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Forgiveness as the Way to Salvation: A Soteriological Account of Forgiveness in the Religious Writings of Kierkegaard and Its Meaning for Immanent Ethics

Odpuščanje kot pot do odrešenja: soteriološki prikaz odpuščanja v Kierkegaardovih verskih spisih in njegov pomen za imanentno etiko

Abstract: This paper attempts to draw a strict Christian vision of forgiveness from Kierkegaard's religious writings and to present its possible meaning for immanent ethics. The starting point of the considerations presented herein is the presupposition that forgiveness, as an essentially Christian phenomenon, does not refer to immanent interpersonal relations, but has its own deep, transcendent dimension. In this view, forgiveness is founded on the spiritual understanding of love of one's neighbour as an act in which God always mediates in the relation between two people. It is He who really forgives and, in this act, reconciles and equalizes the one who loves and the sinner with each other. Such forgiveness does not concern some particular sinful act, but the sin of life—living without God in the world. In this sense, forgiveness is a creative work of love which transforms the being of man and recreates it in the new reality of love, opening before the individual the way to salvation. At the end of the text, I argue that such forgiveness may have great importance for immanent ethics if only the epistemic and moral distance between temporal and eternal reality is kept.

Keywords: forgiveness, love, soteriology, Christianity, Kierkegaard, transcendent ethics, immanent ethics

Povzetek: Prispevek skuša iz Kierkegaardovih verskih spisov izluščiti strogo krščansko vizijo odpuščanja in predstaviti njen morebitni pomen za imanentno etiko. Izhodišče predstavljenih razmišljanj je predpostavka, da se odpuščanje kot bistveno krščanski pojav ne nanaša na imanentne medosebne odnose, temveč ima svojo globoko, transcendentno razsežnost. V tem smislu odpuščanje temelji na duhovnem razumevanju ljubezni do bližnjega kot dejanja, v katerem v odnosu med dvema človekoma vedno posreduje Bog. On je tisti, ki zares odpušča in s tem dejanjem spravi in izenači ljubečega ter grešnika. Takšno odpuščanje ne zadeva kakega posebnega grešnega dejanja, ampak greh življenja –

življenje v svetu brez Boga. V tem smislu je odpuščanje ustvarjalno delo ljubezni, ki človeško bitje preoblikuje, ga poustvarja v novi resničnosti ljubezni in pred posameznikom odpira pot k odrešenju. Na koncu prispevka trdim, da ima takšno odpuščanje za imanentno etiko lahko velik pomen, če le ohranimo epistemično in moralno razdaljo med časno in večno resničnostjo.

Ključne besede: odpuščanje, ljubezen, soteriologija, krščanstvo, Kierkegaard, transcendentna etika, imanentna etika

1. Introduction

The problem of forgiveness is one of those issues in which Kierkegaard's religious thought cumulates.¹ Essentially all of the Danish philosopher's thought regarding the spiritual development of the person is organized around the sin of the individual and the possibility of the individual's liberating himself from its influence. This article is an attempt to develop a certain radical account of Christian forgiveness, which, based on Kierkegaard's thought, refers both to the spiritual vision of love presented in his *Works of Love*, as well as to a broader spiritual concept of man that emerges from the entirety of his religious writings. Of key importance here is Sylvia Walsh's comment that: "Of all the later literature, *The Sickness unto Death* has probably received the most critical attention, while the devotional writings of the period have been virtually ignored. But it is precisely in these works that one finds the heart of Kierkegaard's understanding of the consciousness of sin and its relation to the forgiveness of sin in living Christianly." (Walsh 2005, 32)

Kierkegaard presents his understanding of the act of forgiveness primarily in the discourses devoted to the subject matter "Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins" (1 Pt 4:8)². His vision finds its implicit but clear exemplification in the other set of his discourses referring to the character of "The Woman Who Was a Sinner" from the Gospel of Luke (Lk 7:36-50).³ In order for the correspondence between these two pictures to be complete, however, it is necessary to cast a critical eye on the way in which Kierkegaard sees the encounter of Jesus with the sinful wom-

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² Kierkegaard published discourses devoted to this topic in various series of his discourses over the span of his creative output. He first considers this topic in two texts from *Three Upbuilding Discourses*, published in 1843 (Kierkegaard 1990, 55–68; 69–78), next taking it up in the second series of *Works of Love* from 1847 titled *Love Hides a Multitude of Sins* (1995, 280–299) and finally in the second of *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* from 1851 (1997b, 179–188).

³ These are discourses written and published in a later phase of Kierkegaard's output, though still before his last polemical stage. The first discourse comes from the 1849 collection *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (Kierkegaard 1997b, 135–144), the second was published as *An Upbuilding Discourse* in 1850 (Kierkegaard 1997b, 145–160), and the third opened 1851's *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* (283–292). In the discourses devoted to the subject "Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins," Kierkegaard himself invokes the character of "The Woman Who Was a Sinner" (Kierkegaard 1990, 75–76; 77; 1995, 282) which was the motivating factor behind seeking such a correspondence as an original interpretative approach in this article.

an in the home of the Pharisee. A crucial supplement for understanding his vision of forgiveness are Kierkegaard's thoughts concerning Christian reconciliation as set out in *The Victory of the Conciliatory Spirit in Love, Which Wins the One Overcome* (Kierkegaard 1995, 331–344), as well as his comments regarding the problem of forgiveness and salvation found in other discourses, pseudonymous writings and in his notes from *Journals*.

The authors of publications devoted to the problem of forgiveness in Kierkegaard's discourses have, so far, focused primarily on the possibility of applying select fragments of his thought to the contemporary discussion of this issue. John Lippitt, in his book *Love's Forgiveness: Kierkegaard, Resentment, Humility and Hope* (2020) as well as in several texts predating this work, has devoted the most attention to this problem (Lippitt 2013a; 2013b; 2017). Lippitt presents a deep, multidimensional picture of how Christian forgiveness as understood by Kierkegaard can enrich our universal-human, moral decisions relating to this act. He uses Kierkegaard's deliberations to argue for a certain way of thinking about forgiveness (unconditional forgiveness understood not as an obligation, but as a praiseworthy and admirable gift), one that is present in the contemporary ethics debate. Despite admitting the importance and need for Lippitt's arguments for unconditional forgiveness in the ethics debate, in this paper I intend to advance a different dimension of forgiveness that emerges from Kierkegaard's thought. My deliberations run, to some extent, contrary to those developed by Lippitt.

