



W. Eugene Smith—*The Walk to Paradise Garden*

**The Salvation of Love
And
Love as Salvation**

“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

**Poems in Response to
Søren Kierkegaard's
*Works of Love.***

By Laurence Robert Cohen

Dedication to Silvia
The Subject of My Works of Love

For all this whole long process
 Silvia was always there
As these poems I readdress
 I can see her everywhere
As muse and inspiration
 Motivating as first reader
I could then fulfill my intentions
 Because her love has made them clear

Kierkegaard wrote in some abstraction
 Yet his *Works of Love* contain reality
With Silvia such love's a personification
 Which made true my poetic totality
She and I make this love quite tangible
 The middle term gives us God's blessing
Manifest in the sensual and the spiritual
 Through our love all of life reassessing

Through all this year or more
 There she has always been
As the *Works of Love* we explored
 Each poem is our love's hymn
To Silvia each poem came
 Between each line a presence
Here I now pronounce her name
 She is part of all in essence

We can take this as my dedication
 To the miracle she brings to living
Written in my most profound affection
 And in gratitude for all her giving

Acknowledgments

The page numbers in parenthesis refer to

WORKS OF LOVE SOME CHRISTIAN REELECTIONS IN THE FORM OF DISCOURSES
translation by Howard and Edna Hong, Harper and Row, New York, 1964

Richard Stivers was instrumental in the creation of this book. He suggested I read *Works of Love* as part of larger discussion about the salvational qualities of love in our technological milieu. I thank him for his work generally and for his discussion with me.

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Laurence Robert Cohen

Works of Love

Table of Contents

Part One

(19) *Kierkegaard's Works of Love—Forward*

(20) *Kierkegaard's Works of Love—Prayer*

Works of Love Part One—Love's Hidden Life and Its Recognizability by Its Fruits (23)

(26) *Works of Love LOVE'S HIDDEN LIFE AND ITS RECOGNISABILITY BY ITS FRUITS—second heading*

(34) *Works of Love Part II A You Shall Love*

(40) *Works of Love Your Shall Love The Royal Law*

(41) *Works of Love Your Shall Love The Royal Law "All things are made new"*

(70) *Works of Love II B To love one's neighbor is therefore eternal equality in loving*

(73—80) *Works of Love II C You Shall Love Your Neighbor*

(84-89) *Works of Love II C You Shall Love Your Neighbor—Distinctions*

(85-89) *Works of Love II C You Shall Love Your Neighbor—Distinctions Power and Position*

(88) *Works of Love II C You Shall Love Your Neighbor "For loving one's neighbor is a thankless task!"*

(99) *Works of Love III A Love Is the Fulfilling of the Law (Romans 13: 10)*

(107) *Works of Love III A Love Is the Fulfilling of the Law*

(112-113) *Works of Love Love is the fulfilling of the law God is the Middle Term in Love*

(119) *Works of Love III A Love is the fulfilling of the law God is the Middle Term and the Beloved*

(119) *Works of Love III A God is the Middle Term and When I See My Love*

(123) *Works of Love , Love is the fulfilling of the law, Number One in Love*

(123) *Works of Love Love is the Fulfilling of the Law The World Detests Love*

(122—123) *Works of Love Love is the fulfilling of the law Unequivocal Love and the Uncertain Law*

(127—129) *Works of Love Love is the Fulfillment of the Law Illusions of Love*

(129) *Works of Love Love is the fulfilling of the law Love and the Eternal Will*

(130-131) *Works of Love Love is the fulfilling of the law "Mortgaging Oneself to Evil.. Power, Honor, the Satisfaction of Desires"*

(132—133) *Works Of Love Love is the fulfilling of the law Love Is Inwardness*

(134-135) *Works of Love Love is the fulfilling of the law Endurance in Time Space and the Mundane*

(138-152) *Works Of Love Love Is A Matter Of Conscience God, Love, Conscience And The Middle Term*

