

**TEMPORAL GOODS, DIVINE LOVE AND THE POVERTY OF CHRIST:
or, how Kierkegaard's Ethic in *Works of Love* is Economically Apathetic**

G. P. Marcar, PhD

**Research Affiliate and Teaching Fellow
The Centre for Theology and Public Issues, University of Otago**

gp.marcar@otago.ac.nz

Abstract: *Amongst the most serious objections to Kierkegaard's ethics in Works of Love (1847) is that it does not seek to change temporal socio-economic or political conditions; on these matters, it is alleged, Kierkegaard's thought is apathetic. After first discussing Jamie Ferreira's widely accepted answer to this charge, this article further problematises the issue. Rather than downplaying the implications of Kierkegaard's claims, in what follows I set the vision of Works of Love's ethics against the intertextual backdrop of Kierkegaard's thought on the individual's relatedness to God, and the nature of the love which God mandates towards others. The linchpin of both these strands of thought is the figure of Jesus Christ: the self-revelation of God and "the prototype" for humanity. The result of this, I argue, is to heighten the potentially objectionable nature of Kierkegaard's remarks.*

The Accusation of Otherworldliness in *Works of Love*

The charge of otherworldliness against Kierkegaard's 1847 *Works of Love* (WOL) commonly centres upon a much-discussed passage at the beginning of WOL's discourse "IIIB: Love is a Matter of Conscience." In this passage, Kierkegaard points towards the economically disadvantaged within society, epitomized by his figure of a "poor, wretched charwoman," and argues that what Christianity advises is for every person (including the charwoman) not to "worry" or busy themselves [*travlt*]

about changing their socio-economic conditions so as to achieve a higher social status.¹ The change in referent which occurs within Christianity from the temporal to one's relationship to the eternal/God means that "in inwardness everything is changed," while externally all remains the same.² Indeed, Kierkegaard comments that although people have "foolishly busied [*travlt*] themselves in the name of Christianity" to show that men and women should be socially and economically equal, Christianity has never even "desired" such equality.³ It is on the basis of these provocative comments that Kierkegaard has been read as an apathetic thinker, economically naïve at best, and a "disingenuous advocate" for the bourgeois class of his time at worst.⁴

Ferreira's Defence of Kierkegaard

Among the most persuasive attempts to rescue Kierkegaard from these readings is that of Jamie Ferreira. In her commentary on *WOL*, Ferreira argues that Kierkegaard's apparent dismissal of socio-economic conditions is not intended to promote an attitude of apathy, but to ensure that there can be no grounds for excluding anyone from the commandment to love your neighbor.⁵ In support of this,

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946), 110-11. Where the original Danish words and phrases from this text are cited, these can be found in Søren Kierkegaard, *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger: nogle christelige Overveielser i Talers Form* (C.A. Reitzel, 1862). See also *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (SKS).

² Ibid., 112. Throughout *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard often speaks of "the eternal" in a way which implies its synonymy with God's love. Notably, in his opening "Prayer" to *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard addresses God as "Eternal Love." See Ibid., 4. For a more detailed examination of this point, see also Andrew Burgess, "Kierkegaard's Concept of Redoubling and Luther's *Simul Justus*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary 16: Works of Love*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 39-55.

³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 112-13.

⁴ David R Law, "Cheap Grace and the Cost of Discipleship in Kierkegaard's *For Self-Examination*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary 21: For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 111-42. For the classical formulation of this charge against Kierkegaard's ethic, see Theodor W. Adorno, "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 8 (1939): 413-29.

⁵ M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 56.

Ferreira points towards the formal structure of IIA-IIC in *WOL*. Whereas IIB focuses on the object of Christian love — the “neighbor” — and maintains that no one can be excluded, IIC (“*Thou shalt love*”) focuses upon the subject of love’s duty and argues that no one can exclude themselves from the obligation.

Taken together, Ferreira argues that the three chapters which comprise the second deliberation of *WOL* (IIA, IIB and IIC) “provide a formal account of the unconditionality of the commandment.”⁶ Seen in this context, the temporal conditions which Kierkegaard instructs his reader to ignore are those which “blind us to our kinship” and thereby undermine the command to love one’s neighbor.⁷ Turning to the example of the charwoman in “IIIB: Love is a Matter of Conscience,” Ferreira argues that Kierkegaard addresses this hypothetical figure in her particular circumstances, in order to illustrate that even the poorest person is equal to the richest in her capacity to love the neighbor. Ferreira thus paraphrases Kierkegaard’s advice in IIIB: “do not think that changing such external distinctions can make it easier for you to fulfil your obligations of love... as if it would be easier to be a better Christian if one were also a ‘Madame.’”⁸ Kierkegaard’s central point here, for Ferreira, is not to deny the importance of socio-economic conditions *per se*, but rather to affirm that all human beings, irrespective of their temporal situation, are equal in their capacity to obey the commandment to love and follow their consciences “before God.”

The contention of this paper is that Ferreira too easily dismisses the extent to which Kierkegaard’s thought seems to advocate disregarding temporal matters in favour of focusing upon the eternal. As has been pointed out, one should not expect a mid-19th century thinker such as Kierkegaard to advocate a paternalistic social or economic program.⁹ Nevertheless, Kierkegaard’s steadfast rejection of worldly cares remains striking. It is not simply that Kierkegaard’s comments risk legitimizing a

⁶ M. Jamie Ferreira, “Equality, Impartiality, and Moral Blindness in Kierkegaard’s ‘Works of Love,’” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 25.1 (1997): 74.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸ Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving*, 96.