The main aim of this paper is to provide, within the context presented above, and based on Kierkegaard's religious discourses, a certain vision of Christian forgiveness as a soteriological event. Forgiveness Kierkegaard speaks of does not refer to the typical life situation in which one, having committed a blameworthy act towards another, asks for forgiveness (conditional forgiveness), or to the situation where one receives forgiveness from a victim without asking for it (unconditional forgiveness), but to the spiritual dimension of the individual's existence, the goal of which, in a Christian sense, is to obtain salvation. On Kierkegaard's account, the actual act of forgiveness arising between two individuals proves to be a moment of divine intervention which completely transforms the life of a person.

Forgiveness so understood differs significantly from the way this problem is formulated in the debates in contemporary ethics (See Słowikowski 2020). It does not refer to an interpersonal ethical relation but to the transcendent Christian problem of creating an individual to live in Divine love and to spread this love in the world. On the Christian account presented by Kierkegaard, only love brings forgiveness. In this sense, the individual who, in following the prototype of Christ, spreads forgiveness through love, opens up before himself and others the prospect of salvation.

This spiritual, soteriological understanding of forgiveness which, in essence, has a transcendent dimension (just like Kierkegaard's entire ethics of Christian love—the so-called second ethics), is impossible to directly translate into the typically human understanding of this phenomenon, for it concerns a different real-

ity. The true Christian, an imitator of Christ—as portrayed by Kierkegaard—is a person fixated not on realizing temporal human ends (such as forgiving someone’s particular wrongdoing or forgiving some socio-political phenomenon or even considering, at the meta-level, whether forgiveness is generally sensible or possible), but on obtaining, through oneself and through others, the final aim of existence—salvation.

This paper is tasked with showing, in this context, that immanent ethics (that is, universal-human ethics, that which is concerned with interpersonal relations) needs transcendent ethics (that is, Christian ethics as conceived by Kierkegaard). The former does not need the latter, however, in order to be able to apply the latter’s solutions directly to the former’s domain, this being impossible without the spiritual transformation of the people, whom transcendent ethics is meant to concern. In other words, in the world there is no Christian forgiveness without true Christians who spread it. Transcendent ethics is nevertheless needed in the temporal world as a certain higher idea, as a certain model for behaviour that gives an order to the universal-human world.

In this sense, though of course one can attempt to combine transcendent ethics with immanent ethics as Lippitt does—one then has to constantly bring attention to the distance separating the two and to stress that this distance is epistemically and morally significant. One should not blur the difference between the two, but accentuate it, just as Kierkegaard does when, for example, speaking of the infinite, qualitative difference between the eternal (transcendent ethics) and the temporal (immanent ethics) (Kierkegaard 1985, 41–47; 1992, 217; 412–413; 492; 580; 1980b, 99; 121; 126–27). Here I do not intend to dispute or undermine specific arguments of Lippitt or of other authors who follow a similar interpretive path (Berry 1992, 196–217; Senyshyn 1998; Howell 2010; Pyper 2011; Ball 2019; Marcar 2019). My aim is to show that Kierkegaard’s main endeavour is to make it clear that Christian forgiveness is qualitatively different from the forgiveness that is discussed in ethical debates, both secular and Christian, that focus on the ethical character of people.

To this end, in the steps that follow I will first briefly recount the spiritual conception of Kierkegaard’s understanding of love, which underpins his account of forgiveness. I will then present his vision of the love-forgiveness dialectic in which there always exists a relation between the three sides. With this as a foundation, I will show what Kierkegaard’s Christian strategy of forgiveness as the hiding of sins consists in, a strategy which goes against common-sense ethical intuitions, its main goal being to arouse love in others. This will allow for a more critical analysis of how, in Kierkegaard’s thought, love is created in another person by means of the act of forgiveness, thereby summoning him to a new spiritual life. This in turn will serve as a basis to show how, on such an interpretation of Kierkegaard’s religious writings, Christian forgiveness becomes an event with a soteriological dimension. Having so constructed a picture of Christian forgiveness, in the conclusion I will try to show what the value of such an affirmative theological ideal consists in. To this end, I will attempt to consider why it is worthwhile to be

ethically aware of this ideal's existence, and how, while retaining its qualitative difference from immanent ethics, it can enhance the ordinary person's ethical character in temporal life (i.e. the ethical character of those who are not Christians as understood by Kierkegaard, but who are deeply moral people in the universal-human sense).

2. The Spiritual Concept of Love

To understand what Christian forgiveness is on Kierkegaard's view, it must be shown in the context of the Christian account of love presented in *Works of Love*. Of the greatest importance here is the distinction between spiritual love and preferential love—and the kind of love that makes it possible to separate one attitude from the other is love for one's neighbor (Kierkegaard 1995, 17–90). In short, spiritual love is love for one's neighbor, while every other kind of love is preferential love (all kinds of preference should be included here: erotic love, friendship, love for one's spouse, for the child, for the homeland, and the like). The former belongs to the order of transcendence and is that in which God's love in man manifests itself; the latter refers to immanent reality and is a natural, purely human event.

The category of neighbour in Kierkegaard's thought is treated maximally seriously as that which, in accordance with the pattern of Jesus Christ, unites and equalizes all people in God (Kierkegaard 1995, 44; 49–50; 53; 58–60; 65–73; 80–90; 99–102; 137–143). Love for one's neighbour appears only where man unites through God with another person. Every moment in which love for one's neighbour is actualized in a person is a moment in which divine love manifests itself in this person; this occurrence is the utmost expression of humanity (62–63; 147; 366; 1997a, 117–118). What is clear in this context is that normal, human displays of love—those relating to preference—are deprived of this transcendent feature, and though existentially they are very important in life, they cannot be a medium for a person's relationship with God and do not lead the individual to spiritual fulfilment.

On the other hand, however, love for one's neighbour in Kierkegaard's view is not something voluntary, something one could choose as a life attitude on the basis of preferring one lifestyle or another. Love for one's neighbour is the duty of every person as one who was created by God, and in it lies the essence of humanity (22; 24; 29–44). This duty, however, is hidden in spirit and will remain invisible to anyone who does not delve deep into his interiority. Love for one's neighbour is thus an object of choice, but this choice is a choice of self-denial, that is to say, of giving up preferential love as a fundamental way of relating to other people (52–56; 364–365; 369; 372–373). This means renouncing the attitude of life which is manifested by the majority of people who are oriented in their existence towards fulfilling temporal goals. And that is why it is an extremely difficult choice, even an impossible one for someone who does not seek spiritual transformation in his life.