(153-154) *Works of Love IV Our Duty to Love Those We See*

(155-156) *Works Of Love IV Our Duty To Love Those We See "Love Grounded In The Nature Of Man"*

(156-157) *Works Of Love IV Our Duty To Love Those We See Fastidiousness Is Not Love*

(158-159) *Works Of Love Our Duty To Love Those We See The Structure For Loving God*

(160-170) *Works Of Love IV Our Duty To Love Those We See Limitless Love In Our Time*

(171-172) *Works Of Love IV Our Duty To Be In The Debt Of Love To Each Other "Owe No One Anything, Except To Love One Another." (Romans 13:8)*

(172-173) *Works of Love Our Duty to Be in The Debt of Love Love Is Not Bookkeeping*

(172-174) *Works of Love Our Duty to Be in The Debt of Love The Infinite Value of Debt*

(174-181) *Works Of Love Our Duty To Be In The Debt Of Love Love Has No Comparison*

(186) *Works of Love Our Duty to be in the Debt of Love Works of Love Hated and Despised*

(196) *Works of Love Our Duty To Be in the Debt Of Love Kierkegaard and Self-renunciation in the Debt Of Love*

Part Two

- (197) Works Of Love Part Two I Love Builds Up Introduction
- (199-200) Works of Love Part Two I Love Builds Up "But Love Builds Up." (I Corinthians 8:1)
- (202-204) Works Of Love Part Two I Love Builds Up "Do Everything For The Sake Of Building Up"
- (206-207) Works of Love Part Two I Love Builds Up The Lover Presupposes
- (208-212) Works of Love Part Two I Love Builds Up "Love hopes all things"
- (208-212) Works Of Love Part Two I Love Builds Up "Wherever up-building is, there love is"
- (214-217) Works Of Love Part Two II Love Believes All Things Love Can't be Deceived
- (218-219) Works Of Love Part Two II Love Believes All Things Our Fear Of Error
- (220-221) Works Of Love Part Two II Mistrust And Evil
- (220-221) Works Of Love Part Two II Love Believes All Things Mistrust As Judgment
- (224-230) Works Of Love Part Two II Love Believes All Things Love Is The Highest Good
- (235-240) Works of Love III Love Hopes All Things and Yet Is Never Put to Shame Love . . . hopes all things. (I Corinthians 13 :7) Hope and the Eternal
- (240-243) Works Of Love Part Two III Love Hopes All Things and Yet Is Never Put To Shame Hope, Love, And The Eternal
- (244-245) Works of Love Part III Love Hopes All Things and Yet Is Never Put to Shame Love . . . hopes all things. (I Corinthians 13:7)
- (245-246) Works of Love Part III Love Hopes All Things and Yet Is Never Put to Shame Believing and Hoping
- (248) Works Of Love IV Love Seeks Not Its Own Charity Seeketh Not Her Own. (I Corinthians 13:5)
- (251) Works Of Love IV Love Seeks Not Its Own Language of Possession
- (251-253) Works Of Love IV Love Seeks Not Its Own Yours and Mine as Domination
- (254-255) Works of Love IV Love Seeks Not Its Own Small-mindedness
- (255-260) Works of Love IV Love Seeks Not Its Own The Lover's Unspoken Gift
- (261-262) Works of Love V Love Hides the Multiplicity of Sins Love and Confidence
- (263-268) Works of Love V That Love Hides the Multiplicity of Sins
- (268-270) Works of Love V Love Hides the Multiplicity In Silence
- (271-273) Works of Love V The lover hides the multiplicity of sins in a mitigating explanation
- (273-276) Works of Love V Love hides the multiplicity of sins by forgiveness
- (276-278) Works of Love V For Love Prevents it from Coming into Being, Smothers it at Birth
- (279-280) Works of Love VI Love Abides So ... love abide{s}. (I Corinthians 13: 13)
- (281-282) Works of Love VI Love Abides "Love never fails"—it abides
- (286-289) Works of Love VI Love Abides Love abides—It never wastes away
- (290-291) Works of Love VI Love Abides—It never wastes away
- (292-294) Works of Love VII Mercifulness, a Work of Love, Even if it Can Give Nothing and Is Capable of Doing Nothing “Mercifulness has nothing to give”
- (301-305) Works of Love VII Mercifulness, a Work of Love Mercifulness is able to do nothing
- (306-308) Works of Love VIII The Victory of Reconciliation in Love Which Wins the Vanquished
- (308-310) Works of Love VIII The Victory of Reconciliation in Love Which Wins the Vanquished Reconciliation in love
- (310-314) Works of Love VIII The Victory of Reconciliation in Love Which Wins the Vanquished To win one vanquished
- (314-316) Works of Love VIII THE VICTORY OF RECONCILIATION IN LOVE WHICH WINS THE VANQUISHED
- (317-320) Works of Love IX The Works of Love in Remembering One Dead