⁹ Margaret Daphne Hampson, *Kierkegaard: Exposition and Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 212.

conformist attitude towards the *status quo*.¹⁰ As this paper will aim to elaborate further, seen through the lens of *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing (POH)*¹¹ and Kierkegaard's *Discourses*, Kierkegaard can be seen to advocate a dismissal of temporal goods altogether.

The Commandment to Love thy Neighbor in IIA, IIB and IIC of Works of Love

One point at which Ferreira's reading may be instructively challenged is in her reading of IIA-C in the first series of *WOL*. As outlined above, Ferreira regards these deliberations as structured to collectively give an account of Christian love's unconditionality. Within this framework, IIA posits the imperative-form of the command ("shalt"), IIB that its object (the "neighbor") is everyone, and IIC that no ethical subject ("thou") can exclude themselves from its remit. In what follows, I will argue that, particularly when viewed together with Kierkegaard's other writings, this is not where the pressure of the text lies. Rather, Kierkegaard's unrelenting emphasis in these discourses is on the divine imperative. While it is true that Kierkegaard reads the commandment as mandating that every human being love all others, the overriding theme of these discourses is that the individual is subject to a divine command, to which he must respond immediately with the whole of his being.

IIA and IIB: The Commandment

This point can be illuminated by looking to Kierkegaard's treatment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) in *WOL*. This parable has often been discussed by commentators as if its primary message was the universality of the neighbor and his identity as anyone in need of help. Perhaps in greater faithfulness to the text, however, this is not how Kierkegaard reads the parable.

¹⁰ Sylvia Walsh, "Other-Worldliness in Kierkegaard's Works of Love — A Response," *Philosophical Investigations* 22. 1 (1999): 83.

¹¹ Although cited in its separately published form here, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, also titled "An Occasional Discourse," was written as the first part of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847).

Kierkegaard first references the Good Samaritan in "IIA: *Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor*." In answering the question of "who is my neighbor?," Kierkegaard writes that Christ directs his questioner's attention to the subject of mercy, rather than its object. "Christ does not talk about knowing one's neighbor, but about oneself being a neighbor."¹² The neighbor, for Kierkegaard, is one who recognizes that he has a duty to love. It is the active dutifulness of love, seen in Christ's closing words to his questioner in Luke 10 of "[g]o and do likewise," which for Kierkegaard provides the key to understanding not just this parable, but the whole of Christianity. Christ's answer, Kierkegaard writes, may be regarded as implicitly etched "by the side of every word" in the Bible.¹³ Kierkegaard's message here is one to which he returns repeatedly in *WOL* and elsewhere: Christians must not be preoccupied with self-interested thoughts or concerns, but must instead adhere to God's will without delay.

Against the "double-mindedness" of thinking that Christianity advocates both commanded neighbor-love and natural love, Kierkegaard insists that true Christianity thinks only of the former.¹⁴ The correct pattern of Christian praxis is to direct one's attention to God in prayer, after which "the first [person] you meet is your neighbor whom you *must* love."¹⁵ The category of "neighbor" here is a function of the divine imperative; the true object of Christian love remains God.¹⁶ For Kierkegaard, all earthly love and friendship is self-love, love for "the other I" which effectively amounts to "self-worship."¹⁷ The object of love is therefore either one's self (earthly love) or God (Christianity). In neither is the object the human "other." Put another way, the central message of IIB is not that the object of divinely-commanded love is every human being (although Kierkegaard does affirm this), but that earthly love and friendship are dethroned by the divine imperative ("shalt").

¹² Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 45–48.

IIC: The Individual Subject of the Commandment

The ethical subject, or human “thou,” of IIC’s title is the single individual, “to whom eternity unceasingly speaks” to give the imperative to love his neighbor.¹⁸ In yet another echo of Christ’s closing words in Luke 10 of “[g]o and do likewise,” IIC begins by reaffirming the urgency of the imperative: “So then go out and practice it.”¹⁹ In order to do this, Kierkegaard encourages the ethical subject to close his eyes and “become merely an ear for hearing the word of the commandment.”²⁰ When eternity is the object of one’s attention in this way, all temporal demarcations become irrelevant. That which is loved about the other is the presence of the eternal itself, which Kierkegaard likens to a “watermark” in all human beings.²¹ In attending only to the eternal and its command to love the eternal, the ethical subject therefore adopts an attitude of disregard towards temporal features.

Only by loving one’s neighbor as oneself can one “accomplish the highest,” which is to serve the will of God as an “instrument in the hand of Providence [*Redskab i Styrelsens Haand*].”²² Kierkegaard’s logic in IIA-IIC may therefore be said to follow the overall structure of Matthew 22:34-41, where the command to “love thy neighbor as thyself” is preceded by the imperative to unreservedly love and obey God “with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.”²³ Indeed, Kierkegaard notably orders the focuses of each first-series discourse in *WOL* according to the ordering of objects in Matthew 22:34–41: God (the “*shalt*” of IIA), others (“*neighbor*” in IIB), self (the “*thou*” of IIC). The reason for this, I

¹⁸ Ibid., 74.

¹⁹ Ibid., 51.

²⁰ Ibid., 56–57.

²¹ Ibid., 73.

²² Ibid., 71; see also Ibid., 226.

²³ See Ibid., 17. This also aligns with Luke 10, where the same injunction to neighbor-love is stated, directly prior to the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in the form of a single commandment with two clauses: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

submit, is that for Kierkegaard all Christian love results from, and is directed towards, serving the will of the eternal/God.²⁴

It is with this context in mind, I argue, that one is best able to understand the contours of what follows in Kierkegaard's third discourse (IIIA and IIIB) of *WOL*.

