

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

Kajornpat Tangyin

Assumption University of Thailand

Abstract

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

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

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