits but to work so that it could be known by the fruits. In this working he must watch himself so that this, that love is known, does not become more important to him than the one important thing, that it has fruits and therefore can be known.²¹

(Kierkegaard 1995:14)

After concluding that the fruits of love cannot be objectified in either deeds or words, nor in some kind of visible attitude, the question remains why the Gospel stresses the fact that love is known by its own fruit. What is this statement trying to express? Because the fruits of love lack any form of objectivity it seems unlikely that the expression is meant to offer an instrument to judge each other. In the first place, Kierkegaard reads these words of Scripture as a kind of admonition. We, as readers, are being addressed personally and being asked to enable love to prosper and to become fruitful in us. This imperative, to anchor us in the divine love of our heart, is only meant for ourselves. We may hope that the fruits of this love will be recognised by others and help them to become loving people themselves, but it is

21. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:15): 'Og dog staaer det fast, at Kjerligheden skal kjendes paa Frugterne. Men hine Textens hellige Ord ere jo heller ei sagte for at opmuntre os til at faae travlt med at dømme hinanden; de ere tværtimod sagte formanende til den Enkelte, til Dig, m. T., og til mig, for at opmuntre ham, at han ikke lader sin Kjerlighed blive ufrugtbar, men arbejder, at den maa *kunne* kjendes paa Frugterne, hvad enten disse nu af Andre blive kjendte eller ikke. Thi han skal jo ikke arbeide for, at Kjerligheden bliver kjendt paa Frugterne, men arbeide, at den maa kunne kjendes paa Frugterne; han skal i denne Arbeiden vogte paa sig selv, at det, at Kjerligheden kjendes, ikke bliver ham vigtigere end det ene Vigtige: at den har Frugterne og altsaa kan kjendes.'



against the dynamics of love itself to use this recognition as a motivation for our love. Love is only motivated by love. This love is fruitful in itself, whether it is recognised by others or not. The only responsibility we have is to live this love in such a way that it has the possibility of bearing its fruits.

You are the tree of love

It is one thing to give a person sagacious counsel, to recommend caution against being deceived by others; another and much more important thing is the Gospel's summons to the single individual that he bear in mind that the tree is known by its fruits and that it is he or his love that in the Gospel is compared to the tree. It does not read in the Gospel, as sagacious talk would say. 'You or we are to know the tree by its fruits', but it reads, 'The tree is to be known by its fruits'. The interpretation is that you who read these words of the Gospel, you are the tree. The Gospel does not need to add what the prophet Nathan added to his parable, 'You are the man',²² since it is already contained in the form of the statement and in its being a word of the Gospel. The divine authority of the Gospel does not speak to one person about another, does not speak to you, my listener, about me, or to me about you – no, when the Gospel speaks, it speaks to the single individual. It does not speak *about* us human beings, you and me, but speaks *to* us human beings, to you and me, and what it speaks about is that love is to be known by its fruits.²³

(Kierkegaard 1995:14)

The sagacious counsel 'to recommend caution against being deceived by others' refers to the opening sentence of this reflection, in which Kierkegaard speaks about the conceited sagacity of believing nothing that we cannot see with our physical eyes. Here the counsel is less rigid and only warns us not to be too credulous. The eyes of the other may seem trustworthy, but we can never be sure. Consequently, a sound form of suspicion is inevitable for us. The sagacity of the Gospel, however, has a different kind of logic and, instead of being defensive toward others, summons us to trust the love of our heart as the divine ground of our existence. In this perspective, the expression 'each tree is known by its own fruit' is not meant to encourage us to become knowledgeable in the field of the fruits of love in order to discern between people who can be trusted or not, but to become aware that personally we are called to take part in this divine adventure, in which the image of the tree immediately refers to us or our love. Kierkegaard is convinced that the same holds true for the whole of the Gospel. The Gospel does not speak *about* us, but *to* us. Characteristic of this kind of direct speech is the parable of the prophet Nathan, in which he told David a story about a rich man who stole a poor man's only lamb to