Another look at IIIA and IIIB: Busyness, Distraction and Double-Mindedness

Kierkegaard begins "IIIA: Love is the Fulfilment of the Law" with the story of the "man who had two sons" in Matthew 21. One son promises to do his father's will, but does not, while the other does not make this promise and yet acts. Drawing again on Christ's answer to the question of "who is my neighbor?" in Luke 10, Kierkegaard seeks to elucidate how the Christian, akin to the dutiful son in Matthew 21, acts immediately in order to fulfil the imperative to love one's neighbor.²⁵ Rather than examining the parameters of who should be loved, Christ's answer in the form of an imperative ("go and do likewise") cuts short the conversation and demands an ethical response.²⁶ As Kierkegaard sees it, Christ is here concerned with neither the object nor the subject of Christian love, but rather with its form as an imperative from God.

In Kierkegaard's view, worldliness and busyness have become "inseparable ideas."²⁷ Whether or not human beings are busy depends not on how they do things, but upon the object of their attention. If their object is the "manifold" of temporal matters, then they will be "divided and distracted" in their efforts and therefore "busy."²⁸ If, however, a person's love is focused entirely on the eternal, "undividedly present in every utterance" and "perpetually active," this is not

²⁴ For an account of how this conviction continues to underpin Kierkegaard's ethic in *Works of Love's* second series of discourses, see G. P. Marcar, "The Divine Relationship Ethics of Kierkegaard's Love-Sleuth in *Works of Love*." *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 32.3 (2019): 341-51.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 79-80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

busyness.²⁹ The problem of busyness, distraction and double-mindedness is also the subject of Chapter 7 of *POH*, which was published in the same year as *WOL*. Here, Kierkegaard's aim is to focus on the most common form of double-mindedness which prevents the individual from pursuing the Good in truth: commitment to the Good which is only "to a certain degree."³⁰ Busyness, for Kierkegaard, lies within double-mindedness, just as "stillness dwells in the desert."³¹ Kierkegaard gives a hypothetical with clear parallels to the biblical parable with which he begins IIIA:

Suppose that there were two men: a doubleminded man, who believes he has gained faith in a loving Providence, because he had himself experienced having been helped, even though he had hardheartedly sent away a sufferer whom he could have helped; and another man whose life, by devoted love, was an instrument in the hand of Providence [*Redskab i Forsynets Haand*], so that he helped many suffering ones, although the help he himself had wished continued to be denied him.³²

Just as the brother in Matthew 21 who said "yes" to God did not keep his promise, so too the "double-minded" man in *POH*, Chapter 7 believed in loving divine providence and yet did not follow that divine will in relation to others. This contrasts with the brother who said "no" in Matthew 21 but nevertheless did God's will, and the abovementioned man whose personal belief (or lack thereof) is not mentioned by Kierkegaard, but who was in any case a single-minded "instrument in the hand" of divine providence. In both IIIA of *WOL* and *POH*, Kierkegaard wishes to contrast the mentality of "busyness" and "double-mindedness," in which a person may claim to obey God but does not, with a mentality of single-minded obedience to God's providential will.

²⁹ Ibid., 80–81.

³⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing; Spiritual Preparation for the Office of Confession* (New York: Harper, 1956), 104.

³¹ Ibid., 108.

³² Ibid., 111.

Unlike either of the brothers in Matthew 21, Christ was not divided in answering his Father, and did not delay. The love of Christ, Kierkegaard writes, was “perpetually active,” without a single moment when it was “merely a passive feeling.”³³ Kierkegaard describes how Christ’s life was therefore akin to a “single working day.”³⁴ This presented a “terrible collision” with the purely human conception of love.³⁵ Christ was misunderstood by all who encountered him, including his closest disciples. Commenting upon Christ saying to Peter “get behind me Satan,” Kierkegaard remarks that this occurred because Peter (in his misunderstanding) wanted Christ to subscribe to the human conception of love.³⁶

Kierkegaard goes on to claim that God is not simply a “third party” or “middle term” to love, but its “sole object,” such that “it is not the husband who is the wife’s beloved, but it is God.”³⁷ That Kierkegaard illustrates his point with among the most exclusive of human relationships (the bond between marriage partners) arguably highlights his intention to leave no room for ambiguity or dilution. Within Kierkegaard’s framework, all human love has God as its focus and endpoint: “to be loved is to be helped to love God.”³⁸ Ferreira interprets this as simply meaning that an individual’s own judgements must be sublimated to those of God. “[W]hat is at stake in this idea is that God should remain the judge of what true love is.”³⁹ This reading, however, does not go far enough. As noted above, a thematic thread runs through the preceding content of *WOL* which stresses that being a Christian lover means acting according to the imperative-form of the commandment to love one’s neighbor: “Go and do likewise” (IIA, IIB, IIC, IIIA). The imperative flows from a prior attentiveness towards the eternal/God (IIB) and stands opposed to any distracted, busy, double-mindedness which would prevent the individual from

³³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 82.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving*, 71.

becoming a wholly committed instrument of divine providence (IIC; *POH*). Once this background context is taken into account, it is clear that, as John Lippitt observes, in stating that God is the “sole object” of love, Kierkegaard “certainly *seems* to be saying something stronger” than Ferreira allows.⁴⁰

“IIIB: Love is a Matter of Conscience” continues this emphasis. Christianity renders every human relationship a “matter of conscience” between the individual and God.⁴¹ As noted earlier, Kierkegaard here states (with the example of the poor working woman) that Christianity advises every individual not to busy themselves [*travlt*] with temporal matters. Reference to busyness occurs again when Kierkegaard comments that despite the fact that people have “foolishly busied [*travlt*] themselves” to demonstrate gender equality, such equality has never been Christianity’s concern.⁴² Later in the discourse, Kierkegaard further comments that “[t]he idea... that we should first busy ourselves [*travlt*] in finding the beloved... is very far from being Christian love.”⁴³ This stance against love which involves people being “busy” is immediately reminiscent of IIIA.