(320-329) Works of Love IX The Works of Love in Remembering One Dead
A work of love the most unselfish, free, and faithful
(330-331) The Works of Love X The Work of Love in Praising Love
(331-335) The Works of Love X The Work of Love in Praising Love . . . Must be done inwardly in self-renunciation
(336-343) The Works of Love X The Work of Love in Praising Love . . . must OUTWARDLY be done in sacrificial disinterestedness
(344-353) The Works of Love Conclusion "Beloved, let us love one another"
(344-353) The Works of Love X Conclusion God's Love

Related Poems

Anna and the Divine and Love
Eternal Debt of Love--Works of Love
Kierkegaardian Inspiration and Action
Love as Advantage or Sacrifice--Works of Love
The Many Voices of the Works of Love
The Middle Term Mathematic
The Middle Term, Illumination, and Loneliness
The Mind and Body Connection and Love
Technological Purpose and the Middle Term
Who Abandons Whom?
You Shall Love

(19) *Kierkegaard's Works of Love*—Forward

“These are reflections of the *works of love*... That which in its vast abundance is *essentially* inexhaustible is also *essentially* indescribable in its smallest act, simply because essentially it is everywhere wholly present and *essentially* cannot be described”

Profound insights come from Kierkegaard
 We would be wise to listen
Thoughts that take us far and wide
 Where he offers us his wisdom
He says we need a leap of faith
 To escape our mortal prison
It's where we'll find a state of grace
 For our existential transition

We can transcend our conformity
 In divine love and its acts
Such love comes in its enormity
 And transforms existential facts
These are the facts we have not questioned
 In all our life before
Yet they put us into a painful tension
 Our love can calm restore

Restoration by friend Kierkegaard
 Comes simple and complex
We want to choose to read each word
 To see what he says next
With openness and acceptance
 Such reflections don't come with ease
Still it's worth all of our persistence
 With our new vision, we will feel pleased

Works of Love he named his book
 The result of his Christian reflection
Where we can do more than just look
 We will find love's validation

(20) Kierkegaard's Works of Love—Prayer

“O spirit of love, you who take nothing for your own but remind us of that sacrifice of love, remind the believer to love as he is loved, and his neighbor as himself!”+

The acts of love claim no compensation
He says in his opening prayer
Love's granted by God's dispensation
It's a gift we need receive with care
Love is not a negotiation
There is no buy and sell
It asks for sincere self-renunciation
That comes from love itself

Love is narrowed by our human language
But love is in all true actions
Without that love, we can do great damage
Or make love a mere distraction
Love of neighbor is all inclusive
There are no exceptions
It is not a thought that is selective
Such love makes clear direction

When I say I love you, what do I mean?
Do I speak solely of your body?
Can I love more than you seem?
Or are my feelings shoddy?
Can our love rise and suggest
Something that is far more bold?
Return to love's quality that we oft repress
Then I love you as a soul

When we accept true love, it's God we essential seek
No matter if done passively
Through our love, the divine will speak
And will do so very actively

(23) *Works of Love*

Part One--I--Love's Hidden Life and Its Recognizability by Its Fruits

"For each tree is known by its fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush." *Luke 6:44*