22. See 2 Samuel 12:7.

23. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:15–16): 'Eet er, hvad klogt Raad man kan give Mennesket, hvad Forsigtighed man kan anprise for ikke at blive bedragen af Andre; noget Andet og noget langt Vigtigere er Evangeliets Opfordring til den Enkelte, at han betænker, at Træet kjendes paa Frugterne, og at det er ham eller hans Kjerlighed, der i Evangeliet er sammenlignet med Træet. I Evangeliet staaer der og ikke, som den kløgtige Tale vilde lyde *Du eller man skal kjende Træet paa Frugterne*; men der staaer *Træet skal kjendes paa Frugterne*, det er udlagt, Du, som læser disse Evangeliets Ord, Du er Træet. Hvad Propheten Nathan tilføiede til Parabelen *Du est Manden*, det behøver Evangeliet ikke at tilføie, da det allerede ligger i Udsagnets Form, og i, at det er et Evangeliums Ord. Thi Evangeliets guddommelige Myndighed taler ikke til det ene Menneske om det andet Menneske, ikke til Dig, m. T., om mig, eller til mig om Dig; nei, naar Evangeliet taler, taler det til den Enkelte; det taler ikke om os Mennesker, Dig og mig, men det taler *til* os Mennesker, Dig og mig, og det taler om, at Kjerligheden skal kjendes paa Frugterne.'

serve it to a traveller. After this story, David fell into a blind fury and said to Nathan:

As Yahweh lives, the man who has done this is worthy to die!
He shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity!

(2 Sm 12:5–6)

It is in this moment that Nathan said to David: 'You are the man' (2 Sm 12:7). This shift of perspective in which a story about someone else becomes a story in which we are the addressees is essential to Kierkegaard. The language of the Gospel is not meant to speak to us about others, but to speak to us personally. We are the ones who are being spoken to and it is up to us to believe that it is our divine call to live the love of our heart and to become fruitful in it. These fruits of love are different from person to person, because everyone has his or her own call.

The result of love is in the hands of God

The conclusion that nothing in particular can demonstrate love unconditionally seems to negate the sentence that love is to be known by its fruits. However, Kierkegaard states that this sentence is not meant to encourage us to judge one another, but to spur each of us on, not to allow our love to become unfruitful. This imperative is not meant for others, but is a personal incitement to love for the sake of love itself. The image of the tree and its fruits is used by the Gospel to make us aware that we personally are the trees of God's love and that it is our divine call to become fruitful in this love. Again Kierkegaard does not make clear what these fruits are. He only stresses the fact that, according to the Gospel, we are asked 'to work so that our love *could* be known by its fruits, whether or not these come to be known by others'. In other words, there is no direct relationship between the fruits of love and the actual effects our love has on others. The result of love is not in our hands but in the hands of God. The only responsibility we have is to love and to believe that this love, because of its divine origin, is fruitful in itself, whatever this may mean.

The strength of a love founded in God

Building your house on a rock

If therefore someone, quixotic and fanatical or hypocritical, wanted to teach that love is such a hidden feeling that it is too exalted to bear fruit, or such a hidden feeling that the fruits demonstrate neither for nor against – indeed, that not even the most poisonous fruits demonstrate anything – then we will recall the Gospel verse: 'The tree is to be known by its fruits'. We will recall, not in order to attack but in order to defend ourselves against such persons, that what holds true of every word of the Gospel holds true here, that 'he who acts accordingly is like a man who builds upon a rock'.²⁴ 'When the heavy rains come'²⁵ and destroy the exalted frailty of that hypersensitive love, 'when the winds blow and beat against'²⁶ the web of hypocrisy – then the true love will be recognizable by its fruits. Truly, love is to be

24. Matthew 7:24; cf. Luke 6:47–48.

25. Matthew 7:25; cf. Luke 6:48.

26. Matthew 7:25.

known by its fruits, but still it does not follow from this that you are to take it upon yourself to be the expert knower. Moreover, the tree is to be known by its fruits, but it does not follow from this that there is one tree that is to take it upon itself to judge the others – on the contrary, it is always the individual tree that shall bear the fruits.²⁷

(Kierkegaard 1995:15)