The conceptual and thematic affinity of IIIB with IIIA and *POH* becomes even clearer towards the end of this discourse, when Kierkegaard states that conscience requires a “pure heart.”⁴⁴ Such a heart is “bound” to God, whose demands consequently take absolute priority for the individual in all situations. Those in this relation of conscience are thus entirely “before God,” such that the “confidence of eternity” stands between them and even their closest human relations.⁴⁵ The

⁴⁰ John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 67. For a critique which argues extensively for the prominence of this “anti-social” element in *Works of Love*, see for instance Peter George, “Something Anti-Social About *Works of Love*,” in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*, ed. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 70–81.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 110.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 112–13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

individual's normative reference point is thus changed from the realm of temporal goods and earthly connections, to that of eternity and one's commitment to God.⁴⁶

Seen in this light, a much stronger stance against caring about social or economic conditions begins to emerge in Kierkegaard's ethic. In order to better inform our interpretation of Kierkegaard in this area, it will be instructive to turn to his detailed critiques of caring about worldliness and temporal conditions in his *Discourses*. The centrality of Kierkegaard's concern that God be pursued through a singularly focused, undivided will, as well as the interconnectedness of this concern with the motifs of busyness, distraction and comparison, is seen clearly in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits (UDVS)* (1847), *Devotional Discourses* (1849) and *Christian Discourses (CD)* (1849).

Kierkegaard's *Discourses* and Other Writings

Feathered and Stemmed Teachers: The Birds and the Lilies

A common motif in Kierkegaard's *Discourses* is the pedagogical value of the birds and the lilies cited by Christ during his teaching in Matthew 6. Kierkegaard refers to the birds and the lilies as "teachers,"⁴⁷ capable of exhibiting to humanity how it should relate itself in undivided obedience to the will of God. The example of the birds and the lilies is an analogous and ultimately imperfect one, as Kierkegaard recognises. The ultimate and perfect exemplar for human attitudes towards themselves and others in relation to God (as will be explored below) is Christ himself, "the prototype."

"Before God"

Kierkegaard describes how the birds and the lilies exist wholly "before God." In order to achieve and remain in this state, human beings must avoid comparison,

⁴⁶ In positing that an undistracted focus on the eternal/God entails a rejection of temporal goods, Kierkegaard is, of course, saying no more than many of the Church Fathers who preceded him. See perhaps especially Maximus the Confessor, "The Four Hundred Chapters on Love," in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 33–98.

⁴⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 10.

busyness and worry. The interconnectedness of these practices is made explicit in “To be Contented with Being a Human Being” in *UDVS*. In this discourse, Kierkegaard bemoans how during one’s daily associations with others, “one forgets through the busy [*travle*] or the worried [*bekymrede*] inventiveness of comparison [*Sammenlignings*] what it is to be a human being.”⁴⁸ Kierkegaard then sets out to illustrate the deleterious effects of comparison through two stories. In the first story, the “worried [*bekymrede*] lily,” a lily residing amongst small flowers is seduced by a visiting bird, who over time makes the lily envious by telling it about the beauty of other lilies and the splendour of the “Crown Imperial.”⁴⁹ As a result, the lily becomes unhappy with its place in the world, and eventually asks the bird to transport it to the other lilies and plant it in this richer environment. After the bird uproots the lily and carries it into the air, however, the lily perishes.

From this unhappy ending, Kierkegaard exhorts that “[a]ll *worldly* worry has its basis in a person’s unwillingness to be contented with being a human being, in his worried craving for distinction by way of comparison.”⁵⁰ Kierkegaard’s second story further illustrates this point. In “the bird’s worry” (*Fuglens Bekymring*), a wild wood-dove is told by a tame-dove and its partner of how they are looked after by a farmer who keeps an abundance of grain inside a barn.⁵¹ After comparing its situation unfavourably to the apparent certainty and security enjoyed by the tame-doves, the wood-dove becomes “so busy [*saa travlt*] gleaning and hoarding that it scarcely had time... to eat its fill.”⁵² Although the wood-dove has enough to survive, “it had acquired an *idea* of need in the future. It had lost its peace of mind — it had acquired *worry*.”⁵³ Kierkegaard makes it clear that it is not any material lack *per se*

⁴⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 165. Where the original Danish words and phrases are cited from this text and *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, these can be found in Søren Kierkegaard, *Opbyggelige taler i forskjellig aad* (Reitzels forlag, 1862). See also SKS.

⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 167–69.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 174–76.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

which prevents the creature from contentedly living “before God,” but the mind-set which compares oneself with others, busily attempts to change one’s situation, and worries about future prosperity.