This duty to love one's neighbour points to yet another very important element—the fact that one does not recognize in another one's neighbour and that one does not treat him as one's neighbour does mean that he ceases to be one's neighbour (21–24). This is why a lack of relating to another as one's neighbour reveals the sin of man—the lack of a real relation to God in existence (23; 236–237; 257; 271–273; 281–282; 296–299). The lack of love for one's neighbour is thus here an absence of love for God; it is a resignation from spiritual fulfilment in relation to the Creator (1995, 112–114; 1997a, 195). A person who does not have a love for his neighbour within him is guided in his life by egoistic self-love, which is manifested in preferential love (1995, 21; 44; 52–58). And while there are, of course, different attitudes possible here, from those in the human sense, which are completely condemnable (such as using other people for one's own needs) to the noblest (sacrificing oneself for another person), this ethical difference is, in a certain sense, only a quantitative difference in relation to the qualitative difference between preferential love and love for one's neighbour (53; 139–142). For Kierkegaard, the lack of love for one's neighbour is the source of evil in man; it is precisely that which requires forgiveness in the Christian sense.

3. The Dialectic of Love and Forgiveness

In the Christian account, Kierkegaard presents, the relation of love cannot simply be a relation between one person and another, but “/.../ is a relationship between: a person—God—a person, that is, that God is the middle term” (Kierkegaard 1995, 106–107). God, who establishes love as the foundation of a person's life, must be present in every manifestation of this love if it is to relate to its source of creation (8–10; 215–217). This three-dimensional relation of love is not a matter of a person's choice but constitutes the basis of his being established in love. When one person turns to another, he thereby turns to God, who is the only true and appropriate object of love (106–109; 120–121; 113; 130; 264–265). The ultimate addressee of man's acts is always God. Thus, if one performs an act against another, one at the same time in a spiritual sense performs an act against God and oneself, and when one performs an act for another, one at the same time performs an act for oneself and for God. This results from the fact that, on Kierkegaard's account, “neighbor”, like God, is a middle term (54; 119; 142). Thus, there exists a full equality between love for God and love for one's neighbour, such that to not love God is equivalent to not loving one's neighbour, and not loving one's neighbour is to not love God. In this way, when a person, in his egoism, forgets about others and cares only for himself, God, too, forgets about him, and such a person fails to exist spiritually. And when a person, out of love, forgets about himself and sacrifices himself for others, God then remembers about him and maintains his spirit in existence (281). As a result, Kierkegaard says:

“What love does, that it is; what it is, that it does—at one and the same moment. At the same moment it goes out of itself (the outward direction),

it is in itself (the inward direction); and at the same moment it is in itself, it goes out of itself in such a way that this outward going and this returning, this returning and this outward going are simultaneously one and the same." (280)

This dialectical reflexivity of love radiates upon the Christian understanding of forgiveness, which, on Kierkegaard's account, is nothing more than a work of love (Berry 1992, 207; Ferreira 2001, 169; Lippitt 2017, 21; 22; 30). This means that, when one person forgives another, he at the same time receives forgiveness from God, and that, when he refuses to forgive another, he cannot expect to be shown forgiveness. Here Kierkegaard leaves no illusions:

"Christianity's view is: forgiveness is forgiveness; your forgiveness is your forgiveness; your forgiveness of another is your own forgiveness; the forgiveness you give is the forgiveness you receive, not the reverse, that the forgiveness you receive is the forgiveness you give." (Kierkegaard 1995, 380)

It is such, because forgiveness, like love, is never merely a relation between two people, but has, spiritually, a three-dimensional shape. This relation is always mediated by God, who alone can give ultimate forgiveness (339–342).

This Christian scheme of forgiveness founded upon love therefore always has on Kierkegaard's account, three "actors": the one through whom forgiveness flows—the one who loves; the one who is forgiven—the sinner; and the one who forgives—God. The central figure in this process-act of forgiveness is obviously God. However, it is not the case that forgiveness concerns, in an essential way, only the sinner. Kierkegaard stresses that it is equally necessary for the one who loves, through whom forgiveness flows (336; 343). The former needs forgiveness to free himself of sin and to discover his spiritual path in God, while the latter must strive for forgiveness so that he is able to reaffirm his spiritual existence in the Creator. As a result, at the moment forgiveness is given, both agents are equal to each other in God—they are both equally receivers and givers (1990, 149–151; 156–158; 1995, 281–282)—neither is more important than the other as both are equally necessary: the sinner, to be able to become the one who loves; the one who loves, to be able to reaffirm his state. It thus turns out that forgiveness in the Christian sense must be that which flows out from the one who loves towards the sinner whom he encounters (1995, 335–337). Spreading the good news on Earth is therefore equivalent to spreading forgiveness and mercifulness to every individual encountered, independently of any social connection with him. This results from the spiritual definition of love underscored by Kierkegaard and from Christianity's equality of all people in relation to God (141–143). However, in order to spread forgiveness, one must conceal his actions in love, to undertake self-denial knowing that he is not the one who forgives, but instead the one through whom forgiveness flows, an instrument in the hands of God (340–341; 361–366).

An ideal portrayal of this situation is offered by the encounter of the sinful woman with Jesus described in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 7:36-50). In this case, how-

ever, the Kierkegaardian lens does not fully reflect his own understanding of forgiveness as an act of love. He sees the situation described as two-dimensional, that is, as an encounter of Christ the Savior with a sinful woman. For the model to be complete, one needs to see that Jesus here fulfils a double role, in accordance with his dual nature as God-man—he is simultaneously the one who loves, through whom forgiveness flows, as well as God the Savior, who gives this forgiveness. Along such an interpretive angle, forgiveness arises in accordance with the three-dimensional pattern herein described: Jesus the human—God the Savior (Christ)—and the human sinner. Here the central role is played by the Savior, and it is he who utters the words of forgiveness, yet, for this to actually occur, both Jesus and the sinful woman must humble themselves before Him, to make themselves equal in relation to His Majesty. This can be seen in the behaviour of the sinful woman, which is the focus of Kierkegaard’s attention—her silence, weeping, and wiping of Jesus’s feet as a symbol she acknowledges her infirmity and forgets about herself (Kierkegaard 1997b, 139–142; 155–158). This is also evident in the behaviour of Jesus, who does not speak, but remains focused, allowing the sinful woman to perform her act of washing. Here, this act constitutes a symbolic leveling of each in God. Their absolute concentration on one another (the sinful woman on Jesus, Jesus on the sinful woman), both desiring forgiveness, signifies their renunciation of themselves and their importance in relation to God as well as their utter reliance on Him, as a result of which space is made for His action.