Although love in its immediacy is hidden and cannot be described in objective terms, this is not to say that it is enclosed in our subjective world. Accordingly, Kierkegaard rejects the idea ‘that love is such a hidden feeling that it is too exalted to bear fruit or such a hidden feeling that the fruits demonstrate neither for nor against’. Love as a reality of the heart may be invisible, but the moment we live its call, it transforms our life in such a way that God comes alive in us as the love of our life. This divine fruit of love is indeed not visible for the eyes of the world, but this hiddenness does not imply that it can be disregarded as something too exalted to leave behind its trail. To clarify this, Kierkegaard introduces us to the parable of the two foundations (see Mt 7:24–28; cf. Lk 6:46–49).²⁸ The parable’s point of departure is that we often do not act in accordance with our words. We confess that we want to follow Christ, but most of the time it is only a form of lip service (see Lk 6:46). The tragedy of this attitude is that it will exclude us from the hidden truth of the Gospel. This can only be revealed when the words become flesh in our lives. In other words, love can only reveal its fruit in love. The moment we follow the voice of love in our heart, we build our foundation on God. This foundation is like a rock that will defend us against all different kinds of danger. In fact, these dangers will uncover the real foundation of our love. When love is really founded in God then it will persist. Other forms of apparent love, however, will disappear, because they are only rooted in the vicissitudes of our emotions, or based on the hypocrisy of keeping up appearances. This process of purification has an interpersonal and a personal level. On an interpersonal level, Kierkegaard warns us not to judge the love of others. It may seem that their love is not really rooted in God, but it is not up to us to take up the position of ‘the expert knower’. On the contrary, when our love is tested, it will first of all reveal how poor this love is and how superficially we are rooted in God as the hidden movement of our heart.²⁹ This process of personal discernment is essential to Kierkegaard. It may confront us with the poverty of our love, but this self-knowledge will only help us to find our way towards God as the hidden source of love.

27. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:16): ‘Dersom derfor Nogen, overspændt og sværmerisk, eller hykkelsk, vilde lære, at Kjerligheden var en saadan skjult Følelse, at den var for fornem til at bære Frugt, eller en saadan skjult Følelse, at Frugterne hverken bevise for eller imod, ja at de giftige Frugter end ikke bevise Noget: da ville vi minde om Evangeliets Ord *Træet skal kjendes paa Frugterne*. Vi ville, ikke for at angribe, men for at værgø os selv mod Saadanne, minde om, at det gjælder her, hvad altid gjælder i Forhold til ethvert Evangeliets Ord, at *den, som gjør derefter, han er at ligne med en Mand, som bygger paa en Klippe. Naar da Skyregnen kommer og ødelægger hiin fiintfølende Kjerlighedens fornemme Skrøbelighed; naar Veirene blæse og falde an mod Hykleriets Væv: da skal den sande Kjerlighed være kjendelig paa Frugterne. Thi sandelig, Kjerligheden skal være kjendelig paa Frugterne, men deraf følger dog vel ikke, at Du skal paatage Dig at være Kjenderen; ogsaa Træet skal kjendes paa Frugterne, men deraf følger dog vel ikke, at det er det ene Træ, som skal paatage sig at bedømme de andre, det er jo tvertimod bestandigt det enkelte Træ, der skal – bære Frugterne.*’

28. In his quotations, Kierkegaard refers clearly to the parable in the Gospel of Matthew. However, the same parable is used in Luke within the context of the sentence: *each tree is known by its own fruit* (Lk 6:44).

29. Cf. The quotation of Luther (cited in Kierkegaard 1995:13). Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:15).

Be afraid of yourself and fear God

But a person should fear neither the one who can kill the body³⁰ nor the hypocrite. There is only one whom a person should fear, and that is God; and there is only one of whom a person should be afraid, and that is oneself. It is true that no hypocrite has ever deceived anyone who in fear and trembling before God was afraid of himself. But the one who is busily occupied tracking down hypocrites, whether he succeeds or not, had better see to it that this is not also a hypocrisy, inasmuch as such discoveries are hardly the fruits of love. But without willing it and without covering it, the person whose love truly bears its own fruit will expose every hypocrite who comes near him, or at least shame such hypocrites; but the loving person will perhaps not even be aware of this. The most mediocre defense against hypocrisy is sagacity; indeed, it is hardly a defense, but rather a dangerous neighbor. The best defense against hypocrisy is love; indeed, it is not only a defense but a chasmic abyss; in all eternity it has nothing to do with hypocrisy. This also is a fruit by which love is known – it secures the loving one against falling into the snare of the hypocrite.³¹