As a result of its worrying and busyness, the wood-dove became physically and mentally diminished: “Its feathers lost their iridescence; its flight lost its buoyancy. Its day was passed in a fruitless attempt to accumulate abundance... It was no longer joyful.”⁵⁴ Driven by its envy of the wealthy doves, the wood-dove eventually contrives to sneak into the barn where the grain is kept. When, however, the farmer sees the bird, he places it in a box and kills it.⁵⁵ The wood-dove’s original error, for Kierkegaard, was being discontented with what it was. To be contented as a human being is to live in recognition of one’s dependency upon God, realizing that (irrespective of economic or social status) one can ultimately “no more support himself than create himself.”⁵⁶ Only with this understanding, Kierkegaard claims, can anyone be truly content as a human being.

This normative anthropology occurs again in Kierkegaard’s “The Care of Lowliness” in *CD*. Unlike the carefree birds of Matthew 6, the “lowly Christian” is consciously aware of his socio-economic status in relation to others. Unlike the pagan, however, Kierkegaard writes that the Christian does not define himself according to his comparative status or desire to ascend the socio-economic ladder and be “something” in relation to others.⁵⁷ Instead, the Christian is wholly contented with being “himself before God.”⁵⁸ In this way, Kierkegaard makes clear that the person should not care about their social or economic standing before others, as it simply has no bearing upon their status “before God.”

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 176.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 177.

⁵⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses: The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 40–41.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Service and Obedience to the Divine Will

Existing "before God" without comparison, busyness or worry, the birds and the lilies are able to unconditionally seek God's kingdom, in absolute obedience to their Creator. The bird does not demand to have anything for itself, or to be anything by itself. This, according to Kierkegaard, is its "perfection."⁵⁹ Commenting on the injunctions in Matthew 6:33 to not worry and "seek first" God's kingdom, Kierkegaard similarly describes how the bird does not "seek" anything for itself during even the longest of migrations.⁶⁰ All of the bird's actions are done as imperatives from God. Its will being extensions of God's will, the bird and the lily accept their temporal circumstances as they are, even if these appear disadvantageous to the organism. The kingdom of God must be unconditionally sought from where one is, as to try and begin elsewhere is *prima facie* not to seek God's kingdom "first."⁶¹ Applied to human beings in their various social and economic circumstances, this would seem to imply that one should not aspire to a higher socio-economic status, as such an aspiration is contrary to unconditionally seeking God's will.

In the second of his *Devotional Discourses* on the birds and the lilies (1849), Kierkegaard focuses on the statement that "no one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). As the creator and sustainer of every person's existence, God is "infinitely closer" to a person than anyone else could be.⁶² Consequently, indifference towards God is impossible. One either loves God, or hates Him. Due to the relation being one of creature to Creator, love takes the form of unconditional obedience. The implication of this for one's attitude towards temporal goods is dramatic and uncompromising. Either God is served, or mammon. To believe that one can have "a little mammon" to oneself (for instance, a "single penny") is to be decisively not serving God.⁶³

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 205.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 208–9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁶² Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, 23.

⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 207.

Humanity's Difference

The bird and the lily, as with all of nature for Kierkegaard, exist in a state of "unconditional obedience" to God.⁶⁴ There is no double-mindedness in the bird; God's will simply *is* its will,⁶⁵ and its obedience is therefore never only "to a certain degree." In this way, the birds and the lilies in Matthew 6 analogously exemplify how human beings ought to exist wholly "before God" in absolute obedience to His will. However, as alluded to above, the bird and the lily remain imperfect teachers for the human pupil.

In contrast to non-human animals (which only exist as part of a collective or "crowd"), each human being is a distinct individual.⁶⁶ Moreover, unlike the bird and the lily, who possess only one will (God's) and are unalterably "bound in necessity,"⁶⁷ the human person has an autonomous will which must be sacrificed, freedom with which to make this determination,⁶⁸ and consciousness of what it lacks or will need in the future.⁶⁹ In addition, humanity's most profound difference is its capacity to worship God. Human beings are capable of this because, as created in the image of God, they harbour an internal, invisible glory which the bird and the lily lack.⁷⁰ In becoming as nothing in absolute dependence on God, human beings inversely "image" their Creator and thereby "resemble" Him.⁷¹ This is paradigmatically exemplified for Kierkegaard by Jesus Christ, "the prototype" who,

⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, 25–26.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 190.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 195–96.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 192–93. See also Kierkegaard's 1844 discourse, "One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and Is Victorious — in That God Is Victorious": "God can imprint himself in [a person] only when he himself has become nothing. When the ocean is exerting all its power, that is precisely the time when it cannot reflect the image of heaven, and even the slightest motion blurs the image; but when it becomes still and deep, then the image of heaven sinks into its nothingness." In Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 399.

as the fullest instantiation of what it is to be a human being, could teach humanity in a way that the birds and the lilies (which he pointed to out of humility) could not.

In this sense, the Christian is not simply “before God” in the same sense as the bird and the lily, but also “before his prototype” who is at once fully God and fully human. “As a *human being* he was created in *God’s image* [*Billedede*], but as a *Christian* he has God as the *prototype* [*Forbilledede*].”⁷² Although a person may therefore start with the example set by the bird and the lily so as to ascertain what it means to be “before God” and undividedly obey His will, this cannot be where the lesson stops. “The lowly Christian, who before God is himself, *exists* as a Christian *before his prototype*.”⁷³ As seen earlier, Kierkegaard in IIIA of *WOL* presents Christ as the exemplar *par excellence* of a love which was “perpetually active” in service to the divine imperative, causing a “terrible collision” with the world’s understanding. Only by looking at the example of Christ can one appreciate the full picture of how the Christian, for Kierkegaard, should relate to the temporal world around him.