4. The Hiding of Sins and the Awakening of Love in the Process of Forgiveness

Occupying the very center of Kierkegaard’s thought is the consideration as to how, in a Christian sense, one can really forgive another person, and what actions one should take towards this aim. To the fore in this context comes a certain phenomenon: the ability to not see sins. Such an ability can develop only in a person of pure interiority (heart). Here the matter concerns a particular attitude towards another person in which the one who loves, in spite of an awareness of the other’s sinfulness, comes to him, not with direct reproof or admonition, but instead to try to discover and awaken in him the love established by God at the heart of each person. For Kierkegaard, building up another person in love begins precisely with the fact that: “The one who loves presupposes that love is in the other person’s heart and by this very presupposition builds up love in him—from the ground up, provided, of course, that in love he presupposes its presence in the ground.” (1995, 216–217)

While the actions of a natural person tend to reveal the other’s guilt to force him to confess and to punish him or seek atonement for the sinful act committed, Kierkegaard insists that the truly loving Christian must behave in the opposite way. Here the attitude of the individual, in accordance with the dialectic of love, reveals his interiority:

“A person’s inner being, then, determines what he discovers and what he hides /.../. When envy lives in the heart, the eye has the power to elicit the impure even from the pure; but when love lives in the heart, the eye has the power to love forth the good in the impure, but this eye sees not the impure but the pure, which it loves and loves forth by loving it. Yes, there is a power of this world that in its language translates good into evil, but there is a power from above that translates evil into good—it is the love that hides a multitude of sins. When hate lives in the heart, sin is right there at the door of a human being, and the multitude of its cravings is present to him; but when love lives in the heart, then sin flees far away and he does not even catch a glimpse of it.” (1990, 60–61)

Seeing and showing another’s sins is, on this dialectical account, a sign of one’s own inner impurity. However, it is the power of love, so to speak, to be able to disregard the sinfulness of the other to reach what is in him originally good, which alone can help him cope with his sin. In the discourse “Love Hopes All Things—and Yet Is Never Put to Shame,” Kierkegaard notes that the relation of the one who loves to other people consists in his hope that, at any moment, there exists a possibility of good for the other. He must therefore “hope for him” until the very end, believing in the good of the other to the very end. Not hoping for the other, not searching out the good in him means, in this sense, not loving (1995, 253–256).

The essence of Kierkegaard’s thought here is that the one who loves hides the multitudes of another person’s sins since he knows that condemning particular evil acts of his will not change him in a spiritual sense. It may, in the best-case scenario, bring it about that, in an ethical sense, he will become more mindful in his life. This, however, will not lead him to Christian forgiveness. For this to become possible, it is necessary to approach this other person in such a way that, despite her many sins, one will see what people like her do not see—the love established by God within her. The profundity of the attitude of the one who loves consists in his being able to refer to the sinner such that, instead of his own sinfulness, the sinner discovers the love residing within himself, which allows him to reflexively acknowledge his sin, and which awakens within him the desire for forgiveness (72–74; 77).⁴

The task of the one who loves—he, who is to forgive the sinner—is thus to bring it about that the sinner recognizes himself as a sinner so that he discovers his sin and becomes terrified by it: such is the condition of upbuilding each person (1997a, 96–97). Of concern in this matter is not some particular sinful act or some concrete instance of immoral behaviour, but rather what lies beneath it—the sin of abandoning God, of living without God in the world (1993a, 32–36; 1997b, 136;

⁴ In addition to forgiveness, Kierkegaard provides two other ways to hide sin. They are: silence and mitigating explanation (Kierkegaard 1995, 289–294; Ferreira 2001 174–175; Howell 2010, 33–36). Most commentators grant that Kierkegaard lists three independent ways to hide sins, of which the most excellent is forgiveness.

143; 180–181).⁵ Instead of focusing on a particular sin of another person, the forgiveness of which will not, in a spiritual sense, change anything in the long run, the one who loves focuses on what is important, the source of evil in this person.

However, to experience one's absolute guilt without an internal foundation of consciousness that love resides within oneself and spreads forgiveness and divine mercy would mean an immediate inner death, the destruction of one's spirit. It is for this reason that the first task of the one who loves is to awaken in the sinner the love established within him, to make him aware of God's love for him, to bring it about that he desires this love. It is only in this moment that the inner restoration of a person begins, the process of discovering his own sin and the search for forgiveness. The consciousness of sin must therefore always be accompanied by the consciousness of forgiveness and cannot ever manifest itself without it (1993b, 246; 2010, 181–82; 1992, 524).

The process of discovering one's own sin within the realization of God's love for man is inversely related to seeing the sins of others. For the more one focuses on the sins of other people, the more one does not perceive one's own sins and does not search out forgiveness; and the more one desires forgiveness, the more one stops seeing the sins of others, seeing instead one's own inner imperfection, which completely involves one and orders one to search for forgiveness. Kierkegaard is speaking in this context about one's knowledge of evil, which is common in people living in sin, and about one's opposite knowledge of the good, characteristic of the one who loves. It is from this skill of perceiving the good that one's reluctance to perceive evil stems (1995, 285–287). At the same time, the attitude of the one who loves is not anthropologically naive as was the case with the attitude of Prince Myshkin from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. The one who loves is marked by an intentional lack of interest in evil resulting from the knowledge that curiosity about evil is never spiritually pure and always leads to sin.

In consequence, in the Christian account presented by Kierkegaard, it is precisely this not seeing the sins of another which gives him the chance to discover his own sin—while this pointing out of his sins and placing blame only binds him more to them. This logic is inverse to the intuitions and behaviour of the natural person. In a spiritual sense, the matter comes down, not to showing another his sin, but to giving him a tool that allows him to discover it on his own and to give him the strength to do away with it.

A paradigmatic example of such a situation is the entire context of Jesus' encounter with the sinful woman, about which the Holy Scripture says only perfunctorily that: "A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume." (Lk 7:37) Kierkegaard does not consider what leads to their encounter but instead focuses on the behaviour of the sinful woman, which offers some important guidance. He underscores that the sinful woman—being a symbol of how

⁵ In this sense, Kierkegaard states, in *The Sickness unto Death*, that: "sin is specifically a qualification of spirit" (Kierkegaard 1980b, 81), and "every sin is before God" (80).

one should desire forgiveness and accept it (Kierkegaard 1997b, 140–143)—comes to the home of the Pharisee having already made a decision (150; 155). This act of deciding is key since no one can find forgiveness who is not determined to obtain it. The act of confession, which must necessarily accompany forgiveness, requires that one strives for purification, at all costs and regardless of one's unfavourable inner situation or inner anxieties, as an absolutely overriding goal (137–139). The question arises as to how one can awaken in oneself such a state of inner determination. Kierkegaard notes that of the utmost importance is one's complete concentration on one's sin and the desire to rid oneself of it. Awareness of this inner infirmity that fills man makes everything apart from the search for the forgiveness of sins meaningless (150–155). This is a state of individualistic self-hatred, hatred for the evil which hitherto defined the life of the person, the feeling that continued existence in this state is pointless (138–139).