(Kierkegaard 1995:15)

At first it sounds strange to class our fear of those people who can take our lives, with our fear of those who pretend that they have more noble beliefs or higher standards than others. They may think that they are superior, but this can only be threatening the moment they impose their standards on others. With the term ‘hypocrite’ (*hykler*), Kierkegaard seems to refer to a section of the Sermon on the Mount that precedes the expression ‘each tree is known by its own fruit’. In this section, Jesus admonishes us not to judge others, because with whatever judgement we judge, so will we be judged (cf. Mt 7:1–2):

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. For there is no good tree that brings forth rotten fruit; nor again a rotten tree that brings forth good fruit.

(Lk 6:41–43)

It seems to be a human characteristic to focus on the weaknesses of the people around us and to be forgetful about our own defects. However, this form of projection is often an excuse not to be confronted with the poverty of our own heart. As long as we can blame others for not being as perfect as they should be, we do not have to look inside ourselves to see that we are not a whit better than they are. Jesus calls

30. Cf. Matthew 10:28.

31. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:16–17): ‘Men frygte skal et Menneske ikke hverken Den, som kan slaae Legemet ihjel, ei heller Hykleren. Der er kun Een, som et Menneske skal frygte, det er Gud; og der er kun Een, et Menneske skal være bange for, det er sig selv. Sandeligen, Den, der i Frygt og Bæven mod Gud var bange for sig selv, ham har aldrig nogen Hykler bedraget. Men Den, der faaar travlt for at opsøre Hyklere, hvad enten det nu lykkes ham eller ikke, han see sig vel for, at dette ikke ogsaa er et Hyklerie; thi saadanne Opdagelser ere dog vel neppe Kjerlighedens Frugter. Den derimod, hvis Kjerlighed i Sandhed bærer dens egne Frugt, han skal, uden at ville det og uden at eftertrægte det, gjøre enhver Hykler aabenbar, som kommer ham nær, eller dog beskæmm ham; men den Kjerlige skal maaskee end ikke være vidende derom. Det maadeligste Værn mod Hyklerie er Klogskab, ja den er neppe et Værn, snarere et farligt Naboskab; det bedste Værn mod Hyklerie er Kjerlighed, ja den er ikke blot et Værn, men et svælgende Dyb, den har i al Evighed Intet med Hykleriet at skaffe. Ogsaa dette er en Frugt, hvorpaa Kjerlighed kjendes, at den sikkrer den Kjerlige mod at falde i Hyklerens Snare.’



this attitude in which we try to degrade the other in order to boost our own self-esteem hypocritical, because we apply double standards. We judge others on the basis of criteria by which we ourselves do not want to be judged. We observe the same ambivalence in our fear of those (hypocrites) who try to pass judgement on us. We are afraid of them because they lay bare our weaknesses. Although their aim is hostile, they only reveal the truth. It is on this account that Kierkegaard urges us not to fear them. They may have the ability to discredit our name, but are not able to damage our soul. This will only happen when we debase ourselves to the level of their power game. Despite all our weaknesses, we always have the chance to return to the love of our heart as the divine source of our integrity. Accordingly, the sentence: 'but a person should fear neither the one who can kill the body nor the hypocrite', incites us not to follow the human logic of self-defence, but to believe in God as the hidden foundation of our life. When we are rooted in God, then he will become our shield that will protect us against the dangers threatening us.

Although there are many things that can threaten us, it is only God we really have to fear. This fear originates in awe. We fear God the moment we become aware that his voice of love cannot be denied any longer, even when it contravenes the laws of human logic in which self-preservation is the basic principle. One of the greatest dangers of this perspective is that the situation may become so frightening that we capitulate and turn back to our old habits. Because of this, Kierkegaard warns us not to be afraid of others, but to be afraid of ourselves. As long as we are rooted in the love of God nothing can harm us, but the moment we leave this position, because we, in our sagacity, think that we have to safeguard ourselves, we will get lost in the jungle of our survival instinct. What is important for this attitude is that we are honest with ourselves and do not try to find excuses to leave this inner struggle for a crusade against the hypocrisy of others. Before we know it we will become hypocrites ourselves in our efforts to uncover the hypocrisy of others. The best defence against hypocrisy is our love. This love is always revealing, because it works like a mirror. In the same way that obedience to the voice of love in our heart will uncover the poverty of our own sagacity, it will lay bare the real motivations of the other. Within this perspective Kierkegaard speaks of a chasmic abyss. There is an unbridgeable gap between a love that orients us in every aspect towards the other and the sagacity of our human logic that is primarily focused on self-preservation. Although both dynamics are part of our human existence, as dynamics they exclude each other. We cannot be ruled by love and self-interest at the same time. This exclusion is, according to Kierkegaard, one of the fruits of love. Love itself 'secures the loving one against falling into the snare of the hypocrite'.