Christ’s Prototypical Lowliness in Human Obedience to God

In *UDVS*, Kierkegaard describes how, through enduring the “heaviest suffering” of any human being, Christ “learned obedience” to God.⁷⁴ This is aptly demonstrated for Kierkegaard in Christ praying to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane that the cup be taken from him, but not “if it be your will.” The first part of obedience is the discernment of God’s will; the second part is the fulfilment of that will.⁷⁵ In *Practice in Christianity (PC)*, Anti-Climacus parses this matter in terms of Christ’s “task” (*opgave*) of obedience to God. Christ manifested this task externally through his lowliness, which lasted the duration of his entire life and

⁷² Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 41 (emphasis original).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 42 (emphasis original).

⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 254–55.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 255.

culminated in his death on the cross.⁷⁶ Christ *qua* human being understood this and regarded his entire life as a test in obedience, with God as the examiner. Indeed, Anti-Climacus suggests that Christ's exaltation after death can be viewed as a result of him passing this test "at every moment" of his life. It is at this point that he is the "prototype" whose life guides others in passing the same test.⁷⁷ Passing the test of obedience to God, as shown in the lifespan of Christ, involves abasement and lowliness.

In *Judge for Yourselves!* Kierkegaard posits Christ as the sole example of one who served only one master. As a result of this, Christ could not be tolerated by humanity which, to varying degrees, always serves more than one master. Christ's single-mindedness is shown in the entire "pattern" of his life, in which he had no family connections, belonged to no country, took no property, and married no spouse.⁷⁸ Christ embraces poverty and lowliness, living "without a nest, without a hole... whereon to lay His head."⁷⁹ As such, Christ is "an alien in the world," whose entire existence is deliberately orientated towards serving only one master.⁸⁰ This necessitated a complete rejection of all temporal goods and worldly status. To be a

⁷⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 182. See also Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination; And, Judge for Yourselves; And, Three Discourses 1851*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), 80–81.

⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 183–84.

⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination; And, Judge for Yourselves; And, Three Discourses*, 172–75. The constitutive absence of personal connections in Christ's prototypical life for Kierkegaard should also arguably be taken into account in the contemporary debate on the place of "special relationships" in Kierkegaard's ethic. For a sample of contributions to this debate, see Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 43–65; C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 203–23; Joseph Carlsmith, "Essentially Preferential: A Critique of Kierkegaard's Works of Love," *Gnosis* 12.1 (2012); John Lippitt, "Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special Relationships: Ferreira, Krishek and the 'God Filter'," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 72.3 (2012): 177–97; Sharon Krishek, "In Defence of a Faith-like Model of Love: A Reply to John Lippitt's 'Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special Relationships: Ferreira, Krishek, and the 'God Filter'," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 75.2 (2014): 155–66.

⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination; And, Judge for Yourselves; And, Three Discourses*, 178.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

disciple of Christ is to relate to him through his connection with God.⁸¹ The world insists on compromise; Christianity demands an unambiguous and “absolute” choice of either/or in its injunction that one “cannot serve two masters.”

In *CD*, Kierkegaard cites two reasons why it is more difficult for an eminent person (in the worldly sense) to be or become a Christian, while it is conversely easier for the lowly. Firstly, although the lowliness which is constitutive of being a Christian is primarily spiritual and internal in nature, biblical scriptures show a clear normative preference for being literally (i.e. physically and externally) lowly.⁸² A faithful following of these scriptures should take this emphasis into account. Secondly (and more pertinently for Kierkegaard), “the prototype” for Christian living was literally lowly.⁸³ This, for the Christian, entails that being a lowly person has the potential (actualised in the life of Christ) to mean “infinitely much.”⁸⁴ Kierkegaard thus writes that in being lowly, and yet “forgetting” their socio-economic state before others, the Christian “looks more or less like the prototype.”⁸⁵

The Offensive Love of God in Christ

In *Works of Love*'s first discourse, Kierkegaard makes clear that all Christian love has the love of God as its source: “[a]s the peaceful lake is grounded deep in the hidden spring which no eye can see, so a man’s love is grounded even deeper in the love of God.”⁸⁶ In order to fully appreciate the Christo-centric character of Kierkegaard’s ethic, however, one must begin even further back at *Works of Love*'s

⁸¹ Ibid., 181.

⁸² Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 54.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 43. Fruitful comparisons might here be made with late medieval writers Johannes Tauler and Thomas à Kempis, amongst others. See Johannes Tauler, *The Following of Christ*, trans. J. R. Morell (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910); Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. William C. Creasy (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007); Anonymous, *Theologia Germanica*, trans. Susanna Winkworth (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1907).

⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 8.

opening prayer, in which Kierkegaard states that love is known through God's prior initiative of love towards humanity God "didst hold nothing back but didst give everything in love" and "made manifest what love is" in being humanity's redeemer, giving himself to "save us all."⁸⁷ Kierkegaard proceeds to call on the Holy Spirit, or "Spirit of Love," to "remind the believer to love as he is loved, and his neighbor as himself."⁸⁸ The juxtaposition of biblical verses here is highly instructive. The first clause ("love as he is loved") alludes to John 13:34 or John 15:9-12, where Christ — prior to or after telling his disciples that he is the sole "way" to God the Father and the Holy Spirit will remind them of his teaching (John 14) — newly commands that his disciples "love one another as I have loved you." In placing this imperative as the antecedent to the commandment that one should love one's neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27), Kierkegaard's prayer appears to treat the first commandment or imperative in Matthew 22 and Luke 10 — "love the Lord your God with all your heart" — as substitutable with Christ's instruction that his disciples should love as he, the self-revelation of God, has *already* acted towards them.