Technology and science
 Are both great temptations
So we fall into compliance
 And are trapped in self-deception
They take our senses as totality
 The material our sole condition
When our love is the true reality
 By the most divine admission

When technology is all definitive
 We surrender all our trust
To what is proven evidentive
 Where kinesthesia is a must
But love is not so tangible
 So it ceases to exist
Thus life becomes quite terrible
 And our false beliefs persist

It is far better to believe in love
 And be badly disappointed
Then to fall to a victim of
 A belief that is so disjointed
The loss of love is irredeemable
 Love is one with the eternal
To surrender that's unthinkable
 And really quite infernal

Love's life may be hidden
 But its fruits we recognize
When the best of life is given
 Then love is not disguised

(26) *Works of Love*

LOVE'S HIDDEN LIFE AND ITS RECOGNISABILITY BY ITS FRUITS—second heading

Of love, we cannot find its source
 It is hidden in its depths
But that's no cause to feel remorse
 No need for deep regrets
There is alone one way to truth
 Where love can be uncovered
We know of love by its fruit
 From the works that love's discovered

The source of life and source of mind
 Are both truly hidden
But when we look, we will find
 The place where we are bidden
Where we can perceive but not possess
 The wonder of love's works
It is in the way it is manifest
 Which heals and does not hurt

If we know love's tree by its fruits
 Is it in our word and speech?
It's in our actions without dispute
 Does that make love too hard to reach?
These loving deeds are open-hearted
 They seek no compensation
It must be love that is imparted
 From a heart that's pure intention

This source of love may be truly hidden
 Deep in the heart of eternity
With acts of love full freely given
 Its fruit is there in plenty

(34) *Works of Love*
Part II A
You Shall Love

You shall love thy neighbor as thyself sounds a pretty thing
 But upon that thought we find a catch
Here's the trepidation that phrase brings
 This commandment and self-love simply do not match
To love ourselves as we love another
 We simply can't feel superior
But must feel equal to be that sort of lover
 No one can be inferior

This commandment is awe inspiring
 Because it's so far reaching
So much here that is transpiring
 Subtle and divine in teaching
It can transform all our perceptions
 About who are our neighbors
It's all living beings without exceptions
 Although it's humans we may favor

It will open up our hearts and minds
 To other's ways of seeing
The world is richer we will find
 Than we have long been dreaming
To love our neighbor comes as adventure
 Into other lands unknown
It can end all kinds of censure
 Through the bonds we will have grown

This can be quite liberating
 As daunting as it may feel
There is little more exhilarating
 To escape what self-love seals

(40) *Works of Love*

Your *Shall* Love
The Royal Law

The *Works of Love* is a special place
 One that is self-corrective
We cannot show a false-made face
 Love makes us introspective
We learn how we can love ourselves
 And not as a narcissist
It is by loving someone else
 So in that way we're blessed

If we love our theology
 More than we love the divine
It becomes our love's idolatry
 Not by this is love defined
If we in romance love another
 More than we love as commanded
Love loses its divine encounter
 And in self-love we are remanded

Love so engaged can become a prison
 Entrapping our sacred existence
This royal law pardons such decisions
 With its simple, strong insistence
It frees us from our past perceptions
 Which our thoughts of love distorted
Made us believe in great deceptions
 So all acts of love were thwarted

The best of law will liberate
 When divinely framed
No need to persevere
 Our true sense of love remains

(41) *Works of Love*

Your *Shall* Love
The Royal Law

“All things are made new”

In love, we know, all things are made new
 For all the powers of life spontaneous
Through it we'll find what is the truth
 All else thus seems extraneous
From out of our emotional turmoil
 Love arose as something pure
It brought us balance if not control
 Of this we can be sure

Out of all our feelings, both confused and chaotic
 Can arise our love in purity
At times both intimate and cosmic
 We can love in universal unity
From our self-renunciation
 The best of self will stay
In a divine sort of delineation
 We can reach the highest in this way