Yet one should ask a question for which neither Holy Scripture nor Kierkegaard provides an answer—that is, what exactly happened in the life of the sinful woman, such that she decided against herself and her life hitherto, against everything that seemed at the moment to testify against her, to go to the home of the Pharisee and devote herself to Jesus? It seems that to unravel this puzzle, one ought to reference what Kierkegaard says about “love hiding a multitude of sins” since, in accordance with Kierkegaard's “theory” of forgiveness, for the sinful woman to be able to decide to perform a gesture of confession (being, in this case, the symbolic act of washing Jesus's feet with her tears) she would have had to meet earlier in her life one who loves, who, not wanting to see her sins, discovered the good residing in her and awakened the love established in her heart. This somebody must have been Jesus. It is he who somehow must have earlier influenced the sinful woman, he who must have removed the veil of sin and activated the love residing within her. The most important element here that must appear in the sinner is the desire for forgiveness. This desire, however, cannot arise in and of itself; an impulse from the outside is necessary, some person or event capable of pulling him off the beaten path of sin. In this context, Kierkegaard says precisely that the one who loves is reconciled with the other long before the other even thinks about searching for reconciliation (1995, 335–337). This anticipatory move by the one who loves, his going out to the sinner with love—this here is key. In the New Testament story, Jesus is precisely such a person—a Saint (1997b, 138–139) whose appearance knocks people out of their sinful reality and forces them to disclose the thoughts of the heart (Lk 2:34–35; Kierkegaard 1991, 96; 126; 132; 136). This awakening of the heart concerns every person and each stands then before a decision: either to be offended or to believe (Kierkegaard 1980b, 98; 122; 1991, 33; 40; 81; 96–97; 105; 111; 115–116; 139; 141).

It is worth noting that though Kierkegaard obviously sees in Jesus a Saint, he acknowledges His Holiness as an attribute of His Divinity (1997b, 181–182; 184–188). One should, however, see the Jesus who proclaims the gospel as a man and not God. He becomes God only in those moments in which he performs the miracles of forgiveness and healing when he gives signs. As a matter of fact, these

are his most difficult moments of trial: allowing his Divinity to speak through himself and reaffirming himself in his calling as the Son of God. While at the same time remaining incognito, recognizable only through faith, imperceptible to the purely temporal gaze that searches out empirical evidence (1991, 123–144).

The sinful woman, like Mary (Lk 10:42), chose “the one thing needful” (Kierkegaard 1997b, 149), allowing herself to be directed by the love awakened in her by Jesus. Worthy of note is that this love that was awakened within her was not yet actual, fulfilled love—that is, Christian love as in Kierkegaard’s account, but was a state of a certain indebtedness in this love, a discovery of the possibility of this love’s existence, a desire that she, the sinful woman, have that which was revealed to her in Jesus. This means that the sinful woman, in going to the home of the Pharisee, acts, really, under the influence of Jesus’ love, who leads her, not under the influence of her own love. This situation is analogous to that in which one acts under the influence of a desire for something which remains only a possibility, which at the same time draws one to itself, leading one to make an ultimate choice. This mechanism characterizing the workings of human freedom is brilliantly described by Kierkegaard in the form of the titular “Concept of Anxiety” as “freedom’s possibility” (1980a, 41–42; 49; 61; 91; 123; 155). In other words, Jesus, in awakening in the sinful woman the love established within her, actually reveals to her “love’s possibility,” which activates in her the working of freedom that strives to fulfil this love.

5. Creating Love in Forgiveness

Love cannot be actualized in the individual’s existence without forgiveness, that is, without being absolved of sin. The state of love and the state of sin are mutually exclusive—the former means being a servant of the good, while the latter means remaining under the influence of evil. Thus, one cannot become one who loves when at the same time one is not internally purified, separated from sin.

The very act of forgiveness, which Kierkegaard places special emphasis on, requires faith because only faith has the power to create something in spiritual reality, that is, to bring to life that which is invisible and to take away into non-being that which is visible (Kierkegaard 1995, 294–296). It is precisely the faith in love that makes love truly exist in a spiritual sense and fills the existence of the Christian (5; 16). Such love simply does not exist physically in the world—it is not an object. Its existence is possible only by virtue of the faith of the individual, who, through himself, bears witness to this love before others. Only the loving individual, by believing in God’s love,⁶ can become one through whom love manifests

⁶ The subject of faith in God’s love as the most important element of a person’s spiritual being is the focus of two of Kierkegaard’s discourses: “All Things Must Serve Us for Good—When We Love God” from the third series *Christian Discourses* (Kierkegaard 1997a, 188–201) and “The Joy of It That in Relation to God a Person Always Suffers as Guilty” from the third series of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1993b, 264–88).

in the world in accordance with the pattern set by Jesus. Properly speaking, in this love, the one who loves becomes, in Kierkegaardian terms, contemporary with Christ (1991, 62–66). The actions of the one who loves are, in this way, an instrument for God Himself, who reveals Himself in them. God simultaneously both removes what others see—a person’s sin—and establishes that which cannot be directly seen in the world of the senses, that which requires faith—the forgiveness of sins. It is no coincidence that the forgiveness of sins, made possible solely by faith, is for Kierkegaard an expression of Christian paradox (1992, 224–228; 538–539)—for it is, in a spiritual sense, and by virtue of eternity, a bringing to life of that which is unreal to the senses and a depriving of existence that which is real to them. As Kierkegaard explains: “But when love forgives, the miracle of faith happens /.../: that what is seen is, by being forgiven, not seen.” (1995, 295) Of course, the act of forgiving sins and all that this encompasses makes sense only in spiritual reality and does not strip the individual of his moral responsibility towards others in the temporal world. The fact that sin does not weigh on the individual spiritually does not change the fact that others can blame him for his sins just as they could previously. For here the matter concerns a change of the individual’s internal status, not his position in the world.