Rooted in the inimitable logic of God's love

Although Kierkegaard has made clear that nothing, not even the results of our love, demonstrate the fruitfulness of our love, this is not to say that he wants to question the existence of these fruits. The fruits of love may be invisible to the eyes

of the world, but they become apparent in the strength of our love. The moment we anchor ourselves in God's love, we will be building our house on a rock (Mt 7:24–28), because God will become our strength. This strength reveals itself in the independence of a love that becomes inviolable for attacks either from the inside (the volatility of our fleeting emotions), or from the outside (the hypocrisy of others who want to discredit our love). This independence, however, can only be used to stay rooted in the inimitable logic of God's love and is not meant to unmask others in their hypocrisy. This will just turn us into hypocrites ourselves. The only responsibility we have is to follow love as the divine movement of our heart. This cannot depend on the opinion of others, whether positive in its recognition or negative in its criticism. Accordingly, Kierkegaard warns us not to fear the hypocrite or the person who, in fear of the imperative of love, tries to discredit the name of the one who has the courage to believe in it. The only one we have to fear in this is God and ourselves. Firstly, we have to fear God, because he is the source of our love and without this eternal foundation our life becomes lifeless and fruitless. Secondly, we have to be afraid of ourselves, because in our desperate search for recognition, we easily tend to take the opinion of the other more seriously than the hidden voice of our heart.

Love's only mark is love

Trust love in itself

But now, even if it is true that love is recognizable by its fruits, let us not impatiently, suspiciously, or judgmentally demand continually and incessantly to see the fruits in any relationship of love with one another. The first point developed in this discourse was that we must believe in love – otherwise we simply will not notice that it exists; but now the discourse returns to the first point and says, repeating: Believe in love! If we are to know love, this is the first and the last thing to say about it; but the first time it was said in opposition to the brazen sensibleness that wants to deny the existence of love; now, however, after its recognizability by its fruits has been developed, it is said in opposition to the morbid, anxious, niggardly narrow-mindedness that in petty, miserably mistrust insists on seeing the fruits. Do not forget that it would be a beautiful, a noble, and a sacred fruit by which the love in you would become known if in your relation to another person whose love perhaps bore poorer fruit you were loving enough to see it as more beautiful than it was. If mistrust can actually see something as less than it is, then love also can see something as greater than it is.³²

(Kierkegaard 1995:16)

Love may be invisible to the physical eye; it is not entirely hidden. As the Gospel indicates, love can be known by its

32. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:17–18): 'Men om dette nu end er saaledes, at Kjerligheden er kjendelig paa Frugterne, saa lader os dog ikke i noget Kjerlighedens Forhold til hinanden utaalmodigt, mistroisk, dømmende, fordre idelig og idelig at see Frugterne. Det Første, der blev udviklet i denne Tale, var, at man maa troe paa Kjerlighed, ellers mærker man slet ikke, at den er til; men nu vender Talen atter tilbage til det Første og siger gjentagende: troe paa Kjerlighed! Dette er det Første og det Sidste, der er at sige om Kjerlighed, naar man skal kjende den; men første Gang sagdes det i Modsætning til den frække Forstandighed, der vil negte Kjerlighedens Tilværelse, nu derimod, efter at dens Kjendelighed paa Frugterne er udviklet, siges det i Modsætning til den sygelige, ængstelige, nøieregnende Sneverhertethed, der i smaalig og kummerlig Mistroiskhed vil see Frugterne. Glem det ikke, at det jo vilde være en skjønn, en ædel, en hellig Frugt, paa hvilken Kjerligheden i Dig blev til at kjende, dersom Du i Forhold til et andet Menneske, hvis Kjerlighed maaskee bar ringere Frugt, var kjerlig nok til at see den skjønnere end den var. Kan Mistroiskhed virkeligen see Noget mindre end det er, saa kan ogsaa Kjerlighed see Noget større end det er.'