This, I suggest, provides a new angle on the current discussion. By beginning *Works of Love* with his prayerful and Christo-centric affirmation of divine love, Kierkegaard places all discussion about love in the context of God's prior soteriological initiative towards humanity in becoming incarnate as "humanity's redeemer": Jesus Christ. To apply this lens to our current discussion, while Kierkegaard's *Discourses* and *WOL* may jointly detail what it means to love God as a creature through doxological obedience to His will and becoming "an instrument in the hand of Providence," one's interpretation of this divine will must be conditioned by considering the form of God's antecedent outreach of love towards the believer in Christ; "love as he [*already has been*] loved." The nature and implications of this outreach is not discussed explicitly by Kierkegaard under his own name, but by his pseudonyms, Climacus and Anti-Climacus.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid., For Ferreira's commentary on this point, see Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 18.

"The wonder" of God's Love in Philosophical Fragments and The Sickness Unto Death

In Chapter 2 of *Philosophical Fragments (PF)*, Johannes Climacus embarks on a "poetic venture" which tells of "a king who loved a maiden." This is intended to explore how and why "the Teacher" or "the god" might choose to reveal Himself to the learner. Climacus begins with an unequivocal affirmation that God's motivation is love, and winning the learner's love is His end.⁸⁹ Love for Climacus entails a desire for absolute equality with the beloved. Consequently, God's self-revelation to the learner in the form of a humble "servant" is not a guise, but his "true form."⁹⁰ For Climacus, that God in love seeks absolute equality with the learner is simply too incredible for human comprehension. He explains:

it is indeed less terrifying to fall upon one's face while the mountains tremble at the god's voice than to sit with him as his equal... for if the god gave no indication, how could it occur to a man that the blessed god could need him? This would indeed be... so bad a thought that it could not arise in him, even though, when the god has confided it to him, he adoringly says: This thought did not arise in my heart... for do we not... stand here before the *wonder* [*Vidunderet*].⁹¹

Climacus' acknowledgment here that "the wonder" of God's loving initiative towards the learner "did not arise in [a human] heart" references 1 Corinthians 2:9, the full text of which reads "[w]hat no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."⁹² The "paradox" becomes "absolute," Climacus goes on to claim, in two respects: Firstly, that "absolute equality" is sought with the learner, and secondly that this learner is

⁸⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments; Johannes Climacus*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 25.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 34–36.

⁹² See also "Strengthening in the Inner Being" (1843), where Kierkegaard affirms that "God's love...is more blessed than anything which arose in the human heart" Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 97.

resultantly revealed to be in a state of untruth (i.e. sin).⁹³ The first aspect (that absolute equality is sought with the learner) is the crux of Climacus' "poetic venture."⁹⁴ As C. Stephen Evans notes in his commentary on *PF*, the Incarnation as presented by Climacus' parable of the king and the maiden "represents the epitome of pure, selfless love" which is nowhere encountered in human experience and therefore presents a decisive and threatening challenge to human self-understanding.⁹⁵

Through his parable of the "poor day laborer and the mightiest emperor" in *Sickness Unto Death (SUD)*, Anti-Climacus similarly locates the offensiveness of Christianity in God's selfless outreach towards humanity. One day, the emperor suddenly requests the day-laborer, "in whose heart" (Anti-Climacus remarks in a clear reference to 1 Corinthians 2:9), "it had never arisen" that the emperor even knew he existed.⁹⁶ The emperor reaches out to make the laborer an in-law. Such an invitation is almost impossible for him to believe. "A little favor — that would make sense to the laborer... But this, this plan for him to become a son-in-law, well, that was far too much."⁹⁷ Just as Climacus ends his parable of the king and the maiden by professing that God's initiative to be "the wonder" which did not originate in any human heart, so too Anti-Climacus concludes that the divine action his story portrays is "too high for me, I cannot grasp it."⁹⁸

⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 47.

⁹⁴ Further support for this view can be found in a sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:9, delivered by Kierkegaard at Trinity Church in Copenhagen just 4 months before *Philosophical Fragments* was published. Commenting on the line "what no eye hath seen," Kierkegaard challenges his reader to "visualize" a king, clad as a lowly man and living amongst the people. This, Kierkegaard says, makes the human imagination "quail." See Søren Kierkegaard, *Johannes Climacus (or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est) and A Sermon*, trans. T. H. Croxall (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 167.

⁹⁵ C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 107.

⁹⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 84.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 84–85.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

While Climacus does not explore the reason for this incomprehension and awe, Anti-Climacus proceeds to offer a brief account. “The *summa summarum* of all human wisdom,” Anti-Climacus writes, is encapsulated by the saying that “too much and too little spoil everything.”⁹⁹ The principle which underlies this saying, “*ne quid nimis*”¹⁰⁰ — nothing in excess — was inscribed, along with “know thyself,” at the Delphic Oracle of Ancient Greece. The Christian narrative of God’s communicative love in the Incarnation decisively contravenes this human wisdom in its apparent excessiveness; it is simply “too high” for the self-orientated understanding of human beings. “The uncharitableness of the natural man cannot allow him the extraordinary that God has intended for him; so he is offended.”¹⁰¹ In this way, Anti-Climacus’ account in *SUD* can be seen to complement and expand upon that of Climacus in *PF*. Both ground their stories with a clear nod to 1 Corinthians 2:9 and its declaration that no human heart has ever “conceived” that which “God has prepared for those who love him.”