Kierkegaard notes that from the rational point of view, the forgiveness of sins is something impossible, something that should not occur. In Kierkegaard’s view, forgiveness is so impossible for human reason that people’s first reaction to it should be to take offense, where not reacting in this way constitutes evidence of their spiritlessness or indifference in this regard (Kierkegaard 1980b, 116; 1997a, 107). The possibility of the forgiveness of sins is here what Kierkegaard believes most differentiates man from God (1980b, 121–122).

Under such an account, it becomes clear that through God’s love and in God’s love—as manifested in the one who loves—forgiveness creates love in the sinner, that is, it establishes in him the reality of love, at the same time annihilating his sin, wiping away the reality of sin. A transformation of reality occurs at this moment, which becomes possible thanks to two acts performed by God. On one hand, God, in hoping for the sinner, brings him into a new life in love, while on the other, in forgetting his sin, deprives said sin of its real existence (Kierkegaard 1995, 295–96). To deprive sin of its real existence means, in a spiritual sense, that sin no longer affects the existence of the individual, that it no longer directs his life, that it disappears from his life.

Thus, in the act of forgiveness that occurs between the one who loves and the sinner by means of God’s mediation, the reality of the sinner’s life is reestablished anew. Worth noting is that here Kierkegaard makes use of ontic terms, and thus the matter concerns an authentic change in one’s being, the sinner’s transformation into one who loves. This is possible as, for Kierkegaard, the fundamental, decisive reality of one’s life is not the sensory world but that of the spirit—it is in the latter that what is actual and true for the individual is decided (145–146; 383–384).

This transformation of the spirit is experienced by the sinful woman when she hears Jesus's words of forgiveness "Therefore I say to you, her many sins are forgiven her, because she loved much." These words seem to be spoken in a cause-and-effect mode: first, that "she loved much" and then, that "her many sins are forgiven her". Kierkegaard, in his interpretation of this case, applies this line of reasoning as well, as he acknowledges, somewhat contrary to his own "theory" of forgiveness, that the sinful woman's love somehow actualized before the words of forgiveness were uttered, thus suggesting that her love was prior to them (Kierkegaard 1997b, 143). As a result, Kierkegaard states that the act of forgiveness doubles love in the individual, causing it to acquire additional power (175–176).⁷

Yet, in accordance with the "theory" of forgiveness presented herein, these words of forgiveness cannot simply pronounce the sinful woman's love, they must create it. That which she was previously guided by was not her current love but her desire for it and for purification. The words "because she loved much" cannot, therefore, refer to what proceeded earlier, but must reference what was happening the moment Jesus spoke them. He declares the spiritual fact, that, at that moment, "her many sins are forgiven her," since at that moment "she loved much". If it were otherwise, this would mean that, first of all, God is unnecessary for her, as she could actualize her love herself, which, in turn, contradicts the theory of truth presented by Kierkegaard in *Philosophical Fragments* (1985, 13–22). Love is here, in a spiritual sense, equivalent to the truth, and for it to be learned, the teacher, who is equally necessary in teaching both, must offer the follower the condition for discovering it. This condition is forgiveness, which lies behind what Kierkegaard calls "rebirth" in *Philosophical Fragments* (19). In this way, the sinful woman's transition from a state in which love is possible to the state in which it actually unfolds.

6. Salvation through Forgiveness—Reconciliation in Love

Christian forgiveness as Kierkegaard understands it must lead to reconciliation (1995, 313–314; 335–337; 343–344)—the forgiveness offered by the one who loves must correspond to its being accepted by the sinner. If forgiveness is not accepted, this means that the one who loves did not succeed in awakening love within the sinner. In this case, this is not full forgiveness, but only the possibility of forgiveness directed towards the sinner. It is only when the forgiveness being offered encounters in another the desire to be forgiven that there is a chance for the reconciliation of both individuals in God. It is important to note that it is not the case that the one who loves comes forward unselfishly, in a spiritual sense, with forgiveness. It is obvious that, insofar as the life of the senses is concerned, what he offers is entirely unselfish, however on the spiritual level—as Kierkegaard stresses with all his might—the one who loves needs forgiveness as much as

⁷ John Lippitt in his book (2020, 76–83) provides the detailed description of this problem with the Kierkegaardian interpretation of Jesus' words of forgiveness.

the sinner does (1970, 49), for it is only by spreading love to others in the form of forgiveness that one can reaffirm oneself in this love, thereby strengthening one's spiritual bond with God.

Reconciliation is an act which directly proceeds forgiveness: it is that which occurs immediately after love becomes actualized in the sinner. As only two equals can enter into reconciliation, it is when the actualized love of the sinner answers the initial love of the one who loves that this reconciliation—that which signifies the unity of their love in God—occurs. This reconciliatory act ends the formal process of forgiveness and transforms the sinner into one who loves and whose mission becomes to spread love, in forgiveness, to one's neighbour, that is, to all people.

It must be understood that, on the account that can be constructed from a reading of Kierkegaard's works, the moment one's love is actualized, that is, the moment a person is created in the spiritual reality of love is the very moment the perspective of salvation opens up before him. Of course, for as long as the individual lives, he must spread forgiveness, thereby reaffirming himself in the forgiveness he receives, but every act of forgiveness and reconciliation, starting with the very first such act, is an act of fulfilment in God.

It is not obvious that salvation here is dependent only upon the acts of a person. His actions must be placed into a broader context of atonement in Christ. As David Gouwens notes, in Kierkegaard's account: "Salvation is not *reduced* to experience (because of logical priority and actuality of atonement), but soteriology includes human response and experience." (Gouwens 1996, 149) This means that the subjective salvation of the individual can occur only in the objective and actual sphere of Christ's love, that is, in the love of one's neighbour, which is the response of man's love for God to God's primary love for man.⁸

And in this way, if the moment one's love is actualized happens to be the moment of one's death—as in the case of the robber whom Jesus forgives on the cross (Lk 23:43)—this moment then proves to be the moment of the individual's fulfilment in God as well as his being saved. In this way his salvation is equal to that of the one who loves, who might even have spread love in the world for thirty years. A feeling of injustice relating to this equality arises only in the natural person, who is guided by a temporal sense of justice. From the spiritual point of view, the matter is one of complete logical consistency, as in both cases the unity and equality of God's love for man in man's love for God are fulfilled to the same degree.