fruits. Though the divine source of love is concealed, the trail love leaves behind is undeniable for those who have submitted themselves to the voice of love in their heart. However, others who, in their fear of being deceived, only trust the things that can be seen objectively, exclude themselves from this hidden reality. Nevertheless, love can only be born in freedom. However, as much as we love the other, we cannot force them to return our love. In fact, the impatience we display in this respect is primarily a sign of mistrust. Instead of building a relationship based on mutual trust, we want to see proof of the love of the other. Yet love has its own tracks. These are hidden in God and can only be followed from the moment we entrust ourselves to this love in the relationship. With this, Kierkegaard returns to his starting point. The only way to get in touch with the reality of love is to believe in it. The only difference is that, in the beginning of this reflection, Kierkegaard referred to a 'sagacity' that, in its fear of being deceived, only believes in a world that can be objectified. This 'sagacity' deceives itself because it denies the truth of love that can only be revealed in love. Now, almost at the end of this reflection, the admonition to believe in love refers to an attitude of distrust towards the love of the other. Although love is known by its fruits, we cannot bargain with them. The fruits of love are too sacred to ask for fruits in return. We have to believe in love in the same way. We have to believe in the hidden reality that love reveals to us in our love for the other. In other words, we have to trust the love of the other in whom God's love dwells. In fact, this possibility to see beyond the actual reality of the other is precisely the noble fruit of love. Love gives us eyes to see beyond and to take this divine reality as the basic principle of our love.

Love recognises itself in others

Do not forget that even when you rejoice over the fruits of love, when by them you know that love dwells in this other person, do not forget that it still is even more blessed to believe in love. This is a new expression for the depth of love – that when one has learned to know love by its fruits one again returns to the first point, that is, to believe in love, and returns to it as the highest. The life of love is indeed recognizable by its fruits, which make it manifest, but the life itself is still more than the single fruit and more than all the fruits together that you could count at any moment. Therefore the last, the most blessed, the unconditionally convincing mark of love remains – love itself, the love that becomes known and recognized by the love in another. Like is known only by like; only someone who abides in love can know love, and in the same way his love is to be known.³³

(Kierkegaard 1995:16)

In the final part of this reflection, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between the joy we experience over the fruits of

33. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:18): 'Glem det ikke, at selv naar Du glæder Dig ved Kjerlighedens Frugter, naar Du paa dem kjender, at den boer i dette andet Menneske, glem det ikke, at det dog er endnu saligere at troe paa Kjerlighed. Just dette er et nyt Udtryk for Kjerlighedens Dybde, at, naar man har lært den at kjende paa Frugterne, man da atter vender tilbage til det Første, og vender tilbage til det som til det Høieste, til at troe paa Kjerlighed. Thi vel er Kjerlighedens Liv kjendeligt paa Frugterne, der gjøre det aabenbart, men Livet selv er dog mere end den enkelte Frugt og mere end alle Frugterne tilsammen som Du i noget Øieblik kunde optælle dem. Det sidste, det saligste, det ubetinget overbevisende Kjende paa Kjerlighed bliver derfor: Kjerligheden selv, som bliver kjendt og gjenkjendt af Kjerligheden i en Anden. Det Lige kjendes kun af det Lige; kun Den, der bliver i Kjerlighed, kan kjende Kjerligheden, ligesom hans Kjerlighed er til at kjende.'