Christ’s servant form, Climacus writes, “means only that he was a lowly human being,” indistinguishable from others.¹⁰² Unlike all other human beings, however, Christ in his servant form expresses that an absolute indifference (akin to the lilies and “birds of the air” of Matthew 6) to the distribution of earthly goods, “as one who owns nothing and wishes to own nothing.”¹⁰³ Instead, the entirety of Christ’s focus is on seeking the love [*Kjærlighed*] of his disciples [*Disciplens*].¹⁰⁴ Provided that they remain “absorbed in the service of the spirit,” Climacus affirms that this way of existing within the world is possible for every human being, whereupon they will be “even more glorious” than the lily.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 56.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 56–57.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 57.

It might here be asked why Christ's lowliness and disregard for temporal goods was constitutive of total selflessness. The answer to this may be found through a brief detour to *CD*, where Kierkegaard posits that all temporal goods are intrinsically selfish or "begrudging" [*misundelig*]. While an individual acquires, possesses or maintains such goods, his mind is not wholly attentive to the other.¹⁰⁶ By contrast, in assuming a state of absolute lowliness and poverty, Christ was able to constantly and entirely focus on others.¹⁰⁷ As the Prototype for all humanity, nothing in Christ's life was accidental. His way of living, which was "indeed *the way*,"¹⁰⁸ therefore reveals the "essential truth" that "in order to make others rich one must oneself be poor."¹⁰⁹ The consequences of this way of living within the world are further explored by Anti-Climacus in *PC*.

Christ's Reckless Love, Poverty and Lowliness in Practice in Christianity

Anti-Climacus begins the first part of *PC* by inquiring into why Christ's contemporaries unanimously opposed him. This would not have been the case, Anti-Climacus argues, if he had conformed to the world's conception of compassion.¹¹⁰ Proceeding from the "fixed point" of oneself and the belief that "everyone wants to cling to his own," human compassion is anchored in selfishness; as such, it is only ever "to a certain degree," and never "reckless."¹¹¹ This contrasts absolutely with the divine love revealed in Christ. Being "unconditionally" concerned with all others and without any self-regard, Christ's love manifested as "unlimited

¹⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 121.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 114 (emphasis original).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 122. See also Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1848). Unlike temporal goods such as money and knowledge (which can be acquired in different ways and yet have the same form), Climacus writes that the absolute good of happiness in the eternal "can be defined only by the mode in which it is acquired," which is by selflessly and absolutely "venturing everything." Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed and trans. Howard Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 427 (emphasis original).

¹¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 56–57.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

recklessness” to humanity.¹¹² This alone, Anti-Climacus comments, would have been “sufficient for [Christ] to come to grief in the world.”¹¹³

Anti-Climacus goes on to further describe how a constant outcome of Christ’s self-giving *modus operandi* was others’ failure to understand him. This is exemplified by the Pharisees’ presentation of Christ with a coin, accompanied by the question of whether taxes should be paid to Caesar (Matthew 22:15-22). Anti-Climacus writes that through his answer (“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”), Christ expresses “infinite indifference” towards the very premise of the question, as to do otherwise would detract from giving obedience to God, and selfless love to humanity.¹¹⁴ In the lowly life of the prototype, these orientations towards God and humanity are shown to be co-extensive parts of the same whole which, out of relational selflessness, entails “infinite indifference” towards temporal matters.

Conclusion

While Ferreira rightly identifies Kierkegaard’s focus in *WOL* as the ethical subject of love, she downplays the significance of Kierkegaard’s insistence that God is love’s “sole object.” As outlined above, behind Kierkegaard’s claim as to what Christianity advises in IIIB of *WOL* are motifs of comparison, busyness and double-mindedness which are also present in preceding discourses IIA-C and IIIA. To will only one thing, for Kierkegaard, is to have absolute attentiveness, commitment and love towards the Good (*POH*)/God (*WOL* and *Discourses*). The individual’s commitment will either adhere to this absolute standard, or be only “to a certain degree.” This insistence on *sola Dei*, I submit, may be an instructive hermeneutical lens through which to view Kierkegaard’s advice to the charwoman not to “busy herself” with trying to achieve a higher socio-economic status.

¹¹² Ibid., 58; A similar point is made by Kierkegaard in *UDVS*. Human wisdom, he there affirms, states that “everyone is closest to himself.” From this standpoint, “Christ’s life was foolish, since... it seemed as if he were closest to everyone else but the furthest from himself.” Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 232.

¹¹³ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 58.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 169–70.

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For Kierkegaard, not only does social and economic lowliness not exclude one from the obligation to practice Christian love, but it is normatively conducive to this end. An attitude of disregard towards temporal matters is not an accidental quality of faithful Christians; rather, it is essential to having an undivided will in service to, and “before,” God. The paradigmatic expression of this is Christ, “the prototype,” in whom a dismissal and rejection of temporal goods is made normative. In his human nature, Christ is the definitive prototype for how human beings should unreservedly conform themselves to the divine will. As God, Christ also reveals that this divine will seeks absolute equality with all others in selfless love. In light of this Christological framework and normative theological anthropology, Kierkegaard’s advice to the charwoman in IIIB of *Works of Love* might thus be paraphrased: “do not engage in busy double-mindedness, comparing yourself with others and self-centeredly striving for temporal status. Instead, imitate the prototype, whose undivided will was always perpetually active in selfless service to God and love for others.” Kierkegaard’s ethical vision of the individual “before God” here is, in fact, *more* problematic than is often asserted.