It may be said that the moment one reconciles with another in God, one becomes and is a Christian and is thereby at the end of one's existence; moreover, the individual is "there" each time reconciliation occurs through him in forgiveness. This is a state in which, regardless of the individual's actual life situation in temporality, he can at every moment of his life remain in a spiritual sense fulfilled in God, for at every moment the individual is realizing his existential end. This is possible

⁸ A detailed and multidimensional analysis of the problem of atonement in Kierkegaard's thought is provided by Lee C. Barrett (2013).

because, on Kierkegaard's account, the means and the end in Christianity are always one and the same (Kierkegaard 1993b, 141–143). On precisely this basis, the forgiveness one gives to another (that which one does at a given moment—the means) is, at the same time, forgiveness for him, the forgiver (that which one wants to achieve in eternity—the end). Kierkegaard states that a person: “is not eternally responsible for achieving his end in temporality, but he is unconditionally eternally responsible for which means he uses. When he wills to use or uses only the means that truly is the good means, he is, eternally understood, at the end” (141). This is precisely what the Kierkegaardian concept of becoming and being a Christian consists in: when a person becomes one (the means) he thereby at the same time is one (the end), and for precisely this reason he cannot, for as long as he is alive, stop becoming a Christian, as then he would stop being one. The state in which the Christian here finds himself is described by Kierkegaard as being present to himself or being contemporary with himself, which can be interpreted as being in accordance with one's vocation in God (1997b, 39; 44–45; 1997a, 74–75). In this context Kierkegaard very strongly emphasizes the words spoken by Jesus on the cross to the robber: “This very day you are in paradise.” (Lk 23:41)

It is in this state that both Jesus and the sinful woman find themselves when they reconcile with one another by virtue of The Redeemer uttering his words of forgiveness. In this scene, one should see in Jesus Christ both the man (Jesus), who fulfils his vocation as the Son of God, and the Redeemer (Christ), who actualizes the love within the sinful woman and reaffirms Jesus in his mission to spread love to others. Each time Jesus forgives or performs a miracle, he, as a person, yields to his Divine nature, which speaks through him.

Of importance here as well are the edifying words Christ directs towards Simon immediately after the words of forgiveness are uttered: “But one who is forgiven little loves little.” (Lk 7:47) Kierkegaard's interpretation of these words reverses their meaning, for Kierkegaard reads them as: “he is forgiven little—because he loves little.” (Kierkegaard 1997b, 169; 171–173; 175) This results from his logically literal reading of the words of forgiveness and confirms his thesis that the love within the sinful woman for Jesus exists prior to Jesus's words of forgiveness. However, if one is to remain consistent with the thesis that the sinful woman's love was brought forth concurrently with her forgiveness, these words mean something else. They refer to the idea that if there is no one who can forgive, then likewise there is no one who can awaken love in another person. This means, therefore, that there is no possibility for the sinner, without the help of another person, to discover within himself the possibility of love and the desire for forgiveness. This is why Christianity cannot exist without love of one's neighbour—there must always be one who spreads love to another, as otherwise Christianity as a religion of love ceases to truly exist.

Simon also seems to be an important figure in this whole story since he constitutes a counter-attitude towards the sinful woman, all the while being a person who, in the presence of a saint, is offended by him (137–138). In his thoughts, Simon accuses Jesus, thereby putting him in the situation of a spiritual trial. Jesus

perfectly guesses the intentions of Simon and thus gives him the sinful woman as an example. Such a move must be a shock for Simon and at the same time constitutes a chance for his inner awakening. If he understands the words directed to him by Jesus, love will awaken within him; if not, his offense will deepen. For Kierkegaard, Simon is above all a symbol of his reader, for when Jesus Christ turns to Simon, he turns to each person who has not yet begun to fulfil the Christian ideal in his life (141–142). It bears stressing that, on Kierkegaard's account, when Jesus turns to another with his Gospel message, he at the same time turns to one who reads the Gospel (1995, 14; 97). The words directed towards Simon are thus the words directed towards each person meant to awaken in him the love residing within, pushing him towards the search for forgiveness.

Finally, it is worth noting, that the natural place for forgiveness to happen, the place Kierkegaard speaks of, is where the Christian encounters God—in Church. And, ultimately, Kierkegaard himself actually takes the entire situation that occurs between Jesus and the sinful woman to the church altar. Such an approach appears primarily in the last discourse from the cycle of texts addressing the passage Luke 7:47. In this text, Kierkegaard is no longer referring to the personage of the sinful woman, but to the edifying words Jesus Christ directs towards Simon (1997b, 167–177). By presenting the sinful woman as a pattern of the individual's desire for forgiveness, Kierkegaard speaks of the daily confession of sins of Christians contemporary to him, trying to awaken within him an attitude of utmost seriousness towards this act. It is precisely in this confession that a person's love should be activated and reaffirmed and thereafter spread to others. In this place Kierkegaard passes over the role of the priest, thanks to which the Danish philosopher's interpretation becomes two-dimensional, just as in the case of Jesus's encounter with the sinful woman—the entire situation unfolds between a sinner and the Redeemer (This topic is the main issue of the final discourse from the cycle *Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins* from *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* [Kierkegaard 1997b, 179–188]). Yet it seems it is precisely the priest who should be the one who loves, the one who comes out with love to the sinners who confess their sins in church. It is he who should be able to awaken love within people and to reconcile with them in God such that they then be able to spread this love to others and that he be able to reaffirm himself in his calling to be the loving priest. In this so seriously understood communion, the church becomes a place for the occurrence of Christian love—a place where God forgives sins and where people reconcile with God. In this sense, Jesus's encounter with the sinful woman could be fully reproduced before the altar, in accordance with Kierkegaard's intention.

7. Conclusion: Christian Forgiveness—Its Meaning for Immanent Ethics

Kierkegaard, of course, realizes that, when speaking of Christian forgiveness as an act of love for one's neighbour, he presents an extremely high ideal, one that can

be met by very few in each generation (Kierkegaard 1992, 488; 1991, 247; 2012, 190). These individuals move this living, Christian ideal into the future—they bear witness to the transcendent and eternal truth of Christianity in the immanent and temporal world. The question thus arises as to why Kierkegaard introduces this ideal knowing well that not just a great majority, but in fact an overwhelming majority of his readers are unable to fulfil it. Why does he so fiercely defend the distinctiveness of the Christian ideal and the need to maintain its proper transcendent form?

This problem can be solved in two spheres: the epistemic and the moral. In the epistemic sphere, the Christian ideal of love and forgiveness points to the ultimate purpose and meaning of humanity. In presenting it, Kierkegaard illustrates how absolute good manifests itself in human existence and how this good radically transforms and arranges human being in relation to the world and to other people. At the same time, however, Kierkegaard shows just how extreme the sacrifices are if man is to fulfil this ideal. Kierkegaard devoted a great deal of his Christian works to phenomena such as renunciation, self-denial, dying to oneself and to the world. All of these are meant to show that discovering one's spiritual, transcendent relation with God requires breaking with normal (sinful), human existence that is (in the best-case scenario) focused on fulfilling the immanent ideal.