“Worldly goods are inconsequential”
 These temptations are external
What's within us is so essential
 That in faith we are original
This faith comes in its simplicity
 And not because we're shrewd
Still we can use our ingenuity
 To protect us from what's crude

When we feel by love possessed
 It's an act of deepest faith
Love's a duty by which we're blessed
 And it offers an endless strength

(70) *Works of Love*

II B

“To love one’s neighbor is therefore eternal equality in loving”

Why do some who have religion
 Feel they are superior?
You’d think that it would be forbidden
 So in reverse make them inferior
When we acknowledge “love thy neighbor”
 Such falsity must simply cease
In that we change behavior
 And in ourselves find peace

The concept of the highest
 Is steeped in our bombasity
This is often an educated bias
 Devoid of our true veracity
Does learning teach to love the other?
 Or just beloved pomposity
To yourself become your lover
 In a well-tuned sophistry

Awash in our self-admiration
 By dint of our degrees
But they give no preparation
 For love’s doctrine to make free
The true state of our humanity
 Is in our equality divine
We can’t see that in our urbanity
 Without the love that constant shines

In the height of our intelligence
 We reach the depth of our stupidity
Deny ourselves God’s presence
 In our educated rigidity

(73—80) *Works of Love*
II C

You Shall Love Your Neighbor

In friendship and our love erotic
 We still need to love our neighbor
That does not make our love quixotic
 But makes such love the stronger
It's not the songs of romantic poets
 Whose love sounds narcissistic
Still we love our beloved and we show it
 To love our neighbor is not simplistic

Love returns us to our kinship
 With the essence of the divine
In that love is a form of worship
 Which we can follow all the time
Our friends and our beloved
 Can help us to this task
To love our neighbor help's recommended
 For that help we need to ask

Even if we suffer separation
 That old theme of poetic dirges
Love is still our consolation
 An answer to eternal urges
For the quality that outlasts time
 Love can grow in its perfection
When it's the love that is sublime
 And not dependent on affection

Love they say is blind
 In such blindness we can see all
We can choose to love everyone in kind
 Into divine love we do not fall

(84-89) *Works of Love*
II C

You Shall Love Your Neighbor—Distinctions

Great distinctions can possess us
 Alone in love are we truly free
Our true selves we learn to trust
 And not to distinction's identity
Our vision opens us to all and thus
 We can glory in our equality
Love removes us from the superfluous
 Brings our sacred equanimity

With love we rise above distinctions
 Freed from the chains of hierarchy
Where in love we can seek the extinction
 Of our despair and our inner anarchy
For distinctions trap us in the circle
 Of those in our same level
However grand, our distinctions cripple
 And our soul bedevils

We are distinct in our own being
 Our positions are impermanent
Love can take us near God's seeing
 Thus our souls form our own firmament
Each of us is a vast complexity
 An eternal beauty immaterial
All formed from God's intensity
 And bound for the eternal

Our distinctions are a shibboleth
 They cannot make our true connection
It's love that leads us to express
 And enact the divine intention

(85-89) *Works of Love*
II C

You Shall Love Your Neighbor—Distinctions
Power and Position

When we seek power and position
 To reach for a kind of celebrity
We create a heavy imposition
 On loving our neighbor as reality
This is a kind of inhumanity
 That we subtly perpetrate
Our soul gets lost within our vanity
 From that choice let us hesitate

When we cease to love our neighbor
 Our neighbor will cease to exist
Yet our love presents no favor
 It's self-condemnation will persist
We've become corrupted
 When we wrap ourselves in prominence
And others may be thus obstructed
 By the presence of such dominance

Distinguished corruption is an enormity
 In which Kierkegaard says we're trapped
Distinguished corruption demands conformity
 Where you're a traitor when you love enact
We would be scorned and buffeted
 If we aspired to love our neighbor
The corrupt would say, "Your corrupted"
 A point they'd be glad to belabor

When we walk with our neighbor
 It's with God we also stride
True life will regain its savor
 To its fulfillment we will strive

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