love and joy in love itself. It is a delight and a grace to have the possibility of enjoying the fruits of love. When someone is dear to us and we see that our love has had the desired effect, it is self-evident that this will radiate on us. Attractive as it may seem, we cannot identify love with those delightful moments of the fulfilment of love's desire. It is not up to us whether love succeeds or fails and it is a risky affair to use its successes as something onto which we hold. Accordingly, Kierkegaard admonishes us 'to believe in love'. Love can only become effective in our life if and when we accept its guidance. With this remark, Kierkegaard refers to the inner life of love itself as an ongoing desire. In love we are touched by the unseen reality of the other and it is up to us to believe in it or not. However, the moment we lend credence to its voice, we become part of a love that has its origin not in ourselves, but in God. In a previous part of this reflection, Kierkegaard (1995:12) describes this as form of expropriation. In love we belong to the other.³⁴ In this immediacy we cannot have any other motivation than love itself that moves us from within. Without taking the risk of entering this burning reality of the heart, we will never become part of this divine dynamic. Here Kierkegaard quotes the Greek philosophic principle of 'like is known only by like'.³⁵ We cannot become acquainted with love, if we do not let its voice speak in us. 'Only someone who abides in love can know love, and in the same way his love is to be known.' With the last part of this sentence, Kierkegaard seems to refer to Paul, who wrote: 'Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known' (1 Cor 13:12). In love we know as we are known. This is to say that love is a reciprocal phenomenon in which we are confronted with an immediacy that lives us. This immediacy cannot be described in objective images, but expresses itself in an ongoing desire to be absorbed in this love.

The unseen reality is the foundation of our existence

The final part of Kierkegaard's reflection returns to its starting point. There is no other way to enter into the reality of love than to believe in it. Even if it is true that love can be recognised by its fruits, as long as we stay firm in our conviction that we believe nothing that we cannot see with our eyes, we will never be able to understand this truth that can only be seen through the eyes of a loving person. In other words, love is seeing the unseen and trusting that this naked reality is stronger than everything we build around it. Consequently, Kierkegaard wants us to be careful of making demands on someone in a loving relationship. The source of this demanding attitude is, after all, mistrust. We do not trust the unseen reality we have seen in our love and want to compensate this distrust with the proof of seeing its fruits. What is more important, however, is that we believe in what we have seen and that we do not need material proof

34. Danish original in Kierkegaard (1847:13).

35. The premise of 'like is known by like' was a major philosophical concept at least as early as the 5th century BCE. Pythagoras taught that the extent or depth of our knowledge of the divine depends on us being like the divine, or assimilating to the divine. The idea was that to the degree that we have knowledge of the divine, we must have changed our own character from human to divine. The doctrine of 'like is known by like' was also quite influential in later philosophical and religious schools of thought, especially Neo-Platonism, cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9–11.

of it. After all, this is precisely the fruit of love. The more we become rooted in love as the divine source of our heart, the more we will understand that this unseen reality is the foundation of our existence in which we are known by the other, whose essence is love.

Conclusion

In order to clarify that love cannot be reduced to something graspable in physical reality, Kierkegaard starts his reflection with the divine origin of love. Love originates from a well that has its source in the unfathomable reality of God. This means that although we cannot grasp God with the tools of our logic, in love we immediately participate in God's eternal life. This love manifests itself as a need or urge from within. Consequently, Kierkegaard encourages us to express our love in the awareness that love, as divine movement of our heart, is not something over which we have authority. In other words, in love we belong to God who moves us from within and it is because of this immediacy that we, in love, belong to the other as well. However, much of what we call love is, in fact, not love at all, because it does not arise from our heart, but from our self-interest, or fleeting emotions and therefore discernment is essential. In order to become rooted in the eternal source of love in our heart (i.e. to give love the possibility of forming a heart in us), we need to subject ourselves to its hidden voice, that in many ways contradicts the human voice of our sagacity. Nevertheless, the more we participate in this unfathomable reality of God's love, the more it will transform us from within.

This inner transformation process in which we become what we are (an image of God's love) is the leading principle in the explanation of the sentence 'For each tree is known by its own fruits'. As trees of God's love we are asked to live our personal call of love and to become fruitful in it. This call cannot be

objectified to something particular that can demonstrate our love, but takes a different shape in every call. The only reality that unites us in our call is our rootedness in the divine source of our love. This, however, remains hidden for the objective eye and only becomes apparent in the strength the lovers themselves, who increasingly find their foundation in the steadiness of God's eternal love. Such lovers will neither be distracted by the volatility of their emotions, nor by the hypocrisy of others who try to discredit their love. Their only compass is the love of their heart. In this simplicity of total self-oblivion there is no difference between knowing and being known, because God is the alpha and omega of their love.

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