This spiritual level, as has already been stated, is attained by few, yet for Kierkegaard it remains an object of intense focus due to the fact that consciousness of its existence determines the highest level of a person's being, in relation to which the relativity and self-interest specific to all other human attitudes become visible. The transcendent ideal clearly structures other human attitudes and imparts a deep dimension to the phenomena of human existence. In this sense, a consciousness of the existence of forgiveness as an act of love allows one to consider all purely immanent concepts of forgiveness in a different light. It cannot, of course, replace them, but it shows the essential spiritual difference between forgiveness in which only a certain agreement between people is performed and one which speaks of God's spiritual creation of man to live in love.

This difference has important epistemic implications, for it shows that, in a Christian (transcendent) and universal-human (immanent) sense, the matter at hand concerns two completely different acts of forgiveness that refer to two separate realities of life. At the same time, the unity of a human being's spiritual structure causes us to think that here, formally speaking, we are concerned with one and the same phenomenon (one forgiveness) that manifests itself in different ways (different acts of forgiveness) depending on what reality it refers to (immanence or transcendence).

In the light of this statement, we may go so far as to claim that by being conscious of the existence of Christian forgiveness one can better understand what forgiveness in the immanent world is; it might also indirectly incline people to perform morally better acts of forgiveness. No element of transcendent forgiveness, however, could reveal itself in purely human forgiveness, as, for the latter

to occur, the presence of God would be necessary, which only a true Christian—an imitator of Christ—can bring unto the world.

This epistemic distance so fiercely defended by Kierkegaard is here of the utmost importance, for if it is not preserved, the transcendent ideal and immanent ideal bleed into one another. It is in this way that what Kierkegaard calls the aesthetization of Christianity occurs (1992, 557–561; 562; 572–573; 580–581; 605; 608), a linking of absolute Christian values with temporal and relative human interests. As a result, Christianity ceases to be a timeless way of being centered on attaining salvation and instead becomes a certain type of doctrine to serve people in their efforts to realize their temporal social and political aims. God, rather than creating (via forgiveness) human beings meant to love, is turned into a certain idea, one which allows people to legitimize their position in the world (as well as moral position). It is precisely this that what Kierkegaard calls the possibility of offense is meant to protect Christianity from (1980b, 117; 125; 128–129).

In the moral dimension, the result of this epistemic distance is that the transcendent, Christian ethics of love for one's neighbour that Kierkegaard proposes lacks a direct transposition into immanent, universal-human ethics, which strives towards establishing rules by which people coexist harmoniously with one another. No rule of transcendent ethics can be directly applied in the universal-human world since doing so immediately shatters this world, relativizes its principles, and deprives this world of its autonomicity. This underpins the conflict between faith and reason that Kierkegaard studied so deeply with reference to Abraham's situation in *Fear and Trembling*.

It is on this basis that Christian forgiveness, when applied directly to ordinary human forgiveness, poses absurd and incomprehensible demands on people who have yet to undergo a transformation of love. Here, the victim is not only supposed to forgive his transgressor, but to love him as well—as he loves those closest to him—and to do unto him all the good that is possible. The transgressor, in turn, should not only admit his guilt and repent but must spread this ideal of love further among people. Without a spiritual transformation in love, no human being can do this, not the victim (even if he is morally the best of men) and even less the perpetrator of evil.

In spite of this, the consciousness of the existence of such a transcendent ideal, even if one cannot apply it in one's own life, may be pivotal to how one sees and realizes the immanent ideal in one's life. This transcendent ideal here provides an existential grounding, points to the source of all good (God) and evil (sin) in the world and creates certain patterns of behaviour that can reinforce the immanent moral attitude, perhaps thereby bringing the individual closer to Christian forgiveness.

The patterns of behaviour indirectly inspired by the Christian ideal of love and forgiveness include, among others, focusing on the possible good in another person, not on the particular evil of his act; the tri-relational nature of the ethical attitude—the search for a higher, common good in one's relation with another person and the attempt to reconcile with this person in spite of existing divisions;

consciousness of the reflexivity of one's own moral attitude—my relation to another has a considerable impact on my relation to myself (what I do comes back to me—what I give I myself receive); and finally, the search for life fulfilments by means of doing moral good.⁹

These patterns of behaviour may, on the one hand, resemble certain obvious bits of human wisdom. On the other hand, however, consciousness that these patterns have their source in a transcendent ethics that encodes complete selflessness and full equality between one person and another in relation to God may do much to reinforce one's ability to apply said patterns in one's moral attitude. It seems that, even in people with purely secular moral attitudes who do not agree with defining the values of good and evil in relation to God or sin, these attitude-patterns, as understood by Kierkegaard, can inspire respect, and point the way to a strengthening of one's own moral attitude. Obviously, these patterns cannot be applied directly without a transformation of love, but the ability to adapt them formally to the contents of immanent ethics offers the possibility of strengthening one's own moral attitude and gives rise to a capacity for creating an authentic moral good, one which is only to a slight degree burdened by one's own self-interest (as at the level of immanence this is never possible to completely remove).

In this sense, in the act of forgiveness, it is on one hand not possible to transfer Christian forgiveness into the immanent world—for it is not possible for some person to generate love in another person unless the former has himself already been called to it. Yet on the other hand, in ordinary human forgiveness, the victim's being driven by the possibility of awakening moral good in the transgressor not only makes the former better morally but may also create a moral pattern of conduct for other people. However, this being driven by the moral good of others requires consciousness of the existence of a higher common good to which the victim must subjugate himself and in which he must level himself with the transgressor in order to truly forgive him. Such a morally advanced attitude of forgiveness can clearly be inspired by Kierkegaard's transcendent considerations, yet it does not thereby erase the epistemic distance between the transcendent ideal and the immanent ideal and does not distort the proper sense of Christianity's existence in the world.

⁹ The intriguing example transcendent principles being formally transferred into the immanent world is provided by Sharon Krishek in her book *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (2016). There she claims, in reference to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, that not only is it love for one's neighbour that is based on the model of double movement of faith described by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*, but every relation of true love (in this case, romantic love). On Krishek's interpretation each relation of love first requires sacrifice, which kills the egoism in love, to be followed by self-affirmation, by self-fulfilment.

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